Political Change and Police Representations in Malayalam Cinema

Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut

for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

by

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under the supervision of

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I, Harinarayanan S, hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled, "Political Change and Police Representations in Malayalam Cinema" is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Sreepriya R., and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis are undergone plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

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Harinarayanan S

Abstract

The police are considered the state's most powerful and significant arm, entrusted with duties such as being the guardians of the rule of law, custodians of the social order, endowed with the power to act on any dissent against the state. Cinema is an ideological and political medium, and the images and meanings it produces are rich in connotations and subtexts. This study is an attempt to understand the representation of the police in Malayalam cinema, and it aims to examine the portrayal of police in Malayalam films, focusing on the post-independence socio-political scenario. Malayalam cinema has been a reckonable cultural force over Kerala's social modernity and has reflected the currents of Indian political reality in a significant manner. Emphasising these aspects, this thesis plans to critically analyse how the police are portrayed in Malayalam cinema. The study observes cinema and socio-political scenarios simultaneously to form specific hypotheses based on the influence of the latter on the former, resting on the premise that cinema as cultural industry is fed by and reacts to historical realities.

The thesis traces the shifting regimes of authority and the diverse cinematic reflections of it across the years in Kerala. The first phase of analysis is from the early stages of Malayalam cinema to the 1990s, the next phase is from the 1990s to the 2010s, and the last phase is from 2010 onwards to the present. It closely monitors the manifestation of power to reveal the patterns of police portrayal and analyses a few cinematic narratives to argue that some landmark political junctures in Indian history have impacted cinematic representations. Theoretical concepts of Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Louis Althusser, et al. are used in the study. The hypothesis formed as part of the study indicates to, and explains the ideologies that constituted important trends in Malayalam cinema.

Key Words: Malayalam Cinema, Social Culture, Police, Power, State, Politics

സംഗ്രഹം

പോലീസ് സംവിധാനത്തെ ഒരു രാഷ്ട്രത്തിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും ശക്തിയുള്ളതും പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ടതുമായ ആയുധമായി കണക്കാക്കുന്നു. നിയമത്തിന്റെ കാവൽക്കാരും, സാമൂഹികക്രമത്തിന്റെ സംരക്ഷകരും, സ്റ്റേറ്റിന്റെ നിലപാടിൽ നിന്നും വേറിട്ട് നിലകൊള്ളുന്ന പൗരന്മാരെ അടിച്ചമർത്താനുള്ള അധികാരശേഷിയുള്ള സംവിധാനവുമാണ് പൊലീസ്.

സിനിമ ഒരു സാംസ്കാരികവും രാഷ്ട്രീയവുമായ മാധ്യമമാണ്. അതിന്റെ ദൃശ്യങ്ങളും അവ ഉല്പാദിപ്പിക്കുന്ന അർത്ഥങ്ങളുമെല്ലാം പല മാനങ്ങളുള്ളവയാണ്. മലയാള സിനിമകളിൽ പോലീസിന്റെ പ്രതിനിധാനം എങ്ങനെയാണെന്ന് പരിശോധിക്കുകയാണ് ഈ പഠനത്തിൻറെ ലക്ഷ്യം. സ്വാതന്ത്ര്യാനന്തര ഇന്ത്യയുടെ സാമൂഹ്യ-രാഷ്ട്രീയ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിലേക്കാണ് ഇത് ശ്രദ്ധ കേന്ദ്രീകരിക്കുന്നത്. ഈ പ്രതിനിധാനങ്ങൾ സുപ്രധാനമായ സാമൂഹിക യാഥാർത്ഥ്യങ്ങളോട് എങ്ങനെ പ്രതികരിക്കുന്നു എന്നതിനെ ആധാരമാക്കി, മലയാള സിനിമയിലെ പൊലീസിന്റെ ചിത്രീകരണത്തെ വിമർശനാത്മകമായി വിശകലനം ചെയ്യാനാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണത്തിൽ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നത്. സിനിമയും സാമൂഹ്യ-രാഷ്ട്രീയ സാഹചര്യങ്ങളേയും ഒരുമിച്ച് നിരീക്ഷിക്കുകയാണിവിടെ. ചരിത്രപരമായ സംഭവങ്ങൾ ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ പ്രധാന പങ്ക് വഹിക്കുന്നുണ്ട് .

കേരളത്തിലെ അധികാര വ്യവസ്ഥയുടെ മാറ്റങ്ങളും അതിന്റെ വിവിധ സിനിമാത്മക പ്രതിഫലനങ്ങളും കാലക്രമത്തിൽ എങ്ങനെയായിരുന്നുവെന്നതും പഠനം പിന്തുടരുന്നു. ആദ്യഘട്ടം മലയാള സിനിമയുടെ തുടക്ക കാലത്തുനിന്നും 1990-കൾ വരെയാണ്. രണ്ടാമത്തെ ഘട്ടം 1990-കളിൽ നിന്നും 2010-കളിലേക്കും, അവസാനഘട്ടം 2010 മുതൽ ഇന്നത്തെ കാലം വരെയുമാണ്. ഓരോ ഘട്ടത്തിലും അധികാരത്തിന്റെ പ്രകടന രൂപങ്ങൾ ശ്രദ്ധപൂർവം നിരീക്ഷിക്കുകയും, അതിലൂടെ

പൊലീസിന്റെ ചിത്രീകരണത്തിലെ സാമൂഹികവും രാഷ്ട്രീയവുമായ ഘടകങ്ങൾ മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുകയുമാണ്. മിഷേൽ ഫൂക്കോ, ജോർജിയോ അഗാംബൻ, ലൂയി അൽത്തൂസർ തുടങ്ങിയ വൈചാരികരുടെ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളും, കാഴ്ചപ്പാടുകളും ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ ഉൾപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഈ പഠനത്തിൽ രൂപപ്പെടുന്ന ധാരണകളുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ, സാമൂഹ്യ-രാഷ്ട്രീയ സംഭവങ്ങളും, പ്രബലമായ ആശയങ്ങളും സിനിമയിലെ പ്രതിനിധീകരണ രാഷ്ട്രീയത്തെ എങ്ങനെ സ്വാധീനിച്ചുവെന്ന് കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു.

സൂചക പദങ്ങൾ: സിനിമ, സമൂഹം, പൊലീസ്, അധികാരം, രാഷ്ട്രം, രാഷ്ട്രീയം

Contents

Chapter 1
Introduction

The police are considered the state's most powerful and significant arm, entrusted with duties such as guardians of the rule of law, custodians of the social order, and the oppressive force that can suppress any dissent from the citizenry against the state. The police have certain ideological duties too, as it is expected to function as the caretakers of the state-sponsored ideology. In an ideal scenario, the force is supposed to be aiding the people by ensuring law and order and participating progressively in nation-building. In the Model Police Manual of the Bureau of Police Research and Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, it says that,

> Police are one of the most ubiquitous organisations of the society. The policemen, therefore, happen to be the most visible representatives of the government. In an hour of need, danger, crisis and difficulty, when a citizen does not know what to do and whom to approach, the police station and a policeman happen to be the most appropriate and approachable unit and person for him. The police are expected to be the most accessible, interactive and dynamic organisation of any society. Their roles, functions and duties in the society are natural to be varied, and multifarious on the one hand; and complicated, knotty and complex on the other. Broadly speaking the twin roles, which the police are expected to play in a society are maintenance of law and maintenance of order. ("Functions, Rules and Duties")

The above-stated functions of the police, as prescribed by the state itself, show the societal involvement expected from the force. “In an hour of need... most accessible” (“Functions, Rules and Duties”) are some of the key phrases to be looked into here, as they spell out the duties of police and how they should assist the people in their hour of need. The police are an inevitable arm of the government with multiple functions to perform according to the demands of the situation and needs of its master, the state. It is the local repressive mechanism, an apparatus akin to the army. In India, the police are bestowed with an avatar that transcends the official definitions attached to it. The Khaki in India is synonymous with suppression, public censorship and violence. They occupy the dubious position of restraining the public emotions and moods whenever they turn against the state. Thus, more than being the custodian of law and order, protecting the public and being the last resort of safety for the common folks, the police force is determined to safeguard the state from known and unknown internal threats. There are numerous instances of police unleashing terror on the citizens, which will be discussed in length in the chapter, along with the ideological positioning of the force, which often sides with the majoritarian religious sentiments. In democratic countries across the globe, especially in the West, reformation programmes aimed at revamping the police have significantly transformed their functioning. Numerous studies on the subject have proved that the major hurdle faced by the West was the transformation of the police from the erstwhile colonial era to the modern phase of democratic values. In this phase of transformation, another major obstacle that the attempts at reformation had to face was the lingering effects of the decades of Communist regimes, where the police were used as a repressive force to monitor, censor and

control the populace. The book *Police in Transition*, edited by Andras Kadar, dwells deeply on the attempts at reforming the police in the West and the impediments it had to overcome. In an article in the book, written by István Szikinger, he states that,

> Little attention has been paid to the regulation of police activities in the advanced countries of the West. Comprehensive legislation concerning the organization and functions of the police are relatively new in many European states. For example, in Austria, Belgium, and even the UK, with the Police and Criminal Evidence Act, progress was made in this connection only as recently as the 1980s, or even the 1990s. And in the USA, for specific reasons, comprehensive legal regulation of police structure and activities is almost totally absent. Furthermore, several legislative steps taken by Western countries would not serve as a particularly good pattern for the emerging democracies in Central and Eastern Europe. Deviations from traditional constitutional values, for example, concluding the long debate on bugging in Germany by introducing the powers requested by the police suggest that the end of fighting crime may justify any means. On the other hand, a researcher conducting a careful analysis cannot accept the familiar generalizations about the characteristics of the Socialist police, namely, that the police forces of these dictatorships served exclusively or mainly the political interests of the party-state. (16)

Szikinger shares his views on the difficulty in transforming or democratising the police force in the West. The notion of using “any means” to reduce crime gives the police ample avenues to tread upon the rights of the people. As crime control

becomes the paramount aim of the state in its relationship with society, the guardians of law find it necessary to break the law whenever they deem it necessary.

The Colonial Police and Independent India

The phenomenon of colonialism cannot be reduced to mere geographical invasion. Rather, it was a carefully manifested programme aimed at cultural invasion, where language, religion, habits, etc., could be included. Frantz Fanon defines Colonialism as inherently violent in his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Colonial powers used violence and brutal force to conquer the lands and minds of the colonised. In this venture, they used the police as a significant tool, and they were given the task of taming the natives and bringing a sense of control in matters of law and order. The British-trained police were amply used in their colonies, and the force was soon starting to attain the avatar of being the agents of the colonial masters. Instead of civilised forms of communication between the colonial master and the native populace, force and violence dictated the manner of discourse. In the book *At the End of the Line*: *Colonial Policing and the Imperial Endgame 1945-1980*, Georgina Sinclair analyses the functions and duties of the colonial police and the difference between the British police and the rest of the Western colonisers. According to her,

> What was the function of these colonial policemen? They themselves describe their role not only as police officers but also as soldiers, administrators, magistrates, sheriffs, welfare officers, prison wardens, veterinary officials, teachers and more besides. The job of a colonial policeman involved many different duties and responsibilities reflecting the

> complex administration of the Empire. Yet many were recruited for this task with the barest of educational qualifications, being judged principally on their 'general educational attainment and suitability'. (Sinclair 1)

A country like India (erstwhile many a smaller kingdom) had its first experience with law and order with the royal militia or the King's soldiers. They were given the task of ensuring the law and keeping a tab on criminal activities. With the arrival of the colonial power, its policing system was introduced here. As Sinclair observes, the duties of the colonial policemen were much more complicated than the upkeep of law and order, and they included all the tasks the Empire wanted. The educational qualification was not the criterion of selection, and the overall suitability and durability were given prominence. As mentioned earlier, the nod was given to unleash violence on the colonised subjects, and it propelled the image of the police as the most dreadful element of the colonial conquest and rule. The well-trained policemen were deputed to colonies across the world, and these men spread terror in unknown terrains without impunity. In Edward Said's article "Jane Austen and Empire" from the book *Culture and Imperialism*, he critiques writers like Jane Austen for ignoring the brutal colonial suppression of Britain of their colonised subjects and painting a beautiful picture of Britain in their works. He problematises the projection of Britain as a serene land, where in actuality, the Empire was letting loose a rule marked by incessant violence over the natives. Such validations of violence and brutality helped the Empire to consolidate power and manipulate global opinions in its favour. Slowly, they recruited natives into the police and trained them to suppress their own countrymen's urge to claim independence. In the

Indian scenario, it can be seen that a huge number of locals were recruited and used by the Empire, including sending them to represent Britain in the World Wars.

Once these colonies attained independence, a major question that lingered on the administration was the nature of the police force of these newly born democracies. No major transformations could be seen regarding the working manual of the police force. In India, the colonial police simply changed their avatars to Indian police instantly. The same force that was created and trained to control and oppress the natives soon represented the natives as the official police force of their republic. This contradiction gives rise to numerous questions, such as whether the Indian police, which bears the legacy of the British Empire, can be seen as democratic. How far can such a force show adherence to the constitution, which steers clear of violence and upholds democracy and peace? What stopped Independent India from reigning in the high-handed approach of the Police? etc. The answer lies in the apathy of various governments, as they seldom cared for the democratic decentralisation of the police force. Instead, the history of India bears testimony to the effective use of force as a repressive device against dissent and protest whenever the state felt threatened, which was epitomised by the National Emergency. Thus, any critique of the Indian police has a direct and distinct connection across the past, right to the British Colonial Empire. The analysis of the evolution of the police in India needs to be based on its colonial baggage, which still characterises its functional mechanism.

The police in Independent India appear as the most trusted ally or the henchmen of the state, which seeks to rule over the populace using force. The colour

khaki symbolises terror and suppression, and even from the training stages in the police academy itself, the trainees are taught to be mentally tough, masculine and fierce. The curriculum of most police academies in India still follows the colonial syllabus, a draconian mechanism for systematic oppression. Brooding on the workings of police academies in general and how they shape the mentality of the force in general, Daniel M. Bloomberg, Michael D. Schlosser, et al. present certain significant ideas. As they observe,

> Traditionally, police academies have been conducted in a paramilitary fashion. This means that recruits are held to a high standard of discipline, deportment, and regimentation while learning how to become a police officer. Often, academy training staff would be indistinguishable from military drill sergeants, who verbally harass and even demean recruits who are not measuring up. Push-ups, extra running, and writing reports are used as punishment. Although this training format builds camaraderie and a high level of esprit de corps, it tends to have a fairly high dropout rate, which may not trouble purists who are of the belief that "if they cannot cut it here, they'd never survive on the streets". (Bloomberg et al.)

As the authors state, the intense process of toughening up only makes the cadets more undemocratic and dogmatic, hell-bound on protecting the honour of the owner-state at any cost. The natural relationship with the public, which should have been there, is missing and intentional attempts are made to create a notion that any such attempts to bridge the gap can be akin to being seen as weak and incapable. The state wants the force to be ferocious. Further commenting on the plight of the

cops coming out of such academies, the authors say that “Contemporary policing requires contemporary police training, which incorporates andragogical teaching principles. When academies shift from an authoritarian, paramilitary style to an adult learning model, recruits can develop and strengthen important psychological skills that are essential for today’s police officers” (Bloomberg et al.). The most pertinent question that lingers here is whether the police can ever be democratic, and the state would ever allow its most trusted arm to embrace values of tolerance and peace. The history of the Indian police and its relationship with society cannot be fathomed without addressing this vital discrepancy.

Instances of Police Brutality from the History of Independent India

There have been plenty of instances to prove the partisan nature of the police in India, as the force was nurtured in a way to cater to the interests of the dominant and majority sections. This led to the force being communalised, especially to carry out the majoritarian agendas and policies. This created a Frankenstein in Khaki, with its ideological roots firmly in Islamophobic and anti-subaltern terrains. A close look at the wretched history of the Indian caste hierarchy shows how deeply the malaise has affected our social fabric. In such a scenario, where the society itself was divided based on caste and religion, the Independence movement led by Gandhiji and Dr Ambedkar, basing their ideology on the welfare of the subaltern sections, has helped immensely in popularising a utopian paradise of social and caste/religious equality. This ushered India into an optimistic tomorrow, embellished with the ornamentations of egalitarian ethos and freed from exploitative feudal moral values. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, adopted a socialist

agenda, based on the Soviet model, which was in close parallel to the egalitarian revolutionary ideas preached by Gandhi and Ambedkar. When Ambedkar focussed on ending the discrimination faced by the Dalits from the Savarna sections, Gandhi's motive was to bring forth a fraternal bond between the Hindus and Muslims, who were fighting each other, seriously damaging the societal secular fabric. The early years of the Indian Republic saw attempts to foster fraternity and peace, bridging communal gaps and reducing tensions between warring religious and caste factions. But slowly, the state started to exhibit its authoritarian tendencies and stayed away from the idealistic route enshrined in the constitution.

In his work *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault observes the state as an authoritarian apparatus that seeks to control and discipline the citizens. By elaborating on the notion of the Panopticon by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham, Foucault has observed the state as a constant surveillance machinery that reduces the individual to a mere subject in total control and domination of the state. He says,

> Hence, the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should

> be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, *Discipline* 201)

The elevation of the state from the saviour to the punisher dealt a body blow to the liberal Indians, who dreamt of a socialist future, erasing out the nation's wretched history of caste/religious hierarchies and discrimination. Towards the beginning of the 1960s. The utopian socialist dream, also known as "Nehruvian Socialism", designed and propagated by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, came crumbling down, and the death of Nehru added to the growing sense of disillusionment and exasperation. The social mood has undergone a paradigmatic shift in the decade, and it also saw the transformation of the psyche of the common Indians from an optimistic imagination of an egalitarian social order to the acceptance of the dreary reality of social inequality and exploitation. As Foucault observes, the state has risen into the position of an ever-surveillant, dominating superpower, and citizens meekly surrendered to the new normal. In this significant social transformation, the police played a vital role as the major arbitrator who had to be in constant touch with the populace. The colonial police and their functioning were reproduced in a slightly different manner. The Indian freedom struggle was known for its constant run-ins with the colonial police force. The new Indian police force, trained in the erstwhile colonial model, took on itself the duty to discipline the citizenry. The already controlled populace had to be "disciplined" for the state, which was carried out by the police. The notion of discipline needs to be focused here as Foucault says, "Discipline 'makes' individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise"

(Foucault *Discipline* 170). The Foucauldian notion of discipline here states how the state creates individuals who cater to its needs, and who never veer out of its orbit of control.

In the Indian scenario, the police slowly manifested as the omnipresent machinery built and maintained by the state solely to control the subjects. Over time, the police in India have often been perceived as straying from their role as impartial custodians of law and order—a perception vividly reflected in their portrayals within popular culture. Growing concerns about their lack of empathy and limited alignment with democratic values have contributed to the widening of social divides along lines of religion, caste, class, and other identities, frequently depicted in both visual and literary media. Their tendency to align with dominant interests has, at times, emerged as a central thematic concern across multiple forms of storytelling. In Hindi cinema, numerous instances can be found in which the police characters are depicted as either villains or their henchmen. Popular Hindi films like *Zanjeer* (1973), *Aandhi* (1975), and *Ardh Satya* (1983) portray the police force as either ineffective or incapable. These films talk about the rot in the system and the loss of the public's trust. Even in an immensely popular film like Sholay, where the hero is a police officer, it flays the system of policing as problematic. In her article "Raj Kapoor: From Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai to Ram Teri Ganga Maili", included in the book *The Secret Politics of Our Desires: Innocence, Culpability and Indian Popular Cinema*, Rajani Bakshi makes some significant observations about the representation of police in Hindi cinema. As she puts it,

> By the beginning of the 1980s, the character of police had changed. The police, in popular film, were now either helpless spectators of crime or a party to it. The psychopathic, sleek villain now took many forms, the most recurrent of which was the khadi-clad politician . . . The only possible response to this reality, shown in film after film, was either to become a ruthless killer and beat the ungodly at their own game or to destroy the evil in a single, self-destructive, cataclysmic act of violence. For instance, in Govind Nihlani's film, Ardha Satya, a frustrated honest police officer strangles the mafia don who had tormented him. (Bakshi 122)

She hints at how popular Hindi cinema conceived the police as an institution. The societal perception of the police was getting reflected in various art forms, including cinema.

The partition divided the land as well as the souls of the nation, as the period saw incurable communal wounds created by the British Empire via their divide-and-rule policy fester. The religious divide was evident as a major chunk of the politicians, including many from the ruling Congress party, believed that, as Pakistan was created as a Muslim nation, the Hindus in India had every right to demand a Hindu nation. Though the Indian constitution officially confirmed its status as a secular republic, underneath the socio-political spectrum, simmering communal tensions and sulking majoritarian pride were visible. The sense of loss by the savarna elites in India manifested in the manner in which minorities and subalterns were treated. The police acted as a vital cog in this intense hate campaign. Numerous studies and reports have proved that in India, most of the accused or

prisoners in India, many of them undertrials, are from the subaltern sections. As reported by The Economic Times on September 3, 2022, “Of the total 554,034 prison inmates in the country in 2021, 373,337 or 67.5% belonged to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other backward classes (OBCs), according to the latest prison statistics of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB)” (Tripathi). The prejudicial treatment meted out to the subaltern sections speaks volumes about the ideological alignment of the police force with the Savarna elite.

Independent India has witnessed numerous instances of the police siding with the majoritarian sentiments during communal riots. The Islamophobic traits of the khaki have been a hotly contested issue that dates back to the period of partition. In a secular democratic republic, such partisan actions create deep wounds in the societal fabric. The quintessential Islamophobic attributes of the Indian police came to light on May 22, 1987, when more than 40 members of the Muslim community were shot dead in cold blood by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) of Uttar Pradesh in Hashimpura, an incident later came to be known as the ‘Hashimpura Massacre’. This incident sent shock waves across the nation. The 1980s saw numerous communal shuffles, and the police were said to be aiding the majority groups while dealing with the situation in Uttar Pradesh. In the year 1987, Meerut in Uttar Pradesh witnessed flaring communal tensions, and the state banked on the police and PAC to restore order. When a few communal flare-ups occurred in nearby areas, the PAC took random people from the Muslim community into custody and shot them in cold blood. Later, the bodies of the deceased were thrown into an irrigation canal, much to the shock of secular India. Though the incident

created a hue and cry over the partisan, Islamophobic conduct of the police, the demands to de-communalise the police died down in due time, especially with the rising tempers of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and Babri Masjid demolition. Vibhuti Narain Rai, IPS (retired), throws light on a few aspects. He says,

> When the officers of the PAC abducted 42 Muslims from the Hashimpura area of Meerut on May 22, 1987, and brought them to Ghaziabad where they made them stand between two canals and shot them dead, I was posted in Ghaziabad as Superintendent of Police (SP). The incident took place at 9 pm in the night. I got the information about it around 10:30 PM. I can never forget what I saw that dark night at the Ganga canal -- one of the scenes of the crime when I reached there with other officers. Trying to weed out dead bodies from among the wild shrubs along the banks of the canal, on the blood-stained ground with the dim lights of our weakened torches on that night on Delhi Ghaziabad border. Making sure not to trample on a human body, dead or alive, measuring each step carefully. That gruesome memory is vividly etched in memory. Like a not-to-be-forgotten horror movie. (Rai)

The shameless act of the police in publicly taking sides while two communities engaged in communal altercations was shocking to the secular-minded Indian public. The police were taking orders from the pro-majoritarian state, and its repressive face came to the fore in its bloodied form in Hashimpura. The Delhi High Court in 2018 sentenced 16 members of the PAC to life imprisonment for mass murder, yet the delay in the punishment came at the cost of trust in the criminal

justice system of the country, in light of the partisan nature of the law enforcement agencies.

The image shows the rounding up of random Muslim men by the PAC personnel before the massacre (Jain).

Economic and Political Weekly, a social science journal, which is noted for scholarly articles on socio-political and historical issues, has written numerous editorials and articles on the Hashimpura massacre. In an editorial, it narrates the horrific incident thus,

> On 22 May 1987, 42 Muslim men, the majority of them weavers and daily wage labourers from the locality of Hashimpura in Meerut, Uttar Pradesh (UP), were picked up from their homes. Meerut had witnessed communal riots in the previous months, and the army and police had been called in to conduct a combing operation. The men were loaded into trucks by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), taken outside the city towards the

> Delhi–Ghaziabad border, pushed off the trucks and shot dead. Their bodies were found within hours in two different locations. Five men managed to survive the massacre by pretending to be dead. Vibhuti Narain Rai, who was then superintendent of police, Ghaziabad, reached one of the sites of the massacre within hours after being alerted by a local sub-inspector. There, amongst the dozens of dead men in the stream, he discovered that one man, Babuddin, was still alive. Within 24 hours, Babuddin had filed a first information report (FIR); Rai had submitted his report of what he witnessed and the government also had pictorial evidence by way of photographs taken by an intrepid press photographer of the police leading unarmed men with their hands up in the air to what would eventually be their gruesome deaths. ("A Horror Compounded")

The functioning of the Indian police can be cited as a perfect example of the 'deep state', which is a secretive and illegal arrangement to carry out certain agendas. This arrangement is a clear violation of the popular mandate, as the tentacles of the deep state often bypass the limits of the democratically elected governments. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the deep state as "An alleged secret network of especially unelected government officials and sometimes private entities (as in the financial services and defence industries) operating extralegally to influence and enact government policy" (Merriam-Webster). The secrecy and hidden agendas make this network a sinister one, antithetical to the democratic ethos of any republic. The deep state can either further the state's secret agendas using its wide network, or even work against the state when the elected governments tend to

act against the whims of the powerful sects. In the Indian scenario, the police act as the deep state, a network to carry out the most atrocious and implicit ideological designs of the state. An incident such as Hashimpura proves the callousness of the police deep state in carrying out the majoritarian ideological programmes of the state.

In his pathbreaking work, *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India*, Omar Khalidi lists out the reasons for the partisan and atrocious behavioural patterns of the armed forces and the police in India. He examines the discriminatory manner in which the Khaki functions and how the minority communities have been at the receiving end, especially during communal riots. Khalidi points out how Hindutva leaders have intervened in the daily affairs of the armed forces, like distributing Hindu religious scriptures and texts. He says, "Rear Admiral Vijay Shankar announced that henceforth new naval cadets would be supplied copies of Ramayana for classroom exercises" (Khalidi 27). Along with this, the dwindling number of Muslims in the army and police is another area of concern raised by Khalidi. He goes on to state, "Why are there so few Muslims now, in comparison with their number in the pre-Independence era? First, a majority of the Muslim officers left for Pakistan; secondly, the Congress governments terminated the conscious colonial policy of ethnic balancing between Hindus and Muslims" (Khalidi 69). According to Khalidi, these policies resulted in the reduced number of Muslims in the Indian police force, which, in the long run, led to highly prejudiced and partisan actions against the minorities. As mentioned earlier, the Hashimpura massacre was carried out by the PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary), an armed reserve force tasked to help the

police. Omar Khalidi quotes N.C Saxena, who was the former director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, in the book, which throws light on the reasons for such chilling incidents of abject brutality and communal hatred. As N.C Saxena puts it, “It was then (post-1947) the clear policy of the U.P. government not to recruit any Muslims to PAC (Saxena qtd. in Khalidi 76). The need of the hour was a proper recruitment policy, where cops from both majority and minority communities share camaraderie and national spirit, which was rooted in a secular ethos. The anti-Muslim riot of 1969 in Ahmedabad was one of the most notorious ones in the history of Independent India, as the majority members of the police silently witnessed the lynchings of Muslims by ferocious majority groups. This was later severely criticised by social activists and various journalists. As Khushwant Singh states, as included by Omar Khalidi in his book, “The only thing to do is to draft substantial numbers of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Anglo-Indians and Parsis into our police forces. Let the police force of Kashmir be largely non-Muslim, that of Punjab, Haryana be largely non-Sikh and non-Hindu. In all other states, between 20-25 per cent should be Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsi and Anglo-Indian” (Khushwant Singh qtd. in Khalidi 91). So, the imbalance in religious representation has hugely contributed to the problems already existing in the Indian armed forces.

Extra-judicial killings are antithetical to the democratic principles of a country. India has a wretched history of such illegal and unethical target killings carried out by the police at the behest of the state. As history testifies, such incidents have communal undercurrents, too. Among those, the most notorious and headline-

grabbing one was the fake encounter of Ishrat Jahan Raza by the Gujarat police on 15 June 2004. Later, the CBI and SIT (Special Investigation Team) declared that the encounter was staged, much to the embarrassment of the Gujarat Police and the state government. In such instances, it can be assumed that the police take the authority to carry out punishments, often at the behest of an authoritarian state. This can also be cited as a reason for the public's impatience with the pace of the justice system's work. In such instances, the system as well as the public expect the police to act as the agency that carries out punishments to ensure law and order. In his article "Fake Police Encounter: A Serious Impediment to Fair Trial of Accused in India", published in the *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*, Anurag Ankur highlights the problems posed to democracy by fake encounters. As he observes, "Fake Encounters can be defined as extrajudicial killing of persons who are usually in custody of law enforcement agencies, without following the due process of law. Encounters are a grave violation of Human Rights and portray the pitiful state of our criminal justice system" (Ankur 598). It is antithetical to the values enshrined in the Constitution, and even the Courts have criticised it in numerous instances. He continues to observe that,

> It has been held by Supreme Court in Prakash Kadam & etc. v. Ramprasad Vishwanath Gupta & Anr that 'Fake encounters' are equivalent to cold blooded' and 'brutal murder' by persons who are expected to uphold the supremacy of law. Also it has been observed by the Hon'ble court that if crimes are committed by common people, ordinary punishment should be given, but if the offence is committed by policemen much stricter

> punishment should be given to them because they do an act totally opposed to their duties, and where a fake encounter is established against policemen in a trial, they must be given death sentence, considering it as the 'rarest of rare cases'. (Ankur 601)

The attempts to engage violently with public agitations have also been flayed by humanitarians and human rights members for a long time. The police are a suppressive tool of the state, that only knows one method, that of violence. Incidents like the Thoothukudi massacre, where 13 villagers were killed and more than 100 people injured when the police fired at an agitation without any warning of provocation. All the deceased were from the subaltern sections, and they were peacefully protesting against a copper smelter plant, citing environmental issues. Certain notions that need to be understood in this context include the impunity of the police, which was granted by the authoritarian state mechanism and the anti-subaltern, Islamophobic ideological strains that run through the police machinery. It is evident that post-independence, Indian police have stayed away from the ideal democratic and secular values enshrined in the Constitution. Any examination of the functioning of policing cannot evade the wanton violation of human rights by the people in Khaki, and often, such violations were treated as the norm and left unpunished.

The force in Khaki is an omnipresent influence in the lives of the people of the country. This makes their representation in art, culture and literature immensely significant considering their societal leverage, which holds considerable influence in forming a social and moral value system. As the most popular medium among all

the artistic media, cinema can be regarded as a significant artistic tool that can sway the public's moods, create moral values and even manipulate opinions. It has become a part of people's lives, experiences and even existence. In her book on Gilles Deleuze, philosopher Paola Marrati puts forth her views on the influence and impact of cinema in the modern age. As she observes,

> There is no doubt that cinema was one of the twentieth century's great inventions. It was art, but it also accompanied whole generations as they went about their daily lives. It was modern art, if only because it managed, like no other art of the twentieth century, to be part of all our lives. This is precisely what Deleuze acknowledges in the last lines of the preface to the French edition of *Cinema I*, where he justifies the absence of reproductions in the book by calling on "the great films, of which each of us retains to a greater or lesser extent a memory, emotion, or perception" (xiv/8). Stanley Cavell, too, invokes this collective memory in his books on cinema. The situation may have altered some time ago, but the fact remains that cinema has been able to inscribe its history within our collective memory, and we have yet to assess the significance of such a fact. (Marrati 6)

The influence of cinema in the 20th century is unparalleled. It creates memories and records them in the collective psyche of the audience. As Marrati states, cinema became part of the lives of the people, unlike other art forms. Thus, as the most influential artistic medium, any representation in cinema is a crucial aspect of any study concerning the society and evolution of culture. Cinema is an ideological and political medium, and the images and meanings produced by it are

rich in connotations and subtexts. The subtlety of the patterns of cinematic representations is also a major area to be focused on, as the frames are capable of conveying immensely vital socio-political themes and notions. This thesis is an attempt to examine the representation of the police in Malayalam cinema in particular. This study aims to examine the portrayal of police in Malayalam cinema, focusing on the post-independence social scenario. With an emphasis on how these depictions reflect and react to larger social realities, this thesis aims to critically analyse how the police are portrayed in Malayalam cinema. It aims to investigate how police characters are portrayed in movies and what these portrayals tell us about Kerala's shifting sociopolitical environment, particularly in the years following independence. Malayalam cinema, which is renowned for its realistic stories and attention to current events, provides a wealth of material for examining how the perception of law enforcement is changing. The thesis looks at these depictions in order to comprehend how movies deal with issues like justice, authority, power, and public opinion. The study will closely examine how political, cultural, and historical changes impact police-related film narratives. By doing this, the study examines narrative techniques employed by filmmakers as well as considers the ideological functions these representations serve in the public imagination. Ultimately, this thesis tries to contribute to broader discussions about cinema's role in shaping and reflecting societal attitudes toward state institutions like the police.

The police have been represented in various forms and manners in Indian cinema. There are police heroes, villains, and even cops who take on comic roles.

Hindi cinema has a rich history of accommodating police characters in various shades. Kiran Shaheen, in his article titled "Portrayal of Police Torture in Hindi Films and Television Serials and its impact on children", puts forth numerous perspectives regarding the representation of police characters in Hindi cinema. He cites various films, including *Ardhasatya, Satyameva Jayate, Khuddar, Tejaswini, Anth, Drohkaal, and Ghayal,* to highlight the multifaceted patterns of police portrayal. Kiran goes on to argue that whether the cop is portrayed as a hero or an anti-hero, the right to employ third-degree measures is taken for granted. As he observes,

> Police torture is a common phenomenon in both commercial and parallel cinema. The only treatment of the issue is different in parallel cinema. Some use symbolic violence, and some use stylised violence. Commercial cinema uses gory details of violence and torture by police; Mainly petty criminals belonging to lower income groups are subjected to torture, except in the case of the hero, who is supposed to fight and take revenge later. But at the end of the movie, the climax scene in general portrays violence and torture involving the hero, the heroine, police and underworld mafia. Wherever the hero is a police officer, he also uses third-degree methods on the henchmen of the Mafia. But in all these films, the head of the Mafia or the don has not been subjected to torture by the police, although he is beaten by the hero in the climax; Torture by the police is shown in a way as if there is no other option before police to bring the culprits to book. Police characters, good or bad, honest or corrupt, use the same method to extract a confession, true or

> false. The aim is to inflict torture, forcing a person to confess so s/he can be proven guilty, extract information or torture is inflicted as punishment. (Shaheen 22)

The article points out the politics of police portrayal in Hindi cinema and how those films were received by the audience. Police characters have adorned the Indian silver screen in various shades, but detailed studies on such representations are few. The police representation needs to be problematised for a proper understanding of the systems and patterns at work in such a portrayal. In Malayalam, the portrayal of police is a wide area to be examined, as the history of Malayalam cinema presents numerous films with interesting cop characters. The analysis of the representation of police in Malayalam cinema demands a critique of the historical and political contexts that existed in Kerala post-independence. Kerala's modernity and the much-celebrated renaissance, for its role in spearheading a progressive wave throughout the state, have been much problematised in scholarly writings. Malayalam cinema, especially in its quest to be a realistic enterprise in the earlier stages of its inception, tried to be a mirror that replicates social and cultural realities. Though the police were not visible in the earliest stages, slowly, the presence of khaki became evident.

The study observes cinema and socio-political scenarios simultaneously to form specific hypotheses based on the influence of the latter on the former. Historical incidents play a key role in this aspect. Cinema can never be treated in isolation from society, and it has always been used as a tool to represent ideological standpoints. In her essay "Movies as Mirrors of Politics: Reflecting Socio-Political

Realities on the Silver Screen", Dr. Rubi points out a few important notions regarding cinema and society. She reminds the readers about the way the art form was used by both fascists and socialists, as she cites the instances of the fascist propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* by Leni Riefenstahl and the pro-communist film from the Soviet Union, *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, still regarded as a great political film and a masterpiece. She states that, "During World War II and the Cold War, governments recognised the potent influence of cinema as a propaganda medium. Both Allied and Axis powers used films to manipulate sentiments, bolster national morale, and vilify their adversaries" (Rubi 157). She continues to state that, "Throughout history, films have proven to be more than just a means of entertainment; they have served as powerful mirrors that reflect and shape the complexities of politics, ideologies, and social issues" (Rubi 164-165). Cinema and society have always been influenced by each other. This study focuses on the sociological and political angles of cinema to form conclusions based on certain important milestones and their significance in history.

In the beginning stages of Malayalam cinema, especially during the 1950s and 1960s, police personnel were often deployed for comical purposes. Later, during the 1970s, police in the cinema came to be seen as state machinery. The period was noted for the failure of Nehruvian socialism and the emergence of Naxalism. The police became a repressive system during the Naxal period, yet attempts to represent it on the screen were few and far between. The 1980s, known for the social turmoil created by the Mandal Commission effect, had a bearing on the silver screen as well. The representation of police characters, too, had to be viewed in this regard. In the

1990s, the waves of globalisation were felt in cinema along with the emergence of police morality, which gradually became the accepted social morality. Victorian morality, the product of colonialism, was accepted by Indian society as a State-sponsored cultural process. Police redefined their role as the saviours of this accepted social morality. The study attempts to analyse how such a moral system was reproduced in the reels. The research needs to find certain answers to questions such as, when did the police become visible in Malayalam cinema? When did it evolve as a genre? How can the growth from mere visibility to genre be traced? How did Malayalam cinema reflect the role of police as the champions of state ideology and social morality during the various decades that also witnessed many a cinematic movement? And what is the extent of the influence of politically significant incidents on cinema?

The research problem here needs to be viewed at a juncture, where the social psyche of Kerala is getting used to the police highhandedness as the normal course. This research attempts to assess how the prejudices and established traditional paradigms regarding the behavioural patterns of police are influencing the silver screen. The moot questions here are, what is particular about the collective social psyche of Malayalees regarding police, and how has it influenced cinema? How does power manifest itself through popular media? Is cinema powerful enough to create new social paradigms? The issue discussed here cannot be treated in isolation from the myriad problems of contemporary society in Kerala, as popular cinema is deeply linked to the Malayali social and political fabric. In that case, it is high time a critical approach is developed to view popular media like cinema and the modes of

representation. Value systems thus created should also be studied and criticised. Thus, the basic research problem here is related to society, power and representation. The thesis intends to trace the evolution of the police in Malayalam cinema and the working of hegemonic societal and political power patterns.

As this study is connected with the state, police, and cinema, various theoretical notions that deal with these need to be referred to. Louis Althusser's ideas regarding the state and the state's ideological and repressive apparatus hold significance as far as this research is concerned. Michel Foucault's theories about power and the state are to be resorted to. The research will also be aided immensely by Antonio Gramsci's theoretical insights on hegemony and its manifestations as well. Giorgio Agamben's observations on the exercise of power are useful in understanding the nexus between the police and the state. His ideas, such as 'Homo Sacer' and 'state of exception' are examined in this study. The modes of representation should be examined carefully, as a medium like cinema is not immune to the influence of power. In this juncture, Stuart Hall's concepts on representation need to be used. The thesis intends to critically examine the discourses that occurred during various phases, which could influence the representation of police characters. For this, a comprehensive understanding of the public sphere where these discourses occur is required. Thus, Jürgen Habermas's notions on the public sphere are significant for this study. Jean Louis Baudry's Apparatus theory is a helpful tool in disseminating the complicated relation between cinema and power. Baudry's ideas are also resorted to as the study aims to critically evaluate power and its role in determining modes of representation. As the police are

viewed here as an oppressive machinery that tortures the hapless populace, the trauma that can be inflicted upon society is unparalleled. Here, trauma theory is examined to further the assumptions formed after analysing certain films with police brutality.

A theoretical examination of selected films is needed to form concrete perceptions. When power and political positions are analysed in cinema, theoretical notions of thinkers like Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben are significant. While brooding on the application of Foucauldian notions in cinema, Juan David Cárdenas, in his article "Cinema as a Foucauldian Dispositif: An Anachronistic and Materialistic Approach", states thus

> Now it is possible to find a clear connection between the institutional approach to film and Foucault's analysis of modern disciplinary societies. His theoretical work on disciplinary societies is tremendously useful to cinema studies because it allows us to think of cinema as a wide articulation of institutions, theoretical and vernacular discourses, production, distribution and exhibition practices; technical devices which use have been standardised and finally the so-called filmic language. As a product of these articulations, films are neither simple commodities nor simple works of art. They are not mere isolated objects but the crystallisation of heterogeneous phenomena in the context of modernity. (Cardenas)

Applying Foucauldian concepts in the Hollywood films *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, Susmita Rajkhowa, in her article "Beyond the Bars: Foucault's Panopticon and Resistance in Cinematic

Representation of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Shawshank Redemption*", says,

> In both *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *The Shawshank Redemption*, the institutional settings of a mental institution and a prison, respectively, can be analysed through the eyes of Michel Foucault's *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. In One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest, the mental institution, ruled by Nurse Ratched, exemplifies Foucault's concept of disciplinary power… In *The Shawshank Redemption*, Shawshank State Penitentiary operates as a panoptic institution, a concept central to Foucault's analysis. The prison's design, with its centralised watchtower enabling constant surveillance, reflects the panoptic principle of visibility and control. The presence of guards and wardens reinforces the disciplinary mechanisms aimed at regulating the behaviour of inmates and maintaining order within the institution. (Rajkhova 29)

These concepts have been used by scholars of various disciplines to study state, power and its various manifestations. In the field of cinema studies, notions related to power by theoreticians like Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben have been of great assistance in formulating conclusions regarding the functioning of various systems.

A detailed analysis of the police system in India is necessary to comprehend the politics of cinematic representation. Thus, the criminal justice system has to be understood in depth, along with making use of various theoretical discourses related to it. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a method of studying language to

understand the working of power, ideology and social relations. The dissertation uses mixed/multiple methodologies or triangulation as it involves complex social phenomena across multiple perspectives. As Critical Discourse Analysis is suited here, this study uses it as an approach, and Textual Analysis, a research method of using written texts or visuals to unearth underlying meanings, is employed as a mode of examination.

CDA focuses on various social discourses and examines how they represent and reflects social inequality, discrimination, etc. The attempt is to unravel the power play within these sites of discourse. CDA. looks at language critically and tries to find out how it acts as an agent of power. Critical Discourse Analysis is a concept that believes language can create, alter and shape social hierarchies. Here, the power structures are scrutinised at various junctures of social discourses. In his book *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, Norman Fairclough views the concept from various perspectives, placing language as a basic parameter. He observes that,

> It (CDA) is a functional theory of language orientated to the question of how language is structured to tackle its primary social functions. Thus, grammar is seen as structured by the three (macro) functions of language I referred to earlier, the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions. It is also a textually orientated theory concerned with producing grammatical descriptions which are usable in textual analysis. (Fairclough 10)

As he examines in his book, CDA can be a helpful tool while employing textual analysis. Media, cinema and literature can be studied, and the power relations inherent in them can be unravelled using them.

For a proper understanding of the representation of police in Malayalam cinema, the history of Malayalam cinema can be roughly divided into certain phases, though overlapping of films could be a continuous phenomenon. For the first stage of analysis, which constitutes the second chapter of the thesis, the early stages of Malayalam cinema are to be examined, and a few movies with a notable police representation are to be taken to understand how the police system became visible on the silver screen. While examining the early stages of Malayalam cinema, it is noticeable that significant police characters were in negligible presence only. Only by the 1970s, notable police representations could be found in Malayalam cinema. Movies post-1970s deserve special examination as the period is known for socio-political tumult, which created ripples in Kerala society. The youth of Kerala, who were intellectually involved in the progressive political realm, were thrown into a chaotic and confused state of mind, and the rise of Naxalism as an emancipatory movement also had its share to contribute. This period is noted for the emergence of political cinema in Malayalam.

As this study focuses on the relationship between cinema and the socio-political determining factors, the National Emergency, declared in 1975 by the then Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, must be treated as a crucial development. The emergency sent shocking waves across the body politic of India, which had a great and lasting impact on civilian life, politics, culture, arts, etc. The police, during the times of the Emergency, suppressed the public and acted as the henchmen of the authoritarian state. By analysing selected films post-1975, it is evident that the social situation of the times has greatly influenced the representation of cops on the silver

screen. This thesis views the National Emergency as an important and historical milestone that has influenced the cinematic portrayal of the police.

Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol, directed by P.A. Bakkar, which came out during the period of the Emergency, was an important milestone in the period. This was the first film in the history of independent India, where a film was directly censored by the Police. Thus, the involvement of the state through the police, even before the release of films during these torrid times, needs to be considered. Another important film to be considered is *Meenamasathile Sooryan*, directed by Lenin Rajendran. The film can be viewed as a movie that places the police in the social realm of Kerala as an arm of the state, with its priorities very much in contrast to the common, working-class people. Movies of directors like John Abraham and Hariharan are to be thoroughly examined. This constitutes the second chapter of the thesis, as the introduction is the first chapter.

The next stage deals with post-1990 films. The division is based on the socio-political factors that have influenced the patterns of portrayal of police characters. The years post-1990 are regarded as a game changer considering the evolution Indian society and polity had undergone. The previous decade saw the discussions on the Mandal Commission recommendations irking the caste elites. The 1990s witnessed a rising tide of political Hindutva and neoliberalism. This maverick duo has changed the framework and landscape of Indian civil society and politics. The demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 is given focus in this study as the most significant societal incident while analysing the police characterisation in Malayalam cinema. The Babri incident created a novel political climate that divided

the Indian civil society based on religion. The study observes the influence of this phenomenon on cinema and representation. This stage is significant in this study as this phase marks the evolution of police as a genre in Malayalam cinema, and the police become the creators and preservers of social morality. The duty of the police force was not limited to enforcing criminal rules and laws, instead, they turned into a significant social machinery to ensure the upholding of moral values. Such moral values arise out of the majoritarian religious and political sentiments, rooted in conservative feudal value systems. The evolution of police characters into a noticeable genre was the zeitgeist of the period, and a few films have to be taken for closer analysis. Various films such as *Commissioner*, *Ekalavyan* and *F.I.R.,* directed by Shaji Kailas, *Satyameva Jayathe,* directed by Viji Thampi, are studied here. These films throw light on the evolving patterns of police in Malayalam cinema as a genre of its own. Also, the evolution of actor Suresh Gopi as the poster boy of this movement. His characters need to be closely examined to fathom the closely knit relationship between the polity, state and the moral fabric of the society. This period places the police as the champions of social morality. The transformation of the police system into a religious/moral system, with its inherent violent and dogmatic structure, is evident as the police assume the role of the mighty male saviour. This constitutes the third chapter of the thesis.

The second decade of the new millennium witnessed a cultural and technical revolution in Malayalam cinema. The period ushered in significant changes in the way the medium of cinema was conceived. A crop of new directors with hitherto unseen cinematic language and sensibility came in with their films, which were

heavily influenced by Western cinematic movements like the French New Wave. They questioned the traditional pattern and were brave enough to challenge the conservative cinematic idiom of Malayalam as well as the superstar-oriented power system. Malayalam commercial cinema, which was apolitical, also witnessed quite an evolution, as the New Generation filmmakers spoke politics with clarity and precision, questioning the fundamental treatises of the gender-class-caste hierarchies celebrated by Malayalam cinema. The films of the period attempted to deconstruct the much-celebrated police characterisation, basing their criticism on democratic principles. The study takes into account certain game-changing facets of the period, such as the arrival of social media and the emergence of Hindutva 2.0 at the national stage. These should be seen as the most crucial indicators of the Period. The thesis aims to look at these impacts coupled with the socio-political conditions of Kerala, which might have affected the manner of police representation in films post-2010. Contemporary times see a critique of this police morality on the silver screen as films like *Kammattippadam*, *Annayum Rasoolum* and *Njan Steve Lopez* by Rajeev Ravi, *Mayaanadhi* directed by Aashiq Abu, *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* by Dileesh Pothan *Kismath* by Shanavas. K Bavakkutti and *Thalappavu,* directed by Madhupal, showed the grit to flay accepted conventions while portraying police characters. Here, a dismantling of the structural pattern of policing in Malayalam cinema is initiated. The research intends to delve deep into this latest phenomenon, too. This constitutes the fourth chapter of the thesis. The fifth chapter of the thesis is the conclusion, where a hypothesis will be formed after examining all the above-discussed socio-political phenomena and the intricate patterns of cinematic representation.

Numerous studies about the system of police and its use by the state apparatus have been conducted in the discipline of political science. Books written by Omar Khalidi, such as *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India: Army, Police, and Paramilitary Forces During Communal Riots* and *Khaki and Ethnic Violence in India-2,* present a strong critique of the police system in India. Analysis of Malayalam cinema from cultural and political perspectives has been done in the past by certain scholars. In her research thesis titled *Malayalam Cinema, Society and Politics of Kerala*, K. Vasanthi examines Malayalam cinema and Kerala society from a political and cultural viewpoint, and problematises society, gender roles and places cinema at the centre of the discourse. She divides the history of Malayalam cinema into certain phases: phase one (1938-1953), where mostly mythological and historical films were produced; phase two (1954-1965), where a link between Malayalam literature and Cinema was established, and a unique Kerala cultural idiom was reflected on screen; phase three (1965-1971), which saw the growth of Malayalam film industry and the recognitions it gained on the national stage and phase four (1972-1988), where parallel cinema announced its arrival and found its niche in Malayalam cinema. Vasanthi goes on to bring in political and societal aspects into the ambit of the study and tries to make a connection between the reel and the real. In his research thesis titled *Rethinking Religion Redefining Politics: Malayalam Cinema 1970s, 90s and Beyond,* Benedict Varghese scrutinises Malayalam cinema and the much-celebrated political cinema of the 1970s. As this research deals with the visibility of police in the celluloid, this period holds great significance. Another significant work to be mentioned is *Left Politics in Malayalam Cinema: A Critical Inquiry*, a research thesis by Anwar. It is relevant for its

understanding of politics, power and its manifestation. Anwar goes deep into the societal and political echelons of Malayalam cinema to trace the leftist political narratives within. Though society, politics, religion, gender, etc. have been extensively studied, no serious research activities about the portrayal of police in Malayalam cinema have been conducted thus far, which makes this thesis a novel enquiry on the topic.

The research theses of Anwar and Benedict Varghese analyse in depth the political landscape of Kerala and the social turmoil of the times. Yet, the writers ignore the roles played by the state and police, often conniving for specific purposes. A holistic approach regarding the impacts of the duo on society and culture was also lacking in these studies. In Vasanthi's thesis, too, though she scrutinises the historical and political situations and brings it into the ambit of cinema, there is no detailing regarding the role played by power, its impact on the silver screen its influences in the representation of police characters. In G.P. Ramachandran's *Malayala Cinema: Desam, Bhasha, Samskaram*, the author has touched upon the various parameters that have played a crucial role in the formation of certain belief systems and cultural ethos through cinema. The article "Khaki on Screen: Understanding the Representation of Cops in Malayalam Cinema" by Mitul Joseph Koickakudy is a significant work dealing with the representation of police, especially in contemporary times. He analyses a few films with significant cop characters and establishes certain paradigmatic shifts in representation. The normalisation of police brutality and cinema's penchant for the glorification of macho police avatars are discussed in this article. All these works are important and

can be viewed as a database in understanding Malayalam cinema across decades. Mitul's work gives glimpses into the portrayal of police and is helpful to further the scope of the study. Yet, the representation of police in Malayalam cinema across decades, simultaneously focusing on the socio-political parameters, has not been examined, and this hitherto unexplored terrain intensifies the possibilities of this study. The thesis intends to fill this research gap.

The Kerala society is often touted as the most politically vigilant and sensible institution, which is aware of the social responsibilities and democratic rights, enshrined in the constitution. 'The Kerala model' of development was a much-used phrase in contemporary times, as the social achievements of the state and its high ranks in social indices place it much above every other state in India. This elite positioning of Kerala in the Indian sociological scheme demands great responsibility regarding the contexts of justice and humanitarianism. Though Kerala leads in many social indices, certain questions regarding the conduct of the police force in the state need to be asked. In his M.Phil. dissertation titled, *Marginalised in A Model of Development: Dalit Critique of the Kerala Development Experience*, Manu M.R. problematises the much-celebrated Kerala modernity. He discusses how the subalterns are excluded from its ambit. Though Kerala prides itself on the much celebrated 'Kerala model of development', deep schism between communities can be found in the play of power from a cultural and sociological perspective. As Manu M.R. puts it,

> The very discourse constituting the modern development has excluded Dalits of Kerala, as it had the abstract, unmarked citizen as the subject. It helped to

> produce unmarked governable subjects which resulted in the non-recognition of the relative deprivation of Dalits. A deep inspection of the discourses on the development of Kerala modernity and the development would find no Dalit subject in it. All the approaches used to study the development of Kerala has mostly employed political economy or the capability approach which ignored group inequalities as they had the abstract universal Malayalee as the subject. Even when group inequality was recognised, it has been reduced to a case of state negligence. They stopped short of criticising the fundamental flaw of the modem development itself, which required complex solutions in which self-consciousness and addressing the dignity questions have a greater role to play. (M.R. 77)

The dissertation unravels deep-rooted discrimination in Kerala society and cites instances of Dalit land struggles, such as the Chengara protest, to drive home his idea. Instances such as the police shooting at tribals who were agitating for land rights in Muthanga attest to this fact. The police often treat subaltern struggles in a violent manner, which is approved by the hegemonic social forces. This contrasting scenario, where a democratically vigilant society tolerates a repressive policing system, must be understood only by enhancing the scope of the examination, including popular culture and the politics of representation.

The limitation of the study would be determined by the issues in dealing with the large number of movies that depict the roles of police personnel. Repetitive patterns of portrayal would also be a hindrance while selecting and arranging movies for the study. Though it is hard to meticulously scrutinise every movie, a

comprehensive evaluation of the various factors concerning the representation of the police should be done. In contemporary Kerala society, news regarding police atrocities has ceased to shock the public conscience. Such atrocious actions are repeated, and society often tends to show a sympathetic attitude towards the force, citing their contributions in keeping law and order. The social attitude that valorises the police has influenced cinema to a great extent. The study aims to prove how the Malayalam film industry has created a police culture of its own during the past decades. As the number of films to be studied needs to be fixed, a few films will have to be omitted from the examination. Also, though the scope for gender-based analysis is very much relevant, this study has not traversed that path, as this thesis focuses on the socio-political factors related to power at work. Another major limitation would be the unavailability of texts that have dealt with the representation of police on the silver screen.

The thesis aims to reflect on the cultural and sociological psyche of Kerala and fathom how the normalisation of police violence both inside and outside the silver screen has become the norm. It also examines how this trend has progressed in the course of history. All the selected films are subjected to a thorough investigation, and based on it, the history of Malayalam cinema is divided into certain phases. This compartmentalisation was done to make the analysis much simpler and more understandable, in connection with certain immensely important political developments. The study explores the relation between society, state, power and the patterns of representation. Various decades are analysed here with a keen eye on the sociological phenomenon that might have impacted the modes of cop representation

on screen. The thesis plans to expand the scope of democratic exploration into society, and popular culture needs to be taken along as a vital tool of enquiry. It is expected that the findings of the research will help in ushering in a vigilant and sensible culture of scrutiny and assessment regarding the relationship between society and cinema. As mentioned earlier, the core chapters are divided into three, and they focus on the early stages to the 1990s, the period post-1990 and the new generation phase, which is the period post-2010. The first core chapter, which is the one following the Introduction chapter, examines the decades before the 1990s and scrutinises the important socio-political incidents of the period. A few films are chosen for a detailed study, and the chapter looks at how the period paves the way for a major transformation in the manner in which police are portrayed.

Chapter 2

The Early Stages of Cop Characters in Malayalam Cinema

The history of Malayalam cinema begins with the release of *Vigathakumaran* in 1928, considered the first-ever Malayalam movie. The beginning of Malayalam cinema itself is marked by mayhem, as *Vigathakumaran*'s heroine was P.K. Rosy, a Dalit woman. It resulted in the land's upper-caste echelons wreaking havoc as the caste hegemonic equations were altered. The angry casteist mobs burned down screening arenas and threatened the film's director, J.C. Daniel and P.K. Rosy. As Jenny Rowena recounts,

> On the very first day on which her film was released, men from the upper-caste Nair community tore the screen and broke up the show, unable to bear the sight of a Dalit woman in the role of a Nair woman acting out love scenes with another man. After this, they started attacking Rosy. J C Daniel, who made the film, tried to get her protection from the King, but the Nair landlords came in large numbers and burned down her hut and chased her out of the village. She was forced to run away from Kerala, never to return to the field of cinema. (Rowena)

Thus, the very first heroine of Malayalam cinema had to flee from her native village and live the rest of her life in exile. In his novel *Nashtanayika*, based on the life of P.K. Rosy, Vinu Abraham throws light on the social conditions that paved the way for the forceful exclusion of a Dalit woman from mainstream society. The mere inclusion of a Dalit woman in an art form was then a triggering point enough to

initiate riots. At that time, cinema was in its inception stage, and few considered it an artistic medium with creative potential. While commenting on the early stages of film screening in Kerala, P.K. Rajasekharan, in his award-winning book *Cinema Sandarbhangal: Cinema Shalayum Keraleeya Pothumandalavum,* states,

> The history of Malayali's cinematic and visual experience begins with touring talkies and tent films. What led the people of Kerala to the magic of cinema was tents made of thick cotton clothes. The 'bioscopevalaas', who roamed around from city to city like musical performers and circus artists were active in Kerala till the first four decades of the twentieth century. No evidence is left to understand the inception of this folk cinema movement's history. Those people and the film tents came from nowhere and disappeared in a flash like vagabonds (my trans;34).

This book provides a detailed analysis of the early stages of the Malayali audience's tryst with film viewing. The early instances of watching cinema were related to circus performances, where a tent would be set up to screen random video footage. This constant exposure to such videos developed a habit in people, as they craved more such footage, which could be a significant reason for the development of early film production and screening episodes in Kerala.

After experiencing a period of silent movies, Malayalam had its first talkie in *Balan* (1938), directed by S. Nottani. The release of Balan is regarded as a pathbreaking moment in the annals of Malayalam cinema as it ushered in a new dawn of cinema in Kerala. Numerous other productions followed *Balan*, yet people were reluctant to throng into movie houses in large numbers. There might be

numerous reasons behind this, but the years following Balan saw rather empty theatres, proving that the early enthusiasm was missing. The following decade was a tumultuous one, and it saw World War II and India gaining independence. In such a scenario, the release of the film *Jeevitha Nouka* (1951) needs to be considered as a significant incident, as this movie, directed by K. Vembu, became the first commercially successful Malayalam film. The success of *Jeevitha Nouka* starring Thrikkurissi Sukumaran Nair and B.S Saroja gave the confidence to numerous aspiring filmmakers to throw their hat in the ring. The Malayalam film industry was slowly finding its niche, and this period also witnessed its evolution. Another major milestone in this regard was the release of the film *Neelakkuyil,* which created a rippling effect across the socio-political spectrum of Kerala.

Released in 1954, *Neelakkuyil*, jointly directed by P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, is hailed as a milestone in the history of Malayalam cinema, as this film has paved the way for the inception of authentic Malayalam cinematic aesthetics. The film showcases the cultural versatility of Kerala, which is deeply rooted in its Renaissance tradition. It narrates the story of the forbidden love between an upper caste schoolmaster master Sreedharan Nair (Sathyan), and a Dalit woman, Neeli (Miss Kumari). The film traces their love and the societal pressure that results in Sreedharan's betrayal, leading to Neeli's death. Though the movie ends with a progressive message by declaring that humanity prevails over caste and creed, it was criticised later for being too soft on the casteist male protagonist and leaving the tale of the Dalit woman midway through the plot. Despite all such deficiencies and flaws, one cannot ignore the fact that *Neelakkuyil* demonstrated a novel path in

Malayalam cinema, which was only beginning to find its feet. The reference to *Neelakkuyil* in this context is due to the significance of the period in which it happened. India saw the end of the British Raj in the following decade, and the new era was filled with hope and enthusiasm for a new beginning. Writer-thinker V.C. Harris thought in great depth about the significant context of the film in his seminal article "Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema". According to Harris,

> In the 1940s and 1950s, the processes of artistic production, including cinema, were determined by the important issues of the time: caste inequality, class consciousness, nationalism, and progress. There was optimism in the air, and there was enthusiasm. All of which could be found in *Neelakkuyil* (Ramu Kariat/ P.Bhaskaran,1954) often considered a landmark film in Malayalam, for it succeeded in fusing, for the first time, a variety of ingredients: a truly local, well-crafted story; a distinct engagement with issues such as caste inequality, progress, and the construction of a modern secular subject; a remarkably distinct use of film music, drawing on folk music traditions; and an array of stars and technicians, including well-known writers and political activists, mostly with a broad socialist orientation, who would later dominate the Malayalam film industry. (112)

As V.C. Harris puts it, the impact of a 'truly local' film like *Neelakkuyil* was so huge that it reinvigorated an entire film industry to define itself and find its own niche. The important point to be highlighted here is the relevance of the decade. The 1950s saw India welcoming a new era with great optimism, shaking off the effects of centuries-old colonial repression. *Neelakkuyil* results from the newfound

enthusiasm and the urge to celebrate the ‘local and native’ elements. This prevailing social condition of the period gives great insights into the representation of the police on the silver screen in Malayalam. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the Indian police post-independence was a continuation of the repressive British police and its inherent culture was deeply rooted in the colonialist ideology of violent repression. The 1950s can be seen as a trial phase of the state apparatus, as the citizens and the state were in an optimistic frame of mind, nursing romantic ambitions of the country being a truly democratic and welfare state in the near future. The dream was short-lived, shattering the aspirations of millions, and the result was the state turning into an authoritarian apparatus, placing the police as its pet weapon to steer the society in the direction of total subjugation and obedience. The early phases of Malayalam cinema did not critique this dangerous evolution. The reasons could be innumerable, and the most significant among them is the nature of the industry to turn a blind eye towards society and the contemporary world in general. Cinema was considered a medium of entertainment alone, and any scope of social commentary or opinions from the silver screen was seldom found.

In the same article, V.C. Harris states about the significance of the movie *Chemmeen* (1965) directed by Ramu Kariat. The film, which was the adaptation of the famous novel of the same name by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, is hailed as a classic in Malayalam cinema. It narrates the story of the romance between Karuthamma and Pareekutty and shows how religious and class issues act as a barrier in their relationship, which ends tragically. The film was later criticised for the validation of a patriarchal myth that existed amongst the fisherfolk of southern

Kerala. The film's importance is not limited to the status it has in the annals of Malayalam cinema, and instead, it needs to be analysed in parallel to the socio-political conditions of post-independent India's political situation and Kerala's cultural scenario. According to V.C. Harris, "Even while reinforcing established parameters of form and content of cinema, *Chemmeen*, with its tragic ending, also marks a broad shift from the hope and idealism of the previous decades to a growing sense of discontent and disillusionment" (Harris 112). It can thus be comprehended that the optimism of a progressive and healthy society, which existed in the 1950s as celebrated in a film like *Neelakkuyil,* has been replaced by the disenchantment and cynicism of the 1960s. The hopeful ending of *Neelakkuyil* and the tragic conclusion of *Chemmeen* say a lot about the socio-political and cultural transformation that took place within a decade. Malayalam cinema reflected the mood and anxieties of the period, though subtly, yet firmly. An awareness of the zeitgeist of the period is necessary to fathom the working of power, and this understanding is vital while locating the police characters in the early stages of Malayalam cinema and the various shades of power-play inherent within its ambit.

The 1960s were a turbulent phase in India in general and Kerala in particular because of the huge social churning. As mentioned earlier, the hope and vigorous enthusiasm of the 1950s were replaced by the gloomy 1960s with its harsh realities and severe disillusionment. The period saw the waning of the charm of Nehruvian Socialism, which glued the Indian aspirations in the last decade. The Indian dream of a welfare state and society, coupled with social democracy, was fast-fading, and the stark realisation that discrimination of various forms is here to stay was hard to

accept, especially for the youth. The death of Nehru and the reemergence of the erstwhile feudal lords in the Khadi-clad avatar as politicians, along with the degeneration of the Congress party, was a hammer blow to the subaltern sections, eagerly waiting for an egalitarian and just system to happen. It resulted in the frustrated youth getting disengaged with the system and soon started to revolt both legally and illegally, which escalated to the next decade as well. The sprouting of the 'Naxalbari' movement is a significant episode in this phase. The armed peasants' revolt in the village of Naxalbari in Bengal saw thousands of youths across the country identifying with it. Hundreds of disenchanted communist party activists soon joined the movement, and it snowballed into an unignorable armed movement against the 'unjust state apparatus'. These disturbing incidents of the 1960s and 1970s were imminent, considering the silent yet simmering tensions of the previous decade. In his article "The Volatile Seventies: A Memoir of the Naxalbari Uprising in Calcutta and the Bangladesh War", Manas Ray recounts the sociological reasons for the violent reactions against the oppressive state and how such protests were handled. He delineates through the specificities of history, siding with the underprivileged. As he notes,

> The early 1970s were also a time when West Bengal witnessed an unprecedented political and social upheaval. Starting in 1967 as a peasant rebellion in Naxalbari in the foothills of the Himalayas, the unrest spread like wildfire to other parts of Bengal. In Calcutta, it took the shape of a full-fledged urban uprising. The activists of the movement were popularly known as Naxals, and were linked to a new political party, the Communist Party of

> India (Marxist-Leninist) – CPI(ML) – established in 1969. The state's response was merciless, a severe crackdown which by 1972 had largely eliminated Naxalism from urban areas, though its ripples continued to be felt until Indira Gandhi's declaration of a nationwide Emergency in 1975. (Manas Ray)

The Indian police were also showing their ruthless face to the public, as their defined role as the guardians of the state and enforcers of severe discipline was called to attention. The sixties and seventies saw the Indian state unleashing the police force as a marauding weapon to suppress people's protests, which rocked the streets. The period saw police atrocities galore, as news reports of police repression of people's protests flew in. This socio-political upheaval also greatly impacted the screen, which will be discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter.

The cinema of the 1970s put forth a novel aesthetic and political outlook compared to the previous decades. As Ratheesh Radhakrishnan observes in his article "Aesthetic Dislocations: A Re-take on Malayalam Cinema of the 1970s",

> A new breed of Film Institute-trained filmmakers and actors who brought new concerns and aesthetics to the screen entered the industry during this period. Furthermore, the formation of film societies not only brought cinema from different parts of the world to audiences in different Indian cities and to a wider audience in states such as Kerala, but also provided the space for deliberations and publications on cinema. In the non-Hindi-speaking regions, formation of film societies and active state support for cinema were significant factors behind the shifts in film practices. Around the same time,

> different language cinemas of the South shifted their base away from Madras (now Chennai). For Malayalam cinema, independence from Madras was at best partial, and shifts were more related to anxieties of authenticity vis-à-vis the influence of Tamil cinema that plagued it since the 1950s. The confluence of an intellectual context provided by the film societies, the economic support from the state and traditionally landed elite, and the pervasive arguments regarding cultural authenticity made Malayalam cinema central in the emergent New Indian cinema. (Radhakrishnan)

Ratheesh Radhakrishnan examines the period based on the trope of realism and tries to read a few of the significant films of the decade from the perspective of realism.

The 1970s witnessed great political unrest and chaotic social conditions that continued from the previous decade. Indian political atmosphere was heating up, and the frustration of the youth with the establishment was turning into violent public manifestations due to blatant corruption coupled with nepotism and oligarchy. India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was experiencing the heat, as her immense popularity, especially after the war with Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh, soon started to erode and was replaced by fury and dissatisfaction. The period also witnessed the 'JP movement', a political movement against the leadership of Indira Gandhi, led by the socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan. His call for 'total revolution' inspired thousands of students to hit the streets and participate in struggles against the government. Indira Gandhi crushed the agitation using force, arresting the protesters and using the iron hand whenever and wherever necessary.

This escalated into an unmanageable proportion and resulted in the declaration of a National Emergency. India witnessed the suspension of the Constitution for the first time, and a reign of terror ensued. The police were given a free hand, which resulted in the country evolving into a semi-police state.

In Kerala, it was a decade of social chaos, which saw human rights violations becoming the norm of the day. The beginning of the 1970s witnessed the flourishing of the Naxal movement, where educated and intellectual youths, disillusioned with the existing socio-political climate, chose to embrace armed revolt against the establishment. Wayanad district in northern Kerala was the hotbed of this militant movement. As the National Emergency was declared, it unofficially inaugurated a police state in Kerala, where the functioning of democracy and human rights was stalled. Numerous social and political activists were arrested and tortured. Police torture became a state-sponsored programme, as it acquired the position of the state's most sought-after repressive tool. Instances of students being detained on campuses and criminalising any cultural and social organisations became common, which speaks volumes about the human rights violations that occurred at the time. An infamous episode regarding the police's highhandedness during the Emergency was the disappearance of P. Rajan, a student of the Regional Engineering College of Calicut. He was illegally detained by the police, accused of a Naxalist link. The valorous lone fight led by his father, T.V. Eachara Varier, brought the news out. He had to face innumerable hurdles created by the system to carry out his journey in search of his, which shines in the annals of Kerala as an unparalleled instance of perseverance. Later, the truth came out as Rajan was brutally tortured and killed by

the police at a secret place, and even his body was untraceable. This lonely fight of a hapless old father against an authoritarian state, amply aided by the repressive police, was noticed by the entire nation. In his autobiography, *Memories of a Father*, T.V. Eachara Varier says,

> So it was in Rajan's case. There was never even an attempt to find out if he was a real culprit or not. They just took him, tortured him and killed him. That was all that happened. Somebody gave the police a list and they picked up people from that list. Whether somebody was a culprit or not was irrelevant to the police. None among these police officers were anxious about the future of a young man in their custody. Although trained to use scientific methods in finding real culprits, none of the police employed them. They found it easier to torture the accused. With such an easy way, why resort to scientific methods? This is why I believe that the police are only instruments of torture for the state. (24)

His memoir paints a pathetic picture of the degenerating state of democracy and police excesses in Kerala. T.V. Eachara Varier sheds light on the transformation fast happening in the public's perception of the police force. The 1970s saw the force being seen as the epitome of suppression and human rights violations. The book goes on to say, "The most inhuman aspect of the Emergency was that the two major human rights, the right to life and the right to know, were denied. The tragedy of my son was typical of this denial of rights" (T.V. 61). Rajan can be seen as an example of the gross human rights violations of the period and numerous other martyrs, many of them anonymously sacrificed their lives due to the fascist

tendencies of the police. The film *Piravi*, based on the Rajan case, *was* directed by Shji. N. Karun and released in 1989, paints a pathetic picture of a hapless father's plight. The film has won numerous international recognitions as well. The 1970s can thus be considered a period that spelt out the state's evolution as an authoritarian apparatus. The police started to define their role as the ruthless enforcers of the state ideology.

Tracing the Police Presence in Malayalam Cinema: The First Phase

When did the police become visible in Malayalam cinema? The question needs to be answered in the context of cop films, which have evolved into a genre in Malayalam cinema, especially post-1990s. While examining the early phase of Malayalam cinema, it can be noticed that the police characters were not visible much in the narrative. Often, cop characters were deployed to generate humour, and they had little scope to perform. The early phase of Malayalam cinema coincided with the initial decades of India's new dawn as an independent country, which witnessed the colonial police rebranding themselves as Indian police, without undergoing any radical transformation. When the earlier films that came out in Malayalam are observed, it is evident that the police are not to be seen as a recognisable presence. Cop-centred films were not any, and if at all, cop characters were included in the mix, they were employed for creating slapstick humour. As educational qualification was not a criterion in India to be appointed to the police force, instances of mocking incompetent police officers were a common trend in cinema. Often, the heroes were tasked with proving their valour by beating up a policeman. The police roles were mostly enacted by comedians, and their

significance in the narrative was little. Notably, actor S.P. Pillai played funny police characters in early Malayalam films such as *Nairu Pidicha Pulivalu* (1958) and *Aniyathi (*1955). The early phase of the visibility of cop characters in Malayalam was structured upon the aim to provide comic relief to the audience. Later, this trend undergoes tremendous changes.

CID (1955), directed by M. Krishnan Nair, in which Prem Nazir played the lead role, is a notable movie, in which police procedures and investigations are shown in detail, though the film is centred around a private investigation undertaken by a CID officer. A few notable cop characters and narratives with their involvement can be found in a few films of the 1960s. Films like *Danger Biscuit* (1969), directed by A.B Raj, and *Karutha Kai* (1964), directed by M. Krishnan Nair, are to be noted for the important roles of police characters in the narrative. Yet, these films include cops as part of the investigative procedure or rather a procedural imperative. This was the early trend of the representation of cop characters, especially in the first half of the 1960s, as a critique of the police as a repressive instrument of the state was not to be seen.

A few interesting instances of cops in cinema are also visible in this period, and slowly, the filmmakers were shifting their focus towards telling tales from contemporary society, often critiquing the power centre. The initial euphoria of the society post-independence was fast-waning, the populace was facing hard realities, and the state started to establish its authority with an iron hand, employing the police in the role of a henchman. *Punnapra Vayalar*, a film released in 1968 and directed by Kunchacko, demands a close look. The film is the eponym of the ‘Punnapra

Vayalar' peasants' revolt in 1946, where peasants and workers affiliated to the Communist Party rose in rage against the draconian rulings of the then ruler of the Travancore princely state, C.P. Ramaswami Iyer. The state decided to suppress the revolt using force, and the army and police were deployed to deal with the protesters. In the ensuing violence, hundreds were killed and thousands were severely injured. This turned out to be a watershed moment in the history of the Communist movement in Kerala. The movie narrates the incident with slight fictional additions. Comrade Prabhakaran (Prem Nazir) is the protagonist in the film, and the film shows his efforts to unite the working class against the feudal lord Maalikaveedan, which later turns out to be a resilient movement against the authoritarian Travancore state. In the film, the police are shown hand in glove with the goons of the feudal lord in attacking the political workers. They are devoid of agency and are susceptible to being bought and used according to the whims and fancies of the powerful. Later, the police force assisted the Travancore army in their onslaught against the peasants' movement. Though the Punnapra Vayalar incident occurred before independence, the release of the film, at a crucial juncture when the Naxalist movement was at its prime and the police were employed to silence such 'anti-state' tendencies, holds immense significance. The filmmakers also found themselves in a situation where they must hold a realistic mirror up to contemporary society.

A film that needs to be understood and analysed in depth to fathom the convoluted relationship between the police and the people is *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. Released in 1976, during the National Emergency, the film was

brutally censored by the state, as it comments on the plight of the intellectual and political youth, who are pitched against a suppressive regime. The theme was a reflection of the times, which made it a thorn in the flesh for the state apparatus. In an online article on the film, K.P. Jayakumar narrates an instance when the state award for Best Director was given to *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. The award for Best Director went to P.A. Backer. K. Karunakaran was the Minister of Culture at the time. When journalists asked why an award was given to a pro-Naxalite film, Karunakaran replied, "The film conveys a moral lesson that if someone becomes a Naxalite, they will be shot dead" (Jayakumar, "Kabani Nadi"). The same Karunakaran was infamous during the Emergency as the Home Minister of Kerala and was held responsible for his involvement in the disappearance of Rajan by the media. The film is a chronicle of the times, a stark commentary on the authoritarian regime's blatant excesses and the inability of the reactive youth to find avenues to resist it. The movie was immediately noted and sent to various layers of censorship by the state. As K.P Jayakumar observes,

> National Emergency was not the theme of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. Yet, each and every moment of the production went through the Emergency. The shooting was completed after prolonged efforts and continuous police torture. After editing, the film was submitted to the censor board, yet they removed a significant portion of it. Almost all the significant parts of the film were removed. This resulted in the accusation that the film feels mechanical and mysterious while watching. *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* remains in the

> history of Malayalam cinema as a film with a mutilated body. ("Kabani Nadi"; my trans.)

The movie was thus subjected to brutal censoring for fear of being a critical take on the authoritarian regime that existed then. As Jayakumar observes, the audacity of the authorities to trim down significant portions of the film rendered it an incomplete artwork, something which was left ambiguous. The film is said to be the first in the history of Indian cinema where the police were given the liberty to censor or cut as they wished. This created a curious scenario, where a film, which speaks loudly about police excesses, was placed under the mercy of the force to decide what portion of the film had to be screened. It is learned that even local police stations were involved in the process of censoring, as the movie did not have a uniform running length or coherence between scenes. The manifestation of absolute power, critiqued severely in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol,* turns out to be the game-changer once it is subjected to the approval of the state.

Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol traces the life of Gopi, a student and Naxal activist who yearns for a paradise of socialist value systems, where the "voice of the other is enjoyed like music". He comes knocking at the door of his lover, Salini, who is living in the city, when he is hounded by the police for associating with a murderer. Gopi is shown as a dreamer, someone who is incapable of comprehending the emotional undercurrents in a relationship. His sole aim is to escape from the police, and in disguise, he seeks the help of Salini to communicate with a fellow Naxalite. The film places Gopi and Salini in two extremes, two contradictory planes, as his political ideals and her romantic aspirations never reach a common meeting

point. Gopi symbolises the educated rebel student of the Seventies, and his revolutionary spirit renders him an outsider. The film, which progresses through the political and philosophical ideas spelt out by Gopi, ends tragically as he is shown as killed by the police in an encounter. The movie reflects the undemocratic system at work during the Emergency and loudly comments on the gruesome manner in which human rights were crushed.

An examination of the representation of police in Malayalam cinema shows interesting patterns in parallel with the existing socio-political conditions. The Seventies were the watershed moment in the history of police portrayal, as the 'frightening men in khaki' replaced the affable or funny police characters who were added to the plot just to create light moments in the film. In *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, the audience could sense an aura of fear emanating from the threat posed by the police at the behest of the state. Rather than the condemnation or fury that was prevalent among the intelligentsia during the period, every frame of the film is filled with the ever-persistent menace that the force is capable of unleashing. It often reminds one of the 'theatre of menace' propagated by Harold Pinter, a movement which was a result of the political tensions during the aftermath of the Second World War. The plays reflected the fear in the minds of a generation that witnessed the brutalities of the World War era, including the atomic experiment. In Malayalam cinema, such a scenario can be found, where the National Emergency and the following police suppression frightened the populace. In *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, the protagonist of the film, Gopi, who is in exile, asks his lover

whether she is afraid. He does it multiple times, which signifies the cloud of fear surrounding the characters.

The cops in the film are seen desperate to nab Gopi, and they follow him in mufti. They search for his whereabouts, find Salini's home and visit her to gather knowledge about the absconding Naxalite leader. The police officer in mufti tells her that any information she passes on to them regarding Gopi will be a great service to the nation. The police are portrayed by Backer as the arm of the state, who are also tasked with the duty of inculcating and instilling a sense of nationalism into the citizen, using any means, including violence. This forced sense of nationalism, aided by fear, is critiqued by P.A. Backer in the film. The questioning of Salini, an innocent woman who had to aid her lover in his desperation, is shown in the film using dramatic techniques, once again imposing the omnipotence of the mighty state. A few shots with rising boots and a thumping sound, reminiscent of the 'boot' image in the poem "Daddy" by Sylvia Plath, convey the imposition of brute power orchestrated by the police. The accused person is helpless and is at the mercy of the Kafkaesque system with all its complications. Salini sees nightmarish visions of police, as they dance wildly with an intention to harm her (Fig. 1). Though not the chief culprit here, she is targeted and isolated by the force in their exasperated attempts to catch Gopi. This dreamlike sequence is symbolic and rich in meaning as it conveys the narrative's mood quite effectively. The police engaged in constant surveillance, which was a hallmark of the period of Emergency, where observing the movements and activities of the intellectual youth was a common practice employed

by the police to nip any attempts to revolt in the bud. Jeremy Bentham's coinage 'Panopticon' is a relevant term here as it is a construction aimed at the surveillance of prison inmates. The 1970s in general and the period of Emergency in particular, rendered the country a large prison with the police observing every movement of the citizenry. Regarding the representation of cops in Malayalam cinema, *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* provides ample information, which hits at a change in direction in the manner of police portrayal in tune with the times.

Fig. 1. Still from *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1:00:28).

The 1980s saw certain films with notable police presence, which can be read as a reflection of the social scenario of the times. Another important film that needs to be analysed in this historical context is *Meenamasathile Sooryan* (1986) by Lenin Rajendran. The film is based on the Kayyur incident, which was instrumental in the flourishing of the Communist movement in North Malabar. In Kayyur, in 1941, peasants' peaceful agitations against the exorbitant taxes collected from them and

the suppressive measures adopted by the feudal lords of the region were brutally dealt with by the police. Many suffered grievous injuries, and several houses were torched. As a protest, the farmers, led by the leaders of the Communist Party, organised a march, and while marching, the peasants came across Subbarayan, a policeman who was at the forefront in fermenting trouble in the area. The furious mob forced him to carry the Communist Party's flag. While trying to escape, he jumped into a river and drowned. The government took this as an opportunity to suppress the communist movement in the region, and Communist Party leaders such as Madathil Appu, Koithattil Chirukandan, Podora Kunjambu Nair and Pallikkal Aboobacker were tried and awarded the death penalty. Their martyrdom is still celebrated as a valorous episode in the battle against feudal values and exploitation of the working class. The film throws light on history, and the director has used the tools of fiction too in his depiction of the Kayyur incident.

The movie begins in a prison, and the four revolutionaries, who are to be hanged, are seen speaking to a prison officer. The prison officer's demeanour in this context deserves attention. The officer, played by actor KPAC Sunny, seems restrained and calm and speaks compassionately to them. This is in extreme contrast with the portrayal of policemen in the film, especially their actions during the peaceful protest of the peasants. The prison officer is the henchman of the oppressive state, and his and his colleagues' duty was to thwart any revolutionary attempts in the bud itself. His calm demeanour is that of a person who has accomplished his task effectively, as the foursome is waiting to be killed by the state, the authoritarian decision-maker. The incident happened in 1941, and India

was still under British rule. The British police system was in vogue, and though they were employing Indians in Khaki, the rules and laws were imported from the British Empire. The colonial police were built as a robust mechanism to violently curb any attempts at resistance or rebellion from the colonised. As Frantz Fanon observes in his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*, "The colonial world is a world cut in two. The dividing line, the frontiers, are shown by barracks and police stations. In the colonies, it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression (38). The lives of the colonised are marked by the colonial master and are guarded by well-trained police personnel. This space is defined as a territory where human rights and democratic value systems are permanently suspended. The police force is tasked with the duty of forcefully resisting the attempts of the colonised to claim their voice and rights. The force is trained in such a way that using violence becomes a norm. The irony of the times could not be missed as, in the 1940s and especially after the Second World War, the European colonial powers were soon embracing democratic principles and rebranding themselves as the paradise of human rights and virtues. At the same time, in numerous colonies, including India, the colonial police were engaging in violent repression, as Kayyur can be cited as a prime example.

The feudal lords of erstwhile Kerala were running a parallel power system, and they controlled rural lives as they possessed most of the land and financial resources. The structure of feudalism was so intricate that its practitioners could claim the status of quasi-government. The state's repressive tools often took orders from the feudal barons, and the history of Kerala bears testimony to this unholy and

illegal nexus. The lawlessness in the villages was a pathetic reality of pre-democratic India in general and Kerala in particular. Naxalism sprouted as a desperate reaction against the unbearable reign of Indian feudalism. In *Meenamasathile Sooryan*, the police are represented as the employees of the feudal baron Maalikaveedan, and they directly take orders from him. His ire against the revolting communists and peasants is vented with the assistance of a corrupt police system. In the film, the police officer is played by Balan. K. Nair can be seen assuring the feudal lord regarding the threat of the rebelling workers. He confronts the workers and resorts to violent methods. This blatant use of force is approved by the colonial state, and hence it can be interpreted that the working class of the colonised was facing multiple layers of marginalisation, ranging from the coloniser to the local feudal lords. The film makes it a point that it wants to convey to the audience the image of the police as a repressive and anti-human machinery, fully controlled by the powerful elites. Lenin Rajendran minced no words in critiquing the draconian functioning of the force sponsored by colonialism and aided by feudalism. The film throws up a few more significant details regarding the role of police in the Kayyur incident, and the film's vantage point is worth an examination.

In the actual Kayyur incident, the name of the policeman who died by drowning was Subbarayan, and in the movie too, a cop character of the same name is introduced, and actor Achankunju plays the role. The character is portrayed as a reckless womaniser and a brutish officer who lacks any semblance of humanity. He directly confronts the workers, threatens them and even boasts about "burying Communism" in the soil of Kayyur. He brags about the might of the British Empire

and claims that the machine gun possessed by the British army is capable of eradicating everyone resisting the Empire or feudalism. Subbarayan is a debauchee who believes that the power bestowed on him by the government makes him superior to all the common folks out there, and the women in their families are at his disposal. In a scene, he directly enters a house, sees a young woman and speaks to her mother as if the woman must fulfil his sensual needs. The director intentionally bestows a character arc to him so that he is perceived as a brutal suppressor of the state. The tools of cognitive film theory are applicable in fathoming the subtle nuances of characterisation. The cognitive method in filmmaking focuses on the perception of the audience and pen characters after adding multiple layers to influence the level of the audience's perception. In the book *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Davis Bordwell says that,

> Typical cognitive activities, like sorting or remembering things, depend on inferential processes. In all these activities, whether we call them perceptual or cognitive, organised clusters of knowledge guide our hypothesis-making. These are called schemata. The mental image of a bird is a schema for visual recognition, and the concept of a well-formed sentence functions as a schema in speech perception. Schemata may be of various kinds— prototypes (the bird image, for instance), or templates (like filing systems), or procedural patterns (a skilled behaviour, such as knowing how to ride a bicycle). (31)

In the case of the film's scenario, the director is making use of the image of a repressive police system in the minds of the viewers (essentially police actions during the Emergency) and subtly makes them infer conclusions through the visual

imagery provided. The schemata help in getting the desired result, a carefully constructed version of a historical incident. Bordwell further states about the cognitive theory that “the theory also explains why perception is often a skilled, learned activity; as one constructs a wider repertoire of schemata, tests them against varying situations, and has them challenged by incoming data, one’s perceptual and conceptual abilities become more supple and nuanced” (Bordwell 31).

The Chief police officer, played by Balan K. Nair, asks the rebels why they are organising a revolution if their goal is independence, as Gandhiji is already winning freedom from the British. This is a curious statement considering the historical aversion the coloniser had towards Mahatma Gandhi. The peculiar scenario being played out here proves that an elite police officer, an employee of the British Government, can comprehend or rather sympathise with, the activities of Mahatma Gandhi. Still, he is inimical towards a village's revolutionary idealists who seek basic human rights and dignity. The film portrays the police as a cunning instrument of power that knows how to negotiate with the ‘other’, the rebels who are to be tamed. The patient strategy of Gandhi is hailed, whereas the revolutionary method of the Kayyur revolutionaries is vehemently suppressed. The death of Subbarayan is also shown in a way that the revolting peasants and Communist Party workers are exonerated, at least from the perspective of the audience. The policeman, who encounters the furious activists who are undertaking the protest march, provokes them and even tries to attack them. The workers in the film can be seen keeping their composure, but as a reaction, force the policeman to carry the Communist Party flag (Fig.2). The policeman tries to attack the workers with the

flag, tries to escape, and while doing so, jumps into the river and drowns. Lenin Rajendran takes an ideological position regarding his death, sympathising with the workers and exposing the brutality of the police force. While assessing the paradigm shifts in the portrayal of police characters in Malayalam cinema, *Meenamasathile Sooryan* turns out to be a significant milestone, a film that narrates a historical incident, yet very much carrying the popular mood of the times, the chaotic and turbulent 1980s.

Fig. 2. Still from *Meenamasathile Sooryan* (1:01:35).

Films with Naxal Nostalgia and the Characterisation of Police

The 1980s were a significant period considering the humongous social churning that took place in Indian society in the previous decade, both social and political. The impacts of the last decade, in which the nation saw both extremes, like the ultimate imposition of authority via National Emergency and a novel and maverick resistance movement such as Naxalism. Naxalism, a movement supposed to have emerged in Naxalbari, an impoverished village in West Bengal, influenced a generation with its revolutionary ideals and liberational goals. Leaders like Charu

Majumdar and Kanu Sanyal inspired politically vigilant youth to join the movement. Youths who were disillusioned with the traditional left political parties embraced this new phenomenon and declared war against the state. Naxalism based its emancipatory ideals on violence, which was brutally suppressed by the state. In his scholarly work, *In the Wake of Naxalbari: A History of the Naxalite Movement in India*, Sumanta Banerjee makes a comprehensive evaluation of the Naxal movement in India. He examines the historical factors, imminent causes and the aftermath of the revolutionary movement. As he observes,

> The uprising was crushed by the police within a few months. But from then on, things could never be quite the same in the Indian countryside. The long-suffering peasants appeared to have rediscovered their traditional militancy… In certain parts of India, they boiled over in jacqueries against the privileged feudal elite. In some places, led by the CPI(ML), they fought the police and troops when the latter were sent by the government to protect the landlords. The events illuminated their terrible efforts to end the intolerable conditions of economic oppression and political humiliation, and also represented the CPI(ML)'s programme to seize power from the rulers and establish liberated zones in the countryside. (Banerjee x)

Naxalism and its enchanting political vision were reflected in literature, theatre and cinema. The Naxal activists were portrayed in various shades in films across India. In Malayalam, the trend was visible in the 1970s and 1980s. Films like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1976), *Idimuzhakkam* (1980), *Ore Thooval Pakshikal* (1988), *Amma Ariyan* (1986), *Panchagni* (1986) and *Aranyakam* (1988) portrayed

Naxal characters and the inhuman treatment meted out to them by an oppressive system. In Malayalam, parallel cinema, the influence of the previous decades was very much visible in the 1980s. A sense of loss, nostalgia, or longing for the unachieved liberation, along with intense rage at the never-ending exploitation of the subaltern class, marked the period. In this context, the movie *Amma Ariyan* (1986) directed by John Abraham needs to be studied as it gives immense possibilities regarding the workings of power, the role of the police and the plight of ordinary citizens in Kerala during the 1970s. John Abraham is known as a guerrilla filmmaker, someone who stays clear of the traditional manners and methodology of filmmaking, by involving common people in the endeavour and insisting on the role of art as an agent of social transformation. He rejected popular cinema, the star system embedded in its body, and treated cinema as a medium of social interaction and the voice of the voiceless. Once, he made a statement that he was the Hitler of his cinema, meaning, as a director, he believed that he had the ultimate right over the work of art produced by him. This statement can be understood in parallel with the Auteur theory put forth by French film critic André Bazin. Bazin says in his work, *What is Cinema?* that the director is more than a technician and is the true author of the film. John Abraham believed the director to be the ultimate creative force in cinema. His famous films include *Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile* (1972), *Agraharathil Kazhuthai* (1977) and *Cheriachante Kroorakrithyangal* (1979). John is revered in Malayalam as a filmmaker who paved the way for the arrival of the Third Cinema movement and independent cinema that confronts social realities.

According to Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, “Guerrilla film-making proletarianises the film worker and breaks down the intellectual aristocracy that the bourgeoisie grants to its followers. In a word, it democratises. The filmmaker's tie with reality makes him more a part of his people” (6). This method can be considered a reaction to the hierarchy-bound Hollywood mainstream cinema and the much-celebrated, yet apolitical, European arthouse cinema. They continue to elaborate on the concept of Third Cinema and say, “The process of democratizing cinema is a vital step, as only then can we be honest towards the larger audience. Third Cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognises in that struggle the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated personality with each people as the starting point - in a word, the decolonisation of culture (Solanas et al.2). The Third Cinema originated in Latin America, which was a movement strongly rooted in Marxism. *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), directed by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, is considered a masterpiece and a paragon of Third Cinema. It was a movement that outrightly rejected Hollywood as the first-world cinema and the European arthouse cinema as the second-world cinema. It argued for an egalitarian cinematic universe, a level playing field, which was beyond the hierarchical influence of global capital. It employs guerrilla filmmaking as a tool, which promotes filmmaking on low budgets, innovative locations and methods, along with making each crew member capable of performing any task related to cinema. The filmmaking should be political, dealing with the emancipation of the suppressed class, and the focus was on the lives and struggles of people from Latin America and Africa. Its novel ways of raising capital for filmmaking included crowd-funding, which every common

man could associate with the process of cinema, even with meagre sums, that made the entire apparatus of cinema democratic and libertarian. This influenced filmmakers across continents, and the power of cinema as a reactionary tool was realised in its most innovative and revolutionary sense.

Amma Ariyan is known as the first film which be made with crowd-funding. It was coordinated by Odessa Collective, a film society movement that travelled across villages in Kerala, screened films, and collected small sums of money from the audience, who were mostly from the working class. The film is a significant document for analysing the portrayal of the police. It narrates the journey of Purushan, a youth who is on a mission to meet the mother of Hari, a Naxal sympathiser who committed suicide. He saw the dead body of Hari and realised that he must inform his mother of her son's death to his mother. Purushan undertakes the journey from Wayanad, the hotbed of Naxal activities, to Fort Kochi. Though he sets off alone, slowly he is accompanied by several friends of Hari, and they all have vivid memories of the deceased. Some regard him as a musician with a passion for his art, for some, he was a revolutionary, and some paint a picture of an aimless youth troubled by an existential crisis. However, the group learns about the torture he had to face from the police for his ideological beliefs and the psychological trauma it created. The group finally meets Hari's mother and informs her about his death. This journey is portrayed as a recounting of various political protests in Kerala and the disillusionment of the youth regarding the functioning of the system.

The movie is a pungent critique of the authoritarian political establishment that existed in the 1970s. The movie reflects the atmosphere of fear that existed in

the period. The fear was created by the police excesses, and as far as the intellectual youth were concerned, they found it extremely difficult to survive. In *Amma Ariyan*, along with the blatant portrayal of police torture, John provides certain subtle hints through a handful of insignificant characters about the reign of state-sponsored terror. In a scene, the elder sister cries out to her brother, "Narayanan Kutty, do not go out. The police are here. They are in disguise" (*Amma Ariyan* 00:39:19-00:39:26). She behaves hysterically when the group comes to her house to meet her brother. She is seen in panic as she mistakes the group for policemen. A member of the group says about her condition, "Poor thing. His sister is mad. She thinks that all visitors are policemen. She saw Narayanan Kutty being tortured. That's how she went mad" (*Amma Ariyan* 00:41:17-00:41:28). More than the physical hazards faced by victims at the hands of the cops, the psychological wounds could also trigger emotional imbalances. The trauma created by the memories of police torture is so severe that it could leave a lasting scar on the memory of a person, deeming him/her psychologically fragile. The state-orchestrated fear is multifarious in its impacts. While dwelling on trauma and its effects, Sandor Ferenczi says that "What is traumatic is the unforeseen, the unfathomable, the incalculable. . . Unexpected, external threat, the sense of which one cannot grasp, is unbearable" (Qtd. in Dupont 171). The mere visualisation of the torture of a dear one created a lasting traumatic influence on the character, which even led her to lose her sanity. John ushers the audience into the unexplored details of the absolute reign of terror.

Memories of the oppressed people usually contain terror and torture, hunt them for ages and deem them incapable of survival. They are forced to live with a

bruised psyche. A police state controls its populace through such nefarious designs, where the subjects' minds are controlled and tamed. The authoritarian state promotes the use of such psychological methods of total control. The subjects live with their trauma, and could nott ever escape from its psychological impacts. Dwelling deep on trauma, Sandor Ferenczi further states that,

> Trauma is a process of dissolution that moves toward total dissolution, that is to say, death. The body, the cruder part of the personality, withstands destructive processes longer, but unconsciousness and the fragmentation of the mind already are signs of the death of the more refined parts of the personality. Neurotics and psychotics, even if they are still halfway capable of fulfilling their functions as body and also partly as mind, should actually be considered to be unconsciously in a chronic death-agony. (Qtd.in Dupont 130-131)

Torture, along with destroying a person's body, is capable of damaging one's mind as well. Even though he/she survives the assaults and carries on, internally, he/she dies with the decline of the mind. In *Amma Ariyan*, the suicide of Hari is the result of the intense trauma he had to undergo. Hari loses his self, and his thoughts and ceases to exist as an effervescent youth with great political insights. If Ferenczi's notions are to be subscribed to, the trauma results in the loss of one's form, consciousness. Hari's suicide reminds one of the suicide of Subrahmanya Das, a young intellectual, who killed himself after being disillusioned with society. He was a critic of the National Emergency, state excesses and police highhandedness. In his suicide note, Das writes that "Kerala is a failed society" (Gopikrishnan). Hari is a

symbol of the abject failure of a democratic system. In the movie, when the police raid his abode and insult a female friend of his, Hari hits a cop in uncontrollable fury. They arrest him, and what follows is inhumanity in its most lethal form. Hari is tortured and made to face the most violent form of abuse. He is a mridangam artist, and knowing this, the cops can be seen as stamping on his fingers, leaving him in absolute pain and agony. The encounter between the cops and Hari in the police station is shot in such a way that the existing power dynamics are thrust into the audience's consciousness. In Figure 3, Hari is looking upwards at the police officer, and this is shot using a high angle, which demonstrates the lack of power or agency of Hari and the power possessed by the cop. He seems hopeless and afraid, and his body language seems to be that of a victim. In Figure 4, the policeman can be seen, and he is looking downward at Hari. Here, the cop is holding a power, which is evident from the low-angle shot used. The subtle, yet brilliant use of cinematography aids the narrative in establishing the power structure at work.

Fig. 3. Still from *Amma Ariyan* (00:45:40).

Fig. 4. Still from *Amma Ariyan* (00:45:44).

The film recreates a few instances from the 1970s, like the police station attack by the Naxalites and the following crackdown by the police. *Amma Ariyan* speaks volumes through symbols, and its frames are rich with meaning. Hari's stage as a confused youth is established using shots of him sitting idly in his room. In one shot, the wall is adorned with pictures of cricket players, and in another shot, the same wall bears the images of Communist revolutionaries. The pendulum swing between his beliefs and the existential crisis he faces has been well-established by the director, and the aura of fear, created by the police's havoc, is also evident. In the movie's final scene, when the group meets his mother, she seems calm. When the police ask her whether they need to do anything for her, she replies that they have done what they had to. In a nutshell, *Amma Ariyan* is a poignant saga of

authoritarianism and the failure of emancipatory dreams. The film is a significant document that traces the evolution of the police on the Malayalam screen.

The Naxal nostalgia of the 1980s in Malayalam cinema is further reinforced by two more films, *Panchagni* in 1986 and *Aranyakam* in 1988. Both films address the plight of Naxalites, who are compelled to take up arms due to severe exploitation by the state as well as the powerful bourgeois class. *Panchagni* narrates how a rebellious woman is forced to resort to violence once she realises that the existing law and order system only supports the perpetrators and exploiters. In *Aranyakam*, the audience sees Ammini, a brilliant teenager, who accidentally meets a Naxalite leader who is in exile. Both these films are directed by Hariharan and written by M.T. Vasudevan Nair. In the context of examining the evolution of police representation, the film *Aranyakam* gives a few insights into the subtle and intrinsic designs of police portrayal. The movie has close parallels with the films discussed earlier in the chapter when it comes to the depiction of the police as a brutal and repressive force.

In *Aranyakam*, the chief character, Ammini, a teenager who is passionate about reading, belongs to a feudal family. She is shown as ignorant about the social realities and power dynamics at play. She seems disturbed while seeing the poor workers being tortured by the police at her house. Ammini, who loves to wander alone, meets a Naxalite in hiding, and the film further traces the friendship between the two, Ammini's short relationship with a young man and the Naxals attacking her house to avenge the atrocities committed by the paterfamilias. The movie dwells deeply on the ideology of Naxalism and its perplexing complicity with violence,

despite portraying the dire situations that make them take up arms and resort to violent acts. The film narrates the police atrocities in detail, picturing them as brutal and villainous while sympathising with the suffering subalterns and Naxal activists. The role of the police force in the narrative needs a close look to unearth the manner of police portrayal in tune with the times.

In the film, in one of the earlier scenes, the police officer played by Balan K. Nair is shown as a family friend of the elite family to which the heroine belongs. The head of the family, a feudal baron and an exploiter, treats his workers callously, denying them basic amenities and rights. From the complaints raised by them, it can be gauged that he is further infuriated by a few of the youngsters ' activism in the area, focusing on the exploitation of the working class. The police officer boasts about torturing a Naxalite, to which the feudal lord responds joyously. They engage in drinking, and the police officer is in uniform. This shows the nexus between the powerful people and the police. In another significant scene, the police officer beats the poor workers at the feudal baron's house. He hits them fiercely, and they cry out in agony (Fig.5). The words uttered by the hapless workers are "adiyanonnum ariyilla thambra" (*Aranyakam* 00:14:58-00:15:03) in Malayalam, which is translated as "I do not know anything, my lord". The words reflect the feudal relations that existed then, where the subalterns were mistreated and exploited by the barons with the help of the cops.

Fig. 5. Still from *Aranyakam* (00:15:04).

Aranyakam contains references to two incidents of the 1970s. In a scene, a character refers to an engineering student joining militancy, which is a reference to the Rajan Case. In the climax of the film, the Naxalite leader is killed by the cops, but they stage-manage it as an encounter. This is a reference to the fake encounter of Naxal Varghese by the Kerala police. Varghese was a Naxal leader who was killed in a fake encounter by the Kerala police in 1970. He championed the causes of the impoverished farmers and tribals in Wayanad, a northern district in Kerala. As K.P.M. Basheer remembers in his article "Remembering Varghese, Kerala's first 'encounter' victim",

> Constable Ramachandran Nair had, in a shocking public confession in 1998, revealed that he had shot Varghese point blank on orders from his superiors during the height of the anti-Naxalite drive of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

> Varghese, whom a large section of Adivasis of Wayanad back then considered as their Peruman (saviour), was instrumental in ending the centuries-old system of bonded labour of the tribal people.

The film stands solidly with the suffering class and flays the exploitative feudal-police nexus. Unsurprisingly, the movie shows the police as violence personified. Hence, it comes to light that there is clear sympathy towards the Naxals and a sense of disillusionment with the men in khaki, in tune with the trend of the period. The movie paints an image of the police as a draconian behemoth of a force, capable of unleashing unparalleled violence.

The above-mentioned films put forth a few important questions regarding the representation of police and compel one to brood further on the impact of cop violence in society. In Malayalam, the police as a genre never developed into a significant form before the 1990s, though there are certain signals like the film *Aavanazhi* (1986), directed by I.V. Sasi, which can be seen as an important step in the direction of cop films becoming a major genre to reckon with. Till then, as discussed in this chapter, the decades of the sixties, seventies and eighties witnessed the evolution of police characters from mere presence for fun to a force of terror and a scheming henchman of the authoritarian state. The simmering socio-political context of the time needs to be further introspected to shed light on the evolution of the cop figure in Malayalam cinema. The 1980s, especially, deserve special attention in this regard as this decade saw the emergence of ‘middle-cinema’, a novel brand of cinema that effectively fused commercial artistic interests. While *Amma Ariyan* is a genuine art film sans any commercial interests, a film like *Aranyakam* belongs to the

middle cinema. As Ratheesh Radhakrishnan observes, “In the early 1980s, a third strand of Malayalam cinema, called “madhyavarthi cinema” (middlebrow cinema) and sandwiched between realism and the melodramatic popular, emerged. In film criticism and popular understanding, these commercially viable realist films constitute Malayalam cinema’s lost golden age” (Radhakrishnan). The period saw the lingering effects of the National Emergency and the Kerala police’s brutal crackdown on the Naxal movement. The films discussed here bear testimony to the fact that social events and political situations have influenced the filmmakers while depicting cop characters. Rather than saviours or heroes, they initially found their niche in Malayalam cinema as villainous and treacherous. The whole scenario changes post-1990s, and the years leading up to that are immensely important to fathom the multifarious reasons regarding the evolution of Khaki on the Malayalam silver screen.

Chapter 3
The Emergence of the 'Supercop':
Analysing Malayalam Films Post-1990

Cinema is a medium that can reflect on a society, its cultural patterns, belief systems, and lifestyle through various dimensions. It can have a tremendous bearing on people and can even influence tastes and belief systems. Cinema portrays life authentically, where reality often amalgamates with unique facets of imagination. While analysing the representation of police post-1990, the socio-political conditions that existed then need to be meticulously studied. Indian society at large has been going through a period of tumult and upheavals. The Mandal Commission report created a wide chasm in society, resulting in a hitherto unseen social churning. According to K.P. Jayakumar,

> What is the relationship between the Mandal Commission and Malayalam cinema? Though this question may seem contradictory, when Malayalam films post-1980 are analysed at a micro level, these contradictions become invisible. The reaction of the mainstream society towards the anti-Mandal protests hide many internal conflicts within its ambit…Several films representing the anxieties internalised by the 'upper-caste' sections of society came out in the 1980s. (*Jathi Vyavasthayum*; my trans; 56-57)

The post-Mandal social scenario had far-reaching ramifications in the arts and all other cultural articulations. As K.P. Jayakumar states, cinema too was not out of its ambit. The vibrant discourses related to the recommendations regarding caste reservation had started in the 1980s, and Malayalam cinema reflected the anxieties

and insecurities of the 'savarna' (upper-caste) sections, which spanned to the next decade as well. The commercial Malayalam filmdom showed a penchant for the male hero, born into an aristocratic family, finding it hard to survive in a society that enforces caste reservation. As an instant reaction, several films with such a template thronged the silver screen. *T.P. Balagopalan M.A.* (1986), *Gandhinagar 2nd Street* (1986), *Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhnam* (1986), *Nadodikkattu* (1987), and *Aryan (*1988) were some of the films that catered to the above-mentioned formula. In all these films, the upper-caste hero is shown to be struggling to find employment, despite acquiring higher educational qualifications. The narrative's sympathy rests with the pathetic plight of the hero, as he is portrayed as the victim of an 'unjust system'.

In all the above-mentioned films, Mohanlal played the leading role, which is not a mere coincidence. Mohanlal represented the typical hapless youth, who struggles to meet his life's ends. Thus, he became the poster boy of the anti-Mandal cinematic universe. As Muraleedharan T. suggests, "Mohanlal became the mirror, in which the Malayali audience could see their own face" (75). Such was the influence of the elite body of Mohanlal in Malayalam cinema, and the anti-Mandal trope found it easier to adopt it to suit their strategic needs. This carefully articulated ideological stand goes a long way in guaranteeing the audience's empathy in favour of the distressed hero figure. As K.P. Jayakumar puts it, "The close reading of the Malayalam films of the 1980s shows that there is an intentional attempt to normalise the upper-caste aesthetics, cultural practices, and lifestyle by pitting it against the subaltern reality" (*Jathi* Vyavasthayum; my trans;102). The question of merit was

raised frequently by these films by placing the hero at the receiving end of the impending social revolution, favouring the subaltern sections. In some of the films mentioned earlier, actor Sreenivasan played the role of the inferior other, someone who was bestowed with a job and security of life due to reservation. The dark, short body of Sreenivasan was well suited for the representation of the less qualified, lucky person, who belonged to the backward section. This fortune of the Sreenivasan characters was often pitched against the misfortune of the elite Mohanlal characters, and the workings of the social system were severely flayed. "In films like *Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhanam* and *Gandhinagar 2nd Street*, due to unemployment and financial problems, upper-caste heroes migrate to a foreign land in search of a better life; characters played by Sreenivasan in these films have a secured job back home" (Jayakumar, *Jathi Vyavasthayum*; my trans;104-105).

In *Sanmanassullavarkku Samadhanam*, Mohanlal's character, born in an aristocratic family, struggles to find a permanent job. He is astonished to see Sreenivasan, his old friend, appointed as a police officer. Here, Sreenivasan is portrayed as a comical figure, in a carefully made attempt to make the audience think about how he would have reached such a position. Even his romance is mocked. The film sides with the frustrations of the protagonist, and Sreenivasan is represented as the inferior other of Mohanlal. The same pattern is followed in *Gandhinagar 2nd Street* too, where Mohanlal is devoid of a job, whereas Sreenivasan, with a job, is leading a reputable life. The character is again made a figure to make fun of and is placed against Mohanlal, as his actions in the movie turn out to be hilarious. In *Nadodikkattu* and its sequel, *Pattanapravesham*,

Mohanlal frequently reminds Sreenivasan that he is a B.Com first-class degree holder, whereas Sreenivasan is a pre-degree failure. The concerns regarding merit are frequently brought forth in the narrative of these films. Post-Mandal anxieties of the Savarna sections about the dilution of merit are very much visible here. As K.P Jayakumar posits,

> In contemporary India, discussions about 'merit' are widespread. The dominant sections argue that the subaltern sections lack merit. What is merit? What kinds of meaning does it generate? Though meritocracy is an ideal scenario as envisaged by capitalism, in India, the caste system, which has roots much beyond the origin of capitalism, has been speaking in favour of it. In the Indian social scenario, merit is immensely important to the middle class as well as the bourgeois sections. (*Jathi Vyavasthayum*; my trans; 66)

This trend dominated Malayalam cinema in the 1980s, and the familiar trope of the elitist hero without a job and financial security influenced the audience and society at large. Mandal discourses and the subsequent political churning were seen as a great injustice towards the hapless Savarna segment of the populace. Cinema played a vital role in the creation of this manufactured sentiment. Thus, reservation based on caste, a constitutional category to assure representation and affirmative justice, was misinterpreted and vigorously resisted by Malayalam cinema.

When the Malayalam films of the 1980s are studied from a sociological perspective, it becomes evident that the decade was setting the stage for a stronger and more comprehensive opposition to the Mandal recommendations, which were rooted in democracy. The innocuous, insipid, upper-caste characters started to

evolve, and a new brand of aggressive, macho male figures appeared on the silver screen. These hyper-masculine hero figures were a far cry from the timid figure of the previous decade as these 'angry young savarna men' were furious and agitated regarding the existing social system, which needed to be uprooted. They were the embodiment of the oppressive regimes of the feudal yore. These neo-feudal characters epitomised frustration with the 'Bahujan politics' (politics for the emancipation of the backwards castes), and the new zeal was a clarion call for the revival of the feudal past. Thus, an array of films that catered to the new paradigm thronged the Malayalam silver screen in the 1990s. As in the previous decade, Mohanlal was presented as the poster boy of the new movement as well. He changed his avatar from the impoverished and incapable middle-class youth to a belligerent Savarna warrior, willing to take the law into his own hands. His ire was aimed at the system. Many other Malayalam superstars also got involved in this cinematic phenomenon. Unsurprisingly, most of these films were huge successes at the box office. Meena T. Pillai presents several interesting observations on the transformation of Mohanlal from an affable "lovable little rascal" and "mischievous forever boy" (Pillai 103) to the intimidating, feudal, macho figure. She says,

> Post-1990s, we see Mohanlal in roles where his promiscuity exceeds bodily desires and spills into unlimited cultural and economic markers, fetishistic objects on screen that represent luxury and pleasure. Several movies have him play the feudal lord/don, such as *Devasuram*, *Aaraam Thampuran*, *Ravanaprabhu*, *Narasimham,* and *Thandavam*, where we see him surrounded by bicultural artifacts that resonate with a fetishistic value, in the process

> melding commodity fetishism with cultural capital. Thus, aspects of a feudal culture become imbued with desire and are exhibited and celebrated as cultural commodities. (Pillai 106)

The explicit adherence to the feudal past was a common trope of the Malayalam commercial cinema of the 1990s, and the audience was manipulated to accept the resurgence of the feudal 'thamuparans' (lords) on the silver screen. The violent ways of reclaiming their lost fortunes by the Savarna youth were wholeheartedly celebrated by the Malayali audience, and most of those films created ripples at the box office. Apart from Mohanlal, superstars such as Mammootty (*Valyettan, Dhruvam*) and Suresh Gopi (*Mahatma*) also enacted the new explosive avatar of the upper castes. *Dhruvam* and *Mahathma* are notorious for their venomous utterances aimed at minorities, which perfectly fit the narrative of the glorification of the Hindu feudal past. These novel discourses in the 1990s created a few interesting patterns of meaning production. The movies that followed a certain formula celebrated the bravery and skill of a tough, elite character who was able to succeed against all odds. He was hailed as the perfect answer to the Mandal-based discourses of caste reservation and positive discrimination. The fury of the Savarna against the social churning happening then was given a vent by Malayalam cinema. A critical analysis of the Indian political scenario of the 1990s will help in fathoming the phenomenon of the wide acceptability of such Hindu macho hero figures.

The 1990s are regarded as the decade that, for the first time in the history of Indian politics, explicitly placed religion at the centre stage of all political

discourses. From the times of the Nationalist movement onwards, Majoritarian sentiments were visible in the Indian political landscape. The book *Geeta Press and the Making of Hindu India* by Akshaya Mukul critically examines the shaping of Hindu nationalism and the modern Hindutva political identity, which is antithetical to secular value systems. Mukul observes that the conservative right-wing ideology was at work even during the times of India's freedom movement and was patiently waiting for its turn. Though not explicitly, it ensured its presence and influence in the governing structures. Only after a few decades post-independence, the majoritarian ideologues started expressing the need for direct involvement in the government apparatus. Bharatiya Jana Sangh, a Hindutva political organisation in socialist garbs, was used for the purpose. Later, the Bharatiya Janata Party, which explicitly adhered to the Hindutva ideology, was born. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement, orchestrated by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which wanted to build a Ram temple at Ayodhya, a city in Uttar Pradesh (UP), had divided Indian society based on religion. The clout of the 'political Hindu' started to dominate all political discourses.

Critical research into Indian politics has been well established in his work, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925 to the 1990s*. Here, Christophe Jaffrelot provides a detailed account of the birth, rise and domination of political Hindutva. He assesses the political climate of India in the 1980s and gives significant hints regarding the flourishing of Hindutva ideology in the political sphere of India. As Jaffrelot observes,

> First, the Ayodhya agitation provided it with a means of widening its electoral base, although the motivation of 'mobilised Hindus' was not always religiosity or a new etho-religious consciousness… Second, the B.J.P.'s measured opposition to the recommendations of the Mandal Commission brought it further support from the upper castes. (*The Hindu* 412)

The Mandal discourses even led to the formation of political parties that represented the backward castes. People of the Hindi heartland (states including Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh, etc.) were swayed by this socialist political narrative, which aimed at the annihilation of discrimination and the empowerment of the backward sections. This must have consolidated the upper castes, and the BJP, a pro-Hindu, pro-upper-caste party, presented itself as the saviour of the majority of Hindus. Jaffrolet goes on to state that the RSS, the parent body of the BJP, tried to persuade the majority of Hindus to stand united amidst the huge social churning created by the Mandal report. As he writes,

> In fact, the *Organizer* criticised the policy of reservations in itself: 'The havoc the politics of reservation is playing with the social fabric is unimaginable. It provides a premium for mediocrity, encourages brain-drain and sharpens caste-divide'. The 'social fabric ' here is regarded here as in need of preservation from the state's intervention with the implicit assumption that society was in theory-if not in practice, harmonious. In the view of the *Organizer*, the campaign for the Ram temple revealed this almost tangible unity: 'The dynamics of the abhiyan (campaign) was such that for

> the first time it transcended caste and class barriers and forced Hindu society to think and act as one. (Jaffrolet, *The Hindu* 415)

Supporting the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, L.K. Advani, the then BJP President, embarked on a political journey, a "rath yatra" (chariot journey). Throughout this journey, the dominant slogan was the need for "Ram Rajya" (the land ruled by lord Ram), where Hindus would dominate over other religions. Lord Ram was portrayed as a symbol of manliness and virtue, which had a strong impact across India as Hindus were indoctrinated about the political treachery they had suffered and the need for a ruler like Lord Ram.

The 'Virat Hindu' image was very well advertised and soon became a model to be emulated across the country by patriotic Hindus. It means 'great Hindu', who prides himself in his religious identity and considers himself mighty. As Badri Narayan observes in *Fascinating Hindutva: Saffron Politics and Dalit Mobilisation*,

> Words found in ancient Hindu religious and mythological texts like samrat (great emperor), rashtra, rakshak (saviour), virat (great), which were usually used for describing the glory of rulers and kings, have now entered into the patois of many north Indian villages. Today, these words have acquired communal meanings and have become symbols of the Hindutva ideology that is being disseminated at the grassroots by the BJP–RSS combine. (77)

Though it had its inception in politics, it pervaded to cultural and artistic arena too. The above-discussed Malayalam films, with the Hindu macho identity, have their ideological roots in this carefully constructed political image. The

'thampurans' (feudal lords) can be seen as the incarnation of lord Ram, who has the moral responsibility to fight and defeat evil. The law of the land does not apply to them, as they believe in 'divine law'. In her article, "Hypermasculine Images and the Hindu Identity in Malayalam Cinema", Swapna Gopinath states that, "By mid-1990s and early 2000s, the rise of a new protagonist with a toxic male identity had slowly begun to evolve. This trend also transformed the stardom of Mammootty and Mohanlal" (Gopinath 150). The nineties saw the emerging superhero clout, which influenced the narrative patterns in popular Malayalam cinema. She continues to observe that, "The individual, especially the male, is believed to be powerful enough to challenge institutions and governments that are corrupt and nepotic. These representations of individuals are carefully nurtured and designed as they emerge as symbolic figures, as tropes to be drawn into narratives repeatedly (Gopinath 153).

The 'thampuran' heroes of the 1990s were portrayed as impeccable humans, who are the divine incarnations with a duty to save the land reeling under a wretched system. Swapna Gopinath explains how these superheroes created a lasting impact of disillusionment in the audience's mind about the existing institutions of democracy. As she states,

> During the 1990s, Malayalam films saw a proliferation of hypermasculine characters as the infallible heroes, accompanied by a celebration of toxic male subjectivity and misogyny. There was also decisive change in the nature of masculinity portrayed by Mammootty and Mohanlal. The public conferred superstardom to these actors, and the media enabled the creation of alpha males. The creation of fan clubs accelerated this growth toward a

> regressive male identity. This celebration of phallocracy has had significant repercussions on social structures. (Gopinath 157)

The hypermasculine heroes were adorned with symbols of Hinduism, and the narratives glorified their valorous deeds. As Swapna Gopinath continues, “These hypermasculine images were characterised by a toxicity, a misogyny accompanied by the creation of an ideal Hindu male, a vicious and regressive image, shaped out of a patriarchal myth, a political construct of right-wing forces” (163).

The new macho films in Malayalam portray the current democratic system as flawed in such narratives. It has been propagated that the existing system created this moral turpitude, and these aggressive, macho Hindu heroes must save the land and its cultural essence. The hyper-masculine hero figure and its emergence are a vital tool in studying the evolution and transformation of police characters in Malayalam cinema post-1990. The period, with all its chaotic characteristics, influenced the creation of police characters significantly. Certain films with high-profile police characters as protagonists needed to be examined to understand the patterns of portrayal and the invisible ideological influences. The construction and popularisation of the 'Virat Hindu' archetype served as a significant ideological project, initially emerging within political discourse but subsequently permeating cultural and artistic expressions, including regional cinema. This image, valorised as a model for patriotic Hindus, came to be widely disseminated and emulated across India (*Jaffrelot, Hindu Nationalism* 135; Hansen 210). Malayalam cinema, in particular, reflects this ideological current through its representation of hyper-masculine Hindu protagonists. These characters often draw from the constructed

iconography of feudal lords or ‘thampurans’, who symbolically mirror the mythic figure of Lord Rama, portrayed as moral crusaders with a divine mandate to eradicate evil (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen).

Within such cinematic narratives, the authority of democratic institutions is frequently undermined or dismissed, replaced by an appeal to a higher, ostensibly divine, moral law. These portrayals imply that the prevailing democratic order is morally compromised, necessitating the intervention of a heroic, morally superior figure to restore the cultural and ethical integrity of the land (Nanda 76). This ideological position aligns closely with Hindu nationalist narratives that privilege divine justice over constitutional frameworks. The emergence of the hyper-masculine hero figure in Malayalam cinema, particularly post-1990, must be analysed in relation to broader socio-political transformations. This period witnessed significant shifts in both the political landscape and popular cultural expressions, which in turn influenced cinematic representations of law enforcement. The reconfiguration of the police protagonist, imbued with exaggerated masculinity and moral absolutism, reflects deeper ideological undercurrents that warrant critical examination. A focused analysis of films featuring prominent police characters during this period can reveal patterns of representation and the subtle, often invisible, ideological influences that shape them.

In the article “Nation, Nationalism, and Indian Hindi Cinema”, Goutam Karmakar and Pippa Catterall attempt a detailed cross-examination of the evolution of Hindi cinema after the 1980s. They traverse through various significant socio-political milestones in the annals, such as economic liberalisation,

the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the rise of majoritarian communalism. The study looks at the impacts of these developments on cinema and how nationalism was constructed on the silver screen. As they put it,

> The post-1990s witnessed a diverse range of Hindi cinematic offerings which attempted to inculcate compassion for communities, advocate a message of the need for collective bonding for the nation to prosper, and reinforce the significance of preserving Indian cultural ethos as a hallmark of nation-building and nationalism (Karmakar et al.).

The article continues to trace the communalisation of Hindi cinema, especially post-1990. The writers make valid observations regarding the ideological standpoint of Bollywood such as, "Hindi-language films operated in an environment shaped by these developments and either had to respond to or willingly assimilate its tropes such as 'Bharat Mata', the notion of a Mother India that must be defended against its internal and external enemies" (Karmakar et al.) and "Yet, there was now more of a focus as well on internal enemies. The outsiders principally identified by the Hindutva movement were Muslims and Dalits." (Karmakar et al.). Hindi cinema paved the way for other language mainstream cinema regarding the majoritarian shift in the post-globalised era of majority communalism. Karmakar and Catterall further state that,

> A key aspect of Hindi cinema has always been the role it plays in nation-building. Indeed, in India, nationalism is arguably the most frequently assessed issue in the understanding, teaching, and scholarship of Hindi cinema, as it is seen as functioning primarily to reinforce popular ideological

> validation of the Indian nation. Cinema in India is a crucial medium due to visual narrative power and its closeness to other popular cultural forms such as Parsi theatre, folk theatrical traditions, epic oral narratives, and mythological and theological stories. By emphasising Indianness, Hindi films have been shown as embodying nationalism: nonetheless, through reflecting various articulations of this within their storylines they have also presented alternative, more inclusive, and liberal conceptions of national belonging. ("Nation")

The period saw an unparalleled transition in cinema from the Nehruvian socialist ideals towards a neo-liberal Hindutva vantage point. When the representation of police in Malayalam cinema post-1990 is examined, such a shift, which occurred nationally, needs to be taken into consideration. The police films in Malayalam transformed themselves into a genre to reckon with in the 1990s. It was a significant change, which was very much in tune with the zeitgeist. As discussed in the previous chapter, the representation of police in Malayalam cinema never had a uniform pattern, nor did it lean towards any ideological position. Versatile designs of portrayal were evident before the 1990s, as various phases indicate. When the police films post-1990 are taken for analysis, the popular socio-political mood of the times becomes visible at various junctures. The emergence of the superhero brand and the cult status it had among the spectators played a vital role in the emergence of the new genre of police films in Malayalam. Just like the upper caste superhero fighting a lone battle against the system, the image of a 'supercop' emerged in this period. These police characters often placed themselves above the law, giving them

a superhuman quality where they could do no wrong. Several such films were released post-1990, and the royal abode of the 'thampuran' was replaced by police stations, where the 'supercops' ruled the roost. Interestingly, in most films, politicians were portrayed as villains who engaged in rampant corruption and other illicit activities. These narratives made the point quite clear that the country cannot be saved by politics or political ideologies. It is propagated that the need of the hour is a superhero police officer who can deliver justice instantly. Encounter killings were hailed as the new norm. The society was adapting itself to a novel idea of justice and hero worship. Unlike the 'thampuran' heroes, these cop heroes were part of the state machinery, which made their task of delivering instant justice much easier and believable.

History proves that power always wishes to rule over its citizenry by subjugation, either covertly or overtly. In his book *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Partha Chatterjee sheds light on the concepts of populist politics, governance, civil society's relation to the state, etc. He assesses the conditions in postcolonial countries and observes how populism is used by authoritarian states to bridge the gap between civil society and the political society. Chatterjee defines the civil society as "bourgeois society" (38) and refers to the members of the political society as "They are not, therefore, proper members of civil society and are not regarded as such by the institutions of the state" (38). He states that the members of the political society, mostly the subaltern sections, are legally left out of the definition of social citizens. Instead, they are interpellated in a way that, through populist measures, they are given a

false sense of equal citizenship. Thus, a section of the population is left out of their dignified status as citizens with equal rights and are left to seek the doles and freebies provided by the state. This covert exertion of power by the state subsequently leads to the premise of a total exception, which Giorgio Agamben conceptualised as the state of exception.

Italian philosopher and social critic Giorgio Agamben's notions of the state and the functioning of its machinery are helpful here in disseminating the complicated layers of power politics visible in these police films. German theorist Carl Schmitt introduced the notion of 'the state of exception' in his 1921 essay "On Dictatorship". The concept refers to a peculiar situation in which the state suspends the rule of law for the protection of the existing social order. It is akin to legalising lawlessness. The state can extend the suspension of the rule of law to any extent as long as it thinks that the country is in danger. The citizens will have limited freedoms and rights, where the centralisation of power hands immense authority to the executive. Police and military will function as independent entities with little scope for scrutiny. Schmitt presented this notion on a positive note and believed that it was necessary for a state system to resort to the state of exception whenever it finds its existence in jeopardy. It could be used to restore normalcy and the rule of law. But Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben is of the view that a state of exception is a death knell to democracy and can never be used to protect it. It paves the way for dictatorship. In his seminal work, *State of Exception,* he says,

> Let us take the case of the Nazi State. No sooner did Hitler take power (or, as we should perhaps more accurately say, no sooner was power given to him)

> than, on February 28, he proclaimed the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution concerning personal liberties. The decree was never repealed, so that from a juridical stand- point the entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. In this sense, modern totalitarianism can be defined as the establishment, by means of the state of exception, of a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who, for some reason, cannot be integrated into the political system. Since then, the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states, including so-called democratic ones. (Agamben, *State of Exception* 2)

In the Indian social scenario, except for the years of Emergency, the Indian government has never officially declared a state of exception. However, a critical examination of Indian political history reveals several such instances where the rule of law was suspended to protect the interests of the state, though not officially declared. Instances such as the Operation Blue Star in 1984, the Gujarat Riots in 2002, the Salwa Judum and subsequent anti-Maoist operations in Chhattisgarh, etc., show the suspension of the rule of law and a free hand given to the police machinery. The state declares its enemies, and the police are tasked with the mission of suppression. Various terror laws, including TADA, POTA and UAPA, were criticised for their anti-democratic and authoritarian structure, yet various

governments used them to their advantage. As Ankit Grewal says in his article, "Norm or Exception? The Operation of Anti-Terror Legislations in India", "As is evident through the permanence gained by UAPA, anti-terror laws have now been extracted from the place of "necessity" to be made the mainstream legal refuge for dealing with "suspect communities". It is no longer a "state of exception", no longer "a space devoid of the law" (4). He argues that using such draconian laws, the constitutional spirit of democracy and egalitarianism are put in limbo. Police, thus, acquire immense power and autonomy to function. The impunity of the police force in India is unparalleled. They have more freedom and authority than any other arm of the state.

In his article "The Impunity Effect: Majoritarian Rule, Everyday Legality, and State Formation in India", Moyukh Chatterjee, while brooding on the state and the police's dubious involvement in the Gujarat Riots says that, "What is different in the case of state-backed riots in Gujarat is both the overwhelming scale of the atrocities and the subsequent accusations that "the state" sanctioned it" (Chatterjee 122). The book *Broken System: Dysfunction, Abuse, and Impunity in the Indian Police,* published by the Human Rights Watch, Naureen Shah scrutinises the Indian police system's impunity. She interviews over sixty police officers, eighty victims and states how the force has been working without respecting the values enshrined in the Indian Constitution. She underlines the anti-dalit, anti- minority and pro-majoritarian ideological leaning of the police force and flays the penchant for using violence. As Naureen Shah says,

> A dangerous anachronism, the police have largely failed to evolve from the ruler-supportive, repressive forces they were designed to be under Britain's colonial rule. While sixty years later, much of India is in the process of rapid modernization, the police continue to use their old methods. Instead of policing through public consent and participation, the police use abuse and threats as a primary crime investigation and law enforcement tactic. The institutional culture of police practically discourages officers from acting otherwise, failing to give them resources, training, an ethical environment, and encouragement to develop professional police tactics. (5)

While analysing the patterns of the portrayal of police characters in cinema, the filmmakers, especially post-1990, can be seen as being swayed by the impunity and stature of the force. The already existing supremacy of the police force, coupled with the rise of the new Savarna Hindu avatar, has resulted in filmmakers creating police characters as extraordinary beings with hitherto unseen capacity and will to reform the system and come out triumphant. They are portrayed as the force of nature, the face of virtue that is constantly in the fight against evil. This penchant for police heroism can be seen as the prime reason behind the development of a novel police genre in Malayalam cinema.

The emergence of the new trend can be traced back to the late 1980s. Films with police characters as protagonists, who carried the additional responsibility of safeguarding social and cultural morality, hit the screens with regularity. Many of these films redefined the then-existing system of police portrayal. Films such as *Ekalavyan* (1993), *The City* (1994), *Commissioner* (1994), *F.I.R* (1999), *Inspector*

Balram (1991), *Crime File* (1999) *Sathyameva Jayathe* (2000), *Nariman* (2001), *The Godman* (1999), *Rakshasa Rajavu* (2001), etc. are significant here. These films announced the unchallenging reign of hypermasculine police characters who took upon themselves the responsibility of safeguarding the lives of people as well as social morality. All other aspects of a movie, including the script, supporting actors, and technical faculty, were sidelined, and the sole focus was on the carefully constructed image of the super cop. To fathom the trends that were at work in the Malayalam police films post-1990s, some of the above-mentioned films need to be closely examined. This analysis is also crucial in fine-tuning the hypothetical reasoning, taking into consideration the other two phases of police films in Malayalam, periods before and after the 1990s.

The Solo Saviour in Khaki – Analysing the Evolution of Suresh Gopi

Cop films in the 1990s can be seen as parallel to the 'thampuran' films, though they differ slightly in style and approach. A few police films with hypermasculine superheroes are analysed here, and the focus is on the workings of socio-cultural and ideological patterns in the creation of an omnipotent male figure and saviour. When cop films of the 1990s are analysed, the emergence of actor Suresh Gopi with hitherto unseen macho stardom can be seen as a unique phenomenon. His evolution as an actor who can enact the roles of police officers with suave played a vital role in the overall transformation of the way police characters were written in Malayalam cinema. A close parallel can be drawn between the 'thampuran' characters of Mohanlal and the police characters of Suresh Gopi, as both exhibited a novel form of machismo and the exertion of power. His

police characters acquire a divine right to enforce the law, even if the established methods are seen to be violated. Instead of just showing the public how a model police officer should be, Gopi's cop characters also teach the audience the futility of the existing criminal justice system and the need to overhaul it. He becomes the epitome of the State of Exception, and from the enforcer of law, he becomes the law himself.

Suresh Gopi's career began in the 1980s, though he had debuted as a child artist in *Odayil Ninnu* (1965). The decade saw him playing mostly supporting roles, thus establishing his niche in Malayalam cinema. The breakthrough of his career happened through the film *Ekalavyan* (1993), in which he appeared as a tough cop who was in a relentless war against the drug mafia. The movie was received well at the box office, and his role was also appreciated. The image of a police officer, who even dares to break the existing laws of the land as the saviour of society, captures the imagination of the Malayali audience. The audience's psyche, which was influenced by the social turmoil over the existing social and democratic system, was clamouring for the incarnation of a lord Rama-like 'Virat Hindu Purush' to transform the entire social structure of the nation. They were in awe of this new cinematic phenomenon. Though Malayalam cinema had strong police characters in the past as well, the body of Suresh Gopi was very much suited for the incarnation of the mythical saviour image. This was followed by a slew of 'thampuran' films, in which Mohanlal donned the role of the neo-feudal saviour to perfection. Malayalam cinema was responding to the social upheavals that were drastically changing the social, democratic, and cultural structure of India, especially the 'Hindi heartland'

(Hindi-speaking states including the U.P., Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, etc.). Some of the films by Suresh Gopi need to be examined thoroughly to unearth the hidden patterns regarding the development of a police genre in Malayalam cinema.

Ekalavyan (1993) is a Malayalam film that can be considered a milestone in the career of Suresh Gopi with his successful stint as a cop hero. The film is also important as it has announced the inception of a novel genre of Malayalam cinema, where the cop avatar has undergone a major transformation. The film, directed by Shaji Kailas and penned by Renji Panicker, is a strong take on the need to fight the drug mafia, which was terrorising the state with the support of outside forces. Along with Suresh Gopi, the cast of the film includes Narendra Prasad, Madhu, Geetha, Rajan P. Dev, et al. The film shows the solo fight of Madhavan, a police officer who is transferred to the anti-narcotic cell from Maharashtra to fight against the drug lobby, which has a firm grip on bureaucracy and politics. The film critiques the political class for its overt and covert support of such an illicit establishment. It also sheds light on the use of spirituality and religion to carry out heinous criminal activities, which could jeopardise the safety of the land. When Suresh Gopi's police character in *Ekalavyan* is examined, it offers certain interesting and relevant insights regarding the evolution of the police genre in Malayalam cinema.

The movie follows the story of Madhavan (played by Suresh Gopi), an honest police officer from Maharashtra, who is called to Kerala to put an end to the widespread drug mafia, which poses a threat to society's well-being. The mafia is headed and controlled by Swami Amoorthananda, a self-styled godman and spiritual guru. His clout over the political and bureaucratic circles is so huge that he even

directly interferes in the governance of the state. The home minister of the state is his aide and manages the police according to the whims and fancies of the drug mafia. The film shows Madhavan's solo fight against the ravaging drug menace and the threats he has to encounter. Though it is said at the outset that Madhavan's father's whereabouts are unknown, later it is revealed that he is the son of Valiyakunnikkal Sreedhara Menon (Comrade Sreedharan as his colleagues used to call him). The film ends with Madhavan successfully busting the drug cartel and killing Swami Amoorthananda. The film is touted as a strong, socially committed cinematic creation that vehemently unravels the connivance between the state and nefarious elements in society.

The film starts with a disclaimer, a common practice in Malayalam cinema, as the filmmakers clarify that they do not intend to hurt anyone's feelings if there are any resemblances. But here, *Ekalavyan* starts with an interesting disclaimer, which says, "The story and characters of this film are fictional. They do not resemble anyone. All the incidents are also fictional. But we do not claim that certain resemblances are coincidental" (*Ekalavyan* 0:01:55-00:02:00). This stand at the beginning itself indicates that the film aims to draw parallels to real events and people. The attempt is to critique the workings of the state, society, and its multifarious manifestations. As mentioned earlier, the film traces the workings of the drug mafia in Kerala and is critical of the political class for being hand in glove with the nefarious entities. The new police cinema of Malayalam, which is inspired by the 'thampuran' cinema movement, represents the political class in negative shades and states that the major law and order issues of the land are created by politicians. This is followed by the hailing of a super cop, who stands tall against the

wicked designs of the state and its politicians. Thus, the police, which is a strong and repressive arm of the state, is separated from it.

The lone super cop is assigned the duty of protecting the land and its people, as he is portrayed as a man with a mission, who can take the law into his own hands. In *Ekalavyan,* the character of the home minister is a prime example, as he is a tainted man with connections to the drug mafia. The role played by Rajan P. Dev represents the rotten political class. Though the Chief Minister is shown as a man with noble intentions, he or the ruling class he represents cannot withstand the juggernaut of the drug mafia led by Swamiji. In the film, when Madhavan is brought to Kerala as the head of the anti-narcotic cell of the police, he asks the Chief Minister for surety, as his workings will not have interference from political leaders of the higher echelons. The lack of trust with the political class is once again made visible by such instances. The staunch apolitical stand is laid bare by another utterance by Madhavan as he says, “The red street is more respectable than the corridors of power” (*Ekalavyan* 00:54:40-00:54:44). He informs the Chief Minister that his distrust of the political hegemony stems from the forgettable experiences he had in Maharashtra, as his attempts to scuttle the drug mafia were hampered by the constant interferences from the political lobbies. Madhavan here represents a typical post-Mandal, rejuvenated Savarna identity that is disillusioned with the existing socio-political system and yearns for an overhaul. In yet another instance, when Sarath, the character played by Siddique praises the Chief Minister as a sincere and committed man, Madhavan replies, “I know. I have heard and read a lot about him. But such people too will have to toe a different line when the temperature of the political barometer rises” (*Ekalavyan* 00:55:15-00:55:28).

The emergence of the “thampuran heroes” was marked by blatant sexism and hyper-masculine gestures, which go along with their solo valiant fight against the existing system. The superhero lashing out at their female counterparts was part of the common trend. Suresh Gopi’s police characters, too, are not different in this particular aspect, as a number of his cop films contain scenes where he dominates and subordinates his female counterparts. In *Ekalavyan*, he can be seen shouting at Maya Menon, a character played by Geetha. The context is unwarranted, yet the scene is used by the director to impose the hyper-masculine persona of the character on the narrative. A drunken Madhavan in another scene makes a long speech about his personal life and the pains he is taking to refurbish this rotten system. Maya Menon, here, is portrayed as a passive figure, without any agency, and she is strangely in awe of the dedicated Madhavan’s efforts even amidst his misdemeanour.

The upper-caste identity of Madhavan is evident from the surname of his father, Valiyakunnikkal Sreedhara Menon. The similarities between super cop characters and 'thampuran' heroes of the past can be seen in various forms and mannerisms. While sexism is the most notable trait, casteism is also included in the mix with subtle and nuanced methods of narration. The upper-caste Virat Hindu cop heroes can be seen uttering casteist slurs to degrade the backward caste characters just like their ‘thampuran’ counterparts. In the analysis of the characterisation of the Dalit actor Kalabhavan Mani in the book *Malayala Cinema- Desam, Bhasha, Samskaram*, film critic G.P. Ramachandran has put forth a few significant ideas regarding the abhorrence of the Savarna heroes towards the Dalit bodies. *Narasimham*, starring Mohanlal, is a typical ‘thampuran’ film, with the immense

glorification of the feudal hero. While analysing the film, G.P. Ramachandran suggests that,

> In *Narasimham*,a significant pleasurable visual is the powerful kicking of the dark, Dalit body of Kalabhavan Mani by the Savarna hero… By this act of kicking a subaltern, the audience is provided with a hallucinatory sense of the resurgence of hegemonic Brahmanism, and through pleasurable traits such as dream and memory, a political act is carried over unconsciously. Such 'chavittunadakam' repeats in films such as *Valyettan*, *Dada Saheb,* etc. which were accepted with great applause by the audience. When Kalabhavan Mani is kicked in the film *Karumadikuttan*, the audience is once again presented with the same pleasure of watching a subaltern character being kicked. (my trans; 207-208)

There are clear indications in the neo-Savarna wave in Malayalam cinema about the intentional othering of the subaltern characters. The aristocratic feudal heroes make casteist slurs and insinuations about the subaltern characters on screen. In *Ekalavyan*, the character of the home minister belongs to a backward caste, and Madhavan is making insinuations about the caste status of the minister. He says, "You will shave heads. Hope you have not forgotten your old profession after becoming a minister. Do not forget. It will be useful for you" (*Ekalavyan* 01:26:51-01:26:56). This is a clear innuendo at the backward status of the minister, as the hero reminds him of his old profession of shaving heads. The upper-caste pride of the character is evident in his fury, irrespective of his professional status. In *Malayala Cinema- Desam, Bhasha, Samskaram*, G.P. enquires about the historical and social

contexts of the casteist proverbs in Malayalam, such as “Cherumanu adhikarappani kittiyal” (If a Dalit gets power) and “Pinnem Chankaran thengel thane” (The backward one is still doing his old job). The insensitive utterance of the elite police hero reflects the casteist mindset of Kerala society with its façade of modernity and renaissance.

In the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*, Ekalavya is a Nishada (a hill tribe) prince who wanted to learn archery from Dronacharya, the teacher of the Kuru royal dynasty. Due to Ekalavya’s subaltern social status, Dronacharya refuses to accept him as his student. A dejected yet determined Ekalavya learns archery on his own, considering Dronacharya as his master and trains with dedication, soon becoming a trained archer and fighter. The prince Arjuna got worried and sought the help of Dronacharya to intervene. The sudden rise of a subaltern warrior was beyond the imagination of the royal warriors. Thus, Dronacharya schemes to put an end to Ekalavya’s warrior life, asks for his right thumb as his “gurudakshina” (teacher’s fee). Ekalvya listens to his master with respect and gives his thumb as a gift. A subaltern protege was tactfully wiped out from the social sphere of elite warriors. The story of Ekalvya is used by Scholars of Dalit studies while deconstructing the Hindu myths from a subaltern perspective. This tale of deception is callously appropriated to suit the upper-caste narrative in this movie’s context.

Ekalavyan is a prime example of the new police genre, which has a close connection with the post-Mandal Indian scenario, as the hero believes in taking the law into his own hands. There is little trust in the justice system as it is often viewed as corrupt and partial. The film is made in tune with the zeitgeist of the 1990s. In the

film, once the antagonist Swami Amoorthananda is cornered by Madhavan, he has no plans to leave him to the Indian penal system. Instead, he kills the villain and proclaims that justice is served. The lack of trust in the system is evident in this aspect. Several super-cop films have followed the same path in the decade, and the similarities are noticeable. The film ends with an epilogue which says, "The verdicts on behalf of people become people's mandate. The punishments meted out to those who scheme to unleash misery upon the populace, whichever the manner, become the will of the people" (*Ekalavyan* 02:35:59-02:36:05). Thus, the film justifies the sentence carried out by Madhavan as the will of the people. The sole hero is supposed to be representing the mandate of the people, irrespective of the methods he chooses. *Ekalavyan* proves to be a significant film, considering the above-mentioned socio-political scenario of India, and the evolution in Malayalam commercial cinema.

Fig.1. Still from the climax of *Ekalavyan* (2:35:44).

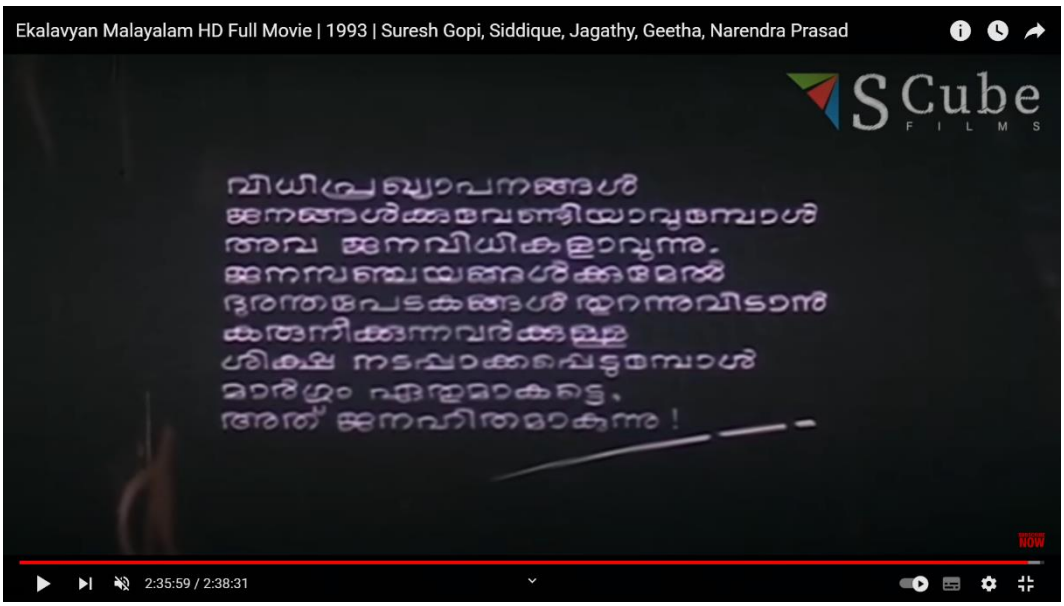

Fig.2. The epilogue in *Ekalavyan* (2:35:59).

The trend set by Suresh Gopi got its extension through another major hit at the box office, *Commissioner*. The film was released in 1994 and stars Suresh Gopi, Ratheesh, Shobhana, M.G. Soman, et al. It is the story of Bharath Chandran IPS, who is in a relentless war against criminals and the drug mafia in the state. The film offers a few interesting takes on the evolution of police characters in Malayalam cinema. It also cemented the place of Suresh Gopi as the 'ultimate super cop'. Directed by Shaji Kailas, the movie *Commissioner* establishes the problematic relationship between the state and police and questions the efficiency of the former in ensuring order in society. The macho manifestation of the saviour cop is once again on display, and the portrayal of female characters is also worth analysing.

Commissioner narrates the lonely fight of Bharathchandran, an honest IPS officer, against a corrupt and nefarious political and bureaucratic system. He nabs a gang involved in gold smuggling, which was orchestrated by a local politician, Kunju Moideen Sahib. Sahib was smuggling gold for Mohan Thomas, a Delhi-based

business magnate with strong political connections in Kerala as well as Delhi. He is notorious for several illegal activities, including drug trafficking and money laundering. His relationship with leaders at the higher echelons has made him a frightening figure, whose clout is beyond the grasp of any law enforcement agencies. Bharathchandran, as part of his enquiry into the murder of Justice Mahendran, who was the chairman of the Poovanthura commission (a judicial commission constituted to enquire about the communal riot at Poovanthura) learns about the involvement of Mohan Thomas in the plot to save two of his trusted aides in the police department. This leads to a direct clash between the honest and dedicated public servant Bharathchandran and the wicked and scheming business tycoon Mohan Thomas. Bharathchandran nabs Srilatha Varma, the legal adviser of Mohan Thomas and fearing further revelations, Mohan kills her. The wily Bharathchandran arrests police officers Rajan Felix and Menon, which results in a direct battle between the protagonist and the villain. The film ends with Bharathchandran, who is reluctant to leave Mohan Thomas to the law, taking it into his own hands and killing him. Thus, the patriotic and righteous Bharathchandran succeeds in his duty to eliminate the most fearsome enemy of the land and save the people. The battle between virtue and evil ends with virtue being triumphant, much to the relief and joy of the audience. This was evident as the film became one of the biggest hits of the year.

Commissioner is a significant film when the representation of police characters post-1990 is studied to unravel the trends and patterns related to this research. The movie outrightly dismisses the need to trust the existing criminal

justice system and laws of the land. It is a paean eulogising the bravery and commitment of an individual who single-handedly uproots an entire corrupt network. In the movie, Bharathchandran is shown to be fighting goons and criminals alone. His effort as an individual is glorified, and the audience is made to forget he even represents the police system. In Indian films, especially in South Indian films, the macho heroic figure who saves the land on his own is much appreciated and celebrated. In Tamil Nadu, MGR (M.G. Ramachandran), after attaining a cult status through his career as a film actor, entered politics and became the chief minister of the state. His charismatic persona as a saviour was carefully built through his successful stint as an actor, and people revered his silver screen image and granted him a godlike status. In erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, N.T. Rama Rao became the chief minister of the state after having an unparalleled career as a Telugu superstar. He portrayed the roles of Hindu mythological figures such as Sree Rama and Sree Krishna, thus attaining a holy status in the minds of the viewers. Like MGR, he too was worshipped, and the people of the state wholeheartedly welcomed his decision to enter politics. But in Malayalam, where the 'saviour-superstar' image had never caught the imagination of the viewers, it never produced such on-screen/off-screen superheroes. The stars were not expected to be performing superhuman liberator roles, and the binary between on-screen and off-screen remained intact. The 1990s thus can be viewed as a path-breaking decade, which ushered in the hitherto unseen and inexperienced brand of superheroes and super-human cops.

In *Commissioner*, the intentional attempt to separate police from politics is visible and noticeable. In a scene in the film, Bharathchandran says to a news

reporter that police and politics are not the same. An evil aura is generated around the discourse of politics. The villain in the film, someone who dares to act against the interest of the country, is shown as someone who built his business/mafia empire using the unholy nexus with politicians. Almost all politicians are portrayed as corrupt and susceptible to bribery. This carefully manoeuvred depiction is placed in contrast to the perfectly positioned police officer, who is the epitome of virtue and sacrifice. In the film, Kunju Moideen Sahib, a leader from a Muslim political party in Malabar, encounters Bharathchandran as part of his enquiry into a gold smuggling case. There is a clear insinuation about the Indian Union Muslim League, a Muslim-majority political party that has strong roots in North Kerala. The representation of Muslim characters in Malayalam cinema has always been criticised for its prejudiced patterns anchored in Islamophobia, which resulted in the construction of Muslim prototypes, especially after the Babri Masjid demolition. Film critic V.K. Joseph sheds light on this problematic method of representation in his essay "The Ideological Reading of Cinema". As he puts it,

> Studies on films like *Dhruvam*, *Aaram Thampuran*, *Naramsimham*, *Ustad* etc., which were released post-1990, help in realising the new interpretations and their significance provided by ideological reading. *Dhruvam* is an important text. Two things deserve attention while understanding the movie. The first one is the year in which the film was released. The year is 1992, and it is an important year in the history of India, like 1947. The year in which Indian people defined their friends and enemies. This was how the demolition of the Babri Masjid was reflected in society. The enemy is decided with the help of tradition. This was the year when an ideological

> system was formed that only approves the uniformity of a particular culture, which ensures that heterogeneity should not be accepted, and destruction and violence are accepted as a norm. Attire and demeanour were determined as the signs of ideology. My ideological reading says that *Dhruvam* is a film with rich political symbolism of the changing ideological patterns (Joseph; my trans; 81-82).

Dhruvam is the story of the rivalry between the feudal lord Narasimha Mannadiar and Hyder Marakkar, a gangster. The film is a perfect example of the post-Mandal 'thampuran' films, which glorified feudal barons and the casteist social system. Mannadiar, the character played by Mammootty can be seen as a prototypical Virat Hindu figure with his upper-caste Virat Hindu figure with all its paraphernalia in dressing and body language. The problematic aspect of *Dhruvam* is the portrayal of the villain Hyder Marakkar, a devout Muslim, as a merciless demon. His portrayal fits very well into the 1990s narrative of the anti-national Muslim, as he is hinted at having terrorist links as well. He is cruel enough to insult the sacred symbols of Hindus. Marakkar throws the remains of a character into the toilet and flushes it down. Such demonisation of a Muslim character goes a long way in the process of othering the minorities on the silver screen. V.K. Joseph states that there cannot be a more perfect specimen than *Dhruvam* to fathom the severe impacts of the Masjid demolition in 1992. It has created a wide gulf between the majority and minority communities in India, which was later reflected in cinema. The majority violence started to be normalised as 'resistance' against the invaders and anti-nationals, whereas minorities were marginalised further from the centres of socio-political discourses and insinuations of terrorism were showered at them at will. Joseph focuses on the portrayal of Hyder Marakkar and says, "The character of

Mannadiar is that of a king who has lost his tradition to rule. His attire and demeanour clearly say it… The attire and body language of Hyder Marakkar fit well into the new enemy image created by the majority society in this age" (Joseph 82).

The representation of Kunju Moideen Sahib as a gold smuggler in *Commissioner* caters to the hegemonic Hindutva ideological framework. Post Babri Masjid demolition, the othering of Muslims in India happened at an unbelievably faster rate. Cultural forms and media, too were not spared. Muslims were portrayed as the evil others who came to India and conquered the land. This minority hatred, coupled with the newfound sense of a lost Hindu glorious past, was well dished out to the Indian public by the right-wing communal forces. Media played a very active part, and cinema was hand in glove with the hegemonic forces in demonising the minority community. In his book *Being the Other: The Muslim in India*, Saeed Naqvi says,

> The Babri Masjid demolition served as a shocking eye-opener for Indian Muslims. It destroyed whatever confidence the community had in the Indian political class and the political party which had governed the country for the greater part of the post-Independence era, namely Congress…The communal picture changed after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The insecurity of the Muslims grew with every passing year. The mosque was demolished on 6 December 1992, but the planning for the event had gone on for three years. (88-90)

The post-Babri scenario of demonising the minorities, coupled with the awakening of the Virat Hindu post-Mandal discourses, comprehensively altered the socio-cultural landscape of India, which was reflected accurately in cinema. The

Babri issue and its aftermath worked as a catalyst in the communal project. Cinema was transforming into a medium that carried divisive messages and fanatic rhetoric. In *Commissioner* Bharathchandran's fury towards the Muslim political leader cannot be seen as a spontaneous outburst against the nefarious elements in the society. It contains certain cultural and political meanings that must be read concerning the peculiar socio-political situation of the decade. He thrusts upon the fact that he has no political affiliations. In a scene when Sahib mentions "our party", Bharathchandran corrects him and says, "It is your party and not mine, as I do not have any political affiliations" (*Commissioner* 00:13:57-00:14:02). The post-Mandal anti-minority sentiments were in abundance in Malayalam cinema, and the *Commissioner* too takes the same route. In the introduction scene of Iqbal, a police officer (Vijayaraghavan) shares an experience with Bharathchandran, which might have resulted in his punishment transfer. In the incident when he arrested people for smuggling, he received a call from the minister asking him to immediately release them as they belonged to his religion. Such dialogues create an impression in the viewer that the politicians are lending unnecessary support to the minority community in their nefarious deals. Iqbal even hints that the smugglers' aim was communal. This insinuation can be seen as part of the wicked agenda to malign minorities.

In Kerala, there have been numerous instances of communal clashes, like the Beemapally police firing and the Marad massacres. As John Oommen observes in his article "Politics of Communalism in Kerala", "Communalism as prevalent in Kerala may be defined as a feeling of group solidarity among different communities and to assert its presence in the day-to-day functioning of society" (545). Nissim Mannathukkaren, in his article "Communalism sans violence: a Keralan

exceptionalism?", examines the majority vs. minority political and cultural power struggle in Kerala. He says the majority always pretend to be under a constant threat posed by the minorities, a feeling born out of sheer social insecurity. As he puts it, "The enormous growth of the minority communal parties and the clout they wield as we have seen had caused disenchantment among sections of the majority community, which feels that it has not been able to influence the socio-political life of Kerala as the minority communities have" (Mannathukkaren 231). In this context, Malayalam cinema's dubious track record post-1990 in the representation of Muslim characters deserves serious examination.

The character of Bharathchandran is created with all the macho ingredients particular to the Indian patriarchal social set-up. He wears in his sleeve hyper-masculine gestures and is the dominating partner in his romantic relationship. The film tries to convey a message that most people in the police force are corrupt, and save the valiant efforts of selfless individuals like Bharathchandran, the system would find itself in a precarious condition. The film takes a pro-Savarna stand on many occasions, including a scene in which senior police officer Balachandran Nair (M.G. Soman) introduces another police officer (K.B. Ganesh Kumar), saying he is a man with a pedigree and is the grandson of former Travancore IG Gopalakrishna Menon. Such dialogues emphasise the earlier stated notion about the post-Mandal period in Malayalam cinema, when the Savarna value systems and characters were either glorified or exemplified. Another character in the film, Sreelatha Varma, a Savarna character with an upper-caste surname, also deserves notice in this context. She is from an erstwhile royal family that once possessed great fortunes. As time passed by, they lost their glory and power and now find themselves in a precarious situation. Miss Varma is portrayed as an educated woman who is struggling to find

her feet. The poverty-stricken family of hers is portrayed as victims to attract the sympathy of the viewers. The anti-Mandal innuendo is also evident here, as she is yet another Savarna victim of the existing system. She is used by Mohan Thomas, and her tragic fate is a reminder of the pathetic plight of the poor Savarna in the post-Mandal social scenario.

Bharathchandran's macho mannerisms are visible throughout the narrative, and he can be seen brandishing them whenever the situation arises. In a scene in *Commissioner,* he encounters a minister and his wife. The minister, Mr.Varghese's wife Achamma Varghese chides him publicly to which Bharathchandran replies in rage by slut shaming her and her past life and chastity is questioned in a typical patriarchal vigour. The furious commissioner even advises the minister to control the ways of his wife by showing her who a real man is. He says, "If at all you get her all alone, do teach her what is the meaning of manhood" (*Commissioner* 01:43:28-01:43:43). Such outright manifestations of hyper-masculinity are a common feature of the post-Mandal era Malayalam super cop who is nothing short of the incarnation of the much desired and worshipped Virat Hindu figure. His violent ways and dominant nature are justified. Suresh Gopi thus becomes the poster boy of the genre, redefining the transformation of the representation of police characters. The film ends with a quote that deserves serious attention in this context. "Wherever power and corruption join hands, conspirators become the last word. The existing laws and justice system are not enough in the fight against them. An individual's blazing fury will not permanently burn everything. Still…" (*Commissioner* 02:53:37-02:53:42).

This epilogue functions as a definition of the new police cinema, which had its inception in the 1990s. As it says, even amidst all the deficiencies, only an

individual can successfully fight the existing evil and save the land. This super-human/ super-cop is given the right to take the law into his own hands. The state of exception is at work, which is presented as the norm. With *Commissioner*, Suresh Gopi cemented his position as the poster boy of the new avatar of police cinema. The film is a significant one considering the evolution of the new genre of police films.

Fig. 3. Bharathchandran slut shaming Achamma Varghese (1:42:11).

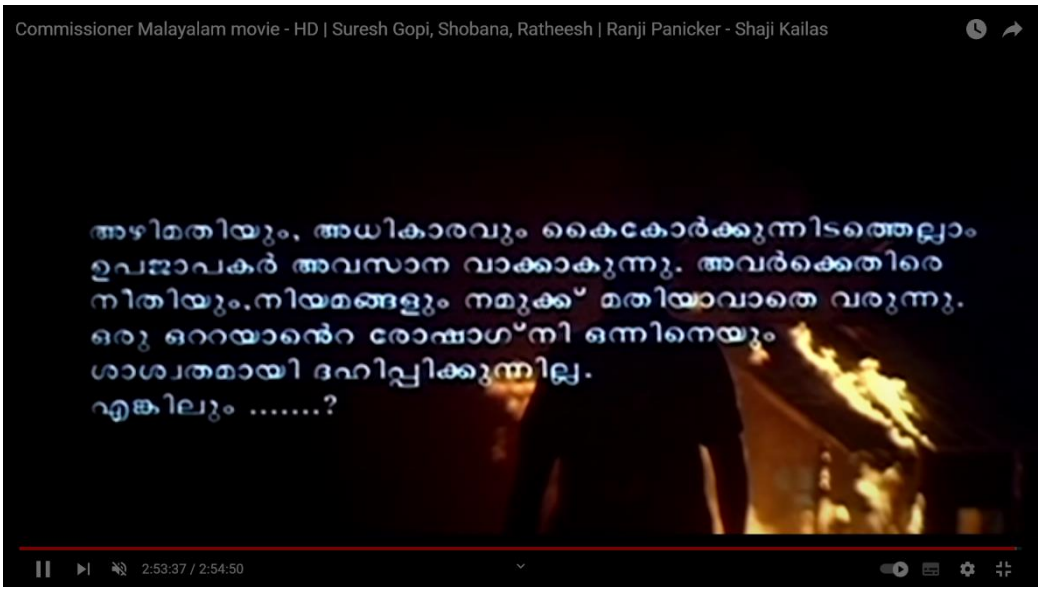

Fig.4. The epilogue in *Commissioner* (2:53:37).

The impact of Suresh Gopi as a supercop fits well into the narrative of the emerging Hindutva nationalism and its political propaganda of the 1990s. The celebration of the saviour Hindu hero and the demonisation of the Muslim villain continue to be an accepted norm, and the bravado in Khaki is adorned with a sense of impunity. The continuation of the same can be seen in yet another Malayalam film, *Satyameva Jayathe* (2000), in which Suresh Gopi played the role of yet another super cop, Chandrachoodan. In *Satyameva Jayathe,* Suresh Gopi's Chandrachoodan is a typical angry young man who is fed up with the corrupt system. He is the son of a late communist leader, and after the demise of his parents, he was taken care of by a friend of his father, Comrade Basheer, a man of principles. As is his wont, Chandrachoodan clashes with high-profile criminals such as Balu Bhai, played by actor Siddique and Musharuf Ibrahim, played by Hemanth Ravan. He has to suffer personal losses in his pursuit of truth, and finally, he kills both his enemies, hence saving the country from a massive terror design.

The film was directed by Viji Thampi and was a success at the box office, especially at a time when Malayalam cinema was struggling to find its feet as far as economic success was concerned. The period saw several films with huge expectations crash at the box office, and the cinema industry was searching in the darkness for answers. *Satyameva Jayathe,* along with *Narasimham*, a Mohanlal starrer, was the surprise package that was a mega hit at a time of distress. The film follows the oft-repeated cop film formula of a solo cop taking on the system and winning the tough fight even amidst great sacrifices and losses. It is reminiscent of the David vs. Goliath trope where the hitherto unknown, relatively weaker

policeman leads a war for justice against a wicked and corrupt empire and succeeds. Like the previously mentioned films, here too, a clear boundary is drawn between politics and policing. The police are portrayed as an apparatus that is corrupted by the maleficent influence of the political class. Chandrachoodan is the lone wolf who fights against the immoral system and the film is also rich with insinuations that adhere to the above-mentioned pro-Hindutva anti-minority political zeitgeist, which embodies the decade.

The film's chief antagonist, Musharuf Ibrahim, is portrayed as a devilish villain to destroy the nation. He is a threat to the national fabric and is capable of colluding with foreign terrorist groups to carry out his nefarious plans. The intentional alienation of the minorities post-Babri demolition and the Islamophobic political climate make such a representation a seemingly usual cinematic affair. In India, there have been numerous instances of Muslims being falsely accused and arrested in terror cases, only to be exonerated later. During incidents such as the Malegaon blasts in 2006, the Mecca Masjid blast in 2007 and the Delhi serial blasts case in 2008, numerous innocent Muslims were arraigned in fabricated cases. Draconian laws such as TADA and UAPA were imposed on them. In his article, "Terror, Innocence, and the Wages of Prejudice", Harsh Mander evaluates the situations and instances where Muslims were falsely arrested in terror cases. Mander says,

> The institutional injustices begin in most cases with the security establishment, political leaders, and a mostly obedient media declaring that a terror attack is the handiwork of specified Islamist groups, usually with

> cross-border linkages to Pakistan or Bangladesh. This is followed by the rounding up of Muslim men, some who have been police informers, others who are overtly religious, a nd others with petty criminal records. (“Terror” 32)

Indian governments seldom accepted such mistakes and the victims, mostly from impoverished backgrounds, are left in the lurch. Mandar continues to say that,

> No official data is available on the number of persons acquitted after being charged with terror crimes. In 2014, Minister of State for Home Kiren Rijiju informed the Rajya Sabha that the central government did not have any data on whether a large number of Muslim youth arrested on the charge of terrorism had been "honourably exonerated" by various courts after the cases were found to be false. (“Terror” 30)

The film *Satyameva Jayathe* employs a method of following the oft-repeated and clichéd analogy of the Good Muslim vs. Bad Muslim. The majoritarian Hindutva ideology marginalises Muslims as inferior others and alienates them from the social sphere. In the film, Chandrachoodan, as the saviour of the nation, is pitted against Musharuf, who has to be eliminated for the nation’s safety. In the climax of the film, Musharuf tells Chandrachoodan, “Musharuf Ibrahim vs. Chandrachoodan. A Rama for a Ravana” (*Satyameva Jayathe* 2:42:48-2:42:53*)*. The images of Rama and Ravana are immensely significant in the context of the post-Babri wave of hyper-nationalist films with communal propaganda etched in the narrative. Chandrachoodan, the suave Hindu, Savarna character is epitomised as the modern-

day avatar of lord Rama, who must ensure the safety of the land by annihilating the foreign stranger. This communal dichotomy is evident as the film progresses. Chandrachoodan is the son of the late Sathyanatha Menon, an upper caste-born communist leader. The hero's legacy as an upper caste 'progressive' communist through his father is thrust upon him just as in the films of the 'thampuran wave'

Another noticeable tactic employed by the majoritarian perspective is to pit the minority members on opposite spectrums of society. One is defined as the 'National Muslim', an epitome of nationalism and sacrifice, who considers the nation over his/her religion. The other minority figure is the anti-national villain, who betrays his/her land at the given opportunity and favours religion over the motherland. This dichotomy is visible in several Hindi films and even in Malayalam, especially the soldier films directed by Major Ravi. Usually, these films follow a common trope as a patriotic Muslim shows the terrorist Muslim how an ideal nationalist should be and how one should work hard to get integrated into the social fabric, which is dominated by majoritarian idealism. Hilal Ahmed writes in the article "The Good Muslim – Bad Muslim binary is as old as Nehru",

> The good Muslims, we are told, would join the mainstream, while the bad Muslims would continue to raise sectarian demands and disrupt the progress of the nation. A number of different phrases are used interchangeably to describe good Muslims- secular Muslims, cultural Muslims, nationalist Muslims and so on- to counter the bad guys or communal Muslims, separatist Muslims, Pro-Pakistan elements and, more recently, the terrorist

> Muslims In this sense, the "Sarkari Mussalman" is referred to as an acceptable and trustworthy agent of the state/government. (Ahmed)

In *Satyameva Jayathe* Comrade Basheer, the guardian of Chandrachoodan is portrayed as the typical nationalist Muslim who is brave enough to sacrifice his life. He is a caricature figure who stands opposed to the deadly villain figure of Musharuf Ibrahim. Basheer is the 'good Muslim', the epitome of virtue, nationalism and sacrifice, whereas Musharuf is the bad Muslim foreigner terrorist who poses a great risk to the nation and its culture. Thus, the lord Rama-like heroic figure of Chandrachoodan is entrusted with the task of annihilating the Asura figure of the Muslim villain.

The film is filled with insinuations and innuendos against the minority community. The age-old accusation of the Hindutva communal forces against the minorities was that they eat beef, which hurts the religious sentiments of the majority of Hindus, as they worship the cow as their mother. There have been several instances of mob lynching where people from the minority community were accused of consuming and transporting beef. Western media even refer to India as "lynchistan", a land of mob lynchings. In his article "Mob Violence and Vigilantism in India", Ishan Gupta delineates the reasons and results of mob lynchings based on religion and caste. As Gupta says,

> In India, although some lynchings may not have been the result of hurt religious sentiments, most targeted Muslims and other minorities, revealing the commonly premeditated nature of these crimes. While the lynchings seem to have been spontaneous, detailed examination reveals that many were

> pre-planned crimes intended to harm not only an individual but also assert dominance over an entire community or "send out a message". (153)

In *Satyameva Jayathe*, in a scene, the police officer tells Chandrachoodan, "A lot of youngsters are newly recruited into the police. They eat beef and work hard in the hot sun in the police training academy. When they come out, they want to vent this buzzing energy onto someone's body" (*Satyameva Jayathe* 00:14:51-00:15:02). This is a clear reference to the Brahmanic notion of Muslims being violent due to their meat-eating habit. The killing of the 'holy cow' is still a hot potato in Indian politics, and it has been brewing as a political issue for decades. As D.N. Jha has put it in his famous work *The Myth of the Holy Cow*,

> The Killing of the cattle seems to have emerged again and again as a troublesome issue on the Indian political scene even in independent India despite legislation by several states prohibiting cow slaughter and the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution, which directs the states to …to take steps for …prohibiting the slaughter of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle'. For instance, in 1966, nearly two decades after Independence, almost all communal political parties and organisations joined hands to mastermind a massive demonstration by several hundred thousand people in favour of a national ban on cow slaughter. This culminated in a violent rioting in front of the Indian Parliament and the death of at least eight persons and injury to many more. In April 1979, Acharya Vinoba Bhave, often called the spiritual heir to Mahatma Gandhi, went on a hunger strike to pressurize the central

> government to prohibit cow slaughter throughout the country and ended it after five days when he succeeded in getting the Prime Minister Morarji Desai's vague assurance that his government would expedite anti-slaughter legislation. (19-20)

Thus, cow and beef have been a political and emotional issue in India for a very long time, and the demonising of Muslims based on their meat-eating dates back decades. The rejuvenated caste Hindu consciousness post-1990 is eager to portray the minorities and their penchant for beef eating as anti-national. As films followed the same method of vilification of Muslims, such indications of beef eating cannot be treated as innocent and normal representations.

Conceiving the cop hero as a hyper-masculine figure has been a usual pattern throughout the period, and this film too follows the same trajectory. The super-cop Chadrachoodan can be seen shouting at a woman (the character played by Aiswarya), venting his fury, and she is presented as a victim without any agency. Later, Chandrachoodan patronises her and acts as her local guardian and makes decisions on her behalf. This dominant manner of dealing with women was a common feature of Suresh Gopi's cop characters. The angry young man who yells at the woman later turns out to be her sole protector, whereas the woman is depicted as a character who acts according to the whims and fancies of her male counterpart. The total subjugation of the female selves is evident in these cop narratives. In an intense scene, he shouts at a senior officer and calls him 'shikhandi', which can be translated as 'transgender'. The exhibition of Chandrachoodan's hypermasculine attributes is hard to miss. Chandrachoodan is never shown as part of a system.

Instead, like many cop heroes of the period, he is a lone warrior fighting numerous battles for the land. The demonisation of the political class is visible in this film as well. The director has quite clearly placed Chandrachoodan on a far higher pedestal compared to the corrupt, anti-national politicians. He can be seen beating and arresting the son of an MP, but due to the pressure from higher officers, he has to let him go. The corrupt political leaders' nexus with police officers in the higher echelons of power is amply highlighted here. Chandrachoodan lashes out at a senior officer for being corrupt and proudly boasts that he prefers life without the uniform to working as an unethical policeman. In the Indian scenario, one can find media echo chambers of corruption that generate and overemphasise a political nexus of corruption. Sukumar Muralidharan, in his article "Media as Echo Chamber: Cluttering the Public Discourse of Corruption", speaks about the role played by the media in creating a picture of corruption. He based his criticism on the coverage of the media during the Anna Hazare-led protest against corruption. As he puts it, "Far from reflecting the complex and multilayered anxieties that underpin the growing popular restiveness with the governance process, the media chose to present a singular authoritarian point of view as the true and authentic voice of all Indians" (Muralidharan 19). In the Indian context, the representation of corruption in the media is often problematic as it involves numerous agents of power.

In the last scene of the film, after Chandrachoodan kills Musharuf Ibrahim, his senior officer asks him why he did not try to capture the villain alive, which would have been useful for the police department. Chandrachoodan's reply sheds light on the significant aspects of the super-cop films produced after 1990. He

replies, “If I had caught him alive, the courts, laws and the governing systems would have arranged five-star facilities for him…If any such anti-national criminals are caught by me, I will finish them without a second thought. No justice system will hold me accountable. If at all any justice system dares to hold me accused, I do not trust it. The history will acquit me of all the accusations” (*Satyameva Jayathe* 02:46:14-02:46:50).

This scenario places the film as the best possible definition of the post-Mandal, post-Babri angry young man super cop films. They do not believe in the rule of law of the land and give little respect to the democratically elected governments. They consider themselves as the flag-bearers of justice and saviours of the land. The land itself is treated as a mother/woman who has to be saved from the external enemies (Muslims) and patronised. *Satyameva Jayathe* forms a vital part of the list of cop films with the above-mentioned traits, peculiar to the films post-1990.

As discussed above, the depictions of Suresh Gopi as a police character follow certain patterns as far as religious and hegemonic structures are concerned. The film *F.I.R.*, released in 1999, needs to be interpreted in this context, as this film throws up certain interesting perspectives to brood upon. The identity of the protagonist has undergone a role reversal from the vantage point of religion, but the portrayal of Suresh Gopi as a Muslim cop brings forth questions regarding the placement of Muslims in a majoritarian hegemonic cultural setup. Here, Suresh Gopi’s character, Mohammed Sarkar, is fighting a deadly war against Narendra Shetty, an international hawala agent and a business tycoon. Narendra Shetty kills politician Rahim Haji and journalist Roy when both planned to scuttle his Hawala

network. The film shows how an honest and brave officer, Mohammed Sarkar, takes down Narendra Shetty, almost single-handedly.

The portrayal of certain Muslim characters needs deep introspection as the film's gaze turns out to be a problematic one, considering the majoritarian hegemonic stand it adopts. The film opens with a scene in the house of Rahim Haji who is killed later. Here, a few dialogues are uttered, which cater to the islamophobia of the majoritarian class. Rahim Haji speaks to a friend and insinuates that he has four wives, an accused religious practice for which the community has been demonised and mocked by others. The first scene itself lays bare the problematic vantage point of the director. This scene also contains certain hints about the incoming foreign money, especially from Saudi Arabia, into the accounts of the Muslim community's orphanages. Rahim Haji and his party are supposed to be dealing in hawala business. He is shown as a cunning figure who uses his political clout to widen the horizons of his illegal business empire. There is a metaphoric usage of the word 'Crusade'. Rahim Haji offers a precious liquor, which is named 'Crusader' to the journalist Roy. This reference to the Holy Crusade brings to the fore the violent history of deadly battles fought by Muslims. The entire scene where Rahim haji appears is filled with religious air and the cinematic connotations are also noteworthy. His party has a close resemblance to the Indian Union Muslim League (The same can be seen in the portrayal of a Muslim party in *Commissioner,* as they are accused of smuggling).

As seen in the other films discussed above, *F.I.R*., too, shows that politicians are corrupt and scheming, where the responsibility to pursue truth and save the

land becomes the sole duty of the supercop. When Rahim Haji is killed, his partymen are adamant that they need a Muslim police officer to investigate the case. The minority party is depicted as communal and sectarian. When Mohammed Sarkar confronts the agitating partymen, a party member accuses him of being a "selfish Muslim sans love towards his own community" (*F.I.R* 00:38:07-00:38:12), to which he replies, "Yes. I am a bloody Muslim. Indian Muslim. Hindu Muslim. A Hindustani Muslim who had converted his mind and religion over generations. A true Muslim with a conscience, who treats all men equally, who does not know how to showcase his sectarian love by killing people of other faiths in bomb blasts" (*F.I.R* 00:38:13-00:38:30). This is the representation of Islamophobia, and importantly, it is uttered by a Muslim character. The film shows how the Savarna Hindu gaze villainises Muslims along with creating 'national Muslims' who are the 'other', in comparison to the perceived Muslim self. Mohammed Sarkar is a national Muslim who is created by the hegemonic socio-religious hierarchy. This monologue functions as a complex rhetorical performance of nationalistic allegiance and moral superiority. On the surface, the monologue appears to resist communal identity politics; however, a deeper reading reveals the internalisation and reproduction of Islamophobic tropes through the voice of a Muslim character himself.

This moment exemplifies how mainstream cinema, operating through the Savarna Hindu gaze, constructs and legitimises the figure of the "national Muslim"—a carefully curated and compliant minority subject whose primary function is to dissociate from a demonised Muslim "other" (Hansen 167; Shaikh,

233). The national Muslim is posited as morally upright, secular, and assimilated into the dominant Hindu-majoritarian narrative of Indian cinema, in contrast to the "bad Muslim," who is portrayed as communal, violent, or aligned with terrorism (Sanjeev Kumar 462). By placing such declarations in the mouth of a Muslim character, the film reinforces dominant nationalist ideologies while displacing the accusation of bigotry. This strategy not only normalises Islamophobia but also absolves the dominant culture of its complicity by presenting the critique as emerging from within the marginalised group itself.

The character of Mohammed Sarkar thus serves as a discursive construct shaped by hegemonic socio-religious hierarchies. His existence within the narrative is contingent on his rejection of his community's perceived "otherness" and his performative loyalty to the nation-state—an allegiance that is authenticated only through his repudiation of the imagined radical Muslim subject. As Mohammed Rafi N.V puts it in his work *Kanyakayude Durnadappukal*,

> The film F.I.R, directed by Shaji Kailas, which was released in 1999, must be read as a film of a Muslim, who has the extra burden of proving his nationalism. Suresh Gopi is the I.P.S officer Mohammed Sarkar...Where there is no National Hindu or National Christian, the film shows that nationalism is a burden to be borne by the Indian Muslim. F.I.R. is noted for having a Muslim protagonist, which was a rarity post-1990. The creation of the 'good Muslim' is to imagine the protagonist as much closer to the white, macho figure of the Brahmanic milieu. This can be seen as a recircumcision.

> This can also be read as the on-screen depiction of the much-quoted off-screen idiom that "all Muslims are not terrorists". (my trans; 209)

Mohammed Sarkar is the Muslim version of the typical hyper-national, Savarna, macho figure who considers himself the saviour of the land. He despises Muslims and considers them a threat to the nation. He is the 'National Muslim' who must be revered as a role model by the anti-national Indian Muslims. The police persona of Sarkar amalgamates the macho saviour and the Hindu jingoist quite cleverly. A close reading of the film would reveal that the director is obsessed with Mohammed Sarkar's Muslim identity. In yet another scene, he says that he is an Indian Muslim who prays to God five times a day and fasts in the holy month every year. When he had to confront a Christian priest, he told his fellow officer, "Do not be hasty. It is a minority religious affair. He is a Christian priest. I am a Muslim. It is a very delicate area. It may end up in the country burning" (*F.I.R.* 01:48:17-01:48:28). Such repeated renderings stressing the religious identity alone are an attempt to place him in opposition to the 'Muslim other', who can be 'dangerous' and 'terrorising'. It is the Malayali silver screen version of Edward Said's Orientalist readings of othering. According to Edward Said, Orientalism is the Western practice of portraying Eastern societies as exotic and inferior. He contends that this serves as a political instrument to defend colonial dominance in addition to being an example of academic or artistic representation. Orientalism, as a critical tool, has been utilised in film studies to examine the politics of representation. Hollywood, with its Western gaze, has constantly portrayed the East and the Middle East as barbaric and

unrefined. While analysing the movie *The Geisha Boy* (1958), David Desser discusses Hollywood's representation of the East and its culture. As he observes,

> The concept of Orientalism, in which the Orient (the Middle East, Asia) is exoticised and feminised, is too well known to be repeated here. But it is worth noting that both before the Second World War and after, American associations with Asia followed a particularly masculinist tack that did not require the brilliant insights of Edward Said to reveal. For instance, American ideology, scripted into the Hollywood cinema, always allowed a certain white, male privilege in which "Other" women were available to white men (though obviously not the reverse). (Desser 156)

F.I.R. is part of the zeitgeist of the 1990s police films in its conceptualisation of the police character. Sarkar is the supercop who takes the law into his own hands and executes his enemy. He can be seen as even pointing a gun at a fellow officer and beating an antagonist inside a courtroom. The Savarna gaze of the film is evident when the police officer played by Maniyan Pillai Raju shouts at a man for denigrating a sacred 'Ayyankar' like him. The film dwells more on the religious question than on solving the case at hand. Suresh Gopi's machismo is yet again used to drive home the fact that the existing system is corrupt and it needs a 'nationalist warrior' like Sarkar to rectify its flaws. The Islamophobic vantage point of the film alienates Muslims and places the responsibility of demonstrating their love and loyalty towards the nation on them. Mohammed Sarkar is the creation of the same ideology that reveres 'thampuran' figures as the neo-feudal icons. This ideology can be traced back to the turbulent political climate that existed in the decade and the

growing mistrust of the majority Hindutva toward the minority Muslims. The Virat Hindu hero has the duty of saving the land, ensuring the maintenance of nationalist moral values and showing the minority their place. Mohammed Sarkar is the perfect model to demonstrate what role the majoritarian politics expects the Nationalist Muslim to fulfil in its larger social engineering. Thus, *F.I.R.* proves to be a significant film while understanding the evolution of the police characterisation in the 1990s.

Fig.5. The last scene of *F.I.R.* (2:46:43).

The Indian socio-political scenario of the 1990s influenced culture, art, literature and cinema, as various novel trends and systems of representations emerged. Malayalam cinema was at the forefront of embracing this newfound political climate and blended it quite effectively in its aesthetic and thematic framework. This period, where a large number of police films with specific political purposes were made, raises numerous questions regarding the relationship between the state and its populace as well as the formulation of ideology in the process of

governance. The films, which place the police as the guardians of the hegemonic cultural ideology, portray the police force as the impeccable hand of the state, which is duty-bound to protect its citizens. The supposed threats are multifaceted, and the total subjugation of the populace is needed for the police to perform their challenging tasks. Suresh Gopi's characters in these films can be seen as the extension of the state itself. The ideology and political philosophy of these characters very much run in parallel with the emerging Hindutva bandwagon of the 1990s. Though the existing governments of the times were said to be secular at least in their pronounced ideological structure, the hard Hindutva intellectual schema was fast entering the Indian socio-political discourse as an inevitable phenomenon that slowly turned itself into a deep state. The Hindutva deep state, with its marked Islamophobic and xenophobic ideological outlook, soon held sway over all the primary institutions of India. The films discussed above are a testimony to the grand-scale impacts of this novel development, as the filmmakers were keen on exploring themes that suit their vested agendas. Police, from the position of the suppressing instrument of the state, are converted and rebranded as the facilitators of the majoritarian concepts of socio-cultural hegemony. Though subtle, this transformation is significant while tracing the evolution of police on the silver screen.

The police, from being a tool of the state to control its populace, transform into an autonomous body that can exist and function on its own regardless of the law of the land. This process undergoes further noticeable changes, hence paving the way for the takeover of an authoritarian vigilante cop who is expected to reign

supreme. The individual hero becomes a state himself, and even the government servants are at his disposal. The worship of power is evident in these portrayals. As Althusser observes in his seminal essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus',

> I shall call Ideological State Apparatuses a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised institutions. I propose an empirical list of these which will obviously have to be examined in detail, tested, corrected and re-organised. With all the reservations implied by this requirement, we can for the moment regard the following institutions as Ideological State Apparatuses (the order in which I have listed them has no particular significance):
>
> -the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'),
>
> the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'),
>
> the family ISA,
>
> the legal ISA,
>
> the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties),
>
> the trade-union ISA,
>
> the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.),
>
> the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.). (143)

Althusser details the intricate workings of ideology to preserve the hegemony of the state apparatus. Cinema, as a mass medium, can influence people more than any other artistic or entertainment medium, which makes it a preferred tool of the dominant class. Althusser's classification of ISA is to be noted, as it

includes cultural ISA in which the medium of cinema can be included. Michel Ryan and Douglas Kellner, in their work *Camera Politica: The Politics and Ideology of Contemporary Hollywood Film,* critically analyse the approach of Althusser and establish how the Althusserian theory is not only about progressive cinema, but is also relevant to analysing popular Hollywood. They advocate a nuanced approach towards the theory of Althusser. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, in their "Toward a Third Cinema", construct an anti-capitalist, anti-Hollywood approach that celebrates cinema from the Third World. It is a Marxian conceptualisation of cinema by debunking the halo attached to the capitalist cinema from the United States. This line of thought can be connected to the notion of the ideological apparatus by Louis Althusser.

Cinema can be used as an effective tool to govern the masses by indoctrinating them in subtle and invisible ways. The German dictator Adolf Hitler used it during his regime to enhance his image as a global leader and an insurmountable statesman. He entrusted the duty of making a propaganda film solely for putting across the notion that Hitler was a charismatic leader who could conquer the world on his own. The director Leni Riefenstahl made *Triumph of the Will,* which is considered the epitome of propaganda filmmaking. Benito Mussolini, the Italian ruler and Fascist party leader, too, realised the potential of cinema as a tool of propaganda, and his government was behind the founding of the Venice International Film Festival. Thus, cinema can be used to a great extent to further hegemonic ideals in a society. The above-discussed films can be seen as part of a grand scheme of cultural ISA with overt and covert political objectives.

Apparatus theory, postulated by Jean-Louis Baudry, views cinema as an ideological medium that can interpellate the spectators. Every frame is rich with ideological messaging, and the theory refutes the argument that cinema is an innocent medium for entertainment alone. According to Baudry, the perspectives of the audience after watching a film are carefully constructed by the technical apparatus of cinema, including the camera and editing, which are controlled by the filmmaker. He/she can manipulate the perceptions of the audience using technology. The 1990s saw the directors employing cinematic apparatus to channel the Savarna fury in the air against the minorities and subalterns. The heroes gave vent to their frustrations by lashing out at the system and deeming it degenerate. As Baudry puts it, Cinema creates a "transcendental subject" by aligning the spectator with the gaze of the camera, almost like the spectator is looking through it. It is similar to the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage. Hence, the audience forgets that what is represented on screen is real and not constructed. The apparatus is neither neutral nor showcases objective reality; thus, as Baudry observes, it helps in reinforcing the dominant ideology.

In the work *Film Theory and Criticism*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, the writers observe Jean-Louis Baudry's notions on cinema's effect on the spectator. They examine it with the help of psychoanalytic theory. As they put it,

> Jean-Louis Baudry compares the experience of film to that of a dream. He attempts, in doing so, to account for the "impression of reality," that "more than real" experience created by film. Baudry observes that many features of the film spectator's situation—features, that is, of the cinematic apparatus—

> resemble the dream. According to psychoanalytic theory, the dream is endowed with this quality of heightened reality because it occasions a regression to the stage of primitive narcissism. The spectator's movements are inhibited; he sits in a darkened room and is unable to engage in reality testing. The distinction between perception and representation does not operate. The intense, "more-than-real" images he views are projected on a screen (in the dreamer's case the mother's breast, what Bertram Lewin calls the dream screen). Given the many similarities between the film experience and the dream experience, argues Baudry, we can infer that the more-than-real experience of the film spectator is attributable to a similar regression. The desire for this regressive experience explains the history and creation of the cinematic apparatus and was already expressed in Plato's myth of the cave. According to Baudry, the prisoner in Plato's cave bears a striking analogy to both to dreamer and the film spectator. (Braudy and Cohen 143)

As Baudry's notions go, the spectator can be effectively ushered into a dream-like scenario while accessing the filmic reality. The films of the 1990s, with their sharp ideological functions, impacted the viewers and their perspectives. The intentional attempt of the makers was to hide reality and make them subscribe to the majoritarian political ideology that was gaining ground across India. Though Kerala remained a strong secular society, the concealed social hegemonic tendencies got an avenue to vent themselves via the silver screen. When the civil society and polity of Kerala are taken for examination, it can be noted that the hegemonic caste and religious values often go unnoticed and are often touted as natural/normal. Kerala

may have resisted the majoritarian right-wing forces politically, but culturally, such forces were also present beneath the social fabric. In his article, “Culture and Religion: Kerala’s Socio-Cultural Struggles and the Erasure of Buddhism by Brahmanism”, Ajay Sekhar attempts a critique of the much-celebrated Kerala modernity. He analyses the cultural history of Kerala with a special emphasis on the conflicts between the savarna (elite) and the avarna (subaltern) classes. As he posits, “Through symbolic and verbal or textual violence or genocidal significations, caste is redeployed in Kerala through the caste Hindu or elite Malayali Kuleena narratives. Their fiction and poetry are all on the othering and annihilation of the Avarna. Even in public talk and rhetoric, they are casteists” (Sekhar 14). Thus, when the larger Indian political scenario became congenial, the dormant forces of caste and anti-minority sentiments found some new modes of surfacing, resulting in a slew of films that lauded the Brahmanic elitist value systems.

A very interesting, yet noticeable fact that transcends outside the realm of cinema is the personal and political life of Suresh Gopi, the poster boy of the propaganda cop film wave. Though his involvement in the social life of Kerala was minimal, especially during his peak years as an actor, he joined the right-wing majoritarian political party once they formed the government at the centre with a brute majority. The ruling party at the centre, the B.J.P., elected Suresh Gopi to the Rajya Sabha first and later he was elected from Thrissur as a Lok Sabha M.P. and made him a minister of state. The public life of Suresh Gopi has witnessed him embroiled in numerous controversies. He once publicly pronounced his wish to be reborn as a Brahmin. As the online news portal, The News Minute reports, he said,

"I believe in rebirth. In my next birth, I want to belong to the community that wears 'poonool' (sacred thread of Brahmins) and want to be the 'tantri' (chief priest) of Sabarimala. I want to be the head priest or at least the lower priest, so that I can touch the god and bathe God," (The News Minute). The hyper-Brahmanic ideological tagline that his characters wore on their sleeves in many of the above-discussed films and the evolution of his persona as a public figure can be seen as part of a continuous process. The majoritarian ethos was always the covert centre of the milieu that the actor flourished in, and it was also part of the larger milieu of savarna rhetoric about the 'progressive' Kerala renaissance. The facade of the glorified Kerala renaissance has been hiding the savarna cultural outlook behind its skin, which gets unravelled in some rare moments of social clarity. Kerala's modernity and its commitment to secular value systems require careful assessment here.

The silver screen image of the majoritarian saviour figure must have influenced the spectators, and the clever ploy of the actor-turned-politician to make use of this emotively is to be noted. The thin line between reel life and real life is intentionally blurred here. While analysing the superstardom of Mohanlal in her article "The Feudal Lord Incarnate: Mohanlal and the Politics of Malayali Masculinity", Meena T. Pillai observes that

> …Mohanlal's rise to 'superstardom' was partly propelled by the liberalisation of the Indian economy, which in a sense narrowed down the distance between the civil society and the market and linked the new masculine imagery to popular consumption, in the process of privileging a

> re-traditionalisation of intimacy and a communalisation of the public sphere. Cinema becomes, from this period onwards, a purely commercial industry, which through a gendered commerce mediates the production and circulation of new representations of masculinity". (101)

This throws light on the crucial aspect of a superstar's reel life. Pillai examines how the image of Mohanlal as a superhero grew in parallel with the fast-liberalising Indian market. He slowly became the face of this phenomenon. The same methodology can be applied to fathom the intricate relationship between Suresh Gopi's growth as a super cop in Malayalam cinema and the new emergent Hindutva ideological juggernaut.

The actor became the mouthpiece of the majoritarian social perspective. As his acceptance as the law enforcer sans partisan or personal interests grew among the audience, it was akin to consenting to the ideological streams he represented. The consent of the audience was manufactured, in the Chomskian sense. Noam Chomsky and Edward S.Herman, in their work *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media,* examine how the mass media have suppressed dissent and served the interests of the elite ruling class. Media abandon objectivity and instead reflect hegemonic power structures, shaping narratives that lead the public to accept constructed meanings that serve elite interests. As the writers observe, "A propaganda model focuses on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalise dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests

to get their messages across to the public" (Chomsky et al. 2). Based on these filters, media create a word view favouring the powerful classes. Chomsky and Herman continue,

> The elite domination of the media and marginalisation of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, frequently operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they choose and interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values. Within the limits of the filter constraints, they often are objective; the constraints are so powerful, and are built into the system in such a fundamental way, that alternative bases of news choices are hardly imaginable. (2)

In post-1990 Malayalam cinema, the figure of the police officer emerged not merely as a character within the narrative but as a powerful ideological apparatus through which the dominant socio-political anxieties and aspirations were articulated. The hegemonic ideals of the majority got their perfect ambassador in Malayalam cinema, and unlike the 'thampuran' films, which espoused a lawless, stateless social scenario where the neo-feudal lord ruled the roost, these cop films portrayed a world order where the cop hero himself becomes the law. The actor, particularly in the case of Suresh Gopi's iconic roles, became a mouthpiece for the majoritarian worldview. His portrayal as a law enforcer seemingly devoid of partisan affiliations or personal motivations gained significant traction with audiences, symbolising not only moral clarity but also legitimising the ideological positions he embodied. This phenomenon can be read as a "manufacturing of

consent" (Chomsky), wherein the hegemonic values of the majority community found cinematic expression and mass acceptance through the heroic persona of the police officer.

Unlike the earlier thampuran films, which depicted a stateless, neo-feudal social order dominated by extra-legal authority figures, the cop films of the 1990s operated within a revised paradigm. Here, lawlessness did not exist outside the state but was increasingly absorbed into its functioning. The cop—often depicted as a hyper-masculine, morally unambiguous figure—came to embody the state itself, wielding its authority yet operating through extra-legal means. This redefinition of the relationship between the police force and the state apparatus marks a significant departure in Malayalam cinematic discourse. The superhero cop, despite resorting to violence and vigilante tactics, is portrayed as the last vestige of justice in a failing democratic system, thus reaffirming majoritarian ideals under the guise of institutional legitimacy.

Suresh Gopi's films, in particular, serve as critical texts for understanding this ideological shift. These narratives crystallised a new cinematic methodology—both aesthetically and thematically—deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric of the time. As noted earlier, the figure of the Virat Hindu (Badri Narayan) with its overt majoritarian inscriptions and cultural nationalism began to surface prominently during this period. Rooted in the political unrest and communal tensions of the era, this archetype evolved into the supercop persona: disillusioned with institutional decay, yet committed to restoring moral order through uncompromising means.

The post-1990 phase in Malayalam police cinema thus emerges as a crucial site for scholarly inquiry. It provides rich material for examining the intersections of state power, masculinity, caste, religion, and popular culture, and calls for interdisciplinary analyses that engage with film studies, political theory, and sociology alike.

Chapter 4
Descending from Divine to Human:
Analysing the 'New Gen' Phase of Malayalam Cinema

As an art form, cinema continually evolves, transforms, and adapts to the changing times, carrying with it the zeitgeist compared to any other art form. When the history of cinema is meticulously examined, it can be understood that every era is either a reaction to the previous one or a reflection of the current age. Indian cinema has several such anecdotes of the arrival of a vibrant crop of filmmakers with hitherto inexperienced filmmaking styles, often braving the traditional echelons and bordering on avant-garde artistic models. Such inevitable changes have occurred in Malayalam too at various stages of its film history. The 1970s saw the arrival of a revolutionary approach to filmmaking as filmmakers such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan and G. Aravindan introduced a novel brand of cinema that was vastly different from the existing commercial stream of cinema. As V.C. Harris observes in the article titled "Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema", "The new cinema that emerged in the early 1970s, spearheaded by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, John Abraham, and others, and often dubbed 'art cinema', was a response to the shifting grounds of politics and aesthetics" (Harris). This movement was marked as a paradigm shift in Malayalam cinema, as the new artistic cinema was crystal clear in its approach. It was a strong reaction to commercial cinema and its market fetishisation. These pioneering filmmakers held art as the supreme element in cinema, shunning its scintillating commercial ornaments, even risking the chances of financial viability. This new wave got its continuation in the following decade through P. Padmarajan,

K.G. George, and Bharathan as they created a unique brand of cinema amalgamating artistic and commercial elements. Film critics hailed this movement as ‘middle cinema’ or ‘middle path cinema’, as these films had a successful run at the cinemas without compromising artistically. History bears testimony to the fact that Malayalam cinema has always welcomed novel experiments and maverick movements.

The first decade of the new millennium is often regarded as a barren period in Malayalam cinema. This phase saw a large number of mainstream films failing at the box office and on the artistic front, too; noteworthy productions were few. The previous decade gave birth to the superstar culture, and fan associations were also sprouting across Kerala. This newfound penchant for the star-oriented cinematic system had a tremendous impact on the quality of the films being made. As most of the films failed miserably, the period saw the emergence of soft-porn cinema, which shocked the establishment as well as the traditional ideological power structure in cinema. This movement was spearheaded by actor Shakeela. As film critic C.S. Venkiteswaran posits,

> As far as mainstream Malayalam cinema, the superstars and technicians are concerned, these obscene films are a stigma in the film industry, its respect, and its image. Many are reluctant to accept the fact that they, too, are connected to such films. What do the words and phrases to describe these films, such as deviant, pervert, lacking art, immoral, obscene, stigmatising, unnatural, etc., convey? These terms do not want to define what these soft-

> porn films are, instead, they simply try to state what "we are not". (*Udalinte*, my trans;101-102)

Thus, the soft-porn movement pioneered by Shakeela challenged the traditional value systems in Malayalam cinema by veering out into hitherto unheard terrains. Darshana Sreedhar Mini, in her work *Rated A: Soft-Porn Cinema and Mediations of Desire in India,* sheds light on the soft-porn wave that swayed Malayalam cinema during the 1990s and early 2000s. She has conducted an extensive study on the trend, focusing on various decades and significant cinematic trends. As she puts it,

> Most filmmakers and technicians who worked in soft-porn migrated from the mainstream Malayalam film industry when it faced a huge financial crisis in the 1990s. The pseudonym-driven nature of the soft-porn industry allowed them to use their creative labour to produce low-budget films that allowed some room for representing non-normative sexual practices on-screen, sometimes by gaming the censorship machine. The growth and sustenance of the soft-porn film industry was facilitated by revenue-sharing models that gave distributors and exhibitors a chance to negotiate deals based on speculative capital with the cast and crew- a system that relied more on trust and individual contacts than legally binding contracts. (Mini 8)

The financial precarity of the Malayalam film industry was the driving force behind this newly emerged trend. These developments led film critics to conclude that the period saw Malayalam cinema falling into crisis. The 'thampuran' films, which created havoc in the previous decade, reemerged as drab copies sans

originality. The audience outrightly rejected this futile exercise of beating about the bush with the same formula/masala-based cinema. The period saw several theatres in rural Kerala shut down due to the financial crisis, while multiplexes emerged in urban areas. This development was crucial in shaping the path of Malayalam cinema in the coming decade.

The first decade of the new millennium in Malayalam cinema might have come to an end on a disappointing note; however, the beginning of the next decade ushered in revolutionary changes in the medium, which were hitherto unseen. Around 2010, a fresh wave hit Malayalam cinema, which was powerful enough to shake the foundations of traditional filmdom. 'New generation' was the term given to a handful of films that steered clear of the conventions and traditions of filmmaking and successfully thwarted quite a few prevalent notions that reigned in the industry. The image of an overwhelming masculine hero was subverted, and the typical plot construction was restructured in a novel manner with technological nuances having a tremendous impact.

A few movies in Malayalam that chose to move away from the conventional manner of filmmaking did make an impact as far as the structure and content of Malayalam cinema were concerned. Movies such as *Traffic*, *Chappa Kurishu*, *Salt N' Pepper*, *City of God*, *22 Female Kottayam,* etc., created havoc on the silver screen, with their bold approaches and thematic innovation. The New Generation wave is said to have started with the unexpected reception of the movie *Traffic* (2011), directed by Rajesh Pillai, which was an innovative endeavour that brought along with its astounding narrative technique, a fresh list of artists and was devoid of

the conventional hero-villain dichotomy. Some of the Films, such as *22 Female Kottayam* and *Chaappa Kurishu,* discussed grave issues such as gender and class in a unique way, which added to the zest of this movement. The audience, too, responded positively to the new and refreshing current of change, as many of the above-mentioned novel ventures set the cash registers ringing at the box office.

The chapter examines the new-gen wave in Malayalam, the politics of representation, and how cop characters were portrayed on the screen. The new gen cinema as a social phenomenon needs to be studied, and the article "Media, youth and sociocultural transitions in Malayalam New Wave Cinema" by Jayan S has been referred to. To assess the representation of Dalit characters, the article "From the Margin to the Frames: The Ideology of the New-Gen Malayalam Cinema" by Arun Remesh is resorted to. *Indian Popular Cinema: A Narrative of Cultural Change*, by Wimal Dissanayake and K. Moti Gokulsing, is a useful resource to introspect on the ideological domains of Indian popular cinema.

The post-2010 phase is noted for the deconstructive wave in Malayalam cinema as traditional value systems and hegemonic power structures were questioned. Significantly, new-gen movies tried in earnest to alter the power dynamics related to gender. Films that deal with gender issues (e.g. *22 Female Kottayam*) and female-centric films (e.g. *How Old Are You*) created novel spaces for gender discourse in Malayalam cinema. Simultaneously, the movement was spanning out of the silver screen as well, as the formation of W.C.C. (Women in Cinema Collective) in 2017 shows. It was a movement to flag the existing gender discrimination and ensure gender justice in Malayalam cinema. This movement was

instrumental in forcing the Kerala government to constitute a committee under K. Hema, a retired judge of the High Court. The Hema committee, in its investigation, has brought out shocking episodes of reality in Malayalam cinema regarding gender discrimination and systemic sexual abuse. Reflecting on the impact of WCC on Malayalam film industry., in her article, "Women in Cinema Collective and the Malayalam Film Industry", Tara S. Nair says,

> For one, the initiation of this collective has extended the canvas of the debate concerning the future of Malayalam cinema. It tabled the issue of film workers' rights to equal opportunity and equal pay as the most important. The WCC. puts forward, in whatever preliminary form, a collective alternative voice to the patriarchal feudalism that rules the industry's conduct at all levels; it draws attention to the labour and production practices followed in cinema-making, which have developed to be illiberal, anti-women, and collusive. (15)

It is indeed imperative to analyse whether such a revolt in an ultra-conservative film industry, such as Malayalam, succeeded in ushering in an era marked by a positive outlook and intent in filmmaking.

In their article "Gender Construct as a Narrative and Text: The Female Protagonist in New-Generation Malayalam Cinema", Swapna Gopinath and Sony Jalarajan Raj investigate the new-gen wave from a gender perspective. As the authors put it, "New Generation' is a discursive term derived from media discourses, where it is used to refer to a new set of Malayalam films that represent a departure from the region's conventional style. It could never be considered as a genre, as it

does not reflect any particular pattern of narration or filmmaking cannot be compared to the French New Wave" (Gopinathan et al 65). Film critic C.S. Venkiteswaran observes the new-gen trend and says,

> The new-gen films came as a rush of fresh air from suffocating narratives in which everything was for, by and around superheroes. The young filmmakers brought characters to a human scale. They were hugely inspired by the aesthetics of contemporary Mexican and Korean films in terms of fluid camera movements and imaging, editing patterns, spatial imagination narrative tempo. (In new-gen)

The new generation movement was triggered by changing times and new sensibilities. The technological development can be cited as a major reason. With the development of information technology, internet data traffic underwent a total transformation as high-speed data was made accessible. This resulted in people, especially the young generation, getting exposed to international cinema. All the discussions surrounding cinema have broadened its horizons, allowing every film enthusiast to witness and experience the latest trends in world cinema. Though piracy is considered a punishable offence, the latest international productions were made available through illegal access via the internet. The youth, now tasting the international flavour, got quickly fed up with conventional filmmaking and unimaginable cinematic language. This caused a new generation movement in Malayalam cinema, as a vivacious group of young filmmakers, with a novel cinematic idiom and an iconoclastic methodology, arrived and found their niche.

The positive influence in Malayalam cinema subverted some age-old rigid patterns regarding the concepts upon which the film industry has been working from its inception. Yet, did such a landslide-like change bring the effects that could entirely revolutionise the medium? Did the bold attempts by a few young directors pave the way for a progressive outlook that can permeate through the nitty-gritty of the medium as such? How far can these films criticise authoritarian power from a democratic vantage point? These questions need answers, and the new generation trend has to be studied in its totality to find out whether the myths of change were indeed worth the clamour it has generated.

Police in New Generation Cinema

To examine the intricate ideological play in the films of this period, while representing police characters, a few of them need to be listed for a detailed study. These films are notable for the representation of police characters, and the attempt here is to unravel the ideological perspectives involved. These characters also need to be examined in parallel with the cop characters discussed in the chapter that dealt with films post-1990, particularly the genre spearheaded by Suresh Gopi. Certain questions arise, such as whether any identifiable changes have occurred as far as representation is concerned, and if so, what could have caused such a gradual change in the mode of representation, etc. The political discourses and the changing trends in Malayalam cinema need to be studied vigorously. For this purpose, the following part of this chapter will analyse in detail a few selected films of the new-gen period, which have a significant representation of police characters.

From the beginning phase of the last decade onwards, several Malayalam films have portrayed cop characters in multiple shades. It is a clear deviation from the established path of Malayalam cinema, which celebrated heroic, macho police characters. The cinematic attempt here is to criticise the authoritarian power structure, which suppresses democratic elements and curtails the flourishing of progressive ideals. A significant film in this regard is *Nayattu* (2021), directed by Martin Prakkat. *Nayattu* meticulously dissects the much-celebrated progressive social fabric of Kerala to unearth the shocking realities of discrimination and highhandedness by the powerful. The film also attempts to throw light on caste discrimination existing in the police force and how the Dalits are victimised. This penchant for cinema with social realities has a strong parallel in Tamil cinema, where a new film wave is very much evident, which exposes the reality of the hegemonic caste structure. Filmmakers such as Pa. Ranjith, Vetrimaaran and Mari Selvaraj have been pioneering this movement, creating reverberations across India, including Kerala. Earlier, Nagraj Manjule, who made films such as *Fandry* (2013) and *Sairat* (2016), had represented the chilling social reality of the Indian society, which works in a casteist hierarchical social order. In her article "Anti-caste Aesthetics and Dalit Interventions in Indian Cinema", Manju Edachira examines the representation of Dalit characters in selected Indian films. She says, "Manjule and Ranjith's films employ aesthetics as a way of being and becoming, an aesthetics of experience rather than mere perception of beauty" (Edachira 48). She looks at the deconstruction of the established popular tropes of commercial cinema by these Dalit directors. Analysing Pa. Ranjith's commercially successful *Kaala* (2018), she says, "Ranjith provides a new dimension to Rajinikanth as a character in Kaala and

gives a new reading of him as a superstar". The Dalit resurgence in Indian cinema needs to be studied in comparison with a film like *Nayattu* to disseminate the subtleties of problematic representation.

Nayattu is also noted for its rich ensemble of mainstream actors as it deals with a grave social issue, sans commercial gimmickry. A historical examination of Malayalam cinema reveals a consistent pattern wherein filmmakers addressing politically sensitive or socially contentious themes often resort to the aesthetics and narrative strategies of parallel or art-house cinema. This mode of filmmaking serves as a protective buffer, allowing directors to engage critically with dominant socio-political structures without directly confronting the prevailing popular cinematic conventions. Given their limited theatrical reach and niche audience, such films are rarely subjected to the kind of public scrutiny or institutional pushback that commercial blockbusters typically face (Vasudevan; Gokulsing and Dissanayake). Consequently, parallel cinema has functioned as a symbolic sanctuary for dissent, operating on the peripheries of mainstream visibility and influence.

However, the emergence of the new generation movement in Malayalam cinema marks a significant departure from this trend. Filmmakers aligned with this movement have demonstrated a conscious willingness to challenge entrenched hierarchies—both cinematic and socio-political—by integrating socially resonant and politically charged content into the framework of commercial, mainstream cinema (Jayan S). Rather than relegating critical discourse to the margins, these films have brought it to the centre of public attention, leveraging the reach and aesthetic appeal of popular formats to disseminate complex ideological narratives

(Kunal Ray and Mochish KS). This shift signals not merely a stylistic evolution but a broader transformation in the political economy of cinematic expression in Kerala, wherein mainstream visibility is no longer incompatible with critical intervention.

Nayattu was released in 2021 and was received well at the Kerala box office. It has also won numerous accolades, including Best Actor, Best Editor and Best Story awards at the Kerala State Film Awards in 2021. The film narrates the lives of three police officers: Maniyan, Praveen Michael and Sunitha. Maniyan and Sunitha belong to the Dalit community. Sunitha is troubled by her cousin, who is an active member of a Dalit political party, which has strong roots and a vote bank in the area. When Sunitha complains to her superiors, her cousin Biju is summoned to the police station, leading to Maniyan beating a provoking Biju, further escalating into a major political problem. A road accident involving the three of them kills a member of the Dalit party, and they find themselves isolated. Finally, the three police officers have to flee, fearing arrest, and they have been victimised by the state. As his long-cherished dream of his daughter performing at the state arts festival perishes, Maniyan commits suicide, after shooting a video in which he absolves Praveen and Sunitha of any involvement in the accident and pleads with the state to acquit them. The film ends when the state, which had earlier recorded the fake arrest of the three officers to save their blushes before the public in front of a looming bi-election, makes fake evidence to proclaim that Maniyan took his life while in police custody.

The film needs to be inspected from multiple dimensions to unravel the curious ways in which power operates. It examines the interactions of caste, class, and power dynamics within society. The representation of police characters deserves

attention in context. In *Nayattu*, the state is depicted as the epitome of evil and the ultimate power centre. The police act as instruments of the state to enforce discipline in society, and the film also represents the force as submissive agents of the omnipotent state apparatus. In the film, the Dalit police officers are shown as pawns in the hands of the state. In a scene, Maniyan is shown framing a hapless youth for having a romantic affair with a girl, who is related to a minister. He makes fake evidence to prove that the youth had tried to burn the girl's house so that a non-bailable case could be charged against him. After doing this unwillingly, out of fear for his superiors, Maniyan says to Praveen, "Even goons have the freedom to accept or reject such orders, but we do not" (*Nayattu* 00:19:32-00:19:42). This indicates the helplessness of the Dalit officer, who is reduced to a mere goon to carry out the master's orders. The state here can be seen as an invisible power structure, which includes complicated arithmetic of caste, class and gender power relations. It works at various levels and is hard to identify or resist. While keeping this notion in mind, referring to Michel Foucault can be useful in understanding the intricate operations of the state machinery. As he says while brooding on the concept of 'governmentality',

> The excessive value attributed to the problem of the state is expressed, basically, in two ways: the one form, immediate, affective and tragic, is the lyricism of the monstre froid we see confronting us; but there is a second way of overvaluing the problem of the state is one which is paradoxical because apparently reductionist: it is a form of analysis that consists in reducing the state to a certain number of functions, such as the development

> of productive forces of the reproduction of relations of production, and yet this reductionist vision of the relative importance of the state's role nevertheless invariably renders it absolutely essential as a target needing to be attacked and a privileged position needing to be occupied. But the state, no more probably than at any other time in its history, does not have this unity, this individuality, this rigorous functionality, nor to speak frankly, this importance: maybe after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicised abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think. (Foucault, *The Foucault* 103)

Foucault's ideas run contrary to the existing model of treating the state as a homogenous, unique epicentre of power, which is omniscient. He argues that power operates invisibly and in a decentralised manner, involving every citizen as an agent of the state. This subtle working of the state is often unrecognisable, as every citizen acts as an agent of the state and forms part of the long and invisible web of power relations. From family to school, this power structure is maintained not directly by the state, but by the willing participants of this extensive network. The state as a homogenous and unified hegemonic superpower has ceased to exist, making the resistance against its inevitable suppression increasingly complex. The film *Nayattu* views the state as an overarching power centre with deep-rooted ideological value systems at the outset. The state is represented as an amalgam of numerous elements that are actively working to ensure the preservation of the traditional moral framework. Yet, it sheds light on the invisible or unrecognisable functioning of the state apparatus. As the Foucauldian notion goes, the state is not a visible behemoth

that can be spotted and resisted by the oppressed. Instead, it permeates into the social, familial, and even individual systems to safeguard the "defined principles" of the societal moral code of conduct. In the movie, the state acts as the guardian of caste supremacy and political one-upmanship. But it also unravels the secret functioning of the state system subtly.

The film differentiates between the 'good Dalit' and the 'bad Dalit', portraying Biju (Sunitha's cousin) and his group as inferior or wretched Dalits, who are to be condemned. In the initial stages, Maniyan and Sunitha are good, acceptable Dalits, and they are pitted against Biju and his friends. Maniyan and Sunitha act as the agents of the state, whereas Biju and his group are the 'dangerous outsiders'. In a scene, while confronting Praveen, Biju says, "We do not bow down anymore. It is a thing of the past" (*Nayattu* 00:25:44-00:25:50). It shows how Biju and his group are assertive of their identity. They want to reclaim their lost space and are not willing to budge before power.

The article, "The Hunter and the Hunted: Problematizing Dalit Representation in the Movie *Nayattu*", focuses on the representation of Dalit characters in the film *Nayattu*. The article argues that the representation is problematic as Dalits are compartmentalised as good and bad, based on certain criteria created by the elites.

> The most striking and problematic premise in *Nayattu* is the noticeable portrayal of Dalit characters. In the film, a line is intentionally drawn to separate socially acceptable and unacceptable Dalits. Cops such as Maniyan and Sunitha belong to the socially acceptable faces from the oppressed Dalit

> section, whereas, Sunitha's cousin Biju (Dinesh Alleppey), who creates ruckus at the police station is portrayed as uncultured and rude, who lacks social etiquette. The film, which was hailed for focussing on the issue of Dalits in society, meticulously creates a division between the 'good Dalit' and the 'bad Dalit'. This notion comes from a savarna Brahmanic gaze, which places Dalits and Muslims in black-and-white columns by creating the good/bad binary (Harinarayanan S 92).

In the article "From the Margin to the Frames: The Ideology of the New-Gen Malayalam Cinema", Arun Remesh critiques the Dalit representation in the new-gen wave by pointing out the underlying patterns of feudal ideological strain. He says such representations only superficially create Dalit characters who lack agency or voice. The existing feudal belief systems are reinforced, and traditional networks of hegemony are maintained. While examining the movie *Nayattu*, he says, "Though Dalits do not have the political representation or the capital to influence claim their demands in Kerala, by placing the Dalit political organisations in a position to influence the ministry, the real plight of the Dalit representative in an attempt to become part of the system has been made futile" (Remesh 129). Remesh continues to say, "The marginalised are not given a platform to present themselves and tell his/her story (130).

In the previous chapter, while discussing the film F.I.R., the ideological scheme of creating the trope of good Muslim and bad Muslim was discussed. The same ideological function is served here, too. The state defines what is acceptable and what is not, thus excluding those who find themselves outside its purview. But,

harking back to the Foucauldian idea of the abstract and flexible structure of the state and its enforcement of power, the film gives certain interesting insights. As the Maniyan, Sunitha and Praveen flee from the scene, suddenly there occurs a shift in the power dynamics. The 'good Dalits', who were effectively carrying out the orders, find themselves at the receiving end after the tragic accident and their decision to escape the law. Biju and his companions, with their political heft, get the active support of the state, thus bestowing them with the 'good Dalit' tagline. Though the 'voice' of the film (voice as defined by American film critic Bill Nichols, which means the 'perspective') is with the three hapless cops, it portrays how the state abandons them. When Biju was arrested and jailed, they got a call from higher officials to release him, as it may affect the electoral prospects of the ruling party. Biju, who was treated as a wretched Dalit by the superior Dalits moments ago, transforms identity, as the role reversal makes him part of the powerful state, disowning Maniyan and Sunitha. The shift in the power interplays is noticeable here. When Maniyan was behaving aggressively towards Biju, he was performing his bit as an agent of the state. Like patriarchy, which curiously often operates through women, power too is capable of functioning via the oppressed, as they can be transformed into agents. Maniyan and Biju are insignificant, tiny knots in the infinite chain of power.

The police in India function as the moral police of the hegemonic state. The film shows how the police spontaneously engage in their duty to preserve societal morality, often emphasising traditional, familial and caste values. Maniyan can be seen shouting at a young couple who were brought to the station. He becomes irate

seeing the students engaged in a romantic relationship, and suddenly thinks about his daughter. He wants his daughter to win accolades at the state school youth festival. This recognition through his daughter is the long-cherished acceptance from the hegemonic society he seeks. Any other deviance from this well-charted path is unacceptable and subject to punishment. The film makes this intervention from Maniyan so organic and instinctive, rather than a needless interference by a police officer. This scene bears testimony to the social role played by the police force, as the guardians of the moral social fabric at the behest of the state. This duty is neither constitutional nor legal, yet, a compulsory responsibility supposed to be carried out by the police.

The previous chapter discussed how the police were portrayed as saviours and how Malayalam cinema hailed them for being impeccable in carrying out their assigned tasks. The supercops were revered, and eulogies were written on screen. *Nayattu* demonstrates a departure from this trend, portraying police officers as humans with emotions, devoid of any spectacular embellishments. The vantage point adopted by the director here is also significant. It stands with the doomed cops and flays the system for its inherent flaws. The representation of cops as humans with flesh and blood, as people with vulnerabilities, is noteworthy. Rather than manifesting as the protector of the state system, the police are depicted as the incapacitated arbitrators, who could be left in the lurch when deemed necessary. In a scene, a disappointed Maniyan says to Praveen, “Cops who do this job honestly always end up getting in trouble. Others are rewarded with good service entry” (*Nayattu* 00:31:33-00:31:39). This indicates the disparities and discrimination

existing in the force. The police are stripped of their divine embellishments and illustrated realistically. The neo-realistic interests of the new generation trend are also visible in this context. From a medium of fascination and fiction, cinema is rendered as a medium that can represent life candidly.

The police, as instruments of the state, have a hierarchy that places Dalit police officers at the perilous bottom. In the film, higher police officials, including the DGP, abandon the three isolated cops. The higher police machinery was even callous enough to hunt down Maniyan's family, shattering his only dream. He says, "I never expected that they would go to my house and do this atrocity. I have been running around as their hunting dog for about 20 years. I never committed any atrocity for my own sake. This is never meant for people like us" (*Nayattu* 01:39:05-01:39:20). These were his words before taking his life. The death of Maniyan is a shocking reminder of the merciless ways in which the system functions. Here, ordinary police officers are victimised. When the high-ranking officials discover a video made by Maniyan, they destroy it immediately. Praveen even asks an officer about proving the truth for their sake, and he is answered thus, "Praveen, you know that the government cannot do anything, right?" (*Nayattu* 01:52:05-01:52:12). This indicates the Kafkaesque nature of the corridors of power, which is frightening to encounter for a powerless human.

The case of the ex-IPS officer from Gujarat, Sanjiv Bhatt, is a significant example in this context. He spoke against his masters, including the Chief Minister, accusing him of masterminding the communal riots in 2002. After so many years, he was charged in various cases, arrested, dismissed from service, and incarcerated.

Social Activist Harsh Mander has written a letter to Sanjiv Bhatt in the online portal The Wire, in which he says,

> Your punishment is a reflection of how formidable and threatening you are as a witness in one of independent India's most important cases of criminal command accountability for communal massacre. Of how dangerous was the evidence which you brought forth. Of how important it was to give a message not just to you but to anyone else in the country who dares to cross swords with the most powerful in the land: if this can be the fate of a senior police officer, then what can happen to an ordinary citizen? ("To Sanjiv" Mander).

The question raised here leads one to a horrifying predicament, the citizens would have to face. If a police officer, once trusted by the state as its agent, is hunted down chillingly, what could happen to an ordinary human? Maniyan's and Sanjeev Bhatt's are cases that have curious resemblances. The film concludes by showing the futility of elections, which are won by manipulation and muscle power. *Nayattu* is a perfect example to fathom the momentum shift, which is humongous in its magnitude, from the 1990s to the second decade of the new millennium. Socio-political and cultural landscapes have undergone tremendous changes in the period, which have likely acted as catalysts for this crucial transformation.

The policing system in India, with all its colonial structural baggage, is operating as a secretive, repressive apparatus that undermines the democratic ethos. Various governments have used the system to their advantage, stripping it of the humane factor, however little it may have remained. Fake encounters and extra-

judicial killings are treated as normal, routine police procedures. In "Fake Encounters in India: Laws, Flaws, and Fear," Peerzada Muzamil sheds light on shocking data about India, despite it being a democratic country. It says,

> Data tabled in the Lok Sabha on July 26 revealed that across the country, 82 people were killed in police encounters during the 2020-2021 fiscal, which jumped to 151 during the 2021-2022 fiscal. Although the data for the year shows an uptick in encounters, India's history since the 1990s has remained replete with instances of fake encounter killings. Between 2000 and 2017, the NHRC registe-red 1,782 fake encounter cases. Similarly, betw-een 1993 and 2009, at least 2,560 cases of encounters were brought to the notice of the NHRC. Of them, 1,224 were fake. (Muzamil)

The endorsement of the state gives the police the autonomy to metamorphose into an oppressive "deep state", which turns a blind eye towards democratic values. The existence of the police deep state is a reality, which is often neglected considering the significance of the force in ensuring the maintenance of law and order.

Rajeev Ravi is a Malayalam filmmaker known for creating realistic films that critique authoritarian state machinery. Some of his notable films include *Annayum Rasoolum* (2013), *Njan Steve Lopez* (2014), *Kammati Paadam* (2016), *Thuramukham* (2023), etc. In his films, he flays the systemic reduction of human identity to a mere obedient subject wherein individuals are reduced to compliant subjects under the aegis of authoritarian governance. His works expose the authoritarian state's coercive mechanisms and its instrumental role in rendering

institutional structures increasingly inhumane. For example, his film Thuramukham is a chilling reminder of the Mattancherry police shooting, which killed poor labourers from Mattancherry, who were protesting for their employment rights. Remembering the incident, Cris and Sukanya Shaji, in the article “The Barbaric Chappa System and the History of Kochi’s Port Labourers’ Mutiny”, say,

> The protest went on peacefully for days, with the likes of PJ Antony- a renowned actor and cultural figure — joining the workers and singing songs. "Kaattalanmar naadu bharicha naatil / Theemazha peythappol / Pattalathe pullai karuthiya / Mattancherry marakkamo?" went one famous song, which roughly translates to, "Could you forget Mattancherry, which did not fear the army, when a rain of fire fell, in a land ruled by savages”... the police torture of the workers continued even after the day of the firing. Those they suspected to be Communists were taken into custody and beaten up. In the case filed by the Mattancherry police, almost 100 persons were charged as accused. Among them were all those who sought treatment at the Fort Kochi hospital after the firing. (“The Barbaric”)

This forgotten episode from the history of Kerala was reinvented and presented by him. Rajeev Ravi’s films focus on the atrocious nature of the operation of the policing system in Kerala. Thus, he can be considered a flagbearer in promulgating the shift in perspective of viewing Khaki in Malayalam cinema. Rajeev’s *Njan Steve Lopez*, *Thurmukham*, *Kammati Paadam*, and *Annayum Rasoolum* are taken for a detailed study here.

The film *Njan Steve Lopez* (2014), directed by Rajeev Ravi, is a realistic account of the extra-judicial nature of the workings of the police system. Though it was not a commercial success, the film sheds light on the pathetic plight of people who get caught in the complex web of the state machinery, often finding themselves at the receiving end. The film starring Farhan Fazil, Ahana Krishna and Sujith Shankar was critically acclaimed for its brave portrayal of the state's excesses and the subtle yet powerful representation of the theme of an individual challenging a formidable system.

The film narrates the life of Steve Lopez, a carefree youth, who spends his time hanging around with friends, partying. He is in love with Anjali, a girl who has a clear plan regarding her life and career. Steve is the son of DYSP George Lopez, and it can be seen on more than one occasion that he enjoys the privilege of it. His life is turned upside down when he witnesses a murder in plain daylight. He tries his best to save the victim, but to no avail. Steve, the innocent youth, is thrown into an ocean of chaos and confusion when he finds out about the involvement of the police system in the murder and how they have been manipulating various gang members, pitting them against each other. He follows Hari, the gang leader behind the murder, and bears witness to his disappearance at the behest of the police. He meets Hari's wife and explains what might have happened to Hari. The film traces Steve's journey of transformation from a naive youth to a citizen who realises the complicated maze of the functioning of power.

The film begins with a quote from Albert Camus' *The Rebel*, "Every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being"

(*Njan Steve Lopez* 00:00:32-00:00:42), which sets the tone for the protagonist, Steve. He is an innocent youth who is about to be initiated into the chaotic universe of power. Here, Steeve is the symbolic representation of innocence, which will not survive in the system. The film's title song is rich with metaphors, depicting the influence of the police on the daily life of a common man. The song "Oorake Kalapila" (translated as "it is mayhem out there") is placed after a scene where Steve and his drunk friends run away after seeing the police on the road checking vehicles. The song subtly criticises the police for frightening the public, especially the youth. It is also a complaint letter from the people about the police. The song asks why the police enforce their moral code of conduct on the youth, restricting their clothing choices and hairstyles. It even asks that when politicians create a ruckus in the parliament, crossing all the limits of decency and public morality, innocent youth are hunted down by the repressive system. It reminds one of the suicide of a Dalit youth, Vinayakan, after suffering severe torture from the police for having his favourite hairstyle. As mentioned in the introduction, Vinayakan's case was a significant event that slammed the social psyche of Kerala and brought the image of the police to closer public scrutiny, especially among the younger population. An article on the incident says,

> Vinayakan was arrested for allegedly stealing a gold chain, but was later released. He died by suicide after returning home. His post-mortem report confirmed that he was subjected to severe torture by police officers while in custody. There were several scars on his forehead, right nipple, and lower

> abdomen, all pointing towards torture. The family also claimed that the police asked him to cut his hair. (“Dalit youth”)

The title song of *Njan Steve Lopez* is an ode against the moral policing of the Kerala Police. The song spells doom for the public, as the cops are omnipresent and there is no way of escape left.

In *Njan Steve Lopez*, the criticism aimed at the police is multilayered. The representation of law enforcement in the narrative underscores a deeply entrenched nexus between the police and criminal syndicates, a relationship that is portrayed as both intricate and multilayered. This collusion, ostensibly justified under the pretext of preserving law and order, serves as a vehicle for the state to implement a covert project of social purification through extrajudicial means. The enforcers of this violence—gang leaders and so-called "antisocial elements"—are predominantly drawn from historically marginalised and socioeconomically disenfranchised communities. Their instrumentalisation reveals a disturbing pattern in which the state selectively targets subaltern groups, effectively denying them fundamental human rights under the guise of criminalisation.

This punitive framework can be understood as a manifestation of state-sanctioned violence, wherein the biopolitical apparatus identifies and eliminates what it perceives as 'undesirable' elements within the population. The deployment of underprivileged individuals as agents of violence further exposes the contradictions within the state’s disciplinary mechanisms, where the oppressed are simultaneously the perpetrators and victims of systemic brutality. Such representations critique the

functioning of the state as an apparatus that perpetuates structural inequality while masking its exclusionary politics through the rhetoric of security and order.

The two gang leaders in the film, Prathapan (actor Vinayakan) and Hari (actor Sujith Sankar) belong to the subaltern sections. They are manipulated by the state and are made to play out the deadly game scripted by the police. The police aim to purge the obnoxious elements from society, thus making it a better, more suitable place for the elite sections. The basic human rights of a few are taken for granted, and the state and its instruments are only concerned about safeguarding the elite socio-cultural morality. Even the identity of the subaltern members is wiped out from the social fabric.

Njan Steve Lopez elaborately discusses the modus operandi of the nexus, which involves the state, police and media. It is evident from the scene where Steve is wondering why the interview he gave to numerous TV channels the previous day, regarding his witnessing of the murder scene, does not appear on any of the prominent channels. Only a local, lesser-known TV channel is airing his video footage. Rajeev Ravi elucidates the vicious cycle at play to camouflage the state's highhandedness. This nexus between the state and the media indicates the abysmal condition of press freedom in India, as the state makes it mandatory for the media houses to toe their line to survive. It leads to many of the media outlets, sensing the mood of the country, acting as the mouthpieces of the state. India ranks pathetically low when it comes to the press freedom index. As the data shows, "India is placed at an abysmal 161 among the 180 countries surveyed in the Press Freedom Index and has fallen 50 points over the last 10 years" (Mahaprashasta). The film is a grave

reminder of the repressive features of the omnipotent state and its most trusted ally, the police, who will go to any lengths to enforce the socio-cultural order they desire.

Steve, in the film, is represented as a symbol of innocence, a typically forthright citizen, whose inexperience borders on naivety. He is unaware of the dubious designs of power till he experiences it firsthand. He learns about the involvement of the police in the murder of the gangster when he sees a cop informing Hari about the death. His father's evasive responses to his inquiries further confuse him. Finally, everything unravels for him when he searches the mobile phone of Hari, where he sees the numbers of his father and other officers in the call list. This shocking realisation leaves Steve with utter disillusionment, prompting him to leave home. The police are functioning like power brokers, and the shift in the modes of representation of khaki from the previous decade to the present is apparent. The saviour, superhero cop is replaced by the cunning, anti-democratic and Machiavellian characters. The portrayal of his uncle Freddy is noteworthy here. Freddy is an anarchist who lives a life far away from the so-called moral elite social circle. Condemned as an alcoholic by the family and society, he is a character with humane qualities, as he is the only person around Steve supporting and lauding him for his initiatives to save the life of a gangster. Freddy serves as a contrasting metaphor to the moralist, state-driven value system, enforced with the help of the police. Once again, the attempt of director to portray the contrast between power, with all its moralistic embellishments and the lack of it, which places people at the margins, is evident.

While analysing the plight of the subaltern in a hegemonic social system, the question of gender always pops up. The predicament of women and other identities of the gender spectrum needs special mention in such contexts. In the book *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society: Volume IX*, Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakrabarty brood on the issues of subaltern identity and the location of women in the societal hierarchy. They argue that,

> The first question demands, we understand that if subaltern and elite appear as opposed terms, this opposition is itself fractured by the introduction of a third term, the figure of 'Woman'. Insofar as subaltern and elite are produced as masculinised terms, their opposition is derived not only from one another, but from 'Woman' (or rather elite women and subaltern women). That is to say that subaltern and elite men become men in relation to women as well as in opposition to one another. (Amin et al. 87)

The representation of women while contextualising the power struggle between the subaltern and the elite is a significant notion to be looked at. The question of gender has a place in the scheme of analysis, especially the portrayal of subaltern women, who are marginalised much more severely compared to their male counterparts. The intersectional ethos in this context makes it mandatory to have a close look at the gender perspective. *Njan Steve Lopez* presents the character of Anjali, the wife of Hari and places her at the heart of the power play. She is a victim who is clueless about the happenings. She is unaware of the gang war her husband is fighting at the behest of the state. The helpless Anjali is told about Hari's possible demise by Steve. The innocence of Steve meets the hopelessness of Anjali, which is

in stark contrast with the police and state, which function like an omniscient panopticon. Steve's attempts to meet Anjali to inform her about Hari draw a parallel to the Malayalam film *Amma Ariyan*, directed by John Abraham, which shows the travails of a few friends to inform the mother of Hari (the namesake of Hari from *Njan Steve Lopez*) about the death of her son. In both films, unprivileged individuals are pitted against an authoritarian state and a callous police system. They also brood on the predicament of women trapped in masculine struggles for power.

Fig. 1. Steve meets Hari's wife and hands over his belongings (*Njan Steve Lopez* 1:49:30).

The last piece of advice given to Steve by a veteran criminal reporter deserves notice. He says to Steve, "I know those who disappeared and the ones who made the disappearance possible. Do not waste your life chasing others' lives" (*Njan Steve Lopez* 01:45:33-01:45:50). The film ends on a pessimistic note, and the discourses initiated by the film are very much relevant considering the shift in the

dynamics of representation of police in Malayalam cinema. *Njan Steve Lopez* bears testimony to the novel impetus in Malayalam, as reverence and glorification pave the way to objective evaluation from the vantage point of the marginalised.

In Malayalam, films that address the issue of caste are hard to find, especially when compared to Tamil cinema's resonating anti-caste politics in recent times. Srinivasa Rao and Arthi Bhaskaran say, "The film *Madras* (2014) by the young Dalit director Pa. Ranjith could be seen as the new beginning of an era in Tamil Cinema. Further, *Kabali* (2016) and *Kaala* (2018) declare the arrival of full-fledged Dalit cinema" (1164).

Kammatti Paadam, released in 2016, is a significant work in this regard, as it skilfully depicts a historical narrative of deceit and injustice from a subaltern perspective, shedding light on the complexities of caste and class dynamics and the abuse of power that suppresses marginalised communities. It focuses on the issue of caste, class, and the workings of power. *Kammatti Paadam* (2016) stands as a seminal work in contemporary Malayalam cinema, offering a potent subaltern critique of systemic injustice and historical betrayal. Through its narrative structure and characterisation, the film meticulously reconstructs a socio-political history marked by the gradual dispossession of Dalit and working-class communities under the pretence of urban development and modernisation. It foregrounds the intersectional dynamics of caste and class, revealing how entrenched power structures manipulate these categories to perpetuate exclusion and dispossession.

The film critiques the complicity of state institutions—most notably the police—in enabling and legitimising the violent erasure of marginalised

communities. Far from being impartial agents of justice, the police are portrayed as enforcers of elite interests, functioning as instruments of structural violence. In this regard, *Kammatti Paadam* aligns with theoretical perspectives that view the state not as a neutral arbiter, but as a site of hegemonic control that disciplines and punishes through both overt coercion and covert ideological apparatuses. As Althusser's notion of State Apparatus (*Lenin and Philosophy*) suggests, the state uses both the Ideological and Repressive apparatuses to regulate and supervise the subaltern populace. By narrating from the vantage point of a Dalit protagonist, the film also destabilises dominant historiographies that erase subaltern experiences, offering instead a counter-narrative that reclaims memory and agency. The subaltern's voice and its relevance are highlighted in the film. As Gayatri Spivak argues in her groundbreaking article "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Indian literature and media have historically silenced the voices of the marginalised. Any attempt to break such conventions deserves attention and detailed examination.

The film narrates the lives of Balan, Ganaga and Krishnan, who belong to a slum in Ernakulam called Kammatti Paadam, the development of their friendship, and the nefarious ways in which the powerful (upper caste, upper class and the police) exploit them. Balan and Ganga are Dalits, and along with their friend Krishnan, they work as the henchmen for their master Surendran. He makes them do all the wretched work for his business empire, including hit jobs and smuggling. The film traces the rise of Surendran as a business tycoon in parallel with the disintegration of the lives of Balan and Ganga, as well as the Dalits in Kammatti

Paadam. It is the tale of betrayal and systemic exploitation of a community by the elites. As an article on the film says,

> In *Kammatti Paadam*, Ravi shows how the Dalits were forced to sell out their land by their own brethren to upper-caste real estate sharks mainly the Syrian Christians. In the film the land mafia uses dark skinned dalit gangs mainly from Pulaya community to use real estate. The characters presented in the movie are not inhuman or mentally or physically challenged people. They are ethical people placed in moments of history with a voice. The hero is a middle class Ezhava man named Krishnan who grew up in the slums along with his best friend Ganga and his brother Balan. *Kammatti Padam* has definitely shaken the edifice of Malayalam commercial cinema as it addresses the issues of the lower strata with utmost realism. (Romeo)

Kammatti Paadam (2016) is particularly noteworthy for its incisive portrayal of the nexus between power and the police apparatus. In keeping with Ravi's broader cinematic repertoire, the film critiques the institutional complicity of the police with elite interests, foregrounding how state actors collude with private power to discipline and displace subaltern communities. The character of Police Inspector Martin epitomises this collusion; he operates not as an impartial enforcer of the law, but rather as a mediator who facilitates the interests of the powerful real estate magnate, Surendran. In this formulation, the gang from Kammatti Paadam—a historically marginalised and dispossessed community—is recast as a disruptive presence to be strategically eliminated.

Martin's dialogue, “Why are you staying in Mumbai? Kochi is not the same anymore. Stay back. You are wanted here” (*Kammatti Paadam*, 1:48:03-1:48:12), serves as a veiled threat cloaked in familiarity, subtly exposing how surveillance and control are exercised under the guise of concern. The shifting allegiances of the police, as seen in their arbitrary arrest and release of former collaborators, reveal a morally ambivalent and opportunistic institution. Furthermore, the scene in which a police officer releases Krishnan following a jailhouse altercation further complicates the image of the police as consistent agents of law. Instead, they are shown to operate with strategic flexibility, prioritising the stability of criminal-political alliances over any fixed ethical mandate.

Unlike Ravi's other films, such as *Njan Steve Lopez* (2014) and *Thuramukham* (2021), where the police are portrayed as overt instruments of repression, *Kammatti Paadam* presents law enforcement as more nuanced, functioning as discreet facilitators who ensure the seamless continuation of illicit operations. This mode of representation reflects the structural complicity of state power, wherein repression is often masked by bureaucracy and procedural legality. Michel Foucault’s concept of biopolitics is significant here as the context deals with the state’s control over its population in dubious means. As Foucault puts it, “Biopolitics deals with the population as a political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political…” (*Lectures* 245). Foucault speaks about two forms of power: disciplinary power and biopower. The state manages populations using various forms of power, and citizens are placed at the mercy of the controlling state, lacking agency.

As elaborated in earlier chapters, the function of the police in contemporary India cannot be disentangled from the ideological imperatives of the dominant political order. In the wake of the consolidation of Hindutva ideology, the police increasingly function as agents of majoritarian control, relegating minority communities, particularly Muslims and Dalits, to the peripheries of civic and legal protection. These groups are frequently constructed as 'others' within the nation-state, subjected to routine surveillance, violence, and denial of rights (Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*; Deepa Kumar, *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire)*. In this context, *Kammatti Paadam* contributes to a broader cinematic discourse that interrogates the state's repressive apparatus and the racialised, casteist, and classist hierarchies it seeks to maintain. In Christophe Jaffrelot's work, he speaks about the history of marginalisation faced by the subaltern castes in India and how they gradually asserted themselves in the public sphere. He analyses the Indian socio-political sphere and finds a silent revolution, rejecting the hegemonic political structure. Deepa Kumar in *Islamophobia and the Politics of Empire* traces the history of Islamophobia and tries to examine it based on the developments post 9/11 terror attack. She scrutinises the war on terror and its role in enforcing racist ideals rooted in Islamophobia.

Annayum Rasoolum critiques the Islamophobic social circle existing in Kerala, and bemoans the plight of the individuals who get trapped in it. Hyder, the brother of Rasool, is a notable character played by director Aashiq Abu. Hyder is attempting to obtain a passport to migrate to Kuwait, but he faces constant trouble from the police, who refuse to provide him with a clearance certificate. They refer to

a case in the past, when Hyder had to serve time in a juvenile home. In a few scenes, where he tries to convince the police of his innocence, the treatment meted out to him is subhuman and discriminatory. Finally, a disillusioned Hyder loses his temper and fights with a policeman, which results in his incarceration. This pitiable condition of the subaltern Muslim in the Savarna hegemonic society is portrayed by Rajeev Ravi empathetically. The portrayal of Hyder's episode is a clear indication of the zeitgeist in the depiction of the police. As discussed in the previous chapter, the 1990s repeatedly uncovered the inherent islamophobia and anti-minority sentiments of police forces. Diatribes aimed at the community were rampant, and often, the hero was represented as a member of the hegemonic majority, who is entrusted with the job of saving the land from the diabolical schemes of the minority. But the arrival of the new generation wave, with its moral foundations based on secularism and progressive ideals, deconstructed the traditional value systems propagated by mainstream Malayalam cinema. The film also sheds light on the othering of Muslims, as they are put under the clouds of suspicion, alleging terrorist links.

In the movie, Rasool is also arrested by the police, accused of engaging in the illegal transaction of money. Rasool is not allowed to prove his innocence and has to spend time in jail, which jeopardises his relationship with Anna. The film subtly flays the tendency of the police to nab youth from minority communities and frame them in serious, non-bailable cases. Rasool is a victim in a game orchestrated by the state, aided amply by the repressive police system. In the movie, the Khaki is represented as the evil force that hunts innocents in a partisan manner. They also act as the guardians of moral and traditional belief systems, as they try to prevent

Rasool from uniting with Anna. The role of the force as the guardians of the moralist, traditional belief systems of the society, is evident here. From the macho, minority-bashing, angry young man in Khaki is transformed by the New Generation into the fascist, malevolent, partisan cop devoid of any semblance of humanity. This shift in perception is stark and reveals a lot about the changes in the socio-political arena of Kerala. *Annayum Rasoolum* is a prototype of the resistance on the silver screen against the excesses of the state. The filmmaker points out and unveils the prejudiced and pro-Savarna stand of the police force.

As discussed in the introduction chapter, the police system in India during the colonial period has not undergone any significant transformation post-independence and has functioned as a repressive force. The police juggernaut at the behest of their new masters has been giving a torrid time to the common folk, who have found themselves at the receiving end of the fury of power. Numerous episodes post-independence can be found where the forces in Khaki gave scant regard to the democratic values that are the cornerstone of our country's existence.

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the Indian police system, despite the formal transition from colonial to postcolonial governance, has largely retained the structural and ideological features of its colonial predecessor. The colonial police apparatus, originally designed to protect imperial interests and suppress dissent, was never fundamentally overhauled in the aftermath of independence. Instead, it was repurposed to serve the interests of the postcolonial elite, continuing to function as a coercive force that frequently undermines the democratic ethos of the republic. The persistent deployment of the police as an instrument of control rather than as a

guarantor of rights reflects a deep-seated institutional continuity that prioritises order over justice.

In the decades following independence, numerous incidents have exposed the authoritarian tendencies embedded within the Indian policing structure. The police, often clad in khaki and empowered by expansive discretionary authority, have shown limited regard for constitutional principles such as equality, justice, and the protection of civil liberties. This tendency becomes particularly visible in the handling of protests, treatment of minority communities, and extra-judicial practices, all of which illustrate the extent to which democratic values are subordinated to the imperatives of power and control.

Arvind Verma, in his seminal work *The New Khaki: The Evolving Nature of Policing in India* (2010), provides a comprehensive analysis of the challenges facing police reform in the country. Verma contends that the task of reconciling India's inherited system of coercive policing with the democratic values enshrined in the Constitution is both urgent and formidable. He highlights the enduring tension between the principles of democracy and the operational culture of Indian policing, noting that without structural and attitudinal reforms, the police are likely to remain a force of repression rather than transformation. His study underscores the need to realign policing practices with human rights norms, advocating for accountability, transparency, and community engagement as foundational elements of democratic policing. As Arvind Verma observes,

> While democracy has given a voice to the suppressed people and opened the doors to those discriminated against for centuries, the system has also

> introduced populism and enabled the nexus of politicians and business and criminal elements. All of these have affected the performance of the police, for the organization has been politicized, and the ruling elite dictate even operational matters. Despite the recommendations of several commissions of inquiry, exposures by the media, and hue and cry by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other concerned citizens, police reforms have not taken place. The elected representatives, irrespective of party affiliation, have stoutly resisted diluting their control over police matters. (15-16)

Thus, the Indian police remained a crude, unmodified version of the suppressive British police. The police were used as cannon fodder to suppress the democratic protest movements by the common people across the country. In this context, the New Generation movement's attempt to contextualise history deserves attention. Ravi's recent flick, *Thuramukham*, is a venture to unveil the police brutality that was unleashed on the working class under the orders of the powerful. The film is a tribute to the martyrs of the Mattancherry police firing, in which three port workers were killed and hundreds were left critically injured. The incident took place in 1953, and the 1950s can be seen as a significant period in national history, as people were slowly getting disenchanted with the promise of Nehruvian Socialism, a political philosophy that pledged to take India to a new dawn of equality and prosperity. After a few years of gaining independence, the common people realised that their fate would not be transformed by the new political rulers, who were essentially the same feudal lords as before but in a new guise. This shocking revelation led to people's uprisings in various parts of the country for their

democratic rights. *Thuaramukham* holds a faithful mirror to the historical incident and tries to showcase the grave injustice to which the poor labourers were subjected.

The film is set in Mattancherry, where inhumane labour laws exist. The 'chappa system' is in practice. It is a labour recruitment system based on certain hierarchies, and the rights of the labourers are seldom respected. In the film, the police are represented as the accomplices of the greedy port authorities who want to exploit the poor labourers at any cost. The chappa system ensures that every labourer fights each other daily for work, and needs to please their masters for their survival. However, the workers unite under the banner of the Communist Party's trade union and peacefully protest against the undemocratic labour practices. The port authorities ordered the police to disperse the protesters at any cost, resulting in the subsequent firing and loss of lives. The film's protagonist, Moidu, a character played by Nivin Pauly, undergoes a significant transformation in the movie. At the outset, he is shown as a goon of the masters, who beats up protesting workers. Later, he realises his folly and stands with the protesting workers.

In *Thuramukham*, Moidu is used by his masters to scare revolting workers. He attacks a union leader, Santo Gopalan, under orders and nearly kills him. After this, the movie shows the police officer telling him to stay away as they are going to raid his house. We will arrest you if you are found there. The scene is a clear indication of the unholy nexus between the cops and the powerful masters. The same police officer and Moidu lock horns in the movie later, after Moidu's shocking realisation of deceit. Moidu's characterisation has close parallels with Balan of *Kammatti Paadam*, as both of them are deceived by their masters, turning them

against their kin. Despite realising their mistake, the cost they pay for it is immense. The film's climax portrays the gruesome episode from the history of Mattancherry, as the peacefully protesting workers are shot by the police, where three of them die and many are wounded. The callousness of the force is yet again on display here. *Thuramukham* is an embodiment of police horror that can be let loose on people whenever power desires it. The film is significant for the dismantling of the hegemonic cop representation in Malayalam cinema. The Khaki is portrayed here with blood stains on it, which puts them on the dock. The above-discussed films of Rajeev Ravi are immensely important to fathom the dynamic transformation in the politics of portrayal. The ideological shift across the decades is to be seriously taken into account.

The phenomenon of honour killing refers to the murder of an individual, most often a woman, by her family members on the pretext of preserving familial, caste, or religious honour, typically in response to perceived transgressions of social norms, particularly those governing sexuality, marriage, and caste endogamy. It constitutes a brutal assertion of patriarchal and caste-based power structures that violently resist challenges to traditional authority, especially in the realm of intimate relationships. Although patriarchal regimes predominantly target women's autonomy, it is also pertinent to note that men, particularly those from lower castes or different religious backgrounds, are victimised when their relationships with upper-caste or dominant-community women are perceived as transgressive. Defining honour killings, Ramakrishnan says, "Honour killings, a euphemism for murder, is violence committed by a group of one community to discourage, curb or

annul marriages between persons of different communities, motivated by a perceived affront to the *honour of the community*, basically a feudal and patriarchal value" ("Honour"). Dalits are often victimised in the terror unleashed by upper castes in such instances of caste based violence, and murders are commonplace for many inter-caste couples in Tamil Nadu, when one of the partners is from a Scheduled Caste. While investigating honour killings in Tamil Nadu, Nithya Pandian and Jahnavi say, "Between 2020 and 2022 alone, activists have recorded at least 18 incidents of caste killings in the state, although the numbers recorded by the police are much lower" (Pandian et al.).

In the Indian scenario, the caste or religious angle can be easily traced to every instance of honour killing. In 2010, the central govt. proposed to make a law in Parliament to curb honour killing. Interestingly, the police can be seen as an active agent in many such cases. As mentioned in the introduction chapter, the murder of Kevin, a Dalit youth from Kerala, is a typical example of the police's dubious involvement in such instances. In the Kevin murder case, when he was abducted by the family members of his partner, the local police refused to file a complaint on his family initially. As a report on the issue says, "… at the police station, the family say they were met with a lack of empathy and arrogance from police officers. "We reached the station early morning on Saturday. They told us to wait. By noon, Neenu also came to the police station. She also asked the police to file a case against her brother and cousins, but they did it only in the evening" (Balan).

Indian cinema has increasingly begun to address the theme of honour killings, with several films exposing the violent interplay of caste, patriarchy, and familial control. The Marathi film *Sairat* (2016), directed by Nagraj Manjule, presents a powerful indictment of caste-based violence through a poignant narrative centred on a Dalit boy and an upper-caste girl. The film was both critically acclaimed and commercially successful, signalling a growing public engagement with these urgent issues. In the Malayalam context, *Kismath* (2016), directed by Shanavas K. Bavakutty, offers a similarly bold critique of moral policing and social conservatism. Drawing from a real-life incident, the film explores the consequences of an interfaith relationship between a Muslim man and a Hindu woman in a deeply stratified and patriarchal society. *Kismath* highlights how societal notions of honour, when policed by the state and community alike, can culminate in life-threatening violence, particularly against the marginalised.

Kismath (2016) claims to be based on real events and narrates the tragic story of Irfan and Anitha, an interfaith couple whose relationship challenges deeply entrenched caste and religious boundaries. Irfan, a young man from an affluent Muslim family, falls in love with Anitha, a Dalit woman from a socioeconomically marginalised background. Complicating their relationship further in a conservative socio-cultural milieu is the fact that Anitha is five years older than Irfan. When familial consent proves unattainable, the couple turns to the police for protection—an act that proves disastrous.

Sub-Inspector Ajai Menon, a Savarna officer depicted as both corrupt and casteist, betrays the couple by alerting their families and obstructing their efforts to

remain together. Rather than safeguarding their rights as citizens, the police function as enforcers of social orthodoxy. The climax reveals Irfan's murder at the hands of his brother, underlining the fatal consequences of a society unwilling to accommodate transgressive love. In the film's final scene, Anitha, though devastated, is shown attempting to regain agency—symbolising resilience amidst systemic oppression.

Kismath offers a scathing critique of the Indian police force, particularly in its casteist and patriarchal operations. Anitha, the Dalit protagonist, is subjected to relentless harassment at the police station, often in the form of caste-based slurs and indignities. Her treatment reflects the entrenched social hierarchies that shape the functioning of law enforcement in India. In a telling sequence, a group of policemen openly discuss caste while a drunk man is brought into custody; the man credits his caste status for his prompt release. This juxtaposition highlights the caste pride and subaltern aversion embedded within police institutions, especially in states like Kerala, which often project a progressive self-image.

The film's portrayal of Ajai Menon, whose Savarna identity is marked by his surname, marks a critical shift in the cinematic depiction of the police. While Malayalam cinema in the 1990s, especially through figures like Suresh Gopi, frequently celebrated the macho-Savarna cop as a heroic figure who restores order through violent justice, *Kismath* deliberately dismantles this myth. Ajai is portrayed as unscrupulous and complicit in a range of injustices. In one scene, he violently intimidates a migrant labourer who approaches the police after a road accident, siding instead with the accused. In another sequence, he coerces Shihab, a young

motor mechanic, into falsely confessing to theft to protect his corrupt colleague Praveen, who had used his position to steal vehicle engines impounded by the police. Shihab's coerced confession demonstrates how the police use systemic power to manufacture guilt and insulate themselves from accountability.

Ajai Menon is thus emblematic of a broader ideological shift in the representation of law enforcement in Indian cinema—from glorified enforcers of a moral order to corrupt custodians of caste and class hierarchies. The transformation reflects the growing critical awareness of how state institutions, especially the police, function in postcolonial India—not as neutral protectors of law, but as instruments of dominant-caste hegemony and systemic injustice. This refiguring of the police character, from hypermasculine saviour to authoritarian enabler of social violence, is indicative of the changing ideological and aesthetic currents in contemporary Malayalam cinema. The role of evolving political discourse, particularly around caste and state power, in enabling this cinematic shift will be examined in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Kismath problematises the role of the Khaki in enforcing a moral code of conduct. The police, as a deep state, are working hard to satisfy the conservative value systems. Here, constitutional morality is overtaken by socio-religious morality with the aid of the repressive force. The SI can be seen mocking the couple, citing their inter-religious marriage and the complications it could create. The goal of the cop is clearly to persuade the couple to give up their adventure and succumb to the social conventions. This attitude of the police raises certain serious questions, like who gave the cops the authority to judge the choice of the citizens? Where should

the police stay when it comes to the choice between constitutional values and social morality values? What is the role of the police in ensuring justice for the subalterns? These questions are significant considering the probable evolution of our land into a semi-fascist police state. In the movie, Irfan's father is the secretary of the mosque. When the SI learns about it, his sole aim is to separate the couple for the sake of the family of Irfan. The tendency to stand with power is evident in this episode. Interestingly, the police station is used by a Hindutva activist to advise Anita about the possible 'perils' of inter-religious marriage. Thus, a secular, state administrative office is turned into a moralist space of ultra-traditional values.

The majority of the movie scenes take place in the police station. As only a few flashback scenes are shot outside, the police station is the vital place of action. The director's take on the space here is significant, as it is shown as a gloomy place with negative vibes. The film intentionally creates an atmosphere of suffocation, portraying a society where power determines everything and social hierarchy is dominant. The film ends by strongly commenting on the diabolic designs of fanatic society, which broke up the union of two individuals, citing caste and religion. The death of Irfan is a classic case of honour killing, as the family places its honour above the rights of a member. The concept of "governmentality" by Foucault, which was discussed earlier in the chapter, is applicable here too, as the family, as an institution, demonstrates the traits of an authoritarian state and acts as an instrument of the state. *Kismath* is the tragic tale of individuals being hunted down in the name of social honour with the assistance of the police. The police incarnate as the repressive hand of the state to discipline its citizens. The repressive nature of the

police force is unravelled and questioned in the film, much like many of the other films of the period.

The state and its most trusted arm, the police, always try to distinguish between the citizenry to regulate them. The differentiation is mostly based on discipline, and the disciplined sect is always included, whereas the other is relegated to the margins. The undisciplined are stripped of their rights and treated as a liability to the state. They are considered a threat to the "well-maintained order" created by the state system. Such exceptions are a commonality in an authoritarian power model, where the rights of people are determined by the degree of discipline. The state acts as a demi-god, suspending the rule of law for its own sake. Such instances occur whenever the state feels threatened by the uprising of the people, which could shake the foundations of power. It is an established myth that during these extraordinary times, the values and rights of a citizen/ a group of citizens are temporarily suspended. Wars and civil wars often create such exceptional situations apart from strong and continuous rebellions from certain groups that aim to destabilise or overthrow the state. The state uses the police as its repressive agent in these times, and such drastic measures, which are not validated by the rule of law, are supposed to be approved by the "law-abiding", disciplined citizens.

In his influential theorisation of sovereign power and biopolitics, Giorgio Agamben introduces the concept of *Homo Sacer*, a figure derived from archaic Roman law. A Homo Sacer is an individual who, having been excluded from the juridical-political order, is simultaneously placed under the power of the sovereign and deprived of legal protection. Such a person can be killed without the act being

considered homicide, and yet cannot be sacrificed in religious rites—thereby existing in a paradoxical state of "bare life" (nuda vita) (Agamben, 1998). This figure exemplifies the extreme operation of state power: the capacity to strip individuals of political status and rights, thereby rendering them vulnerable to state violence without recourse to justice.

As Agamben says,

> What defines the status of homo sacer is therefore not the originary ambivalence of the sacredness that is assumed to belong to him, but rather both the particular character of the double exclusion into which he is taken and the violence to which he finds himself exposed. This violence-the unsanctionable killing that, in his case, anyone may commit-is classifiable neither as sacrifice nor as homicide, neither as the execution of a condemnation to death nor as sacrilege. Subtracting itself from the sanctioned forms of both human and divine law, this violence opens a sphere of human action that is neither the sphere of sacrum facre nor that of profane action. (*Homo Sacer* 82)

Agamben's concept provides a compelling framework to understand the workings of state power in the context of insurgencies and state repression, particularly in postcolonial democracies such as India. The state's capacity to designate certain subjects as threats to sovereignty allows it to enact violence upon them with legal and moral impunity. This logic was particularly evident during the rise and suppression of the Naxalite movement in India.

Emerging in the late 1960s, the Naxalite uprising—named after the village of Naxalbari in West Bengal—represented a radical, militant response to systemic landlessness, caste oppression, and class exploitation. Rooted in Maoist ideology and emerging from the disillusionment with mainstream communist politics, the movement rapidly spread to various parts of India, including Kerala. In Kerala, a faction of the Communist Party of India (pre-split) splintered off to embrace armed revolution, rejecting what they perceived as the party's reformist drift. The movement began in 1967 as a radical breakaway from the Communist Party of India (Marxist), emerging from a peasant uprising in Naxalbari, West Bengal. Disillusioned with the CPI(M)'s parliamentary path, its leaders advocated Maoist armed struggle to dismantle feudal landholdings and address caste and class exploitation. Understanding the Naxal movement, Rabindra Ray observes,

> The Naxalite, however much committed to the welfare of the dispossessed, is a Naxalite on grounds of conviction having to do with intellectual proclivities and dilemmas. The roots of the Naxalite phenomenon do not lie in the poverty of India's labouring rural population, but in the psychological traumas of its urban educated young. These traumas are inextricably enmeshed in the oral and intellectual problems of the leading thought of our times. (XIII)

As the Naxalite organisation was banned, they entered the forests and worked against the state using guerrilla methods. In Malayalam, there were numerous films depicting the movement, often sympathising with the youth, who had to sacrifice everything for the sake of an imaginary revolution. *Udalil Kothiya*

Charithra Smaranakal by K.P. Jayakumar chronicles the films based on the Naxal movement and analyses how the audience reacted to the cinematic movement. As this chapter deals with films in the second decade of the new millennium, it is important to enquire about the representation of the police while discussing themes such as the Naxal movement. In this regard, *Thalappavu,* directed by Madhupal, deserves attention. Although it was released in 2008, a few years before the inception of the new generation wave, it is still a significant milestone considering the representation of the police in Malayalam cinema.

Thalappavu is based on the confession of the police constable P. Ramachandran Nair, who admitted to the murder of the Naxal activist Varghese. He was compelled by his superior officers to commit the crime. The confession, which came after many years, created a stir in the socio-political arena of Kerala. The brutal suppression of Naxalites by the police in the late 1960s and 1970s was a hotly contested topic in human rights circles. The film focuses on retired constable Raveendran Pillai, who confesses to the murder of the Naxal leader Joseph. He was forced by his superior officer to kill Varghese in a fake encounter. The film sympathetically portrays Varghese as a man of great humanitarian and altruistic qualities. The movie sheds light on the atrocities unleashed by the cops on common people, including the tribals, at the behest of a feudal lord. The feudal lord is killed by Varghese and his comrades, which leads to a vehement police reaction. The film narrates the shocking tale of state highhandedness in the form of Raveendran Pillai's fading memory. The film portrays Mr. Pillai as a victim, a pawn in the wretched

game played by the authorities. *Thalappavu* asks sharp and shrewd questions to power and holds them accountable.

At the beginning of the film, the attitude of the police officers and their patron, the feudal lord, is unravelled to the audience, and they are made to realise the partisan and oppressive machinery at work. The police officers can be seen asking for raw deer meat from the Forest. They exploit both the forest as well as its dwellers, the tribals. The feudal lord is the epitome of evil, a promiscuous man devoid of any semblance of humanity. Though the Naxals are engaging in anti-state/illegal activities, the perspective adopted by the director acquits them and accuses the authorities of forcing the youth to take weapons and fight them. The criticism of power shapes the narrative structure of the film. As the Apparatus theory posits, cinema is an ideological medium that influences the viewer and shapes his/her imagination. The director's perspective/vantage point is inherent in every frame. In *Thalappavu*, the conscious attempt of Madhupal, the director, is to manipulate the viewers' sentiments and pit them against the agents of power. The ideological vantage point is quite evident as every frame of the movie narrates the agonising tale of discrimination and brutality. In the film, the police can be seen torturing Joseph, and they never admit to his arrest as his whereabouts are unknown; it gives the police the opportunity to settle scores with him, bypassing legal hurdles. This extra-judicial method of functioning was a feature of the Kerala police in the 1970s, especially during the national emergency. *Thalappavu* highlights the historical injustices inflicted on the subaltern by blaming those who facilitated the abuse of power.

The movie *Thalappavu* portrays Raveendran Pillai as a representation of the common man, who is powerless and victimised. He is an ordinary police constable who finds himself fighting against an unjust system or empire. The audience is made to feel the vulnerabilities of the powerless in those times, and Raveendran Pillai is portrayed as a cop, devoid of the usual embellishments attached to such characters. He is meek, obedient and submissive and has been easily manipulated by the higher officials by instigating fear psychosis. Raveendran Pillai is compelled by his superiors to kill Varghese. When he resists, the officer threatens to kill him and make it look like an encounter. This blatant violation of the rule of law was hailed as heroic in the Suresh Gopi films of the 1990s, whereas *Thalappavu* condemns this trend in strong terms. Fake encounters and extra-judicial murders were rampant in Kerala during the days of the 'Naxal hunt'. The cops were given impunity by the state to suppress the movement at any cost. The infamous "Rajan Case" is worth referring to when a student was accused of active participation in the Naxal movement and arrested illegally. His whereabouts were unknown, and the police initially claimed innocence. Later, the public ire raged against the then government headed by C. Achutha Menon. Rajan's father, T.V. Eachara Varier, was fighting a lone war through the courts against the state machinery to unravel the truths behind his son's disappearance. The book *Naxalbari and After*: *A Frontier Anthology* narrates the incident thus,

> Rajan and many other students of the Calicut Regional Engineering College were active sympathisers of the party. They arranged shelters and organized funds for the party cadres. Following the attack on the Kayanna Police

> Station, Rajan and hundreds of others were rounded up in Calicut district. They were tortured at the Kakkayam camp. Political as well as police bosses visited and supervised the torture of political workers and sympathizers. In the torture camp, Comrade Rajan died in March 1976. His body was destroyed secretly by the police officers. (Sen, et al. 255)

The movie pays tribute to the victims of undemocratic and illegal punishments that were inflicted in the past. It also sheds light on the extent to which the authorities might go to castigate those who challenge the system's juggernaut. Here, the cops spread scandalous stories about Mr. Pilai to morally destroy him, which leads to his wife deserting him. They also put him under surveillance and followed him in civilian dress. This isolation and witch-hunting affect even the mental balance of Mr. Pilai. In the film, he says that the law only goes its way and it never goes in the direction of the common man. The film tries to paint a realistic picture of the times, and it also conveys a curious message that the lawlessness of the Naxals was preferable to the lawful police officers. The movie is scathing in its depiction of power, i.e., the police. It can be assumed that the paradigm shifts in the portrayal of cop characters in the new-gen period kicked off with *Thalappavu*. The problematization of history makes the film immensely significant, and any study on the representation of the police in the new-gen age must refer to *Thalappavu* for the novel manner in which the khaki was shown on the screen.

The Indian criminal justice system's unfair treatment of subalterns raises serious concerns. There have been numerous cases where the police have arrested underprivileged people without evidence, resulting in long trials that often last for

years or even decades. Unfortunately, innocent parties are often punished before the truth is revealed. Caste, class, religious and social hierarchies act as impediments in the impartial execution of justice. Many activists, who campaign against the death penalty, draw attention to the high number of subaltern population among the penalised. Amnesty International has pointed out ten reasons to abolish the death penalty, and the fifth point says that the punishment is discriminatory in its application. It says,

> Throughout the world, the death penalty is disproportionately used against disadvantaged people. Some condemned prisoners from the most impoverished social classes would not have been sentenced to death if they were from wealthier sectors of society. In these cases, either the accused are less able to find their way through the maze of the judicial system (because of a lack of knowledge, confidence or financial means), or the system reflects the generally negative attitude of society and the powerful towards them. It has also been proved that certain criminals run a greater risk of being condemned to death if their victims come from higher social classes. ("10 Reasons")

Power and privilege play a vital role in the execution of justice in India. The police are often accused of being partisan and bending the rules to favour the powerful. The policing system, which was the repressive machinery of the colonisers, continues to discriminate against the underprivileged. Has Malayalam cinema gravely addressed this issue? The question is immensely significant considering films from Tamil, such as *Visaranai* and *Jai Bhim*, which laid bare the

inhuman workings of the police machinery that victimises the powerless and saves the powerful at any cost. A few Malayalam films have attempted to shed light on this aspect of the policing system, and among them, *Oru Kuprasidha Payyan,* directed by Madhupal and released in 2018, deserves notice. The film focuses on the work of the police, and their zeal to accuse an innocent, underprivileged worker when the real culprits escaped the arms of the law. The movie has adopted a realistic pattern of narration and shows how justice remains a mirage to the impoverished and the marginalised.

Oru Kuprasidha Payyan tells the story of Ajayan, a poor hotel labourer, who was framed for the murder of a woman. The woman was an acquaintance of his who had eloped from Tamil Nadu after an inter-caste love affair decades ago. The crime branch was under immense pressure to solve the case, so they decided to frame Ajayan by threatening his coworkers to give fake testimonies. Later, a hapless Ajayan was incarcerated, and without legal help, he could nott fight his case. Realising his situation, the court granted him legal assistance, and Advocate Hanna took up his case. Her investigations into the annals of the case proved to be decisive, as she unearthed the police conspiracy in the case. The murder was supposedly done by the woman's relatives, and the film ended with the acquittal of Ajayan. The film presents the darker shades of police procedures and laments the discriminatory attitude meted out to the underprivileged.

The movie holds a faithful mirror to the workings of Kerala police without any semblance of glorification, unlike the previous decade. When the pressure on the crime branch mounts, they are given the order from the higher echelons of power

to catch anyone who does not need to be a suspect and frame them in the case. The officer says that they must be careful enough to ensure that the "Catch should be perfect" (*Oru Kuprasidha Payyan* 00:41:44-00:41:47). Ajayan is continuously harassed at the police station and tortured for days. Finally, he is forced to admit to the murder. The director strongly criticises the police for their way of functioning when they fail to find the right suspect. Instead, they create one that fits the case perfectly. Once the profile of a poor labourer is found out and verified, he is witch-hunted and isolated before his total submission. Like Joseph K from *The Trial*, Ajayan too is kept in the dark about his involvement in the crime, despite the wheel of the rule of law being constantly in motion. When his advocate asks Ajayan why he confessed to the crime, he sarcastically says that if anyone gets the beating that he got, they would have admitted to killing Indira Gandhi. The methods of the colonial police are still in use, and the film makes the audience brood about the harsh realities existing here. A hapless, underprivileged victim like Ajayan is easy prey to the marauding police machinery, which is on the hunt to find easy targets.

The Indian police are notorious for raking up communal angles whenever it is deemed necessary. Often, they are accused of partisanship, favouring the majority at the behest of the state. The police films of the 1990s have proved how this attitude was prevalent and approved by the filmmakers as the zeitgeist. *Oru Kuprasidha Payyan* raises the communal question about the attitude of the police and criticises the force by subtly incorporating a subtext into the film. In the movie, when Ajayan is arrested, the cops present him as Ajayan alias Ajmal. The new name is alien to both Ajayan and his friends, yet the police stand firm in their opinion that he has

another name, which proves that he is a Muslim and not a Hindu. The reason for this cunning nomenclature is attributed to the fact that he was handed over to the orphanage by a Muslim man. Though it may sound harmless, the history of the Indian penal system throws up some staggering data, which shows how Muslims and Dalits find themselves at the receiving end when it comes to harsher punishments. Advocate Hanna discovers this villainous plot by the police and unravels it in court. She points out how bestowing a Muslim identity on an accused can make him more susceptible before the law in a land where religious prejudice still holds sway. Ajay's transformation as Ajmal can make the task of the police much easier, as his arguments may become more fragile henceforth. This perilous communal game is not fictitious, as Indian reality is much gloomier when it comes to the policing system. The introduction chapter discussed incidents such as Hashimpura, where the partisan communal attitude of the police was on display.

The filmmaker intends to lay bare the glorified status of the police as the saviour of the people, the land and the destroyer of evil. The movie instead focuses on the stark reality of the time, without compromising a wee bit. The communal angle worked by the police is further established in the film, as the virtuous hotel owner, Ashraf, is threatened by the police officer about his father's arrest in the past for wrongly portraying the map of India. The cop accuses his father of being a traitor and an Islamic terrorist. The veiled threat is that if Mr. Ashraf does not toe the line, he may be incarcerated, citing anti-national activities. The fear of Indian Muslims being branded as anti-national by the state is a shocking reality, and the police play the role of the repressive agents who carry out the punishments. *Oru Kuprasidha*

Payyan takes the criticism of the police to a new level, accentuating its habit of differentiating between the citizenry. From planting fake evidence to creating fake identities of the victims, the devilry in uniform is pointed out and criticised. The new generation trends' nonchalant attitude of portraying khaki in grey shades gets further emphasis in *Oru Kuprasidha Payyan*. Like in *Thalappavu*, the narrative sympathises with the underprivileged, and the camera is brave enough to capture the atrocities orchestrated by the state. The film is yet another example of the changing patterns of portrayal as far as the police in Malayalam cinema are concerned. The transformation in a decade is huge enough to deserve a close study of the matter.

The above-mentioned films analysed the portrayal of Kerala police on screen and the directors' perspectives. An important question that arises here is whether the police are the same everywhere. The basic characteristic features of the Indian police force include its penchant for highhandedness and scant regard for the law, which do not need any further testimony. The Malayalam filmmakers post the new generation wav, focusing on the workings of Kerala police critically and deconstructing the established patterns of glorification. In this context, the movie *Mayaanadhi* (2017), directed by Aashiq Abu, needs a close examination. The movie portrays the Tamil Nadu police and focuses on the force's excesses by narrating the story of a couple. The film is a liberal adaptation of the classic French film *Breathless* (1960), directed by Jean-Luc Godard. Though it is structured as a tragic love story, the inner layers of the workings of power need to be thoroughly inspected. It is also interesting to note that, even though it is a Malayalam film, with most of the incidents happening in Kerala, especially in Cochin, the film does not

show any Kerala police officers. Instead, the only cops seen by the audience are the Tamil Nadu police, who came to Kerala to nab a murderer. The movie was well-received at the box office, along with gaining critical acclaim.

The story of the film revolves around Aparna and Mathews (Mathan), a couple who have different approaches towards life but are still attracted to each other. Mathan has betrayed the trust of Aparna, a struggling actress, which is still disturbing her. Though Mathan has confessed and wants to make amends, she is apprehensive about his motives. Mathan's goal is to make quick money and settle abroad, and for this purpose, he has been involved in an illegal money laundering business. While conducting business in Tamil Nadu, the police unexpectedly intervened, resulting in the death of all of his team members. Mathan has to kill a police officer to escape, and later, he comes to Kerala to meet Aparna. The film traces the love life of the couple and their growing differences. Ultimately, the police caught up with Mathan in Kerala, and instead of following legal procedures, they staged a fake encounter and shot him.

Films like *Jai Bim* and *Karnan* have depicted the atrocities of the Tamil Nadu police chillingly without mincing any details. The terror unleashed by the cops on Dalits speaks volumes about the caste discrimination and police raj that existed in villages. In several cases of honour killing, too, the dubious involvement of police was noted. In *Mayaanadhi*, the cops are determined to exact revenge on the murderer for killing their colleague. They seldom care about the legal procedures here. A group of three police officers, consisting of two seniors and one junior, travels to Kerala to apprehend Mathan. The junior cop is the only one concerned

about the law, whereas the other two simply want to take revenge, making it a personal issue rather than a procedural one. The police are trying to catch Mathan through his girlfriend, Aparna. The methods they have adopted to achieve this goal are callous and alarming. The police barge into a ladies' lavatory and threaten Aparna, which ends in them slapping her. They emotionally torture her just to get their target. The senior officer says to her, “We are ugly enough to go to any extent” (*Mayaanadhi* 1:32:35-1:32:43). The depiction of the methods adopted by the police may seem like a common thing, which is to be expected from them, but the subtle way of criticising the inhuman and torturous manner is not lost here. Aashiq Abu proves that khaki, whether in Kerala or Tamil Nadu, functions as a repressive machine as far as common citizens and subalterns are concerned. The state never intervenes in such operations, and the rule of law is temporarily suspended. The film shows the extent to which the force may go to achieve its goals, which are beyond scrutiny.

In a crucial scene in *Mayaanadhi*, when the junior cop casts aspersions on killing Mathan in an encounter, the senior cop replies thus, “Have you seen the statue of the goddess of justice? There is a weighing scale in her right hand. What’s in her right hand? A sword. That’s the police. The public should fear the system. If that fear is lost, society will not be under control. It is our job” (*Mayaanadhi* 2:00:52-2:01:00). This indicates the mindset of the law enforcers, who believe in frightening the public using the “sword” (force, violence) at will. This violent method of enforcing the law is justified, and the junior cop accepts the explanation. The film comments openly on the police’s self-styled vigilantism, which evades the

maze of the Indian legal system. In the past, especially during the 1990s, such instances of blatant vigilantism were celebrated as heroic, placing the supercops as the ultimate saviours. The times have changed, and the novel trends in portrayal flay the police vigilantism (a euphemism for atrocities like fake encounters) and sympathise with victims like Mathan. The sadistic nature of the police is also on display in the film when the officer states about informing Mathan in his dying moments that he was betrayed by his girlfriend. When the junior cop says it is nothing but sadistic, the officer says that he will make sure that Mathan dies in pain. The insensitivity is beyond imagination, and a human being is tortured to the limit here. The film shows how the cops believe in taking the law into their own hands and meting out punishments at will, as their divine right and responsibility.

The characterisation of the cop heroes of the 1990s is noted for their manifestation of macho attributes. They seldom respected women as fellow beings and considered themselves superior and powerful. Instances of such superheroes slut shaming and demeaning women are plenty, especially in the films of Suresh Gopi. In the book *Policing Citizens*, P.A.J. Waddington says,

> The "cult of masculinity" is the celebration of the core aspect of the role—the willingness and ability to use force; the sense of a crime-fighting mission provides ideological justification for the authority that is exercised against fellow citizens; the abusive, and often racist, denigration of "police property" is the means through which moral dilemmas are routinely neutralised; and the defensive solidarity of the lower ranks is the frank recognition of the precariousness of their position. Instead of pathologizing

> the police, this analysis of the police sub-culture exposes the surprising fragility of what appears at first sight to be a robust powerful social institution. Police work so hard at affirming what their experience denies because they occupy a marginal position in any society that has pretensions to liberal democracy (120).

This observation acquires particular significance when situated within the evolving cinematic representation of police personnel in Malayalam cinema. During the late 20th and early 21st centuries, police characters were often depicted through the lens of hypermasculinity, embodying a hegemonic ideal that valorised physical dominance, authoritarianism, and a readiness to resort to violence. These portrayals not only mirrored but also reinforced patriarchal values and the cultural legitimacy of state-sanctioned force. The cinematic cop of this era—frequently portrayed by actors such as Suresh Gopi—was celebrated as a moral crusader whose violent methods were justified by the inefficacy of legal institutions. As Rachel Dwyer in his book Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema has noted, moral crusadership has been integral to the cinematic narratives in Indian cinema. In general, the representation of state power in Indian cinema has often oscillated between demonisation and romanticisation. In the Malayalam context, the dominant narrative until the early 2000s largely glorified law enforcement officers as embodiments of divine justice, whose transgressions of legal boundaries were framed as necessary evils in a morally degraded society.

However, with the advent of the so-called “new generation” wave in Malayalam cinema—approximately from 2010 onwards—there has been a

discernible shift in both aesthetic sensibility and political consciousness. Films in this period demonstrate a more critical engagement with institutional power structures, including the police force. The cult of masculinity, once central to the figure of the cop, is increasingly interrogated, deconstructed, or altogether subverted. Characters are portrayed as morally ambiguous, complicit in systemic corruption, or entangled in the socio-political hierarchies of caste, class, and religion.

This paradigmatic shift aligns with larger currents in global and regional film studies, which dismantle the monolithic image of state agents and open up representational space for critique, irony, and nuance. The "new generation" aesthetic and ideological turn in Malayalam cinema marks a significant departure from the earlier glorification of authoritarian masculinity, ushering in a phase where the ethical contradictions of law enforcement are foregrounded rather than concealed.

In *Mayaanadhi*, the senior cop can be seen trying to educate the junior about the nature of women. According to him, women cannot be trusted, and the greatest folly of Mathews was that he trusted a woman. The most important point to be noted here is the vantage point taken by the director. The voice of the text does not agree with his opinion, and he is shown as an egoistic, sexist, violent police officer with little regard for democratic values. The movie critiques power, its multifarious manifestations and the violence perpetrated by it. *Mayaanadhi* further shows how excess power can transcend state boundaries, and the fate of hapless citizens remains the same.

The genre of police films in Malayalam always followed an over-the-top or exaggerated style of narration, which placed the police and their work on a higher pedestal, far away from the comprehension of the public. The realm of law and order was portrayed as a mysterious space, directly controlled by the omnipotent state. As depicted in the films of the 1990s. The public has a passive role in the entire scenario, as they are not involved in the legal proceedings. The gaze of such films is important to reckon with, as they avoid the perspective of the public. The gaze of the camera in such films is a hierarchical one, with machoistic and powerful tendencies, often glorifying the actions of the police. It celebrates violence and lawlessness and deems it necessary for the public order. An objective depiction of the mundane police procedure and the close study of police personnel was not to be found in any of the films of the previous era, as the taste of the times favoured generalisation at the cost of subtle scrutiny. This is a crucial phase, where the new generation differs starkly from the methods adopted by the cop genre of the 1990s. As established earlier in the chapter, the new-gen filmmakers did away with glorification and preferred in-depth examination and scrutiny. The hitherto unexplored layers of the working of the police system bestow a novel understanding of the police force. Here, a film like *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), directed by Dileesh Pothan, presents significant opportunities to understand the realities surrounding it. The camera stays away from glorification, instead taking an objective stand, and the audience is involved in the process of the discourse to make meaning. The film is a revolutionary attempt to peel off the ornamentation around the police, already established by the existing traditional system of portrayal and present it as a comprehensible human enterprise, focusing on the mundane realities.

Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum belongs to the 'neorealistic' phase of the new generation Malayalam cinema, where a new crop of films with neorealistic aesthetic designs arrived on the scene. Films like *Maheshinte Prathikaaram*, *Kumbalangi Nights*, *Ee*. *Ma*. *Yau*, etc. came out with a novel style of narration as the films, though part of the commercial set-up, steered clear of the typical market-driven gimmicks and chose a realistic approach to storytelling. These films set their own pace, slowly developing the plot and carefully building the character arc and conflicts. The social media troll pages nicknamed this trend as 'prakruthi cinema' (natural cinema) for its slow pace and lack of action. *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* is the first film that has adopted this new style while depicting a police drama. The film narrates the story of Prasad and Sreeja, an inter-caste couple, who have come to Kasaragod, the northern end of Kerala, to escape the fury of their casteist families. They are struggling to find a permanent income and have decided to try their luck in farming. At this juncture, while they were travelling in a bus, Sreeja's chain was snatched by a thief. The film then focuses its entire action inside a police station where Prasad, Sreeja and the thief, along with a few policemen, are involved. The thief, the character played by Fahad Fazil, tried his absolute best to deny the allegation against him. Later, a medical test proved his guilt, and he even tried to escape, running away from the police. In the end, a desperate thief tells Prasad where he has hidden the gold chain after facing severe torture from the police. The film shows even the minutest details regarding police procedures, and was also in the news for employing actual police personnel as actors. The film comes up with certain important notions regarding the portrayal of the police, which need to be examined carefully.

Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum is shot in a documentary style, detailing everything that happens in a police station. Though it is a feature film, the movie's structure resembles a documentary. The cops are portrayed as 'normal' humans, sans the extraordinariness of the 1990s. The dialogues are written in a manner that gives the audience a clear idea about the daily transactions happening in a police station. Does it mean that this new avatar of police or the 'human police' is different from the earlier discussed oppressive police machinery? The film provides an affirmative answer that it does not. In the film, the director has penned numerous occasions where the police in their violent avatar rule the roost. A man, who was accused of drinking and causing trouble, is given the task of carrying water to the police station in the scorching heat. The act is shown as a routine one as far as this police station is concerned. The idea of punishment directly meted out by the men in khaki is implied here. The film has deconstructed the myth of the supercop saviour, someone who can successfully cross all hurdles and mete out justice to the needy. Here, even the superior police officers are portrayed as fearful and desperate, too preoccupied with their careers and the impact this case would have on them. Instead of finding the truth, the police are keen to somehow resolve it and save their day. The lack of intent at the outset on the part of the cops bears testimony to their attitude. The film sheds light on the relationship between the police and the legal system of the land. On many occasions, the character Chandran, a police constable, can be seen constantly expressing his distrust of the same system in which he is also a part. He is the one who worries Prasad the most, as he seldom gives him any hope about the retrieval of the gold chain. Chandran says that the legal process is too slow and that it may take more than a year for them to get their chain back. This is a clear

indication of the attitude of the men in khaki who are little interested in bringing justice to the disadvantaged, and the subtlety of criticism by the director here is not lost. Prasad and Sreeja are symbols of the helpless citizens, at the mercy of the police and are also depending on the efficiency of the system

The cops in the film are presented as sly, manipulative and selfish people who are not committed to justice. The police constable Chandran, on more than one occasion, tries to manipulate Sreeja to get the case done at the earliest. He even shouts and mildly threatens her. The vulnerable couple is made to wait endlessly without a proper answer to any of their questions they are made to feel insecure. In a scene, a shopkeeper tells Prasad that Constable Chandran is notorious for his third-degree measures and was transferred here as a punishment. This further disillusions Prasad. The impoverished Prasad is made to pay for the food of the police and even the thief while travelling for medical tests and further legal procedures. This callous and insensitive attitude of the cops is felt by the audience through the disappointment of Prasad, who represents the common citizen. He is also fed up with the mundane work at the police station, where he is simply reduced to an onlooker/outsider. This banal work of the police reminds one of the depictions of the legal system in Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, where the tedious labyrinth of the system exhausts and frightens a common citizen who encounters it. The cops are only concerned about their promotions and fame, as they frequently mention the news of the theft and the likely perks to follow for nabbing the thief.

Torture is a common method adopted by the police to make the accused admit to their crimes. In the case of D.K. Basu vs. the State of Bengal, the Supreme

Court observed that,

> Custodial violence, including torture and death in the lock-ups, strikes a blow at the rule of law, which demands that the powers of the executive should not only be derived from law but also that the same should be limited by law. Custodial violence is a matter of concern. It is aggravated by the fact that it is committed by persons who are supposed to be the protectors of the citizens. It is committed under the shield of uniform and authority in the four walls of a police station or lock-up, the victim being totally helpless. The protection of an individual from torture and abuse by the police and other law-enforcing officers is a matter of deep concern in a free society. (Aftab et al.)

Even the Supreme Court had to alert the public regarding the impunity of the police in exercising third-degree measures. The system behaves as if such methods are consented to by society. In most such cases of custodial torture and deaths, the victims are subalterns. As discussed in the previous chapter, the superhero policeman, who inflicts violence upon the enemies, was hailed as a model cop or saviour. In reality, as depicted in the new generation films, the torture at the police stations causes intense emotional and physical trauma. In *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum,* when the thief resists and does not admit the crime, the cops resort to violent methods. This even frightens the complainants, Prasad and Sreeja, who could nott bear witnessing it. The scene is portrayed interestingly as the audience is not made to sympathise with the complainant but rather feel empathy towards the

thief. Though the audience is aware of the crime committed by the thief, the director is clear in his approach to show police torture as an inhuman method that must stop.

Every frame in the film tries to convey the mood of a police station without adding anything fictional. The audience, now feeling the tension in the air and watching it from the eyes of Prasad and Sreeja, gets to know the system from close range. This helps in breaking the estrangement that had been created by cinema from its inception. Earlier, whenever Khaki was portrayed on screen, the usual added elements of exaggeration and glorification were visible. The movie unearths the layers of hierarchy that exist within the police force and how a common police constable feels threatened. In a scene, Chandran says, “Policing is an ungrateful profession. Those sitting above are merciless. I think, I’ll be in trouble tomorrow” (*Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* 1:16:35-1:16:43). This fear of the superiors results in utter frustration, and the common people have to bear the brunt. The movie is a vital document for understanding the transformation happening in the depiction of police on screen and the style and ideology preferred by the new generation of filmmakers. It is also a textbook for comprehending the psychology of the police and the structure of the maze of power they are involved in.

An analysis of the aforementioned films reveals a marked transformation in the cinematic representation of the police force in Malayalam cinema. This shift is not merely formal or stylistic; it is fundamentally ideological. The evolution signifies a rupture with long-standing narrative conventions that historically upheld the police as symbols of moral authority and custodians of justice. Instead, contemporary portrayals reflect a growing scepticism towards institutional power

and its complicity in structural violence. One of the key catalysts behind this transformation is the emergence of the "new generation wave in Malayalam cinema, which took shape in the early years of the second decade of the 21st century. As elaborated in the introductory section of this chapter, these filmmakers consciously deviated from the mainstream grammar of Malayalam cinema, embracing an aesthetic that was simultaneously experimental and politically engaged. Their narratives often privilege the subaltern, expose systemic corruption, and confront authoritarianism—an ideological orientation that directly challenges the glorification of state power, especially the police.

This radical departure in representational strategy bears thematic and aesthetic affinities with both the French New Wave and the Third Cinema movements. Like the French New Wave auteurs, the New Generation directors demonstrate a critical consciousness of form and an aversion to formulaic storytelling. Their films often exhibit a self-reflexive cinematic language, minimalism, and an intimate engagement with urban and rural spaces, aligning with the spirit of cinéma vérité. At the same time, the political undertones in their works—especially their critique of state violence, caste hierarchies, and patriarchal norms—resonate with the objectives of *Third Cinema*, a movement born in Latin America that sought to use cinema as a tool of resistance against neo-colonialism and imperialism. (Solanas et al.1969)

While these artistic tendencies had long been the preserve of parallel or "art" cinema, their integration into commercially successful Malayalam films marks a significant turning point. The fact that such politically subversive content now

permeates films with substantial production budgets and wide theatrical releases underscores the extent to which public discourse around institutional authority, particularly policing, has evolved in Kerala. This trend reflects not only changing audience sensibilities but also a broader cultural and political awakening that foregrounds questions of justice, accountability, and democratic values.

A significant facet that may be posited to have contributed to the emergence of the new aesthetics of Malayalam cinema is the emergence of a vibrant social media discourse in Kerala. The period of the new-gen trend also witnessed a booming social media culture where serious socio-political discourses were happening. Many of the new-gen filmmakers were active in social media circles and involved themselves in such discourses. Aashiq Abu is regarded as the first director to acknowledge the power of social media, as he advertised and promoted his film *Salt N' Pepper* using it. Political activism in Kerala was evolving in a hitherto unseen manner as youngsters with little experience in social activism jumped onto the scene and stood against the traditional value systems that were rooted in majoritarian hegemony. Protests like 'Kiss of Love', which shook the foundations of Kerala's social morality, had their inception in cyberspace. In his article "Urban Upheavals as Practices of New Sexual Ethics: 'Kiss of Love' Movement in India", T.T.Sreekumar says, " KoL represented a historical context when a large section of people had to express their unwillingness to be subjugated through such a weapon of violence. It also became a symbol for any such movement that could challenge the deep-rooted value systems and norms that define sexual contexts in India" (Sreekumar). Protest movements such as 'Kiss of Love,' which posed significant

challenges to Kerala's established moral frameworks, first emerged through digital platforms.

The ascension of Narendra Modi to power in 2014 and the subsequent assertion of Hindutva majoritarianism marked a turning point in the national political landscape, prompting widespread concern and resistance. Reports of vigilante attacks by cow protection groups targeting Muslims on allegations of beef consumption or cattle transportation began surfacing with increased frequency. In response, innovative modes of protest such as 'Beef fests' were organised, symbolic acts opposing the reported lynchings in North Indian states. Kerala too witnessed strong reactions, particularly from its youth, who turned to social media to critique the prevailing political atmosphere. A wide range of discussions emerged online, many of which expressed deep concern over the state's perceived overreach and the erosion of individual freedoms. The Kerala police were especially criticised for allegedly reinforcing a regressive social morality. Cultural collectives and artists (including the protest music group 'Oorali') also began organising events to oppose such moral policing. These digitally mediated discussions and expressions of dissent gradually shaped the cultural and political mood of the period.

The second decade of the new millennium saw the rise of Hindutva, which has been branded in social media circles as Hindutva 2.0 or Corporate Hindutva. The book *Neo-Hindutva': Evolving Forms, Spaces, and Expressions of Hindu Nationalism,* edited by Edward Anderson and Arkotong Longkumer, examines the new avatar of Hindutva and its model of functioning in social media. It also glimpses at the corporate nexus and the flourishing of crony capitalism under neo-

Hindutva's watch. Bhabani Shankar Nayak in his article "Hindutva, Crony Capitalism, and American Imperialism" observes,

> Business elites and influential business communities have been the lifeblood of Hindutva politics and its crony capitalist framework in the name of economic growth. The big bourgeoisie have consistently supported the authoritarian politics of Hindutva, aligning with the interests of local, regional, national, and international capitalist classes. This reciprocal relationship underscores the deep intertwining of economic and political power under the Hindutva model of economic development, concomitant with capitalism. (Nayak)

So, as the right-wing political ideology gained ground with a newfound zeal, the social media circles were hectic with ideological battles between the chauvinistic right-wing and the left-liberal democratic groups. These intense battles were often dominated by the Hindutva groups as they systematically captured online spaces using power and financial might. Sahana Udupa's concept of 'Enterprise Hindutva' is important here. Enterprise Hindutva advocates are of a new type. They are not formally affiliated with any party and do not consider themselves ideologues. Rather, they engage with social media professionally, in 'digital marketing' as it is called, where they use their skills and platforms to reshape public discourse towards Hindu nationalism. As she points out,

> Enterprise Hindutva, I suggest, should be located within this expanding global infrastructure for online influence management as well as popular participation in 'high politics' facilitated and animated by social media. In

> India, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was the first major political party to systematically adopt social media strategies for electoral gains. The run-up to the Parliamentary elections in 2014 witnessed a flurry of intense mobilization tactics on social media, spearheaded primarily by the BJP and its Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi. (Udupa 455)

This online warmongering heated the social media spheres in Kerala too, as the period witnessed several protests and strikes, often against elitist morality and religious intolerance. Kiss of Love, as mentioned earlier, can be cited as a perfect example as the liberal, anti-right-wing youth of Kerala joined hands in a maverick protest aiming to provoke the moral policing tendencies of Hindutva. Thus, an atmosphere was developing in Kerala that was marked by a zeitgeist filled with a progressive, anti-majoritarian ethos. It was a reaction against the crowning of Hindutva at the centre, as well as the elitist social practices that existed in Kerala. Historian Vinil Paul, in his works *Adimakeralathinte Adrishycharithram* and *Dalit Charithradamsanam,* unravels the hegemonic value systems concealed under the much-celebrated secular and progressive social fabric of Kerala. As he observes, Kerala's public sphere made sure that the subaltern identities and value systems are marginalised. The films that were released during the period placed hierarchical and prejudiced power centres in opposition and hailed a democratic and egalitarian system. The ideas represented were rooted in pluralism and a sharp contrast to the savarna ethos of the 1990s.

While postulating his notions on the ideological intricacies related to media representation, Stuart Hall has pointed out certain important facets. In his analysis,

Hall says that every representation by the media is the result of disparate ideological vantage points, which ultimately decide the manner of representation. Media representations must be understood as meaning-makers that could ascribe ideologically filled semantic patterns to what they represent. As Hall puts it, meanings are not inherent in things, but rather forced upon them with ideological aims. His theory of representation has been a pathbreaking concept in understanding the workings of media in the modern age. According to Hall, "representation is the production of meaning through language" (16). Media creates signs for the masses, and through such carefully built sign systems, it gives shape to narratives that reflect the dominant discourses or cultural/political patterns, often promoting stereotypes. Hall is adamant in arguing that meanings produced by media can never be viewed as objective reality; rather, it is made and disseminated intentionally by the creators.

Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding and his insights into cultural hegemony offer a valuable framework for understanding the dynamics of social media in the contemporary socio-political landscape. Social media platforms, once hailed as democratic spaces fostering participatory discourse, have increasingly come under scrutiny for their complicity with dominant hegemonic structures. Allegations against tech conglomerates such as Facebook, particularly in relation to the manipulation of public opinion during critical electoral processes, including the US presidential elections, exemplify how digital spaces are susceptible to ideological capture. In India, cyberspace has witnessed a disturbing proliferation of hate speech, cyberbullying, and the systematic marginalisation of minority voices, largely perpetrated by groups aligned with majoritarian nationalist ideologies. This

phenomenon points towards the state's indirect (and at times direct) influence in shaping the discursive boundaries of social media, privileging narratives that legitimise the ideological stance of the ruling elite. Thus, social media effects are complex and transitory, leading to both mobilisation and polarisation.

Within this context, the meanings and representations circulating in digital media are often encoded with dominant ideological values, aligning with Hall's concept of the preferred reading—a reading that reproduces and reinforces hegemonic power. However, it is important to acknowledge that the early phase of the social media boom in India, particularly in the years following 2010, did witness the emergence of alternative and resistant discursive practices. These counter-publics, primarily driven by progressive users and collectives, engaged in sustained digital contestations against the Hindutva right. They fostered democratic discourses and cultivated online spaces that functioned as vibrant sites of protest, critique, and counter-hegemonic resistance. Such moments of disruption attest to Hall's notion of negotiated and oppositional readings, wherein audiences actively resist and reinterpret dominant messages, thus challenging the monolithic control of meaning by the state or the state's role in determining which narratives gain traction and which are suppressed closely mirrors what Michel Foucault refers to as *biopower*—the control of populations through the subtle management of knowledge, visibility, and discourse (Foucault, 1977). The surveillance and data practices embedded in social media systems function as technologies of governance that discipline user behaviour, regulate dissent, and create docile digital citizens.

Noam Chomsky's propaganda model, developed with Edward S. Herman in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988), offers another illuminating lens. According to Chomsky, media systems—though appearing free—function within a framework of five filters that ultimately serve elite economic and political interests. In the Indian digital context, corporate ownership of platforms and the close nexus between political power and digital capital result in a structural bias that favours the state's ideological agenda. Media in this formulation becomes a channel for the reproduction of dominant ideologies, while dissenting voices are algorithmically downranked, shadow-banned, or subjected to legal intimidation. Shoshana Zuboff's, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* further expands this critique by highlighting how the commodification of personal data transforms individuals into behavioural surplus. According to Zuboff, tech giants extract, predict, and monetise human behaviour at scale, enabling not only economic profit but also sociopolitical manipulation. The practice of predictive policing, targeted misinformation, and real-time surveillance exemplifies how digital infrastructures serve both capital and coercion.

However, it is important to recall Hall's theorisation of 'transcoding', which leaves space for resistance, especially in the context of cultural productions that align with marginalised identities. According to Hall, audiences engaged in an oppositional reading of a given media text cannot just read the text in opposition to its intended meaning, but they can also 'transcode' the text and generate counter-strategies of resistance. In the article "Stuart Hall, Film Studies and the Cinema", Angela Prysthon sheds light on Stuart Hall's notions of representation and how

hegemonic representational tropes reinforce stereotypes, whereas transcoded representation of the very same stereotypes creates spaces of opposition and resilience

Particularly in the years following 2010, India witnessed a vibrant wave of counter-hegemonic digital activism. Progressive collectives and individuals created alternative media spaces that challenged Hindutva narratives, exposed state excesses, and amplified subaltern voices. These cyber counterpublics resembled the kinds of political resistance envisioned by theorists of the Third Cinema movement—an aesthetic and ideological resistance to state and market forces alike. Lincoln Dahlberg challenges the widely held belief that online fragmentation threatens democracy in "Rethinking the Fragmentation of the Cyberpublic". He contends that both sides of the argument those who view fragmentation as destructive and those who view it as a means of deliberation share a faulty, Habermasian-theory-based vision of the public sphere. As he states, "...the fragmentation debate operates largely among deliberative democratic 'friends'... [who] assume a liberal-rationalist, consensus-oriented model of deliberative democracy and the public sphere, where difference is ultimately a problem to be dealt with..." (Dahlberg).

The films analysed in this chapter, which can be branded as part of the new-gen wave post-2010, clearly carry with them certain ideological functions. Stuart Hall, in his article "Encoding/Decoding", elaborates on the idea of meaning production and says that "Meaning is not simply sent and received. It is encoded by producers and decoded by audiences, and these two processes may not align" (Hall

131). Though there is an intended meaning encoded in artistic media like cinema, as Hall's notion goes, meaning is produced during the interaction between the sender and receiver, depending on the context. Cinema, as a popular medium, has created a vivid and novel ground for discourses that vehemently criticise authoritarianism and excessive use of power. Here, instead of mere reflection, meanings, especially rebellious and anti-authoritarian, are constructed. Unlike mass is that is under the control of the state and is used by the state for appropriating the masses social media that is more autonomous has at times provided a fertile ground for democratic discourses, and even amidst the attempts of the state to censor it, it has succeeded in creating spaces of discourses rooted in democracy. Thus, social media joined hands with the popular medium of cinema, which resulted in the creation of an array of films that effectively flayed Khaki as an authoritarian state apparatus. Discussions on political correctness during Facebook debates, critiquing authoritarian power structures, enhanced the scope of its influence, which impacted mass media like cinema. Reflecting on the social media discourse during popular civic protests like Kiss of Love, T.T. Sreekumar observes,

> The use of social media in Kerala had been hitherto under critical review as mostly a gratifying venue for aspiring young poets or for the use of blogs as layman's media or in the discussions about localization of computing, of Unicode, and digitization of Malaya lam scripts. KoL, which was essentially a Facebook-initiated movement, for the first time brought another distinct possibility of Web sociality into the purview of the Malayalam online world, that involved the wider prospects of using social media as a

> tool for collective social action. Most of the protesters were matured Web users who did not want the move ment to be labelled as completely "online" or "new-generation," even as they claimed that it could be the first full-fledged movement in the history of Indian social media to have exploited the potentials of collective action through Facebook. (Sreekumar 121)

It is also imperative to bring in the concept of the public sphere by Jürgen Habermas, which is discussed in detail in his famous work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Habermas puts forth the notion of the public sphere as a space where individuals could come together and engage in meaningful discourses that could influence culture, society and polity. But he also warns about the perils if the space is occupied by commercial interests and authoritarianism. Erlis Sela, while assessing social media using Habermas' concept of the public sphere, says, "Similar to the mass media case, the internet and especially the social media, allows the individuals to discuss and express their thoughts in public regarding events which have a wide public interest" (195). He speaks about the social capital and online community engagement in reshaping the traditional notion of the public sphere.

In its early phase, particularly in the years following 2010, social media in India emerged as a relatively democratic and participatory platform, functioning almost as an "idealised public sphere" in the Habermasian sense. Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere—a space where individuals come together to discuss and influence political action—finds a digital analogue in how early social media

facilitated vibrant civic engagement, cultural critique, and counter-hegemonic dialogue. Within this framework, social media became not merely a tool of communication but a space of ideological production, fostering constructive conversations and the emergence of new socio-political sensibilities.

This democratic affordance of cyberspace catalysed the articulation of dissent, the mobilisation of public protests, and the reshaping of cultural narratives. The horizontal structure of digital platforms allowed previously marginalised voices to disrupt dominant narratives, challenge state authority, and critique entrenched caste, gender, and religious hierarchies. In particular, the burgeoning cyber-public of this period offered fertile ground for the formation of radical new imaginaries that departed from the formulaic nationalism and moral conservatism upheld by the mainstream media.

This digitally charged socio-political atmosphere had a palpable impact on popular culture, particularly Malayalam cinema, which began to display rebellious tendencies in both form and content. The so-called new-gen cinematic movement of the 2010s, with its sharp political undertones and aesthetic experimentation, cannot be detached from the wider democratizing pulse of cyberspace. Directors and screenwriters attuned to the energy of online discourse infused their narratives with subversive themes, deconstructing dominant representations of power, masculinity, and state authority, most notably, the police.

In this way, social media not only acted as a discursive catalyst but also contributed to the formation of a new cultural-political consciousness. It played a foundational role in enabling a shift in audience expectations and ideological

leanings, which, in turn, empowered filmmakers to break away from conventional tropes and explore politically charged narratives. Thus, the rebellious streak of the new-gen films—characterised by their sympathy for the subaltern, critique of institutional violence, and dismantling of hero-worship—is inextricably linked to the emancipatory energy once radiated by Kerala's digital public sphere. Assessing digital media and the socio-political discourse in Kerala, Amrutha P.T. and Jyothi Justin observe, "Digital media have revitalised culture by including the marginalised sections of the society who gained social mobility from periphery to the centre." (31). They continue to state that "The recent incident in Kerala where a prominent actress got molested in a moving vehicle… gained support from the digital media... creating a hashtag movement 'avalkoppam'" (33). This was a revolutionary movement aiming at gender justice, which was born and flourished in the social media sphere of Kerala. The writers examine the potential of the medium to create spaces for a parallel culture and say, "The potential of the digital media to create a parallel culture that incorporates every section of our society has to be exploited to a greater extent…The creation of community blogs, pages and websites based on gender, locality, etc., are also helpful in gathering and disseminating similar and diverse ideas" (33). Citing Homi Bhabha the article posits, "...the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable..." (33).

In many Indian regional languages, filmmakers were influenced by such anti-authoritarian discourses. Films of Nagraj Manjule in Marathi and Mari Selvaraj and Vetrimaaran in Tamil can be seen as products of this sentiment. The police's

highhandedness was severely criticised, and democracy and the constitution were hailed. Films such as *Jai Bhim* (2021) by T.J. Gnanavel and *Karnan* (2021) by Mari Selvaraj flay police atrocities in strong terms. This same trend was visible in Kerala as well, during the New Gen period. The new-gen directors, who brought forth a novel cinematic sensibility, were heavily influenced by movements of world cinema. The access to world cinema due to the counter cinematic culture developed by film societies in Kerala and the popular film festivals might have resulted in filmmakers understanding the medium better. This could be a factor in paving the way for the arrival of a new brand of cinema. This is amply aided by the digitalisation in cinema and the audience's access to world cinema via OTT and piracy sites and apps such as torrent and telegram. Post-2010 saw a refined Malayalam audience as well as filmmakers. The constructive criticism of power comes from the immense belief in the democratic structure of the country. The period post-1990 saw the loss of belief in the democratic echelons. Cinema reflected the mood, and it resulted in the creation of one-man-show films, as super cops, IAS officers and even feudal lords were shown as the ultimate saviours and righteous people. The system was deemed rotten, and individuals and their abilities were hailed. The new-gen period saw the belief in democracy returning, and the filmmakers were careful enough not to fall into the trap of glorifying individuals. The state is criticised, the police force is vehemently put to task, and authoritarian tendencies are pointed out.

The relationship between the state and police in the films of the 1990s and the new-gen period is an area that needs to be explored in detail. In the films post-1990, it can be observed that the police hero is created and placed as an independent

entity, devoid of any baggage of the legal system upon him. He is separated from the state as well as the rule of law. The cop hero is the saviour of society, following his own rules, thus attaining the stature of the state himself. The Gramscian notion of a 'Civil Society', where discourses happen, is invisible here. Such Civil Societies host versatile discourses that may lead to the emergence of hegemonic ideas, which could ultimately benefit the state apparatus. In the context of the hyper-masculine police hero manifestations, all discourses are nullified and only paeans of the supercops are to be seen. Thus, the idea of the state itself transforms. The post-Mandal penchant for the emergence of the majoritarian hero figure, who could redefine the existing system, clearly separated the police from the state. The cop genre in Malayalam cinema reinvented the image of the police noticeably. Meanwhile, the new-gen representation of the khaki on-screen travelled in the opposite direction as far as the relationship between the state and police is concerned. These films do not separate the police from the state and present the police force as an integral part of the state. The state is the power centre, which uses the police as a repressive force. The use and abuse of the police is the direct responsibility of the authoritarian state. This stark difference between these two periods is a significant point to be noted while examining the manner and politics of representation.

The borderline between the police in real life and 'reel life' is thin, and only through a meticulous inspection can it be discovered. The tyrannical features of the force vary according to the governments, but underneath, it remained a repressive hand of the state. The films post-2010 successfully see through the umpteen layers of the manifestation of the police. Their detailed study and scrutiny of the real-life

police have enabled the directors to present a more comprehensive and realistic avatar of the khaki, devoid of the embellishments of the 1990s. The period witnessed the impacts of the social discourses surrounding power and authoritarianism as a result of the emerging tide of majoritarian politics. The Hindutva 2.0 created ripples in the public sphere, which created numerous discourses against communal power exertions. The new gen films ideologically differed from the existing power structure, and unlike the 1990s, resisted it vehemently. A sharp eye for detail and clarity on the ideological front are the major characteristic features of the films of this period. From the demigod status, the cop characters are stripped of their divine adornments and presented as humans with flaws and vices. This 'humanisation' of police is the brightest hallmark of the period, which is also remarkable for the courage to usher Malayalam cinema towards the hitherto unmapped terrains.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

The police, as a power centre, have been a constant and important presence in the historical evolution of Indian society. The colonial police had built a solid functional structure that carried on post-independence without altering its fundamental ethos. Thus, police, even in the current Indian scenario, appear as an oppressive behemoth that hardly regards constitutional norms or cultural values. The public also expects the police to function, as the force in khaki is seen as a terrifying presence in their daily lives rather than a comforting and protective presence. The representation of police in cinema has to be understood from a socio-political and historical vantage point to fathom the deep-seated trends across decades. The politics of representation and the emerging political climate of the times have played significant roles in this aspect. When the representation of police in Malayalam cinema is looked at critically, certain interesting trends can be found out, and those must be evaluated in light of the hegemonic power structures of the period. The study tries to trace such peculiar trends and evolutions by analysing various films from the beginning stages of Malayalam cinema to the present. The hypotheses thus formed point to the correlation between dominant political moods and patterns of representation.

From the time of Indian independence, the police have acted as the arm of the state and represented its repressive face. The training involving the days in the police academy is designed in such a way that the force is developed as an insensitive and obedient mechanism to carry out the tasks for its masters. The Indian

constitutional morality, which has been particular in transforming every arm of the state and society democratically, turned a blind eye towards the democratisation of the belligerent colonial police set up. This dilemma of defining the structural and functional objectives of the force is evident from the early days of India's existence as an independent republic. History proves that, whenever the state has decided to use its excess power over the public, the police have been hand in glove with their master in carrying out their objective. As mentioned earlier in this study, the notion of the 'state of exception', put forward by Giorgio Agamben, becomes immensely significant. The governments temporarily suspend the rule of law, citing various emergencies, and during such phases, the police are given the duty to directly manage public affairs. Here, democratic and constitutional value systems are replaced by a repressive police iron hand. The public is devoid of their right to question, and an obedient social/political sphere is created. The history of India as a nation has many instances of such episodes of suspension of the rule of law, including the National Emergency of 1975. Such historical milestones are significant markers to map the evolution of the police force as an inhuman punishing mechanism.

How do the police view their role in a democratic republic? It is imperative to understand how the police personnel themselves realise their duties and roles. In an article in The Hindu newspaper, based on a survey conducted by Lokniti- Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Priyanka Mittal, Sanjay Kumar and Devesh Kumar shed light on the beliefs and mental framework of the police force. In the survey, in which 8276 police personnel participated, the answers given by

them to several questions need serious introspection. When asked how important it is for the police to use tough methods on the public, 55 per cent of the participants answered that such methods are important. To another question regarding the justification of mob violence on suspects, more than 50 per cent of the participants answered in the cases of sexual crimes, such mob violence can be justified. This clearly indicates the mindset of the people in uniform regarding violence and the rule of law while dealing with the public. As the article says,

> It reveals that a majority of police personnel believe in using intimidation as a law enforcement tool. More than half the respondents endorsed the use of tough methods to create fear among the public, with 20% describing it as very important, and 35% as somewhat important…Only three in ten police personnel completely rejected this fear-based approach, stating that the police force should be a friendly force and should have no need to instil fear. (Mittal et.al 11)

When the police are represented on screen, across various periods, the politics of representations can be seen altering according to the zeitgeist. In Malayalam cinema, the khaki on screen has undergone various transformations according to the political mood of the period. This is evident considering the history of Malayalam cinema in a chronological order, placing it parallel with the important socio-political events that have influenced the destiny of the land. From mere comic visibility to a villainous aura, the police on screen reinvented itself as heroic figures and solo saviours. Later, as social moods changed, it could also be seen that the holiness attached to the men in Khaki was stripped away, and cinema was willing to

evaluate their role critically. The study focuses on these significant transformations and tries to make sense of the roles of important political incidents and key social movements.

The thesis aims to examine the representation of police in Malayalam cinema and identify the various intricate patterns of portrayal, considering socio-political factors. Malayalam films across multiple decades are analysed, and a select few are included in the thesis. In this study, Malayalam films from the beginning stage to the present are divided into three phases of history. The thesis looks at how the shifts in legal-political formations get reflected in the way the police force is imagined in Malayalam cinema. It traces the shifting regimes of authority and the diverse cinematic reflections of it across the years in Kerala. The first phase of analysis is from the early stages of Malayalam cinema to the 1990s, the next phase is from the 1990s to the 2010s, and the last phase is from 2010 onwards to the present. The study tries to understand whether socio-political discourses have affected the representation of police characters in Malayalam cinema. It closely monitors the manifestation of power to understand the patterns of police portrayal and observes various decades to reach conclusions regarding certain politically significant incidents that might have influenced cinematic representations.

An analysis of the early phases of Malayalam cinema reveals that police characters initially held marginal narrative significance. In these formative years—roughly from the 1950s to the late 1970s—police roles were often deployed as stock characters, serving comic relief or perfunctory administrative functions, rather than as ideologically charged or narratively central figures. Their presence added little

thematic weight, reflecting both a cinematic apathy toward institutional critique and a society yet to fully reckon with the complex dynamics of state power.

A discernible shift in the representational patterns begins to emerge only by the 1980s and gains momentum into the 1990s. This period, identified in this study as the first phase of Malayalam cinema's engagement with law enforcement imagery, witnesses a growing visibility and narrative centrality of the police character. Crucially, this evolution cannot be viewed in isolation from the socio-political upheavals that Kerala, and India at large, experienced during this time, most notably, the imposition of the National Emergency (1975–77) and the rise of the Naxalite movement.

The Emergency era, with its blanket suspension of civil liberties, mass incarcerations, and widespread state-sanctioned repression, laid bare the authoritarian potential of the state apparatus, including the police. The Naxalite movement, on the other hand, represented a grassroots revolutionary fervour that directly challenged the state's monopoly on violence. These contrasting yet convergent forces—one from above and the other from below—left a profound imprint on public consciousness, especially among the youth, who bore the brunt of both suppression and sacrifice.

Malayalam cinema, attuned to these seismic socio-political tremors, began to mirror the anxieties, resistances, and critiques that shaped the zeitgeist. The police, once peripheral and caricatured, now began to be inscribed with ideological weight. On screen, they increasingly came to embody state power, functioning either as the brutal arm of authoritarianism or as conflicted agents caught within morally fraught

structures. This was a significant departure from earlier portrayals and marked the beginning of cinema's engagement with the dialectics of power, authority, and dissent.

In this way, the trajectory of police representation in Malayalam cinema during this early phase reflects a growing political consciousness within the medium itself. The affective response of the masses to events like the Emergency and the Naxalite rebellion found cinematic expression, as filmmakers sought to capture the tension between control and resistance, silence and speech, fear and agency. Cinema, thus, did not merely entertain but also documented the affective histories of oppression and rebellion that defined an entire generation.

The films chosen as samples from this period are *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1975), directed by P.A. Backer; *Meenamasathile Sooryan* (1986), directed by Lenin Rajendran; *Amma Ariyan* (1986), directed by John Abraham; *Panchagni* (1986) and *Aranyakam* (1988), directed by Hariharan. These films spelt out the mammoth shift in the portrayal of cop characters in Malayalam cinema and showed police as the oppressive arm of an authoritarian state. During the active period of Naxalism and the National Emergency, Kerala witnessed police brutalities galore. The democratic rule of law was suspended, and a police raj was in existence. As mentioned in the thesis, a film like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* had to undergo direct censorship by the police, a novelty in the history of India. The film shed light on the brutal police system that was in vogue during the time. Though *Meenamasathile Sooryan* refers to an incident that happened pre-independence, the film also captured the mood of the period while portraying police characters. *Amma*

Ariyan depicted the plight of the youth infected by the utopian dream of liberty envisaged by Naxalism and how the government tried to nip it in the bud using the police force. Both *Panchagni* and *Aranyakam* sympathised with the Naxal movement, while portraying the police as a villainous group with little humanitarian ethos. The period shows the paradigm shift in representation, and the study tries to explain how the socio-political mood and political zeitgeist have influenced it. The period leaves behind certain hints, too, about the future evolution of cop representation. The second phase focuses on the representation of the police characters in films post-1990. The period division is based on a significant shift in the manner of representation. The Mandal Commission and the Babri Masjid demolition are taken as significant socio-political milestones of the period. Where the Mandal commission recommendations have created a sharp rift in the social body of the nation, the Babri Masjid demolition resulted in a sharp communal division across the country. When the films of this period were examined, an interesting evolution of the police in cinema from mere visibility to a major genre could be observed. The characters in Khaki were celebrated as superheroes, and the stories revolved around their valorous deeds. The study focused on the creation of the trope of the 'super cop' and analysed the reasons behind it. This novel phenomenon of the supercop could be understood as an upper-caste social psyche's response to the prevalent mood of the times, and its anxiety over Mandal-related discourses, its prejudices leading up to and following the Babri demolition and the subsequent communal rhetoric. Though Kerala is hailed as a secular society built on Renaissance values, many social critics have pointed out the Savarna ethos lying still underneath. Thinkers such as K.E.N. Kunjahammed and Sunny M. Kapicadu

have pointed out that progressive Kerala modernity is built on fake premises, and the elitist and casteist ideologies are very much prevalent. While critiquing the savarna cultural domain of Kerala society, K.E.N. says, "It is evident that the 'elitism' culturally nurtured by the elite classes has categorically undermined the subaltern aesthetics, which led to their inferiority" (my trans; 17). According to them, the cultural hegemony of the Savarna elite is ruling over the social sphere of Kerala. Sanal Mohan in *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles Against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* criticises the discriminatory nature of the social realm of Kerala. He points out the grave issues related to land ownership, culture and social interactions between the elites and the Dalits. In his memoir *Ethiru*, M. Kunjaman, an intellectual who belonged to the Scheduled Caste community, has severely criticised the much-hailed Kerala modernity and its progressive façade. He points out how Kerala had betrayed the subaltern sections and carried out the Savarna agenda in the social sphere. As he puts it, "Including the state policies such as the land reform ordinance only helped in the strengthening of elitism and Brahminism here" (my trans; 94). He specifically points out the strategies of the upper-caste sections to dominate the cultural, social, financial, and political landscapes by marginalising the subaltern classes. The Malayalam cinema of the 90s predominantly represents the very decadence and hypocrisy of Kerala society that the vehement critics of the region's progress and reform rhetoric have been eloquent about.

The critical analysis of the social situation of the decades leading to the 1990s proves that the ideological shifts in the cinematic realm are noticeable. There was a systematic transformation from innocuous Savarna heroes to aggressive and

machoistic ‘thampuran’ superheroes. The dominant Hindutva ideology, which gained nationwide traction following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, found its echo in Malayalam cinema, particularly through a marked ideological shift in the representation of authority and power structures. This period witnessed a resurgence of elitist and feudal cultural values, subtly woven into mainstream cinematic narratives. These regressive socio-political undercurrents—often glorifying patriarchal, casteist, and majoritarian worldviews—were not only normalised on screen but also widely celebrated by audiences, as evidenced by the commercial success of such films.

The genre of cop films, in particular, became a fertile ground for the articulation of this ideological turn. These narratives frequently showcased hyper-masculine law enforcers as heroic upholders of “order”, masking authoritarianism and caste privilege behind the veil of justice. In doing so, the cinematic space increasingly distanced itself from constitutional ethics and democratic ideals, instead aligning with a feudal moral order. The popularity of such representations points to a collective cultural shift—one that embraced spectacle and power at the expense of civil rights, marginal voices, and pluralism. Such films shared an ideological fraternity with the ‘thampuran’ films as Savarna value systems of yore were glorified and the law of the land was intentionally demonised. Malayalam cinema reciprocated with the newfound Virat Hindu saviour image propagated by political Hindutva and gave vent to their support on the screen.

The films post-1990, while examined, gave numerous insights into the influence of this socio-political phenomenon. The study found that in this context,

the rise of Suresh Gopi as a superhero in khaki deserves serious attention. Suresh Gopi was introduced as a feudal lord in Khaki who gives scant regard to the rule books and often takes the law into his own hands. Most of his characters were elitist and wore hatred against subaltern sections and minority communities on their sleeves. This cannot be seen as a spontaneous cinematic phenomenon, considering the political climate and dominant hegemonic value systems. Several films with Suresh Gopi donning the cop hero figure could be found in the period, and a few of them were taken for a detailed study. Those include *Ekalavyan* (1993), *Commissioner (1994)* and *F.I.R*. (1999) directed by Shaji Kailas and *Satyameva Jayathe* (2000) directed by Viji Thampi. These films portray Suresh Gopi as a macho saviour figure with contempt towards the existing law. These films exhibit hyper-Hindutva ideological values and Islamophobic prejudices. This period can be identified as a significant era while tracing the evolution of the representation of police in Malayalam cinema.

The third phase of the analysis puts 2010 as a marker and examines films post-2010. The period is significant for politically as well as cinematically significant movements. The most important cinematic phenomenon identified in this study is the new-generation trend that happened in Malayalam cinema. This novel movement deconstructed the hegemonic traditional cinematic tropes in Malayalam. The study identified the advent of social media and the consolidation and accession of majoritarian power as a political regime at the centre as immensely significant happenings of the period. The emergence of digital counterpublic spaces helped to consolidate the resilience and identity assertion of hitherto marginalised sections of

the population, thereby providing the impetus for altered perceptions of the police in Malayalam cinema. The study could observe massive changes in the way police characters were depicted on screen in this period. Along with technical innovations brought in by the new generation wave, noticeable ideological shifts could also be found. The influence of social media, the emergent discourses on power and the rising communal tensions across the country are identified as some factors that influenced the cinematic imagination of the time.

The new generation trend was a pathbreaking one in Malayalam cinema around the beginning of the second decade of the new century. A group of young filmmakers challenged the traditional notions of filmmaking and dismantled the thematic and structural hegemony of filmmaking. The study could realise that this maverick trend has resulted in comprehensively altering the manner of representation of police characters in Malayalam. From the glorification to Savarna machismo, the films of the period critically probed the role of the police and the exertion of power. The examination of films post-2010 proves that the trend was favouring democracy and the rule of law instead of superman cops meting out justice as they wish. Director Rajeev Ravi's films were given a special focus while examining this phase. His films, such as *Njan Steve Lopez* (2014), *Kammatti Paadam* (2016), *Thuramukham* (2023) and *Annayum Rasoolum* (2013) gave some important hints about the dynamic shift in the manner of cop representation. Other films analysed in this phase are *Kismath* (2016), directed by Shanavas K. Bavakkutty; *Thalappavu* (2008) and *Oru Kuprasidha Payyan* (2018), directed by Madhupal; *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum* (2017), directed by Dileesh Pothan;

Mayaanadhi (2017), directed by Aashiq Abu; and *Nayattu* (2021), directed by Martin Prakkat. These films are testimony to the huge transformation of police representation that occurred during this new generation phase.

The period witnessed the emergence of social media. The study could observe the major role played by social media discourses related to power and resistance that created an anti-authoritarian mood in the country. Across the globe, digital counterpublics rose against blatant use of power, like the Jasmine Revolution in the Middle East, me-too movements, etc., in all of which the influence of social media was noticeable as it created a space for novel discourses. In India, the social media sphere was abuzz with various active movements emanating from the virtual sphere. The new government and some of its policies were sharply criticised on social media for their communal bias. Instances, including the lynching of people for allegedly carrying beef, resulted in heated social media debates around freedom and secularism. In Kerala, too, such active anti-power protests were initiated in the virtual space. Malayalam cinema bore witness to the evolution from the hyper conventional 'Thampuranesque' cop heroes to a brutal and repressive force used by the authoritarian state to control its populace. When Malayalam cinema in the 1990s reacted positively to the rising majoritarian trends across the country, the years post-2010 flayed it with great zeal and hung on to democratic and secular principles. This thesis set out to explore pivotal questions: When did the police first become visible in Malayalam cinema? When did the genre of police-centric narratives begin to take shape? Were there discernible patterns across different decades, and how did the prevailing social morality of Kerala influence the cinematic portrayal of police

characters? In addressing these inquiries, the study foregrounded the deep-seated connection between the politics of representation and the shifting socio-political landscape of the state. The relationship between the state, police, and society is inherently complex and ideologically charged. Whenever artistic expressions attempt to mirror this dynamic, underlying ideological forces inevitably surface. Cinema, as a powerful cultural medium, is never ideologically neutral—it frequently reproduces dominant hegemonic values, consciously or otherwise.

In the context of Malayalam cinema, early representations of the police were mostly peripheral, often relegated to comic relief or functional plot devices. However, as Kerala's socio-political climate was shaped by major national events, shifts in public consciousness, and ideological realignments, so too did the cinematic portrayal of law enforcement. The police character gradually transitioned from a benign presence to a visible symbol of state repression. This trajectory was particularly pronounced during the rise of communalism in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition, which destabilised Kerala’s secular ethos and reoriented popular narratives toward majoritarian and feudal ideals. The emergence of the police genre during this period reflected an ideological realignment within Malayalam cinema, reinforcing patriarchal and authoritarian tendencies under the guise of justice and order.

In the subsequent decades, a radical departure took shape. The advent of the new-generation cinematic movement in the 2010s ushered in a paradigm shift, deconstructing the glorified image of the infallible cop and replacing it with a more grounded, critical portrayal of the police as agents of systemic oppression. These

films exposed the complicity of law enforcement in upholding caste hierarchies, patriarchal norms, and authoritarian governance. This transformation was not merely aesthetic but ideological, fuelled by a broader culture of dissent and resistance across India, mirrored in Kerala through vibrant digital discourse and social media activism. The police figure, once celebrated as a demigod, was now interrogated as a potential threat to civil liberties and constitutional morality. Thus, Malayalam cinema has not only traced but also actively participated in the ideological metamorphosis of the police character from comic relief to cultural symbol, from patriarchal hero to object of critique.

The research has included films across various decades from the inception of Malayalam cinema to the present. This huge quantity of data makes the task quite difficult, considering the methodology used for analysis. The study adopted Critical Discourse Analysis and Textual Analysis to deepen the insights gained from the research problem. The study is constructed as a sociological examination based on cinema. Theoretical notions of thinkers such as Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall, et.al were used to give a thematic and theoretical clarity to the thesis. Sample films were chosen from each period to conduct a detailed and in-depth examination. The study steered clear of the traditional research approaches related to film studies and instead, a socially and politically oriented approach was adopted, while understanding the play of power. The findings of the study prove that the representation of police in Malayalam cinema is heavily influenced by the socio-political discourses of the times. There is a clear and well-defined play of power when it comes to cop characterisation. Police in Malayalam

cinema have undergone tremendous changes across decades, and the thesis explored these changes. The figure of police that begins as farce/comical evolves into one of fear, and then as an elitist saviour, passing on to the present stage of disillusionment in which a mode of satire and cynical/clinical dissection of institutional power sets in. The research interrogated how power is felt and imagined in the cinematic and cultural psyche.

The scope of the study is related to socio-cultural and political parameters. The ideas thus generated can be used to critically understand the working of power in a democratic social set-up. The study tried to fill a research gap in Malayalam cinema by locating the crucial socio-political influences that impacted cinematic narratives in the decades following the 1970s. The dissertation tried to bring in novel vantage points while analysing cinema, avoiding common analytic tools in Film studies. The attempt is to contribute positively to the knowledge domain related to cinema, at the same time keeping the possibilities of critical discourses open. Though police atrocities are still not uncommon, the human rights interventions and civil society engagements have provided some modes of social scrutiny that have put restraints on the system and repressed the abuses of power. Cinema, being a considerable force of social influence, may also have, in a way, acted as a process of scrutiny. The influence of cinema on society could be studied carefully to understand how dominant value systems are created and perpetuated. In such a critical stage, the ideas generated in this research could be helpful to enlarge the scope of societal and civilian engagement with power. Cinema is conceived in this study not merely as a technical medium, but rather as a medium with great potential

to be studied in parallel with public life and polity. Power, both in the silver screen and outside, is dissected here to form a concrete and nuanced hypothesis related to the human condition.

No study is without limitations, and this one, too, has a few limitations to point out. The study has tried to focus its attention on the identified target of bridging the invisible link between society and cinema. So, the method of study to be adopted needed to be chosen carefully. As this research demanded a thematic examination based on sociological parameters, the technological aspects of the medium have not been explored in detail. While analysing a few films, certain technological elements were explored, but that was not subjected to a detailed scrutiny. As the scope of the study does not permit a detailed investigation of the technological sides of the selected films, this approach had to be omitted. Another limitation of the study is, the gender angle in the representation of police could nott be focused on. Though the possibilities of such a study are huge, this examination could nott bring it within the ambit. The main reason is the socio-political angle to be explored, and the chosen films warranted a thematic approach, centring on power and hegemony. This made the option of bringing a gender-based scrutiny impossible in the current scheme of the study. To select a few films for critical analysis from a large database is a hectic task, and this could be cited as another limitation of the study. Each period, as classified in the thesis, needed to be examined through a selected list of films. But the major issue that was present during the selection was the omission of certain films. For example, a film like *Unda* (2019) or *Crime File* (1999) could nott be included in the study. Also, as this research is based on the

already divided phases of Malayalam cinema, certain overlaps were there. The study focused on trends and overlapping had to be excluded. For example, in a period where khaki and its highhandedness were severely flayed, films like *Action Hero Biju* (2016) and *Kasaba* (2016), noted for the glorification of the violent cop figure, were released. These variations were not considered, as this research was more of an attempt to assimilate some aspects that contributed to a trend that favoured democratisation of police systems and their internal critique, while commercial trends may have continued with the entrenched formulaic narratives.

The thesis attempted to trace the transformation of the representation of police characters in Malayalam cinema. The study aimed to find out the various complicated and multifarious patterns of portrayal. Socio-political and cultural factors were considered and focused on in the study. The manifestation of power was studied closely to reach conclusions regarding social relationships. The hypothesis formed as part of the study points towards the continuous trend of significant socio-political incidents and hegemonic social ideals impacting the politics of representation. Cinema is not free from social eye, and the study proves that the medium always finds itself in close parallel with society. Stars are created and criticised by filmmakers, and such cinematic representations always carry hefty ideological messages. Khaki in Malayalam cinema as a subject throws up limitless ideas related to state, power and politics to evaluate and brood upon. A comprehensive understanding of the subject provides great insights about the intricacies of representation and the politics of characterisation.

Chapter 6
Recommendations

The study's findings highlight the invisible yet strongly bonded relationship between cinema and society. It tried to extend the scope of film analysis to various other terrains, such as society and politics. Thus, the study opens new avenues for further exploration connecting cinema and society. As cinema is a medium that is known for its immense influence on the populace, any attempts at understanding the social and political significance of cinema are vital. The thesis explored films from various decades with significant police representations and tried to understand the trends that might have affected such portrayals. Given the direct effect of police actions on society, the insights derived from this study may prove precious for future research exploring multifarious topics at the intersection of policing, societal dynamics, and cinema. The study, like any other academic endeavour, is not complete and leaves some space for further additions. The following are a few of the recommendations that can be investigated in detail.

As mentioned in the conclusion as part of the limitations of the research, this study could nott delve into the notions of gender and its politics while analysing police and Malayalam cinema. It is recommended to have a gender-based approach to get a different picture of police representation in cinema. In Indian cinema and specifically in Malayalam cinema, there have been important female cop characters, and not much research has been done on that account. Actors like Vijayasanthi and Vani Viswanath are remembered for their cop roles. The politics of gender

representation is a broader area with immense potential to explore. There are films with female cop characters as protagonists as well as doing a subordinate role, and both can be included in the purview of the study. For instance, in Malayalam, films such as *The Truth* (1998), *Chathurangam* (2002) and *Praja* (2001) have female police officers in significant roles. But interestingly, in all these films, these officers are humiliated by the heroes for their incompetence and overconfidence. These scenes of macho intellectual exhibitions were added to satisfy the patriarchal gaze of the viewers. Such politically problematic scenes are in abundance in Malayalam cinema alone, which warrants a deeper examination by researchers. The character IG Geetha Prabhakar in the movie *Drishyam (*2013) is a textbook example of a police woman of high rank being intellectually discredited by an ordinary individual who claims moral superiority over her. Such representations always catered to the male gaze of the viewers.

Tracing the evolution of police characters across decades is made difficult by the sheer number of films with significant cop roles. In Malayalam, numerous films have come out recently showing various shades of the system of police. Shahi Kabir is a name to reckon with in this aspect. He was the writer of cop films like *Nayattu* (2021), J*oseph* (2018) and *Officer on Duty* (2024) while directing another cop film, *Ela Veezha Pooonchira* (2022). He worked in the police force before his entry into cinema, and this has contributed in bestowing his cop characters with interesting novel shades. It is highly recommended to study his films in detail to understand new trends in police portrayal. Numerous films like the recently released *Narivetta* (2025), based on the Muthanga police firing, can also be brought into the

ambit of the study. It is also possible to conduct a caste/religious-based study of recent cop films. The power politics related to caste and religion needed to be probed further so that certain invisible influences in representation can be found.

Recently, in Tamil, various films with important police characters have hit the silver screen. Most of them spoke about subaltern politics and the role of police in suppressing the voices from the margins. Films such as *Karnan* (2021), *Jai Bhim* (2021), *Writer* (2021), *Viduthalai* (2023) and *Visaranai* (2016) have shown police brutality in great detail. In all these films, the focus was on how the police act as the henchmen of the elites and mete out inexplicable misery to the subaltern sections. These films can be placed in parallel to the mainstream Tamil films with superstars donning cop roles, which glorify police violence. Interestingly, the most famous Tamil superstar Rajnikanth has done two contrasting films recently, *Jailer* (2023) and *Vettaiyan* (2024). In *Jailer,* he plays the role of a police officer who believes in taking the law into his own hands and even neutralising the culprits. The films glorify his acts as courageous and selfless. In *Vettaiyan,* quite interestingly, he plays a cop character who regrets committing an extrajudicial killing. The film is a clarion call against the police's high-handedness and fake encounters. It is highly recommended that Tamil cinema be subjected to a detailed and critical examination to throw light on the patterns of cop representation. There are numerous web series also, including *Delhi Crime*, *Kohrra*, *Dahaad*, *Black Warrant*, etc., with cop characters leading the plot. These can be further examined as web series, as a medium offers entirely different possibilities. Studies on web series are very few, making it a promising enterprise.

Police brutality has ceased to be news in contemporary Kerala, and the force has earned a notorious name for inflicting power unabashedly. Instances of police oppressing common people have multiplied in recent times, which raises serious questions about the Kerala society as a civilised and political community. The moral consciousness of Kerala is getting used to such atrocities, and perpetrators often escape punishment. A major aim of the thesis is to highlight the impacts of police brutality and the inhuman levels of subjugation. In most cases, the victims turn out to be from the subaltern sections, mostly Dalits or Tribals, which speaks volumes about the casteist and prejudiced mindset of the police force. Incidents such as the arrest and illegal detention of a Dalit woman named Bindu, forcing the suicide of the Dalit youth Vinayakan for growing long hair and the involvement in the honour killing of Kevin, a Dalit Christian youth unravels the mysterious terrains of abject casteism in the force as well as the much-hyped progressive social order of Kerala. A detailed study of the exercise of power over common people by police with the consent of the state is recommended. Such research can use the tools of sociological studies and political science and could be interdisciplinary. The contemporary scenario requires such an elaborate take on the role of police in the subjugation of the subaltern sections while trying to climb the social ladder and attain justice and equality. Power, its various manifestations, the role of the state in such situations, workings of the social/moral consciousness can also be probed in detail and included in the ambit of the study.

This thesis is designed as a thematic study on the relationship between society and cinema, and the intricate play of power across decades. The scope of the

study was limited to the films' characterisation, representation, and social connection. As the major aim of the study was to find the missing links to establish patterns across various periods socially and politically, film as a technical medium was not explored in great detail. So, it is highly recommended that films with cop representations can be studied using the technical aspects of cinema, using the tools of film studies. Theoreticians such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have put forth significant concepts and tools to understand cinema as a technical medium. Attempts can be made to probe these technical aspects and understand the politics of representation.

The researchers should be aware of the dominant political mood of the time and must try to focus on the power relations while analysing characters related to power. For example, instances such as glorifying the blatant Islamophobic representations and anti-female utterances by celebrated cop heroes of the 1990s could influence public discourses related to such topics, and a researcher must be vigilant enough to notice it. Creative criticism shall make the filmmakers exercise caution while depicting socially vulnerable sections. Though a strict and semi-fascist censoring of films using the guise of political correctness is not recommended, an attempt to refrain from the glorification of elite machoistic violence is needed. Research on the topic of police representation could affect positive discussions, which in turn could result in character depiction. From depicting the "good cop vs. bad cop" binary to addressing systemic issues like political interference, institutional corruption, and inadequate training is essential. There is a need for stronger, multidimensional portrayals of female police officers to challenge prevailing gender

stereotypes in the force, and future research must point out such lacunae in the characterisation. It is clear that whenever important female cop characters are brought into the plot, attempts are often made to discredit their actions or show them to be either arrogant or incapable. This will be followed by macho characters venting their fury on these women. Research focusing on gender could point out these discrepancies, aiming for a balanced take in such scenarios. The way police are portrayed in Malayalam films has changed significantly, and it is now closely related to Kerala's and India's overall sociopolitical landscape. These cinematic shifts reflect changing public attitudes and larger societal developments, ranging from depictions of the police as morally upright law enforcement officials to more contemporary, nuanced representations that reflect institutional corruption, political meddling, and moral ambiguity. These narratives have been significantly shaped by important sociopolitical events, including the Emergency, political upheaval, the emergence of communist ideas, and growing media attention to custodial violence. Police characters have frequently been employed by filmmakers as a means of making statements about justice, power dynamics, and the inconsistencies inherent in a democracy. The thesis attempted to shed light on the complex relationship between societal consciousness, often controlled by hegemonic ideas and the representation of police characters. There are possibilities for future research based on these findings, and any such attempts would make this effort more fruitful. The recommendations discussed here can be further elaborated, and numerous avenues of knowledge related to this topic could be opened.

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