

**Aesthetic Reconfiguration and the Formation of the
Cultural Self in Popular Media Representations:
A Study of the Visual Culture Practices of Kerala in the 1990s**

**Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
for the award of the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English**

**By
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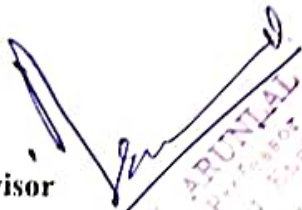
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled “Aesthetic Reconfiguration and the Formation of the Cultural Self in Popular Media Representations: A Study of the Visual Culture Practices of Kerala in the 1990s”, submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy, is a bona fide research work carried out by Nisanth TV, under my supervision and guidance. No part of this thesis had been submitted earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition.



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled **Aesthetic Reconfiguration and the Formation of the Cultural Self in Popular Media Representations: A Study of the Visual Culture Practices of Kerala in the 1990s** is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of Dr. K Arunlal 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.

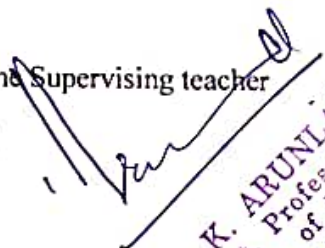
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Date: *29/4/24*



DECLARATION

I, Nisanth TV, hereby declare that the thesis titled “Aesthetic Reconfiguration and the Formation of the Cultural Self in Popular Media Representations: A Study of the Visual Culture Practices of Kerala in the 1990s ” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is a bona fide record of research carried out by me and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma, associateship, fellowship, or any other similar titles.

Mokeri

29 April 2024



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**Dedicated to the memory of my father,
Mr. Raghavan TV**

IMAGES DETACHED FROM every aspect of life merge into a common stream, and the former unity of life is lost forever. Apprehended in a partial way, reality unfolds in a new generality as a pseudo-world apart, solely as an object of contemplation. The tendency toward the specialization of images-of-the-world finds its highest expression in the world of the autonomous image, where deceit deceives itself. The spectacle in its generality is a concrete inversion of life, and, as such, the autonomous movement of non-life.

Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*

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Abstract

With the introduction of neo-liberal economic policies in the 1990s by the Government of India, Kerala also fell in line with consumerist tendencies. These economic changes brought about shifts in popular attitudes, thereby affecting popular culture as well. Long-standing traditions of aesthetic expressions in popular culture were replaced by newly emerging combinations. This study aims to map the underlying cultural patterns that brought about these changes, particularly those that emerged in visual media aesthetics. One of the significant factors that altered the way Malayalis expressed their aesthetic preferences was the new visual media configurations. The thesis hypothesizes the existence of a field of hybridized culture in Kerala in 1990s resulting from these new visual media configurations. Therefore, the study posits an aesthetic reconfiguration as a combined result of all these factors. This inherently points to a changed cultural self that assimilated the new aesthetic values of the globalized idea of modernity and thereby liberated from conflicting traditional and textual anchorage.

Television played a definitive role in this context as it effectively educated people in the new visual media aesthetics. Visual technology stirred up new forms of aesthetic experience for the masses. Traditional frameworks lost their hold on aesthetic values since the new experiences were closely related to a new global context played out by corporate capital. In the new cultural terrain, there was evident visual overload that overshadowed other forms of experiences. Everyone in the new space began to occupy subject positions by engaging in the consumption and reproduction of the new visual experience.

The study examines the nature of these visual cultural practices and the changes they brought to the cultural self of Kerala. A historical examination reveals how the cultural space of Kerala is inherently open to ideals of Western modernity assimilated through historical factors like trade relations, migration, and English medium education. In the context of colonial modernity in the second half of the nineteenth century, these ideals converged into new aesthetic practices associated

with 'fine art'. This change resulted in a conflict between tradition and modernity, which in turn created a split in the cultural self. The popular aesthetic choices reflect this split in various forms and themes. Raja Ravi Varma, as an iconic artist of this period, expressed this split of cultural self in his art. Many characteristics of his art recur in the popular aesthetic practices in the twentieth century, such as the illustrations in the *Painkili* periodicals. In other words, this split in the cultural self remained as the core driving force in cultural practices of Kerala until the 1990s.

Malayalam cinema, through its popular and parallel pathways, marks this conflict internally. Cinema, as a form of technological innovation, represented modernity. It tried to remedy the conflict arising from its affiliation with modern technology by adapting traditional aesthetic experiences in its themes and visual representations. The emergence of middlebrow cinema in the 1980s is an evident form that addressed this situation. It was a new combination for the middle class that emerged as a deciding factor for the convenient and stress-free enjoyment of the modern value system. Until 1990s Malayalam cinema continued to express the same conflict in various forms.

Television emerged as a national medium and, as a product of technology; it has been associated with cultural pollution from the West. In Kerala, it faced many forms of cultural resistance, including being regarded as a representation of imperialistic power. Despite the resistance, it could make a strong cultural impact, especially among the growing middle class. Television, as an object of modernity and as a form of visual entertainment, expressed the same conflict between tradition and modernity in various forms. However, by the 1990s, television was able to prepare the cultural and aesthetic attitude of Malayalis for accepting the new visual culture entering the cultural milieu through various channels of globalization.

With the entry of satellite television channels in the 1990s, a new age of visuality emerged. The concept of tradition lost its textual anchoring and turned out to be a consumer object with imagined nostalgic value. Malayalam cinema, as a visual aesthetic experience, underwent many transformations by accepting this change and recognizing the aesthetics of leisure, imagined nostalgia, and celebration of the new floating concepts of life as its core themes and forms. In this context, the

visual cultural practices do not carry the conflict of tradition and modernity. These transformations in the visual cultural practices endorse an altered attitude towards aesthetic choices that have lost their lodging in the traditional value conduits. The cultural self emerging from this is expressive of its liberation from textual bondage and celebrates its capacity to float free.

സംഗ്രഹം

നവ ലിബറൽ സാമ്പത്തിക നയങ്ങളുടെ ഫലമായി ആയിരത്തി തൊള്ളായിരത്തി തൊണ്ണൂറുകളോടെ കേരളം ഉപഭോക്തൃ സംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ സ്വർഗമായി മാറി . ഈ രാഷ്ട്രീയ സാമ്പത്തിക നയ വ്യതിയാനങ്ങളുടെ ഫലമായി സാംസ്കാരിക രംഗത്തും വളരെയധികം മാറ്റങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടായി. ജനപ്രിയ സംസ്കാരത്തിലെ പാരമ്പര്യ കലാ സൗന്ദര്യ സങ്കല്പനങ്ങൾക്കു പകരം പുതിയ രീതിയിലുള്ള ചേരുവകൾ ഉദയം ചെയ്തു. ഇത്തരം പുതിയ പ്രകടനങ്ങളെയും തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകളെയും സാമ്പത്തികമായി മനസ്സിലാക്കാനും അവയിലെ വിന്യാസങ്ങൾ കണ്ടുപിടിക്കാനുമാണ് ഈ ഗവേഷണം ലക്ഷ്യമിടുന്നത്. ആയിരത്തി തൊള്ളായിരത്തി തൊണ്ണൂറുകളിൽ പുതിയ സാംസ്കാരിക കലർപ്പ് മാതൃകകൾ രൂപപ്പെടുമ്പോഴും അത് ദൃശ്യ മാധ്യമങ്ങളുടെ പെരുപ്പത്തിൽ നിന്നും ഉടലെടുത്ത ഒരു ദൃശ്യസംസ്കാരമായിരുന്നുവെന്നും ഈ പ്രബന്ധം പരികൽപ്പന ചെയ്യുന്നു. മറ്റൊരു തരത്തിൽ, ഈ മാറ്റം സൗന്ദര്യ സങ്കല്പങ്ങളുടെ പുനർനിർണ്ണയം തന്നെയായിരുന്നു. ഈ പ്രക്രിയകളുടെ ചാലക ശക്തിയായി പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തെ സൗന്ദര്യ സങ്കല്പങ്ങളുടെ ജനപ്രിയ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകൾ ആയി മനസ്സിലാക്കി, ആ സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിന് സംഭവിക്കുന്ന മാറ്റങ്ങളെ കാലഘട്ടങ്ങളിൽ വന്ന വ്യതിയാനങ്ങളിലൂടെ മനസ്സിലാക്കാനും ഈ പ്രബന്ധം ശ്രമിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.

ഈ സന്ദർഭത്തിൽ ടെലിവിഷൻ ഒരു നിർണ്ണായക ശക്തിയായി വർത്തിക്കുന്നു. കാരണം അത് പുതിയ ദൃശ്യമാധ്യമ സൗന്ദര്യ സങ്കല്പങ്ങളെ കുറിച്ച് കാഴ്ചക്കാരെ സാക്ഷരരാക്കി. ദൃശ്യ സാങ്കേതികത ടെലിവിഷനിലൂടെ ഒരു പുതിയ ദൃശ്യ സൗന്ദര്യ ബോധത്തെ ജനപ്രിയ സംകാരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി അതിശക്തമായി പ്രസരിപ്പിച്ചു. ഈ പുതിയ സൗന്ദര്യബോധങ്ങൾ ആഗോള കോർപ്പറേറ്റ് മൂലധനവുമായി ബന്ധപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കയാൽ തന്നെ അവ പാരമ്പര്യ സൗന്ദര്യ സങ്കല്പ ചട്ടങ്ങളിൽ ഒതുങ്ങുന്നതായിരുന്നില്ല. ഇതിന്റെ പ്രധാന വശം കാഴ്ചയുടെ അധിക ഭാരം തന്നെയായിരുന്നു: സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രകടനങ്ങൾ എല്ലാം മൾട്ടി മീഡിയ സന്ദേശങ്ങളുടെ രൂപം കൈവരിച്ചു. ഈ പുതിയ സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രതലത്തിൽ എല്ലാവരും ദൃശ്യങ്ങളുടെ ഉപഭോക്താക്കളും പുനരുൽപ്പാദകരും ആയി മാറി.

ഇത്, ഈ ദൃശ്യസംസ്കാര പ്രയോഗങ്ങളുടെയും അവ കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിന് ഉണ്ടാക്കിയ മാറ്റങ്ങളുടെയും പഠനം കൂടിയായി മാറുന്നുണ്ട്. കേരള സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രതലം ചരിത്രപരമായ വ്യാപാര ബന്ധങ്ങൾ, കുടിയേറ്റം, ഇംഗ്ലീഷ് വിദ്യാഭ്യാസം എന്നിവ കൊണ്ടൊക്കെതന്നെ പടിഞ്ഞാറൻ സംസ്കാരത്താൽ വളരെയധികം സ്വാധീനിക്കപ്പെട്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഇതിലൂടെ പടിഞ്ഞാറൻ ആധുനികതയുടെ ആശയങ്ങൾ കേരളത്തിന്റെ സാംസ്കാരിക മൂല്യങ്ങളെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിൽ പങ്ക് വഹിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. പത്തൊൻപതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ കൊളോണിയൽ ആധുനികതയുടെ പശ്ചാത്തലത്തിൽ ഇത്തരം ആശയങ്ങൾ 'ഫൈൻ ആർട്' എന്ന സങ്കല്പവുമായി ചേർന്ന് പുതിയ സൗന്ദര്യബോധ പ്രയോഗങ്ങൾ സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.

ഇത് പാരമ്പര്യവും ആധുനികതയും തമ്മിലുള്ള സംഘർഷങ്ങൾ ആയി മാറി സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിൽ വിള്ളലുകൾ ഉളവാക്കി. ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിലെ ജനപ്രിയ സൗന്ദര്യ രൂപങ്ങൾ ഈ വിള്ളൽ പ്രതിഫലിപ്പിക്കുന്നതായി കാണാം. രാജാ രവിവർമ്മയുടെ ചിത്രങ്ങളിലെ ആധുനികതയും പാരമ്പര്യവും തമ്മിലുള്ള സംഘർഷം ഇതിനുദാഹരണമാണ്. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കലയുടെ പല സവിശേഷതകളും ഇരുപതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിലെ ജനപ്രിയ കലകളിലും കണ്ടെത്താൻ കഴിയും. പൈങ്കിളി വാരികകളിലെ ഇല്ലസ്ട്രേഷനുകൾ പലതും ഇതേ പ്രത്യേകതകൾ കാണിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ഇതിൽനിന്നും, ഈ സാംസ്കാരിക സംഘർഷം ആയിരത്തി തൊള്ളായിരത്തി തൊണ്ണൂറുകൾ വരെയുള്ള സൗന്ദര്യബോധ സങ്കല്പങ്ങളുടെയും സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രയോഗങ്ങളുടെയും പ്രധാന ആന്തരിക ചോദ്യനയായി നിലകൊള്ളുന്നു എന്നു അനുമാനിക്കാം.

മലയാള സിനിമയുടെ വളർച്ചയുടെ ചരിത്രം ഈ സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിലെ വിടവിനെ പലതരത്തിൽ പ്രതിഫലിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ഒരു സാങ്കേതിക സംവിധാനമെന്ന നിലയിൽ സിനിമ

ആധുനികതയെ പ്രതിനിധീകരിക്കുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ അത് ഉള്ളടക്കത്തിനെയും ദൃശ്യ പാഠങ്ങളെയും പാരമ്പര്യ ചട്ടക്കൂടുകൾ കൊണ്ട് നിയന്ത്രിച്ച് പാരമ്പര്യ / ആധുനികത സംഘർഷങ്ങൾ മറികടക്കാൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. എൺപതുകളോട് കൂടി ഉണ്ടായ മധ്യവർത്തി സിനിമ (ജനപ്രിയ/ കലാ സിനിമകളുടെ സംയോജനം) ആ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ ശക്തമായി മാറിയ മധ്യ വർഗ ത്തിന്റെ താൽപ്പര്യങ്ങളെ പരിലാളിക്കുന്നതായി കാണാം. ഈ കാലഘട്ടത്തിൽ മധ്യ വർഗ താൽപ്പര്യങ്ങൾ ആധുനികതയേയും പാരമ്പര്യത്തെയും ഒരുപോലെ പുണരാനാണ് ശ്രമിച്ചിരുന്നത്.

ടെലിവിഷൻ എന്ന ദൃശ്യ മാധ്യമം ഉയർന്നു വരുമ്പോൾ തന്നെ ഒരു സാങ്കേതിക വിദ്യ എന്ന നിലക്ക് ഇന്ത്യൻ സംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ സാംസ്കാരിക മലിനീകരണം എന്ന വിശേഷണം അത് പേറുന്നുണ്ട്. സാംസ്കാരിക മലിനീകരണത്തിന്റെയും സാമ്രാജ്യത്വ പ്രതിനിധാനത്തിന്റെയും പേരിൽ അത് പല വിധത്തിൽ പ്രതിരോധിക്കപ്പെടുന്നുണ്ട്. ഇത്തരത്തിൽ ടെലിവിഷനും, പാരമ്പര്യവും ആധുനികതയും തമ്മിലുള്ള സംഘർഷങ്ങളെ വെളിവാക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ഇതിനെല്ലാം മീതെ അത് വളരെ ശക്തമായ സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വാധീനം, പ്രത്യേകിച്ചും മധ്യ വർഗത്തിന്മേൽ, ഉണ്ടാക്കി. തൊണ്ണൂറുകൾ ആകുമ്പോഴേക്കും അത് ഒരു പുതിയ ദൃശ്യ സംസ്കാരത്തെ സ്വീകരിക്കാൻ വിധത്തിൽ മലയാളിയുടെ സാംസ്കാരിക പ്രതലത്തെ ഒരുക്കിയെടുക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു.

സാമ്പത്തിക ആഗോള വൽക്കരണവും മറ്റും ചേർന്ന് തൊണ്ണൂറുകളിൽ കേരളത്തിന്റെ ദൃശ്യ സംകാരത്തിൽ കാര്യമായ മാറ്റങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാക്കി. ഉപഗ്രഹ ടെലിവിഷൻ ചാനലുകളുടെ വരവോടു കൂടി പാരമ്പര്യം എന്നത് ദൃശ്യ മാധ്യമങ്ങളിലെ ഗൃഹാതുരത്വ മൂല്യങ്ങൾ ഉള്ള വിൽപ്പനച്ചരക്കായി മാറി. പാരമ്പര്യ മൂല്യങ്ങളിൽ ഉള്ള നഷ്ടങ്ങൾ നഷ്ടപ്പെട്ടതുകൊണ്ടുതന്നെ ആധുനികതയുമായുള്ള പ പാരമ്പര്യത്തിന്റെ കലഹവും അതിൽ നിന്നുളവാകുന്ന സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിലെ പിളർപ്പും ഇല്ലാതായി. മലയാള സിനിമയിലും ഇതുപോലെയുള്ള മാറ്റങ്ങൾ ഉണ്ടാവുകയും, വിശ്രമവും വിനോദവുമാണ് ജീവിതം എന്ന വ്യാഖ്യാനങ്ങൾ നിറഞ്ഞ, ഭാവനയിലെ ഗൃഹാതുരത്വത്തെ പുണരുന്ന ഉള്ളടക്കങ്ങൾക്കും ദൃശ്യതയ്ക്കും പ്രാധാന്യം ലഭിക്കുകയും ചെയ്തു.

ദൃശ്യ സംസ്കാരത്തിലെ ഇത്തരം മാറ്റങ്ങൾ സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നത് ഒരു പുതിയ തരം സാംസ്കാരിക സ്വത്വത്തിന്റെ ഉദയമാണ്. ഇതിന് പാരമ്പര്യ മൂല്യ വ്യവസ്ഥയിലും പാഠങ്ങളിലും ഉള്ള വേരുകൾ നഷ്ടമായിരിക്കുന്നു. അതുകൊണ്ടു തന്നെ അതിനു സംഘർഷങ്ങൾ ഇല്ലാതെ ആഗോള ആധുനികതയെ ആഘോഷിക്കാൻ കഴിയുന്നുമുണ്ട്.

Chapter I

Introduction

Kerala has a unique place in the history of sociological and cultural discussions of India due to its comparatively high social indices which are similar to that of developed countries. In academic discussions, this is often referred to as the 'Kerala Model' of development. A paradoxical state of attainment of high levels of social development with comparatively low per capita income is the speciality of this model. This paradoxical nature of social development became a frequent topic in academic discussions after the publication of a study done by the United Nations and the Centre for Development Studies in 1975. The report states that Kerala is different from other parts of India as its "*per capita* income is low (about one seventh lower than the average for India as a whole), but its rate of literacy is high (twice the rate for India as a whole), and it has also had a long tradition of providing in sizable volume such services as education and health to the general public" ("Poverty, Unemployment" iv). The same report finds Social mobilization, land reforms, effective public distribution system, health care, and, most importantly, education as the reasons for this paradoxical situation (147-154).

Education and schooling have been crucial in shaping the Kerala model; but the shape is not necessarily one that planners might hope for or intend.

Thousands of women teachers have been welcome salary earners for their families for nearly a hundred years. The education of girls raises the age of

marriage. Literate women care for their babies more successfully than illiterate mothers.(Jeffrey, *Politics, Women*150)

By the last decades of the twentieth century the Kerala Model of development came under wide criticism from different quarters. For instance, in a debate on *The Perils of Social Development without Economic Growth: The Development Debacle of Kerala, India* in 1998 organized by the Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars, Richard Frankie and Amartya Sen criticised the Kerala model as “romanticised versions” that overlooked the underlying economic crisis(George, *The Kerala Model* 35). J Devika points out that the “egalitarian developmentalism” that remained the core idea of the narrative of ‘Kerala model’, in fact, left out many marginalised communities. “While the social democratic construction of Kerala as a near-egalitarian paradise may have a certain utility in anticapitalist political work in the West, it obscures the exclusion of the lower castes (Dalits) and coastal and tribal communities, and works against their struggle for resources and citizenship, heightened in the present” (“Egalitarian”, 801-802). Other scholars also expressed the same concerns. For instance T. K Ramachandran states in 1995:

Any realistic analysis of contemporary Kerala society and culture will have to come to terms with what can tentatively be termed ‘the ultra-conservative backlash’. Nurtured diligently by the popular media, and aided and abetted by the establishment, the ‘backlash’ has become a well-entrenched and palpable ideological entity in our daily life. Further, its pernicious influence has eroded, to a great extent, the unquestioned hegemony that the progressive forces had enjoyed in the cultural life of Kerala right up to the sixties. (110)

In this way, the twenty first century became a turning point that raised crucial questions regarding many traditionally accepted notions about the social and cultural practices of Kerala.

In terms of its political affiliation, the state of Kerala is known as a stronghold of the left parties that strongly opposed consumerist tendencies (Jeffrey, *Politics, Women* 1). Despite these political and social factors, Kerala quickly became a hub for consumer goods and witnessed great cultural transformations at the turn of the twenty-first century as a result of globalisation (Mannathukkaren, 527-532). This change and its repercussions were discussed by Filippo and Caroline Osellas in their study of Ezhava community (“Consumption Life and Social Mobility”, 1007-1013). It was a subversion of tradition and emergence of new forms of cultural expressions. For example, availability of new technology brought remarkable changes in stage performances that tried to recreate cinematic experiences in live performances. The emergence of Mimics Parade as a dominant form of stage performance in this period points at this cultural shift. The period witnessed the reformulation of the art of mimicry, a mere gap-filler in stage shows until then, into a full-fledged performance with a duration of two to three hours with high power sound and light technology..

The popularity of the mimicry artists based in and around Kochi and organized by Cochin Kalabhavan grew steadily to the point that they did their first show abroad in the US in 1984 and in the Persian Gulf in 1987. The necessity to keep the audience engaged required that the 2–3 hour programs included comedy sketches known as ‘skits’ that alternated with performance of popular songs. By 1987, when the first ‘Gulf Show of Cochin Kalabhavan’ was staged, Mimics Parade had already begun using

several ‘skits’ that were not of mere imitation of voices, but of bodies and manners. (Sebastian 114)

Subhash Chandran in his novel *Manushyanu Oru Amugham* (2010) cynically depicts the way in which the performance of mimicry dominates the cultural space of Kerala in this period by picturing a temple festival in a fictional village identified as Thachankara.

That year, four young men, who came from Kochi for performing in the temple festival, unloaded a new performance called Mimics Parade in Thachanakkara. The huge box speakers rented out from Aluva amplified their incredible mimicked voices a thousand times. A few members in the Devaswom Festival Committee, who had been struggling to bring back the long-ignored Kathakali to the temple, laughed uncontrollably at the mimicry performance, and pre-booked young men in their sandal-coloured uniforms for the next year’s festivities. (My trans.299)

Mimics Parade was a new form that combined mimicry of sounds, skits, modern dance and sound, and light shows. This format was introduced for the first time in 1980s by the mimicry troupe Cochin Kalabhavan (George, “Why Mimicry Artists”). Cochin Kalabhavan also released audio cassettes that contained such performances. Anubha George, in an article written in the online magazine *Scroll.in*, examines the comparatively higher influence of Mimicry artists in the cultural space of Kerala and makes the following observation: “*Dhe Maveli Kombathu*, a comic album series that released every Onam, from the early 1990s to the mid-nineties. The series portrayed Kerala through the eyes of the protagonist Mahabali during Onam”. Such attempts used the possibility of technology for popularising the

mimicry. Mimicry and comic films enriched each other. While mimicry artists used films as their primary source for creating humour, the comedy films thrived on the supply of mimicry artists from the stage (Sebastian 112). When the audience watched the mimicry artists performing in films and on live stage shows in which they presented comic imitations of film scenes, a continuity of cinematic experience was established. Such shows were also available in the form of VHS to be viewed on television at home.

It could be argued that the availability of new light and sound technology facilitated the necessary background by creating cinematic illusion on stage. New formats of visual experiences came out by creating such continuities between screen and reality. This, certainly, influenced the aesthetic choices of Malayalis and resulted in the gradual formation of an altered cultural self. Visual media like television and cinema played a significant role in this reconfiguration of aesthetic choices and the formation of a new cultural self. Appadurai writes: “Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin” (*Modernity* 3). By tracing various patterns of these two mediums some conclusions could be formulated regarding the emergence of a new cultural self at the turn of the century.

Television and cinema represent two prominent forms of visual media that reconfigured the aesthetic choices of Malayalis and substantially aided the formation of a new cultural self at the turn of the century. The transformations experienced by Kerala in the realm of culture cannot be approached in isolation, for their evolution is connected to the larger spectrum of Indian culture. The colonial modernity in the

nineteenth-century India, in this context, becomes the background from which such visual cultural practices emerge.

The paradigm shifts in the cultural spectrum, experienced by India in the last decades of the twentieth century were directly or indirectly related to the changes in the underlying social, economic, and political factors. In the official version, India faced an economic crisis due to currency deficit to meet import worsened by the Gulf War as it depended on the Gulf countries for the import of petroleum (Rajaraman). To tackle the crisis, political decision was taken to liberalise the economic system. As a result, India became a part of the global economy by adopting a market-oriented consumer system that responded to the global economic tides. Globalisation and liberalization of economy led to a subversion that dismantled existing notions of Indian culture. Appadurai says: "Globalisation has shrunk the distance between producers and consumers, broken many links between labour and family life, obscured the lines between temporary locales and imaginary national attachments" (*Modernity* 9). In India, as elsewhere, visual media, especially television had a major role in this process.

Globalisation and corporate investments by multinational corporations have undoubtedly played a role in the changing culture of India that became apparent in the audiovisual narratives, news, and advertisements. In India, from the 1990s private TV channels have proliferated that compete with each other for breaking news and even making news. (Dasgupta 5)

The effect of this cultural subversion had two tangents. On the one side, there was an invasion of the Western cultural values under the title of global culture and on the other; the local cultural forms began to attain global values in the market. The

spread of electronic media played a significant role in this transformation. The critical role of electronic media in transforming the global cultural-scape becomes evident in Appadurai's observation. He goes on to argue that: "Because of the sheer multiplicity of forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephone) and because of the rapid way in which they move through daily life routines, electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project" (*Modernity* 4). All engagements of daily life that form the foundations of cultural pattern are thereby affected in this manner. New forms of cultural expressions are born from these altered engagements.

Globalisation unsettled the foundational values of the tradition that were once reformulated by colonial modernity in the nineteenth century. Since the values of colonial modernity were inherently acquired from European modernity, one of the significant processes of modernization it offered was 'refinement.' As a result, new cultural forms of fine art were born. Such forms could be learned from academic institutions by following a uniform syllabus rather than through apprenticeship. This refinement of tradition resulted in an internal conflict between tradition and modernity. In this context and in the larger context the present study, idea of this conflict is recurrently used to explain cultural formations in various historical stages. Therefore the idea of tradition is to be understood as a framework that forms from ethical and aesthetic notions already existing in a cultural context. The culture preferences are often contained by this framework negotiated through aesthetic and ethical justifications. In the context of colonial modernity this framework was destabilized by values formed and prescribed by colonial administration in the name of refinement. It could also be stated that this refinement of culture was a type of

hybridisation that remoulded the underlying structures of the traditional understanding of culture. But for colonial subjects, the experience of modernity created more scepticism rather than wholehearted acceptance. Partha Chatterjee argues that the idea of Indian modernity is entwined with its colonial version. India could never believe in the possibility of a universal modernity:

Somehow, from the very beginning, we had a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledges and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain consumers of universal modernity; never would be taken seriously as its producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, for over hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become creators of our own modernity. (4)

Chatterjee writes from the specific context of the formation of *Bangali Badralok* at the time of colonial modernity. Though his observations cannot be generalised for the whole India, similar formations may be identified in other parts of India. For example, he observes how the formation of various institutions for the localisation of modern knowledge systems in the second half of the nineteenth century in India facilitated the assimilation of the new knowledge in an indigenous context far away from the source of modernity (*Our Modernity*16). Similarly in Kerala, caste organisations like *Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam* founded in 1903, *Yoga Kshema Sabha* founded in 1908, and *Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangham* founded in 1907 functioned in line with the ideals of colonial modernity by focussing on modern education. All these attempts were primarily parts of an

educative process centered on ideals of colonial modernity carried out through indigenous social institutions that resulted in hybrid forms of modernity.

This hybridity has been the core principle of cultural expressions refined by colonial modernity and lead to the formation of unstable forms of cultural expressions. Glimpses of this core hybridity were seen in various forms of internal conflicts in cultural expressions in different circumstances. These conflicts led to a split in the cultural self¹ not only as a form of creative expression but also as a limiting principle behind every day cultural choices. Since the popular also meant the most preferred forms in daily choices of cultural products, they invariably became reflections of the split cultural self in many contexts.

Ours is the modernity of the once-colonized. The same historical process that has taught us the value of modernity has also made us the victims of modernity. Our attitude to modernity, therefore, cannot but be deeply be ambiguous. This is reflected in the way we have described our experience with modernity in the last century and a half, from Rajnarayan Basu to our contemporaries today. (Chatterjee 20)

This ambiguity leads finally to a complete rejection of tradition in the face of global modernity, or the modernity proposed by the global capital in terms of consumerism. Colonial modernity thus becomes an experience that prepared the ground for quick and easy changes in cultural patterns in the times of globalisation at the end of the twentieth century.

To a certain extent, the hybridization of tradition helped the quick and easy cultural transformations in the times of globalisation. The desires kindled by colonial modernity functioned as the foundations for the paradigm shifts in the

culture at the end of the twentieth century. In such formations, the split of cultural self is never experienced as a painful reality but gets celebrated as a choice by replacing the values of tradition with new global values. These global values were created by a transnational flow of capital and commodities and were not tied to particular nationalities. The prominent feature of these new hybrid forms of culture is their ephemerality induced by commodity fetishism. Therefore globalisation and the resulting cultural confusion at the turn of the century may be viewed as the second turning point of the Indian cultural milieu. Subsequently, colonial modernity and globalisation can be considered as two significant paradigm shifts in the cultural history of India².

Both these occasions—the colonial modernity at the end of the nineteenth century and globalisation at the end of the twentieth century—are marked by a dominant sense of visuality because the dominant sense of the Western modernity was visual³. The visual turn of Indian culture, in these occasions, shows a hybrid nature that leads to a split cultural self in many occasions. When analysing the general claim that the primary character of European Modernity is visual, Martin Jay writes:

...it is difficult to deny that the visual has been dominant in modern Western culture in a wide variety of ways. Whether we focus on "the mirror of nature" metaphor in philosophy with Richard Rorty or emphasize the prevalence of surveillance with Michel Foucault or bemoan the society of the spectacle with Guy Debord, we confront again and again the ubiquity of vision as the master sense of the modern era. (3)

Vision and visuality, thus, evolve as the most significant practices of daily life of modern society. Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967) looks at this phenomenon as a corruption of modern society. According to him, “it is the heart of society’s real unreality”(13). Spectacles are composed of “signs of dominant organization of production” and they are to be exposed “as a visible negation of life” (13, 14). Emergence of the early cinema and the amusement-park are examples for this phenomenon. Cartesian perspectivalism is identified with the modern scopic regime for a long time. Through this, modern paintings gradually attained the quality of textual narratives by adding details. The narrative element that formerly carried out the duty of effective realism by going into details was transformed as the background of the main object (Jay 5-9).

The visuality of colonial modernity was related to qualities adopted from European modernity which was in many ways ‘scopic’ with its Cartesian perspectivalism and refinement in art as the scribbling of Blake that “art is the foundation of Empire” (Pinney, “Look of History” 115). In the instance of colonial modernity, Indian visual art underwent a ‘refinement’ by adopting new mediums and methods introduced through colonial institutions of art. The adaption of oil as the medium, perspectivalism, the growth of the printing industry, and the spread of Calendars were the result of the colonial transformation of visual art in India. The spread of photography and later the introduction of cinema also influenced this transformation. For example, the new methods of representation reinvented the Hindu pantheon by presenting gods and mythological characters in new perspectives.

Here patronage mapped onto pilgrimage and social-commercial networks, mapping in turn onto technologies and circuits of movement variously influenced by colonial trade, conquest, and missionary activity. Techniques such as reverse glass painting, woodblock printing, photography, and elements of perspective and modelling were not simply reincorporated into pre-existing iconic schemata but were used to create devotional and secular forms that instituted new modes of address to—and brought into being—new constituencies of vernacular consumers. (Jain 92)

The calendar industry ensured the popularity of these images and brought the gods outside the temples into the poor households. Such methodological and technological changes in artistic representations could create new popular perceptions regarding visuals.

Television, a medium which received much of its popularity as a consequence of the emergence of globalisation, became a strong device for spreading a new visual culture. It systematically altered the visual culture and simultaneously functioned as an effective tool of consumerism. It could reinvent the everyday life of individuals and give momentum to the transformations of the cultural self mentioned earlier. The broadcast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath* exerted a significant influence on Indian politics in the twentieth century. Aravind Rajgopal writes: “As the era of economic reforms approached, Hindu nationalism saw its opportunity to act as a hinge or point of transfer between old and new dispensations, providing assurance of a symbolic continuity between them, with the Ramayan available as part of its armoury” (119). Cinema also became an assertive presence in cultural choices apart from its growth as the most important form of visual mass entertainment. These two

prominent visual media controlled the dynamics of visual cultural practices at the turn of the century.

The methods of treatment of visuals in these media and the resulting cultural effect are to be understood in two tangents. On the one hand, they are to be connected to the specific cultural situations of Kerala and, on the other, they are to be understood in the larger context of India. As far as the visual cultural practices are concerned, some continuity and possible departure may be traced back to the practices and figures of colonial modernity in the form of ideals, methods, and necessary evolutions. For instance, popularity of cinematic and television visuals among Malayalis in the last decade of the twentieth century reflected a total departure from the conflict of tradition and modernity that continued to occupy cultural expressions until then. In retrospect, this departure is the result of the very same conflict that moulded the cultural self continuously for a century. Apart from these two tangents, many other epistemological inquiries are needed to understand such a cultural phenomenon. The difficulty of studying this in a singular tangent makes these phenomena open to multiple layers of meaning. The result of such a study would naturally belong to cultural studies due to the sheer involvement of several disciplines in comprehending the hidden patterns.

Social and economic factors tend to be vital forces in reconfiguring the cultural self according to the visual practices as represented in visual media namely cinema and television. Statistical evidence is used to confirm various trends that may point to popular choices and hidden anxieties produced by the difference between desires and achievement in society. It is an accepted fact⁴ that economic situations, sociological trends, and cultural choices are interlinked. For example, the rise of the

middle class as a socio-economic phenomenon since the beginning of the twentieth century in Kerala becomes a significant factor in the cultural changes. Variations in foreign remittance, industrial and agricultural policy changes, governmental decisions regarding private investments, and many other economic factors have direct bearing on the cultural changes and the everyday cultural choices of the individual. Social factors like family system, education, and cultural exposure because of trade and commerce also contributed to the cultural configuration under study. It could be affirmed that both economic and social classifications and ethical compulsions of belonging to a particular class also influenced cultural choices. Pierre Bourdieu explains how social fields induce an inert compulsion for attaining capital—economic, cultural, and symbolic. “In the cultural market – and no doubt elsewhere—the matching of supply and demand is neither the simple effect of production imposing itself on consumption nor the effect of a conscious endeavour to serve the consumers’ needs, but the result of the objective orchestration of two relatively independent logics, that of fields of production and that of fields of consumption”(Bourdieu 230). Every field exerts a compulsion on its members to choose ethically for belonging to that field resulting in the production of a particular taste. Taste changes when, “...the demand which is shaped in the objectively or subjectively antagonistic relations between the different classes or class fractions over material or cultural consumer goods or, more exactly, in the competitive struggle between them over these goods...”(230). The dissertation used such insights to tackle some complexities, but has not been bound by any particular sociological theories.

Aesthetics is treated as an expression of attitude in the cultural choice rather than a discourse regarding the abstract quality of an object that attracts for no specific reason. The popularity of a particular expression or format in the visual media—cinema or television—derives from the frequency of being chosen. Here, the social orientation towards a specific pattern of visual content is taken for a particular aesthetic configuration in society. The term ‘taste’ is also used to indicate the same. Bourdieu states: “Popular taste applies the schemes of the ethos, which pertain in the ordinary circumstances of life, to legitimate works of art, and so performs a systematic reduction of the things of art to the things of life” (5). He points at the function of education in cultivating the taste. In the context of India, this observation assumes critical significance in understanding the role of English education in the formation of colonial modernity. Education functions as a necessary qualification for aesthetic disposition, as it forms the “academic capital” that distinguishes the educated bourgeois from other classes (Bourdieu 23). But everything that “takes place as if the ‘popular aesthetic’ were based on the affirmation of continuity between art and life, which implies the subordination of form to function, or, one might say. On a refusal of the refusal which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, i.e., the clear-cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specifically aesthetic disposition” (Bourdieu 32). He places the ‘popular taste’ in opposition to the taste of the bourgeois. The elite social classes with ‘academic capital’ decided the ‘good’ taste or the ‘refined’ taste⁵. Taste, as a part of elite culture, creates a social compulsion for everyone to follow the good taste which is obviously the refined taste of the bourgeois. While analysing the ideas of social distinction, Gronow suggests:

For the new middle class – or rather the new bourgeoisie, whose ethical and aesthetic standards the new middle class only helps to universalize – this game of distinctions functions in a particular way. Its members do not try to ascend along the same scale or hierarchy of values as their predecessors; on the contrary, their dispositions and preferences tend to deny the importance and relevance of the old order. In disregarding the tastes and lifestyles of their superiors, they tend to establish a completely new hierarchy of tastes demanding the status of legitimate or good taste. Thus they are challengers of the old culture, not social climbers trying to ascend its ladders.(24)

In the first instance, the taste is imitated and, in the second, it is rejected as old to establish a new hierarchy that challenges the old order. A similar pattern can be found functioning in the two stages of modernity that have been mentioned: the colonial modernity and the modernity brought in by globalisation. When they are considered from the perspective of shifting taste, the first one seems to let the tradition remain as a continuously conflicting element within the modernity in various forms. In this way, the conflict between tradition and modernity has led to a split in cultural self. In the second stage, when globalisation created a new hedonistic taste, tradition lost its role entirely in making cultural choices. The cultural self became a floating one without any anchorage in tradition. In other words, the framework of tradition that controlled the cultural choices even in the space of modernity loses its control. The conglomeration of numerous factors that created this trend may be quantified and studied for understanding the complex sociological pattern. Since such an attempt is beyond the scope of the present project, the study tries to propose explanations about the codes that create the taste.It

does not make any final ideological statements regarding the conclusions reached. In this context, aesthetics is a tendency culturally created and constantly influenced by shifting cultural patterns. In a commodity culture fuelled by globalisation, the 'taste' is just another product of consumerism. Apparently, visual media has a significant role in deploying these codes which is explored as a part of the present study.

Visual culture provides many possibilities to link factors under analysis. In his introduction to *The Visual Culture Reader*, Nicholas Mirzoeff points at the 'intervisuality' of present-day visuals. With the technological advancement in the field of media and communication, visuals intersect in multiple points in their journey to various directions. The new type of subjects created in this environment is called "visual subjects" (10). "By the visual subject, I mean a person who is both constituted as an agent of sight (regardless of his or her biological capacity to see) and as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity", a two-fold visual subject that emerges from the replacement of "I think therefore I am" by "I am seen and I see that I am seen"(10). This observation is relevant in the case of Kerala that embraced the consumer culture ensuing globalisation in 1990s with an avid interest. When the flood gate of consumer objects from the West was opened, the cultural space of Kerala suddenly turned into a consumer market. Television as a powerful visual media played a crucial role in this transformation, because it could bring the visuals of a fascinating consumer world into the house and family of Keralites, or it could bring out the underlying urge for visibility in the cultural texts of Kerala. For example, the social reformation movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries viewed visibility as one of the primary steps towards achieving equality of social status. The idea was that access to public space decides an

individual's membership into the groups that determine cultural matters. For example, there were many struggles regarding the visibility of female bodies like *marumarakkal samaram* (the agitation of women to cover their upper body) of the lower caste women. On another instance, the *sudra* women did not have the right to wear gold and silver jewellery until a royal proclamation regarding this came out in 1768 (Udayakumar, *Writing the First Person* 14). The women of *pulaya* caste used to wear red stone necklace as a part of their caste identity. Such movements related to visibility were partly influenced by the colonial modernity and its educative processes. Consequently, they carried the influence of European scopical regime, though not directly. It would be accurate to assert that the act of seeing and being seen were problematical in the setting of the reform movements. If cultural products are considered as a part of the vogue, it is interesting to note the dominant aspect of visuality in the narratives written in the late nineteenth century. Udaya Kumar, while analysing the novel *Premamrutam* (1913), writes about the predominance of visual images in the narrative. "Readers are interpellated into a new imaginative practice in which the configuration of vision and language, seeing and saying, become difficult to disentangle" (*Writing the First Person* 146). The introduction of photography also played a crucial role in bringing this realistic turn. The emergence of photography influenced the methods of popular artists who tried to bring in a more realistic rendering in their works. The fascination for realism in painting and narratives changed to bring imaginative expressions comparatively more near to life. The result of these practices is the formation of a cultural self prominently occupied by visuals. Emergence of the modern visual subject in the backdrop of globalisation in Kerala at the end of twentieth century can be traced back to this context. With access to

advanced visual communication systems spreading across national boundaries that increased the pace of globalisation, Malayalis also became global visual subjects. Television and cinema as popular media had a vital role in this transformation.

One of the significant features of the popular visual media ensuing globalisation was the way in which they influenced each other and created mixed forms and contents. For example, one of the popular forms of television broadcast, in the beginning, was the broadcast of cinema on television. The viewers of television watched the repeated telecast of films many times so as to absorb the characters and situations into their daily life. Moreover, the rise of popular stage shows, like *mimics parade* in the 1990s in Kerala, definitely had a huge influence on how films were viewed. The main content of such shows was imitation of film stars and skits that contain humorous rendering of the plots of various films. Traditional art forms were either ridiculed as boring or were reformatted with western music and dance moves as they are shown in films. Such recreations provided new experiences of intertextuality to the viewers. Irit Rogoff in *Studying Visual Culture* writes:

Thus visual culture opens up an entire world of intertextuality in which images, sounds, and spatial delineations are read on to and through one another, lending ever-accruing layers of meanings and of subjective responses to each encounter we might have with film, TV, advertising, art works, buildings or urban environments. In a sense we have produced a field of vision version of Derrida's concept of difference and its achievement has had two fold effect both on structures of meaning and interpretation and on the epistemic and institutional frameworks that attempt to organize them.(24,25)

Further, insights from the theories of surveillance by Michael Foucault, and the theories of subjectivity by Louis Althusser are used in many contexts in the present study. In the study of image production in the twentieth-century, theories on the reality of images are important. According to Jean Baudrillard, “it is in its resemblance, not only analogical but technological, that the image is most immoral and most perverse” (*Evil Demon* 14). The visuals may be purely manipulative in developing an effect of reality. Such effects of reality could create an alternative reality aimed at fulfilling the desire of society. In his, *Showing and Seeing: Critique of Visual Culture*, W.J.T. Mitchell writes:

I propose what I hope is a more nuanced and balanced approach located in the equivocation between the visual image as instrument and agency, the image as a tool for manipulation, one the one hand, and as an apparently autonomous source of its own purposes and meanings on the other. This approach would treat visual culture and visual images as ‘go-betweens’ in social transactions, as a repertoire of screen images or templates that structure our encounters with other human beings. (96)

An intense form of this condition is evident in the wake of globalisation where the visual media controls basic choices of everyday life of human beings. In the preface to the third French edition of *The Society of the Spectacle*, originally published in 1967, Debord says, “This striving of the spectacle toward modernization and unification, together with all the other tendencies toward the simplification of society, was what in 1989 led the Russian bureaucracy suddenly, and as one man, to convert to the current ideology of democracy - in other words, to the dictatorial freedom of the Market, as tempered by the recognition of the rights of Homo

Spectator” (9). Guy Debord looks at the domination of spectacle as a process of decay of human relationships. Spectacle is the representation that replaces reality of experience. He looks at various historical events like the World Wars, attempts of European integration in 1960s, and later the dismantling of the USSR as a result of this simplification of life as spectacle. In the first thesis he states, “The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that once was directly lived has become mere representation”(12). The sixth thesis states:

Understood in its totality, the spectacle is both the outcome and the goal of the dominant mode of production. It is not something added to the real world not a decorative element, so to speak. On the contrary, it is the very heart of society's real unreality. In all its specific manifestations - news or propaganda, advertising or the actual consumption of entertainment the spectacle epitomizes the prevailing model of social life. It is the omnipresent celebration of a choice already made in the sphere of production, and the consummate result of that choice. In form as in content the spectacle serves as total justification for the conditions and aims of the existing system. It further ensures the permanent presence of that justification, for it governs almost all time spent outside the production process itself. (13)

This statement uncovers the way in which the capitalist industrial production and consumer culture turned European life into a continuous display of spectacle mediated by mass media. The seventeenth thesis traces the gradual development from being to having and then to appearing (16). This observation parallels that of Mirzoeff about ‘visual subject’ that defines oneself by ‘being

seen'andsimultaneously having a visual perception of the same. By turning the combination of economy and political events into a form of spectacle, the life in the industrial society appears to make choices of spectacle that have already been constructed. So, the term 'sapiens,' that indicates liberal choice and an ability to discern, is replaced with the term 'spectator.' As visual media became a deciding factor in the cultural act of every day, aesthetic disposition became a choice that has already been made somewhere else by forces of production giving birth to a new cultural self for Malayali spectator.

Raymond Williams in his seminal work *Culture and Society* observes the emergence of words like industry, democracy, class, art, and culture in the first half of the nineteenth-century England (xi). These terms acquire a new set of meanings in the latter half of the eighteenth century. The term culture acquires polysemantic dimensions by making a departure from the traditional meaning of "tending a natural growth."

But this latter use, which had usually been a culture of something, was changed, in the nineteenth century, to culture as such, a thing in itself. It came to mean, first, 'a general state or habit of the mind', having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean 'the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole'. Third, it came to mean 'the general body of the arts'. Fourth, later in the century, it came to mean a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual'. It came also, as we know, to be a word which often provoked either hostility or embarrassment. (xiv)

These definitions are helpful in reaching solid conclusions regarding the idea of the cultural self. They provide a wide angle regarding the understanding of culture with a variety of reference including private aesthetic. While commenting on the numerous reference points these definitions of culture can make, Williams writes, "Further, while these responses define bearings, in a given external area that was surveyed, there is also, in the formation of the meanings of culture, an evident reference back to an area of personal and apparently private experience, which was notably to affect the meaning and practice of art" (xvi).

In the context of the present study, this suggestion is important in assuming the mutual exchanges between individual practices and cultural practices. Here, an aesthetic attitude reflected in the cultural choices of an individual appears to be inside the purview of social factors. For example, policy changes on the economic front of a nation may open up the limits of aesthetic choices previously available. At the same time, the individual is bound by moral codes as a part of cultural belongingness. Even though a change in the aesthetic is desired, the existing moral codes may create conflict that is reflected in the hesitation for moving towards new choices. Since the aesthetic experience primarily created a sense of being good the individual may be apprehensive about getting detached from existing moral codes (Gronov 11,12 and Eco 8). These conflicts are finally overcome by middle-class societies as a move towards fulfilling political aspirations. In his *Ideology of the Aesthetic*, Eagleton says, "The aesthetic offers the middle class a superbly versatile model of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between the law and desire, morality and knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social

relations on the basis of custom, affection and sympathy" (28). In a bourgeois society where individual sensibility dominates, enlightened opinion has a free circulation and diverse participants enjoy abstractly equalized status (Eagleton 32) the possibility of aesthetic choices, thus enjoyed by the middle class, forms the taste or the trend that reflects the cultural self.

In the wake of globalisation, these choices are aestheticised. This change is similar to the refinement of art at the time of colonial modernity. As Partha Mitter observes one of the reasons for the shift in the elite taste at the time of colonial modernity was the accumulation of European objects in the colonial cities (270). Similarly, the accumulation of consumer objects in the market at the time of globalisation remoulded the aesthetic choices of individuals. With the development of mass communication representations of the global taste are available locally and as a consequence individual choices are tied up with global taste or lifestyle. According to Anthony Giddens, "The development and expansion of modern institutions were directly bound up with the tremendous increase in the mediation of experience which these communication forms brought in their train" (*Modernity and Self Identity*, 24). In other words, the global is moulded into the local through an aesthetic mediation of experience. So the taste is marked by a tendency to be global in taste which is otherwise called global lifestyle. Taste comprises both aesthetic and moral values. "Taste was essentially both an aesthetic and moral category; in other words, these senses could not be separated from each other. Thus, decent conduct, dress and decorum were all indicators of an individual's moral value, or good taste" (Gronow 11,12). That means there is a moral compulsion on the part of society to make a particular choice as a condition for belonging to the culture. Since the

cultural self is understood as the expression of aesthetic choices of the individual in a cultural context this lifestyle seems to comprise the expressions of the cultural self. In the context of the global choices made by the individual, the moral compulsion is replaced by the hedonistic perspective of the market. So the aesthetic experience is no longer bound by moral conflict and the result is a floating cultural self that is different from the split cultural self at the time of colonial modernity. What is expressed by the popular media of Kerala with its presence, its contents and formats are analysed to reveal this transformation at the time of globalisation at the turn of the century in this study.

The common socio-economic factor that connects these cultural changes is the growth of a middle-class that had time and money to respond to the aesthetic trends. Geetha Kapur observes:

In the latter half of the 19th century Indian aristocracy was turning part-bourgeois through material changes in social production. Owing to western influence it was losing its aesthetic. There was a ever increasing urban middle class. Ravivarma was trying to supply a new iconography that served a new culture. There is a disparity between motive and meaning. This is a cultural counterpart of alienating attributes of modernization (164)

The new middle class tried to equate themselves with the elite European taste by preferring the aesthetic of colonial modernity to the traditional one. According to Mitter, "When European naturalism replaced traditional aesthetics in the last century, the English educated accepted Renaissance naturalism as the acme of perfection" (10). Changes in education also brought in conceptual changes in daily practices or 'taste'. In the present study growth of the middle class is considered one of the

factors that lead to the aesthetic reconfiguration at the end of the twentieth century in Kerala after globalisation.

The growth of a new middle class whose aspirations were essentially pro-western began to exert considerable influence in the cultural production of Kerala in the same period. But it can be said that even before the colonial period Kerala had the notable cultural influence of foreign countries through trade relations. There is plenty of archaeological evidence regarding the trade relationship that Kerala kept with foreign nations like Greek, China and Arabia. By 45 AD Kerala's trade with Arabia, Greece and Egypt got better due to new improved knowledge about the monsoon winds. By the 15th century, Kerala started trading with China, and in 1405 around 250 ships from China visited Kerala with 27 to 28 thousand persons in them. (Nair, *By Sweat and Sword* 20-22). "Pliny tells us that pepper was transported to Becare (Varkala) in country boats from Cottonara'. This has to be Kuttanad, the Kottanarikê of the Periplus, which the latter wrongly describes as the pepper-growing region par excellence, whereas Pliny simply says it was 'the region from which pepper is conveyed to Becare', implying it may just have been a transshipment hub"(Romanis, 116,117).After the decline of Pattanam, Kollam emerged as the main centre of trade in Kerala. "Kollam (Quilon) may well have emerged by the ninth century to fill the void left by Pattanam's decline, battenning on the gulf networks and attracting a cosmopolitan community of traders who were literate in Arabic, Hebrew, and Pahlavi—Nestorians, Jews, Muslims, and Zoroastrians"(Romanis,122). The public space of Kerala has plenty of signs of this foreign influence. It appeared to realize the Kantian idea of 'cosmopolis' created through transnational commerce (Cheah, *Given Culture*159). It can be assumed that these relationships helped

Kerala to develop an underlying cosmopolitan attitude in the culture of Kerala that helped in its transformations at the time of colonial modernity.

Changes in the educational system, especially the introduction of English education made significant changes in the taste. The history of English education in Kerala starts with the arrival of Christian missionaries. The first English school was established in 1834 in Thiruvananthapuram. In 1841 Rev. Hubic came to Kannur for missionary work and established a school at Varnassery. He appointed a teacher from the Thiyya community to teach Malayalam and it helped to spread English education among the Thiyya community. In 1848 and 1856 English schools were established in Kozhikode and Thalassery (Gopalakrishnan 507). The cultural effect of the missionaries and their conversion efforts using education were not immediate. One of the notable developments they could create was the change in the social perception of the lower castes. In a way this added up to cultural modernity and discussions on progress as the spread of literacy took the message of modernity to them (Sanal Mohan 26). As a result new forms of literature also emerged. It is impossible to over look the emergence of the new genre of Novel in Malayalam literature. Most of the early novelists were influenced by British novels.

The novels brought about a new reading experience that was more realistic than reading mythologies and devotional poetry which was the common practice. Since their form was an imitation of English realistic novels they could bring discussions of contemporary life and thereby function as an educational device for the society. Udayakumar identifies three strands of Malayalam novels in the nineteenth century. “The first, loosely modelled on the liberal novel of ideas, addressed questions of education, reform, and issues in the civic sphere. Many of

these novels came from Malabar, then directly under British rule, and were often written by Nayar writers worrying over issues raised by English education and the legitimacy of their caste practices within the colonial world” (*Writing the First Person* 51). The second trend was from the Travencore which was a princely state and often imitated historical romances. By the last decade of the nineteenth century the Travencore region witnessed many political events that “were vital for the making of the early political novels in Travencore” (Udayakumar, *Sovereignty, Allegory... 170*). The third one was from the northern Kerala that discussed the problems of religious conversion and often written by missionaries (51-52). Having said this, the cultural impact of this new genre was related to its capacity in bringing the contemporary social issue into the plot and form. The novel could reinvent the form and content of popular reading texts and create a new taste among the readers. The English educated middle class assimilated this as a part of their modern elitism. The connection between these factors is specifically discussed in the first Malayalam novel *Indulekha*. The novel *Indulekha*, written by O Chandumenon from Talassery in the nineteenth century contains many occasions that justify the new elite taste and English education.

Indulekha is significant in this context as a literary text of emerging modernity. Since the novel contains long discussions on various factors of modernity and the role of English education in the transformation of society it has attained the status of a historical document in academic discussions. According to KN Panikkar, “*Indulekha* is not just a story that happened in the historical context of the 19th century. The history of 19th century Malabar is infused into the format of a literary framework adopted from English. The significance and success of this book

is related to the craft that could imbibe the political and cultural experiences of the intelligentsia of that period with all the paradoxes and vanishing points (Panikkar 40-41). The novel begins with an incident in which the protagonist of the novel- Madhavan- decides to educate Chinnan, challenging the tradition of obedience to the head (Karanavar) of the family. The 18th chapter of the same novel gives us an impressive picture of the gaining importance of English education (Menon, *Indulekha* 247). The novel is, "A box of presents that includes the social discourse, social criticisms and a catalyst of self-criticism of various communities that are accelerated by British rule and a youth that is attracted towards a world opened by English education wrapped in the gilt paper of novel is given to Malayalis by the author Chandumenon" (Menon, *Athe Indulekha* 16 Translation). The English-educated middle class of Kerala in the nineteenth century thus become the harbingers of changes in the aesthetic preference of Malayalis. For example, the city of Madras offered a way of life for the new middle class from Malabar. Activities like the formation of Malayalee Club, Kerala Samaj, and Cosmopolitan Club offered them a lifestyle akin to that of colonial modernity (Sreejith 35). Modernisation of transportation facilities like Railways and Waterways could create an industrial atmosphere and the emergence of more public places like roads where traditional disparities were not applicable. By the early twentieth century, the concept of joint families began to be questioned. In the high castes like Namboothiri and Nairs *tarawads* (Joint family houses) began to break up. "The breakup of *tarawads* was a traumatic experience for many. In the case of lower castes, however, since the great majority of families did not own any land, their change over to elementary family units was relatively easier and many families among these castes gradually did so" (

Sreejith 68). The loss of land revenue led people to come to towns in search of jobs and nuclear families became their preference. Many forms of commercialization in various sectors including agriculture developed a service sector that offered a fertile space for the middle-class economy to develop. Social impact of urbanisation projects like Cochin Port was crucial. The traditional skill sets were put to better use in a space the traditional ethnic tensions cannot prevail. "The project experienced a considerable influx of various ethnic groups entering the town as job opportunities opened up. The process of urbanisation of nearby villages as an outcome of urban expansion also changed the nature of village occupational groups (Mathew 83). As a parallel development of various forms of urbanisation an influential middle class emerged in Kerala. This class found new forms of leisure and entertainment that differed from the traditional forms. New games like tennis, badminton and caroms were introduced in schools and elite clubs (Sreejith 100). After the official formation of Kerala, this middle class who had early access to English education became a strong presence in the intellectual and cultural space of Kerala.

By the middle of the twentieth century, an increase in the rate of migration helped to reinforce the economic and cultural preferences of the middle class of Kerala. In the article, *Onne Kaal Kodi Malayalikal* (One and a Quarter Crores of Malayalis) published in 1946, EM Sankaran Namboothiripad says, "It is said that there were fifty thousand Malayalis in Bombay city alone (there is no precise data). That means for every 240 persons living in Kerala one is living in Bombay. (Total population of Kerala is 120 lakhs) Likewise, exact data of Malayalis living in Madras, Calcutta, and Delhi will be appalling" (Namboothiripad, 290). Migration is an important factor in shaping the life of Malayalis in the 20th century. In the

documentary titled *Translated Lives* nurses who migrated to Germany and other European nations describe how they were trained and convinced by their church to migrate to the war-ravaged Germany and its allies. "The country, which was recovering from the ravages of World War II, was in need of trained professionals in various fields, especially in medicine. The documentary says that around 5,000 women migrated from Kerala during the 1960s and 70s to become nurses there" ("A Kerala Touch"). The most important among these migrant groups is the gulf migrants. This mass migration to the Middle East made a huge impact on the social-economic and cultural aspects of Kerala. To a certain extent, the remittance from the gulf migrants became one of the main sources of income for Kerala's economy. For instance, the total cash remittance received by Kerala households during 12 month period for migrants in 1998 was 35304 million rupees (GK Lieten, *Human Development in Kerala* 22). Remittance to localities with a large number of migrants known as the gulf pockets reached 50 percent of local GDP (Kurien 765). These gulf pockets with concrete buildings, shops with a lot of consumer goods, and a reinvented geography and networks of roads became a model for developmental concepts of the common people. The increasing consumption pattern was essentially linked to migration and economic liberalisation that brought expensive goods into the villages (Osella 117). This migratory experience and its economic result were significant influences in the formation of cultural patterns in the twentieth-century Kerala.

The emergence of a new pattern of popular culture in the context of globalization in the 1990s, thus subscribes to the evolution of the conflict between tradition and modernity appeared in various forms in historical contexts. Previous

studies of scholars like EM Sankaran Nampoothirippad, PK Balakrishnan, VC Harris, KN Panikkar, TK Ramachandran, K Sukumaran, and M Govindan points at some aspects of this cultural process. Authors like J Devika, Pradeep Menon, Shiju Sam Vargeese, anthropological studies of Osellas, migration studies of KC Zachariah and Irudaya Rajan, and Sociological observations of Robin Jeffrey can also shed light on this area. Studies on Malayalam films like that of CS Vekiteswaran and GP Ramachadran can provide insights on various aspects of the cultural formation in different historical contexts of Kerala. Some of these studies are evidently leftist in their nature and many of these scholars were active in left politics. As a consequence their political preference has influenced their assumptions regarding the cultural spectrum. In this context, though their insights are helpful in establishing a pattern of study one must be careful in making final statements or reaching inferences. At the same time television studies of Nalin Mehta or Aravind Rajagopal provide a larger political perspective helpful in understanding the television as a cultural phenomenon. Since television is originally a state-controlled media and many policy decisions, political, ideological and even personal interests played an influential role in shaping its spirit in the initial period. So the study of television, unlike cinema, extends to the colonial apprehensions regarding its cultural impact. Studies on Indian art in the nineteenth century by scholars like Tapti Guha Thakurta, Christopher Pinney, Kajri Jain, Partha Mitter and Geetha Kapur can impart profound observations regarding the remoulding of Indian art through colonial modernity. The present study makes use of such valuable observations from these scholars while simultaneously finding its own niche among cultural studies.

Methodology

The methodology of cultural studies is eclectic. Culture is an ensemble of shifting values that requires an acceptance of combinations of theoretical formulations for analysing materials in hand. In *Culture and Materialism*, Raymond Williams observes, “The outstanding difference between physical and humane studies is not only a matter of inevitable questions of expressed and active values. It is also a matter of the nature of change: the societies and literatures have active and conflicting human histories, which are always inseparable from active values” (15). Therefore attribution of rigid frameworks, in this way, is a display of sidelining many contributory factors by presuming that a disinterested totality will be available at the end for theorizing. The only factor that binds this study is the propriety of selecting observations and insights from a wide range of theories and how far they are capable of philosophic interpretations. In this context, insights of the researcher are very important since they are the interpretive force of the phenomena studied here. Hence, the study and its methodology evolve together accepting possible values and variations with the key emphasis laid on interpreting internal deployment of power relations.

The two core concepts examined in the present study are ‘aesthetic reconfiguration’ and ‘cultural self’. The first one is used hypothetically to indicate the paradigm shifts in the aesthetic attitudes and preferences. This shift is often marked as an indication of the effect of economic globalisation and related policy changes happened in 1990s. Traditional popular aesthetic forms and expressions all of a sudden found to be vastly replaced by new forms that displayed an obvious affiliation to modernity. Visual media functioned as a platform that showcased this

shift. It also carried out the function as a channel to disseminate the new values and legitimizing them. The term 'cultural self' explains the collective nature of aesthetic choices in a society. Across various selves that an individual possesses there exists certain common platform of choices that majority of individuals in a particular culture subscribe. This platform is formed by accepting values from various cultural and historical forces at play. These characteristics of the cultural self are decided by both ethical and aesthetic notions prevalent in the society and this in turn is visible in the aesthetic choices. In the present context, the characteristics of cultural self of Malayalis registered a change in the context of effects of globalization. The study will try to make statements on these characteristics by analysing popular visual media representations.

To theorise the reconfiguration of popular aesthetics by visual media and the eventual evolution of a new cultural self at the turn of the twenty first century in Kerala, numerous factors are to be taken into account. Since the scope of such an attempt would be beyond the frame work of a single project, cinema and television are selected for streamlining the theoretical formulations for visual cultural analysis. Subsequently, the methodology of visual culture becomes a prominent choice of this study. Contribution of Nicholas Mirzoeff, W.J.T Mitchell, Ella Shohat, Robert Stam, and Guy Debord may provide grounding for theoretical analysis in this regard. At the same time evolutionary history for the television and film in India and the aesthetics they came to disseminate by the end of the twentieth century contextualize theoretical observations. The characteristics of this aesthetics originate from the colonial modernity that brought in a paradigm shift in the perception of visual texts in India in the second half of nineteenth century. Studies on Indian colonial

modernity by people like Partha Chatterjee, Pavan K Varma, and Ashish Rajadhyaksha provide detailed pictures of the cultural nuances of this period. The present study chooses to analyse the paintings of Raja Ravi Varma as the visual texts that reflect this paradigm shift. The study of the painting of Varma takes in to account the interpretations of art critics and art historians and uses sociological theories for grounding them. Tapti Guha Thakurta, Shalvi Agarwal, Sandria . B Freitag, Geetha Kapur, G Arunima, Christopher Pinney, Partha Mitter, Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger are useful to understand the paradigm shifts in art in that period. This context requires a methodology that combines insights from visual cultural theories, art histories and sociology. Along with sociological concepts of Pierre Bourdieu, and Max Weber, observations of Indian cultural theorist like Partha Chatterjee and, Pavan K Varma will be useful. Certain popular visual texts like *painkili art* produced in the twentieth century appear to refer to the same patterns used by Varma. The influence of colonial modernity is to be placed as a pan-Indian background to learn this and the conflict between tradition and modernity is to be considered as an important factor in this phenomenon. One of the prominent names in the study of popular art in Kerala is Dr. Kavitha Balakrishnan. Her insights in this regard are significant for the present study. Malayalam cinema as a prominent cultural text carries forward some patterns that formed the core ideas of cultural production. Contextually, a combination of media studies, film studies and sociological studies is needed to form insights into this phenomenon. Similarly, the study of television as a cultural phenomenon also requires observations from television studies, media studies and sociological studies. Some of the names that come up in this context are Anthony Giddens, Arjun Appadurai, Walter Benjamin,

Terry Eagleton, Umberto Eco, and George Simmel. Many observations made by these theorists could lead to logical conclusions regarding the period.

For learning the origin and development of television in India, policy documents and commission reports would be helpful. Observations of McLuhan, Sanjay Asthana, Shylaja Bajpai, Mellisa Butcher, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Dipankar Sinha, Sudeshna Chakravarti, Mira Kapil Desai, Purnima Mankekar, Arvind Rajagopal would be helpful. For studying Malayalam cinema, insights of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, K Gopinathan, V. C Harris, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, G. P Ramachandran, T. K Ramachandran, I Shanmughadas, S. V Srinivas, and C. S Venkiteswaran may be used. These analyses are to be combined with an understanding of socio-cultural movements, governmental decisions, and socio-economic factors. Governmental documents from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting- Government of India, Planning Commission of Government of Kerala and other forms of statistical data available with the government may be used according to the context. Consequently the methodology of the study evolves from a situational selection of theoretical observations and insights from such branches of knowledge. The term cultural self is interpreted philosophically as collective attitude reflected in the aesthetic choices in popular culture. An attempt to find out the reasons for the prominence and popularity of certain patterns chosen widely in particular periods will reveal the sociological factors functioning in the back ground of such a phenomenon. A philosophical interpretation of the way in which these sociological factors are connected puts light on the nature of cultural self of that period. Studies of the socio-cultural scenario of Kerala are by J Devika, Udaya Kumar, Ameet Parameswaran, K. N Panikkar, Caroline Osella and Flippo Osella, E.

M. Sankaran Namboothiripad, Robin Jeffrey migration studies of KC Zachariah, E.T. Mathew, and S. Irudaya Rajan are helpful in studying the general socio cultural context of Kerala. Observations made by theorists like Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, John Berger, Frederic Jameson and Jean Baudrillard can be used to form the philosophical interpretations of the cultural phenomenon thus contextualized.

Literature Survey

There is a large corpus of works related to visual culture, media and communication, art history, sociology and cultural studies. *The Visual Culture Reader* by Nicholas Mirzoeff, provides a collection of seminal writings on various visual forms including photography, painting, sculpture, fashion advertising, television, cinema and digital culture. The articles in this collection are organized thematically. Some of the articles from this book that provided theoretical grounding for the present study are “The Subject of Visual Culture” by Mirzoeff, “Narrativizing Visual Culture: Towards a Polycentric Aesthetics” by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Showing and Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture* by W.J.T. Mitchell, “The Society of the Spectacle” by Guy Debord, and “Here and Now” by Arjun Appadurai. These writings elaborate the emerging field of visual culture studies in the context of globalisation. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, edited by Arjun Appadurai contributes to the idea of transaction of things in cultural setting. In such exchanges the values are externalised. It contains articles by social anthropologists and historians and bridges the disciplines of social history, cultural anthropology, and economics, and marks a major step in our understanding of the cultural basis of economic life and the sociology of culture. Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* ranges across a wide area of topics like aesthetics, subcultures, opinion

formation and how the taste in a wide sense is related to social origin and upbringing. The observations are made in connection with French cultural milieu. The observations in this book defy the usual analysis of visible consumption by showing that specific judgments and choices matter less than an aesthetic outlook in general. It also comments on the way in which class becomes an important factor in aesthetic outlook and how the aesthetic world view serves as an instrument of domination. In “The Ecstasy of Communication” Baudrillard makes a departure from his prominent idea of simulacra and deals with the human being lost in communication. He traces the idea of information and communication network affecting the essence of human beings and related objects and its causes in this work. “Egalitarian Developmentalism, Communist Mobilization, and the Question of Caste in Kerala State, India” “Migration, Transnationalism, and Modernity: Thinking of Kerala’s many Cosmopolitanisms”, ‘A People United in Development’: Developmentalism in Modern Malayalee Identity” are articles by J Devika which provide novel insights into the sociological and political forces at work in the present day Kerala. These articles are filled with observation resulting from hectic research and a profound understanding. In *The Consequences of Modernity*, Anthony Giddens focuses on the self and the emergence of new mechanisms of self-identity that are shaped by—yet also shape—the institutions of modernity. The author argues that the self is not a passive entity, determined by external influences. Rather, in forging their self-identities, no matter how local their contexts of action, individuals contribute to and directly promote social influences that are global in their consequences and implications.

The volume *Image Journeys: Audio Visual Media and Cultural Change in India* by Christian Brosius, Melisa Butcher acknowledges the radical changes happened in the mediascape of India in the wake of Globalization . It claims how the media infrastructure has led to a dynamic process of opening and overlapping visual spaces from which new combinations emerged. The core idea of the book is to bring together articles that rope in fields like ecology of images and cultural change. The significance of this work lies in its effort to bring together articles related to the non-measurable phenomena such as imagination and memory. “Doordarshan: Representing the Nation’s State” by Britta Ohm, “Is This the Real Thing? Packaging Cultural Nationalism” by Christine Brosius, “Parallell Texts: The Body and Television in India” by Melissa Butcher are some of the articles included in this book. Sanjay Asthana’s *India’s State-Run Media: Broadcasting, Power, and Narrative* provides a novel perspective on broadcasting by bringing together the ideas of public, religion, and nation in radio and television, and the spatio-temporal dynamics of broadcasting. According to the author these two concepts are connected by the idea of sovereignty of the nation. It also traces the concept of ‘public’ in broadcasting and how that is related to the history of Indian broadcasting services. It makes unique observations on the institutionalization of the television viewers and audiences in the post colonial India.

In “Westernisation and Tradition in South Indian Painting in the Nineteenth Century: The Case of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1906)”, Tapti GuhaThakurtapresents a profound analysis of Raja Ravi Varma’s art and life. The article makes seminal observations on the struggle between the Western formats and the traditional content in the paintings of Varma. In the background of colonial refinement of art Varma

tried to bring the traditional imagination into the new framework of fine art. Takurtha comments on efforts made by the artist in reconfiguring the popular imagination and aesthetic preferences through disseminating his art through market. *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India-1850 to 1922: Occidental Orientations* by Patha Mitteris a pioneering study of the history of modern art in India from 1850 to 1922. It narrates the tale of Indian art during the Raj in the backdrop of interplay of colonialism and nationalism. Mitter addresses the contradictions that attended the advent of European naturalism in India, as part of the westernisation of the elite, and traces the artists' evolution from this conflict to that of Hindu national identity. A wide range of literary and pictorial sources are included in this book. Mitter balances the study of colonial cultural institutions and networks with the ideologies of the nationalist and intellectual movements.

Christopher Pinney's *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* is a comprehensive history of India's popular visual culture. It combines anthropology, political and cultural history, and the study of aesthetic systems. It examines the history of the printed image in India from 1870 to the present. Pinney, in this book observes how the printed images and political struggle are connected as they helped in forming a national identity from the colonial period to present-day India. Pinney presents a profoundly convincing and extremely nuanced case for visual culture as a key element in considering politics and religion in modern India. The book is lavishly illustrated and showcases interesting visuals and analysis. *Vayana Manushyante Kala Charitram* [The Art History of Reading Human] by Dr. Kavitha Balakrishnan is a unique attempt to map the cultural nuances of the illustrations in Malayalam periodical in the twentieth century. It

provides contemporary ideas regarding the cultural significance of illustrations that accompanied popular narratives in the periodicals.

In *Cinimayum Malayaliyude Jeevithavum* [Cinema and the Life of Malayalis], GP Ramachandran goes through various stages of Malayalam Cinema from its origin to the present. Instead of using the usual method of film criticism he approaches the film from different angles like that of art, culture, industry and society. He makes significant observations on how cinema reflected the social and cultural milieu of Malayalis. His analysis spreads over the social history of Malayalam cinema through various stages like that of art cinema, film society and middle brow cinema. Studies of specific films and how they are connected to the cultural contexts are also included in the book. *Udalinte Thara Sancharangal* [Starry Journeys of the Body] by CS Venkiteswaran is a cultural analysis of prominent actors of Malayalam cinema. Actors like Mammooty, Mohan Lal, Gopi, Jagathi Sreekumar, Kalabhavan Mani, Silk Smitha, Kamal Hasan, Shakeela, Adoor Bhavani, Kochin Haneefa, and Nedumudi Vanu are studied in detail. Venkiteswaran contextualizes the career of these actors in the culture of Kerala and examines their strength and weaknesses related to existing notions of womanhood, masculinity, family values, tradition, ethics, and identity and so on. The book provides many insights into the development of Malayalam cinema in connection with changes in the cultural scenario of Kerala in various periods. *Men and Masculinities in South India* by Caroline, and Flippo Osella aims to increase understanding the concept of gender within South Asia. Osellas cover a range of areas including work, cross-sex relationships, sexuality, men's friendships, religious practices and leisure.

Observation on the career of two film stars of Malayalam –Mammootty and Mohan Lal – makes this book significant in the context of the present research.

Chapterisation

The present study is divided into six chapters including introduction. The introductory chapter lays the foundation for this study by situating it within its historical and cultural context. It identifies the core questions addressed, surveys the relevant factors, explains the adopted research methodology, and offers a concise review of existing literature on the subject. The second chapter is an exploration of the art of Raja Ravi Varma and the reinvention of Indian visuality at the time of colonial modernity in nineteenth-century India. The art of Ravi Varma is studied against the backdrop of colonial intervention into the visual culture of India. His art in the form of prints, chromolithographs, colanders, matchbox labels, textile stickers and textile designs is embedded in the popular culture. The chapter also tries to find possible connections between the art of Ravi Varma and the illustrations used in popular periodicals published later in the twentieth century. These periodicals are called *painkili* magazines and are mainly published from the Kottayam district of Kerala. The illustrations used in these weeklies were very popular among the readers. Unlike the illustrations in the standard literary periodicals, they were drawn with photogenic realism. The human figures were depicted with classical bodily proportions in the context of some emotional excitement. The chapter makes an analysis of the prominent qualities shared by Varma's paintings and these illustrations.

The third chapter traces the evolution of television as a visual media in Kerala. In the beginning television functioned as the national media and its access was limited to the upper-class households. At the same time, television began to influence how the public discourse on visuals was formed. In Kerala formation of the neighborhood-audience to watch Malayalam cinema and epic serials of Ramayan and Mahabharath was a phenomenon of this period. Television was celebrated and cursed by various forces for various reasons. However, this period is important in tracing the evolution of television as a national media in the Indian context and its significance in the cultural space of Kerala.

The fourth chapter traces the evolution of Malayalam cinema from its initial stages to the 1980s. From its beginning in the 1940s Malayalam cinema remained one of the significant forms of visual entertainment in Kerala. Cinema, like anywhere else, is marked by its huge reception in popular culture. The Malayalam film industry was in second place under the Tamil industry in the number of production in India. This fact points to the huge influence it could make on the formation of the visual culture of Malayalis in the twentieth century. Cinema could easily replace the theatre and other types of visual performances as the first preference of Malayalis by the 1980s. Great artists, technicians and directors were contributed by Malayalam cinema to the national cinema and it has been recognized in many international film festivals. In the twentieth century, as the prominent form of entertainment, it has changed its formats, techniques and content many times. In the wake of globalisation, Malayalam cinema underwent notable changes and evolved to express the formation of a new cultural self of Malayalis. The chapter traces the history of Malayalam cinema until the 1980s which will give a picture of

various cultural forces that evolved through it in the practices of visuality that formed the foundation for the changes in the last decade.

The fifth chapter deals with the visual practices of popular culture influenced by the media aesthetics of television and cinema in the wake of globalisation the last decade of twentieth century. Television and cinema as the two popular forms of visual entertainment played a crucial role in the cultural transformation in this period. With the entry of satellite broadcast, television gained preference over cinema. Cinema also began to display new patterns in form and content that reflected changing cultural values. These new patterns showed prominent influence of the values of consumerism that ensued globalisation. These sudden shifts in the visual media also had a role in the formation of a new cultural self that was expressed in the changed aesthetic preferences of Malayalis in this decade.

The final chapter is an attempt to reach theoretical conclusions regarding the nature of the aesthetic choices of Malayalis at the turn of the century. Analysis done on cinema and television in the previous chapters are used to reach philosophical perspectives about such preferences. Such perspectives are helpful in reaching conclusive inferences about the transformations in the cultural self of Malayalis in this period. Relevant insights from literary and sociological theories are used in reaching them.

End Notes

1. The split in the cultural self is a dominant concept in this study. The cultural self is understood as the shared mindset that functions as the reference point of individual aesthetic preferences. It is revealed in the recurring patterns found in the material choices of individuals within a singular cultural space. This is bound by a continuity of certain patterns called tradition. Introduction of elements of colonial modernity in

the 19th century created a confusion between the existing pattern of choices and the new ones. This is reflected in the aesthetic preferences of the individuals in this period. They cherished the traditional values and simultaneously accepted the new ones. This ambivalence is signified in the usage.

2. Colonial modernity in the 19th century altered existing patterns and introduced the Western as modern in to the cultural space of India. This modernity was prominently orchestrated by the British Raj. This can be considered as the first stage of modernity. Globalisation in wake of 21st century opened up the cultural space of India to the Global culture. By this time the values of the first stage of modernity have merged with the tradition to form a new tradition of values. Globalisation altered these values to establish a new cultural pattern. These are the two stages of modernity mentioned.
3. Andrew Darley also observes that in the 18th century popular forms of entertainments diverge from the classical forms to more performance oriented ones (39).
4. For instance globalisation which is basically an economic activity alters the flow of capital resulting in migration, social change and new form of cultural patterns. For a detailed analysis see Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*.
5. The term 'taste' originates from the culinary habit of a person. But food choice is not devoid of social preferences and class status. In this study the term represents an individual's preference for a particular choice from a number of choices. For discussion see Bourdieu.

Also see

Gronow about the cultural scenario in eighteenth century France:

Complex small but expensive dishes, a complicated hierarchy of tastes and even the ability to discuss and argue about taste, cuisine and cooking methods made it possible to make more and more refined distinctions and to establish an elaborately differentiated system. Only an expert on etiquette and a real gourmet could always infallibly decide what was good or bad, what was valuable and what was valueless. A gentleman's choice was an expression of good taste and he could always 'smell' people with bad taste. (19)

Chapter II

From Raja Ravi Varma to the *Painkili* Illustrations: Tradition, Colonial Modernity and the Formation of a Split Cultural Self

The present chapter looks at the second half of the nineteenth century as the formative period of the modern visual cultural practices in India. It considers Raja Ravi Varma and his art, as representing the visual culture of the period in its entirety. The first part of the chapter examines the general features of the period. The life of Ravi Varma and his art are specifically analysed to trace the general patterns that are reflected in his art and to further locate the expression of the cultural self in it. In the last part, a study of the illustrations in the popular periodicals is done, to understand how the same pattern exists in the popular taste of the twentieth century visual culture.

The colonial administration in the nineteenth century had a significant role in the formation of the modern visual cultural practices in India. Inspired by the enlightenment, the colonisers initiated a process of cultural modernisation in various forms. For instance, Partha Chatterjee points at the emergence of many learned societies in India in the nineteenth century, like, 'The Society for the Acquisition of General Knowledge' in 1843 and later, many societies exclusively for Indian members (14-16). Partha Mitter notes the change in the colonial administration to a form of 'benevolent despotism' with the consecration of Queen Victoria to the throne (*Art and Nationalism* 29). Traditional forms of knowledge and practices were questioned by the new generation of academicians, who came out of the official institutions of knowledge. Art and its enjoyment were not exempted from this

transformation. From the eighteenth century onwards, many European artists visited India for various assignments and their works fascinated the native elites (*Art and Nationalism* Mitter 19). By the second half of the nineteenth century, this trend began to decline¹. “Though more lucrative than in England, earning a living as a professional artist in India was not easy. It is not surprising, therefore, that by 1825, the “fancy died away”, and one would be hard pressed to name even half a dozen eminent artists who succumbed to the lure of India during the last century of British rule in the subcontinent”. (Pal 13). They left behind their legacy in the form of a group of Indian artists, who were skilled in European techniques. Indian artists learned from the visiting European artists, the techniques and skills of realist art. The new technology of image printing like ‘chromolithography’ was introduced in India in this period. Lithographs were first used in India in the 1820s and owing to its portability and low cost, it democratised printing in India (Pinney 14). As a result, traditional visual cultural practices in India underwent a paradigm shift in this period. The official beginning of art education by the British Raj in 1854 also accounted for this change. “Nineteenth-century India was increasingly pervaded by images. These were hand-made and mass produced, local and exotic, religious and commercial” (Pinney 17). According to Pinney, the variety of these images resist a common label like calendar art. But this label is convenient in addressing some of the common factors under discussion like the popularity of such images and their inherent nature of combining European realism and Indian mythology. They are significant as a form that made the secularisation of sacred images of Hindu pantheon.

In *The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, Kajri Jain argues that after the uprising in 1857 against the colonial administration in India, there was a vernacular turn in the cultural production, which, instead of following the tradition, tried to reinterpret it with the help of colonial modernity. As a part of the Hindu reformation movements, there was a reinterpretation of tradition, which in turn paved the way for the emergence of novel thoughts on Indianness. There were several attempts to place Indian epics above the Greek and European classics from different corners as a part of the renewed interest in *Indianness*.

Paradoxically, therefore, it was not until Indian artists displayed a mastery of European naturalist methods that they were seen as capable of a fine art that embodied the essence of Indianness. From the point of view of the growing vernacular public, a discourse that harnessed images to the expression of civilization or community required the self-reflexive articulation of what we might now call “cultural identity.” This was, in fact, the primary aim of many competing projects in vernacular and English-literate public spheres over the second half of the nineteenth century. Paradoxically again, these formulations of identity, many of them positioned in resistance to Western culture, often deployed categories and ideas derived from colonial administration, missionary activity, and Orientalist scholarship—although the translation of these ideas often made for significant and productive differences. (Jain 93)

The modern methods used by their practitioners essentially marked a departure from the tradition. One of the significant features of this movement was the visualization of traditional narratives in various formats. Textual narratives were reformulated

into theatre and paintings in the new frameworks offered by colonial modernity. These visual expressions were marked by two important characteristics. One was the internal conflict these forms expressed between tradition and modernity. All these forms could be seen as attempts to overcome this conflict and find a proper blend of these two aspects. The other one was that all these forms depended on textual narrations that already existed in various forms like literature, folktales, classics and mythology. Visual interpretation of these literary narratives from within the framework of colonial modernity helped the people to reimagine their tradition without losing their ethical and moral concerns. It appears that the popularity attained by many of the cultural expressions of this period had the capacity to blend these elements in a beautiful manner. In other words, by doing this, they were setting new parameters for the aesthetic experience to be justified in terms of traditional values and modern tastes simultaneously. The popularity of Raja Ravi Varma was not an exception.

In visual culture, this departure led to several attempts to blend modernity with tradition. “The fact that the modern never properly belongs to us as Indians, or we to it, does lead to anxieties of misappropriation. But these are often pragmatically resolved. In visual art, for example, eclecticism becomes a preferred option and the sense of aesthetic difference begins to be resolved to our advantage” (Kapur 146,147). New realistic techniques and motifs of European paintings were imitated by Indian painters to decorate the quasi-colonial cultural mix inside luxury buildings of the new elite. For the artists in India, this move was also the beginning of a new experience of learning because it took place outside the boundary of tradition. The ability of an Indian artist to master the Western techniques of realistic portraiture

depended not only upon his innate talent, but his opportunity to learn directly either from a British artist or from repeated copying of European works (Pal 156). Apart from their innate talent and hereditary training, they had to learn the new techniques through apprenticeship under a foreign painter and repeated copying of European art. Most of the benefactors of this new art were Indian aristocrats (Welch 426).

Welch looks at this phenomenon as the decay of Indian art. He writes:

By the 1880s painters were losing out to photographers at courts in India- if they had already taken to the new art themselves in a scramble for patronage. To compete, painter had explored all avenues, from making painted copies of photographs, to painting over them, to, as here, adding portraits in photographic style to traditional compositions. Some artists became sign painters (their successors have participated in the recent artistic crescendo of film billboards); others, to make ends meet, designed coloured lithographs of gods, goddesses, and worldly notables, or adorned the walls of rich merchants' mansions, or at wedding times enlivened buildings and courtyard with depictions of bridegrooms riding horses or elephants. (444)

The evolving scenario of Indian aesthetic values is what gets reflected in the changing medium, method, and subject matter in art. "While Maharajas, Nawabs and leading families built galleries to indulge in their taste in European art, the average English- educated hung prints in their living rooms. Even the poor had their cheap Kalighat paintings to decorate their walls" (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 24). The accumulation of European artistic objects gradually changed the elite taste to western. The second half of the 19th century is called the period of "optimistic westernisation" by Mitter (*Art and Nationalism* 9). The cultural space of India in the

period between 1850 and 1900 was dominated by the western-educated middle class, whose aspirations were predominantly European. They encouraged Renaissance naturalism in art forms that existed in India (*Art and Nationalism* 9). But Mitter adds that there was a parallel resistance from the same corner entailing the ideals of nationalism, “The counterpoint (c.1900 – 22) was the cultural nationalism at the turn of the century. A new sensibility, expressed by the *swadeshi* (indigenous) doctrine of art, closely linked to the emergent Hindu identity. It prompted a reassessment of the traditional heritage from which the elite had recoiled in the first phase” (9). This cultural situation of the 19th century was a reason for the peculiar blending of the eastern and western traditions, which resulted in what Mitter calls, *Oriental Art*. In *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* he says, “When European naturalism replaced traditional aesthetics in the last century, the English – educated accepted Renaissance naturalism as the acme of perfection. The next generation asserted the opposite, seeking to set up an alternative canon of ‘oriental’ art” (10). He explains how even the spiritualist tradition of *Patuwa* artists were ignoring the ritualistic content of their art to satisfy the taste of the newly emerging Babus of the British Raj by the second half of the 18th century (15). Fresh ways of displaying art also originated with European architectural influence. “While Maharajas, Nawabs and leading families built galleries to indulge their taste in European art, the average English-educated hung prints in their living rooms. Even the poor had their cheap Kalighat paintings to decorate their walls. In this period, the fashion in hanging pictures originated in princely courts”(Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 24).

By the middle of the 19th century, photography was introduced in India. Unlike the West where painters were forced to depart from naturalism, Indian painters adopted photographic naturalism into their paintings. “Taught at art schools, it transformed Indian art in terms of scale, style and subject-matter”(Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 17, 18). What Welch calls a decline, was a transformation that brought conflicting aesthetic values to a single cultural space:

Nineteenth-century India witnessed a marked alteration in the realm of painting techniques and also serves as the advent of modernity within the Indian society. During the pre-colonial phase and post the Mughal rule, India was heading towards its own universalistic modernity, and in due course of time would have evolved its indigenous version of it. However; the colonial intervention not only thwarted this process but changed its trajectory altogether. (Agarwal 7)

The establishment of art schools was a leading factor in reorientation. The primary aim of the art school was to refine the skills of the workforce of the colonies for aestheticisation of industrial production. The new refined taste of the modern consumers of the west sought for products that suited their taste.

The effects of the Industrial Revolution in Britain had been disastrous for the Indian economy in general and the village industries in particular. Rather than impose tariffs to protect Indian manufacturing, the government adopted the questionable policy of establishing art colleges “to maintain, restore, and improve the application of oriental art to industry and manufacture”, as well as to “modify existing designs in the light of British taste so as to make them more suitable for export.” (Pal 178)

The first western art school was founded by Sir Charles Malet in Pune in 1798 to give training for Indian painters to guide the visiting European painters. But the first proper art school was Calcutta Mechanic Institution and School of Art founded by Federic Corbin in 1839. In Madras, the first art school was opened in 1850 by Dr Alexander Hunter with an aim to refine taste, and in 1851 he started a school of industry for producing better native instruments. A Parsi man named Sir JamsetjeeJeejeebhoy started the art school in Bombay in 1851 and in Calcutta, the Society for the Promotion of Industrial Art began in 1854. When these schools started offering drawing lessons for improving 'native taste, they also introduced western techniques to the native artists (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 31). These institutions followed the syllabus of Central School of Industrial Art at South Kensington established in 1857. As per the prospectus of Madras school, it aimed to enhance the taste of the natives regarding perception of beauty in daily life (Pal 178). By 1850, Art schools in India came under the control of the department of public instruction. In 1880, Richard Temple writes:

This branch of education received a great impulse from the exertions of Sir Bartle Frere when[sic] Governor of Bombay. Many young men thus receive artistic instruction and some aesthetic culture, all of which prove most useful in several professions followed by them as portrait-painters, photographers, lithographers, engravers, wood and ivory carvers, ornamental designers and draughtsmen, more especially as architects. Thus, art class rooms are well filled. The instruction embodies the principles applicable to art in all climes and the practice most approved in European art; but does not disdain Native art. It encourages the students to fix their gaze on the antique remains of

Indian art, which flourished at times when the national imagination was in its prime and its finer faculties soared highest; ... It recognises the fact that inferior European art has sometimes been incongruously introduced into India, the effect of which, though meant to be elevating, must really be debasing and injurious to the opening faculties of the Native mind. (154)

As Temple noticed, though European taste was debasing, it could bring in a sense of order in understanding the rich artistic tradition and in creating a sense of professionalism. These schools were different from Indian tradition in their methods of training and in the conception of artistic process as well. The tradition of master-apprentice relationship came to an end with formal training. Indian artists differ in their artistic process in that, they usually begin with an outline and fill the space between lines while in European tradition, the initial formula is constantly corrected by employing observation. This indicates that Indian artistic process was conceptual whereas the European artists followed a perceptual model (Mitter³⁰)². Traditional methods, concepts and medium of aesthetic expressions as explained in texts like *Chitra Sootra* were replaced by Kessington models. This deliberate and violent cultural transformation created its everlasting marks on what Mitter calls Oriental Art and for a long time, the binary of Indian/Western remained the core principle of discussion in art and aesthetics. The famous speech of Lord Napier, Governor of Madras, in 1871 addressing the Native Christian Literary Society, stating the purpose of the Indian Pencil, is to be considered in this context. He seems to praise the possibilities of Indian mythology as the subject matter for paintings. He also proposes the western realistic method as the best way to bring out such representations (Neumayer, *Chronology* 297). The benefit of this discussion was

reflected in the elevation of the social status of Indian artists from that of a craftsman to a genius. Freed from the patronage of the elite and the label of craftsman, they could mingle with the society freely. According to Pal, “this social acceptability of the artist made it easier for Indians from all walks of life to practice art on professional and amateur levels” (20). Discussions of westernisation of Indian art continued even after independence. It is reflected in many letters addressed to the ministry of education in 1949 by various organizations like the All India Association of Fine Arts in Bombay, Principal of the Govt. School of Art Calcutta, Director of JJ School of Art and so on. The letters are a part of the *Reports Relating to the Conference on Art at Calcutta 1949* published by Ministry of Education Government of India which is available in the archive of South Asia Commons.

As a result of the cultural parenting³ of the Raj through the establishment of art schools, Indian art also got entry into the category of *fine art*. The colonisers wanted to realign traditional Indian art from its religious inclinations to that of rational disinterested enjoyment. The Indian artists started using oil as the new refined medium in which more artificial colours were available. They started rendering portraits and characters of Indian mythology in oil using the technique of perspective to create an illusive reality. This rendering marked a departure from the traditional two-dimensional paintings of such figures in temple art and ritual paintings. Pinney writes, “It had been hoped that new techniques of representation could be instilled that would facilitate a broader dismantling of the Hindu worldview. Perspective would necessarily make the gods less real, it was believed, for the mythic realm they inhabited would be unable to bear the scrutiny of linear perspective and its mathematical certainty” (66). The effect of realistic rendering of

Hindu deities and mythological characters using modern techniques was just the opposite. Instead of dismantling, it elevated the enjoyment of religiosity. The inherent flexibility of Hindu religion in enacting various representations of devotion in the public realm might be one of the reasons behind this acceptance⁴. In the preface to the first edition of the first Malayalam novel *Indulekha*, published in 1889, O Chandumenon says that, before the introduction of European oil painting, traditional painting without any realistic techniques like perspective or shadow used to get appreciated here. But now people show an aversion towards such flat and unrealistic rendering of deities like Krishna with disproportionate body and unrealistic placement of limbs like the twisted legs. So such artists who can bring as much reality as possible in their representation are now appreciated⁵ (xi-xii). Menon makes this comment to counter the arguments of critics who questioned his use of a realistic plot for the first Malayalam novel. It reveals how new realistic art destabilized the aesthetic concepts of traditional visual cultural practices and paved the way for the emergence of a new form of popular art and literature, that incorporates Western realism into the theme of Indianness. These concepts formed the foundation of the visual cultural practices of modern India.

The nineteenth century proved to be a formative period of Indian cultural practices with intense visual culture activities, especially in painting. It was a time when the traditional values joined hands with the ideals of colonial modernity to mould the practices of visual culture of modern India. Rtuja Sawant writes:

The beginning of India's popular imagery results from the major cultural and technological shifts during the nineteenth century which included the impact of the pedagogy of colonial art-school; the exposure to European images

circulating in Indian market; the advent of new art materials; new techniques of engraving including, lithography and oleography and the great influence of photography as well as proscenium stage. (1)

The relevance of these changes at the time of colonial modernity lies in their huge impact in the formation of the aesthetic sensibility of the twentieth century popular culture. This sensibility existed as the underlying force of cultural self until globalisation started raising new challenges. The art of Raja Ravi Varma is crucial in understanding the evolution of this cultural self as it exemplifies a successful blending of the aforesaid elements. One cannot overlook the massive role his art played in the formation of the visual cultural practices of the twentieth century.

Raja Ravi Varma lived in a trans-cultural situation when colonial modernity was gradually emerging into a tangible reality in India. Effects of industrialisation in the West began to reflect on different cultural spaces to form delusional patterns of mixed expression in artistic endeavours. As already illustrated, reformation of taste in terms of refinement and civilization was happening as a project of colonial modernity initiated by British Raj and carried over by the rising English-educated middle class. Results of this project attained acceptance and authenticity by using the terminology of nationalism which was to be reinvented for furthering resistance against the Raj.

Buttressing this process, public arenas in British India became spaces in which seeing and knowing could be contested, refined and reworked; they most often operated at some distance from imperial concerns and so presented a world in which Indians of various interests and senses of identity could interact. (Freitag 96)

A 'refined' adaptation of the traditional images of Hindu mythology in a secular colour was a part of this process. In the paintings of Ravi Varma, gods and classical figures were existed outside their sanctum to occupy a much more marketable space of modernity. This condition removes the religious aura from those paintings. The printed images could be bought and used by any person irrespective of his religious identity and social status. The traditional sanctity and religious fervour associated with these images of gods and mythological characters, thus lost their ground. As a result, Hindu mythology attained a more secular space. Here, the spread of images created a new identity of a 'consumer with a refined taste' that facilitated a conditional acceptance of the civilized class.

The influence of Varma remains significant even in the twentieth century visual cultural practices as they are generated in the form of decontextualized simulacra. The Raja Ravi Varma Heritage Foundation conducted an exclusive show of four of Raja Ravi Varma's paintings titled *Heavenly Bodies* in 2016 decorated by Olaf Van Cleef, belonging to the well-known Van Cleef jewellery family and a consultant at Cartier. In 2019, National Award-winning designer Gaurang Shah and his team have woven 30 paintings of Varma into saris. Many more examples can be cited from various corners of cultural production for the affirmative existence of Ravi Varma in the present aesthetics.

1.Contextualising Ravi Varma

The cultural transitions in the nineteenth century which were described in the previous passages were the background from which Varma emerged as the national painter of India. The source of aesthetic sensibility of popular visual art, until the aggressive reorientation of it in the 1990s due to liberalisation, can be found in the

repertoire of artistic production of Varma on various levels. For a long time, the childhood legend of Ravi Varma was a part of the Malayalam primer for lower Primary schools of Kerala. It introduced him as a genius who was incidentally discovered by his uncle. Though the primer celebrated Varma as a person who brought fame to Kerala, he lived at a time when Kerala was part of the Madras state. He was born in 1848 at Kilimanoor in Travancore Princely state in Kerala. His uncle AyiliamThirunaal patronised Varma and he received training in art from Ramaswami Naidu and Edgar Thurston. Varma learned the basic techniques of oil painting from Theodore Jensen, who was one of the last members of the visiting artists. Mitter writes, "The steady stream of European painters was reduced to a trickle in Theodore Jensen's time, the last of itinerant artists, if we leave out Valentine Prinsep, the official painter of Durbar in 1877. Of Danish origin, Jensen was an exception rather than the rule in the mid-nineteenth century. He was soon replaced by Ravi Varma" (*Art Nationalism*19).

The elite status of his family and the training he received under European artists have helped Varma to develop a self that floats between traditional values and modern aspirations. His paintings are expressions of these values in conflict. A look at some of his available photographs reveals this conflicting self as a personal quality. One of the popular photographs of Ravi Varma is the one that presents his profile in an Indian suit wearing his turban and the Kaiser-i-Hind Medal, taken in 1904. This was the photograph given in the Malayalam primer mentioned earlier along with the lesson about his childhood. Another photograph taken in the same year shows him in a similar appearance sitting on a stool with a walking stick and a *bindi* on his forehead in a royal attitude. In a photograph taken in 1902, he is found

holding a brush and palette in his studio, wearing an Indian overcoat and European trousers and shoes in front of the painting of Nizam of Hyderabad. In a photograph taken in 1890, Ravi Varma is found wearing a turban, an extra-long Indian coat with a *bindi* on his forehead. His entire body posture reminds us of the full-length portraits of north Indian maharajas (which were imitations of European salon paintings) of the period. In another photograph taken in 1894 that shows the details of his studio in Girguam-Bombay, Ravi Varma and his brother Raja Raja Varma are found painting, wearing the traditional Kerala dress *mundu* with a European shirt and overcoat(Appendix A).

In contrast to these appearances, Raja Ravi Varma is seen as a traditional upper-caste Keralite in two photographs. Both these were taken in 1900. In the first photo, he is seen enjoying the recital of some text by another person, wearing the traditional *mundu* and *randaammundu* with *kuduma* without a shirt in *anantha sayana*² posture and in the second photo, he is seen before his easel wearing only his *mundu*. Instead of the rich and royal carpets and draperies found in the other four photos, the background of these two photos is filled with dilapidated furniture and bamboo screens.

These photographs provide a metaphor for the way in which Varma blended tradition and modernity in his works. In the first four of the seven photos mentioned here, Varma presents himself as a rich, royal and modern personality in refined fashion and taste, performing the role of a modern Indian in his Indian overcoat and other paraphernalia in an urban backdrop with Victorian furniture and other exquisite materials. He does not imitate the European but appears in the outfits of the Indian elite. Whereas in the photographs where Varma appears shirtless in his

mundu and *poonool* , he performs the tradition by presenting his visual as a rural landlord of Kerala enjoying his traditional life in a leisurely mood. This duality was in tandem with the conflicting self expressed by the Indian artists of his time. In this sense, the photographs of Varma represent the conflict of tradition and modernity, which formed the underlying pattern of his art too.

In the second half of the 19th century, Indian aristocracy was turning partly bourgeois in nature through material changes in social production. The emerging middle class found solace in its Occidental dreams about Indian culture getting refined by colonial modernity, simultaneously attempting to develop a new cultural perspective to strengthen the national movement. This class used the tools and techniques of the emerging system of knowledge to frame an imagined tradition of India by developing a new iconography. As a result, their attempts at cultural production created new aesthetics that performed an internal conflict within the culture. The urge to create an Indian modernity against the European modernity was the reason for this conflict. Partha Chatterjee writes:

Somehow from the very beginning, we had a shrewd guess that given the close complicity between modern knowledge and modern regimes of power, we would forever remain the consumers of universal modernity; never would be taken seriously as its producers. It is for this reason that we have tried, for over hundred years, to take our eyes away from this chimera of universal modernity and clear up a space where we might become the creators of our own modernity. (14)

According to Geetha Kapur, “We know of course that in India the modern is a deeply vexed value. Since Ravi Varma’s time, the modernizing impulse is best

understood as the beginning of a historical self-consciousness under the twin banners of the past and future”(*Representational Dilemmas* 59). The past and the future or tradition and modernity formed a paradoxical self constantly reflected in the aesthetic values of cultural expressions, since they obviously were the result of compulsive contexts formed out of cultural transitions. This aspect is clearer when Kapur writes:

The elements of pastiche and charade and the acknowledgment of class transpositions within the civilizational effort produce a stress on form. This is what I call a farce and the farce has its uses. The past is now merely a sign, the rich tradition is an anthropological residue of a lost culture. There is a disjuncture between motif and meaning, between models and effect. This is a cultural counterpart of the larger social disjuncture we call the alienating attribute of modernization.” (*When was Modernism* 164)

Varma’s’ significance lies in the way in which he used this paradoxical self to create a whole new tradition with a brand of his own. The core principle of this brand was a blend of the East and the West. His aristocratic lineage helped in making him an autonomous icon and brand of what his art represented. G Arunima writes:

Ravi Varma’s autonomy derived from his links to his traditional power as an upper-caste, Hindu aristocrat, and he negotiated the space of colonial modernity, the as yet nascent ‘bourgeois public sphere’, with the ease of the upper classes. His imaginary map of India itself is a testimony to that – he moved with ease between the traditional world of princely states and the modern space of the city, such as Bombay. (74)

Though he was privileged as a member of the royal family, the success of his artistic career cannot be solely attributed to this social position. As an artist, he spent a lot of time outside Kerala, where his elite family status provided nothing more than good lodging and easy access to money and business. As per the diary entries of his brother Raja Raja Varma, even for setting up an art gallery at his place, he had to write to the state machinery in 1896 and was granted by the state an amount of 1500 Rupees. The letter expresses the tone of a person who pleaded before the state rather than a person of aristocratic authority (Neumayer, *Raja Ravi Varma*10). Though he contributed his paintings to the gallery, they were kept in a school building and the gallery was set up only half a century later in 1941. He could not use his aristocratic position to influence his business partner for an amicable settlement regarding the Ravi Varma Studio and had to visit many times an evading partner for getting an unsatisfactory agreement signed. Many of the diary entries made by Raja Varma in 1901 in this regard, reveal a helpless artist rather than a powerful aristocrat. An entry in the same diary on 12 August 1898 tells us how the brothers faced difficulty in procuring money to settle a deal with Ms[sic] Govardhan Das Khatau. In another situation, despite his aristocratic heritage, Varma had to wait for days to meet the Nizam of Hyderabad which he could not accomplish. The diary entry of Raja Raja Varma on 25 February 1902 expresses their disappointment in this regard and on 12 March he wrote, “I have been disappointed with Hyderabad and its people. Hypocrisy and un-punctuality and failures to keep promises are the sins of the people high as well as low” (123). In the diary of Raja Raja Varma who accompanied his brother in his journeys, we find them wandering in the streets of Mumbai and other cities of India observing the public, watching plays, buying

magazines and art materials, occasionally visiting elite gatherings rather than two kings travelling with all the paraphernalia displaying power and aristocracy. Like amateur artists, both of them appeared anxious about public acceptance and academic praise for their paintings. The title 'Raja', which resonates with aristocratic lineage, helped him to find patronage in business and his profession. But his autonomy as an artist and the popularity of his art come from his use of colonial modernity to develop professionalism like that of European painters. His business acumen in making lithographs of his own paintings is to be noted here. The 'Ravi Varma Press' later grew into a brand for authentic mythological images for the people of India. Mitter writes, "We can learn a great deal about the professional routine of the two artists from their life in Bombay, where they lived in summer and monsoon months in order to complete commissions, returning to Kerala every year in autumn" (Neumayer, *Introduction*). The brothers followed a disciplined professional life with all the ritualistic practices of Hindus. "The brothers undertook several paintings simultaneously, the studio resembling that of a European portraitist with three or four paintings at different stages of completion" (Mitter, *Foreword*). Varma's artistic professionalism was not affected by his life as an elite aristocrat of Kerala. He fought legal battles for retrieving the lost land, efficiently managed the joint property at Kilimanoor, and introduced pepper cultivation but his professionalism in art remained intact. Mitter writes, "Indeed Varma's professionalism reminds us of Victorian painters. Throughout his career, Ravi Varma adhered to a work ethic, which was alien to his semi-feudal milieu" (*Art Nationalism* 190).

However, Varma created a universe of images that placed him as an icon of Indian art. Shalvi Agarwal writes:

A harbinger of modernity, Varma, stood up as a synthesis of the traditional and the modern, which eventually led to the creation of an altogether new genre of mythological oil painting. A cult phenomenon and a national hero, Ravi Varma stood as the only artist to receive an imperial accolade as well as the painter who helped in nation building. He enjoyed a popularity transcending ethnicity, class, culture, region that has not been equalled since. The inexpensive prints of his Hindu deities hung in possibly every home in the country. (13)

This does not mean that the life of Varma as an artist was beyond criticism. The Bengal school and philosophers like Ananda Coomaraswamy and Sister Nivedita criticised Varma for using western techniques to depict Indian mythology (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 221). Despite these criticisms, his art captured the imagination of the common man.

An analysis of the popularity of Ravi Varma and his art provides significant and interesting ideas about the formation of popular visual cultural practices in India. The volatility of the cultural context that he confronted and managed was incomparable to other historical contexts. The colonial modernity was in friction with tradition in all cultural formations and a new middle class emerged with a strong affiliation to the Western taste. This quasi-western space inside India gradually took control of epistemological discourses in cultural contexts. Their interpretations of *Indianness* became the norm for popular preferences of cultural products. Images in various forms flooded the cultural space to mark cultural transitions pre-programmed for the ruling British Raj. The introduction of 'fine art' was thus prominently a discourse of cultural invasion scheduled for an emerging

global market in which India, as a colonial space, had an important part. “A rapid expansion in the acquisition and use of visual images occurred in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, facilitated by India’s position within the global capitalist world fostered under British imperialism” (Freitag 97). New developmental visions introduced by industrial capitalism created more public spaces like roads, railways and public and private spaces for urban elite gatherings. They turned out to be exhibition spaces for artworks and fashion which, Freitag writes, led to “commodified looking” (100).

The European naturalistic technique of painting not only increased the fascination for Indian art among the public, but also removed their ritualistic aura to make them accessible for the market to trade in, like any other commodity. This commoditisation of images altered the traditional moral bondages of aesthetic preference and resulted in a new cultural self which was expressed in such preferences. Realistic tendencies in art in India in the nineteenth century may be addressed as cultural realignment from which a new aesthetically reconfigured cultural self emerged.

2. Oil as the New Medium

The quality of oil as a medium to enhance the effect of reality gained an upper hand over the flat two dimensional traditional paintings. It changed the traditional perception of images. Adaptation of new colour schemes and the incorporation of ‘light’ as an element into the painting resulted in photographic naturalism. According to Parimoo they were introduced into Indian art through art school education. He writes, “The new elements introduced in the art school training in the oil medium were perhaps the rendering of ‘light’ as an entity (as distinct from

‘tonal gradations’ to render ‘volume’), besides the sensitivity towards the new ways of colour applications and colour-schemes” (16). Though Varma did not attend any art schools, his works were incomparably academic in their nature. Most of his training was from watching painters like Ramaswami Naidu and Tanjavoor painters like Alagiri Naidu. He had a short spell of training under Theodore Jensen, who was visiting various princely courts with the recommendation of Viceroy (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 184). In his letter to the Divan of Travancore requesting to set up an art gallery at Trivandrum, Varma praises European academic art. “To what are the triumphs of art achieved by the European countries due but their schools and art galleries? We find the stamp of true artistic genius in all articles of European manufacture” (Neumayer, *Raja Ravi Varma* 209). Varma’s adoption of oil as his medium was a huge step towards accepting modernity and opening up his artistic venture to the confusions of colonial modernity as it was celebrated as a refined medium by companions of colonial modernity. According to Jain,

The advent of chromolithographs, the direct forerunners of contemporary offset-printed calendar art, occurred in a milieu where colonial discourses of civilization and the institutions of “fine art” in its nineteenth century colonial avatar imparted a particular prestige and significance to certain aspects of image making. These valorised aspects included the medium of oil painting, the mastery of naturalist techniques, and, perhaps most saliently, the artwork’s embodiment of authentic civilizational essence. (92)

His admiration of the European art is evident in the letter which was written in 1896, but his methods of blending them with Indian mythology shows his genius. This fondness of oil was a paradigm shift in Indian art. It could open a new ‘reality’

for the viewers of art. With the effect of photographic realism that the oil could make, the characters and situations that existed only in the collective imagination could be presented with an illusion of reality. Geetha Kapur writes in her book, *When was Modernism:*

The paint-matter oil and pigment is conducive to simulating substances (flesh, cloth, gold, masonry, marble) and capturing atmospheric sensations (the glossiness of light, the translucent depth of shadows). Flowing from such material possibilities of oil paint is the lure of appropriating the world, of appeasing the acquisitive impulse, of saturating the consciousness with the profit of possession. (150)

Preference for oil paint was not just a formal transformation but also an appropriation of taste according to the new consumerist values emerging with the rise of a new middle class lenient towards western values. The Indian elite were avidly collecting European art at that time (Kapur 147). This was the time Napier's famous address of the Christian Literary Association was delivered. Ravi Varma is often said to be the one who fulfilled the prophesy of Lord Napier concerning the Indian pencil⁶. By adapting oil and other modern western naturalistic techniques for depicting Indian mythology, Ravi Varma developed a visual content directly associated with the Indian Hindu imagination, that people from all strata of the social structure could easily relate to it. Kapur writes:

Mixing techniques and genres and styles with a benevolent universality of intentions, Ravi Varma creates a re-vision of Indian civilization for his contemporaries. It is as if he is destined to fulfil the 'prophesy' delivered in 1871 by the governor of Madras, Lord Napier, who suggested that Indian

artists deploy their modern skills and new techniques learnt from European paintings to present not only the rich pictorial potential of India's everyday culture but to incorporate ancient Indian mythology. (*When was Modernism* 159)

In this sense, he could take Indian imagination into a secular visual space which involves the everyday life of the people. Thus, the visual content created by Ravi Varma using the fascinating realistic effect of oil in Indian mythology played a huge role in facilitating the origin of a new cultural self.

3. Gods as Popular Figures

There are visual depictions of scenes from epics and classical literature and paintings of gods and goddesses. Varma's depiction of gods differ from their traditional ritualistic portrayals in temple arts and in murals. Traditional Hindu imagination contains a strong sense of visuality interpreted in terms of *drishti* or look. There is a special ceremony called *netronmeelanamin* temples, in which, the eyes of a new idol are opened. The faculty of looking, visuals and viewing are categorically ritualistic in Hindu mythology. Pinney writes, "Within Hindu practice, the enormous stress on visuality endows a great range of images with extraordinary power. A key concept here is the notion of darshan, of 'seeing and being seen' by a deity, but which also connotes a whole range of ideas relating to 'insight', 'knowledge' and 'philosophy'" (Pinney 8, 9). The gods look directly into the eyes of a devotee and creates a one-to-one bond by negating the universe around them. Varma's adaptations altered this feature by adding theatricality and context and his gods look directly into the eyes of the viewer, but they are placed in a perspective and in context.

Depiction of gods and classical characters in perspective within a naturalistic setting liberates them from the captivity of a singular time and space and brings them to the orbit of the everyday life. Such visuals marked a point of departure from the Indian tradition of ritualistic abstraction. The auratic and ritualistic quality that surrounds Hindu gods is due to their unique existence within a sacred place. Rituals are metaphoric practices that create momentary portals between the realm of the devotee and the realm of gods. The reality of this divine realm presence is lost when they become accessible in their forms. Varma's realistic portrayal of gods functioned in the same manner. According to Geetha Kapur "... RaviVarma succeeds in obliterating the forms in which past has come to us. Henceforth the past is mediated not by metaphoric forms. The past is a pastiche of present desires clad in flesh and blood and costume" (*When was Modernism* 159). The tradition is reinterpreted by adding an accessible reality to forms of gods. The ensuing reconfiguration of taste and moral concern is addressed by retaining or strengthening the narratives from which the gods had conceptual origin by placing them in suitable symbolic backgrounds or dramatic situations. In depicting the classical characters, Varma selected the most dramatic moments that are retold in different contexts to address moral questions. Kajri Jain says:

Here, naturalism, or the "scientific" approach to pictorial representation, replaced the idol's ritually imbued embodiment of the sacred with the artwork's aesthetically imbued embodiment of Hindu "culture". This resonated with the reformist use of rationalist, post- Enlightenment categories to recreate an ideal Hinduism as the altered and spiritual basis for an Indian polity. So for certain sections of consumers, in a certain register of

subjectivity, images took on extra layers of signification by being harnessed to the self-reflexive definition of community identity via the explicit articulation of a “cultural” domain. (97)

Thakurta compares this mythological visual content creation of Varma to that of some European academic painters. He was influenced by romantic allegorical painters from France, like, Gustave Boulanger (1829-88) and William Adolphe Bouguereau (1825-1905), especially in extending human figures from being merely life-like figures to symbols of ideals and emotions (175-176). “Varma’s mythological paintings freeze moments of mythology and recreated a part against which the ‘modern’ can be constructed. They are loaded with cultural reforms and values” (Rajadhyaksha “The Phalke Era” 64, 65). “As with ‘olympians’, so with Varma the line between history and myth was thinly drawn” (Mitter, *Art Nationalism* 201). The time is suspended to erase the materiality and thus the impact of the image is rather emotional or idealistic rather than physical. In the context of analysing the portraits of Varma, G Arunima observes, "It is the paradoxical time defying quality of Ravi Varma's very colonial art that ensured its popularity during and after his life" (75). Varma was idealising the scenes and characters from mythology and classics for representing a cultural heritage to anchor the Indian cultural self and identity.

To sustain and re-enact the narratives, Varma transmitted the dynamics of the texts into the visuals using cultural types. Since these narratives had already formed a part of the social imagination, they facilitated an easy transformation of such cultural types into mythological figures. References familiar to ethnic models also helped in the easy identification of such figures with Indian culture and mythology. Varma carefully built typical reference figures that reflect marks of

Indian ethnicity for this purpose. Analysing the female figures of Varma, Thakurta says that the search for archetypal figures depicting ideal beauty was not only a personal choice but the society that was 'alive to history' is the precondition for such a selection (159). The famous painting of 1892-93 titled *Galaxy* won critical acclaim in the Chicago exhibition for its ethnic value, rather than artistic merit. Ethnic types exist in cultural reference points like art for creating norms for representing ideal beauty. Varma's selection of women in the painting *Galaxy*, in the context, represents the establishment of standards of beauty for his ideal figures.

The Hindu revival and related use of its philosophy in the nationalist movement reinvented Hindu iconography in the modern format. The visual content created by cultural activities of that period like painting, photography, theatre, and films aimed at imagining a golden Hindu heritage that existed in oral narratives and religious texts. They formed an allegory of the golden cultural heritage of India against the domination of European visuality. The past was reimagined according to the visuality of the present with modern methods introduced by colonial modernity. The colonial dimension of these visuals did not stop with perspective, light or colour schemes. For example, visuals of European landscapes, portraits and mythological characters were available in the market in cheap prints, especially from Germany. Indian artists used these prints as their primary framework for visualising contexts in Indian mythology. Varma also used cheap German prints available in the market and models in European periodicals for sketching his human figures and sometimes modelled his scenes on theatre sets (Neumayer, *Introduction* 12-17). The allegory was partly colonial in its materialisation of visuals. Later, this iconographical recreation of mythology deeply influenced the social imagination of the tradition of

India. As far as the art of Ravi Varma is concerned, this was a two-way process. He was a part of the process and simultaneously was also the product of it.

Varma's visual representations of Hindu mythology and classical literature in the modern method were not a conscious choice, but they reflected the cultural self, that evolved in the period of which Varma was a part. The impact of the images created by Varma was so forceful that, "These popular stories, depicted with such a fidelity, dazzled the ordinary people in Trivandrum, Bombay and Baroda. Brahmin women, mentions Raja Varma, visited their studio in Bombay simply in order to gaze in wonder at these canvases" (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 204). Varma's visualisation, thus, has become a reinterpretation of the proto-nationalist imaginary that helped to boost the national movement against the British (Jain 99).

The classical figures of Varma appeal to the moral questions of everyday life of the people by offering clear cut distinctions between good and evil through colour schemes and expressions. Bad characters are depicted in dark shades and good ones in light tones (Thakurta, *Art Nationalism* 205). In the case of the depiction of gods, this humanisation has other effects on the cultural milieu. The gods are freed from their confinement to a secular cultural space. The extension of his god figures into the image bazaar through mechanical reproduction further enhanced the process of secularisation. However, Ravi Varma's function as an intermediary between the abstract realm of gods and the earthly realm of humans was so successful that the images produced by him attained ritualistic value over time and even now adorn many temples and homes.

4. The Market and the Popular

Ravi Varma started his lithographic press in 1894, for reproducing his own paintings for the picture bazaars of India. Indian image market was dominated by European prints from Germany and other nations. They lacked the essence of Indian taste. Ravi Varma could see the opportunity and with the blessings of Diwan Madhava Rao, he found business partners in Bombay to start his press. His entry into the image market altered Indian sensibility in unexpected ways. Neumayer in his preface to the diary of Raja Raja Varma writes:

His 'Ravi Varma Fine Arts Lithographic Press' was, for years to come, the largest and technically most innovative commercial press in India. From the Ravi Varma Press, millions of mythological pictures were churned out and distributed all over the world where ever Indians had settled. By 1900 Ravi Varma pictures were indispensable decorations or religious icons in every 'cultured' home of India. (xiv)

Apart from printing the paintings of Varma, there were artists specially employed for creating oleographs and lithographs from Indian mythology. The press started printing images of gods and mythological figures, images for decoration and ritualistic purposes, calendars, textile labels, matchbox labels, textbooks and advertisements. These images became very popular all over India. The entry in the diary of Raja Raja Varma on 7th January 1902 says, "This evening we visited two shops one of a Parsee and the other of a native. The latter was full stocked with things and we are not a little pleased to see there all of our oleographs exposed for sale. They are popular" (115).

There were many reasons for the popularity of these images. The global situation as already noted before, was emerging towards a consumerist turn with middle-class aesthetics. In India, the middle class with their English education and Indian tradition, was caught up in a never-ending conflict between their imagined self of an authentic Indian and the modern western identity. Varma's works addressed this conflict in self by constituting a modernity through visual representation. His art could offer the traditional values in a refined framework according to the desire of the middle class.

Apart from the visual appeal of photo-realism, Ravi Varma's 'puranic' pictures also

appealed to refined and educated taste. While their images and themes were ostensibly Indian, these paintings matched up to the growing familiarity of middle class, literate Indians with the 'history' and 'allegory' paintings of the European Academy artists, circulated in India through prints and magazine reproductions (Thakurta, "Westernisation" 174)

According to Kajri Jain, the images possess an 'undeniable contestation of the national and they are 'authentically hybrid' to become an index of the colonial condition. "In the commercial realm of the bazaar that is my concern here, however, the modernist question of whether or not Varma's printed images truly embodied or represented "Indianness" is obviated by their undeniable *performance* of "India" as an enacted as well as an imagined community: as a market, a network of transactions, and as the space of a shared, pan-national visual idiom" (104). The popularity of Varma's printed images comes from a blend of cultural, aesthetic and personal

factors. However, the cultural context of nineteenth century India was a perfect catalyst for this popular reaction.

The dissemination of Ravi Varma prints had a significant role in generating the feeling of a perennial culture. The gods and classical characters representing a golden era with embedded cultural values began to occupy public and private spaces and imparted a continuous visual experience of the Hindu mythological world. “[C]hromolithographs and other industrially produced images clearly facilitated profound transformations in patterns of worship and of political practice” (Pinney 17). Some of the images were used by European firms for the advertisements of their products. Images of gods and other figures from classical literature appearing on textile labels and matchboxes had a strong cultural significance. It established a new aesthetic parameter agreeable to Indian cultural heritage and suitable to the perspectives of colonial modernity. “The circulation of Ravi Varma’s chromolithographs in the vernacular public sphere actualized a nationalist cultural imaginary, fashioned through a selective engagement with the colonial discourse of “civilization” and the practices of fine art” (Jain 107). The press was disowned by Varma in 1903 and by the time Ravi Varma Press had become a brand name. Erwin Neumayer and Christine Schelberger write:

Although the press was not a financial success for Ravi Varma personally, it was instrumental- as no other mediums of mass communication before- in introducing a pan Indian system of visual aesthetics. A new vocabulary of imagery became so deeply ingrained into every aspect of Indian art, that later, visual art, be it applied on performing art, or even cinema and later

television had to adhere to the canon of expression introduced by Ravi Varma's oleographic prints. (xiv)

5. Women as Cultural Types

Varma's paintings set some aesthetic parameters in popular culture, especially in the depiction of women. Referring to Parimoo, Patricia Uberoi writes about calendar art, "In another sense, the polar opposites mutually invoke each other in calendar art as in Ravi Varma's paintings. Goddesses are luscious women, and luscious women goddesses, as has often been remarked" (44). Varma depended on descriptions in classical literature and art journals from Europe to create his images of Indian women. His painting, *Galaxy* (Appendix B) as already mentioned, depicts ethnic types of women from India. "The particular attraction of his work seemed to be the lovely luminescent women reaching out to capture the viewer's imagination" (Arunima 57). According to Thakurta, "Ravi Varma's choice of Nayikas and of legendary couples can be seen in relation to literal descriptions of the erotic in contemporary Malayalam poetry" ("Westernisation and Tradition" 160). This shows that his European legacy of form does not curtail the selection and the expression of local culture in the content.

In his later figure studies and mythological paintings, Ravi Varma was to conceptualise and idealise the female figure, with many of the same guileful mannerisms and gestures of these Academy paintings. But clothed and ornamented in elaborate Indian costumes, and placed within a narrative painting as Shakuntala, Draupadi or Damayanti, they became the new, much-admired 'devis' of Hindu legend, though even in this sphere, his main

reference point were European illustrations. (“Westernisation and Tradition” 177)

While the textual references to literature and classics gave them authenticity, the naturalism of modern methods provided them with fascinating appearance.

These figures have evolved into popular model for cultural expressions setting a course in which the popular visual art flourished (Appendix C).

6. The *Painkili* Art in Kerala and the Tradition of Ravivarma

The textual anchoring in literature or in mythology was one of the significant features of Varma’s modernity. This was a unique feature that differentiated colonial modernity and its visual expressions. Apart from providing authenticity, the textual references helped the viewers to overcome ethical apprehensions. Texts projected values on to the visuals. So, representations of sacred texts in the visual format naturally acquire a moral sanctity from the text for a viewer from the same culture. The popularity of Varma’s art was partly from this moral sanction acquired from their conjunction with sacred texts. But later in the twentieth century, the term ‘popular’ gathered many other cultural connotations, some of which are negative in cultural discourses. The emergence of popular novels called *Painkili Novels* in the 1980s was one of the phenomena that problematised the idea of the popular. The illustrations that accompanied these novels played a vital role in the popularity of the periodicals that published them. Most of these illustrations had some common features like photo realism and many of them contained a frozen dramatic situation. Many of these illustrations were centred on the popular models of beautiful men and women. A lineage of the tradition of RaviVarma art can be found in this *Painkili Art*.

In the cultural discourses of Kerala, the term popular was used to distinguish commercial cinema from the parallel film industry of the 1970s. However, the concept of the 'popular' had been there in the literary discourses as an antithesis of the progressive literature that evolved in connection with the leftist movement in literature. In the first All India Progressive Writers' Congress held at Lucknow on April 10, 1936, Munshi Prem Chand said:

Life and literature were considered to be two different things which bore relation to each other. Literature reflects the age. In the past days of decadence the main function of literature was to entertain the parasitic class. In this literature the dominant notes were either sex or mysticism, pessimism or fatalism. It was devoid of vigour, originality, and even the power of observation.

Literature was to be redefined according to various literary movements happening at that time across the globe. Prem Chand elaborates: "The role of literature is not simply to provide us with amusement, or recreation; it does not follow, but is, on the contrary, a torch-bearer to all the progressive movements in society". The literature has to carry out the role of propaganda for a future revolution of the oppressed. The format of the literature must be comprehensible for the common man. He also said, "With a correct ideology, language will become simpler and better. So as long as the content of our writing is on the right lines, we need not worry about the form". These thoughts and ideas provided ideological foundation for those who stood for people's literature which was in Malayalam called *janakeeya saahithyam*.

An organisation that was formed along the same line was the Indian People Theatre Association (IPTA). It concentrated on theatre and film productions that can convey ideological messages to the suppressed. As a part of the left movement, IPTA also adopted an anti-elitist, anti-traditional perspective in literary productions. Indian People Theatre Association Bulletin, July 1943, includes a report from Malabar which says that the traditional art forms were now being performed among the masses outside the temple premises. Instead of *Kurukshetra*, they now tell the story of Stalin Grad. The report, recorded in detail, the communist plays and the agricultural movements in Malabar (Pradhan 153-155). In 1937, an organisation that was similar to PWA was founded in Kerala under the name “*Jeeval Sahitya Sangham*” under the aegis of Left-inclined politicians and writers at Trichur and soon after, it was linked to the All India Progressive Writers' Association. In 1944, it was renamed as Purogamana Sahithya Sanghatana (PSS). “A serious attempt was undertaken by the intellectuals allied with the PSS to introduce a category of the ‘masses’ (*janam*) or more precisely, ‘the common mass’ (*janasamaanyam*) into the aesthetical habit of Malayalam literature” (Bay 94).

These movements were against the concept of elitist literary tendencies. 'Simple language' was one of the prominent features of *janakeeyasahityam* or 'people's literature'. The *janakeeyasahityam* was aimed at educating the common masses on social conditions. In other words this term signified a simplified presentation of progressive ideal for the common people. The word *janapriyam* or popular was presented as an antithesis to the term *jankeeyam*. While the people's literature functioned as an educational tool among the masses, the popular literature served as a medium of entertainment that would make them forget the reality and the

need to change it. “While *janakeeyam* was conceived as an organic engraft on the ways people live and react, *janapriyam* was argued to be an artificial creation, often accused of being a commoditised artefact in the local culture-industry and as living upon a set of manufactured tastes” (Bay 98). Malayalam literary discourse never considered the *janapriyasahithyam* (popular literature) as having any serious role in society and either discarded them as undeserving or criticised them as detestable. A prominent critic had the opinion that such literature provided the youth with repulsive psychic satisfaction and encouraged capitalist-consumer (Bay, *Notes* 107)

The progressive movement in literature began to decline by the 1970s owing to many socio-political reasons. Sachidanandan blames the capitalist forces that got strengthened in this period:

By the 1960s, the Progressive Movement had exhausted its innovative energy. Though industrial capitalism never made a real debut in Kerala, the capitalist value systems, norms and perspectives on life and literature began to penetrate Kerala's every day by the fifties of the 20th century. The creative forces of the Renaissance had weakened; reformist community concern was giving way to casteism; love of acquisition and greed were occupying the space left by reformist values. (*Society and Literature*)

The ‘*painkili*’ as a term to indicate *janapriyam* (popular) became acceptable with the publication of the novel ‘*Padatha Painkili*’ by Muttathu Varkey in 1957. The initial printing of *Padathapainkili* produced 2500 copies and after one month another 3000 copies were printed (Bay 100). These novels marked the beginning of a new trend and as a result, several novels of the same type came out in cheap prints and became

successful in the market. *Painkili Literature* became a cultural phenomenon as they got serialised in weeklies like *Malayala Manorama* and *Mangalam*.

Manorama started its publication in 1937. When *Mangalam* began its publication in 1969, this new weekly became suddenly successful with serialised *painkili* novels. The readers anxiously awaited each week for the next issue of the magazine to follow the life of their favourite heroes and heroines from the high-range regions of Kerala in their romantic adventures. Dr. K. M George calls them *lollypop literature*. “While the high percentage of literacy in Kerala and the enthusiasm shown by the ordinary people for reading are commendable, one is not happy about the standard of literary writings, especially in the periodicals with a large circulation. A lot of pulp is being produced and read. In Malayalam, there is a special name given to this brand of writing— 'PainkiliSahityam' which can be roughly rendered as 'Lollipop Literature’” (83).

These weeklies redefined the readership in a new dimension. By the 1980s, there were several periodicals with *painkili* literature in Malayalam. According to Dr. KM George,

To understand the magnitude of the facility before the reader in Malayalam, we may give a few figures. According to the ABC report for January-June 1985, the largest-selling daily in India is Malayala Manorama with a circulation of 6,33,538 copies. Its weekly has also a circulation of about six lakhs. But the weekly in Malayalam which has beaten all records is Mangalam published from Kottayam, its circulation for the same period being 12,86,442 copies. From Kottayam itself, there appear three or four Malayalam weeklies with a circulation of at least two lakhs. (83)

Many writers observed this phenomenon with interest. The sudden surge of popular periodicals in a place where people are supposed to be highly political in their attitude was worth noticing. For instance, in October 1986, Sreedhar Pillai wrote in *India Today*:

Over the past few months, news-stands in Kerala have been hit by a magazine boom that has few parallels in the country. Relying heavily on this sure fire cocktail, a plethora of Malayalam magazines - described as painkili (pulp) - are taking the state by storm. One of these, *Mangalam*, is already the largest selling weekly in the country. With an audited circulation of an unbelievable 14,44,974, it has already left the *Malayala Manorama* - till now the unrivalled number one seller - trailing far behind at 5,55,159. *Sunanda* has already hit the 1.70 lakh mark with its fourth issue. In 1980, there were only six such magazines. Today, there are 27 - and more in the pipeline - almost all of them published from Kottayam. Says A.S. Nair, who has been involved with three such magazines, *Mangalam Sakhi* and *Sunanda*: Painkili publications are the biggest industry in Kottayam.

With a circulation of fourteen million copies in a state with a population below three billion, *Mangalam* had an unparalleled influence in shaping the public taste. It serialised novels mainly with Christian backgrounds in the hilly regions of Kerala. Such novels had characters from poor family backgrounds fighting the local rich people to complete their love missions. They also published features that were a blend of investigative journalism and sentimental fiction. Most of the readers of these periodicals were youngsters and women from ordinary families.

Servants in Kerala read a daily and at least one weekly. This shows the nature and extent of readership in Malayalam. While the craze for reading has a cheering aspect, there is reason to be unhappy on two accounts: One, a lot of good time is wasted in reading cheap fiction which is highly sexy and sensational, and two, it leaves very little time for reading good books. This is the case even with the upper class readers. The average reader in Malayalam is so frequently treated to a strong dose of sexy and sensational stuff that his sensibility gets blunted. This is the situation which obtains in Kerala now.

(George, "The Malayalam Scene" 84)

It was said that one copy of the magazine was read by at least eight persons which increased the total number of readers to around one billion. Sreedhar Pillai says, "Recently, when a housewife committed suicide, she left behind her tear-jerking autobiography for Mangalam. The magazine had a windfall as its readers lapped up each sappy episode of her martyred life. Then there are the occasional gimmicks, like the mass marriages organised by Mangalam. Other magazines give away sewing machines and pressure cookers as prizes in various contests." Until the 1990s, these publications had a strong readership but with the introduction of satellite television they gradually lost their readers to the sit-coms.

The illustrations done for the serialised novels in the *painkili* magazines also gained huge popularity among the readers. They helped enhance the emotional intensity of the narration by enabling the readers to visualise the situations in vivid reality. For a short while the *Malayala Manorama* used photographs in the place of illustrations along with such novels. These photographs were used to represent the characters in their heightened emotional stages. According to Kavita Balakrishnan,

these photos were used to run the novels like films in the theatre of reading⁷ (179-180).

The illustrators of these periodicals followed a tendency of super-realism in their art. These artworks were also one of the reasons for their popularity. These illustrations played a huge role in creating the reality effect in the minds of the readers. These figures were attributed the same social position as that of film stars. Some artists used film stars as their models and later the same actors acted in the roles when such novels were made into films. A memory shared on Facebook says:

Manorama used the pictures of Mohan Lal to illustrate the novel written by Baton Bos. In the novel *Kanakachilanka* (I think it was written by Sudhakar Mangalodayam) the illustrations were similar photo shoots. Pictures of film actresses like Renjini and Sreeja were used to illustrate heroines of that novel. I don't remember who the hero was and not sure whether they were real photos or not. I was just a child then. I heard the same stars would act in their film versions. But they were not made into films. Instead it came out as TV serial starring Neena Kuruppu and Manju Raghavan as heroines. In the novel *Nandini Oppol* artist Mohanan Manimala used actress Geetha as his model for illustrations. When it became a film Geetha acted as the heroine. The novel 'Sthree Dhanam' was a family hit. I remember every one waiting for *Manorama* on Fridays. (Mangalam used to come on Tuesdays). This novel became a film starring Jagadeesh and Urvashi. (Ragesh, My trans.)

The photo-realistic quality of the illustrations accompanying the text of *painkili* could easily capture the attention of the readers. They have an intended affiliation with the cinematic visuals produced through its use of the technique of deceptive

realism and dramatic moments. The readers were often prompted to imagine a cinematic version of these novels. The dramatic sequences were intensely conveyed by use of film stars as models for their illustrations.

The *painkli* was not just a reading experience but a visual experience too. To a certain extent, these visuals functioned as an intermediary between textual narration and cinematic visuals. Unlike the illustrations in standard periodicals that tried to move towards abstraction, *Painkiliillustrations* preferred realism. Along with the text, these visuals were also criticised for their low taste. Dr. Kavitha Balakrishnan views these illustrations as expressions of voyeurism. According to her, these titillating visuals were the secret pleasures of those with a low cultural taste. Later, they came to be known as Kottayam Art. As most of these periodicals were published in Kottayam, they were called Kottayam-weeklies or even 'ma-weeklies' as most of them started with the sound 'ma'. These weeklies expressed the mischief of bad taste. The artists usually did not sign these illustrations since they were not included in the circle of art and even if they signed, they were not acknowledged as illustrators (Balakrishnan 393). They were known to represent the voyeuristic gaze of the readers well hidden under the cultural code of art because they did not have any semantic quality of art but were filled with the signs of a voyeur (Balakrishnan 393). She identifies some common qualities for these illustrations in various *painkili* weeklies. The selling point of these visuals was their realism which could excel even photography. They made use of the possibilities of painting like chiaroscuro and tonality of watercolours and absolute correction of flesh tones to make them hyper-realistic. Instead of emotional intensity, these paintings aimed to create a tantalizing effect on the reader/viewer. The use of

flaming colours and passionate facial expressions and fleshy bodies that are illuminated by falling light created appealing bodies to be gazed at by onlookers that enjoyed by a viewer. In short, they were tantalizing, voluptuous, passionate depictions of human bodies ready to be consumed by the reader / consumer⁸(Balakrishnan 393-402).

In their realistic executions and dramatic content, the *painkili* followed the colonial notion of refined art that later continued in the art of Ravi Varma. The observation of *painkili* as a low form of art also points to a point of departure of Indian art from its colonial tradition and reminds one of the criticisms faced by Varma for the fusion of colonial format with Indian mythology. Ravi Varma faced severe criticism from the Bangali school of art for accepting the colonial method for depicting Indian mythological figures.

Confessing an ignorance of his works in the original, Coomaraswamy accused Varma of pandering to public weakness for the sentimental and the incomprehensible. This was elucidated two contrasting images of the epic heroine, Sita. Varma's Sita in Exile was a woman bullied by her captor, while Abanindranath, was the 'embodiment of a national ideal'. The Keralan painter was guilty of a gross, physical treatment of symbolic subjects.

(Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 261)

His gods and heroes are cast in common moulds and lack dignity. But Coomaraswami does not blame Varma for his popularity. Rather, he identifies some problems in the Indian taste. "For this corruption of sensibility, Coomaraswami pointed his finger at colonialism. It replaced hand-woven textiles with Manchester

fabrics, grafted European buildings onto the cities, imposed art schools of craftsmen, in a final betrayal, perpetuated a century of false education" (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 263). While art education generally followed the imported skill training as its core objective and the European style as its core method, the Indian artists took it upon their shoulders to get rid of this corrupted European sensibility hanging on to the common people's taste.

Absorption, indirectness and history painting were part of the package exported by the colonial state into its Government Art Schools in the nineteenth century and we will encounter some silhouettes of these early anaesthetics. The 'supreme fiction' of the absent beholder becomes – in colonial India – a mark of western 'distinction' and a marker of distance from Hindu 'idols', from the fetish that was the common origin of all art. (Pinney, *Photos of Gods* 23)

Absorption and theatricality are two contradictory qualities. The first one is the primary feature of realism promoted by the colonial art education. It was a part of the European tradition. "(Michael) Fried defines "absorption" as a strategy commonly used in oil painting since the 18th century, whereby the subject of a picture does not acknowledge the presence of the viewer, but allows the viewer to enjoy it only vicariously, as a voyeur. By contrast, in "theatrical" images, figures look out of the picture plane and directly engage the viewer" (Sinha, "Visual Culture" 193). Absorption is the quality of an artwork that does not acknowledge the presence of a viewer. Traditional Indian paintings of gods and idols have the quality of providing 'darshan' to the viewer by looking directly back at him. According to Pinney, this is one of the qualities that were replaced by the Art Schools with the

quality of ‘absorption’. Indian artists like Varma were compelled to follow the quality of ‘absorption’ or the European tradition against the traditional quality of ‘theatricality’ of Indian images (*Photos of Gods* 66). This led to a conflict resulting from a disinterested imitation of the realistic feature called xeno-real.

Xeno- real quality comes from the mimicry of realism introduced by colonialism. When realism was mimicked by the Indian artist, it was not authenticated by tradition but only by the colonial regime. For instance, “The ‘Victorian Indian’ art style pioneered by Ravi Varnia has been deprecated as inauthentic by later art critics, seeking an essential Indianness in other ways, and denigrated for its conservatism and obsolescence in the light of emerging new trends within European art” (Uberoi 43). In this context, the xeno-real reflects a conflict of modernity and tradition. According to Christopher Pinney, “By extension, I take xeno-real to mean the form of colonially authorized realism that circulates outside its framework of origination: it is jettisoned into the colony, where it comes (primarily) to signify itself” (*Photos of Gods* 31). Sinha refers to Pinney who observes that while the elite patrons of Ravi Varma liked his mythological paintings for the quality of absorption, the common people worshipped the idols created by the quality of theatricality (Sinha, “ Visual Culture” 194). In this way the quality of Xeno-real can be understood as a result of the conflict between the quality of ‘absorption’ and the quality of ‘theatricality’. According to Pinney, the result of this tension was another form of Indian images that he calls ‘corpotherics’, “(...) the notion of ‘corpotherics’ – embodied, corporeal aesthetics – as opposed to ‘disinterested’ representation, which over-cerebralizes and textualizes the image” (*Photos of Gods* 8). He writes:

I have proposed the use of the term ‘corpothetics’ as opposed to ‘aesthetics’ to describe the practices that surround these images. If ‘aesthetics’ is about the separation between the image and the beholder, and a ‘disinterested’ evaluation of images, ‘corpothetics’ entails a desire to fuse image and beholder, and the elevation of efficacy (as, for example, in barkat) as the central criterion of value. (Pinney, *Photos of Gods* 194)

Understanding ‘corpothetics’ as a feature of the xeno-real explains the criticisms of ‘voluptuousness levelled against the figures of Varma. The corpothetic quality invites the viewer to a physical engagement involving all the senses. According to Pinney,

“The hold of absorption and history painting was tenuous and reached its apogee in the work of Ravi Varma (1848–1906), the Indian painter most amenable to the western genre of art-historical evaluation. Partly this is the result of his own self-mystification in Vasarian mode but it is, more importantly, the result of his adoption of a painterly style that strove for the ‘supreme fiction’”(Pinney *Photos of Gods* 23).

Varma’s art-historically celebrated works do not acknowledge the presence of the viewer. The characters in the works will look past the viewer as if he does not even exist. Paradoxically such works are not popular and those that made remarkable influence on the popular culture are those that have corpothetic quality. They not only look back at the viewer but acknowledge his presence as a worshipper. (Pinney, *Photos of Gods* 23). This claim that most of Varma’s paintings that survive have corpothetic quality points at the way in which Varma has been retraditionalised as they stood visibly against the modern-abstract equation. The artists could easily

follow the form created by Varma as ‘traditional’ as Varma had become the model sustained as a part of the popular culture. Varma’s colonial adaptations have been thus understood as ‘traditional’.

There are some other engaging qualities attributed to the art of Ravi Varma. “Varma’s images of the past are *tableaux vivants* in which great human dramas unfold; as such they betray the influence of Parsi theatre in Bombay. The brothers were avid theatregoers, enjoying both English and indigenous productions. One of their admirers was the visiting American actor, Edmund Russel, who often invited them to theatre. It was this influence of the stage that lent an air of fancy-dress parade to Varma’s canvases” (Mitter *Art and Nationalism* 207). The physical engagement with the images of Varma comes not only from their corporetics but their ability to freeze a dramatic moment and also their ability to make that specific moment of emotion convincing. For instance, Mitter observes how the depiction of Sakunthala could easily convince by depicting a concrete situation of a girl writing a love letter instead of raising that to a generalised emotion (*Art and Nationalism* 201). The xeno-real quality of Varma’s images makes them find reference points outside their origin as in the case of some of them referring to the Parsi theatre.

These qualities of Varma’s art have made permanent marks on the popular notions of aesthetic quality. Consequentially, the popular artists could not help but bring those qualities in their works as well. The illustrations of *painkili* novels prove the significance of the Varma’s influence. The *painkili* novels also possessed a narrative quality that is suitable for such painting that accompanied them. In narration, the *painkili* may find parallels with some of the early novels written in Malayalam in the initial stages of the genre in Malayalam. The first Malayalam

novel *Indulekha* has all the characteristics of a *painkili* novel as it tells the love story between a handsome young man and a beautiful lady who unite at the end, defeating hostile circumstances and villains. One of the significant features of this novel is its detailed narration which is akin to visual representation. Eighteenth century Malayalam novels have this visual quality. Udaya Kumar observes, “Realisms are interpellated into a new imaginative practice in which the configuration of vision and language, seeing and saying, become difficult to disentangle. Through their perceptual and discursive economies, these early novels found ways of inserting subjects into new, complex domains of worldliness and speech” (146, 147). The *painkili* as a genre, uses a form of realism, that presents a fascinating account of daily life. Drawing on Nancy Armstrong’s ideas, Udaya Kumar elaborates on the visual aspect of realism. Literary realism converted a particular kind of visual information, infinitely reproducible and capable of rapid and wide dissemination, into what was both a way of seeing and a picture of the world that a mass readership could share – visual information becomes the basis for the intelligibility of verbal narrative (151, 152). The form of *painkili* is also demarcated by its rapid and wide dissemination and its reproducibility, evident in its wide readership and clones. It could be assumed that the *painkili* illustrations have the added advantage of this visual quality of narratives that qualified the visuals attached. Analysing the novel *Premamrutham* (1913) by CV Raman Pillai, Udaya Kumar observes how some of the descriptions of women reminds the readers of Raja Ravi Varma’s paintings “The proliferation of visual images in *Premamrutham* is in tune with the transformations in scopical regimes and technologies of image-making at the time of the novel was written” (Kumar, *Writing the First Person* 149). *Painkili* is thus revealed to be a later

form of the traditional novels that have the same corpothetic dimension of images. “Vision and language in early novels in Malayalam, and the new modes of imagining subjectivities they offered, worked within the ambit of a corpothetic dimension of images and transformative power of seeing and saying” (Kumar , *Writing the First Person*153). One of the reasons for the popularity and emotional appeal of the *painkili* might be the way in which it could combine the corpothetic quality of language with that of illustrations.

Kavitha Balakrishnan discusses the corpothetic quality in relation to the use of photographs for the purpose of illustrations in periodicals. In the use of retouched photographs in periodicals, the cultural context or the social milieu is removed. The person in the photo is just a part of the viewing process. She compares this to the calendar art and referring to Pinney calls this quality corpothetic (185). The physicality of the *painkili* illustrations creates a similar effect on the reader/viewer. The image compels the viewer by inviting his/her attention with its detailed and voluptuous depiction of sensual figures. The difference is that the engagement is not a result of mutual looking but by offering an illusion of inviting proximity created through photographic realism. So the reader/viewer is not an admirer or worshiper but a voyeur. The voyeur is fascinated by the bright colours, highlighted body curves and the prominent use of light and shadow. The use of light and shade effect is very subtle so as to make the shadows of undergarments seen to create a sensual fascination with the image. The same quality was seen in the female figures of Varma by critics like Ratan Parimoo. He writes:

Ravivarma perpetuated a kind of Indian feminine type which persists today in the wall calenders of deities, cinema posters and even in the live form on

Hindi screen, popularised through his oleographs issued by his press established in Bombay around 1890. It is an idealized image matching again European academic nude paintings of e.g. Etty and Cabanel – sensuous, sweet, plump and luscious, full of eros – whether it be goddess, epic heroine or Malabar beauty. (*The Paintings of Three Tagores* 31)

In this perspective, the sensuality of the *painkili* images can be traced to the luscious women of Varma. In other words, the corporeal quality in the art of Ravi Varma found its way into the erotic figures of *painkili* that formed a significant part of the popular aesthetic notions of Kerala in 1980s (Appendix D).

Another notable quality of *painkili* art was the dramatic moment it presents with a strong emotional content. The ‘supreme fiction’ sought by Ravi Varma in his depiction of mythological narratives exists in a diminutive and fanciful form in the narratives of *painkili*. One of the qualities which may be of utmost importance for the admirers of Varma, was the ‘*bhava*’ (Mitter, *Art and Nationalism* 210) or the feeling in the visual. A similar intensity of feeling is there in *Painkili art*. The *painkili* depicted concrete situations instead of generalised emotions as in the case of illustrators of the standard magazines. The human figures in *painkili* art always appear in emotional situations. Sometimes these paintings accompany dialogues from the novel. Though they do not engage the viewer directly, their dramatic quality compels the viewer to be involved with all the senses. Many of these images exhibited a cinematic quality with their bright Fuji colours that can create a heightened form of light effect. This cinematic realism was an expression of the visuality of the narrative as Varma could transform the internal visuality of the Hindu epics into the corporeal images through mimicry of European realism. As

the xeno-real images of Varma found their reference points in Parsi theatre, the *painkili* appeared to find their reference in cinema. These visuals could, on a smaller scale, with their corpothetic quality and emotional intensity, become a part of the aesthetic culture of the 1980s Kerala just as how Varma remained as the popular aesthetic choice of India for decades.

When tele-serials took over the space of *painkili*, they followed a pattern of visualisation in which the characters usually appear to produce a similar pattern of visual experience. They are presented as visual treats with colourful makeup and costume rather than in a realistic manner. The experience of watching a tele-serial thus tries to simulate the experience of reading *painkili* in private, in which the voyeuristic imagination of participating in transforms the combination of visuals and text into a sensual experience. The developments in photography must have influenced the methods used by these artists to generate cinematic realism. The reasons raised by the critics for keeping these images and accompanying narratives away from the accepted cultural space are similar to that of the criticism raised against popular cinema and later against satellite television. In this sense, these *painkili* images may be considered as one of the first experiences of popular visual culture in Kerala. Their significance lies in its underlying influence of colonial modernity that created the RaviVarma school. According to Kavitha Balakrishnan, “Ultimately the ‘Kottaym art’ divided the viewers into two categories - the aesthetic viewer and the pulp-viewer”(393-403). This cultural attitude informed categorization like art-film and commercial film or class-film and mass-film. To a certain extent, it was the same group of pulp viewers that formed the consumers of the television viewers after the invasion of satellite television in the 1990s in Kerala.

End Notes

1. Tilly Kettle, Ozias Humphrey, John Zoffany, Charles Smith and Francesco Rinaldi are some others (Mitter,*Art Nationalism*19)
2. Traditional Indian painting, for instance, takes as its starting point an outline drawing or stencil, which is then coloured in without any significant modification. A western painting or drawing on the other hand, attempts to build up a three dimensional version of the subject by constantly modifying the initial schema (Mitter, *Art Nationalism* 30)
3. The second half of the Nineteenth century witnessed a change in the imperial policy. A change from the early suppressive rule to benevolent despotism was seen. The British Raj tried to develop a sensibility change through various educational initiatives. For a detailed analysis see Mitter,*Art Nationalism*(29-62)
4. The inherent flexibility of Hindu religion: Unlike Semitic religious practices the Hindus believe in numerous gods and goddesses. The nature and form of rituals and gods vary from place to place.
5. സാധാരണ ഈ കാലങ്ങളിൽ നടക്കുന്ന മാതിരിയുള്ള സംഗതികളെ മാത്രം കാണിച്ചും ആശ്ചര്യകരമായ യാതൊരു അവസ്ഥകളെയും കാണിക്കാതെയും ഒരു കഥ എഴുതിയാൽ അത് എങ്ങിനെ ആളുകൾക്ക് രസിക്കും എന്ന് ഈ പുസ്തകം എഴുതുന്ന കാലത്ത് മറ്റ് ചിലർ എന്നോടു ചോദിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. അതിന് ഞാൻ അവരോടു മറുപടി പറഞ്ഞത് - എണ്ണച്ചായ ചിത്രങ്ങൾ യൂറോപ്പിൽ എഴുതുന്ന മാതിരി ഈ ദിക്കിൽ കണ്ടു രസിച്ചു തുടങ്ങുന്നതിന് മുൻപ് , ഉണ്ടാവാൻ പാടില്ലാത്ത ആകൃതിയിൽ എഴുതിയിട്ടുള്ള നരസിംഹ മുർത്തിയുടെ ചിത്രം, വേട്ടക്കൊരുമകന്റെ ചിത്രം , ചില വ്യാളി മുഖ ചിത്രം, ശ്രീകൃഷ്ണൻ സാധാരണ രണ്ടു കാൽ ഉള്ളവർക്ക് നില്ക്കാൻ ഒരു വിധവും പാടില്ലാത്ത വിധം കാൽ പിണച്ച് വച്ച് ഓടക്കഴൽ ഉറുന്ന മാതിരി കാണിക്കുന്ന ചിത്രം , വലിയ ഫണമുള്ള അനന്തന്റെ ചിത്രം, വലിയ രാക്ഷസന്മാരുടെ ചിത്രം ഇതുകളെ നിഴലും വെളിച്ചവും നിറഞ്ഞ സ്വഭാവങ്ങളും സ്മരിക്കപ്പെടാത്ത മാതിരിയിൽ രൂക്ഷങ്ങളായ ചായങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ട് എഴുതിയത് കണ്ടു രസിച്ചു ആ വക എഴുത്ത് കാർക്ക് പലവിധം സമ്മാനങ്ങൾ കൊടുത്തു വന്നിരുന്ന പലർക്കും ഇപ്പോൾ അതുമേൽ വിരക്തിവന്ന മനുഷ്യന്റെയോ മൃഗത്തിന്റെയോ വേറെ വസ്തുക്കളുടെയോ സാധാരണ സ്വഭാവങ്ങൾ കാണിക്കുന്ന എണ്ണച്ചായ ചിത്രം , വെള്ള ചായ ചിത്രം ഇതുകളെക്കുറിച്ച് കൗതുകപ്പെട്ടു എത്രകണ്ട് സൃഷ്ടിസ്വഭാവങ്ങൾക്കു ചിത്രങ്ങൾ ഒത്തു വരുന്നുവോ അത്ര കണ്ടു ആ ചിത്രകാരന്മാരെ ബഹുമാനിച്ചു വരുന്നത് കാണുന്നില്ലയോ , അതുപ്രകാരം തന്നെ കഥകൾ സ്വാഭാവികമായി ഉണ്ടാവാൻ പാടുള്ള വൃത്താന്തങ്ങളെക്കൊണ്ടു തന്നെ ഭംഗിയായി ചമച്ചാൽ കാലക്രമേണ ആവക കഥകളെ അസംഭവ്യ സംഗതികളെക്കൊണ്ടു ചമക്കപ്പെട്ട പഴയ കഥകളെക്കാൾ രചിക്കുമെന്നാകുന്നു(Menon,*Indulekha* xi-xii).

6. Lord Napier, Governor General of Madras, giving a talk to Native Christian Literary Society in Madras 1871 said, ... “ In all portraiture of these powers with their appropriate accessories and duties how vast a field is opened for an Indian Pencil. The form of Indra, with his attendant breezes hovering over the famished plains of hindusthan, might surely more than rival the triumphant flight of the Italian Aurora with her galaxy of Hours.... Next to the Vedic mythology as a source of Artistic inspiration, come the two legendary epics, the Mahabaratha and the Ramayana... (Neumayer297). Also see (Mitter, *Art nationalism* 199)
7. ഫോട്ടോ-ഇലസ്ട്രേഷൻ നീണ്ട നോവലുകൾക്ക് മാത്രമേ നൽകപ്പെടുള്ളൂ. ഈ പ്രത്യേക ഫോട്ടോ സെഷനുകൾ വായനയുടെയും നോട്ടുപുസ്തകം നോട്ടുത്തിന്റെയും ചില പ്രധാനവശങ്ങൾ അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു എന്നത് പ്രധാനമാണ്. അവ ആക്ഷൻ കേന്ദ്രീകരിക്കുന്നവയാണ്. കഥാപാത്രനിലകൾ മാത്രമല്ല ഇവയുടെ താല്പര്യം. തീയേറ്ററിൽ സിനിമ ‘ഓടിക്കും’ പോലെ, വാരിക ഒരു നോവലിനെ സിനിമാറ്റിക്കായി ‘അഭിനയിക്കും ശരീരങ്ങൾ കൊണ്ട് വായനയുടെ തീയേറ്ററിൽ ഓടിക്കുന്നു’.(Balakrishnan, *Vayanamanushyante* 179-180)
8. ഇവർ സാംസ്കാരികമായ ചിന്തയുടെ ഒരു ഉയർന്ന സൂചകവും ബാക്കി വയ്ക്കാത്ത ‘സെല്ലിങ് പോയിന്റ്’ ആണ് അതാത് വാരികകൾക്ക് കൊടുത്തത്. ചിത്ര ഭാഷയുടെ വഴിക്കു പറഞ്ഞാൽ റിയലിസം ആണ് ആ സെല്ലിങ് പോയിന്റ്. അഭിരുചിയുടെ വഴിക്കു പറഞ്ഞാൽ വാർപ്പിനെ ചിത്രോപമാ സൗന്ദര്യം അവർ അതി തീവ്ര നിലയിലേക്കുയർത്തി. പെയിന്റിങ്ങിന്റെ സാധ്യതകളായ നിഴലും വെളിച്ചവും ഒക്കെ നല്ലവണ്ണം ഉപയോഗപ്പെടുത്തി. പക്ഷേ വൈകാരികതയെക്കാൾ ഇക്കിളിപ്പെടൽ ആണ് ഒരു ലക്ഷ്യമായി മുൻനിർത്തിയത്. ചിത്രത്തിൽ എന്നത്തേക്കാൾ നോട്ടത്തിൽ ആണ് കോട്ടയം ആർട്ടിന്റെ രചനാ താല്പര്യം. (Balakrishnan, *Vayana Manushyante* 95)

Also see

കോട്ടയം അർപ്പിസ്റ്റുകളുടെ ഇല്ലസ്ട്രേഷനുകൾ അങ്ങിനെ കലയുടെ മൗലികമായ ഉപകരണങ്ങളെ തൊടാനാകാത്ത ഒരു സംവർഗമായി നിൽക്കുന്നു. കത്തുന്ന വർണങ്ങളുടെ ഉപയോഗവും, വൈകാരികാവസ്ഥ വെറുതെ മുഖത്തണിഞ്ഞുള്ള ഉടൽ നിലകളും, വെളിച്ചം തട്ടിയ ശരീരങ്ങളുടെ മാംസളതയുടെ പ്രതീതികളുമാണ് അവയുടെ പ്രത്യേകത.(Balakrishnan, *Vayana Manushyante* 97)

Chapter III

Television in India: Origin and Development upto the Era of Satellite TV

The present chapter traces the origin and development of television broadcast in India till the entry of satellite television in the last decades of twentieth century. It analyses various factors like governmental interests, policy decisions and cultural anxieties that shaped the ethos of the National Television broadcast to reach assumption about their influence in the formation of visual cultural practices and aesthetic attitudes.

The colonial regime and its foundational ideas like ‘white men’s burden,’ refinement, and civilisation played a great role in creating the broadcasting ethos of India in the colonial period. For the colonial regime, technology was a means to reshape the cultural values of the colonies so that they could function according to the imperial notions of refinement and civilisation.

In the Indian context, the origins of several television forms can be traced to the late colonial period, 1920–47, when British administrators and bureaucrats sought to create radio formats and schedules for broadcasting. For instance, colonial broadcasting’s centralized control, programme formats, and construction of audiences through essentialized cultural categories were in tandem with postcolonial state’s upper caste–class Hindu ideologies. (Asthana 4)

The history of broadcast in India can be traced back to the first half of the 20th century when a few expatriates who served in the suburban areas in India thought of

starting radio broadcast. “Armed with an inadequate start-up fund and a five-year monopoly from the Government of India, the Indian Broadcasting Company in 1927 erected two weak stations in Calcutta and Bombay, each with a thirty-mile transmission radius” (Zivin 726). The initial capital for the starting of the company was from private sources and the running cost was supposed to come from the license fees and the contributions of local administrations that might use the service. This initiative was a result of attitudinal changes in the colonial administration towards benevolent despotism. The people who started the initiative had in mind the hefty ideal of the upliftment of India, especially the rural areas. For example, accepting that the government had not done anything with special focus on the improvement of villages in India, in the foreword to the first edition of *The Remaking of Village India* Brayne argues: “But the charge is to this extent true, that we have never made a direct and concerted attack on this problem; we have never deliberately attempted to effect that change in the psychology of the peasant, and in his social and personal habits, without which it is impossible materially to improve his conditions of life” (xvii). The author of this book was a district administrator, and it is a record of a special upliftment programme for the village Gurgaon near Delhi. The book was very popular among foreign and Indian nationals who were actively involved in the upliftment programmes of villages of India. In the preface to the second edition the author claims that around 5000 copies of the book have already been sold in different languages. As per the book, people from different walks of life including influential Indians and foreign social workers started visiting the place to have a direct experience of what was happening in the village (ix). In the aforesaid pronouncements, a territorial marking of the village and the peasant as a

space to be improved through forced education is implied. To a certain extent, the same thing could be found in the Gandhian declaration that India lives in her villages. In *YoungIndia* published in 1927, Gandhi stated: “The half a dozen modern cities are an excrescence and serve at the present moment the evil purpose of draining the life-blood of the villages” (qtd. in Joshi 11). The same argument is repeated in his famous declaration in 1931, “India does not live in its towns but in its villages. But if the cities want to demonstrate that their populations will live for the villagers of India the bulk of their resources should be spent in ameliorating the condition of and befriending the poor” (qtd. in Joshi 15). This proves how the British Empire and the Indian nationalists formed a similar conceptual framework for the village as a place that requires intervention from the city, the educated, the wealthy, and the civilised for getting out of their pathetic, ignorant, and uncivilised peasant life. As for Brayne, all the resources of the government may be used for improving life in the villages. Broadcasting was one of them:

Whenever I see the wireless masts in Delhi Fort, I long to be using them. Think of the immense value of being in immediate contact with the villages. Besides evening and school lectures, every sort of announcement could be made of meeting and shows, tours and visits of itinerant officials, warning of pests and epidemics, all sorts of news, information and advice, and all the hundred one things one wants to tell the villagers in a country where literacy is rare and communications sketchy. (183)

He was one of the persons who could realize the potential of public broadcasting for education the people. Through this process they can be easily managed for the needs of the government. In other words public broadcasting can be imagined as a weapon

that is highly useful in governance and enforcement of law and order. In the foreword he laments, "... but we are as yet to include this priceless weapon in our armoury" (xiv).

The British government took over the broadcast and renamed it All India Radio in 1935 (Asthana 39). Prior to the government takeover, many discussions and studies were carried out to understand how the broadcast could be improved to benefit the rural population of India. C. F Strickland addressed a meeting of the members of the East India Association in 1934 with suggestions to improve broadcasting service. This was done when the political scenario in India was turning against the British Empire and the pressure resulted in the Government of India Act in 1935. Strickland considers the village as a territory for improvement, because the young men find the village life boring and go to cities for entertainment. He believes that the voters in the village must be enlightened (Strickland1). He also proposes some suggestions regarding the content of the broadcast. He said, "Broadcasting has many duties to perform. It should in the first place entertain and interest, giving the peasant a mixed diet of song and story, preferably of well known kinds; for the country man does not always seek novelty, but has old favourites – religious, sentimental, and humorous – which he welcomes again and again"(1, 2). These initial figures in the history of broadcasting imagined a community-listening where the information would be announced through a loudspeaker in the villages at such a volume that even the women should be able to hear it from their household. Strickland takes examples from different countries like Egypt, Palestine, and Ceylon. In order to develop the concept of community radio he took the model from the USSR (4, 5). He also stresses the importance of iteration, "I wish to stress the

value of iteration to a rural audience – or, indeed to any audience- to carry conviction” (2). What Strickland meant was a forceful intervention into the territory of villages through information. He even had a design for a mechanism to keep the community radio safe so that only the person responsible (at first, it was the police and then *zameendars* or village headman or *khans*) will be able to switch it on.

Another contribution in this regard in the same period was done by Lieutenant Lionel Harding.

Harding travelled widely in India surveying broadcasting on behalf of the IVWA and the Marconi Company, and was so ubiquitous that a Government of India official imagined that everything about Indian broadcasting in the home press emanated from him, most notably accusations that the Government was dragging its feet with respect to the new medium. (Zivin 730)

The legacy of these colonial administrators continued to exist in the system even after the British government took over the broadcast in 1936. In 1935 Lionel Fielding came to take the position of the controller of AIR. He brought with him the BBC model and trained the staff to follow the same procedure here. By the time he left for Britain, he could establish a strong framework that was followed into the postcolonial era of India. The Government Of India act of 1935 placed the institution of broadcasting under central authority and the same structure remained even after independence.

Demarcating the villager/peasant as the receiver of information was also an attempt at defining the ‘public’ who is going to be at the receiving end of the broadcast. In his address to the East India Association Strickland mentions how a

visiting official finds two types of people in a protest march against the British. One side of the crowd was filled with a few people who were definitely urbane, English educated, politically minded middle class and on the other the peasant India. For the official who mentioned this, it was not a division of class but that of genus (Zivin 720). Stickland proposed two types of broadcasts to meet these two types of people: entertainment programmes for the city dwellers and educational programmes for the peasant. From this colonial strategic division of the receivers of the broadcast, an accepted definition of the 'public' gradually emerged. Gandhian principles that focussed on the villages later supported and cemented this definition of the public in the broadcast policy makings of India after independence. The same is reflected in the 1996 Supreme Court of India order that declared the airwaves as "public property."

Equating the Indian public to the 'ignorant Indian peasant' kept later policies of broadcasting in strict compliance with the ideas of the 'Nation.' Many policy decisions and commission reports emerged after the Independence in connection with broadcasting. When television broadcasting started on an experimental level in 1959, a whole range of discussions started along with it, but the focal point of most of those discussions was 'Nation building' as explained by Asthana, "The object was to use it as a weapon against illiteracy and ignorance, according to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. State planners were adamant that television 'would not be allowed to become a rich man's toy-as it is in certain countries-but would be almost exclusively for the benefit of the common man' (Asthana 737, 738). The metaphor of weapon from the colonial period used by Brayne in the case of radio broadcast reappears in the declaration of TV broadcast after thirty years. The

equation between the peasant, the common people and the public remains the same in this context too. The concern of the bureaucratic machinery at the time of nation building, the rigorous five-year planning of the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and the Gandhian principles of the ministers of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting are reflected in this pronouncement. Apart from this colonial legacy, the attitudes of the ministers of broadcasting in the formative years of Indian television, various committee reports until the entry of the satellite TV, and some political events contributed to the making of the idea of national television and the national public.

1. Report of Indian Cinematograph Committee 1928

The relevance of this report lies in its analysis of the reception of moving visuals by the Indian public. Though it studies cinema, the experience of which varies considerably from that of television, the report provides how the Indian public receives the moving visuals in the initial stages. The same division between the educated elite and the ignorant rural public seen in Brayne, Strickland, and many others can be seen in this report also. The report came out almost at the same period when Brayne was actively involved in the upliftment of villages in India. The report widely discusses the ethical and moral issues regarding visuals from Indian and foreign origin. At the beginning itself, the report talks about the educational value of foreign films:

In the forefront of our report, however, we desire to place on record our unanimous conviction that the general effect of the Western films in India is not evil, but, on the whole is good. India is essentially a conservative country, possibly an ultra conservative country. We are satisfied that the

western films, in spite of their defects, have an educational value for the people of India. They tend to open the eyes of the uneducated to other and more advanced conditions of life and to give them some idea, however imperfect, of conditions in other countries; they tend to broaden their minds and widen their outlook. (2)

Such assertions are valuable as expressions of the attitude of the Empire and the state towards the Indian public. The upliftment formula is applied here too. The report categorises the audience into two: the educated and westernised middle class and the uneducated rural folk. But the films could offer different genres for these two types of audiences. The educated and westernised liked 'social dramas' whereas the uneducated usually wanted to watch 'stunt films.' It says, "Indian films are extremely popular with Indian audiences, particularly with less cultured classes. The educated Indian is generally apt to find them somewhat lacking both in technique and in artistry and compare them unfavourably with the more finished American products" (21-23). Remarks on the difference in the taste of the westernised, educated Indian and the uneducated Indian show how the colonial regime viewed the Indian public and planned the content of cultural production for them. The significance of the report lies in this division that permeated into the system and continued its existence even after the Independence. According to the report, fascination for the spectacle was a common feature of Indian culture. But there is a difference in appreciating the value of its combinations. The committee proposes India-West coproductions so that the "public taste of the country will be improved" (89).

2. The Period of National TV

The concept of national television originates from the idea of a monolithic nationhood that caters to the development and wellbeing of a single minded population.

Television in those days was about nation-building. The farmer and his needs were paramount, with weather forecasts, cropping patterns, new technologies of tilling the soil, water management, pest control, and so on, being broadcast. The farmer was an important constituency and an important consideration of state. National pride was an important goal and so, the achievement of our scientists with satellite launches, atomic implosions for peaceful purposes, and the green revolution were all given key broadcast slots. (Desuza x)

Improvement, upliftment, and remaking were some of the common terms used by the colonial regime to justify its intervention in the creation of a hybrid culture for India. In fact, the same can be found in the later years when India as an independent nation started thinking about the content and control of its media. According to Robin Jeffrey, there are mainly three factors that shaped the initial years of national television: the restrictive policies inherited from the colonial period, the puritanism of Gandhian national movement, and the fear inflicted by the experience of the Partition in 1947 which inflamed social conflict (“The Mahatma”¹³).

After the Indian Independence, Gandhian ideals were the leading principles followed in India. India as a nation was being built around his idea of Grama Swaraj with its focus on village upliftment and poverty eradication. Gandhi did not like

films. He was said to be a person who watched only one film in his life—*Ramrajya*. Though he watched it for the religious aspect, he did not like the film. Moving visuals never appealed to him and when he met Charlie Chapline in London, he did not know him (Jeffrey, “The Mahatma” 9). The lauded revolutionary modernist and the first Prime Minister of Independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, also shared the same Gandhian principles and wanted to educate the ‘village folk’ through films (Jeffrey, “The Mahatma” 21). This aversion towards moving visuals permeated into the system whose controls, in the initial years, were in the hands of staunch Gandhians like Sardar Vallabhai Patel (Jeffrey, “The Mahatma” 18).

Patel was the first Information and Broadcasting Minister of India. He was a well-known Gandhian and a staunch nationalist in his character. He was known as the iron man of India because of his strong nationalist stance in joining the princely states into the nation. He applied the same principle in the case of broadcasting too.

Luthra says:

Sardar Patel, as Minister of Information and Broadcasting in the Interim Government (1946-47) was too busy with the Princely States to devote much time to Radio, but the one decision he took about Indian music caused a great stir, as mentioned earlier. This was to ban from AIR programmes all artists whose private life was a public scandal", his oft-quoted phrase. It did not cover either male Indian musicians or those taking part in western music programmes, being aimed apparently at those who were thought to come from the professional or ‘nautch’ class. The effect was short-lived though, after a little while the ‘Bais’ returned as ‘Devis.’ (*Indian Broadcasting*)

R. R Diwakar, the second Minister of Information and Broadcasting Ministry, who came to power in 1950 was also a devotee of Gandhian principles. He was more interested in Gandhi Peace Foundation than in AIR (Jeffrey “The Mahatma”²⁰). The third Minister, Dr. B. V Keskar, who was in power from 1952 to 1962 was a puritan who had a special interest in musical programmes. He brought major changes in the broadcast of music. He started grading artists, established a separate unit for light music, and banned film music from AIR. Luthra writes, “The decision to abolish film music recoiled on AIR and film songs had later to be brought back in another way but not before a large number of listeners had been alienated and the concept of 'balanced channels' had received a rude shaking and according to some resulted in some permanent adverse effect on the pattern of radio listening”. Other radio stations like Radio Ceylon used this opportunity to canvas the listeners of AIR. “During the fifties, AIR banned film music on the ground that it was vulgar, both musically and in respect of the text of the lyrics. But film music was and is very popular, especially with audiences below the age of thirty and the Commercial Service of Radio Ceylon captured listeners by beaming programmes of film music to India” (Chatterji 142, 143).

In India, the broadcast of television programmes started on an experimental basis in 1959. An examination of the historical development of broadcasting as a cultural phenomenon reveals the following concerns. The first one was the colonial legacy it carried in defining ‘the public’. From the very beginning of broadcast, the fundamental function was decided as the education of the ignorant rural villager and thereby achieving the upliftment of villages. This educational function remained the primary principle of every type of broadcasting even after the Independence. The

second one was a fear of cultural pollution. Though fear of an inflammatory situation in terms of religion persisted, for British India was a volatile space, the ethical and moral concerns regarding cultural pollution had the upper hand. This concern can be found both in colonial and post-independence periods. This is related to a pool of cultural imaginaries that was promoted by forces of national movement at the time of colonialism. A similar pattern was adopted later for initiating the nation building process. The third one is a strong centralisation in the authority that decided the process of dissemination of information. Since the public is already defined as an ignorant peasant, the audience/spectator is always kept at bay to receive whatever was broadcast. The fourth one is the attitude of the power structure towards broadcasting. It is possible to observe that the structures of power have always looked down upon broadcasting as an insignificant tool to influence the public imagination. "In India, when Doordarshan was the only available network from the late 1950s to the late 1980s, the state-sponsored agenda of national broadcasting defined the many meanings of 'public' in television. During this period, the concept of 'national programming' served as the guiding framework for public broadcasting in India" (Kumar, "Spaces of Television" 4, 5).

When the broadcast of television started, these fundamentals were very strongly in place inside the broadcasting system of India. The Delhi based Experimental Television Service, was inaugurated by the President of India, Dr Rajendra Prasad, on September 15, 1959, in an improvised studio at Akashvani Bhavan. The broadcast was intended only for educational purposes. Since Television sets were not available in the market, the broadcast was limited to community centres around Delhi. It was started "after a series of discussions on its relevance to

the state projects of national integration and social development enunciated and enumerated in the constitution and outlined by National Planning Commission” (Asthana 44).

In India, Western technological innovations are always approached with a lot of apprehensions about cultural pollution, though models of progress, civilisation and citizenship were accepted from the west. Apart from the already mentioned factors that influenced the system of broadcasting, cultural disruption caused by the dissemination of visuals was an added apprehension. Strong centralised control of the state was the answer to these anxieties. Apart from functioning as an educational device targeting the upliftment of the common people, television under state control becomes an informative machine which has a significant role in opinion formation. Policy changes happened at the time of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi in the field of broadcasting came from the changes in the image of India in the international scenario. One of the events that helped in this regard was the ASIAD in 1982. In 1984, television broadcast was expanded with a lot of private participation and as a result, the target of television changed to producing ‘audience/voter/consumer.’ The development of national television puts forth some questions regarding the conflict between imposed national culture and individuals struggling against that in a space of multiplicity like India. However, the sign of this struggle can be found in three important commission reports that argued for the freedom of broadcasting institutions from state control. One is the *Commission on Broadcasting and Information Media* chaired by Asok K. Chanda in 1964, the other is the report of the *Working Group on the Autonomy of the Akashwani and Doordarshan* Chaired by B.

G Verghese in 1977, and the final one is the *P. C Joshi Committee for Software Development for Doordarshan*.

The *Chanda Committee* submitted its report in 1966 when the radio was the primary choice of the public. Television sets were not popular mainly owing to their cost and also the lack of electricity in many parts of India. The report was eloquent on the condition of the present system of broadcasting, mainly AIR. The report says, “There was also a belated realisation in official quarters that the media of mass communication had largely failed to inform, educate and entertain the people and to enlist their cooperation in fulfilling the plans of social and economic development” (2). The report blames the restrictive system for the present condition of AIR in India. “The denial of freedom and discouragement of initiative in the staff to plan and present imaginative and original programmes” are some of the factors that make AIR redundant (47). It comments on the rejection of Western music and how the new reading in English apes the West and “makes the broadcast irritating and even ludicrous” (73, 96). The report accepts the superiority of the visual medium, “the magic persuasiveness of visual presentation,” and considers it as the medium of the future (9). In the suggestions for improving the quality of television programmes, it says the priority should be given to educational and social programmes (205). One of the important suggestions of the Chanda Committee was regarding the commercialisation of Vividh Bharathi. It took around ten years to complete the proposal.

In this context, the central Government led by Janatha Party proposed a working group to study the process of giving autonomy to AIR and Doordarshan in 1977. Another thing was the white paper laid before the parliament on the abuse of

media at the time of the Emergency declared by the Indira Gandhi government in 1975. During the time of Emergency, the AIR code, which was revised and adopted in 1970, was kept in abeyance for making the media silent and bringing it under the strict control of the totalitarian regime. The committee recommended Akash Bharathi, a national broadcast trust (Chatterji 166). A bill in this regard was presented in the parliament but it rejected the autonomous trusteeship. The bill lapsed due to the dissolution of Lok Sabha in 1979. Though the bill did not bring about any solid changes in the structure of broadcast, it showed initial signs of urge for autonomous media.

The P. C Joshi Committee (1983-84) was constituted to prepare a software plan for Doordarshan. The Committee was “asked to prepare a software plan taking into consideration the main objectives of television of assisting in the process of social and economic development of the country and to act as an effective medium for providing information, education and entertainment”(Chatterji 170). The traditional formula of information, education, entertainment, remains intact in this suggestion too. For the state, the changes happening in the cultural scenario of India as an independent nation were not significant and showed an endless kinship towards the formula of the colonial regime conceived for the media. For the government, the media was still a one-sided megaphone to fire information to the public and provide something what the state calls entertainment. But the committee conceived the television as a modernising tool that can lead the nation towards egalitarian principles (Chatterji 171). The report proposes decentralisation as a tool for evolving Doordarshan as a truly Indian media with an ardent commitment towards modernising the nation instead of using the technology to develop a bond

between the rich of this country or a bond between the rich of this country and the rich of other countries. It gave special consideration to education through entertainment and criticised Doordarshan's focus on film-based entertainment, because it found that most of the films are an "assault on aesthetic sensibility" (Chatterji 173). An interesting finding of the social survey conducted by the Committee was that foreign serials were watched by 84.2 per cent of the viewers, though 24.2 per cent respondents did not even identify the genre of the serial, because they did not have any idea of English (Chatterji 174). While the committee was still in effect, the central government came up with a plan for the biggest expansion in the history of the television network. The intention of this widening was the broadcast of the national programme from 8.30 pm to 10.00 pm, daily over the entire network, in Hindi and English. The paradox of this attempt was that it turned out to be an intervention in the prime time of the regional channels and led to further centralisation. The first part of the report contained one of the most comprehensive audience surveys that expressed the various kinds of frustrations of the viewers of Doordarshan. They were related to consumerism, moral questions, quality of the programme, the wrong idea of social integration, and a lot of others (Chatterji 176-178). This part of the report shows how far away the Doordarshan was from its audience's needs and desires in the 1980s. But the Joshi Committee also took a strong ethical stance in the case of the nature of programmes. It wanted to reduce the number of films that get broadcasted and stop programmes that advertise luxury commodities of various kinds. The Committee took a strong position that the primary aim of the broadcast must be educational. However, in 1983 Doordarshan started commercial programmes. "Empirical data on television

during this period demonstrates the spatial consolidation of Doordarshan and the rise in sponsored commercial programmes indicating television's shift from state-led developmentalism toward market-based consumerism" (Asthana 55). This report shows the moral apprehension of the state regarding possible cultural pollution through media.

The ASIAD of 1982 allowed Doordarshan to get its audience back through live coverage of events. The widened network of transmitters and imported machinery provided a chance to live up to the desires of its viewers. But this does not happen. The bureaucratic attitudes behind information passing kept it in the colonial attitude of the 19th century. The long bureaucratic processing of information often ended up in delay.¹The national television broadcast dominated much of the time of the regional viewers. Since the programme in the national broadcast was in Hindi and English, the south Indian listeners who traditionally are averse to Hindi kept away from it. According to audience research unity of Doordarshan, by 1985 the percentage of programmes in Hindi was 38 and other languages got only 2 percentage (Chatterji 161). For the regional viewers, the situation was dismal. The monotony and language kept them away from the national broadcast. They used to watch Doordarshan because they had no other options. In 1980s, Lutgendorf writes:

The addition of a weekly program of song and dance clips from hit films ('Chitrahar,' which immediately became the most popular thing on television) and of a Sunday afternoon feature-length picture sparked viewer interest but also confirmed that the appeal of television as a mass entertainment medium was largely as an adjunct to the existing film industry

and that the distinctive potential of the small screen had yet to be realized.(132)

3. Doordarshan in Kerala

In 1985 the Doordarshan Kendra, Trivandrum, was inaugurated by then Chief Minister of Kerala K. Karunakaran. Even before the broadcast of Doordarshan, there were experimental telecasts by KELTRON through a Russian satellite (“The Man Who Brought TV to Kerala”). The commercial transformation of the National channel that began in the early 1980s did not reach the South Indian states so fast, especially Kerala, due to many socio-cultural circumstances. The most prominent reason was the predominance of Hindi in Doordarshan. The non-Hindi southern states were not in the purview of the nation as far as Doordarshan was concerned. In 1982 one of “Tamil Nadu’s ministers asked AIR and Doordarshan to cancel his pre-recorded talk in connection with the World Environment Day on June 5. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu expressed regrets that the overzealous officials were continuing their attempts to impose Hindi and sought the Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi's intervention” (Luthra). Compared to the states where the mother tongue is Hindi, the impact of Doordarshan in the cultural space of Kerala was initially minimal. Famous serials like *Humlog* (1984) or *Buniyad*(1986) had only a few takers in Kerala. Apart from this linguistic factor, there were many infrastructural, financial, and cultural factors also. The strong left front tried to resist the influence of television, for it viewed television as a polluting influence and a tool of the bourgeois. According to the Economic Review of Kerala State Planning Board 1985 the population of Kerala was estimated to be 273.17 lakhs(7). According to the same report, the total number of domestic electricity connections

was 1603138 (127). The number of domestic electricity connections was only five per cent of the total population. Most of it was in the urban areas while the villages still lacked electricity. Lack of electricity was a factor that prevented the spread of television in Kerala in the initial stage of its broadcast. Though there was a section of the *nouveau riche* who made money from the Gulf region, they could not enjoy television due to lack of electricity. According to the Economic Review of State Planning Commission, per-capita income of a Malayali in 1984 was Rs.1761 (91) while colour television sets cost Rs. 8000 to 10000 (Dubashi). In this context, television sets were not affordable for the common people of Kerala. The production of television sets was in the initial stage in 1985. The government was planning to give a liberal hand to the production of TV sets since the 232 crore expansion project for Doordarshan was expected to increase the demand of TV sets to 80000 in 1985. Many public sector industries could not provide enough sets into the market according to consumer demand (Dubashi). Moreover, Kerala was facing a rising rate of unemployment. According to the Economic Review 1985, number of applications received for non-employment assistance in the financial year was 102939 and the number of beneficiaries 244669(95). In a society that was in a stage of chaos with low per-capita income, surging rate of employment, and lack of industrialisation to provide employment, television was a luxury affordable only to the rich and elite.

The political left of Kerala was suspicious of the new technology. When the tractor was introduced for agricultural work in the state, the left trade unions opposed arguing that the workers will lose their work (Oommen, “Agrarian Tension”253). When Rajiv Gandhi brought computerisation to various sectors in

1984, there were many protest movements organised by left parties in Kerala. For instance, as an answer to a question raised by a person named Balakrishnan Manjakkulam, E.M Sankaran Namboothiripad, the veteran theoretician of CPIM, accepts that CPIM supported people's opposition against the computerisation of various sectors by Rajiv Gandhi. For him, the reason was that computerisation in a capitalist social structure would bring unemployment (*Party OfficekalileAdhunika* 198-201). This socialist thinking is merged into the social consciousness of Kerala so much so that technological innovations are often viewed as tools of American imperialism. Television was mockingly called '*tele-visham*', because *vishamin* Malayalam means poison. This saying had a proverbial nature with an implication that television is basically destructive to cultural values.

The language factor also had a role in the cold reception of television in Kerala in the initial stage. The regional language broadcast from 6.30 pm to 7.40 pm was not enough to attract the crowd. Hindi was always considered a north Indian language that has no reputed place in the cultural space of Kerala. Only those who were educated outside Kerala had a connection with this language. In the national broadcast, people used to watch English news instead of Hindi Samachar.

“There seemed to be a disregard for financial and linguistic barriers to a truly mass audience: those urban well-to-do who were able to watch would have to understand a Sanskritised Hindi or English. One hundred and twelve towns would receive low-powered transmitters, which would act as relays, broadcasting the programmes aired from the capital. This meant that although fifteen major language groups were encompassed in these areas, they would all receive the same programme.” (Rajagopal, “The Rise” 96)

Other programmes that had some good reception in Kerala in the initial stages of the broadcast were the broadcast of Malayalam films on Sunday evenings, film songs, Hindi films, and Cricket. To watch Malayalam films on Sunday evenings, neighbours used to gather in those one or two houses in a village where a television exists. Every house where there is a television used to become a community centre where around fifty people would come to watch the Malayalam movie. Another programme that had a huge fan base was *Chitrageetham* which copies the format of Hindi *Chitrhar*. It was a compilation of Malayalam film songs. Only those programmes that had some connection with films directly or indirectly had comparatively good reception. Even then, watching television was not a personal experience since there would always be neighbours or family members present. When Doordarshan started the broadcast of *Ramayana* in 1987 the number of the audience increased. People used to watch *Ramayana* in the morning and Malayalam films in the evening from the same neighbour's house. For the people of Kerala, the viewing experience of these shows was never a personal one until the 1990s when the economic liberalisation started to make television sets available with a lot of consumer-friendly finance schemes and the electrification of rural areas picked up the pace. The increased presence of the middle class in the social structure of Kerala made television a common household object in the 1990s. The increased availability and display of televisions in shops as an attractive commodity, and advertisements binding that with modern lifestyle helped to increase the acceptance of television in Kerala.

4. A Brief Analysis of Popular Programmes of Doordarshan in the 80s and 90s in Kerala

4.1. Broadcast of Malayalam Film

The 1980s was one of the richest periods in the history of Malayalam cinema. Both the popular and the art-house genres flourished with a host of talented directors who often claimed national and international accolades. There were nearly 1600 movie theatres in Kerala in 1982. The Gulf-boom of the economy led to a large influx of money into the film industry (Pillai, "Kerala Goes Through Frantic Theatre Boom"). Movie-going was a normal activity for all types of families, because there were various classes of theatre that offered affordable ticket rates for all income groups. Though the low-income groups were unable to watch movies releasing in A class theatres, they could watch them after a few weeks in B or C class theatres. By the end of 1990s, the number of releasing theatres and multiplexes increased but the total number of theatres came down considerably (Jacob 51). An increase in the number of middle-class income groups due to the infrastructural boom initiated by Gulf money, and the introduction of video cassettes and VCR can be connected to this phenomenon. The audience who watched the Sunday broadcast of films on Doordarshan was the same who watched films in the 1600 theatres in Kerala. Paul Monaco writes:

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, repetition as an artistic value is popular and democratic. It works well for societies in which constantly growing numbers of people seek affordable pleasures and diversions that can be made easily and inexpensively available to them. And the movies and

television can only be understood on a premise that proceeds from this fundamental recognition. (21, 22)

Doordarshan's Sunday movie broadcast subscribed this idea of repetition of artistic value because many of the movies were very old. It provided the pleasure of watching movies in an affordable form to the viewers.

In the 1980s, Doordarshan used to broadcast old black and white movies due to a crunch in the allocation of funds. In a society of moviegoers who had access to new colour films in theatre, the purpose met by the broadcast of old black and white and occasional colour films was unique. Compared to those movies, the commercial aired for fifteen minutes before the beginning of the movie attracted more viewers (Lutgendrof 133). Since the interest in old black and white films was comparatively less, the audience was not watching the films as such. Women from rural low income families had access to theatres only if they were accompanied either by their husbands or by the family. Since women also knew the format of new movies, their need for entertainment was not met by old black and white films on television. Therefore, instead of watching movies, the viewers were participating in some kind of ritual of watching television. Neighbours, friends, and family members used to gather in the TV owner's house to watch Sunday movies in Doordarshan. The Malayalam film *Sabaash Chandrabose* (2022) directed by V. C Abhilash portrays this situation hilariously. The plot of the film is centred on the revelry between two friends, Yatheendran and Subhash Chandrabose, created by television. Yatheendran owns a black and white television. The villagers gather to watch it in his house and as a result he receives respect and social status. After a quarrel, Subhash Chandrabose tries to acquire the same status by owning a colour television

set. Finding it difficult to raise enough money, he steals a television from the factory where he works. The film depicts how the social status of a person is created by owning a television. Therefore, engagement with television becomes a worshipful viewing where, instead of the film, the television itself is watched and admired.

4.2. Epic Serials: *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath* in Kerala

The broadcast of *Ramayan* began on 25 January 1987 and ended after 78 episodes on July 31, 1988. The period covered a decade that brought a lot of changes in the experience of television viewing. Increase in the number of television sets in use, increase in the percentage colour television sets, and the familiarity with the technology changed people's attitude to television viewing. *Ramayan* was one of the popular programmes broadcast on Doordarshan ever. It could acquire eighty percent viewership all over the country and kept the same until the last episode. The epic serial refashioned the routine of the majority of Indians across language or religion on Sundays. The producer/ director Ramanand Sagar's proposal for making the epic serial based on Tulsi Das's *Ramacharithmanas* was initially rejected by the Mandi House. A revised proposal was submitted later and got approval in 1986.

Ramayan was produced and aired on Doordarshan "as an All- India tradition, a symbol of national unity and integration" (Lutgendrof 135). The programme outgrossed every other programme generating a weekly income near Rs. 40 lakhs for Doordarshan (Bajpai 1). There were strong criticisms from the part of intellectuals and media critics about the treatment and form of the epic serial. But the common people gathered in front of television to watch it and those without television approached their neighbours. The paradox lies in the fact that in 1982 around half of the 25000 community TV sets installed by the government were dysfunctional

(Rajagopal, *The Rise* 94). The form in which the epic was presented was not the one that had been used by films and theatre. It was a mixture of the epic story and Bollywood with a lot of melodrama, gilt, puffed up makeup, elaborate settings, and dialogues. S. S Gill, former secretary of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, wrote in the letter replying to the proposal of *Ramayan*:

It is one thing to present a petrified, wooden and traditional version of Ramayan in the manner and style of a small town theatrical company. The real challenge of your project lies in seeing the immortal epic with the eyes of a modern man and relating the message to the spiritual and emotional needs of our age...It will indeed, be a great achievement if the eternal varieties embodied in the cosmic drama of this epic could acquire on temporary relevance for human condition. (8)

Some of the viewers even had a devotional attitude to the serial, that they came after bathing as though they are visiting temples and sometimes performed *poojas* in front of the television (Melwani 56). When the serial was over after 78 episodes, “The *Ramayan* has gone taking with it the joy of Sunday mornings, leaving this country to mourn its passage, a nation robbed of its favourite toy” (Bajpai 1). The viewers watching the epic on TV were unconsciously subjected to an experience of community feeling as every viewer at that moment is bound by an imaginary ritual performed across time.

Shilaja Bajpai refers to Dwipal Kumar Bose, Director of Hindustan Thomson and Associates who says that the reach of *Ramayan* was immense even in the non-Hindi states. “Even in Kerala, the response has been about 60 -65 per cent”(Bajpai 1). Apart from the huge audience participation, it reveals how the response of

southern states was viewed by the authorities. It reveals that they never expected this percentage from Kerala. In Kerala, for the first time, a Hindi serial had 65 per cent viewership. It was for the first time that Malayali was involved in a pan-Indian ritual and shared a cultural and religious fervour. Unlike the northern part of India, Kerala has only limited number of Ram temples and there are no mass celebrations of the Ram-cult like Ramlila. The studies that compare the serial to that of Ramlila to explain its popularity are not fit for the cultural space of Kerala. The god Ram is known to Kerala through the Malayalam *Ramayan* written by ThunchathEzhuthachan named *RamayanamKilippaattu* (A Bird Singing Ramayan). There is also a tradition of reciting *Ramayan* in the month of *Karkkitaka* (according to the Malayalam calendar) to ward off evil spirits. Therefore, there was no previous acquaintance with the visual aspect of Ramayan in the popular culture of Kerala except serialised *Amarchitrakatha Ramayana* in Malayalam Children's magazines like *Balarama* and *Poompatta*, and the calendar art of Raja Ravi Varma. Perhaps these were the only visual interpretations of the epic that Kerala had before the serial came out.

The success of *Ramayan* in a non-Hindi state like Kerala is to be understood from a different cultural context. The popularity of *Ramayan* and later *Mahabharath* (1988-1990, directed by Ravi Chopra and produced by B. R Chopra) in Kerala was a response to the form in which they were presented before the people rather than the content which was comparatively unfamiliar to the culture. Compared to *Ramayan*, *Mahabharath* includes a comparatively more popular cultural figure of the south—Krishna. The formal aspects that attracted the viewers to the screen were an anxious apprehension regarding the transformation of oral experience into visual content and

the surprise element of television that brings special effects more telling since the surprising visuals happen inside one's house. The audience was anxiously waiting to watch the visuals of the surreal situations in the epic. Since the tale, with all its surprises and super-human dimensions, was embedded in the social memory of the viewers, and the special effects could bring these memories into realistic visual experience. Thus, the popularity of *Ramayan* was partly the result of the format mediated by technology.

The visual transformation of the oral imagination creates an effect of reality that can transform the imaginaries into a commodity. The technology could mediate the abstract synesthetic pleasure into a nearby visual reality (McLuhan 346). The surprising appearance of epic characters on a screen that is placed inside the house could create a sense of proximity similar to the tactile experience. "The TV image, that is to say, even more than an icon is an extension of the sense of touch. Where it encounters a literate culture, it necessarily thickens the sense-mix, transforming fragmented and specialist extensions into a seamless web" (McLuhan 365). The cultural text of *Ramayan* existed in fragmented forms. It remained as an ensemble of tales, proverbs, literary references, morals and ethical notions, and fables. In the modern times comics, calendar art and also in a few paintings of Ravi Varma contributed in visualizing it. The *Doordarshan-Ramayan* offered a continuous and tangible combination of all these fragments with the enhanced intensity of TV visuals. Lutgendrof writes: "At the same time the tradition acquired greater standardization through the impact of new technologies for the mass production of images, texts and sounds. A certain homogenization has been one result of this process: visually speaking, the characters and setting of Sagar's serial look much

like those of *Amar Chitra Katha* comic books, which in turn look like poster and calendar art” (168). It was a shift from the multiple narratives of the epic to the standard, homogenised, and linear narrative.

Popularity of *Ramayan* was also related to the novel technology it used. Technological marvels offer an alluring vision of future that can address the aspirations of a trans-modern culture and alleviate anxieties about future achievements. As popular visual media, movie and television have the capacity to generate convincing visuals for the masses. Therefore, the popular perception of visual media also points to the existing cultural pattern. Engagement with technological marvels that can address tradition in novel formats, thus, gains popularity as a cultural product. Abhijith Roy writes: “The emergence of multiple desires for local dissemination of new global technologies should be taken as the condition of possibility for the identitarian grid of engagement with television, the new screen for global consumer culture offering semblance of the local popular form” (14). There were 1400 movie theatres² in 1990s in Kerala. With a high rate of migration to the Middle East, Keralites had already acquainted modernity with technological gadgets from the Gulf that had become a hub of the global consumer market by 1980s. Television represented a form of lifestyle that engages a future possibility across the time/space continuum without constraints of reality. Epic serials offered a comfortable opportunity to the people of Kerala to enjoy the role of a consumer without any moral apprehension for cultural loss.

The spectators of *Ramayan* were a group of eclectic mixture across caste, community, age, gender, and political interests. In this way, the crowd resembled the gathering of people at temple festivals. Therefore, rather than the activity of

watching they were participating in the ritual. “As I have noted, viewers of the ‘Ramayan’ serial, far from being passive, interacted with the performance to a remarkable degree. For most people, the epic serial was not simply a program to ‘see,’ it was something to do—an event to participate in—and this participation was nearly always a group (extended family, neighbourhood, village) activity” (Lutgendrof 164). The paradox of watching the god on screen and the resulting loss of cultural sanctity could be overcome through this participatory nature of the viewing process. The god inside the sanctum is protected by a divine space that keeps human being as a devotee outside its periphery. On a TV screen the devotee becomes a viewer and certain proximity is attained. This may be compared to the gods coming out to the crowd in various forms of processions and rituals. The viewer was, thus, engaged in a ritual of having the *darshan* of the god on a screen. It was this ritualistic aspect that saved the viewer from the curse of being on the brink of modernity while viewing the god on screen. Modernity in the form of capitalistic capsules filled with technological marvels in the form of special effects, as wished by Gill himself, drew the audience of Kerala to throng before neighbour’s television on Sunday mornings. The process watching *Ramayan* represented how the conflict between tradition and modernity evolved in cultural preferences. According to Mankekar: “The most cursory glance at Indian television’s history from 1980s onwards reveals its centrality to representations of aspects of modernity, in particular capitalistic modernity, as something to aspire for the future” (*Screening Culture* 10). The subversion of *Ramayan* into a technological format addressed the aspirations of the middle class about future modernity simultaneously engaging their anxieties of cultural loss.

4.3. *Chitrageetham*

Chitrageetham was a film music-based programme in which a compilation of film songs was presented. This regional programme was a copy of *Chitrhar* which was popular on national television. The format is used in all regional languages for the broadcast of film music. Asthana writes about the speciality of Indian television content at the time of commercialisation in 1980s:

...television in India has incorporated the formal language of commercial Indian popular cinema in developing specific televisual forms that adapt the cinematic techniques in programme production or directly draw upon the content of the films—as in song and dance sequences, cinema scenes or talk shows and so on. The borrowing and reworking of film music on television and the increasing pastiche of film-based television programmes may point to television's constant thirst for content. (67)

Music and dance are an essential part of Indian movies. They do not often form an essential element for the plot to progress. It is, therefore, possible to remove music and dance from the main plot of the movie without affecting the storyline and could also be presented as a separate performance. Song sequences are specially shot in elaborate settings with a lot of special effects.

On the one hand, it was a dance-music programme with film-quality visuals and, on the other, it carried out the function of an advertisement of the films that run in theatres or those upcoming ones. In effect, the programme was a dance-music-commercial that needed no script for itself. Without any intervention of an anchor or a narrator, those songs were played one after the other like commercials. Such programmes came out of an Indianisation process along with the commercialisation

of Indian television. The convergence of the film industry and television industry gave birth to many unique programmes like *Chitrageetham*, reality shows based on film sequences and songs, and many other similar formats (Kumar, *Space of Television 2*). The enjoyment of *Chitrageetham* lies in what Raymond Williams called the ‘flow’ which conjures up a non-existing continuity between various types of programmes. He writes:

Analysis of a distribution of interest or categories in a broadcasting programme, while in its own terms significant, is necessarily abstract and static. In all developed broadcasting systems the characteristic organisation, and therefore the characteristic experience, is one of sequence or flow. This phenomenon, of planned flow, is then perhaps the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form.

(*Television 86*)

The concept of flow is found in the sequences of film songs and commercials. The totality of enjoyment comes from a combined effect of both. The popularity of this programme comes from how it allows visual fulfilment of consumer desires of a trans-modern cultural context to be in an organic continuity of an aesthetic experience.

4.4. Cricket

Cricket is not just a game for India. It is mixed up with the colonial fantasies, modernity, and many other anxieties including cultural loss. For Asish Nandi, Cricket is “an Indian game accidentally discovered by English” (1). When there is an important match everyone begins to talk about cricket. “As a result, in recent years, cricket has been blamed for almost every form of evil in India – from delays in the

passage of budgets through legislatures to bank robberies, from vandalism of street cricketers to the decline in Indian sports and the corruption of youth; from idleness and lethargy in public life to the wastage of time and the decline of Indian TV”

(Nandi 1). The first live coverage of cricket in India was done by Doordarshan on 20 December 1966 without modern sophisticated technology. The match was between Prime Minister XI and West Indies. After that Doordarshan had the sole authority to broadcast live cricket in India until 1993. The relationship between cricket and television is so strong that, in India, they grew together. In the 1980s cricket remained an elite game accessed by the upper middle class in their drawing rooms, but after the advent of satellite television, the game became very popular in India and Kerala. The most important thing that made cricket suitable for television is its episodic character. As in the case of *Chithrahar*, there was an immense possibility for showing commercials in the intervals between Overs. “Also a consumable sport –as opposed to a playful sport– cricket strengthens hyper–competitiveness rather than human values, such as disinterested competition as sportsmanship”

(Chattopadhyay 100). In the case of test cricket, the game can be extended to statistical analysis of data and create an authentic aura of seriousness around it. Broadcast of cricket in television facilitated this by providing details physical action. Raymond Williams observes how television can bring new perspectives in sports."At the same time, some of the best television coverage of sport, with its detailed close-ups and its variety of perspectives, has given us a new excitement and immediacy in watching physical action, and even a new visual experience of a distinct kind"(*Television*65).The ability to analyse data is supposed to be an integral part of being modern. “By the criteria set up by modern science, the ability to predict

and control are the heart of experience and, by these criteria, most ordinary viewers of cricket are not worse off than experts. This has immense significance in non-modern societies like India where there is a widespread suspicion of expertise and one often likes to be one's own expert" (Nandi 25). Through television cricket as a form of modern knowledge reached the cultural space and for the common man it became imperative to assimilate it as a precondition for belonging to modernity. After the victory of India in the Cricket World Cup in 1983, broadcast of the game in Doordarshan was an activity to spread nationalism. The continuous emphasis given by Doordarshan to cricket, obviously for commercial reasons, made the game an expression of patriotism by 1990s. For a game like cricket that does not have the playful spirit of other games, the television camera is a very important factor in showing the occasionally performed actions in detail. Therefore, cricket has become an expression of national identity through deliberate and continuous projection on television. "Cricket is, consequently, a popular medium of expressing one's affiliation to the nation, of expressing one's belongingness to an Indian cultural community, and of expressing Indianness or Indian ethnicity" (Chattopadhyay 98). The popularity of cricket after the 1990s can be seen as an example of the power of television in forming viewing communities even at the national or international level without any risk of physical control of the crowd.

5. Satellite Revolution: The National Background

The beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century in India, 1991, was marked by many important events. One was the financial emergency faced by India and the following measures taken by the Central government to liberalise the economy. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq and the following rise in the petroleum

products was one of the reasons for the crisis. Following a critical deficit in the foreign currency, the Indian government decided to sell of many public limited companies to national and international corporations. Following these measures of privatisation, like signing General Agreement of Tariff and Trade India liberalised its economy by opening its market to foreign capital. Such measures of liberalisation of economy led to policy changes regarding communication and broadcasting too.

Liberalisation of broadcasting policy allowed foreign channels to broadcast their television content through satellite. The Gulf War which was one of the reasons for the financial crisis, also led to the popularity of satellite television. The channel CNN broadcast the war live. This broadcast displayed the power of satellite television in front of the common people. According to Kumar:

Beginning in the early 1990s, Doordarshan's hegemony over definitions of the 'public' in Indian television was dramatically disrupted by the rise of commercial satellite channels, first, in English and Hindi and later, in several other Indian languages. Unlike Doordarshan, whose mandate as a state-sponsored broadcaster has been to serve as an agent of social change by focusing on issues like national integration, agricultural development, literacy, education, health, and family welfare, the programming strategies of private commercial channels have been driven by profit motives and the quest for larger audience share in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

("Space of Television"5)

When the traditional closed economy was opened, there was a cultural paradigm shift that resulted in the renaming of the citizens as consumers by redefining the relationship between the nation and its subjects. In other words, the moulding of this

new citizen has been given over to the market. The term 'consumer' provided a membership into the international community where a global consumer culture took shape. New forms and formats of culture came into the traditional cultural spaces of India with such a force that it was equal to the second colonisation of India. Satellite television was redefining the cultural ethos of India on a hitherto unseen tangent. But to understand how satellite television functioned as a cultural force it must be located within a complex pattern of other cultural phenomena. Asthana writes:

In a place like India, it is impossible to have an unmixed idea about the visuals produced by TV alone. The visual culture of India creates a conglomeration of visuals from different sources like popular paintings, illustrations of popular magazines, theatre, film, and TV in a flex of continuous and chaotic production to create a visual regime. Thus, a visual regime in postcolonial India, especially in media and cultural production, draws upon a range of ideologies and social practices—pre-colonial, pre-capitalist, modern, and capitalist. (114)

Many political and economic notions functioned as catalysts for permitting satellite television to come over to the Indian cultural spectrum. The hegemony of Doordarshan over television broadcast ended in 1991. By the time official sanction for foreign broadcast on Indian soil came out in 1995, Indians had dish antennas everywhere and urban and rural households were watching STAR channels through indigenous cable networks. Mehta writes:

In 1991, new satellite technology enabled the forces of global capitalism to leapfrog over the barriers of the Indian state. The catalyst was Hong Kong-based billionaire Li Ka-Shing's vision of using satellite technology to create

a new trans-Asian television market. It propelled his affiliated company, Hutchinson Whampoa, to launch the STAR TV network in 1991 to target the wealthiest 5 per cent of Asia's population, excluding Japan, with its free-to-air television signal. (*Early History* 4)

The satellite channel invasion along with other sudden changes in the economic and political system was sure to bring about unpredictable changes in Indian culture. Government documents of this period display anxiety about cultural pollution and a gradual acceptance of the fact that the inevitability of this situation cannot be prevented. The Prasar Bharathi Bill was presented in the parliament in 1990 which was drafted according to the recommendation of the Vergeese Committee Report and many other pressures from the political and cultural sides for the autonomy of broadcasting. Another important document of this period was the Report of the High-Powered Committee Appointed to Review the Performance of the National Academies and the National School of Drama chaired by N. Haksar. The report contains an approach paper to Indian culture and the threats it was facing in the times of the last decade of the twentieth century. The Prasar Bharathi Bill was reviewed many times by many committees. The subcommittee of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting was constituted in 1994 under the chairmanship of Ram Vilas Paswan, and its report came out in 1996. In the same year, Nitish Sengupta Committee report on Prasar Bharathi also came out. All these reports show cultural anxieties caught up in the flow of global capital and alternative suggestions for open competition rather than increased control. These documents help in forming an understanding of various

policy changes which were caused by anxieties of cultural pollution and a changing mediascape.

5.1. Haksar Committee Report

The second chapter of the report of the committee is titled *Indian Society: An Approach to Culture, Arts and Values*. The title is suggestive of how art and culture are connected to social values in India. It says that there are two types of social activities: material production and cultural production. Cultural production gives creative energy to material production (6). The report gives a very long definition of culture:

The term culture, therefore, in its most comprehensive sense refers to diverse creative activities –to literature; the visual and performing arts; and the various forms of artistic self-expression by the individual, specialist or lay, or by communities- which give a sense of purpose to human existence; at the same time as they provide the reflexive poise and spiritual energy so essential to the maturing of the “good society”; and to providing a rich life-style to the individual and the community spanning both material and non-material activity.(6)

Basically, the committee envisioned a “good society” achieved through the existential involvement of the society in such activities(9). This activity is also “self-reflexive”so that a sense of history is significant in deciding the process(8). The report provides a long and detailed understanding of Indian culture by referring to thinkers like Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, political leaders like Nehru, religious texts, and spiritual leaders. It was apprehensive about the cultural pollution happening at the time of liberalisation through media and the market. “Just as the crafts are threatened

by the market laws of mass production and standardisation, the pristine manifestations of folk art and culture are also seriously threatened by the invasion of commercialised “mass culture” which gets projected into every nook and corner of the country by the modern media”(20). The traditional culture is considered as pristine and being polluted by mass media. In a global village, the report says: “if our country wants to retain its cultural identity, and distinctiveness, then it is imperative to evolve a conceptual framework for our electronic media” (26). Electronic media and its global nature questioned the idea of cultural purity and standardised its contours with the global consumer culture.

5.2. Paswan Committee Report (1996)

The report of this committee that came out after six years of the Haksar Committee report is much more realistic in its understanding of globalisation and satellite television. By the time this report came out, private networks of cable television have started to provide STAR television channels to millions of households in India. According to the Audience Research Unit of Doordarshan, in 1996, 307000 houses in six major cities in India – Bangalore, Hyderabad, Delhi, Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta –were connected with cable TV and they were watching STAR and 39% of them were lower-income households(McMillin 47).

The Annual Report of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting 1995-96 refers to the Paswan Committee recommendations under the heading Media Policy (98). The committee views the function of state-owned media as “public service broadcasting.” It says that the “national broadcasters –Akashvani and Doordarshan- should bear the responsibility to offer a high quality public service broadcasting that informs, educates and entertains the people and also provide coverage to national

events like Republic Day Parade” (Annual Report 95-96 99). The function of the state-owned media was to address the same issues, but the quality must be high. Entertainment is an added value that makes information and education attractive. But unlike the traditional views, it talks about the quality of the programme and “people oriented programme style” (99). It is cautious about foreign channels and recommends that they should be brought under the control of the state. The Committee realised the importance of regional language channels and observes that the “present programming in electronic media, especially television, needs to be more decentralized to meet the regional/local aspirations” (Annual Report 95-96 100). It warns against the monopoly of foreign channels which may have several other interests. The report gives a mixed response about the mediascape. On the one side, it was filled with anxieties about satellite invasion and, on the other, bound with the national mission of eradication of ignorance.

5.3. The Nitesh Sengupta Committee Report on Prasar Bharati

Nitish Sengupta’s report is that of realisation and acceptance of the reality of the market and the consumerist turn of the global economy. The report came out in 1996 when the situation of satellite invasion was beyond control. A sudden jump in the revenue of Doordarshan was recorded in 1991. From Rs.933 million from 1986-87 to Rs.3006 million in 1991-1992 (par.2.32). The Sengupta Report offered a realisation of the huge profit that can be generated by involving in the market economy. It led to a much more realistic concept of national media in India. Moreover, there were around 20000 cable operators in India in the mid 1990s and they were providing access to international media to households in metros (Mehta, *When Live News* 5). As per the Committee Report, there were 52 million television

sets and 9 million of them had satellite access (par. 2.40). In the six metros of India – Hyderabad, Bombay, Calcutta, Bangalore, Delhi, and Madras—there were 3070000 television sets with satellite connections and 39 per cent of them were from lower income groups (McMillin 47). Juluri writes:

Television viewing has thus certainly become a greater part of daily life for many people since satellite television was introduced—an average viewer in 1997 spent 13 hours per week on TV, an increase of two hours per week since 1995. On this note, while “audiencehood” may be seen as an increasingly pervasive condition of Indian life, the question about its role in the larger economy still remains. Interestingly, NRS-V, which reported an increase in all income groups in the city in 1995, also shows that the largest growth among all income groups took place in Group “E,” consisting of families with incomes of less than Rs. 750 (\$18) per month. Also, only 13 per cent of Group “E” families live in the larger cities, and as much as 50 per cent of them live in small towns (population less than 100,000) pointing toward an urban-rural disparity. (44)

A factual acceptance of the consumerist turn of the culture and the development of market forces was already in the air and alternative possibilities were to be sought. According to the para graph 2.35 of the report the national channels often ignore the controversial issues to keep a climate of conformity. There is always a tendency to play safe and “one tends to take shelter behind the maxim ‘prudence is better part of valour’”. Thus, for the Committee, the function of the national channel was to be redefined.

In 1995-96 the total budget of Doordarshan was Rs.10890 million. With such a huge budget and established infrastructure Doordarshan could bring many changes in its vision of the mediascape. According to the Committee, the scope of television has not yet been exploited fully. The paragraphs 4 and 5 say:

There is tremendous scope for extending the use of television in our country and we feel that so far the potential of television has not been fully exploited. There is scope for running channels exclusively for education, agriculture, public health and sanitation, weather etc. The resources of TV needs to be exploited in promoting literacy campaign and also promoting population control. These are areas where the potential of television has not been exploited. We are only scratching the surface.

The Committee was very much aware of the satellite invasion and the fact that it cannot be stopped. The only alternative was to raise the national channels as a defense mechanism to protect the 'public' good. In paragraph 5.2, it expresses this concern for the 'public service' and 'social purpose.'

In the wake of a large influx nay deluge of alien entertainment, directed to the top crust, the minority with growing purchasing power and propensity to spend, the significance of public service broadcasting needs no over-emphasis. The presence of mere frothy entertainment, fun and frolic can only amuse for a while but cannot meet the real desires of people unless the fare offered is imbued with a social purpose. We believe broadcasting has a higher purpose than the constant drive to reach out to the largest possible number of people, flattening out in the process disparate audiences into a

homogeneous mass of buyers. Crass commercialization hinders variety in approach and style, resulting in mere variation of the same theme.

The committee did not get rid of the colonial and later nationalistic equation of the public with the poor. It says that the contents broadcast on foreign television were aimed at the upper class. So, national broadcasting must rise upto the status of a saviour of public interest, or the interest of the poor. The report was missing the point that globalisation would be redefining the class definition soon. Though worried about the cultural pollution of India from the satellite invasion of the 'alien' channels, it practically suggested that the up linking facility might be provided in the Indian soil. This suggestion came out from a realisation that this phenomenon cannot be stopped by the state. Minister of Information and Broadcasting, P. Upendra said in 1990s, "(Y)ou cannot stop the sun holding an umbrella (Mehta, *When Live News* 5). It is better to have them on Indian soil so that India could at least apply some limited control over their activities. The report hoped that this could create more job opportunities and would enhance the technological know-how of Indians in this field.

The Committee was more concerned about national security than cultural pollution. It used the contemporary vocabulary from the Hollywood alien films to suggest an unknown fear of an unfamiliar enemy invading from the sky. In this context, the Annual Report of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in the year 1995 –1996 is relevant. The report boasts of 85.8 per cent coverage for Doordarshan (25). A change in the attitude can be found in its claim of being the first respondent in many news events. "In most of these events, Doordarshan news was the first one to break the news well ahead of all agencies including foreign

agencies/broadcasting organizations and Doordarshan visuals were later used by other networks, such as Reuters, CNN, BBC and ANI” (28). This claim suggests its readiness to compete in the market instead of being under the protection of the state in the name of public service.

The events the Report mentions as proud achievements are evidence of this attitudinal change at least in the micro-system of Doordarshan. It says it was the first to give live coverage to the bomb blast at Chandigarh on 31 August 1995 in which Beant Singh, the Chief Minister was killed. The report is proud about telecasting Miss World Pageant 1995 which was unthinkable before. Miss World Competition was an event that created much disturbance in the cultural context of India. It was criticised for the cultural pollution it could bring in and the resulting moral and ethical issues. By covering it, Doordarshan came out to the market and instead of considering its viewers as clients, it started to look at them as consumers. The same attitudinal change can be found in starting new regional satellite channels on August 15, 1994 in many languages including Malayalam and in signing an agreement with CNN to start DD International in 1995.

5.4. Prasar Bharathi Bill

The Prasar Bharathi Bill was conceptualised in the context of rising demands for the freedom of electronic media from government control. The bill envisaged formulation of a corporation for the purpose of media broadcasting which included both radio and televisions. It was thought that such a delinking from direct government control would provide more freedom for the press. Prasar Bharathi Bill was presented in the Parliament in 1990 for the first time. The bill, after much review and discussion, was enacted in 1997. By the end of the twentieth century, the

entire scenario of media in India went through many substantial changes. One of the important events that shifted the paradigm of the 'public' created by the national media was the judgment of the honourable Supreme Court on airwaves in 1995. The dispute was between the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) and the Bengal Cricket Association (BCA).

The dispute leads to the question of how to define the public sphere and who can represent them. Doordarshan claimed that they had the widest reach into the public and they will, thus, have the monopoly of broadcast. In its judgment, the honourable Supreme Court observed that the airwaves are public property and it should be controlled by an autonomous public authority. This judgment has liberated the viewers from the definition of 'public' given by the state-owned media, especially Doordarshan. To a certain extent, that was a redefinition which eliminated the traditional and colonial equations usually attached in referring to the viewers by national media. This judgment sped up the enactment of Prasar Bharathi Bill in 1997. With the Act, Prasar Bharathi Corporation was established as an autonomous body to control the broadcast of national electronic media in India. This Act along with Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995, which replaced the Indian Telegraph Act 1885, gave the state a new form of control over the electronic media broadcast in India.

6. Satellite Television in Indian Cultural Context

The entry of satellite television in the last decade to the Indian cultural context coincided with a few other incidents which were directly or indirectly connected to its huge impact on the Indian cultural pattern. The liberalisation of the economy, India's renewal of GATT agreement in a changed circumstance of WTO,

and the first Gulf War were some of the prominent factors in this regard. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait created a reverse migration from the Gulf countries to India. The situation prompted a reanalysis of the economic policies of India and especially that of Kerala. In the cultural context of India, this introduced two important changes. One was the presence of a crowd that has been exposed to the consumer gadgets of the Gulf countries like multi-channel television, and the other was the live telecast of the Gulf War by CNN. The first one, the crowd of Gulf returnees, by its mere presence initiated a series of discussions on consumer modernity in the traditional Indian society by disseminating narratives of alternative experiences in the wealthy Gulf countries. As a result, the Indian middle class began to endorse such narratives and started a new age of cultural modernity in India.

To a certain extent, a similar thing happened in the case of CNN broadcasting the Gulf War live on television. Doordarshan had to borrow visuals from CNN to appease the curiosity of its viewers. The newspapers also published many stills from the video footage aired by CNN on its channel. It started a discussion on the reality of these visuals and later many of them proved false. But this event subverted how the world watched television. India's exposure to satellite television coincided with this event so much so that, unlike in the West, India was suddenly waking up to a cultural shock. "As late as 1991 – and in legal terms, until as late as 1995 – Indian viewers could only watch one television channel, Doordarshan. Between 1995 and 2007 India experienced the rise of more than 300 satellite networks" (Mehta, *Introduction* 6). In the twenty-first century, India became the third largest TV market in the world. Indian culture, in the last decade of the twentieth century, was redefined by this visual media which laid the foundation for

scophylic enjoyment. Two important types of channels that led this cultural revolution through satellite television were music channels and news channels.

6.1. Music Channels and MTV

Doordarshandid not take the popular music seriously. The only programme that used music videos was *Chitrahar* and the format was minimalistic. There was not even an anchor, and the videos were played one after the other with some commercials sandwiched in between. The music industry was booming with the cassette revolution. For instance, the cassettes of film music produced by *T-Series* were cheap and available everywhere. Doordarshan, because of its static formatting, never even thought of making use of this opportunity. The entry of MTV to India with the STAR network was a novel experience for television viewers.

The rise of Indian music television, and the specific forms it has taken, are related not only to the global and national imperatives of liberalization, marketization, and audience building described thus far, but also to certain important developments in the Indian music industry that have been taking place since the 1980s. The close complicity between music television and the music industry is evident at the outset in the ownership patterns of music television at the global and national levels. (Juluri 36)

Another factor was the production cost. Musical programmes had comparatively less production cost and often the film clips were given free of cost by film producers for the sake of promotion.

The proliferation of music-based programs across national and regional channels aiming to reach large audiences has come about not only because of their perceived commercial success in a competitive environment but also

because of the relatively low costs involved in producing them. Although dubbing Western programs and Indian productions into various other languages is the cheapest production route available (Rs. 20,000, or \$500 per half-hour episode in comparison to up to Rs. 500,000, or \$12,000 for an original production), film music-based programming has emerged as a viable alternative.(Juluri 32)

This was the scenario in which MTV entered the Indian mediascape. Music TV or MTV is an American cable television channel established in 1981. When STAR (Satellite Television Asia Region) started broadcasting in India 1991, MTV was a part of the network. The establishment of STAR aimed to transmit American entertainment channels to various countries in Asia. When the cable television operators started illegally distributing these channels to neighbourhood houses in India, MTV could easily become one of the popular channels among the youth. “When the network first carried MTV, youth in various cities emulated the clothing and jargon of various characters in the music videos and of the video jockeys (VJs) themselves” (McMillin 56). In its first avatar, MTV was in its original western form. In 1994, it was forced to stop its transmission. Though it made a benchmark as a youth channel of USA, it could not fit into Indian cultural context where television was a form of family entertainment. The objectionable anti-old language used by its presenters was not acceptable to the family audience. “MTV did not find its way back into Indian households for a few years, but some of its VJs and programs moved to a new music television network on the Star TV platform, namely, Channel V”(Juluri 33). Channel V with its unique style and composition could create a huge fan base in India. In the absence of MTV, in 1995 Channel V hired Ruby Bhatia an

Indian anchor who settled in Canada. When she started speaking ‘Hinglish’ to Indian viewers, the channel could easily find inroads into the television viewers here.

Following this, MTV hired two NRI Indians as the creative head of their programmes in India— Cyrus Oshidar and Natasha Malhotra. This was the turning point in the history of MTV. In its second entry, MTV displayed tri-colour on its screen to assert its Indianness. Thus, in the second coming, the youth channel of USA became a family channel for India (Nayar). The channel tried to avoid remarks that are offensive in Indian culture, tried to include Indian motifs in titles, and gave more importance to Indian languages. According to the annual report of STAR of 1996 titled *Vision into Reality*, “the magical thing is that we have actually managed a style and kind of fusion that India has never seen before and whose popularity can only be explained by the scale of copies that can be seen on other channels” (qtd. in Mc Millin 57). MTV created a new type of nationalism in which the individual is free to choose the Western style as an independent expression where he or she is ready for competing with the West. The proper mix of Indian reality with the Western format –pan wallahs, street magicians, common labourers, housewives, and even beggars caricatured in funky cool Western attire and surrealistic background – created a distinct group of viewers that was both democratic and modern. Through taglines of specific Indian English like “MTV- Enjoy,” and “We are like this only” it could emanate a street sense of informality into its programme and thereby influence the youth(Cullity 419).

MTV kept its Western format but indigenized (or localized) it to suit Indian middle-class tastes. The MTV brand is kept in place; the focus on youth culture is maintained but refitted to suit Indian tastes presented by Indian

players. This is what many producers, in general, have done in India this past decade. They have taken Western program formatting, analyzed techniques within the formatting, and Indianized it.(Cullity 414).

In the traditional Indian cultural context, individuals can be Indian only if they can fit themselves into collective cultural demarcations. MTV could generate a visual experience of the collective through funky use of national visual symbols with funky settings of cool youthful dreams. It was a blend of the counter-cultural movement and hippy style of the 1960s and symbols of traditional national culture. The viewers were treated as liberal individuals, free to choose with all the rights of a consumer. The justification of that choice was its reference to the visual experience mentioned above. According to JocelynCullity:

Rather than a debilitating aping of the West, the identification with Western culture is taken to represent the ability of Indians to compete with Westerners on a level playing field. Perhaps most important, it assumes—in explicit contrast to previous versions of Indian identity—that it is possible to engage with modernity and the West as an individual and still maintain one’s Indianness. Although one may certainly question the quality and ultimate significance of this consumer agency, it is important to register the simple fact that this engagement does function to subvert the West = modernity /India = tradition binary that has dominated much of India’s relation with the world. (421)

Promotion of Indian pop music was also a part of this approach. It could lead to the rise of Indian pop stars like Alisha Chinai, Apache Indian, and Daler Mehndi. Alisha Chinai’s *Made in India* became the first Indian pop album that reached a sale of

2.2million copies. Instead of the static picture of the old nation builder with his roots stuck in the tradition, a dynamic consumer with a sense of tradition was presented as the builder of a new nation. The entry of MTV was not just the beginning of a music genre in Indian television, it was a resettlement of sensibility which remained rooted of tradition for centuries.

6.2. News Channels

News and current affairs have been a significant part of the Indian television broadcast from its initial days. The government was aware of the crucial role played by the phenomenon of news in the policy making and the manipulation of the consent of the common people. Even after the launch of satellite television, news and current affairs remained the monopoly of Doordarshan. Even though CNN and BBC World Service started their broadcast in India from 1991 onwards, they aimed only the upper-class viewers and had only limited influence among the general people. It was only in the second half of the decade exclusive news channels came into the scenario. According to Cable waves 1998, the percentage of news and current affairs in the total programme of private channels was two to three per cent whereas in the case of Doordarshan twenty-three to thirty per cent (Widernuth 437). In 1984 Prannoy Roy with his wife Radhika started NDTV (New Delhi Television) and obtained permission in 1988 to do international news in Doordarshan titled *World this Week*. The programme became a success due to the added professionalism and novel approach. In 1995, NDTV started a show titled *Tonight* with news coverage on Doordarshan. Since all these attempts were done on the state-owned platform, there was strict control on the news content. In the initial days of liberalisation, all such attempts from private parties concerning the dissemination

of information were viewed suspiciously. The presence of transnational television was considered a political threat at a time when the decision to join WTO and the insurgency in Kashmir were creating political controversies for the central government in India. "In general, all the not state-controlled broadcasters were the subject of both envy and suspicion in the eyes of those who enjoyed or defended the government's longstanding practice of interference with the national broadcasting news production"(Widermuth 437, 38). Parallel to this view of satellite television as an alien force threatening the integrity of the nation, the upper-class audience preferred watching these channels for fast and free access to news worldwide. This condition continued until the second half of the decade.

The decision of Doordarshan to join hands with CNN to launch an international channel in 1995 was a turning point. Though the agreement could not remain in force for more than two years, it was a turning point in the way in which DD approached news and current affairs. CNN contributed much by providing modern training to the staff of Doordarshan with top-notch trainers and around 3000 training videos (Widermuth 444). But the state did not let Doordarshan go out of its grip. The launch of DD3 as an exclusive news channel was cancelled after the government came to know that it was launching live news in 1995 (Mehta, *When Live News*). In 1996 Rathikant Basu, the chief of Doordarshan, changed sides and joined STAR. After this, STAR began to draw more viewers to its side.

According to MARG's findings, viewers, particularly men over 25 years of age, have now started spending more time with STAR Plus than with Doordarshan. The total viewership between 9.00 p m and 9.30 p m has increased substantially (70 per cent in Mumbai and 14 per cent in Delhi) and

most of this increased viewership has gone to STAR Plus. In the four weeks after Prannoy Roy and his NDTV moved to the Murdoch-owned channel, STAR TV has managed to capture 60 per cent of all viewers of the 9.00 pm slot in Mumbai and 54 per cent in Delhi (IPAN BC Review, December 1996). (Widermuth 466)

Later NDTV also joined STAR network and a new era of private channels with professionalism and credibility began. By 1997 the private news channels brought more news content so that its percentage increased from 19 to 22 of the total programmes (Widermuth 453). This shift led to a new trend in news in which on spot live reporting became a very attractive element in the news in private channels. News programmes like *Janatha Ki Adalat*, *Awaz*, and *Newstack* were launched in STAR Plus in this format to strengthen its influence. Paradoxically, in December 1997, Prasar Bharati CEO S.S. Gill announced 'uncensored' news on DD and the result was his expulsion after one year.

As for the viewers, their preference for the new professional and discursive presentation of news and current affairs was influenced by a group of periodicals that emerged in the last decade of the century. Fortnightly illustrated magazines like *India Today*, *Outlook*, *Frontline*, and *The Week* had already created a new type of aesthetic of information. Aesthetic appeal also became a notable aspect of news presentation. The news-studios of private channels were designed to create a visual appeal to make the news a commodity for the consumer to enjoy. The news also was a part of entertainment in spite of its value as information. At the same time, Doordarshan followed the traditional way of presenting news where the visual aspect was minimal. News readers in Doordarshan used to read aloud the news

while the private channels tried to catch the visuals of the event. The viewers did not have anything to 'watch' apart from the face of the news reader.

The transformation from viewers of news to consumers of news marked this shift in the second half of 1990s. The period was marked by a swarming of 24x7 news channels that even influence many policy decisions of the government. However, a new type of informed public began to emerge from the news consumers of television at the end of the century in India while the state-owned media remained in its traditional role.

7. Satellite Television in Kerala: A Short Sketch.

The entry of satellite television in Kerala launched many discussions regarding cultural pollution. It was viewed as an agenda of Westernisation set in motion by American imperialism. Though such discussions existed, they could not mar its acceptability among viewers. Kerala was experiencing poverty of television shows in regional language since Doordarshan programmes in Hindi could not achieve any significant popularity in Kerala with notable exceptions of epic serials like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath*. Satellite television offered an opportunity for a 'television-culture-shift' to programmes in English which were comparatively more comfortable as far as Malayalis were concerned. People used dish antennas to access the international channels directly from satellites. Since there were no restrictions regarding the content accessed in this way, Western channels with soft porn content could be streamed without any censorship. In a state like Kerala where many soft porn movies had found box office success, there has always been a market for such visuals. Since Kerala is a closed society, this raised a lot of concern on the cultural front and led to the argument about cultural pollution. Despite such concerns, cable

TV started to gain prominence over the national channels a few years after its entry. The first Malayalam satellite channel in the private sector came out in 1993. It was a daring step from a former journalist Sasi Kumar who struggled to launch it amid a lot of financial and technological problems. The uplink of the channel was to be done from a hired studio in the Philippines, using a Russian satellite. The channel aimed to give a fresh experience through novelty in the style of presentation and appearance. The guidebook compiled by Sasikumar for the early days of the channel reveals how Asianet was trying to get away from the established notion of the visual text of Doordarshan. The style manual of the channel has the following observations:

1. We MUST be different from Doordarshan. More casual, irreverent, tongue-in-cheek, innovative to the extent of brinkmanship (constantly pushing the margins of moral acceptability). This may mean a few comments or jokes at our own expense. The whole point is not to take ourselves too seriously – at least the effect should be one of effortless discourse which takes the viewer always into confidence.
2. We must plug ‘*ASIANET*’ as “the viewers’ channel”; there must be a sense of sharing all our effort, the process of creativity or programming with the viewer, even at the risk of exposing our shortcomings or faults. This will mean: we never talk down to the viewer, unless it is done deliberately in a provocative manner; we talk to them and with them, at times sharing a joke, at times conspiratorially, at other times placing our problems before them.
3. The comperes, presenters, anchors should become personalities with distinctive style. Their creative ego should never be submerged in any

corporate or impersonal style. Their angularities and at times eccentricities could become assets, just as much as their professional skill. This would mean the texts have to be evolved like speaking parts in a dialogue between them and the viewers. This may also mean that we do not pre-set the text, fully – leave it open-ended enough to allow for spontaneous innovations even in the last minute.

(...)

4. The initial one hour slots with which we go on the air should communicate a sense of the PROCESS of our programming work. It should be open ended in style. It can incorporate vignettes of the process of programming – editing, shooting, discussion, planning, etc. at work...(qtd.in Joseph, "Satellite Television" 13)

Doordarshan was a reference point of a visual media for nation hood and education. Asianet on the other represented the new entertaining media. Sasikumar in an interview talks about how those banks that had been reluctant to provide financial support came to him offering loans after the success of the channel (Mehta, *When Live News* 8-9). Asianet could sign a contract with the Kerala Electricity Board to use their poles to for establishing a cable network across Kerala, so that they could reach every house where there is an electricity connection. In the initial stages, an employee had to travel every day to the Philippines with a videotape for uplink. Despite all the technical glitches, Asianet could develop a huge popularity due to the novelty of their programmes which were specially made for the Malayali audience worldwide. Many programmes in Asianet used comedy to tap the humour sense of Malayali audience. Some of them, like *Comicola* and *Cinemala*, used satire to question

the leaders of various political parties. Programmes like *Ente Keralam* could provide informal discussions on the politics and culture of Kerala and also garnered good viewership. The serial *Sthree (Woman)* directed by Syamaprasad was a tremendous success. Asianet, as the first Malayalam Satellite channel, could bring significant changes in the formation of the cultural self of Malyalis at the turn of the century.

8. Kerala in the Doordarshan Era

The Doordarshan era came to an end with the advent of satellite television in 1990s. Many social, cultural, and economic factors led to a paradigm shift in the last decade of the twentieth century which, in turn, became the effect of these shifts too. How Doordarshan performed as an instrument of culture in the context of Kerala was different from other parts of India in some respects. As a non- Hindi state, a media like Doordarshan which functioned predominantly in the Hindi language could make little influence on its cultural pattern. When the regional broadcast of Doordarshan started in 1985, there were only a limited number of programmes that were popular among people. The long history of Doordarshan as a national media with strong moralistic and ethical concerns and its failed attempt to create a viewing public from the village peasant seem to have no direct influence on the real cultural context of Kerala though it contracted some of the values from Doordarshan as from the National movement. As national television, Doordarshan followed the tradition of AIR as a tool for the upliftment of the ignorant Indian villager and it failed miserably in Kerala as elsewhere. Despite its failure in achieving the proposed aim, it could make significant inputs in the changing cultural pattern of Kerala.

Doordarshan's role in preparing the mindset of an emerging middle class for accepting an aesthetic blend of tradition and modernity was significant. Its broadcast

represented a mixture of the colonial legacy of forced nationalism and technological modernity. This, as the essential nature of colonial modernity, already entered the cultural space of Kerala in the format of films. The difference lies in the illusion of proximity and control of the device felt by the owner. For the community, the one who controls is privileged either as the owner or as the representative of the owner. The authority is transferred to what is being watched. In the form of appropriation, a complex blend of tradition and modernity is created that, in turn, offers a floating cultural self. Doordarshan which tried to create a national culture by cherishing those values that make a nation unique (Selznick 2). These values did not go well contented with a trans-modern context in Kerala.

Doordarshan became a medium for fixing the desires of a trans-modern culture in the capitalistic heaven of the future. This desire is not collective, but only shared in various tangents of modernity. Constant engagement with television altered existing cultural expressions. For example, the certainty of a ritualistic gathering in a festival where the pattern is fixed by an unchallenged force beyond one's grasp is remodeled by the gatherings before the television to watch *Ramayan*. Here, television provides an aesthetic experience with uncertain contents which satisfies the desires of the audience through 'flow' as suggested by Willimas (*Television* 77). Roy writes:

The sense of such correspondence of flow with a local popular is so insistent in the constitution of the televisual subject in this part of the world that denying its force becomes difficult. The homology would not be less operative in the relatively 'modern' subject, who, despite being armed with the legacy of classical/literary realism, is simultaneously vulnerable to the

vibrant appeals of an indigenous aesthetic. I propose that this correspondence tends to orient the televisual subject in India in a grid of identification. It is not identification per se in the psychoanalytic sense of the term deployed in studies of classic realist film. It is rather a certain perception of 'us', not of 'I', that identifies its major expressive conduit in the televisual form here. The communitarian form of participation in the traditional entertainment performances possibly finds a resonance, with significant alterations, in a live interactive network of viewers. The drive for the televisual subject here is to re-member the 'self' over and over again into the televisual flow staging a network. (10)

In this context certainty of togetherness in a temple festival is paradoxically simulated by the uncertainty of individual pleasure which is shared among the group to overcome the anxiety thus produced. Despite the sharing, the desire for belongingness is continuously produced as a part of examining the possibility of self-expression. This is to be read along with the mass migration to the Gulf countries in 1970s and 80s from Kerala. By the 1980s, remittance from these expatriates was pumped into the Kerala economy to create a 'pseudo-modernity.' They tried to use their consumer potential to create alternative spaces for appearing modern at the same time failing to alter the basic social structures. New technological gadgets, lifestyle products, and architectural changes were a part of this experience. This was the period in which consumerist desires created by social status were gradually coming up. The anxiety of expressing the self was caught up in an uncertain aesthetic produced by television.

Another significant observation that comes up as part of the analysis of the cultural contact of television in Kerala until 1990s is regarding the creation of a television-owner status which provided social distinction to a few. The TV-owning class has privileges of authenticity owing to their access to the visual content. 'I saw it on TV' became a signature utterance of this class which provided superior intentionality over other expressions. Bourdieu writes:

Because the appropriation of cultural products presupposes dispositions and competencies which are not distributed universally (although they have the appearance of innateness), these products are subject to exclusive appropriation, material or symbolic, and, functioning as cultural capital (objectified or internalized), they yield a profit in distinction, proportionate to the rarity of the means required to appropriate them, and a profit in legitimacy, the profit par excellence, which consists in the fact of feeling justified in being (what one is), being what it is right to be. (228)

In Kerala, the TV-owning class in the Doordarshan period had already acquired their elite status traditionally or by expanding their financial capability using modern methods. Television provided an added authenticity to the emerging middle-class in their determination of what Bourdieu refers to as 'taste'. The formation of 'taste' influenced aesthetic expressions that, in turn, created the cultural self. The problem lies in the cultural capital of the elite. The elite aesthetic is supposed to be traditional. The aesthetic choice of the TV owners who are members of the privileged class generates a popular taste that cannot get rid of its roots in tradition.

By the end of the Doordarshan era, the social structure of Kerala assimilated television into its cultural context. The political and cultural apprehensions have been erased to create an atmosphere congenial for the floating Malayali-self to emerge. The anxieties of nation-building have come to rest on the corrupt political system and the spirit of the nationalist movement that was built on the idea of people working together as depicted in the film *Humlog* has been forgotten. Increased migration and the resulting foreign remittance, renovation of traditional buildings in concrete structures, upsurge in English medium education, increased accessibility to telecommunication system and resulting increase of capital flow into the service sector, urbanisation, low-cost government health care system, high literacy rate, and many other factors have prepared the background for transnational television to enter into the cultural space of Kerala. Television created a new kind of organisation of everyday life.

End Notes

1. All India Radio could not announce the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi until 6p.m in the evening. Broadcasters like BBC could do the announcement early. Her son Rajiv Gandhi was in Calcutta and he came to know the news through BBC. In an article titled “Why All India Radio couldn't Announce Indira Gandhi's Death till 6pm” Ram Mohan Rao, the principal information officer, writes about the incident. See <https://www.rediff.com/news/report/why-all-india-radio-couldnt-announce-indira-gandhis-death-till-6pm/20161031.htm>.
Also see <https://www.aninews.in/news/national/politics/why-all-india-radio-could-not-announce-the-death-of-indira-gandhi-till-six-in-the-evening/>

2. There was a gradual increase in the number of theatres until 1995. The number began to decrease after that. In 1987, the number was 1389, in 1993 it was 1422, in 1995 it showed a slow coming down to 1408 and a sharp fall in 2000 to 1323 (Venkiteswaran, *Udalinte* 32)

Chapter IV

Malayalam Cinema: Origin and Development till 1990s

This chapter traces the origin, development and trends in Malayalam cinema until 1990s, when Globalisation hit mass media. As a prominent form of mass entertainment, Malayalam cinema has a crucial role in shaping the popular culture of Kerala in the twentieth century. The chapter takes into account various formats, genres, and star formation in Malayalam cinema and tries to reach inferences about its cultural influence on various levels.

The history of Malayalam cinema begins with a failed attempt to screen *Vigathakumaran* in 1928 at Capitol Theatre in Thiruvananthapuram. Oommen M. A. and K. V. Joseph in their book *Economics of Indian Cinema* observes, "Daniel could not succeed because there was no market for films in Kerala at that time. There was neither any distributing agency for the distribution of films nor adequate number of cinema halls for the optimum screening of films. There were hardly 10 cine-theatres in the whole of Kerala" (Oommen 30). Further, the caste-conscious audience of Kerala could not accept a *dalit* heroine. The social rejection resulted in the subsequent exile of the heroine and left the hero-producer J.C. Daniel bankrupt. The notable fact is that unlike the film industries of other languages that depended on devotional dramas for their content, from the initial stage itself Malayalam industry started off with a relevant social theme of child abduction in *Vigathakumaran*. The second film *Marathandavarma* (1931) was also unsuccessful as it was caught in a legal battle regarding copyright and was banned from screening in the theatres. The first talkie named *Balan* (1938) was the first to reach the theatres.

1. The Formative Period: 1930s to 1970s

In the formative years from 1930s to 1950s, Malayalam cinema depended on Tamil production infrastructure and so it carried traces of Tamil culture. It has been observed by many scholars that this dependency of Malayalam cinema on Tamil production units later came to be a blessing in disguise because many films were shot during that interval of time in studios with minimal backgrounds which resulted in realistic effect¹. The claim that Malayalam cinema always adapted a sort of realism was an effect of its initial handicaps. It was only after the founding of Udaya Studio in Alappuzha in 1947 that Malayalam cinema established itself in Kerala. The film *Jeevitha Nauka* (1951) can be called the first successful movie produced by a production house in Kerala- KK Productions, Alappuzha. The movie ran for nearly 300 days in Thiruvananthapuram alone and was dubbed into other languages too (Haridasan94). This was the second movie of Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair which made him famous as an actor. The second film studio, Merryland, came into existence with its production house named Neela Productions in 1951 in Thiruvananthapuram. It produced its first movie in 1952 named *Athmasakhi* introducing the first star in Malayalam—Satyan. In the same year, another film, *Marumakal*, came out with Prem Nazeer who shared the star platform with Satyan for the years to come.

The release of the film *Neelakuyil* in 1954 changed how Malayali audience watched films. The film and its progressive stance were lauded as a representation of anti-caste and progressive social sentiments of that period. The so-called progressive theme of the film has gone through severe criticism after the emergence of Dalit Studies though. The film also won the second-best film award at the national level

and thus became the first film to win national recognition for Malayalam. The screenplay of *Neelakuyil* was written by the famous Malayalam writer Uroob. It brought forth a new practice of producing movies based on famous literary works. The film is viewed by writers like Zacharia in the context of accession of the Communist party into power in Kerala (Anwar 48). The success of *Neelakuyil* is connected to many progressive movements in Kerala like the Public Library movement and the organisation of *Purogamana Sahitya Sangham* (Progressive Writers' Movement) started in 1944. In 1955, there were 1747 public libraries in Kerala to cater to the needs of the reading public and these libraries became public spaces for cultural activities of the youth, who represented the modern Kerala. Another cultural factor was strong theatre movements backed by the left in Kerala like the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC). One of their plays *Ningalenne Communisttakki* (*You Made Me a Communist*) later became a legend in the history of the left movement in Kerala (Mathew 7). Such activities could create a reading public that became a major reason for the strong literary connection of Malayalam cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1955, an experimental film *Newspaper Boy* directed by Ramdas was released. Though the film is now considered to be the first realist film in Malayalam, it failed miserably at the box office.

After the formation of Kerala state in 1956, attempts were made to redefine Malayalam cinema in connection with the culture of Kerala. According to scholars like C S Venkiteswaran the period from the 1950 to 1970 in Malayalam cinema was a literary period (*Marunna Malayali Samooham* 126). The producers showed high enthusiasm in obtaining the copyright of novels by famous writers like Uroob, Ponkunnam Varkey and Muttathu Varkey. Poets like P. Bhaskaran and

VayalaarRamavarma worked in many films of this period. Many of these writers depended mainly on their experience in the left theatre movement in Kerala. The exceptions were the films like *Rarichan Enna Pauran*(1956) directed by P Bhaskaran and *Chemmeen* (1965) directed by Ramu Karyaat, the story of which was written by the famous novelist ThakazhiSivasankara Pillai. *Rarichan* was a failure at the box office but *Chemmeen* was an enormous success, and is even now regarded as one of the classic films in Malayalam by critics and ordinary viewers. In this studio period, Malayalam cinema could shed off the influence of Tamil film industry. Along with the development of infrastructure, it started to absorb more cultural elements of Kerala into production.

In an article written in the *Close-Up* film magazine in 1970, Adoor Gopalakrishnan criticises Malayalam films for their similarity with stage plays:

Virtually our films are sheer celluloid copies of stage plays enacted against painted backdrops and occasionally natural locales. The style of acting is very much reminiscent of the stage. Characters, whether inside a studio- set or outdoors, line up before the camera posing as if for a group photograph and deliver long passage of dialogue while others in the row wait eagerly and nervously for their cue. (61)

He compares the profusion of dialogue to the feature of stage plays. He writes, "Everything finds expression through dialogue, the thought process of characters, their antecedents, their ambitions, their anxieties, their conflict, their reconciliation... (Why not?)... even the SILENCE" (61). This trend continued until the mid 1970s. This period was marked by the declaration of emergency in India and

intense political activities in Kerala, because of the stronghold of left parties who opposed the emergency.

The criticism raised by Adoor Gopalakrishnan who was at the initial stage of his career as a director can be seen as the perspective of an academic filmmaker on the contemporary popular filmmaking practice. From another point of view, in this period Malayalam cinema developed into a full-fledged entertainment industry that reflected the taste of society. The increase in the number of theatres from 30 in 1938 to 300 in 1970 accounted for the strong viewership of Malayalam cinema in these decades. The rate of production was one film per year until 1950 (Mathew, "Film Society Movement" 7). In 1950, it went up to six films and in 1970, the number of films produced per year increased to 40 (Vallachira 15-17). In India, 241 films were produced in 1950 and in 1960 the production increased to 318 and in 1970 again increased to 396 (Oomen, *Economics of Indian Cinema* 24). A straight comparison will, therefore, reveal the sudden growth of the film industry in Kerala in the two decades mentioned from a mere 2.5 % in 1950 to 10% in 1970. In the case of the first talkie *Balan*, the production cost was Rs.22500/- and the net collection was Rs. 200000/-. A devotional film *Kumaarasambhavam* released in 1969 with a production cost of Rs. 576328/- could collect Rs.1291690/- from the box office (Oomen, *Economics of Indian Cinema* 24). From *Jeevithanaukain* in 1950 to *Aranaazhikaneram* in 1970, 324 films were released in Malayalam (Vallachira 15-17). It revealed the popularity that this medium achieved in the initial stages itself.

The huge margins collected by films in these decades show a sympathetic audience, the cultural self which was getting into shape after the official formation of Kerala state in 1956. According to G.P. Ramachandran, this phase of Malayalam

cinema was marked by the influence of Malayalam and Tamil folk theatre, Malayalam literature, melodrama, songs and music and ideas of social justice and conventional family ideals (*CinemayumMalayaaliyudeJeevithavum* 20, 21). As a form of entertainment that belongs to the mass culture, cinema would invariably address the mass desires and cultural attitudes and tastes of the society. According to C S Venkiteswaran, the period from the 1960s to the mid 1970s can be considered as an age that established the Malayalam Film industry and its aesthetics (*Cinema Talkies* 80).

The period was marked by a literate and well-informed public in Kerala. This was the result of easy access to literature through the public library movement, the presence of a well- established educational system and the progressive reformation movements taken up by the left. A long line of poets like Kumaran Asan (1873-1924) had already prepared the ground for progressive literature with his association with the reformation movements of Sree Narayana Guru. His poems like *Duravastha* and *Chandalabishuki* were already in the social consciousness of Kerala. Poems of Changampuzha Krishna Pilli (1931-1948), and Edappalli Ragavan Pillai (1909-1936) were popular among youth owing to their romantically progressive content. Such poems were available in the form of booklets and were essentially read by every young man of the period.

As identified by Geetha Sen, the surge of social reform movements in the later part of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century brought in the democratisation of society in which hitherto invisible sections could find expressions (Lieten 50). The missionaries had already established a strong educational system that could function in many tangents like eradication of illiteracy

and caste discrimination and empowerment of *dalits*. A detailed analysis of the educational progress of *dalits* and the project of modernity can be found in a lot of scholastic works including that of Sanal Mohan (various chapters), J. Devika, and Pradeepan Pambirikunnu. The *Jeeval Sahitya Prasthanam* started in 1937 by the leftist writers in connection with the communist party was expanded to a bigger organisation called *Purogamana Sahitya Sangham* in 1944. Many writers who later came to associate with cinema-like Ponkunnam Varkey, P. C Kuttikrishnan (Uroob), and K. P Kesavadev were active members of this organisation. With its strong belief in the idea of literature as a tool of social change, this organization had a very strong presence in Malayalam literary scenario. Their ideological stance was basically inspired by the paradigms of modernity introduced by colonial regime². In this way, literature and its reading functioned as a part of the continuing project of colonial modernity which strengthened after the political formation of Kerala state in 1956. The cinema of the sixties was a sort of 'collaborative cinema' as it was a collaboration of writers and film-makers. K. P Kesavadev, Thoppil Bhasi, Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Lalithambika Antharjanam, M. T Vasudevan Nair, Ponkunnam Varky, Muttathu Varkey, Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai, and many other minor and major writers worked along with filmmakers of this period. Most of these writers showed social commitment in their works and participated actively in the progressive movements of that period.

The assimilated label of literate progressive Malayali later played a significant role in the cultural choices of Malayali audience including cinema. Fascination with English medium education developed the idea of literacy to English-knowing public. For instance, as a cultural factor, this is reflected in

preferring English to Malayalam in sign boards in public places. In cinema, the English speaking hero could always gain public attention and popularity. Since the literate-progressive label suggests refinement and civilisation modeled on the ideals of colonial modernity, which formed the fundamental patterns of social visibility through various colonial forms of education executed by missionaries in Kerala, it remained the central in the discussion of development.

Another aspect of the progressive label was the left leniency embedded into the social structure of Kerala. After the formation of the Communist Party of India in Malabar in 1939, they provided strong support for anti-feudal movements in Kerala. Various movements led by social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru in the Southern part of Kerala and the strong presence of the communist movement in the Northern part supported by the educational reforms of missionaries, influenced the formation of the cultural self of Kerala in the first half of the twentieth century. When Communist party was elected to power in 1957, the society was filled with socialist hopes for a developed future. The progressive measures initiated by the first communist ministry of Kerala like the Agrarian Relation Bill (1957) which resulted in the historical Land Reform Act in 1969 and the Kerala Education Bill (1958) could reinforce the socialist hopes in the society. Malayalees, in their various cultural discourses, always tried to distinguish themselves from the progressive label of the northern and southern states until the late twentieth century. So, the progressive-literary aspect of the Malayalam cinema of this period—and subsequent periods, to a certain extent,—was a reflection of such desires in society.

The cultural space responded positively to the progressive measures initiated by the communist party in power. Most of the films of the period tried to represent

social issues to be solved and proposed how a progressive society should view such issues. For instance, the first Malayalam film that won the President's Gold Medal, *Neelakuyil*(1950) is regarded as one of the cultural influences that supported the success of the Communist party in the first election to Kerala assembly in 1957 like the play *NingalenneCommunistakki*(Anwar 48). Some scholars noted that after the formation of Kerala state, the equal influence of the Left and Right front in elections led to competitive responsibility and both of them were forced to follow policies to ensure support from every possible section of the society. This also led to comparatively faster progress in various sectors (Lieten, *The Human Development Puzzle* 52). According to K. Gopinathan, cinema of this period was inspired by the humanitarian attitudes upheld by all these social reform movements and people's struggles (25).

The influence of theatre created strong melodramatic elements in cinema. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Kerala had a strong presence of modern theatre, apart from the folk and traditional theatre arts like *Kathakali* and *Theyyam*. By 1930s, Kerala experienced modern proscenium theatre as a part of various cultural organisations that led reformist movements like *SadhujanaParipalana Sangam*, *Prathyaksha Raksha Deiva Sabha* and *Namboothiri YogakshemaSabha*(organisation for the reformation of the Namboothiri caste). The revolutionary play *AdukkalayilNinum Arangathekku*³(*From Kitchen to Stage*) written by V. T Bhattathirippadu was staged in 1929. It was a part of the movement for reformation of Namboothiri community. The first communist play *Paattabaaki*⁴ by K. Damodaran came out in 1936. In 1949, *Kootukrishi* (*Community Farming*) was written by Edassery Govindan Nair which had visible influence of European theatre.

In the context of such progressive theatre activities, a theatre organisation named *Malabar Kendra Kala Samithi* was born. Under the influence of the Indian People's Theatre Association, the Communist party formulated a cultural policy and formed *Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC)* in 1950. In 1952, the legendary *NingalenneKammunistaakki* (*You Made Me a Communist*) was staged for the first time. The play became a part of the communist movement in Kerala.

These plays were performed in temporary proscenium stage without proper lighting or sound systems. The performance mainly depended on dialogue delivery and melodramatic over-acting⁵. Most of the actors for films were recruited from this background. In an article written in 1988, P. K Nair says, "Most of the artists and directors came from the stage. They brought with them whatever knowledge they had of the stage and continued to go about under the strange misconceptions that cinema is just an extension of the stage— an attitude, which continues to prevail even to this date. They had limited ideas of the nature of the new medium and did not bother to find out on their own" (2). He adds that "the approach of most Malayalam film-makers as adaptation of literary works is concerned, has been to picture them in simple narrative terms, making it too obvious, melodramatic and load to suit the so-called tastes of the mass-audience" (4). What the popular cinema expressed was an extension of the popular taste which still sowed its affiliation to textual content and the visuals remained just an elaborate interpretation of the text.

As argued by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Malayalam cinema in the period from the 1950s to the middle of the 1970s, showed formal crudity and existed merely as an extension of the theatre and literary texts. He writes, "Our screen-plays are virtual stage plays sliced more closely" (*Contemporary Malayalam Cinema* 60). The

minimalism displayed in the settings and characterisation in this period was a result of financial and infrastructural handicaps rather than a deliberate aesthetic choice. However, by the 1950s, Malayalam cinema industry could establish a finance-production-distribution system that helped it to stand on its feet in the later decades (Gopinathan 27). Cinema of this period reflected the hopes and desires of the society that was fed by various reformative and progressive movements. It displayed a strong affiliation to the political developments but did not attempt at any formal refinement as a unique medium. Most of the films produced in this period could not come out of the traditional textual boundaries and the experience of visuals was limited to the interpretations of the text. However, the films of this period could get rid of its bondage with Tamil language and culture and tried to reflect the culture of Kerala. In this sense the period can be understood as the initial stage of the formation of a unique aesthetic self.

2. The Developmental Phase: 1970s–1990s

As a result of the various social, political, and economic transformations that took place in Kerala in the 1970s, a new cultural self emerged with a strong political core. In the later period, this political dimension gradually lost its significance with the emergence of a middle-class as the deciding force in the cultural spectrum. These developments were reflected in the radical changes in the cultural taste registered in this period. The socio-political changes began in the early 1970, but started getting reflected in the cultural expressions by the middle of the decade and could be found existing until the late 1980s. Therefore, this section treats Malayalam cinemas produced roughly between mid 1970s to late 1980s as a group that expressed the formation of a split cultural self by the final years of the 1980s. This

development was parallel to the gradual shift in the aesthetics of cinema, that started as a division between art cinema and commercial cinema in the 1970s (Radhakrishnan, *Drishaharshathinte* 89). This division came to an end as its political edge was lost with the rise of a strong middle class as the deciding force of cultural factors by the end of the 1980s. Thus, this period is significant as the evolutionary period of the aesthetics of Malayalam cinema.

A scrutiny of various social sectors that controlled this evolution may reveal certain pattern of cultural forces at play. Some of these factors had a long-term impact on the evolution of the aesthetics of popular cinema by the end of 1980s. Some of these factors like the radical left movement, Film Society movement and parallel cinema, Gulf migration and sudden changes in the economy, emergence of the concept of class and mass cinemas, the rise of stars in Malayalam cinema, the genre of middle-brow or *madhyavarthy* cinema, and finally the emergence of a popular cinema with a new aesthetics are crucial in this developmental phase. Though this process was not strictly historical, by 1990s Malayalam cinema seemed to reach a stage to exert significant influence in the formation of popular culture. The factors discussed below played a crucial role in this phase of Malayalam cinema.

3. The Radical Left and the New Wave

The youth who were frustrated due to various reasons against the establishment started the radical left movement as a form of protest. This was fuelled by the world wide protest culture of the youth in that period.

In the larger context of the protest culture across the world in the 1960s, and dislodged from familiar habitations by the movement of populations toward

townships, frustrated by the lack of employment, the urban youth went through palpable unrest. The growth of small urban centres in Kerala became conspicuous with an observably significant increase in the number of census towns. (Mathew, “The Image Regime” 7)

The Naxalbari uprising in West Bengal created a furore among the youth of the nation and Kerala too witnessed similar but scattered uprisings towards the northern regions like Wayanadu, Kannur, and Kozhikode districts. Police stations in Pulppally, Thalassery, and Kayanna were attacked in 1968 by Naxalites and there was a police crackdown on the organisation. The movement continued to affect intellectual circles for a long time. After the declaration of Emergency in 1975, members of the radical left organizations were hunted down and the movement gradually died down. Though it existed only for a short period, the movement made very strong marks on the academic and intellectual circles of Kerala. The movement could strengthen the ideas of egalitarian development.

Yet, the dream of ‘Progressive Kerala’ was very much alive. Some conditions widely acclaimed as necessary steps towards the ideal Malayalee society of the future seemed to have arrived here in the 70s. For example, the widespread popular assent to Family Planning in the early 1970s — population reduction had been projected as vital to Kerala’s future as a prosperous region — as was a cause for exultation for the Malayalee press, which read this as a sign indicating the emergence of the people as active contributors to Kerala’s goals, as individuals. Also, the land reforms, which promised greater productivity and fairness in the distribution of resources,

were successfully carried out, and this kept alive the dream of egalitarian development. (Devika, "A People United in Development" 28)

Inspired by the movement, students on various campuses organised a lot of radical cultural activities and were actively involved in socio-cultural issues. Many film directors showed a strong sympathy in their works for these movements. The Naxal movement in Kerala became a reason for many radical egalitarian ideas expressed in art and culture and had a great influence in determining the youth culture. C. S Venkiteswaran writes:

The 1970s also marked a turning point in Indian politics and cinema. The period witnessed growing disillusionment with the existing socio-political system and the emergence of new forms of revolt and resistance. The complacency and optimism of the post-independence period were waning and political struggles all over the world, especially among youth, were gaining attention. The naxalbari, the hippie movement, and student revolts in Paris, Vietnam all helped form part of the general ambience of 'protest' during this period. ("Reflections on Film Society" 66)

4. The Film Society Movement

The film society movement in Kerala grew by subscribing to this protest culture. In 1988, The National Film Archive produced a monograph titled *50 Years of Malayalam Cinema* in connection with the *Filmotsav* held at Trivandrum. In it, Vasanthi Sankaranarayan makes a relevant observation about the transformation that took place in Malayalam cinema of this period. She identifies three important factors that led to the cinema of the period. They are *Chitralekha* Cooperative, the film society movement, and intense political awareness. She writes, "As a result of all

this, three types of films emerged- the experimental cinema, the middle tire popular cinema and the sex and violence oriented commercial cinema. All had their own patrons, their own votaries and they developed simultaneously" (8).

The Film and Television Institute of India was established in 1960 in Pune. It endorsed a new academic culture in the production and appreciation of films in India. Many film-makers of the art house genre in Malayalam cinema like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and John Abraham are the products of this institute. Most of the film-makers who supported the art film movement had some connections with the institute⁶. All these directors maintained a close friendship and followed a bohemian lifestyle and radical left ideology in their life. The influence of this new group who had exposure to world cinema, showed a passion for film as artists tried to follow masters of world cinema. They showed very strong artistic commitment towards the medium and ignored the financial aspects of the film industry. The same persons were behind the film society movement of Kerala. After the formation of Chitrlekha Film Society in 1964 under the leadership of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, several societies came up all over Kerala along with rural public libraries. The public libraries provided liberal and secular spaces for the youth to gather and share their opinions. Many progressive and radical movements started from such gatherings. Public library movement also functioned as informal educational spaces accessible to all types of people. Naturally, they turned up to be space for cultural activities like Film Societies. Many of these societies turned to filmmaking through cooperative financing. *Chitrlekha* produced the film *Swayamvaram* in 1972, which brought a national award for Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Odessa Film Society formed by John Abraham took initiative in producing the film *Amma Ariyaan* (1986) through

crowd funding. The film was screened for people in various locations without entry free all over Kerala by Odessa. In the evolution of Malayalam cinema and its unique spectatorship, the New-wave films and film societies had a significant role to play.

The production of Malayalam films increased and 1257 films were made between 1970 and 1985. Among them, 495 films were produced between 1980 and 1985 (Radhakrishnan, *Drishyaharshathinte* 219). The entertainment tax paid in the year 1978-79 was 187 crores and in 1979-80 it increased to 207 crores (Rizvi and Amladi 6). This number indicates the growth of the industry that could mobilise a huge viewership. Both the commercial and art house genres invited the attention of filmgoers in this period. Film societies also could generate a huge viewership from the educated middle class. This genre profited with the help of the Film Finance Corporation established in 1960 and later, National Film Development Corporation in 1975. The distinction between New wave/ Arthouse cinema and commercial cinema became increasingly visible. CS Venkiteswaran observes,

In the discourses about cinema, the divide between ‘commercial’ and ‘art’ cinema also emerged during this period. Malayalam cinema up to this time was largely based upon literature and dealt with socio-political themes. Their form and narratives drew heavily from theatre, mixed with conventional folk entertainment techniques. However, the 1970s ushered in a new self-consciousness about the medium and film was very much part of that transition. The film society movement brought in a new consciousness about cinema and stood for a ‘different’ kind of cinema, which was termed ‘new wave’, ‘parallel’ or ‘art’. In the process, they defined themselves as distinct

from the 'commercial', 'mainstream', or 'popular' cinema. (Venkiteswaran, *Reflections on Film Society* 66)

The year 1972 is very important in this regard as it was the year in which the film *Swayamvaram* by Adoor Gopalakrishnan came out. His films were academic experimentations too as they were made with textbook methods in various aspects. In an interview given to M. F Thomas about his film *Elipathayam* (Rat Trap) he says:

The story is so structured as to unfold in a series of departures from a condition of entrapment to liberation. The first three are of the rats and the other three, different from one another, human inmates of the old house. The economic, social, cultural and even moral decay of a pattern of living comes in for close examination. There are of course many more things, in the background; I do not push them to the foreground. They are there for those who want to see more. The audience does not have to be necessarily conscious that the filmmaker is trying to do this or that. The intentions should get embedded in the treatment so that the audience does not get to see that scheme. The scheme of things, the skeleton should not show. (6)

This opinion suggests that he viewed the process of film making as a serious intellectual activity that requires a learned viewership rather than a mass that seeks pure entertainment. In the same interview answering the question about the use of colours, he puts forth a very complex idea of colours that does not aim to serve the common viewer:

Colour was essential for this film. And I think I have used colour meaningfully. For instance, let us take the use of colour for the dress worn by

the main characters: Primary colours are used for the three sisters. The elder sister wears shades of green. Green suggests practicability, earthiness, maturity, and worldly-wiseness. The second sister wears blue suggesting submissiveness, nobility, spirituality, serenity and even doom. (6)

Adoor views filmmaking and film viewing as intellectual activities that need a lot of previous knowledge about the language of films. All the directors of the NewWave, with their academic exposure to world-class films and learning, approached filmmaking from this angle. These academic and intellectual exercises certainly brought a new sensibility to the world of Malayalam cinema. The main figures of the new wave in Malayalam were inspired by European masters like Godard and Truffaut and Indian masters like Satyajit Ray. While these film-makers tried to create a new sensibility in films, the Film Societies tried to educate the audience about such films. It can be noted that many of the shows by masters of Bengali Films ran houseful in Kerala when they were exhibited by film societies. Lenin Rajendran recalls in an essay entitled “Aa ChuvannaKaalathinteOrmakku”(“In Memory of those Crimson Days”), that films like *Appu Trilogy* by Ray and *Mrigaya* by Minal Sen were very successful in their shows in Kerala (106, 107). The title of the essay shows how this new wave in production and film societies in education was inspired by communist ideals. Most of the films that belong to the new wave show this romantic fascination with the left movement. Films like *Yaro Oral* (1978) by V. K Pavitran, *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1976), *ChuvannaVithukal* (1978), and *ManninteMaril* (1979) by P. A Backer, and *IniyumMarichittillathaNammal* (1980) by Chintha Ravi were explicitly political in their content and treatment. Directors like K. G George, G.

Aravindan, and John Abraham developed their aesthetics within the NewWave movement. While K. G George experimented with psychological narratives, Aravindan changed his method from one film to the next without getting into types. John Abraham showed a non-committal affiliation towards the medium and made four feature films including the first docu-fiction in Malayalam– *Amma Ariyaan*–in (1986). This film was produced by *Odessa Film Society* through crowd funding. The film depicts the journey of a group of people from the north to the south of Kerala. Many of the scenes in the movie depict real-life situations and it registers a new angle in making realist films, which were a prominent feature of the parallel cinema movement. These directors made low-cost films since they were not supported by the profit-oriented commercial film industry.

The rise of the middle class owing to reasons already mentioned (The Land Reform Act 1969, various movements like *Ezhava Memorial*, widespread migration, rise of the service sector and access to higher education), created a highly westernised youth culture. This middle-class youth developed new tastes and cultural attitudes akin to cosmopolitanism, taken from European cultural products accessible to them in various forms including cinema. But they faced severe unemployment and related economic problems. The Economic Review of Kerala State Planning Board in 1980 reveals a grim picture of this situation. It says, "The employment situation in the state presented a rather gloomy picture during the year 1980. There was an unprecedented increase in the number of work seekers registered with Employment exchanges 12.49 lakhs in 1979 to 18.43 lakhs in 1980" (3). The result was an educated community of youth disillusioned with unemployment.

Radhakrishnan writes:

By the late 1980s, the picture had changed considerably. The hopes that were associated with the Kerala model were waning, at least in the popular imagination. The complacency that had marked the middle classes seemed to be changing and the issue of unemployment among young educated men was articulated as the most vexing concern in the state. The saturation of jobs in the service sector and the initial signals of the state's imminent withdrawal from sectors of welfare could be seen as possible causes for this anxiety.

(The Gulf in the Imagination 231)

The unemployed, educated, middleclass youth tried to overcome their social frustration through subscribing to a liberal and creative counter-culture fostering a romantic vision of the society imbibed from Western thought. The parallel cinema thus represented the romantic visions of a counter-youth-culture that existed as a part of such groups. The cultural transformations from rural/natural to urban/artificial life created a sudden void in the attitude of the youth which became a permanent presence in such films (Radhakrishnan, *Drishyaharshathinte* 86). Their attempts to create a new cinema questioned both the content and form of traditional cinema in Malayalam. Venkiteswaran writes:

The film society movement and the so-called 'new wave' reflected the times in their urge to challenge the status quo and to establish their position in the world. The various moods of hope, guilt, exhilaration, anarchy and political adventurism constituted the heady mix of the period. Malayalee was also part of the spirit of the times, reflected in the film society movement. Sensibility-wise, the Malayalam literary scene was already agitated by 'modernist' ideas

from Europe and its modern masters in literature. (*Reflections on Film Society Movement* 66)

The educated middle-class youth that believed in a cosmopolitan culture tried to bring about changes through educating the society. They tried to display their self-adorned intellectualism in public space through films. Most of the films previewed in such societies were from a few European nations and USSR. In this sense, it was an educative mission of the middle-class youth aimed at an ideological justification of the counterculture. It reflected their desire to tell the society about a liberated world they dreamed.

The movement viewed films as consumer objects that requires the practice of seeing or visual consumption rather than creating or visual production. It failed to reach the cultural consciousness and remained cut off from the sources of production of visual cultural texts in popular culture and thus, was unable to dominate the formation of cultural self of Kerala. The exponents of parallel cinema also functioned in such circles where the middle-class ideals of a revolutionary and romantic world remained the core bonding principle between individuals. In this way, the film societies and parallel cinema movements created a class audience who were aware of the complex language of films unlike the mass audience that indulges in the entertainment possibilities of the medium.

This made a split in the cultural taste. While the common public declared their allegiance to the traditional cinema and continued to throng at the box office to watch family dramas, soft porn and action films, a group of educated audience deliberately engaged in the consumption of the new wave. Venkiteswaran writes how this movement helped to create a new sensibility:

It is undeniable that the film society movement opened up a new world for the cineastes of Kerala and helped create a new sensibility. It worked in the fissure between contemporary Malayalam cinema and world cinema. The concerns, techniques, and imagery of both were worlds apart for the neophytes. I want to suggest that this interface can be termed as a production-consumption divide, characteristic in fact of Malayalee society and economy in general. It could be described as a condition where production is minimal, backward or almost absent, whereas consumption is diverse, sophisticated, and contemporary. This socioeconomic situation has contributed a lot to creating a peculiar mindset that is highly advanced with regard to its consumption patterns and tastes but is totally cut off from local production. (Venkiteswaran, *Reflections on Film Society Movement* 66)

The cosmopolitan ideas of these movements, therefore, remained in an ideational space without making any direct impact on cultural sensibility. The popular taste aligned with the commercial form of entertainment. In this sense, the educative mission of the movement was not fully successful since the common public named such films as 'award cinema' (cinema made to win awards and not for entertainment) and kept themselves away from them. No parallel cinema was a box office success in this period but they were successful in creating awareness that another type of film existed. Though the movement could not create a new sensibility or make a dominant mark on popular culture, it provided a learning experience for the popular film industry that led to the emergence of a new language for films which showed technical perfection in many aspects (Ramachandran, *Cinimayum* 23).

The emergence of middle brow cinema can be viewed from this angle. This genre tried to blend the characteristics of Art cinema and commercial cinema. It did not compromise with the popular aesthetics but showed the industry the possibilities of film making. One of the forerunners of this genre was Padmarajan. “Film director Padmarajan reflects this trajectory in the evolution of a postmodern aesthetic, expressing his understanding of cinema as a medium that unifies diverse elements and creates aesthetic beauty” (Mathew, *The Image Regime* 6). The emergence of a unique genre called ‘middle brow’ or *Madyavarthy* cinema in Kerala is to be viewed from this angle as it tried to be commercially successful while deviating from the ordinary formula of popular cinema.

This new wave of filmmakers through their academic, leftist, bohemian, personal, realist, and low-cost films brought in a new sensibility that forced the audience to rethink Malayalam cinema as a whole. According to G. P Ramachandran, these film-makers of the 1970s adopted a 'media fundamentalism' to get rid of cinematic conventions of the past and created a group of films that focused on the language of films by ignoring the content⁷ (*Cinimayum Malayaliyude* 22). The result was a gradual change in the aesthetic attitude of the spectators. The same thing happened in the pan-Indian context. In an essay titled “The Indian New Wave” written in 1974, K.A Abbas writes:

But the response to at least some of the low-budget "New Wave" films indicates that the tide of public opinion (which had kept the commercial movies afloat) is now running out. There is a new wave among the cine goers too, if Hindi film like *Bhuvan Shome*, *Sara Akash*, *Chetna*, *Dastat Garas* *Hawa* are drawing capacity houses at least for some weeks. There is a

perceptible qualitative change in the taste of at least a section of audience which was not manifest 25 years ago— at the time of my *DhartiKe Lal*, Chethan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* and Uday Shankar's *Kalpana* or some years later, of Mahesh Kaul's *Gopinath* and Kamal Arun Rohi's *Daera*. (13,14)

They were not accepted as the popular cinema, but as owe inspiring complex artistic product. In Kerala, the new wave was accepted as films of the educated and intellectuals. They were called 'Award films' and usually were attended by the middle-class audience active in various intellectual and progressive movements like the library movement or the film society movement. Since the aesthetic preference of the middleclass has already been woven into the prominent crossroads of the social structure⁸, such films were viewed by the general public as elitist. But as a middle-class exercise, the aesthetic of such films was viewed as acceptable, as a part of the class aspirations of the lower class. This formation of aesthetics was a part of the self-exploration of the mass that was invariably caught between middle-class elitist aspirations and the lived realities.

The parallel cinema in Kerala cannot be separated from the Film Society. While parallel cinema tried to create new textual content to be viewed by the audience, the film societies were trying to impart this educative content to the public. The new wave and the Film Society Movement were inseparable from each other. Moreover, film societies as in the case of *Chitralkha*, functioned as production houses for parallel cinema. Therefore, both these phenomena are to be viewed together. The production and consumption of these films belonged to a sort of intellectual elitism. Venkiteswaran writes:

Blind to local efforts and with selective exposure to the masters, a culture of self-hate developed on various counts. For example, there was a failure to develop creative/stimulating critical approaches to Indian cinema; overwhelmed by received notions/theories, it failed to take up the responsibility of placing our cinema in the context of continuity and change of Indian visual culture. The film society movement indulged in a sort of illusory elitism, which drew its energy and rationale from the 'mainstream' versus 'art' cinema divide. (*Reflections on Film Society* 67)

The sharp divide between art/parallel/new wave films and commercial films created two types of audiences. The class audience belonging to the educated middle-class who can appreciate the intellectually complex academic messages behind the aesthetics of parallel cinema and the mass audience that viewed films only as a form of entertainment and are not bothered about its value as an art form.

S. V Sreenivas observes:

'Mass-audience' refers to the lower-class audience. Never clearly stated but implied is the lower caste origin of the referent. 'Mass' connotes tastelessness, absence or negation of culture, with the mass-audience supposedly watching mass-films and rejecting meaningful cinema. On the other hand, the 'class-audience' is middle-class (and upper caste) in origin, and watches class-films which are believed to fuse tasteful entertainment and social purpose. (2)

An analysis of the evolutionary process of the popular genre of Malayalam cinema will reveal how this class aesthetics gradually became the aesthetic preference in the

formation of the cultural self. The middle-class taste plays a crucial role in this formation.

5. The Rise of the Popular Genre

The division between the art-film and commercial film and the former's intellectual association helped the commercial film-makers to renew themselves by learning the new language of films and use it for their success. The most important structural change witnessed in 1970 is the departure of Malayalam cinema from its direct connection with literary texts. The convention of directly transferring literary works into theatrical displays of actors before the camera became obsolete. These formal changes could create a new language for films. The script became an important factor and a new group of script writers emerged through learning the new formats from parallel cinema movement. The commercial film-makers benefited by learning this new film language from the parallel cinema and marketing it successfully in their films. Paul Mathew writes:

New departures from the early dependency on literary fiction and theatre emerge in the 1960s and 1970s in Kerala. The film society movement inaugurated in 1965 by Adoor Gopalakrishnan and *Chitralekha* Film Society introduced new modes of cinematic expression into the public culture. This becomes a new period that challenges both readers of fiction and viewers of film that employed conventional narrative devices. Indications of the disorienting effect caused by new cinematic techniques and language itself are evident in the scholars observing cinema in the late 1970s and later. (6)

Gradual but continuous commercialisation of the economy and globalisation of cultural values in Kerala started with a high rate of migration to foreign nations,

especially that of the Middle East, from the 1970s. Though migration has been a constant part of the social structure, in the 1970s, Kerala witnessed a surge in migration to gulf countries (Zachariah "Impact of Migration" Working Paper 9). The huge increase in remittance from the Non-Resident Keralites started to reflect in the economy by the mid70s in Kerala. This trend continued until the second half of the 1980s and by the 1990s, total remittance by NRKs increased to 35304 million per household (Zachariah "Impact of Migration" Working Paper 22). This huge remittance in the form of legal and illegal money altered various life indices which were later celebrated as the Kerala model. For example, the per capita consumption doubled by the 1990s. Per-capita expenditure among rural households which was 11.6% below the Indian average in 1970-71 increased to 9.5% above the Indian average by 1987-88 (Lieten,*Human Development Puzzle* 48). The Land Reformation Act in 1969 brought a sudden change in the economy by creating a middle class from the lower classes. In *Human Development in Kerala: Structure and Agency in History*,Lieten points to the increase in literacy rate from 31.9% in 1961 to 60.4% in 1971 (1544) which indicates an attitudinal change in cultural space with an increased presence of the middle class. Kerala was gradually emerging as a consumer state with a shift in economy away from agricultural production. This shift contributed much towards service sector ad led to the Kerala Model development. "The subject of Kerala model of development was the service sector middle class that started consolidating its position in the political and cultural space of Kerala from the early 1970s itself"(Radhakrishnan,*Gulf in the Imagination* 228). Gulf remittance created a new breed of film producers who loved an elaborate display of wealth in visuals. Such changes were reflected in the content and characterisation of

the popular cinema of the period. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan observes, "Let me lay out some of the economic implications of Gulf migration for the film industry. Unlike the preceding years, capital had started flowing into the film industry by the middle of the 1970s, supporting commercial cinema in a big way. A significant part of it came in as remittances from the Gulf. The money that flowed into Kerala from the Gulf between 1975 and 1985 is estimated to be about 5 billion rupees annually ("The Gulf in the Imagination" 219). By the 1980s, the first-generation migrants from Gulf began to occupy the central transformative vortex of the culture industry as the economy started to witness huge remittances from these returnees. According to Ratheesh Radhakrishnan,

The construction boom, the establishment of various small-scale industrial units, the burgeoning gold market, the increasing number of travel agencies in the state, the spread of private telephone connections and public telephone booths as early as the mid-1980s and the growing availability of consumer goods like music systems, video cassette recorders and video cassettes with English and Arabic subtitles, rechargeable torches, all bring to relief the immediate and visible aspects of the influence of the Persian Gulf in Kerala. ("The Gulf in the Imagination" 218)

The article titled "Film in Kerala" in the magazine *Cinema Vision* published in July 1980 says,

In Kerala, people are genuinely interested in films that are different. They are not only more literate than audiences from other States, they are more articulate and critical. There is effective feedback as a result of group discussion and article writing. The sources of finance have been remittance

from Malayalis abroad in the Gulf, various co-operatives and Film Finance Corporation. In 1979, 129 films were made. Out of this 56 were in colour. (Chandran 62)

This statement speaks about three important things namely, – the connection of finance to the remittance from the Gulf, the transformation of Malayalam cinema from its previous poverty regarding settings, and the increased public interest in cinema. In a study of the connection between Gulf migration and Malayalam cinema, Ratheesh Radhakrishnan comments on the display of wealth in the sets of Malayalam cinema between 1975 and 1985. He writes, "Opulent sets of huge colourful bungalows and winding stairways, people wearing colourful 'modern' costumes, song and dance sequences picturised in sets suggesting five-star hotels and bars, melodramatic acting styles and garish make ups represented the excess of new economy that was being thematised without being named" ("The Gulf in the Imagination" 220). Malayalam cinema was praised for the absence of hyperbole usually found in the sets of cinemas of other languages in the initial years. Now, when the financial support got strengthened, Malayalam cinema was also raised to the level of spectacular films from other languages. This display of wealth was a part of "consumptive cosmopolitanism" emerging in the cultural space of Kerala (Mathew, "The Imae Regime" 9). The establishment of *Navodaya* studio in Kakkannadu in 1976 was a mile stone in the technological advancement of Malayalam film industry. Many of their productions came out with the label 'firsts in Indian cinema.' The first Cinema Scope using an anamorphic lens, *Thacholi Ambu* and the first film in India to be recorded on a 70mm wide film reel, *Padayottam* were their productions. In 1984, the same studio released the first 3D film *My Dear*

Kuttichatan(Anwar 70). The inflow of money from the Gulf and the exposure of non- resident Keralites to a new world outside India brought in cosmopolitanism that shaped the imagination of Malayalis and restructured the cultural self and aesthetic attitudes accordingly. Commercial cinema until the 1980s was full of implicit references to these aesthetic changes. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan writes, "Curiously, the commercial cinema of the time did not foreground the reasons for these rapid changes in the economy, nor did it name these as originating in the Gulf, even though illegal economies and their influence in society became a central theme of these films" (Radhakrishnan, *Gulf in the Imagination* 220). He continues:

The outlaw and the industrial worker became the heroes of these films, as in the case of Hindi cinema. Thematically, these films tried to dramatise the conflicts between classes, emphasising the promise of mobility that the changing economy offered subaltern populations. The macho actor, Jayan, who represented the desire for upward economic mobility, and Seema, who epitomised the modernity of the heroine, became the most sought-after stars of the time. ("Gulf in the Imagination" 220)

The remittance from Gulf countries through migrants functioned as the financial source for the Malayalam cinema in this period. This financial support was reflected in technological advancement, sets and other formal experimentations.

By the 1980s, the Indian film industry had grown to have around 90 million audiences per week that pumped more than 200 crore rupees to the government exchequer as entertainment tax (Rizvi and Amladi 6). India was also growing on the economic front by having around 21000 crores parallel economy of black money (Rizvi and Amladi 7). The cinema industry became one of the best options for

making a profit by investing this huge amount of black money. In Kerala, the Malayalam cinema turned to an industrial mode where the most important thing was to make profit. A huge number of films (One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eight) were released between 1970 and 1990, and half of them were box office successes (Jacob 55). By the middle of 1970s Malayalam cinema developed into a notable industry in India. "With a production figure exceeding 70 feature films since 1975, Malayalam film industry could beat Bengali and Marathi, the two pioneering languages in film production and secure a prominent place among the language films in India" (Oommen, *Economics of Indian Cinema* 29). By the middle of the decade of 1980s, Kerala was one of the most successful commercial film industries with more than 1300 screens and with highest theatre density in India (Oommen 34; Jacob 51). With the largest theatre density and standing second in position to Tamil in the number of the production and with a high success rate, Malayalam film industry attracted financial investment from the novae-rich gulf migrants to this industry. The inflow of foreign remittance was huge: "It is safer to estimate an annual flow of Rs 500 crores during the decade 1975 through 1985" (Oommen 37). This huge investment even led to the emergence of a new soft-porn genre in the 1980s. Sreedhar Mini writes: "In the mid-1980s, the Indian filmscape saw the emergence of a wave of soft-porn films. Originating in the Malayalam-speaking state of Kerala in southern India, they offered a forceful alternative to Kerala's mainstream film culture, allowing personnel from the lower rungs of the production hierarchy to step out of their usual crew positions and engage in independent production practices" ("The Rise of Soft Porn" 49). The film *Kanyaka Talkies* (2013), directed by K.R. Manoj discusses the issue of a theatre that is closed down

after these types of films faced setbacks in the beginning of 21st century. In the film “... portrayal of Yakoob as a Gulf-returned Malayali is a reference to the nouveau-riche Gulf emigrants who invested their surplus money in soft-porn films, a phenomenon that opened up film production as an alternative mode of business enterprise to reap profits with limited investment" (Mini, *The Spectral Duration* 133). In the period between 1971 and 1980 “approximately 250,000 men left the shores of Kerala to find employment in the Middle-East" (Bhat and Rajan 1957). According to Kerala State Economic Review, 1990, the number of migrants to the gulf was 300,929 (16).

By this time, the film industry had also been saturated by money that came into Kerala from the Gulf both through legitimate and illegitimate means. Film magazines from the 1970s are full of reports of black money moving into the industry. If in the 1970s its sources were thought to be ubiquitous and hence elusive, in the 1980s it was specifically linked to the Gulf. The euphoria about state support for the film industry seems to have died down by the early 1980s. (Radhakrishnan, *Drishyahareshathinte* 233)

All types of films including family dramas, mythologies, fantasies, action films, soft-porn films, and crime thrillers were produced and were successful at the box office. Some films were continuously screened for more than 300 days in some theatres. Shaji Jacob observes that the success of these films is indicative of a cultural sensibility that preferred the pleasure of viewing above all other preferences including the quality of cinema (55). According to G. P Ramachandran, the commercial cinema of this period was a reflection of the middle-class apolitical sensibility that showed evident consumerist values against the renaissance values

propagated by Malayalam film industry before (*Cinemayum*24). Ratheesh Radhakrishnan observes this change as a display of wealth. He writes, "The new economy was marked by using objects that clearly had a semiotic link with gulf, including clothing of the latest fashion, fancy watches, transistor radios, sunglasses, suitcase, gold bars which were called gold biscuits and through narrative mobility"⁹(*Gulf in the Imagination* 220,221). KC Zachariah and Irudaya Rajan noted this phenomenon in their migration studies many times.

Conspicuous consumption is the hallmark of an emigrant, especially a Kerala emigrant. Emigrants become accustomed to using durable consumer goods while abroad, and because many of these goods were unavailable locally, they brought them on their return home. Because most of these goods are now available locally, the higher purchasing power of migrant households enables them to acquire these goods more frequently and effortlessly than could non-migrants. (Zachariah, *Impact of Migration* 75).

According to Osellas, consumption was also a sign of upward social mobility which enabled the lower class to get more avenues opened and thereby acquire a form of social prestige (*Social Mobility* 117-120). Though Osellas' assumptions were based on the study of Ezhava community, and these could be applied in the context of Kerala as well. So, the display of wealth in the popular films from the 1970s to 1990s, especially in the 1980s, can be a reflection of the hidden desires of the powerful middle class that had a strong influence on the culture industry of Kerala at that time. The migration created a social class that possessed excess income to access consumer goods, while the emerging middle class who were employed in the government sectors and small-scale industries tried to raise their

status by possessing these goods. The opulent display of wealth in the films that mainly dealt with the theme of family issues reflected this crisis.

All the prominent directors of the commercial cinema of the 1980s, like I. V Sasi, Joshi, Sathyan Anthikkad, Balachandra Menon, and Sibi Malayil tried their best to focus on family dramas. Even I. V Sasi and Joshi who were experts in action and thriller genres incorporated an emotional strain of family ties into their films. Such films could simultaneously address the consumer desires and the bondage of tradition. An examination of the hits directed by them may prove this point. *Angadi* (1980), *Avalude Ravukal* (1978), *Thrishna* (1981), *Ee Nadu* (1982), *Vaartha* (1986), *Avanazhi* (1986) by I. V Sasi; *TP Balagopalan MA* (1986), *Gandhinagar 2nd Street* (1986), *Naadodikaatu* (1987), *Kudumbapuraanam* (1988) by Sathyan Anthikkaad; *Nagakshathangal* (1986), *Amrutham Gamaya* (1987) by Hariharan; *Muthaaram Kunnu PO* (1985), *Thaniyaavarthanam* (1987) *Kireedam* (1989) by Sibi Malayil; *Ishtamaanu Pakshe* (1980), *Kelkkaatha Sabdham* (1982), *Kaaryam Nissaaram* (1983), *Prasnam Gurutharam* (1983) *April 18* (1984), *Manjil Virinja Pookkal* (1980) by Fazil; *New Delhi* (1987), *Nayar Saab* (1989) by Joshi are some of the examples. Most of these directors focused on melodramas that involve family issues and were usually called 'family films.' These films do not contain much violence and sex so that they can be watched by Malayali families without feeling any moral predicament. In these family dramas, one of the recurring themes was the conflict of urbanisation. Since the urban was interpreted as modern, the conflict was visualised occurring between the modern and the traditional values. AS Hari observes,

Along with changing social outlooks, Malayalam cinema of the 80s has also brought in a culture of "revivalism" that created a social ambience of tolerance among the viewers towards the import of a traditional past to justify the treacherous, exploitative and alienating attitudes of the present. The best way to explain this is by focusing on the "overindulgence" shown by Malayalam cinema towards the portrayal of caste, class and patriarchy. (Hari 15)

This revivalism was often depicted as a nostalgic desire for the village life, where the 'tharavadu' once kept everything in order. Rapid urbanization created an anxious middle class that worried about the loss of traditional values but was desirous of the new world. The rural/traditional values are in constant conflict with the urban/modern emerging world. Even action films like *Nayar Saab* or thriller movies like *New Delhi*, that had a different milieu, referred to emotional familial bonding between characters. These films functioned as gap fillers for the changing sensibility of Malayali culture through the visual realisation of a floating cultural self being formed as a result of the consumerism.

6. Film Stars and Cultural self of Kerala

Stardom is a universal phenomenon as far as the film industry is concerned. When an actor attains stardom, the aura of characters enacted by him crosses the frame of cinema into real life. Considering various perspectives on conditions of stardom from a sociological point of view, Richard Dyer refers to Barry King to find the following social conditions as imperative for the rise of stars. They are surplus production, development of technology of mass communication, extensive penetration of the cultural sphere by industrialisation which leads to a separation

between utilitarian system and moralistic systems, rigid separation of work and leisure, decline of local cultures and development of mass-level culture, organisation of the motion picture industry around commodity production, and finally a relative increase of social mobility into expressive role positions outside sacred institution (Dyer 8). The period under discussion in Kerala could satisfy all these conditions one way or the other. Even though the industrial or agricultural production was not surplus, the foreign remittance created an effect of surplus production with rising developmental indices of the state at that time. The motion picture industry got organised with a strong production and distribution system with studios, distribution companies and around 1300 theatres for screening all over Kerala. The motion picture industry began to produce a huge number of films and most of them were consumed by the audience leading to its organisation around commodity production. As far as mobility and expressive social positions were concerned, Kerala had already achieved upward social mobility outside the religious practices owing to the strong presence of the left and various other social movements. An analysis of the stardom of Jayan, Mammooty, and Mohan Lal in this period reveals some of the features of the cultural self of Malayalis. Though stardom in the modern sense starts with Jayan, Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair, Sathyan, and Prem Nazeer were also stars of Malayalam cinema in their own way.

The film *Jeevitha Nauka* was not only a box office success but it could create the first star of Malayalam cinema, -Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair.¹⁰

Historians of cinema in Malayalam, in their origin narratives, agree on the fact that *Jeevitha Nauka* was the first hit in Malayalam and that Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair (popularly known as “Thikkurissi”) was its first bona fide

star. It is clear from the details of films released after *Jeevitha Nauka* that Thikkurissi was the first male actor to have had a fan base in Malayalam cinema. (Radhakrishnan, *Thiruvithamkoor* 134)

In *Jeevitha Nauka*, Thikkurissi represented modern ideals as his character was unmarked by caste and represented the emerging middleclass. He studies in a college in the city and loves a girl from lower caste. This character made Thikkurissi a star as it associated him with the progressive ideals that modern Kerala cherished. When the film *Neelakkuyil* was released in 1954, Sathyan rose to the position of star. In the film Sathyan plays the role of Sreedharan Nair, an upper caste man who falls in love with Neeli, who belongs to the Pulaya caste. When Neeli becomes pregnant Sreedharan Nair refuses to accept her. She gives birth to a child and dies. The child is brought up by another upper caste man named Sankaran Nair. At the end, a transformed Sreedharan Nair accepts the child as his son. The idea of transformation into a modern man is embedded in the character of Sreedharan Nair. This self-reflexive quality of the character helped Sathyan to reach the position of stardom.

Sreedharan Nair, as portrayed by Sathyan, remained the hero of the film precisely because of his potential for transformation and because he provided the ground for the elaboration of interiority. The displacement of the normative rational discourse onto Sankaran Nair, a secondary character, is what made possible the emergence of Sathyan as a star for post-reorganization Kerala, replacing Thikkurissi, whose star potential was limited to Thiruvithamkoor and its caste/reform habitus. (Radhakrishnan, *Thiruvithamkoor* 140)

The stardom of Thikkurissi and Sathyan can be associated with the characters that represented the progressive ideals of modern Kerala that the society cherished at the time of the official formation of the state of Kerala. By the 1960s, Prem Nazir came to occupy the position of star of Malayalam cinema. He is called ‘the evergreen hero’ of Malayalam cinema. By the time Nazir rose to stardom, the studio period of Malayalam cinema was coming to an end. Nazir was thus helped by the changing scenario of Malayalam cinema as it searched for new vistas. In the peak of his career Nazir acted in a lot of films that sourced their plot from myths and legends. He could enact a lot of mythological characters and legendary heroes of *Vadakkan Pattu*¹¹. The role of Velayudhan in the film *Irutinte Athmavu* (1966) proved his talent as an actor. Unlike Thikkurissi and Sathyan, the stardom of Prem Nazir was associated with the new practices in the film making itself. The star persona of Nazir derived from the new viewership that Malayalam cinema started to enjoy after its infancy in the 1950s. The stardom of Nazir lasted till the 1980s and by the time Jayan gradually came to claim the position. He redefined the concept of star in Malayalam cinema.

6.1. Jayan

Jayan in his career from 1974 to 1981 acted in 122 films. His rise to stardom happened at a time when the only other mass media with a ubiquitous presence was radio. The penetration of television was limited to upper middle-class urban households and was not appealing to the mass. There were no organised fan clubs for Jayan to function as a support system outside the framework of cinema. The mass appeal of Jayan was limited to the film screens. His journey to stardom by the 1980s was parallel to the development of the Malayalam commercial film industry.

A new breed of directors like Hariharan and I. V Sasi began their careers in these changing times. They were helped by technological advancements and increased accessibility of that technology. The NewWave movement at the beginning of the 1970s created a learning platform from which these directors became aware of the new language of cinema. They were also helped by the availability of Hollywood, Bollywood, and Tamil films in the form of video cassettes from which they developed a sense of creating mass appeal in films. These directors began to stay away from the much-celebrated realistic minimalism and started to use successful commercial formulae of films— action, emotion, and sensuality.

One of the most celebrated movies of Jayan is *Sarapancharam*(1979) which thematically deals with the female desires and its tragic effect on family ties. It celebrates the villain character enacted by Jayan in every sequence. The character openly declares that he is not satisfied with one woman and hunts for women like an aggressive male. The movie is filled with visuals of consumer modernity like a bungalow with horses, jeeps, Royal Enfield motorcycle,—to which the character associates— in an exquisite setting. It also portrays voluptuous women who drink, smoke and party, to an audience who live in a society in which such expressions from women were considered taboo. The character by Jayan represented the male fascination for being successful by possessing macho symbols offered by modernity. Most of the celebrated films of Jayan like *Angadi* (1980), *Kanthavalayam* (1980), *Karimpana* (1980), and *Meen* (1980) were directed by I. V Sasi who was a maker of films for ‘mass appeal.’ One of the popular films of Jayan —*Angadi*— was directed by I. V Sasi and scripted by T. Damodaran who was a thriving scriptwriter in Malayalam popular cinema. His subjects often dealt with contemporary politics and

social issues. The long and trendy dialogues written by T.Damodaran often represent the rebellious youth culture. Such dialogues are often used in informal gatherings of youth in Kerala for fun. One of the scenes from the film *Angadi* is often recalled by fans of Jayan. He acts the role of a manual worker in a market (*angadi*). The car of a rich person is stopped by the goods-trolley pullers and the person in the car calls them 'beggars'. Jayan's character wearing a red vest retorts with a long dialogue in English that attracts the beautiful lady companion of the person in the car. He says: "What did you say? Maybe we are poor, coolies, trolley-pullers but we are not beggars. You enjoy this status because of our sweat and blood. Let it be the last time. If you utter that word again I will pull out your bloody tongue"¹². After uttering this angry dialogue, he turns towards the police officer nearby and says sorry to him in an emotional tone. The entire scene takes only 60 seconds but it contains 19 shots that include every possible angle like panning, trolley shots, crane shots, close-ups and extreme close-ups. Most of them are close-ups. Such scenes perform in two important angles— one is the linguistic content that directly refers to the indignation of a left-oriented society and the other is a visual celebration of the context where the hero becomes a star by becoming the object of desire of an upper-class woman. Since English is associated with upper-class culture, it gives the hero an upper hand over his fellow lower-class friends. From the moment the hero starts moving towards the villain of the scene, fast musical notes fill the gap to get rid of the time lag. The scene proves how important the skill of the director and scriptwriter is in the making of a star. *Angadi* made with a budget of 32.5 lakhs grossed 1.76 crores at the box office (George 18,19). Though the display of the body, the daredevil attitude, stunt scenes and dialogue delivery were important in the

making of Jayan into a film star, the new language of films that got matured by the 1980s also had a very important role in this. The visual language of his films that targeted the growing desires of consumer modernity, his characters that represented the suppressed male fantasies of voluptuous women and above all the changing sensibility of Malayali culture shaped by the middle-class taste helped his rise to stardom. Ann Marry George says: "The first actor to create a 'mass appeal' amongst the Malayalee audience was Jayan, whose intense bodily and sartorial presence – typified by his macho masculinity – was to redefine the image of a star within popular imagination". Jayan died falling from a helicopter on the set of the film *Kolilakkam* (1981). This death made him a legend. The image of Jayan has been celebrated in various forms in the popular culture of Kerala since then.

Ann Marry George in her unpublished research thesis on stardom in Malayalam cinema observes: "Satyan and Nazeer, though popular were not stars. Jayan with his intense bodily and sartorial presence—typified his macho masculinity—was to redefine the image of a star within popular imagination". Jayan drew mass support from the audience with his distinctive presence through the stylised emphasis of his physicality and unique tonal signature of voice in dialogue delivery. He also expressed a youthful representation of the modernity by being distinctively fashionable. His contemporary dressing style with bell-bottom trousers, t-shirts, cooling glass, and modern hairstyle were imitated by the youth. Characters enacted by Jayan associated with macho symbols like motorcycles, guns, and horses. Apart from his personal qualities as an actor, new methods of presenting an actor like entry music, close-up shots of his muscular physique, and combination scenes with seductive women characters also helped to make a distinctive mark in the mind of

spectators. When the mimicry troupes became a prominent cultural presence in 1990, the legend of Jayan was given a rebirth in their imitations. A Jayan cult was created among youth who imitated the dress and fashion of the actor. New films *Dupe DupeDupe* (2001) and *AparanmaarNagarathil* (2001) were produced using dupes of Jayan. Jayan continued to exist in dupes and pastiche in the present century with mimicry troupes, stage shows and even in the form of tea vendors¹³.

6.2. Mammooty and Mohan Lal

The year 1980 is significant with the death of a star and the rise of two new stars – Mammooty and Mohan Lal– in Malayalam cinema. These actors rose to such a prominent position that they could control the industry for almost two decades. The first lead role of Mammooty was in *Mela* (1980) and that of Mohan Lal was in *ManjilVirinjaPookkal* (1980) as a villain. By the middle of the 1980s, they organised fan clubs across Kerala and by the end of the decade: both of them became superstars by enacting a variety of roles in art and commercial films. This organized fan public and the rise of stars are seen as significant developments of Malayalam cinema in the 1980s. The huge financial investment, technological advancements, and the spread of video cassettes and VCRs were some of the factors that contributed to this phenomenon. Both Mammooty and Lal initiated their organised fan associations in 1983 (Osella, *Men and Masculinities* 183, 184).

Mohan Lal and Mammooty were distinctive in appearance, body language, mannerisms, and acting styles and both of them created their own followers. This phenomenon was studied by Osellas in connection with underlying cultural patterns. According to them, the curious co-existence of Mammooty and Mohan Lal in the

position of superstars is related to many cultural dimensions including ethnic stereotypes. Caroline, and Flippo Osella observe:

The Malayali refusal to countenance genuine rivalry between the two stars, and the common phenomenon of switching or sharing allegiance, confirms that both Mammooty and Mohan Lal are necessary for a full fantasy life. Young men need to maintain access to the full complexity of the range of characteristics embodied by the pair as a 'set' covering masculine possibilities. (*Men and Masculinities* 189)

These two types of masculine possibilities are related to the cultural fantasies arising from a trans-cultural situation in which Kerala expresses various cultural products, a blend of both fixed and floating cultural-selves. This case of dual stardom is studied by many scholars. According to C. S Venkiteswaran, these dual stars represent ambivalent aspects of Malayali masculinity. It oscillates between the hard and pure one and the other soft and flexible (*Udalinte* 20, 21).

By the second half of 1980s, the division between the art and commercial genre became thin and the industry saw the strengthening of the middle-brow cinema or the *madhyavarthy* cinema. The rise of these two actors into stardom coincided with the rise of middle-brow cinema in Malayalam. This is important because middle-brow cinema provided characters with the possibilities to showcase their acting talent. Most of the films they acted in the initial stages of their career were family dramas. These roles with heightened expressions of emotions helped them to create a space in the mind of the audience. The first role that gave Mammooty a star image was in *Mela* (1980) directed by the middle brow director K. G George. The film *Thrishna* (1981) directed by I. V Sasi gave him the first role of a

solo hero. He won accolades from critics and fans in the role of a police officer in *Yavanika* (1982) directed by K. G George. His roles in *Athiratham* (1984) by I. V Sasi in which he acted as the character of a smuggler named Tharadas and later in *New Delhi* (1987) by Joshi raised him to the position of superstar. Two films *Yatra* and *Nirakoottu* released in 1985 gave him great opportunities for expressing intense emotional moments as an actor. These roles were significant since they won him many awards too. By the end of the 1980s, he was recognised as a versatile actor suitable for characters that need serious, sentimental, and masculine performances from an actor.

Mohan Lal made his debut appearance in the film *ManjilVirinjaPookkal* (1980) as a villain. In the first half of the decade, he acted in a partially comic role in commercial films. His partnership with the director Priyadarshan made him a popular actor through films like *KaliyilAlppamKaaryam*(1984), *Engine Nee Marakkum*(1983), *Ente Maamaattikkuttiyammakku* (1983), *Sreekrishnapparunthu*(1984). In 1985, his films with Priyadrshan like *OnnanamKunnil Oradikkunnil*(1985), *Boeing Boeing*(1985), *Aram+Aram=Kinnaram* (1985) made him a favourite actor of families in Kerala. These roles gave him the face of a charming playful friend of families. In 1986, the film *Rajavinte Makan* directed by Thampi Kannanthaanam raised him to stardom. In the film, he enacted the role of an underworld don named Vincent Gomaz. In 1986 alone he acted in 36 films and most of them were box office successes including the film by Padmarajan titled *NamukkuPaarkkaanMunthirithoppukal* (1986). By the end of the decade, his role in tragedies like *Thalavattam*(1986),*Kireedam*(1989), *Chenkol* (1993) and comedies like *Nadodikkattu* (1987)*Pattana Pravesham* (1988), and

AkkareAkkareAkkare (1990) made him known in the industry as a versatile actor. His roles in action thrillers like *Aryan*(1988) and dramas like *Padamudra* (1988) raised him to fame. In this period, he won many state awards and special jury mentions.

In the 1990s, these actors were accepted by art-house directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Shaji N. Karun which expanded their reach into parallel films too. The stardom continued to the first decade of the 21st century in such a way that the entire industry remained under the control of these two actors. They had an organised fan system doing charity and promotion of their films, and both of them have respectable positions in organisations and various quasi-governmental bodies.

Caroline and Filippo Osella analyse how these actors represent two types of masculinities. Mammooty represents a perfect male for his fans and Mohan Lal is a regular next-door guy (180). The heroes acted by Mammooty are often rough and tough and try to hide their emotions towards the female. Their strength comes from the rejection of female desires rather than accepting them. His best roles at the beginning of his career were that of a family man who is ready to give up everything for the love of his family. Mammooty has played the role of police officers in many movies starting with *Yavanika*. These officers display an uncompromising commitment to duty and an indifference to emotions. One such role was that of the police inspector named Balram in the film *Avanaazhi*. The film was so popular that it had a sequel titled *Inspector Balram* (1991) and the character appears in another film titled *Balram vs. Taradas* in 2006. This character is similar to the cowboys in Hollywood westerns. Osellas write:

Mammootty embodies, performs and alludes to a familiar style of masculinity, attractive to both men and women. In Mammootty's picture gallery on 'Kerala Org' we repeatedly see him as a man-of-action or phallic hero: in military or police uniform; cocking a gun; standing in 'hard' pose in vest and combat pants; pointing an accusatory and threatening finger into a co-actors face; standing erect and aloof. If we see him at all with a woman it is often a screen mother, a grey-haired lady looking proudly at her son who finally, in mother's presence, permits himself a smile. He was identified to us by cinema watchers as 'manly'; 'even in roles in which he apparently begins as powerless, viewers know that the worm will surely turn'. (*Men and Maculinites* 175)

The popular characters of Mohan Lal in the 1980s were of the quasi-comic type (Venkiteswaran, *Udalinte* 38,39). These characters openly expressed of their attraction towards women and sometimes were even ready to woo them without hesitation. Though he has performed the roles of underworld dons and police officers, this softness towards women never leaves him. He is often celebrated for his flexibility in doing dance moves and acrobatic-falls in love scenes. It is often said that he does not act but behaves. He is popular for his epicurean philosophy and his love for Osho¹⁴. The masculinity represented by Mohan Lal is the opposite of what Mammootty does. The character of Mohan Lal in a majority of films is accompanied by a subordinate feminine companion enacted by actors like Sreenivasan, Mukesh, or Jagathi Sreekumar. There are many popular films by Mohan Lal like *Nadodikattu*, *Boeing Boeing*, and *Kilukkam*. According to Osellas,

Mohan Lal began as a small-time villain or ‘negative hero’—characterized by one informant as an ‘angry young man’—who grew to stardom in the late 1980s. His versatility was mentioned by many as a motivation for liking him: he is often perceived as able to ‘do’ violence, love, comedy, drama and so on, and is put forward by his supporters as a ‘real’ star, an actor who can constantly surprise his public and offer them new insights into his enormous talent. We heard several stories of his unexpected on-set improvisations in dance or dialogue, and one fan offered the interesting observation that, ‘he has many different ways of smiling’. (*Men and Masculinities* 175)

They further add that “Lal appears then as an elevation of the ordinary via the hyper-ordinary towards the extraordinary: he is at once the guy just like me and the guy who has a natural talent in every direction—his success can augur mine. Mammooty is a necessary complement to this figure, in his aspects as the always already—by virtue of innate otherness—truly and authentically extraordinary: both perfectly other and a perfect other” (199). According to C. S Venkiteswaran, Mammooty represents power, justice, and moral righteousness in his roles as bureaucrats, advocates, police officers, detectives, military personals, and high-caste Brahmins whereas Mohan Lal redefined the hero as a comic persona,—a poor guy,—who tries to sustain the former status of family. Many characters of Mohan Lal questioned the traditional notions of love and sensuality through a romantic engagement (*Udalinte* 11-48).

These two stars may represent a split in the cultural self of Malayali. The stardom of Mammooty, which rests in his masculine strong self, points to how the cultural self of the Malayalis tried hard to cling to the traditional values at a time

when the changing economy was questioning the very foundations of it. The romantic celebration of life based on an attitudinal levity towards the values of tradition in the stardom of Mohan Lal points to the hidden consumer desires of the same cultural self. Osellas write:

Malayali payyans are caught between aspirations towards the glamour, violence and access to sex cinematically represented by villainy or ambivalent heroes and the possibility of behaving like the wholly good character. One would want to be able to practice—or imagine oneself—speaking like Mammooty, in a voice that resonates power, warmth and sensuality; one would want to imagine oneself as Mohan Lal, singing and romancing a girl; one would aspire to this one's swaggering gait, that one's expression of amused disdain. (*Men and Masculinities* 178)

The rise of stars in Malayalam cinema is parallel to the rise of this split identity that culminated in a floating self at the turn of the century. The first star Jayan in the first decade represented confusion of a cultural change in its early stages. It was still hopeful of the strength of its traditional value systems and ethical consciousness. It was satisfied by a single star that can express the confusion and hopes and fulfil the desires of the underlying patriarchal system. By the second half of the 1980s, the confusion in cultural self was much more visible. It wanted to move with its desires while carrying the burden of tradition. It needed more than one star—one to celebrate and the other to control that— and the stardom of Mammooty and Mohan Lal might be helpful in this regard. Osellas observe:

We can think of Malayali payyans as located in a mimetic economy, in which they take and exchange characteristics, parts of self and others, with

their on-screen heroes and with each other. The Malayali young man reproduces and newly fashions over each generation and with each shift in masculine style what it means to be a Malayali man, negotiating the demands of modernity and finding a way to move through the various arenas—family, work, leisure—around him. (200)

7. The *Madyavarthy* Cinema and the Cultural self of Kerala

Emergence of the middle brow or *madhyavarthy* cinema marked a new era in Malayalam cinema. They could create a new aesthetic sensibility that could satisfy the changed taste of the new middle class.

The valorised aesthetics of filmmaking were no longer that of art-house cinema. The mid-to-late 1980s are marked in writings on Malayalam cinema as a golden period for what came to be called middlebrow cinema.

Middlebrow cinema, in its attempt to bring the realist imperatives presented by art cinema into a commercial format, followed the political and aesthetic imperatives of the former”(Radhakrishnan, “The Gulf” 234).

The main proponents of this middle-brow cinema were Padmarajan, Bharathan, and K.G George. Padmarajan was a novelist, short story writer, and script writer who along with Bharathan created some of the most popular hits of Malayalam cinema. Bharathan was an artist who was best known for beautiful frames of natural beauty. Apart from his collaborations with Padmarajan he directed his own films. Bharathan directed 40 films, Padmarajan 18 films, and K. G George directed 19 films in their career. These directors made films that deviated from the success formulae of commercial films and created a new sensibility in film industry. The best of George includes *Swapnandanm* (1976), *LekhayudeMaranamoru*

Flashback (1983), *Adaminte Variyellu* (1983), *Irakal* (1985), *Yavanika* (1985), and *Mattoral* (1988). Most of these films deal with psychological themes. Padmarajan's directorial ventures include *Peruvazhiyambalam* (1978), *OridathoruPhyalvan* (1981), *Kallan Pavitran* (1981), *NavambarinteNashtam* (1982), *NamukkuPaarkkanMunthirithoppukal* (1986), *Thoovanathumbikal* (1988) and he continued to make films until the second half of the decade. He used new faces for his films and is said to have depicted individual freedom romantically in his films. Bharathan's first film *Prayanam* came out in 1975 and through his other hits like *Guruvayur Kesavan* (1977), *Rathinirvedam* (1978), *Thakara* (1979), *Lorry* (1980), *Vaisali* (1988), and *Thazvaram* (1990), he continued as a hitmaker until the last years of this decade. These films could make a permanent mark on the Malayalam film industry and their period is often called the golden age of Malayalam cinema.

The growth of middle-brow cinema or *madhyavarthy* cinema in the 1980s is significant as an expression of the middle-class ambivalent self. They were labelled so by the critics to point at their artistic merit and commercial success. But this naming is a result of some popular prejudices about the artistic sensibility in Malayali culture. In the initial stages, Malayalam cinema was praised for its realistic rendering and lack of luxurious sets. Later, critics look at this as a result of a lack of resources and financing.

When the New Wave film-makers entered the industry, they also faced the same problems and their films took a minimalist approach towards technical perfection and focused on the rebellious politics that their films can put forward. They modelled their production on the European new wave, where this form was a deliberate choice of ideology. The ideological underpinnings of such films

necessitated a selection of unpolished visual reality against the embellished narrative technique of the commercial films. The political correctness of this choice is also related to a declaration of allegiance with the working class. In Kerala, the lack of sophistication, minimalism in narration and deliberately slow editing were preferred to align with this ideology. Moreover, most of the film-makers of parallel films in Kerala were from the film academy and tried to practice the same complex forms that they had learned in their films. Popular belief held that modern art became a form of abstraction incomprehensible to the ordinary man.

In the art films, the complexity of form was an ideological choice and the negligence of it happened due to financial constraints. Either way the result was unattractive and lacked popular ideas of aesthetics. This was addressed by the middle-brow directors by adding technical perfection and aesthetic patterns to some of philosophical perspectives addressed by art cinema. The result was fascinating narrations through visuals pertaining to popular aesthetics. Most of them referred to the hidden desires of individuals who are rebellious to the system or beyond the control of the system. These directors could give commercial genres like psychological thrillers, crime stories, dramas and soft porn an aesthetic aura, by deviating from the well-accepted formulaic paths, in their idiosyncratic ways. Therefore, such films became morally acceptable to the learned critics and family audiences. They also used superstars like Mammooty and Mohan Lal to make their films commercially viable. In such situations, these actors were forced to part with their mannerisms and typical acting styles which can create a surprising complexity to the entire narration. Sometimes they used new faces or actors of other languages to make a novel impression.

The popular films by K. G George like *Yavanika* (1982) *Adaminte Variyellu* (1984) and *Irakal* (1985) are psychological thrillers. These films came out at a time when this genre was unfamiliar to Malayali audiences though they were common abroad. *Panchavdipaalam* (1984) was a caricature which was also new to Kerala. The films of Padmarajan are different for their exotic themes and open approach to man-woman relationships. He treated sexual content aesthetically so that a visual treat of this tabooed theme can be enjoyed without any moral concern. The theme of pre-marital sex in *Thoovanathumbikal* (1988) was romanticised so that it is freed from the traditional taboo associated with such a relationship. The same is applicable to lesbian relationships in *Desadanakili Karayarilla* (1986), sexual fantasies of young women in *Njaan Gadharvan* (1991) and brothel life in *Arappatta Kettiya Gramathil* (1986). The theme of mistaken identity in *Aparan* (1988) was a novel experience to Kerala. In *Moonnam Pakkam* (1989), legends of death and ocean were presented with a high emotional tone and poetic quality. The theme of exotic love in *Namukku Parkan Mmunthirithoppukal* (1986) expressed the romantic escapism in a modern method. These themes were represented poetically to address the hidden desires of a trans-modern society. As a scriptwriter, his partnership with the director Bharathan was very successful. Films directed by Bharathan like *Thakara* (1980) and *Rathinirvedam* (1978) are examples of this success. Most of the films by Bharathan present women characters who do not hesitate to express their sexuality. He was known for the 'Bharathan touch' created by beautiful frames of natural beauty. He was an artist and used his artistic talent to create unconventional frames hitherto unknown to the audience of Kerala.

His film *Palangal* (1981) deals with death and love by picturing a heroine, who mourns the accidental death of her lover falling in love again. The film *Katathe Kilikkoodu* (1983) pictures the theme of old age sexual fascinations while *Oru Minaminunginte Nurungu Vettam* (1987) depicts the emotions of a childless couple. In *Kathodu Kathoram* (1985) Bharathan depicts the fascinating relationship between a widow and a stranger and in *Vaisali* (1988) he takes a totally different path by visualising an anecdote from the epic *Mahabharatham*. The film *Thazhvaaram* (1990), which tells the story of revenge, and *Amaram* (1991) that visualised the life of fishermen were a great success in the box office and won critical acclaim.

From this point of view, the so-called *middlebrow* cinema was not a blend of art cinema and commercial cinema but just a formal deviation from the commercial formulae by individual directors. For example, some films of I. V Sasi, who is supposed to be the exponent of the commercial genre, like *1921* (1988) and *Mrigaya* (1989) won critical acclaim and box office success. Therefore, 'middlebrow' cinema is to be viewed as a product of the change in sensibilities, through which a split cultural identity was formed. They offered fulfillment of desire without compromising the moral consciousness. By offering exotic visuals and unfamiliar themes they could build a cover-up for the guilt with which the moral framework was breached in viewing such films. In this context, the middlebrow is found to reflect the split cultural self of Malayalis. The continuous conflict between tradition and modernity experienced by the individuals of a trans-modern culture was the source of cultural products like middlebrow cinema. The same split self is detectable in various forms related to the various aspects in Malayalam film industry. The

formal evolution of a prominent cultural product is the result of a popular choice that reflects the nature of the cultural self. This split cultural self is reflected in the evolution of the New Wave and film societies that functioned as an anti-thesis to the popular films, the stardom of Mammooty and Mohan Lal and in the development of middle brow cinema.

8. Aesthetics of Malayalam Cinema until the 1990s and the Evolution of a Cultural Self

Malayalam cinemas from 1975 to 1990 went through a transformative phase that was characterised by the New Wave that brought a new sensibility. It is marked by a departure from the literary bondage, the luxury of foreign remittance, and the beginning of stardom and fan culture. This transformed aesthetic points to the changes that took place in the underlying structure of *Malayali* cultural values. The films from the middle of this decade to the turn of the century reflect open acceptance of the levity with which the traditional values were approached. Such changes point at conflicting cultural values that generated a confused cultural self. The origin of this phenomenon can be traced back to the transformations that happened in the early decades of the 1970s which matured as cultural expressions by the middle of the decade. Mathew writes:

In the 1960s and 1970s, film viewing becomes pervasive as a truly public experience in Kerala. Increasing from a meagre thirty in 1937, there are as many as three hundred screens in the mid-1960s (Venkiteswaran2009, 82). Nevertheless, the lack of an acutely “image” centric culture in this period poses questions. This can be understood by the fact that the institution of Malayalam cinema and the film going public encountered new modes of

film-making extensively only in the 1970s. For a large majority of the readership, with their daily experiences, work and aesthetics rooted in an agrarian regime of experience, there was an irreconcilable disjunction with postmodern aesthetics. In other words, the conditions for postmodernity did not exist in a non-industrial, agrarian economy. In the absence of the mnemotechnical immersion necessary to modify the structures of memory and experience, the dominant aesthetic is one shaped by non-externalized time, indicating the absence of technologically mediated memory. (“The Image-Regime” 7)

What is found later is a gradual development of technological invasion into the social pattern as part of changes in the economic system. The rise of the middle-class after the formation of Kerala state was related to many political and economic decisions and various movements. The Land Reform Act of 1969 was one of the most important events that abolished slave labour and provided ownership of land to agricultural slaves known as *Kudiyaan*. This led to a reduction in large-scale agriculture by land owners who belonged to the upper caste who did not have any knowledge of farming. The lower castes who earned ownership used their new identity to get rid of their old occupation and moved to new avenues. Since the 19th century itself the lower castes of Kerala, though involved in the agricultural slave labour, had already developed attitudinal upward mobility through movements based on caste identity like *Sadhujanaparipalana Sangham* and *EzhavaMemorial*. These communities started to move to the service sector for their employment. The huge remittance from the Gulf countries that began in the 1970s and reached its peak in the 1980s also contributed to the rise of a middle-class culture.

This middle class had high aspirations that they tried to fulfill consumption. This phenomenon led to “consumption centred cosmopolitanism”(Devika, *Migration, Transnationalism*137). The result was a floating self that could not leave its cultural roots but simultaneously yearned for the riches of transforming modernity experienced elsewhere by migrants. This yearning was reflected in the aesthetic choices of the middle class in the form of technological marvels and the construction boom.

The introduction of video cassettes and video recordings influenced the visual cultural practices of this period. One of the first consumer goods brought home by the *Gulf-Malayali* (migrant to Middle-Eastern countries are often called by this name) was television. Video cassettes introduced middle-class Malayalis to a cosmopolitan aesthetics of visuals since they could watch films from other countries especially Hollywood films. The directors of Malayalam films were, thus, forced to equip themselves with a new sensibility that can cater to the expectations of a new community of middle-class spectators. The availability of video equipment through import functioned as a learning equipment for film directors. The influence of migration was not just financial in nature. It helped in creating a cosmopolitan cultural space with strong consumerist desires.

The origin of the New Wave in the initial years of the 1970s, the emergence of the class audience against the mass that had no special preferences regarding films, except a ritualistic fascination for surprise elements, the changes in the aesthetic of the popular genre and its inclusion of hyperbolic presentations of amazing visuals, the rise of stardom, and the emergence of ‘middlebrow’ cinema in this period are significant cultural phenomenon. At the turn of the twentyfirst

century a new cultural self that has been completely uprooted from tradition began to evolve. The confusing split between tradition and modernity has been replaced with levity and leisure of a new cultural self. These are the markers in the evolution of a this new floating cultural self at the turn of the twenty first century.

End Notes

1. The conventional method of film making in the initial days of Indian film Industry was to depend on some mythological texts. Such texts required elaborate sets and costly infrastructure. Malayalam film industry, in the initial stages, lacked huge financial investments and depended on the Tamil industry for infrastructure. Due to financial crunch, such films were shot in the intervals of Tamil cinema and could not use themes from mythology. It resulted in a sort of minimalism in those aspects of cinema like sets and special effects. This minimalism restrained the film makers to select common plots and resulted in realistic renderings. (See George, Ann Mary. Introduction. *Starring Cinema: Production and Stardom in Malayalam Cinema*)
2. Gopal Guru observes that the idea of modernity including that of Narayana Guru and Ayyankali in India was initially inspired by the Western concepts. He says, “ As a corollary to this point , it could also be further argued that, thinkers from the margins did not base their modernity on the ‘desi conception’ as suggested by scholars looking for alternative modernity. As it is clear from their own writings ad speeches , their conception of modernity cannot be completely desi in character. They had to borrow intellectual resources from the West as these resources were not available to them in the local epistemological field.” (Guru, Foreword x)
3. *Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathekku* was a revolutionary play that made a social impact on the concept of marriage of *Namboothiri* women. The traditional practice of marriage between very old men and young women in the community was questioned in this play. The play was first staged on the 22nd anniversary of *Namboothiri Yoga Khsema Sabha* in 1929. The plot is about the success of a young girl in resisting her marriage arranged to a very old man who had already married many times. The play is considered to be one of the turning points in the reformation movement of *Namboothiri* caste.

4. *Pattam* was the practice of renting out land for cultivation to *kudiyaan* (agricultural slaves of lower caste). The *Kudiyaan* is supposed to give a predetermined quantity of the harvest back to the land lord. If the *Kudiyaan* is unable to do it, he will be punished severely.
5. An amusing picture of these performances and the popularity of such plays are available in *Arangu Kanatha Nadan (An Actor who Never Entered the Stage)* by Thikkodiyam, a Malayalam writer. The autobiography/ memoir received in 1992.
6. Director V. K Pavitran (popularly known as Pavitran) could not get admission to Pune Film Institute. He joined the nearby Law College and spent his time in the campus of Film Institute to learn film making. (<https://indiancine.ma/TOK/info>).
7. മുൻ
കാലത്തെസിനിമയുടെദുശ്ശാഡ്യങ്ങളെകുടഞ്ഞറിയുന്നതിന്പേണ്ടിഒരുച
ലചിത്രമായമമൗലികവാദത്തെനേക്കൂട്ടർ
സീകരിക്കുകയുംഅപകാരംചലചിത്രഭാഷയിൽ
ഊന്നൽകൊടുക്കുകയുംഇതിവൃത്തത്തിൽ
കാര്യമായശ്രദ്ധപുലർത്തുന്നതിൽ
വിമുഖതവിമുഖതകാട്ടുകയുംചെയ്തതരംസിനിമകൾ
സൃഷ്ടിക്കുകയുംചെയ്തു(Ramachandran GP *Sinimayum...*22).
8. This is an attribution arrived at from the discussion of the stardom of Mammooty and Mohan Lal by Osella. See
“Mammooty ‘just reads a script quickly and then improvises from his own imagination’⁹. In his alleged ‘seriousness’ or intellectualism and artistry he also, importantly, embodies an aspect of Malayali fantasy ethnic identity. Many Malayalis, in a state which proclaims 100 per cent literacy and a progressive outlook, like to differentiate themselves from ‘illiterate and unclean’ northerners and ‘backward unworldly’ other southerners. Malayalis hold strong aspirations towards modernity and development, and distinguish themselves from other non-metropolitan Indians by virtue of their proclaimed abilities to pursue these goals and act ‘in pursuit of progress’— *progressinuveni*.”(Men and Masculinities 179)
See another observation from the same authors:
“Lal, seen to be still haunted by his early days as villain and judged negatively for his populism. For this group, Mohan Lal represents the basest and worse aspects of Malayali-ness, those parts of Kerala culture which seem to challenge the modern

aspirant values of respectability, intellectualism and sophistication. If Lal is indeed the ‘alter-ego of the average Malayali’, then that Malayali is being elided with a lower- middle-class or working class (probably) Hindu male, a point to which we shall later return” (*Men and Masculinities* 182).

Also see

“... our ethnography suggests that we must allow agency not only to the ‘hybridised’ elites who come into direct contact with European ideas and practices, but also to the illiterate labourers, blue-collar workers or unskilled migrants who, just as much as, *if not more than* their elite fellow-citizens, practice and experience modernity in all its ambivalences and contradictions. Indeed, if we move away from intellectualism and bring practice and embodiment to the centre of our analyses, then the factory worker, the migrant or the consumer of popular film is a far more important player than the Indian high-caste intellectual”(Osella, *Social Mobility* 261).

Through a reverse observation association between intellectualism and Malayali middle-class and their perspective of the lower-class as the consumer of the popular can be reached.

9. In the cartoon strip titled *CheriyamanushyaramValiyaLokavum*, published serially in *Kala Kaumudi*, G. Aravindan portrays the life of Ramu a representative of the disillusioned youth of Kerala in 1970s and 80s. While Ramu leads a frustrated life of an idealist the background changes significantly. Another character named Mammad who runs a makeshift shop gradually grows into a business man who deals smuggled electronic gadgets. See bibliographic entry Aravindan, G.
10. Thikkurissi tried to establish his stardom very ostentatiously. “Waiting for the right opportunity to launch himself as a superstar Thikkurissi got such a chance in 1982. A group of film lovers and certain film organisation got together to organise a function in honour of veteran film stars. The venue was the Town Hall in Ernakulam. The venue was packed much before time. All the big names in cinema and literature were there. The meeting started. Thikkurissi, who was a special invitee, was a notable absentee. The organisers were a bit disappointed. A few minutes into the meeting Thikkurissi made his appearance. He was dressed in a dark blue T-shirt and black pants. On his T-shirt embroidered in silver were the words Super Star Thikkurissi with a prominent star on the back of the T-shirt. He had also dyed his hair and moustache black. It was certain what Thikkurissi was up to, he

saw to it that he would be noticed. To reinforce this he walked up to the dais and wished each one seated there before sitting next to Kottarakara Sreedharan Nair”(Chelangad)

11. *VadakkanPaatukal(Songs from the North)* is a collection of folk songs in the form of ballads about heroes and heroines of the north of Kerala. These legends believed to exist in the medieval period. Prominent characters are *ThacholiOthenan*, *AromalChevakar*, *Unniyarcha*, *Poomathi Ponnamma*, *Thacholi Ambu*, and so on. There is a temple named *LokanarKavu* at Vatakara in Kozhikode district that *Othenan* used to visit.
12. See the film clip in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Htv-fTyUh7Q>
13. There are persons who imitate Jayan even in real life. The news of a tea vendor in the guise of Jayan appeared in 2022. See ജയന്റെ വേഷത്തിൽ ചായവിൽപ്പനക്കിറങ്ങുന്ന അച്ഛന്റെ കഥ | Actor Jayan | Tea seller. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyXWLkkukN0>. 07-Apr-2023.
14. Mohan Lal himself revealed his love of Osho and his principles in interviews. See “I Don't Care. I Don't Fear” – Actor Mohanlal on OSHO– The Way,The Life.mp4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTitpFmnUr4>. 24 Jan. 2013.
KalamandalamKunhikuttan

Chapter V

Popular Media Aesthetics and Cultural Shifts in the Wake of Globalisation in Kerala

The last decade of the twentieth century is marked by Globalisation and its cultural impact. The new market oriented consumer culture of a new world of economic liberalisation altered the aesthetic disposition of culture. Popular media like cinema and television played a significant role in bringing about these changes. These popular media also underwent huge changes in their formats and preferences of content and presentations. New media aesthetics emerged from these changes. This led to the evolution of a new floating cultural self unbound by tradition.

Liberalisation of the economy was started officially by the Central Government of India in 1991 by shifting to the policy of market domination and privatisation. It made structural adjustments like selling public sector units to private firms, allowing foreign direct investments in many sectors, entering GATT agreement with WTO and lowering taxes to bring in more corporate investment to overcome the financial crisis. The middle class came up as the strongest contestant in the ensuing consumer market and shedding its traditional values, established itself at the top of the power spectrum. In the years following the liberalisation, a new sort of enthusiasm filled the middle class of India for attaining quality living standards. According to Asish Nandi:

This veto exercised by the public sensibilities of a minority has ensured the Indian middle class a disproportionate access to state power during the last twenty years and has pushed the culture of Indian politics in directions that

would have been unthinkable earlier. The class now gives a sustainable base to the emerging mass culture of politics in the country and, to do so, has redrawn the map of the popular culture mainly created by the class itself in the pre-war years.(4)

This is much more open and forceful in the context of liberalisation.

According to Leela Fernandes, "In public discourses, practice of consumption and depictions of associated lifestyle changes distinguish the new Indian middleclass from the older traditional middle class that was held back by the cultural strictures of consumption inherent in Nehruvian state socialism and Gandhian ideals of austerity" (30). By the second half of the 90s, the number of middle-class households including aspirants in India was estimated to be around 125 million according to the NCAER survey 1994-95 (Fernandes 75). The emphatic presence of the new middle class and their strong desire for consumption, brought forth a new idea of modernity into the cultural space.

As a potential consuming class, the new educated middle class became the deciding factor in policy decisions by the end of the century. Consequently, the taste of the cultural context fell in line with the choice and sensibilities of the middle-class. Shields and Muppidi observe, "The emphasis on privatization has been intertwined with a commitment to 'high-tech leap frogging' as a route to economic development. The Rajiv Gandhi government prioritized such sectors as telecommunications and computer software development, for example. This policy thrust benefited certain segments of business community and the middle classes" (Shields 9, 10). Though the middle-class in the pre-liberalisation period had the same advantage, in the post-liberalisation era, the concept of culture assumed by the

middle-class took a departure from the ethical concerns of traditional morality and showed a devotional affiliation to the heritage as nostalgia.

The core principle of this new modernity was a new aesthetic that celebrated leisure and pleasure as the primary goal of life.

The experience of manifold change due to economic liberalisation is often expressed in dichotomies of giant leaps from tradition to modernity, from old to new, as if, in principle, it was not possible for the one to accommodate the other; but India is one of the few exceptions where the impossible worked. Change is also placed on a teleological axis, narrating and associating India's development with self-empowerment and freedom. The ultimate source of freedom, for many, is that of individual choice, leisure and pleasure of consumption; the ultimate fear, simultaneously, that of a loss of heritage.(Brosius, *India's Middle Class* 4)

Advancements in communication technologies played a crucial role in transforming the values of tradition into an experience of nostalgia. Through visual media tradition has been museumised into a fascinating consumable artifact. Liberalization of the communication sector allowed private investments and improved access to the latest technology. Due to this, visual communication underwent a decisive transformation and as a result, new ways of manipulating the perception of visual information were developed. The entry of satellite television opened up a new world of visibility. By the end of the decade, cinema and television turned out to be the deciding factors in the aesthetic choices of the middle-class. The new programme environment was designed according to their taste (Shields 18). In

this way, they created a visual universe where the cultural texts are decided and disseminated. Appadurai writes:

The importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels. One of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and video technology (and the ways in which they frame and energize other, older media), has to do with the role of the imagination in social life. (*Modernity at Large* 53)

Visual communication technology could make visuals more fascinating by masking the boundaries of reality and fantasy. Thus, visual media gets an upper hand in mediating cultural expressions. The categorical presence of television in the domestic space compelled a change in perception of reality as it functioned as a channel for consumer objects to alter lifestyle choices. Assimilation of commodities into everyday life became a status statement. They are caught up invariably in the global flow of capital. The spatial metaphors used by Appadurai explain the significance of media in shaping the ideology of the Global flow of capital. Pointing to the strong connection between the mediascape and ideoscape, he writes:

I propose that an elementary framework for exploring such disjunctures is to look at the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows that can be termed (a) ethnoscares, (b) mediascares, (c) technoscares, (d) finanscares, and (e) ideoscares. The suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes, shapes that characterize international capital as deeply as they do international clothing styles. These

terms with the common suffix -scape also indicate that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision but, rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as subnational groupings and movements (whether religious, political, or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods, and families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part from their own sense of what these landscapes offer. (*Modernity at Large* 33)

The mediascape and ideoscape are closely connected. "Mediascapes, whether produced by private or state interests, tend to be image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality, and what they offer to those who experience and transform them is a series of elements (such as characters, plots, and textual forms) out of which scripts can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others living in other places" (*Modernity at Large* 35). By the time of globalisation in India, visual media began to dominate the space of mass media. It could provide strong visual links to generate imagination in the social realm. The certain and anchored forms of previous social life is questioned by fantasies projected through media.

Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of possible lives, and that fantasy and imagination were residual practices,

confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places. In general, imagination and fantasy were antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the past two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on the new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice,— it enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies.

(Appadurai, *Modernity* 53, 54)

When new forms of visual representations originated from this, they were filled paradoxically with hopeful futures and nostalgic pasts. Many socio-cultural factors played their role in moulding a suitable atmosphere for such forms to develop, exist and get accepted. Development in communication technology, the rise of a new middle-class, growth of visual media and consumer culture were some of them. This collective aspiration enabled the middle-class consciousness that was rising from the change in economic structure to violate established norms of consumption. In this way, the new Indian middle class distinguished itself from their tradition. These factors were not functioning in isolation, but as a complex system that made it challenging in all aspects. New consumer goods began to flood the Indian market, redefining the taste of Indian consumers.

1. Globalisation and Cultural Change in Kerala

At the beginning of the 1990s, Kerala was ruled by the Left Democratic Front that opposed the policy changes towards a market economy by the central government. At the same time, the right front in the state welcomed the new policies

and there were many intellectual and political debates regarding globalisation. However, Kerala also experienced the impact of these changes on every walk of life. Though the economy registered growth in the first half of the decade, it showed a downward tendency in the second half. There was an increase in the return of migrants from the gulf countries due to various reasons including the gulf war in which Kuwait was invaded by Iraq. As a result, there was an unprecedented fall in the economic situation and by the end of the decade, the unemployment rate rose sharply.

During the 1990s, the state's economy registered moderate growth during the first half as compared to the second half of the decade. The major factors which influenced the economy during the first half of the 1990s were the implementation of the new economic policy reforms of the central government since 1991, the spurt in migration to the Gulf countries and the consequent increase in the inflow of remittances, a steady increase in the price of most agricultural products and an increase in exports. But the state's economy experienced a severe recession during the second half of the 1990s. The major factors contributing to the recession were the large-scale return of emigrants from the Gulf countries, a decline in the price of agricultural commodities, an unprecedented fiscal crisis of the state government, infrastructural backwardness and shortages, a low rate of investment and outflows of capital, industries, entrepreneurs and professional students to other states. Though the economy registered moderate growth during the first half of the 1990s, the severe recession during the second half reversed these gains. By the beginning of the new millennium, Kerala remained a backward

economy with underdeveloped productive sectors, low levels of technology, inadequate infrastructure, a slow pace of structural transformation and a high incidence of poverty and unemployment. (Prakash 15)

By 1999, the total number of job seekers registered in employment exchange was 20.77 lakhs women and 17.14 lakhs men (*Kerala State Economic Review*, 1999). The rural unemployment rate went up to 21.7 and that of the urban rose to 19.1 in 1999-2000 (Prakash 54). Though every economic index showed a negative trend in the state, Kerala always showed an exceptional Human Development Index¹. The creation of this paradoxical situation is attributed to various factors like the high literacy rate among women, the reformation movements in the 19th century and remittance by migrants. A strong service sector in the state formed a strong middle class who enjoyed a lifestyle fashioned from English education and exposure to consumer goods from the west channeled through Gulf migrants. To a certain extent, with a wide acceptance of the Kerala Model, the state enjoyed an insulated existence that could create exotic discourses regarding Kerala. Since this was the ultimate model of social progress, without searching for alternatives and resisting changes, the social space of Kerala has become stagnant.

Return migration from the Gulf countries due to the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in 1990 proved that foreign remittance is no longer a dependable income source. Many traditional slogans of the Left that pictures the USSR as a heaven of plenty came under criticism. The left raised the argument of the hidden agenda of American imperialism to counter these discourses and developed a critique of the liberalisation policies of the central government. But new criticisms continued to emerge not only from the right-wing political parties but from the left-wing

intellectuals too. By the second half of the 1990s, as the financial situation worsened the criticism also increased. There was a rethinking of the Kerala model. Various political parties and academicians expressed their concerns over the existing model of development. VK Ramachadran writes:

People at large and political parties of the left perceive the problems of unemployment and production as the major economic problems of the immediate future; this concern also found repeated expression in the proceedings of the International Congress on Kerala Studies in August 1994. The persistence of the crisis is understood as being a threat to the polity and society, and the question has also been raised, by persons in politics, journalists, scholars, and others, whether the development achievements of Kerala's people can be sustained if the employment and production situations are not transformed. (Ramachandran, *On Kerala's Development* 212)

When United Democratic Front with its pro-liberalisation perspective came to power in 1996, it increased the speed of implementation of liberalization policies. This change increased the speed of transformation of Kerala into a consumer market.

From this perspective, the last decade of the twentieth century can be roughly divided into two phases: the first half of the decade as a decade of doubt and resistance and the second half as the period of realisation and acceptance. A parallel division can be done in understanding the influence of visual media too. In the case of television, widespread penetration of television occurred in the second half of the decade and in the case of films the second half of the decade registered a sharp decrease in the number of theatres. Such transformations have significant cultural underpinnings.

2. Cinema, Television, and the New Visual Order

In the second half of the 1990s, the rate of growth of the number of television households showed phenomenal increase in India. A jump from 49million to 65 million from 1995 to 1999 shows a significant change in the preference of media (Page and Crawley 91). This shift towards visual media has a significant role in transforming Kerala into a fantasy market in the context of globalisation and economic reforms. They together created a new sensibility justifying the cultural choices, attitudes and expressions influenced by consumerist principles of liberalisation of the economy. With their capacity to create an alternative reality, they could offer a new modern lifestyle with refined choices. Both cinema and television were mutually dependent and enriching. They also promoted new formats of aesthetic expressions that incorporated technology to provide novel experiences. When the import taxation on consumer goods got reduced, new light and sound shows, and new stage performances like *Mimics Parades*² evolved to replace traditional ones. New forms of entertainment and leisure like amusement parks (The first amusement park named *Fantasy Park* came up in 1996 in Malampuzha, Kerala) began to appear in the cultural spectrum.

New formats like *Mimics Parade* tried to create a cinematic effect on the stage developed with the help of advanced sound and visual technology. Such shows sometimes added new dimensions to films by comic imitations of some of the scenes. In such contexts, cinema lost its normal form that can convey a solid experience. For example, mimicry artists used serious scenes to create comic effect. For a viewer who watches the film after watching the comic rendering on television screen, the experience will be a blend of the cinema and its comic imitation. It can

be said that watching films on television in a cultural context that blends many visual media texts together will be a new form of entertainment. The visual texts of cinema and television in this period introduced new formats that led to the formation of new media aesthetics.

The visual texts produced by television and cinema were expressive of the shift in the aesthetic preference. They helped in forming a floating culturalself which facilitated the explosive paradigm shifts that happened in the age of digital mobile communication and social media. These later developments do not come under the purview of the present study. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue that the foundation for such transformations was laid by the visual shift in aesthetics and the emergence of a floating cultural- self brought in by the media during the initial period of globalisation in Kerala. The various ways in which cinema and television expressed this phenomenon will be discussed in this chapter.

3. Television as a Social Marker: The First Half of the Decade

Until 1995, the Indian telegraph act restricted the broadcast of Satellite Television to Indian Satellites. The entry of satellite television changed the scenario. “As late as 1991 – and in legal terms, until as late as 1995 – Indian viewers could only watch one television channel, Doordarshan. Between 1995 and 2007, however, India experienced the rise of more than 300 satellite networks” (Mehta, *Introduction* 6). From this, it is evident how in the second half of the decade, with a change in policy, invasion of satellite television changed the narrative by bringing in a whole new “imaginary (imaginarie) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations of Emilie Durkheim, now mediated through the complex prism of modern media” (Appadurai, *Modernity* 31).

In the early 90s, cable television was a luxury. Only the rich could afford a television with a terrestrial service and cable connection, because its availability was limited to cities. The advent of cable TV and transnational television channels did not create much influence on the *culture-scape* of Kerala in the first half of the decade after liberalisation. As with other technological modernisation attempts in Kerala, like computerisation and mechanisation of agriculture; the satellite television evolved and expanded at a very slow pace. Indian scenario showed a rapid growth rate of television households from 27.8% in 1990 to 75.5 percentage in 1999 and in the case of satellite television, the growth was from 0.41% in 1990 to 29% in 1999 (Desai *Indian Television* 57, 58). But the picture of Kerala was not that bright. According to the 1991 census, electrified houses were only 50.4 % (123). The report does not include television as a household amenity. This is an indication that the television-owning households in Kerala at the beginning of the decade were only nominal and limited to the rich urban spaces. In Kerala, the urban /rural divide is problematic but amenities like cable television were available only in the cities at the beginning of the decade. The state was facing an acute power shortage above the urban/rural divide and a lot of small-scale industries producing voltage-raising devices (step-up transformers) and voltage stabilizers were emerging everywhere. Even after ten years, the television penetration in Kerala was only 38.8% and the supply of electricity to houses was 70.2% as per the census report of 2001(48). Moreover, television, like many other technologies was vehemently opposed by left-wing intellectuals. Periodicals continuously published articles criticizing the 'negative influence of television' (Benjamin, *Television and Material Culture* 2,3). In

this social scenario, television existed simultaneously as a social marker of evil modernity and an object of desire for the majority.

The presence of a terrestrial television with an aerial on the rooftop was considered to be a key status symbol as it is a marker of modernity and a sign of acceptance of foreign culture. From the perspective of those who suspicious of cultural pollution through television, the owner's position is also that of a victim of foreign culture. Studying satellite television as a cultural symbol in the UK neighbourhoods, Shaun Moores writes:

Few household technologies are visible from the street- they are usually hidden out of sight behind closed doors and drawn curtains- but satellite TV dish aerial is an extremely public symbol of possession. Displayed on exterior walls or rooftops, dishes openly announce the technology's arrival. They give aesthetics a fair indication of the types of sounds and images that are being consumed in private. We could pursue the comparison with automobiles a little further new because just as the car parked at the front of the home says something about the lifestyle of the driver, so the satellite ariel is a sign to be read by neighbours and passersby. How it is valued will depend, of course, on the person making the judgment and the geographical area in which it is sighted. For onlookers, the dish can either be a focus of disgust or a matter of indifference. Similarly, for owners, it may be a source of pride or else a cause of embarrassment. The task is to match those various decoding and dispositions to social patterns of taste in contemporary culture.

(624)

In the context of Kerala, the terrestrial antenna and the dish antenna, apart from financial statements they made, represented two types of cultural preference. The house with a terrestrial antenna represents a cultural taste, that oscillates between traditional and modern value system. On the other hand, a culture that embraces the technology of dish antenna, points to the wholehearted acceptance of the modern/Western value system without any moral compunction for the loss of traditional values.

The Left-wing political parties in Kerala, confused by the unexpected dissolution of the USSR and liberalization of the economy, viewed all these sudden changes as projects of American imperialism and regarded television as an agent of the same. People owning a television in Kerala at that time, were, therefore, labelled as either being the supporters or the victims of the imperialist project. For the Right-wing political section, the television was a symbol of change from a closed cultural space to an open one, parallel to the change in the economy. However, both the Left and Right were equally concerned about the scarcity of active workers, who, they feared, would start investing more time in television programmes. The impact that the advent of television would have on the traditional values was another major concern for them.

Despite these political concerns, new visual aesthetics started gradually evolving. Though the programmes on National television had not been westernised and transnational television was available only to a few, the advertisements of new lifestyle commodities were common to both these platforms. In the case of transnational television like MTV, the difference between advertisements and programmes was minimal. In the paper titled *Television Advertising and Indian*

Poor published in 1989, J Vilanilam provides a list of consumer goods, namely, food, health, and beauty products, dominating the advertisement on Indian television (494, 95). He writes that the, "media users (most of whom are urbanites) get the impression that everything will be fine provided the ruling elite introduces modern gadgets and labour-saving devices and that, within a few more years, the country will catch up with the west. They are carried far away from the revolutionary core of modern India's constitution-the establishment of a secular, democratic and socialist republic"(487). So, the new fascinating language of television commercials provided a new tantalizing model of high-life style that is instantaneous in gratification, glamorous, bigger and better. It was transforming the culture within, from work-ethics to fun-ethics (Desai, *Television and Cultural Crisis* 30).

In this phase, television was transforming the cultural pattern of Kerala by producing visual content only for a certain influential group called the middle-class, that functioned as a model for the rest of the population. The government anticipated transnational channels targeting Indian viewers and the national channel *Doordarshan* was equipped with programmes of educational and cultural values to counter this attack(Desai, *Indian Television* 61). But *Doordarshan* could not keep away from the market economy and income generation through advertisements. It responded to the situation by increasing the number of channels according to the trend "Responding to the competition, state-owned Doordarshan supplemented its regional-language channels and national network with five new satellite channels (Entertainment, Music, Business and Current Affairs, Enrichment) which provided similar programming to STAR TV" (Shields 2).

Visual advertisements could easily manipulate the desires of the new middle class, who came to occupy the central position of the culture industry as potential consumers and thereby the most powerful agents in deciding the taste. Through the liberalization of the economy, the middle class has been equipped with more purchasing power over consumer goods (Palackal 573). Multinational companies used the forceful visual language of television to inject this class with more desires oriented towards the market. As new consumer goods flooded the market, the steady-income groups were supported by hire-purchase schemes by financial companies that were also advertised on television. Television remained the central factor through which the consumer market is created, experienced, and executed.

Official acceptance of television as a class marker can be found in the divisions like television households and non-television households. Narratives of modernity created by the TV-owning class would influence other classes because that was a symbol of having a modern life. Entry of the neighbourhood into the domestic space of TV-owning class (elite middle-class) to watch television would make the interior of a middle-class household a museum of modernity with its new consumer goods adding to the imagination of others. Here, the mere presence of television itself is the stimulant in initiating cultural trends. Aravind Rajagopal writes about this experience:

Television, as a communicating thing, signifies important aspects of modernity – a new mode of communication, and a certain kind of thingness, a desirable commodity pointing to other desirable commodities. I can remember when we first bought a refrigerator, on a bank loan my father obtained for the purpose. I was nineteen, but I knew I could have been five,

as I stroked its shining white surface and put my arms around it. I joked to my brother that we should put it on a revolving table in the hall, so that every guest could admire it. Its function played little part in this celebration. To an unbiased spectator, its physical beauty too could not have been great, as a large, unbudgeable white cuboid of metal. It was something else, something hard to express, pointing to things and worlds beyond us, things we desired as well, that this thing reassured us we might after all attain. Indeed it was not so much the having of the thing as the state of being thereby reached, or being reached out to. (*Politics after Television* 123)

Thus, television carried out the function of legitimising itself by creating a public familiar with the new visual language of consumerism.

National television tried to develop a counter-narrative of tradition and culture by broadcasting educational and cultural programmes. Thus, television in this period also functioned as a homogenising agency that introduced a form of national culture to Kerala and incorporated the Malayali into a pan-Indian context. The basic essence of these programmes was to introduce an Indian version of modernity that could blend traditional values with a modern lifestyle. In a study on *Mediating the Temporal and Consumerist Practices in Preliberalised Kerala*, Benitta Acca Benjamin writes:

By telecasting programmes like Krishidarshan, Yuvadashan, Arogyavedi etc., television tried to mould the ideal citizen who would aid India's modernisation. While these programmes were meant to introduce the viewers to more efficient methods to manage various resources and to create a common platform where the social and scientific developments of the

country will be appreciated, they discreetly initiated new understandings about managing time. These programmes that were telecast during the evening in Malayalam *Doordarshan* tried to restructure social roles and leisurely pursuits so that time would be utilized more purposively by strategically obliterating the boundaries between personal time and socially beneficial labour. To this end, a specific orientation towards time and its disciplined utilization were cultivated among the viewers. (3)

The new way of life that ensued henceforth was characterised by a uniform national lifestyle that embraced modernity without sacrificing traditional cultural values. A new version of Indianness with a modern attitude was encouraged through programmes on hygiene, family planning etc. Programmes on scientific farming tried to bring modernity to the Indian context while at the same time accepting the traditional Gandhian India that depends on farmers. These programmes imagined modernisation across India without considering the regional disparities and spatio-temporal differences. (Benjamin 2)

Apart from the temporal mediation pointed out by Benjamin, there was a cultural mediation too. The idea of becoming modern in a unique Indian sense was the core of the cultural education provided by national television. This project of national television was subverted by satellite television in the following years. Page and Crawley observe:

By the 1990s, however, the Indian middle class, in particular, had become a massive market, both for consumer goods and for alternative media services. South Asian governments were locked in a centralizing mindset, which apparently prevented them from responding creatively to these new

challenges. But they were about to face a challenge from the skies, which would threaten the mindset, the monopoly and the projection of national culture which went with them (68).

4. Television and the Culture of Consumption: The Second Half of the Decade

In 1996, The National Council for Applied Economic Research came out with new facts about the buying potential of Indian consumers. A consuming class with an income below the actual middle-class existed within 30 million households with 150 million members. Below them, another 275 million surplus customers that could support the market also existed in India (Page 111). This fact was a moral boost to Multinational Corporations to focus on the Indian market. Kerala with its already established consumer behaviour gained special focus. The liberalisation of the exchange rate increased foreign remittance to Kerala. Though one can find a gradual increase from 1991 onwards, a sudden jump from Rs. 4028.92 crore to 6410.34 crore was experienced in the second half of the decade- 1994-95. It was 22.34 % of the total income of the state (28697 crore). For the first time foreign remittance crossed 20 % of the total state income (Kannan and Hari 14). This increase in foreign remittance was not invested sustainably but used for building huge houses and procuring consumer items. Kanan and Hari comments on the macroeconomic impact of the gulf migration from Kerala thus:

The significance of remittances is not merely in absolute magnitudes. By mid-nineties, its relative magnitudes have assumed a crucial place in the Kerala economy. By this time the size of remittances reached more than 22 per cent of the NSDP, 113 per cent of the government expenditure, 208 per cent of value added in manufacturing and 110 per cent of the value added in

industry. By the end of the nineties, remittances reached a level well above the last three variables. Value added in manufacturing was only less than half of the remittances. (8)

Despite the criticism raised against the Kerala model in the 90s, Kerala developed as a consumer economy in all senses. Television with its increased presence played a significant role in shaping this consumer mindset.

When talking to people about television, these questions appeared scrambled: it was sometimes as a real function, as a window on modernity, offering lessons on how to eat, sit, walk, and dress without betraying one's origins, to aspiring members of the middle classes. It often worked as a machine dispensing private space, offering a refuge from the distractions of family and the neighbourhood. In crowded urban locales, the blessings of such a function overrode the limitations of any particular program offering. Television could be used by parents to lure children indoors and control their errant movements; the same force could be used to challenge authority, not only by children, but also by women in the home. (Rajagopal, *Politics after Television* 124)

The spread of satellite television in Kerala in the second half of the 1990s severed the roots of traditional cultural values and took it to a kind of floating ephemerality. By the mid-90s, India was going through a communication revolution in technological front and in policy matters. In this period, it launched four functioning communication Satellites (INSAT). The *Air Wave Judgment* of the Supreme Court of India in 1993 removed the restrictions in policy and made the sky open to private channels and The Cable Regulation Act of 1995 recognised the

unorganised sector of cable operators in the country. In Kerala, the first private satellite channel in Malayalam- Asianet, came into existence in 1993 and by the second half of the 90s established a strong presence with new programme formats and its cable networks in cities. Its agreement with KSEB to use electricity poles for the next ten years for cable connections was a revolutionary arrangement that facilitated the establishment of the widest private television cable network in the state. In the same year, SUN TV joined the group of regional language private channels from south India. The legislation that allowed up-linking from Indian soil came out in 1998, which benefited the growth of channels in south India. In 2000, Kairali TV controlled by the political party CPIM came out to compete with the growing channel-market of Kerala. There was a sudden increase in the number of TV households in India- from 49 million in 1995 to 80 million in 2000 (Page and Crawley 91). Domestic consumption of colour television in India grew 43% in 1994-95 and by 1997, the television penetration in the state was 54 % and cable TV penetration was 24 % (Fernandes 78; Page and Crawley 103).

A trend started in the mid 90s in Kerala to have a personal satellite dish antenna, designed to receive T.V signals from satellites. Resident associations also used dish antennas to downlink signals from foreign satellites. It is impossible, therefore, to say that people without cable connections had no access to any transnational channels and only a limited number with disposable income could afford it. The cable penetration in Kerala in this period was comparatively less when compared to Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Only 32 percent of the rural and urban population could receive cable at home (Page 92). The reason for the lesser penetration of cable television in Kerala compared to the other states was not

because of financial limitations. The spatial deployment of households in Kerala is different from other parts of India. Since there is considerable distance between houses, cable operators needed comparatively more investment. In this first phase, cable connection to domestic space was limited to housing colonies and cities. Since the houses were placed adjacently, it was easy for the cable operators to provide connections with comparatively less investment.

When these local cable networks brought regional and transnational channels, people started preferring them over Doordarshan. This situation compelled Doordarshan to change its attitude to the programmes. It was forced to open up a space for more commercials and international programmes as a part of the competition. The statistics show that high-income groups prefer satellite channels over Doordarshan but a mass with an income below Rs 6000/- per month still preferred Doordarshan as their first choice (Page and Crawley 127). But the pressure of the market and falling commercial revenue forced Doordarshan to change its marketing strategies.

In this strategy, DD1 was to be the main public service broadcasting channel, leaving DD2 (Metro) to be market-driven, earning revenues from commercially more popular programmes. But advertisers were not entirely convinced by this strategy. Most of them still preferred DD1 because of its extensive reach, although DD2 had been extended to cover nearly fifty towns and further audience of 30 million through cable networks. In 1997-98, DD2 earned Rs. 12.3 million and DD1 Rs. 34.5 million. A further 17.3 million came from DD's regional stations, most of it from the five in the South. The regional stations accounted for 38 per cent of *Doordarshan's* revenues

in 1995-96, falling to 31 per cent in 1996-97 and 27 per cent in 1997-98.

(Page and Crawley 129)

The rate of change in the advertising revenues shows how the regional channels gradually lost their hold on the audience to the private regional channels while the National channel still maintained its audience.

Analysing these factors in a cultural context, some assumptions can be made about the changing attitudes of the viewers. The national channel of Doordarshan was a Hindi channel and it could maintain its Hindi audience in the northern part of India (Shields 15-17). But the regional channels could not maintain their audience in the wake of private broadcasters, especially in South India where Hindi is not a preferred language. Naturally, the preference changed in favour of private regional channels and transnational channels because its graphic quality was superior to that of Doordarshan.

The first Malayalam private channel, Asianet was different from Doordarshan for the emphasis it gave on news programmes and talk shows in tune with foreign satellite channels, capitalising on the regional interest in the news programmes. *Kannadi* (1993–2016), *Nammal Thammil* (1994–2015), and *Ente Keralam* (1993–2001) were very popular. The channel was also famous for comedy programmes that included political criticism like *Comic Cola* (1993–2000) and *Cinemala* (1993–2013)³. The programme *Nammal Thammil* was a talk show with audience participation hosted by N Sreekandan Nair in which experts share their opinions and observations on any current topic of public interest in front of a group of audience, who are also invited to take part in the discussion. The presence of Asianet in Kerala had a 'cloning effect' on DD Malayalam as it sought

technical sophistication and professional improvement within state control.

Broadcaster Kiran Karnik predicted that the 'cloning effect' on Doordarshan will also affect the viewership of domestic channels (Page and Crawley 145).

In keeping with the sense of individualism, many satellite channels have created a new environment in which audiences feel more empowered than before. They discarded *Doordarshan's* serious discussion programmes with politicians and intellectuals. Instead, they brought the viewers into the studios and used them to call politicians and intellectuals to account. The vogue for seriousness was replaced by showmanship. But with it came a greater sense of public participation, as evidenced in the huge popularity of musical talent shows like *Anthakshari* or political debates with studio participation like *Aap Ki Adalat*, both on Zee TV. (143)

Imitating this trend, Doordarshan also started telecasting programmes that recognise individual talents like *Meri Aavaaz Suno* (1996). This, being the first music reality show in the Indian television industry, became an instant success.

The private regional channels were modeled on transnational channels rather than on Doordarshan. In the first half of the decade, television as a consumer product was a status symbol and an object of desire. Similarly, in the second half or in the second phase of television penetration, a connection to satellite channels became a status symbol and an object of desire. The social imagination, thus, began to form around programmes on satellite television which offered high sophistication and professionalism when compared to Doordarshan.

The television with its newly acquired transnational styling presented a homogenised cosmopolitan culture to the domestic audience. The refined

international modernity against the unrefined local culture was presented with visual authenticity in the domestic space. The mere presence of television reminded of this fascinating world of freedom and opportunities. Consumerism as a cultural principle aims at individual pleasure rather than the happiness of the community.

5. Audience as Consumer: Creating a New Identity

There is a certain parallel between the programme formats used by transnational channels and the format of television advertisements. The similarity in format comes from their identification of the viewer as a potential consumer since the viewership rating will be reflected in advertisement revenue. So, watching satellite channels provided a similar experience to watching advertisements. In other words, the modernity offered by the model space in a satellite television programme was similar to the pleasing space inside advertisements on the national channel. The actual presence of satellite television or the new fascinating modernity, hence, was not limited to the 24% of homes where cable television was available. Middle-class aspirations for upward mobility got new vistas of imagination unlike in the previous cultural pattern, where it resonated with the lifestyle of the elite class in the society.

If earlier the middle class was held hostage by the aesthetic preferences of the elite, today it is nonchalantly lowbrow, does not aspire to be classical, and has evolved in response to needs, not structured concepts. To the despair of purists, it has displayed an extraordinary ability to be hybrid, often at the lowest common denominator of conventional cultural aesthetics. The cultural expressions of this new middle class-ness—moulded by attitude, aspiration, exposure and need—have evolved in a haphazard yet spontaneous manner, showing an exhilarating lack of inhibition and an enviable capacity for

improvisation. They have given common symbols and icons to Indians even in the remotest part of the country and permeated all aspects of everyday life: dress, food, art, language and entertainment. What it lacks in the pedigree is more than made up for by the confidence stemming from the realization that more people from the same background are now bound in a common language of cultural communication in more areas of everyday life than ever before. (Varma 9)

The success of the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* (1993) in Kerala reveals how deep the influence television advertisements have in moulding the cultural taste of Kerala. The film registered an unprecedented success in the history of Hollywood movies in Kerala. It can even be considered as the first Hollywood film that has been advertised in the regional language channels. Television functioned as a platform that connected the domestic space of Kerala to the Hollywood. The gap between the foreign and domestic release of the film was used to create great anticipation among the public through TV advertisements. These advertisements had a visual language like that of MTV, which talk to the audience by hiding or distorting information. It showed the fearful expression of a girl and a glass of water shaken out of vibration from the ground. It revealed nothing but increased the anticipation. The film was a box office success in Kerala and was dubbed to screen in C-class theatres, even in remote rural areas. Nandini Ramnath writes in *Mint*—an online news paper, "The mega-budget, computer-generated marvel came to India 10 months after its original release date—unthinkable today—but there was an excellent reason for the delay. *Jurassic Park* was the first Hollywood film to be dubbed in Hindi, Tamil and Telugu, a feat that contributed in no small measure to its

remarkable 25-week run and ₹ 19 crore box office takings". After the success of this movie which was eventually screened even in the C class theatres in rural areas, many Hollywood movies like *Titanic* (1997) had a similar rate of success and popularity. For the first time in Kerala, a cinema had become a cultural symbol. The title and dinosaurs started appearing on a lot of consumer goods like locally made toys, shoes, umbrellas, and T-shirts and in stage shows and public places like parks and beaches. The symbol of dinosaur, as a sign from a primal global visual language, was present everywhere in Kerala .

In the year 1994, the *Miss Universe* beauty pageant was held in Bangalore, India. Such beauty contests also created cultural shock in the Indians. In the northern part of India, the pageant was opposed by right-wing parties in the name of destroying Indian culture while in Kerala, it was opposed by Left-wing political parties and intellectuals for promoting objectification of women. But all the protest demonstrations turned out to have the effect of advertisements and the pageant was broadcast on Doordarshan successfully. In the following years, a lot of beauty pageants were held in different parts of Kerala without facing any protest from political or social organisations. New forms of cultural expressions that reject the traditional values were gradually taking over the cultural space of Kerala. Here, the role of television was important as it could carry these experiences forward to the domestic space. To a certain extent, this domestication of foreign culture through visuals led to a widespread acceptance and justification of such cultural transgressions. Television in this period functioned as a portal of cultural oblivion in transforming the citizen to a cosmopolitan consumer.

As discussed in the introduction, the formation of cosmopolitan attitude among the middle class of Kerala can be attributed to various factors like early exposure to foreign trade, English medium education, and large-scale migration to the middle-east. But there was no cultural context to transform that into consumer identity. The presence of satellite television boosted their morale to be more active and confident in cultural space. In a study on the new consumer culture and youth in Kerala, Ritty Lukose talks about how the Malayalam word '*chethu*' (which means chisel out something) comes to signify a new form of youth culture in the post-liberalisation period. She writes:

An important concept in understanding the association between youth, masculinity, and consumption is a youth slang word, *chethu*. While it can refer to the stylish nature of many commodities and in some sense can refer to the notion of "being fashionable" in general, it refers most significantly to a kind of commodified masculinity. If a male is dressed in a new pair of jeans and fancy sneakers, he is usually referred to as *chethu*, a word which literally refers to the traditional, low-caste occupation of toddy-tapping and the tapper's knife, and figuratively means "sharp", "cool", "hip", or "shine", referring to something like the "cutting-edge". A fancy car, a stylish house, or a new motorbike are all *chethu*. A store dedicated to selling fashionable clothes was named *Chethu*. A fashionable young man is *chethu*, but rarely is the term applied to women. If a woman dressed in a particularly fashionable way (especially if she were wearing a western-style skirt), she was said to have *gema*, a term which connotes arrogance-something between being a

"show-off" and being "stuck-up". A young man was rarely described as having *gema*. (925)

When films tended to such cultural deviations, televisions normalised them by bringing that into the domestic space of everyday life. Gradually, they go with the 'Flow' of television programming into acceptance. Television has, as Williams suggests, the capacity to create a flow where the audience views the television instead of a particular programme (*Television* 77-120). For example, the film *Sainyam* (1993), starring Mammooty, had a song that the traditional Malayali was surprised to hear. The lines “*Bagi Jeensum shusumaninju townil chethi nadakkaan, handrad si si baikkum athiloru pooja bhattum venam*” from *Sainyam* (the military) raised many eyebrows. These lines instantly became popular among the youth. It referred to all aspirations of the youth at that time in Kerala. They meant that what young men needed were a pair of cool baggyjeans, shoes and a 100 cc motorcycle with a glamorous girl like Hindi film star Pooja Bhat on it, and roam around the city⁴. The visuals of these songs expressed, in the steps of Bollywood-style dance sequences, the new liberal culture of the youth and their cosmopolitan consumer aspirations. The Hindi song “*Choli ke peeche kyahei*” (What is there under the blouse?) from the Hindi movie *Khal Nayak* (1993) also became popular in Kerala. The song raised protests for its open sensuality, but was gradually normalised and accepted into the cultural spectrum. Though the traditional Malayali was resistant towards such changes, television had a great role in legitimising this new world by continuously broadcasting such songs to make them a part of the everyday discourse of life. A similar discussion on the normalization of the expression “time-pass” can be found in Aravind Rajagopal:

With “time pass,” consumers hand over their money for the privilege of spending time, perhaps ranking the variety of ways in which they may do so in a hierarchy of consumption habits. But as the language itself suggests, “time-pass” is a refuge from and a measure of boredom, both a defence against vacancy and a proof and example of it. The term suggests both an expression of will and a resignation to circumstance, hesitating between enjoyment and drudgery. As such it may signal a truth about what follows in the wake of television. In audiences’ relatively eventless experience of duration, often devoid of personal social significance, I suggest, we can find expressions of an emergent and ambivalent consciousness about the new civic responsibility of processing time (while television itself permits, and symbolizes, its accumulation elsewhere). (*Politics After Television* 135)

An added openness and non-committed mindset towards ethical values and a heightened desire for leisure are the qualities reflected in this attitude.

6. Television and the New Aesthetics of Leisure

At the turn of the century, television technology mediated different socio-cultural factors that occurred in connection with globalisation into a new visual aesthetics in Kerala. The core principle of this new aesthetics was consumerist desires moulded into a fantastic occupation of everyday life by the visual authenticity of television. This came out mainly as novel expressions of choices in youth culture, acquisition of consumer goods into the households, and an open acceptance of new cultural forms like beauty pageants and mimics parades.

In the first half of the decade when the television penetration of Kerala was limited, it functioned primarily as an object that determines the status of the owner

and his family by declaring its presence through the antenna seen outside the house. It made a clear distinction between television households and non-television households to create a desire for owning television rather than watching television. New communities like owners and viewers were formed when the domestic space of the owners was occupied by viewers. When the middle-class who owned television purchased and displayed consumer objects in their house, that space turned out to be a futuristic museum for the visitors and directed their social imagination towards a new aesthetics of consumer heaven. Apart from the direct influence of the visuals from television, new narratives common in everyday transactions regarding what was seen on television (I saw it on TV), prompted new cultural choices. In the formative years, television made its considerable presence as an object rather than a media and it could instill a new language of visuality and grammar into the cultural space of Kerala.

In the second phase, more or less in the second half of the decade, the television became a visual space of new consumer culture. An increase in the penetration of satellite television and the presence of new regional private channels and around 54 per cent television (Page and Crowley 103) penetration as a whole increased the visibility of the new consumer culture. The cloning effect from the presence of satellite television changed the format of programmes of Doordarshan and the commercial value of programmes got an upper hand. In this process of commercialization, advertisements brought in a new visual language of refined modernity. The social imagination began to be processed in this new pattern which created an enthusiastic desire for a new aesthetic. Emphasis on individuality by this new visuality of consumerism dismantled the national public formed in the previous

years by the national television and replaced it with a homogenised cosmopolitan individual. Individuals existed in the privacy of domestic space. Unlike in a public space, they are free to exercise their choice without any moral obligation towards traditional values. In this liberal space, it was easy for the television to mediate choices by constantly projecting influential visual texts. Therefore, the new aesthetics of television could easily overcome the traditional obligations of the national/public good. It was aimed at providing instant gratification by imparting a sense of belongingness to a refined modernity. The cultural self became ephemeral in the sense that, severing its moral connections to the ethical roots of culture, it reestablished itself within the pattern of cosmopolitan experience. In this context the local and the traditional are museumised for their commercial and cosmetic values rather than for their ethical roots. Thus, the new television culture gave rise to an ephemeral floating cultural self that desires for an ultimate experience of leisure by offering its resistance to the cultural roots.

7. Malayalam Cinema in 1990s

In the context of TV visuals constantly present in the domestic space, cinema was forced to adjust according to the needs of the new consumers. Cinema no longer remained the dominant form of visual mass media. The themes usually handled by cinema were taken over by television in a much more effective manner. So, cinema had to find new avenues for existence and expression. When video libraries that offered pirated video cassettes for rent started flourishing, movies from across the world were available to watch at home. As a result, the audience from all classes came to possess ideas about movies with more advanced technology like CGI, especially Hollywood. Malayalam cinema had to struggle to move forward with its

limited resources and regional themes. As the availability of video players and video cassettes on rent increased, there was a decline in the number of theatre-going spectators.

By the middle of the decade, there were 1422 theatres in Kerala. By 2000, the number fell to 1323 and by 2009, it became a mere 670. There was a decrease in the number of films released in Malayalam as the average number came down to 78.6 between 1990 and 2000 from 104.7 between 1981- 1990 (Venkiteswaran, *Udalinte* 31,32). The age of cinema as a spectacle to be enjoyed in the shared space of theatre was coming to an end. Cinema had to cope up with the new habits of repeated viewing, replication, paused viewing, and viewing pieces of films on television. Traditional formulas were not welcomed by the viewers and the producers were forced to find new themes and patterns. The financial crisis of the state economy affected film production and the volatility of the market forced many producers to depend on themes and formats with minimal production costs. Even the presence of the superstars could not assure box office success since many films by them met failure at the box office. Another factor was the emergence of the second row of stars who could assure minimum success for their films. New genres like comedy films emerged with stock formulas and type characters. By the end of the decade, a new type of superstar-movies with anti-heroes also came up in the scenario.

According to GP Ramachandran, there is a structural change in Malayalam cinema in that, it started catering to the tastes of the modern society that was familiar with a variety of entertainment forms. The cinema is now experienced in almost the same way as other entertainment forms like fried chicken, beer, and gambling inside

a supermarket⁵ (*Cinemayum* 25). It is difficult to find analytical categories in such a chaotic blend in order to determine how the new aesthetic was built, catering to various kinds of viewership. Some insights of S.V Sreenivas in studying Telugu cinema of the 1980s are used here for categorical labelling. Apart from the categories mentioned by Sreenivas, an additional category under the title 'comic popular' is added to indicate a format that reflected the levity and fun with which life is treated in such films.

8. Categorisation of Malayalam Films of the 1990s

Culture is traditionally conceived as something related to tradition. The class-film is one such category that promotes this idea of culture with a predefined value system. Sreenivas writes:

The class-film, unlike the mass-film, is primarily concerned with propagating culture (which is not necessarily local but often a popular version of the classical). The class-film is an answer to the 'vulgarization' of culture in cinema. Addressing a 'national' middle class created by art cinema which is accessed largely via television (and to an extent by film festivals), the class-film sought to expand its viewership by incorporating elements of popular cinema, the most important one being the star. (120)

The middle class forms the main audience of the class-film as they are expressive of their value system, primarily that of the family. Sreenivas uses the analysis of the films of Chiranjeevi, a Telugu film star, to explain the qualities of mass film as a genre. It is antithetical to the class-film as it challenges the ideal class value system by introducing a rowdy citizen hero. It is based on direct communication between the star and his audience. Detailed introduction of the star,

song sequences, and the inclusion of what is often called the vulgar by the middle-class are studied in detail by Sreenivas concerning the mass film. A similar category with exceptions and variations can be found in Malayalam too.

The third category, 'the comic popular' is notable for the sheer playfulness in its content. Its levity and comic nullity please everyone beyond class demarcations as a comic form of entertainment. Such films are also called comic films by critics, but this label is not genre specific since there were comic films in which superstars acted. Here, the label 'comic popular' along with the 'class' and the 'mass' is used to indicate films that are comic in nature but do not belong to the existing star system. The label also suggests their popularity and wide viewership across class divisions. A comprehensive study of these three labels can help us reach some conclusions on the cultural pattern expressed in Malayalam cinema in the 1990s. This categorisation may also be viewed based on their response to the idea of tradition and how its content is executed. It is to be noted that within the limit of this section, all the films cannot be analysed. Therefore, only a few films can be included within the definition of the class-films and these films are analysed here to develop a paradigm for reference.

8.1. The Class-films of the 1990s

The class-films are not new to Malayalam cinema. They are also known as the family cinema because, as discussed in the previous chapter on cinema, there is an absence of violence and vulgarity which makes it appealing to a family audience. *His Highness Abdulla* by Sibi Malayil, *Innale* by Padmarajan, *Thoovalsparsham* by Kamal released in the 1990s can be considered as class-films that made commercial success. *His Highness Abdullah* was a film starring Mohanlal in which the hero was

a singer who is forced to perform the role of an assassin because of his circumstances. He falls into a familial relationship with the person whom he was supposed to kill and become the saviour of that person. The background of the film was that of a high caste elite family and its head resembles the nostalgic picture of a traditional ruler. Sequences of semi-classical music and dance give a classical aura to the entire film. The film *Innale* tells the story of a girl with retrograde amnesia. She falls in love with the doctor who helps her in the situation. The plot of *Thooval Sparsham* revolves around three unmarried youngsters who get a newborn abandoned baby. The emotional drama was a huge success among the family audience of Kerala.

In 1991, films like *Kilukkam* by Priyadarshan, *Sandesham* by Sreenivasan, in 1992 *Venkalam* by Bharathan, and in 1993 *Paithrukam* by Jayaraj, *Manichitrathazhu* by Fazil came out as commercially successful ventures. *Kilukkam* tells the story of a daughter in search of her father in the beautiful background of Ooty. The film has Mohanlal and Revathi in the lead roles. The film was loaded with colourful backlit scenes that provided a romantic feel to the entire film. *Sandesham* was a political satire that ridiculed the political parties in Kerala. It depicts two idle sons of a father fighting over their political ideologies. The film *Venkalam* tells the story of brass smiths and some superstitions regarding marriage. The film is shot with period lighting that provided an ancient feel to the background. The film *Paithrukam* (Heritage) by Jayaraj faced much criticism as a film that tried to bring back outdated belief systems. It is a product of the revivalist tendencies of the period that witnessed right-wing Hindu nationalism on the rise⁶. *Manichirathazhu*, a psychological thriller with a stellar cast of Mohanlal, Suresh Gopi, and Shobhana,

made a huge impact on the cultural expressions of Malayalis. Even after thirty years, the film is shown on television and its segments still appear in various formats in the artistic and cultural realms. Shobhana plays the role of a woman suffering from schizophrenia. The curing of the illness is done using a blend of modern psychology and occult rituals. Numerous interpretations and critical reviews were published on this film and Shobhana bagged the national award for the best actress for this film.

The film *Sallapam* (1996) by Sundardas, *Desatanam* (1996) by Jayaraj, *Aniyathipravu* (1997) by Fazil, *Chinthavishtayaaya Shyamala* (1998) by Sreenivasan, *Ennu Swantham Janakikkuttikku* (1998) by Hariharan can also be given the same label. *Sallapam* is a romantic triangular love story and *Aniyathipravu* is a teenage love story. *Chinthavishtayaaya Shyamala* tells the story of a lazy husband who finds spirituality as an easy way to escape the responsibilities of life, while his wife sheds off the traditional housewife position and starts a successful business venture. *Ennu Swantham Janakikkuttikku* depicts the fantasy of a teenager befriending a playful *yakshi* (a femme fatal) who fulfils her desires.

The concept of the family plays a pivotal role in all these films. In *His Highness Abdulla*, a person without a family eventually ends up being with another family where he finds the values of love, care, and warmth. *Innale* is about retrieving the memory of a family and almost the same thing is there in *Kilukkam*. Bharathan's *Venkalam* brings out the concept of family in a particular caste and how it is challenged in the space of modernity. The film *Paithrukam* talks about traditional values of family and the dangers of violating the norms of tradition. *Manichitrathazhu* has, as its background, a traditional family and its serenity is violated by a woman without familial bond. The order of the family is reestablished

when her imaginative past is erased from her memory. While *Sallapam* talks about the love hidden to protect family values, in *Aniyathipravu* the lovers consciously part and go back to their family. *Desatanam* is about losing a family member for the common good of *sanyasa*. Many of these films use scenes that represent traditional family values. Elaborate scenes of family gathering in which values of family are imparted to children were characteristic of most of these films. Melodramatic scenes of mother-child relationship, like a protective motherhood and a sacrificing father, and ideal love without sensuality, are emphasised. These films lack stunt scenes where the hero beats up several people and characters are presented in traditional dress. Semi-classical songs and dance fill the gaps in the narrative and often a song with the rhythm of a lullaby is included to intensify the viewer's involvement. These films are famous for their melodious songs and music too. The narrative is made sober by making the scenes appear ordinary or familiar in real-life circumstances.

8.1.1. The Concept of Family and Class-Films

The label of class-film suggests a connection to the middle-class value system and the format of such films are moulded in a way that is acceptable to the middle class. “The addressee of the class-film is undoubtedly the middle class. However, it is important to recognize that the class-film is a conservative cinema of dissent whose political statements are often inscribed in the critique of the mass-film” (Srinivas 118). The new middle-class in Kerala that rose to prominence with economic liberalisation in the 1990s was different from the old caste-based hierarchical notion of the middle-class. In the pre-liberalisation period, the middle-class was not just a label of economic class structure but it had a caste label too. The wealth acquired by them through heredity and their contiguity with the elite

provided power and social position. In the beginning of the twentieth century, a large part of the learned professionals in Malabar came from the Nair caste. For instance, according to the Statistical Atlas of Malabar, 1906, most of the teachers, advocates and clerks came from the Nair caste (Sreejith 22). But the new middle-class with an economic label, acquired through their white-collar jobs and migration, began to rise to prominence in the post-liberalisation period due to their buying power in the market economy. The visibility of this middleclass in public spaces displaying the newly acquired social position in various ways increased.

This class was not bound by traditional value system or the traditional concepts of family. Rising to sudden prominence, they imagined a system of values that may lead to the concepts of good and bad and eventually to a concept of superior taste. In a discussion regarding the development of middle-class aesthetics in the 18th-century England, Colin Campbell writes about the middle-class developing a taste by incorporating the elements of the elite-classical notion of taste to overcome the notion of having no tradition of taste at all (224). Similarly, in Kerala the rising new the middle-class developed a nostalgia for the elitist concept of family values since the new middle class lacked their own traditional value system. For instance, the elaborate rituals of traditional marriage ceremony of the Hindu elite class are imitated by the new middle class in many ways. Such imitations range from bringing *Namboothiri* for blessings to the pure vegetarian *sadya* (meals in the elite tradition). When the new middle class constructed houses, they tried to assimilate concepts like *nadumuttam* and *thulasithara* that existed only in the house of the elite class. This affiliation shown to the traditional values was a form of imagined nostalgia or nostalgia for something that never existed.

Imagination is a driving force for creating a past that has not been really experienced.

According to Appadurai it is a forceful element in today's world. He observes,

The imagination, on the other hand, has a projective sense about it, the sense of being a prelude to some sort of expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise. Fantasy can dissipate (because its logic is so often autotelic), but the imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action. It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighbourhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labour prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape. (Appadurai, *Modernity* 7)

Such a collective imagination leads to what Appadurai calls 'community sentiment' and the collective experience of the mass media will create a sense of solidarity among the community members (Appadurai, *Modernity* 8). These cinemas responded positively to this collective imagination of a nostalgic past, where family values generated an ethical space. They justified aesthetic preference and reinforced them by providing visually authentic models for the newly emerging middle class. Media as a reservoir of cultural memory can create nostalgia. The impact of visual media on cultural memory can create an imagined nostalgia. "Media can serve as a means of virtually accessing the past, and are thus an important resource for cultural memory. Consequently, they often establish the precondition for nostalgic perspective on things past (and present). This nostalgia can be the content or style of the media representation, and beyond that, media themselves can become an object of nostalgia" (Schrey 29). The nostalgic memory of familial values is created through visual media. This imagined past was accepted as the 'tradition' by the new

middle class to overcome the confusion of loss of tradition at the time of accepting the new definitions of consumer modernity offered by globalisation. In this way they could also easily avoid the facts of oppression by the elite communities and overcome the feeling of regret.

The heroes of these films are bound by ethical notions and a sense of morality, the foundation of which lies in the family values of imagined tradition. In this way, they try to be on the side of the good which is also beautiful. The goodness of a person is usually assessed by how he treats others. These heroes are ready to sacrifice themselves to protect their family. Their choice of goodness adds to the overall aesthetics proposed by these films too. The members of the middle-class family whole heartedly accepted these films because they considered it as moral and ethical according to the imagined past. Most of the heroes in the class films find their pleasure in rejoining or developing a family. The loss of family is stressful for them like in the film *Desadanam*. Retrieving the pleasure of an imagined family thus becomes the primary good of the heroes. This is a solution offered by the cinema for the new concerns regarding the family system in Kerala.

“When the history of nuclear family in Kerala begins to reveal certain cracks and fissures in the last couple of decades, we have these films that address the crisis—not in any sociologically informed manner, of course, but with a naïve though soothing psychologism packed in melos” (Haris, *Engendering* 213). In this context, the following conclusions can be drawn about the aesthetics of the class-films in the last decade of the 20th century in Kerala. These films were, invariably a part of the phenomenon of the rise of the new middle-class after globalisation. The decentralisation of family, loss of family values, and the struggle of the hero in most

of the films to find his comfort in the family space justify his ethical choices. This family and its values exist in an imagined nostalgia against reality. This collective imagination helps the middle-class overcome the lack of heritage and makes the choice of taste easy and justifiable in the cultural space. Ultimately, the choice of taste leads to the pattern expressed in the assumed authenticity of the visuals projected to the cultural memory.

8.2. The Mass-films of the 1990s

The mass- films were superstar films that offered a cocktail of entertainment for the mass to celebrate and enjoy. Stylised presentations of long dialogues, violence, elongated stunt scenes in which the hero fights several persons alone, and voluptuous representation of women are some of the features of such films. Bollywood-style songs and dance sequences are integrated into the films to entertain the fans of the movie star. The hero has the quality of a rowdy, but his negativity often comes as a result of the indignation towards an unjust social system. Mass films are not meant for family audience and often question family values. They are particularly meant for an audience that is formed on the basis of hero worship. These films help them seek instant gratification for their suppressed desires. Sometimes the rowdy hero may have an elite background but his conscious rejection of elite choices makes him heroic. In many scenes, the hero directly addresses the viewers to create the illusion of companionship.

By the end of the decade, there was a sea change in the way in which mass-films were made. In the previous decades, even those films made for mass appeal had the quality of temperance unlike the Tamil films which limited themselves to certain ethical concerns. In the post-liberalisation era, new avatars came up to the

Malayalam films mostly under the influence of violent heroes of the Tamil cinema and on the models of refined rowdies of Hollywood Westerns⁷. A combination of cultural paradoxes like elite goons, violent musicians, and rowdy police officers was born in this period to appeal to the masses. The mass-film conceptually addresses the lower classes by taking over the task of fulfilling their desires at least imaginatively. These heroes can be seen as the reflection of the mass desire in a corrupted society where the benefits of a liberal economy are enjoyed only by the rich. This assumption may not apply to the films made in the early years of the decade but one can find the volume and dimension of such characters increasing by the end of the decade when the effects of liberalisation of the economy became increasingly visible.

There were a few directors like I.V Sasi, Shaji Kailas and Sibi Malayil who created such mass-films in Malayalam. These directors used the stardom of both Mammooty and Mohan Lal and created a new star for police movies, Suresh Gopi. The beginning of these new types of mass films can be found in the movies like *Devasuram* (1993) by I.V. Sasi, *Ekalavyan* (1993) by Shaji Kailas, and *Druvam* (1993) by Bhadran. This was followed by *Commissioner* (1994) by Shaji Kailas as a sequel to *Ekalavyan*. *Spadikam* (1995) by Bhadran, *AramThampuran* (1997) by Shaji Kailas, *Kamadam* (1998) by Lohitha Das, *Usthad* (1999) by Sibi Malayil and in 2000, the two big hits by Shaji Kailas namely *Narasimham* starring Mohanlal and *Valliettan* with Mammooty in the lead role. In this group, *Ekalavyan* and *The Commissioner* were police movies with Suresh Gopi in the lead roles. These movies raised the status of this actor to stardom and most of his later films typecast him in similar police roles. All other films have either Mammooty or Mohanlal in the lead

role. Films of Mohanlal like *Devasuram*, *Spadikam*, *AramThampuran*, *Kanmadam*, *Ustad*, have the same type of rowdy elite as the hero. His trials and tribulations, familial problems, and social interaction in which he saves many poor and marginalised people and finally settles for a family life are the main themes discussed in these films. Mammooty films like *Druvam* and *Valliettan* have elite characters born into a high caste, with rich and powerful families carrying out revenge on villains while protecting a lot of people who are dependent on them. The police characters in *Ekalavyan* and *Commissioner* are not law-abiding police officers, but they show the same lawless qualities as rowdies. Hero in *Devasuram*, which means a blend of Deva and Asura (Good and Bad), is an elite rowdy who loves art and music. In *Spadikam*, the hero is a genius turned delinquent and *AramThampuran* showcases an underworld don with a nostalgic romance for his village and antiquity. In the film *Kanmadam* again common man turned an accidental murderer coming to a remote village to solve the family problems of his victim and in *Ustad* the hero leads a double life as a businessman with a secret life of a don. The film *Narasimham* with Mohanlal in the lead role is an unbeatable hero who fights, sings, dances, and drinks beyond control. He is a good student turned delinquent, imprisoned for a crime that he did not commit and comes back with a secret life of the underworld don to his village to take revenge on his former enemy. The film *Valliettan* is a Mammooty starrer. The hero is an elite Nair who is affluent, wealthy, and a protector of the family. He also had a miserable former life that he fought successfully with all his physical and mental strength. Both these characters share a lot of similarities in their appearance and execution. They are introduced in alternative shots with wild animals like lion and elephant. Lion as a cultural symbol

signifies strength that nobody can oppose, and elephant is associated with elite power with a high pedigree. Both these characters belong to powerful upper-caste families and live amidst a lot of admiring friends and family members.

The hero Arakkal Madhavanunni—the hero of film *Valliettan* and Induchoodan—the hero of *Narasimham*—have many things in common. Both belong to elite Nair families with a miserable past. Induchoodan comes back from prison and Madhavanunni comes back from his miserable life as a wood merchant. Both films begin with titles shown in the background of the river Bharathapuzha, which is famous for its sandbanks and temples located on either side of the river and Hindu festivals associated with it. These heroes are presented to the viewers after long introductions by their companions. One is in a close up shot with a passing bullet and the other comes up from the river in a montage of a roaring lion. Long dialogues uttered by these heroes are on the verge of vulgarity with double entendre and in many scenes, they are uttered directly to the viewer. The language used for dialogues is idiosyncratic as it blends refined literary language and regional expressions. The physical appearance of these heroes displays raw masculinity by showing hairy chests and thighs. They are experts in *Kalari* which was conceived to be the martial art of Nair warriors in ancient Kerala. Macho violence can be found in every aspect of the films including love scenes. The star's charisma is enhanced through long stunt scenes in which the hero fights for family members and the poor.

These films, in every aspect, are antithetical to the class films and the sobriety and sense of reality presented in them. S. V Sreenivas writes on how these films become mass films by generating a cultural concept about the stock audience of such films. “According to its critics (as opposed to its patrons), the mass-film is

recognized by its 'vulgarity', violence and address to its intended audience, the masses. While there can be little justification in accepting this description at face value, it points at the larger processes at work in generic classification”(69). The aesthetics of these films have streaks of the Hollywood gangster films and western films. The segmented presentation of the body of the hero that begins with close-up shots of the legs is indebted to the Hollywood Westerns while the companionship, principles of loyalty, and the quality of grit are similar to that of gangster movies. Many such aspects have been a part of a majority of the Tamil and Telugu movies, while Malayalam movies took to realism in the past. The huge success of these movies showed a shift in the cultural pattern at the turn of the century, and they forced new readings on novel aesthetic patterns brought about by the media and the resulting restructuring of the mass culture.

8.2.1. Absence of Value is the Value: Mass Films Culture

The prominent characteristics of the mass-films include their revivalist nature, visible elitism, a celebration of hedonistic pleasure, and limitless celebration of the stardom and masculinity. In his analysis, Sreenivas relates the term 'mass' to the suppressed class which stays in opposition to the privileged middle class (83,84). Another point that he emphasises is the creation of this class space inside the theatre that rejects the values of middle-class refinement. The rowdy- hero, according to Sreenivas, as seen in the films of Chiranjeevi represents the suppressed anger of the marginalised and creates a fantasy of fulfillment (84). In the case of Malayalam cinema, the mass is not always suppressed, as in the case of most of the Telugu films, owing to the democratisation of social space, but it functions antithetical to the value systems of the middle-class. The post-liberalisation cultural scenario

opened up the cultural spaces confined to the intellectual and ethical notions of the middle-class to new forms of open celebrations of the masses. With the advent of television, this celebratory aspect of culture got legitimised as a result of its sheer acceptance in the domestic space.

The rowdy hero of the Malayalam mass film is different from his elite heredity. In the film *Devasuram* (1993) which appeared to set the trend, the hero belongs to a decaying Nair *tharavadu* but is very proud of his heritage and is ready for any violence to protect his social status. But when it comes to *Narasimham* (2000) and *Vallietan* (2000), this elite hero from *Devasuram* becomes a celebrating hero who has no regrets about his past. The history of suppression usually associated with elitism is conveniently forgotten to have a comfortable storyline of a family feud. The hero is not refined in the sense of modern consumerism or he is not fit for a cosmopolitan cultural space in middle class imagination. He keeps his regional identity in appearance, clothing, language, behaviour, and his local macho demeanour. At the same time, the hero possesses all the amenities of consumerist sophistication like modern gadgets, exotic beverages, and luxury vehicles. Paradoxically, the hero lives in a traditional *tharavadu* with his accomplices following a hedonistic lifestyle.

The aesthetics projected by mass-films like *Narasimham* and *Vallietan* are to be understood within the ambit of the cultural shifts brought in by the consumerist turn at the turn of the century. Meena T Pillai writes:

A newly liberalized economy that resulted in the creation of a spectacle of market excess became the most significant marker of Malayalam cinema post-1990s. One also saw in this period the syndication of the film

industry, which contributed to a propensity to control and regimentalise artists and technicians. Also crucial was the valorisation of the star. This was in a continuum with the refeudalisation of the public sphere, which was in turn legitimised by cinema through the retraditionalisation of intimacy on the one hand and feudal nostalgia on the other. (53)

From this perspective, the hedonistic films of new consumerist culture with their revivalist and elitist content and form are a part of this refudalisation. T. K. Ramachandran also makes the same comment on the social scenario of the post-90 Kerala. He is concerned about the ideological aberration that leads to a revival of the past values once kept under the carpet by the social reform movements. He writes:

Any realistic analysis of contemporary Kerala society and culture will have to come to terms with what can tentatively be termed 'the ultra-conservative backlash'. Nurtured diligently by the popular media, and aided and abetted by the establishment, the 'backlash' has become a well-entrenched and palpable ideological entity in our daily life. Further, its pernicious influence has eroded, to a great extent, the unquestioned hegemony that the progressive forces had enjoyed in the cultural life of Kerala right up to the sixties. (110)

The reformation movement did not eliminate the social malpractices but rather kept these values under the carpet and moved on with cosmetic changes. For example, in the case of marriage practices, caste, still, remains the primary concern despite the social status or political leniency. It is amusing to note that in these films, the socially underprivileged (mass) admires the cast identity of the hero and celebrates his show of traditional values of oppressive masculinity. Subsequently they display a total disregard for the modern value of gender equality.

These two films-*Narasimham* and *Vallietan*- show a macho violent world where women are to be considered victims of male violence or just objects of their desire. They are supportive of these feudal goons as obedient sexual toys and servants. The concept of violent masculinity in these films was essentially justified as a part of protecting the elite value system. The mass audience enjoyed the feudal violence and worshipped the feudal hero as a part of their desire to enter the elite value system. This is the illusion created by the aesthetic of these mass-films. The anti-colonial movements, anti-feudal movements, social reformation movements and later the communist movements are some of the democratic moves or initiatives that enabled the visibility of the marginalised in society. Most of these movements were led by the privileged class for the underprivileged. So, the definition of the mass remained as '*sadharanakkar*' or the common people. The common people, as mentioned above, needs lessons of refinement from the refined middle and elite classes. The class-films proposed conditional acceptance of this common man into the refined circle based on an imagined value system. But in the case of the mass-films, this acceptance is unconditional since such a huge project of refining the society through a value system is absent there. Life is celebrated in its everyday aspects. John Fiske writes:

Theories of "everyday life," such as those of de Certeau (1984) explain the ordinary social practices of ordinary people as a series of tactical evasions or resistances of the order that society tries to organize them into. On one level this may involve social practices as simple as taking shortcuts across the grass instead of keeping to the paths that architects have provided; on a more complex level it involves using the resources provided by the social order

(which are the only ones available) in ways that detach them from the system that produced them and that enable them to be turned back against the interests of the producers. (135)

The role of the star in reinforcing this pattern is very significant. Legitimised by the 'star authority' everything is justifiable with the narrative. For example, in *Narasimham* and *Valliettan*, young women are murdered as they are caught in the family war. They are the victims of the collateral damage and lose significance as the story moves on. Thus, the incorporation of the common people into the narrative is done through expressive celebrations, where the star-hero comes down to sing, dance, and drink with his companions. Since this companionship is extended to the viewers by bringing them within the purview of the direct gaze of the star-hero, this acceptance is equal to having an unconditional social position as companions of the elite, in real life.

The pleasure enjoyed by the mass in their illusive involvement associates them to the celebratory aesthetic of mass movies. Everything, including violence, is a source of pleasure. The hero of the film *Narasimham* after beating someone turns to the viewer and tells them '*Chumma*' (for fun). So, the aesthetic of mass-films, like *Narsimham* and *Valliettan* was that of hedonistic consumerism. For the mass, it was an opportunity to get visibility as the companions of the star-macho-elite-hero unconditionally – antithetical to the class-film where everything was conditional. In this way the mass films celebrated the absence of value as the value and justified this paradoxical condition through the support of the mass or the common people.

8.3. Comic Popular Movies of the 1990s

These movies are made with shoestring budgets using second and third-row actors on a comic theme without any ideological burden. The class and mass films had some serious responses to the values of tradition either by rejecting or relocating or by accepting them. In these movies, such notions are considered completely irrelevant and the narrative instead focuses on a variety of comic situations. The trend of such movies started with *Ramji Rao Speaking* (1989) directed by Siddique and Lal. The huge success of this movie set a vogue and several movies followed the same pattern in the following years. *In Harihar Nagar* (1990) by the same directors was also a box office hit and repeated their success in the following year with *God Father* (1991). A lot of movies like *Mookkilla Rajyath* (1991) by Asokan and Taha, *Mimics Parade* (1991) by Thulasi Das, *Kunukkitta Kozhi* (1992) by Kaloore Denis, *Poochakkaru Manikettum* (1992) by Thulasi Das, *Adeham Enna Ideham* (1993) by Viji Thampi, *Mele Parambil Aan Veedu* (1993) by Raja Senan, *Malappuram Haji Mahanaya Joji* (1994) by Thulasi Das, *Vardhakya Puranam* (1994) by Raja Senan, *Aniyan Bava Chettan Bava* (1995) by Raja Senan, *Mimics Action 500* (1995) by Balu Kiriyaath, *Mannar Mathayi Speaking* (1995) by Mani C Kappan made success in the first half of the decade. In the second half, *Dilliwalla Rajakumaran* (1996) by Rajasenana, *Junior Mandrake* (1997) by Ali Akbar, *Panjabi House* (1998) by Rafi Mekartin, *Friends* (1999) by Siddique and *Mr. Butler* (2000) were some of the box office hit movies. These films usually depended on a group of actors rather than a single hero, certainly with a few exceptions. The group is usually a compilation of third-row character artists and comedy actors. Most of the comedy actors are from the mimicry troops like Cochin Kalabhavan. In this period many mimicry artists

from this troop entered the Malayalam film industry. The actors in these films were usually Mukesh, Jagadeesh, Sidique, Ashokan, Jagathi Sreekumar, Harisree Ashokan, Dileep, Innocent, and some new actors from mimicry troops along with a heroin who is usually a new face.

There was a huge increase in the number of such films in this decade. Vipin Kumar in his article on the rise of comic films in Kerala in the 1990s writes:

In Malayalam, compared to the high average of 111 films per year in the 1980s, film production itself was on the lower ebb of 76 per year in the 1990s. However, the comic film dominated the scene while production seemed to have some crisis. In 1992, of the 78 films released in Malayalam, as many as 31 were definitively comic films in the sense we are using the term 'comic film' here. This trend stayed alive: in 1998, more than half of the films were comic ones – roughly 32 out of 61. (17)

Despite the absence of stars, expensive sets, and other spectacular events, most of these films were popular and ensured average financial success to the producers. Some films like *Ramji Rao Speaking*, *In Harihar Nagar*, *Mimics Parade*, and *Panjabi House* were box office breakers. Since they lack crude violence and open vulgarity, they were acceptable to the family audience within the framework of Malayali morality. These films were filled with verbal humour, situational humour, slapstick comedy, and pratfalls and made use of cinematographic and editing possibilities to create laughter. The backdrop of these films is often an urban space where a gang of youths, often unemployed or seeking employment, live. Some unexpected incident leads them to many complex but humorous situations and finally brings them some kind of fortune in the form of marriage or wealth. In some

films even if the entire gang is not placed in the position of the hero, the hero has a group of friends around him to make most of the situations comic. There are incidents of mistaken identity, hidden wealth, unemployment, petty thefts, eccentricity, debt, and double identity. Though all these situations indicate suffering, misery, and tragedy in ordinary situations, all of them lead to comic situations in these films. The rise of these non-committed movies in the popular genre points to a shift in the definition of the popular, which always found association with the mass in Kerala. These comic films led to the rise of new popular aesthetics without the burden of political and cultural utopias, especially in the background of globalisation.

8.3.1. The Rise of the Comic Popular in the 1990s

Rise of the comic films as the most popular genre of Malayalam cinema in the 1990s points to a paradigm shift in the cultural scenario of Kerala. Apart from the very material reasons like the financial crunch in the state economy which forced the producers to consider alternative formats with low budgets, there were strong cultural reasons for their huge reception at the box office. They suddenly became the favourite of all types of filmgoers across class divisions. The sudden acceptability of such films reveals an ardent desire for leisure. The middle-class's tendency to seek leisure as an experience that can help them climb the social ladder is visible in the wide acceptance of the comic popular genre of films in Kerala.

The pleasure that has been inculcated into the subjects who act as modern consumers is to be found in the tension between nostalgia and fantasy, where the present is represented as if it were already past. This inculcation of the pleasure of ephemerality is at the heart of the disciplining of the modern

consumer. The valorization of ephemerality expresses itself at a variety of social and cultural levels: the short shelf life of products and lifestyles,— the speed of fashion change,— the velocity of expenditure,— the polyrhythms of credit, acquisition, and gift,— the transience of television product images,— the aura of periodisation that hangs over both products and lifestyles in the imagery of mass media. The much-vaunted feature of modern consumption—namely, the search for novelty—is only a symptom of a deeper discipline of consumption in which desire is organized around the aesthetic of ephemerality. (Apadurai, *Modernity* 83, 84)

New cultural tendencies like tourism museumised tradition and heritage into visual commodities to be enjoyed at leisure. Film industry took over this principle to produce multi-layered experience, as in the film *Jeans* (1998), which provided the experience of a film and a world tour simultaneously. The USP of this film was that one can see all the seven wonders in a single song sequence.

The invasion of new forms of performances like *mimics parades* with a cinematic gloss replacing the traditional performance art forms is to be viewed here as an entertainment ride in a comic theme park. The popular comic films in this period exhibited many formal similarities with mimicry. "The emergence of the comic film as an independent genre has close and sustained associations with mimicry. Some of the comic films in fact thematised the mimicry artists' lives. Many of today's actors who dominate the comic film (Jayaram, Dilip, Cochin Haneefa and Harishree Ashokan) come from mimicry troupes that specialize in imitation and humour" (Kumar, "Politics of Laughter" 19). Films like *Mimics Parade*, and *Mimics Action 500* are examples of such films. The film *Mimics Parade* was a box office

success and even had two sequels: *Kazargod Kadar Bhai* (1992) and *Kazargod Kadar Bhai-2* (2010). The characters in these films are youth who took to the profession of mimicry artists due to unemployment. Many of them talk about poverty and family financial crunches but appear in fashionable dresses and modern styles. Such depictions present the fashion which is a display of being contemporary and modern, irrespective of the wealth or heredity, justifying the principles of consumerism. This was another expression of ‘*chethu*’ (youth lifestyle) as discussed in connection with television culture. From this period onwards, *Mimicry* is promoted in many films in various circumstances as a part of youth culture.

Though mimicry as an art form existed as a minor art in stage performances producing short intervals of laughter and surprises, it was unimaginable to have three hours of mimicry on stage. The role of the institution named *Kalabhavan* is notable for the widespread acceptance of this form. Mimics Parade extended mimicry as the dominant form of performance and sidelined all other forms as interludes signified an obvious preference from the audience. This had many connections to the traditional forms of performance and such forms are often mocked in such shows. This form has been performed in all spaces like festival grounds, among Non- Resident Malayali communities, as television programmes, and even as a part of official celebrations. With the entry of mimics pared the use of such spaces for performance of traditional art forms underwent a change. The value systems associated with such places also changed along with it but the performance of mimics pared needed such spaces to grow upon. For instance the levity and leisure brought in by Mimics Pared to a temple festival, where the traditional elite art forms used to be performed, changes the value system of that place from the

traditional-elite to the modern-consumerist. Since the origin of Mimics Pared was related to the new consumerist culture it reflects it expresses the parasitic nature of consumer culture. For instance, Ameet Parameswaran explains how the out migration and new consumption practices “transformed the state into an ‘ultimate consumer state’, that allows the mimics parade as a form to take over the spaces of ‘tradition’ and the ‘popular’ as a parasitic form, without instituting a counter-utopia of ‘metropolitan migrancy” (150). The mimics parade as a form that negotiates the trans-modernity at the time of liberalisation represents a complimentary form.

Rather than positing the spheres as antagonistic, with the sphere of rituals representing the traditional and the new representational mediums the modern and transnational, in a narrative of one negating the other, mimics parade indexes the need to look at the spheres as complementary, emerging and changing due to the structural changes brought in by the consumerist economy. (Parameswaran 150)

The form, thus, represents a more democratic space offered by consumption that is devoid of any labour or learned behaviour of tradition. In this sense, it offers an ephemerality and levity of ultimate form of leisure. For instance, in mimics parade the laborious task of learning and performing *Kathakali* becomes a manipulation of sound and performance without any labour. The aura of *Kathakali* is removed to release it from the burden of tradition. “Mimics parade rejects the popular elite forms as waste with its non-adherence to the conventions of a realist narrative, yet, as an alternative, it posits an even more visible form of the temporality of excess and waste. As parasitic form, what it posits is not a counter-space of non-waste and professionalism. Instead, it stages the infinite ‘present’ of

the consumption regime itself” (Parameswaran 167). The levity, the element of fun, being transnational and the possibility of consumption make the mimics a form of entertainment that represents the culture of leisure propagated by consumption regime. Jeremy Seabrook, when codifying the concept of leisure society, says that leisure is the result of anticipation. It is often haunted by anticipations about a better future and a hard past:

Leisure, then, is often discussed as though it were anticipated free time: certainly for those in work there has been little decrease in the actual number of hours worked. The promise of the leisure society acts as a comfort and distraction in a present that is often hard to bear; it eases painful transitions and, more important, gains our acquiescence in necessary changes. One of the most salient features of our culture is our preoccupation with both the future (you must have something to look forward to) and the past (you must have something to look back on). Simultaneously, we eagerly anticipate the future and hoard our memories. Is it an elaborate avoidance of the here-and-now that sends out the winter holiday brochures in midsummer and the summer holiday suggestions on Boxing Day? Enjoyment of the present is always contaminated by the belief that the future is going to be much better or is spoilt by longings profitably moulded by the nostalgia industries. (4)

By the second half of the 90s, Kerala became a marketplace for global brands which propagated a celebration of the ‘here and now,’ and began to shape the youth culture. Losing their faith in those extended projects of social reformation and socialist leftism, they confronted the present reality of unemployment and the downfall of the economy in everyday life. Consequently, leisure as the principle of

enjoying the present with levity has become the aesthetics of everyday life. The advent of the Mimics Parade as the dominant form of cultural performance is to be seen in this light.

The comic-popular films had the same format of a Mimics Parade. It offered a form of entertainment that was as versatile as Mimics Parades without serious continuity, so that the viewer is not bothered by any value system, reformatory project, or political consciousness. The two important levels of the transnationalist claim of mimics parade include- the level of language and the level of 'excess.' "At the level of language, mimics parade foregrounds a self-referential, an already-arrived at transnationalism through the rejection of the saskritised and indigenous structures shared both by high and popular art" (Parameswaran 165). On the level of excess, he writes, "Mimics parade rejects the popular form for its waste and its non-adherence to conventions of a realist narrative; yet, as an alternative, it posits an even more visible form of temporality of excess and waste" (167). Likewise, the comic-popular provided a variety of visuals for mass consumption, making many forms it renders a waste. The everyday life of the characters was presented in two and half hours of comic talk and absurd pratfalls to create the illusion of life turned into leisure and pleasure. So, the rise of the 'comic popular' and their success was related to the three principles of consumption namely levity, leisure, and pleasure, offering the disillusioned public a freedom from the ideological burden, transferring them into a theme park based on 'fun ethics'⁸.

What have been engendered by these visual media practices in last decade of twentieth century in Kerala are complex aesthetic attitudes pertaining to a floating value system and the resultant vacuum in the cultural self. Since various effects of

globalisation play a significant part in the formation of this pattern, the geographical limit is void of its claim and, thereby, the term culture breaks away from any conventional formations. Relative categorisations and assumed patterns are to be taken as indicators of this paradigm shift. However, using these dynamic patterns what one can do is to create statements regarding the nature of visual practices, aesthetic preferences, and cultural self expressed in them.

Introduction of new aesthetic choices through colonial modernity questioned the traditional cultural preferences. This choice created a conflict in the cultural self of Malayalis. On the one hand, it adheres to the tradition and on the other, it tried to embrace the refined modernity of the West. The cosmopolitan experience gained by Kerala from the prehistorical times itself fabricated a cosmopolitan-self inside the traditional cultural frame and this also contributed to an easy acceptance of modernity. In the twentieth century Western ideas of modernity have been taken up by the socio-political movements as modes of development. So, the split cultural self created by colonial modernity remained as the core principle of aesthetic choices of the Malayalis of the twentieth century. The experience of migration and widespread English medium education among the middle-class strengthened the pattern. The rise of the middle-class along with the development of the service sector was a contributing factor here. The middle-class was inspired by the ideas of modernity which eventually became the model for aesthetic choice in the culture. Until the last decade of the twentieth century, this pattern existed in various formats like cinema and television. Globalisation and liberalisation of the economy in the last decade of the twentieth century subverted this and a new aesthetics and cultural self emerged.

After widespread introduction of television into the cultural spectrum, it functioned along with cinema in producing a new age of visuals. For television, cinema was the main component of its programme environment. The categorical divisions applied to the cinema in the 90s can be understood in relation to three important aspects of consumerist turn of culture related to the globalisation of the economy. The first category of class-films suggests an aesthetics of nostalgia while the second category mass-films suggests an aesthetics of hedonism. The third category of comic films, which comprises of more than thirty percent of the total film production, points to an aesthetics that comes from the replacement of work ethics by fun ethics. The same can be extended to the aesthetics of leisure that the television was proposing for its viewers as consumers of the commodity.

End Notes

1. The paradox in Kerala model is pointed out by many scholars. It is the achievement of high social indices with a lower per capita income. For example, see G K Lieten “Kerala, which in 1957-59 had attracted some world attention as the first democratically elected –and undemocratically removed left-led state government in India, henceforth served as a metaphor for a high HDI despite a low GNP. In terms of literacy, morbidity, child mortality, longevity and fertility, it approached the standards reached in the developed countries. Even in comparison with China and South Korea, admittedly success stories in HD management, Kerala did much better. Dreze and Sen (1995) have shown how Kerala, for example, in terms of rural female literacy, had done better than every individual province in China. By the turn of the millennium, the state was credited as having attained near total literacy of men and women. The gender disparity index, an indicator of the different achievements of males and females in terms of education, longevity, employment, etc, has narrowed down significantly. In terms of rural literacy, for example, the female/male disparity has narrowed down to 92 per cent.”(*Human Development in Kerala* 1539). See also Devika J. *Egalitarian Developmentalism* and many others.

2. Mimics parade is an elaborate form of performance developed during the 1980s in Kerala. The main proponent of this form was an institution titled *Kalabhavan* established in 1968. The cultural impact of this form is more fully discussed in Parameswaran, Ameet. *Performance and the Political: Power and Pleasure in Contemporary Kerala*. Also see Introduction, pp.3-16).
3. There were many other programmes in Asianet that went popular among the audience like Devatha (1999), Innocent Kadhakal (1994), Krishnathulasi (1999), Sthree Part 1, 2, 3, 4 (1998–2003), Betaal Kadhakal (1997–1998), Anweshanam (1994–2001), Auto Show (1996), Ente Keralam (1993–2001), Naattarangu (1997–2002), Sports Week (1998–2002), Suprabhatham (1996–2012), Voice of The Week (1997–1999) and many others.
4. This song went popular among the youth. As a cultural text it reflected a departure from the existing concepts of the youth, an urge for urbanisation and enjoyment of city life and levity regarding the concept of love. The refrain of the song says, “We want a revolution friction we want liberalization”. The complete lyrics is available in <https://malayalasangetham.info/s.php?10089&cl=1> or for video see Baggy jeansum | Sainyam | Malayalam Film Song /Evergreen Film Songs. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F10Lz_nulDg.
5. വിവിധ കലാപരിപാടി (Variety Entertainment) ഒരുമിച്ച് വിഴുങ്ങുന്ന തരം ശിഥിലാസ്വാദന പരിചയം അഭ്യസിച്ചു വരുന്ന ആധുനിക സമൂഹത്തിനു യോജിച്ച വിധം ചലച്ചിത്ര പ്രദർശനത്തിലും പരിഷ്കാരങ്ങളുണ്ടായി വരികയാണ്. ഇത് വഴി വിവിധ ഗെയിം, ചുരുക്കുക, ബിയർ, കോഴിയിറച്ചി, ഷോപ്പിങ് എന്നിവയുടെ കൂട്ടത്തിൽ ഒരു വെറും സൂപ്പർ മാർക്കറ്റ് വിനോദം മാത്രമായി സിനിമ കൂട്ടതൽ അധപതിച്ചേക്കാം. പുതിയ ആഗോള സാഹചര്യം സിനിമയുടെ വ്യവസായിക നില നിൽപ്പിനായി മുന്നോട്ട് വരുന്നത് ഇത്തരം ചില സൂത്രങ്ങളാണ്. (Cinimayum Malayaliyude... 25)
6. The debate on safronisation of culture was vary rampant in the intellectual circles of the period form 1990s, especially after the demolition of Babari Masjid in 1992. The rise of the Hindu right wing in the Indian politics has been widely discussed in connection with cinema too. The film *Desadanam* (1996) was criticised by the left wing as a form of Hindu revivalism. The plot of the film revolves around the tribulations of family when their only child is selected for the position of the head of a Hindu monastery. For instance, see Haris, VC. “*On the Uneasy Pleasure of Watching Desadanam*” Specters of Writing. Ref. Bibliography.
7. The rise of the antiheros in Malayalam films was a phenomenon in the second half of 1990s. Many of these characters were types established in Hollywood westerns.

Most of them were murderers, assassins, and psychopaths with an elegant taste for music and high life. In Tamil movies the hero often uses very violent methods to annihilate the villain. In the Malayalam film *Devasuram* (1993) the hero is a drunkard and ruffian but possesses high taste in music and dance. Many films of the period show this type of heroes.

8. Fun ethics is discussed by Jukka Gronov. “The new ethics of pleasure or ‘fun ethics’ is often contrasted with the earlier dominant ethic of work; hedonism is contrasted with asceticism”(2). It is related the new consumption culture that demands qualities like wastefulness, self-indulgence, and artificial obsolescence from the individuals. It negates values of efficiency and the work ethic on which the system was based. For a detailed discussion see Gronov, Jukka. *The Sociology of Taste*.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

The intricacies of the visual cultural practices of Kerala in the last decade of twentieth century, a critical juncture in its history, display a complex blend of numerous cultural factors. One of them at play in this cultural space was various visual media forms that emanated a new aesthetics for the novel cultural self. Kerala as a place with an isolated cultural heritage remained comparatively untouched by the conceptual 'Indian culture' until the transformative global realignment in the economic policies of India. Concurrently, it maintained a receptive attitude to various aspects of modernity in its socio-cultural fabric and engendered conflicts between tradition and modernity. Therefore, modernity remained a forceful and controlling factor in the formation of the cultural self of Kerala ever since its introduction in India as a part of the colonial modernity in the nineteenth century. The conflict created by the introduction of colonial modernity was the fundamental impetus behind the split in the cultural self expressed in the lifestyle choices of the Malayali in the twentieth century. The very same layer of consciousness may have facilitated the seamless integration of consumerist ideologies in the wake of the globalisation era in the *fin de siècle* of the twentieth century.

1. The Formative Phase

The dissertation focused on reaching some generalised assumptions by tracing two potent conduits of visibility, namely cinema and television. These two mediums, with their high transformative capacity, exerted an indelible influence on the cultural self at the turn of the century. To substantiate the analytical process, it is

imperative to form some rudimentary postulations regarding their genesis and development. They initially subscribed to some of the practices of visuality emerged at the second half of the nineteenth century. As a period of transformation, this period developed many conflicts originating from tradition and colonial modernity and consequently resulted in a split cultural self. These transformations could be found profoundly reflected in the artistic endeavours of Raja Ravi Varma. Therefore, Varma's artistic corpus occupies a pivotal position within the trajectory of subsequent cultural metamorphosis.

Varma's art showcases the struggle of merging tradition and modernity in many tangents. He recreated Hindu mythology by depicting the characters and gods in new colours and perspectives. The characters from two prominent epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* were pictured in dramatic contexts. In this way, the gods and mythological figures were brought out of their sanctum to the popular imagination. The introduction of perspective and oil painting reinforced this experience by adding to the reality effect of the paintings. Apart from this, Varma established Ravi Varma Press which produced oleographs and lithographs of these paintings. Cost-effective prints made such paintings accessible to the common people. Thus, Varma could create a novel popular aesthetics that marked a paradigm shift from the traditional notions.

Change in the medium was a significant factor that registered the shift from tradition to modernity. Berger observes that oil painting did to appearances what capital did to social relations. It reduced everything to equality of objects.

“Everything became exchangeable because everything became a commodity” (87).

The utilisation of oil as opposed to traditional paints underscored photographic

naturalism that emerged during the middle of the nineteenth century. Varma followed the methods of artists who were either trained under European tutelage or in art academies. They encouraged the use of oil owing to their training and also for its capacity to impart striking semblance to reality. Varma's oil paintings of deities and characters of Hindu mythology made a profound impact on the aesthetic sensibility of the common people. They were available in the market in printed formats affordable for the common people. These paintings, in their printed form, attained the status of a tangible manifestation of the prevailing beliefs. The portrayal of divine and mythical entities, depicted in a naturalistic framework, provided a new dimension for the popular aesthetic experience. Hindu mythology, thus, assimilated a new dimension and proximity aligning itself with the sensibilities of the common people. Most of the characters were rendered dramatically by alluding to some popular situations in the narrative. Apart from this contextualisation, they are placed in perspective that increases the effect of reality.

Acceptance of perspectivalism was the first step of modernity in the visual practice of Kerala. Varma's use of perspective was different from that of Europe. Instead of eliminating the textual element, Varma used the perspective to reinvent the texts that he referred to in the painting— the epics and *Puranas*. Though he adopted the perspective and the luminosity of oil, he placed the bodies and figures in the foreground to address the passionate viewer rather than the disinterested logic and mathematical stability of the Cartesian perspective. The preference for oil is important because: "The tradition, however, forms many of our cultural assumptions. It defines what we mean by pictorial likeness. Its norms still affect the way we see such objects as landscape, women, food, dignitaries, mythology. It supplies us with

our archetypes of artistic genius” (Berger 84). The result was a unique blend of a sensual prominence of figures in perspective which satisfied both the surprise element of recreating reality in a two-dimensional space and the emotional involvement of the viewer.

As an iconic artist Varma could establish certain parameters for the general conception of the beauty of human figures. His popular paintings featuring gods and mythological characters referred to specific types of human figures adorned in certain types of clothes. The focus on the realistic recreation of the body in these paintings exerted a significant influence on the prevailing notion of the beauty of human figures. For instance, his painting *Musicians* (1889) portrays eleven Indian women. These female figures are clad in eleven types of attire and have different skin tones to proclaim their ethnicity, but their facial features and body type are similar. He recurrently depicted typical female body types in the paintings of goddesses and mythic characters who had been already established as beautiful through narrations. In other words, these modern visualisations were supported by the authenticity of traditional textual narratives. Varma, with his realistic modern techniques, was evoking these figures from the past into visual formats so that many paintings could occupy a sacred space in the mind of Hindu believers. However, these types of human figures merged into popular imagination so well that popular artistic production could not escape these formats. Therefore, the paradigm of Varma became the foundation for popular visual aesthetics since it could address moral guilt by reinventing the tradition instead of replacing or eliminating it. He created a visual catalogue for the reinvented tradition so that the textual narratives in the popular imagination were given a realistic representation and formulated a

spectacular museum that reflected the splendour of a mythical past for the popular eye.

This is significantly evident in the popularity of Malayalam *Painkili* novels in the twentieth century. The popular novels published in several periodicals like *Mangalam*, *Manorama*, or *Manorajyam* from Kottayam in Kerala were called *Painkili* novels. These novels were also called *Janapriya* novels owing to their cheap romance and popularity. They could claim a huge readership that comprised mostly of the common people. The illustrations that accompanied these novels had a significant role in making them popular. They were super-realistic in nature and tried to emanate a cinematic sheen. The *Painkili* art had the same theatrical quality as Varma's popular chromolithographs. They did not engage the viewer directly and, thereby, emphasised the context of their appearance. This added to their realistic effect. They also possessed the same corporeal quality as Varma's images. They could entice the reader with their alluring appearance and dominating physicality. In this manner, *Painkili art* incorporates the methods of Varma to influence popular imagination. It addressed the same aesthetic sensibility created by Ravi Varma by simulating his methods. The *Painkili* visuals were produced in a period when Malayalam cinema was gradually forming its own identity and television serials began to enter the domestic space of Malayalis. Therefore, they were also influenced by the cinematic visuals that controlled the popular aesthetic choices of Malayali in that period.

For television, the texts of nationality and Indian cultural heritage controlled its cultural function in the beginning. It remained largely a national media and the mouthpiece of the government until the entry of satellite television in the 1990s. It is

interesting to note that the growth of television as the most powerful media which exerts control on every form of visual practice occurred by the 1980s in India. In this period, Kerala remained outside the influence of television for various reasons. However, television until the 1990s was a tool for creating a citizen public. The values of aesthetics followed by television were based on a concept of great Indian tradition that was essentially a Hindu tradition. But television as a product of Western technology has been a metaphor for modernity ever since its entry. The visual interpretation of those 'great Indian values' in television, thus, expressed a natural blend of tradition and modernity. The aesthetics of state-owned television was inevitably informed by the ethical concerns of the Indian tradition which was invented at the time of colonial modernity. As a media under the strict control of the state, it struggled to find a proper blend between the anxieties of cultural pollution and the necessity for technological advancement. Broadcast of *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath* into the televisual format can be viewed as an attempt to overcome this struggle.

Until 1990s, television for Kerala was an object that could project the modern aspirations of its owner. Though epic serials like *Ramayan* and *Mahabharath* could influence the viewers the television consumer as a lonely individual inside a domestic space was yet to be formed. It was usually watched by a group of people that comprised of relatives, friends, and neighbours. Therefore, owning a television could raise the social status of an individual as a person who has access to modern technology. In Kerala, this coincided with negative labels like 'pro-imperialist' or 'pro-capitalist' person. In this phase, television functioned along with cinema as most of the content enjoyed by the public on television had some

association with cinema like film songs, or weekly broadcasts of regional films. By the time television entered the cultural scenario of Kerala, Malayalam cinema had developed its own identity and aesthetics. The 1980s was one of the best periods of Malayalam cinema with a number of good directors and strong financial support from the migrants.

Malayalam cinema could form its own aesthetic identity only after the 1970s. Popular cinema acquired a lot of practices from the parallel cinema movement led by directors who came out of academies and were supported by radical left organisations. Though this movement could not last long, popular cinema learnt the language of cinema and tried to establish a unique aesthetic identity for itself by 1980s. It created a class audience with elite taste who belonged to the educated middle-class. The common public preferred the commercial genre by naming this movement 'award films.' They formed a mass audience that represented the anguish of a consumer society.. Popular films, in general, were preoccupied with the themes of a conflict between tradition and modernity often depicted in the form of losing family values. A new form of cultural identity haunted by a self that is divided between desires and limited resources of a mimetic economy can be found in every aspect of films– even in the two types of masculinity expressed in the stardom of Mammooty and Mohan Lal. This conflict is expressed ostentatiously in the middle-brow (*madyavarthi*) cinemas of 1980s. They offered desire fulfilment without compromising the moral consciousness. By offering exotic visuals and unfamiliar themes, they could build a cover-up for the guilt with which the moral framework was breached in the act of viewing such films. They have engaged the same commercial formulas with a heightened aesthetic perspective. In this manner, they

addressed the moral anxieties of the middle-class whose cultural self was split, between consumer desires and traditional ethical values.

As a media, the visuals in cinema were experienced as an extension of a textual narrative. At the beginning of the industry, this trend was very much visible in its expressive dependence on literary fiction. Though such literary references diminished, the pattern of rooting in textuality remained the same as their place was taken over by narratives about the anxieties of the middle-class about the tradition being lost. As a product of technology and commerce, the idea of modernity in films of this period was showing advancement in technology and the splendour of consumerism. The tradition was conveyed in an invented format of a fine past of rural elite life and values of family. Their strong textual engagement in the ethics of the middle-class and the family system provided comfortable viewing angles for the audience. The cinema of this period as a cultural expression had very strong thematic engagements with this conflict between modernity and tradition. Their popularity proved that they were reflections of the cultural attitude of that period. The decade of 1980s can be considered as the culmination of the first stage of modernity experienced by Kerala. The *Painkili* art, film, and television expressed the same conflict between tradition and modernity as their essential principle. As an anchoring point to which modern forms of visual expressions are tied, tradition appeared in the form of textual narrative, nostalgic affiliations, ethical considerations, anxieties about lost values, nationalism, and the great Indian cultural heritage.

The idea of modernity in this period appears to be critical of tradition or its very existence and originates by forming an antithesis of the tradition. In visual

media aesthetics of this period, modernity appears along with tradition either in the form of cultural anguish or in the form of a cultural mix. Either way, it addresses a cultural self that expresses an internal conflict in its state of transformation. Thus, the cultural self in this period expresses anxieties about this conflict as a split between modern aspirations and traditional value systems. In the case of cinema and television, this split is more evident as a conflict between the fascinating possibilities of technology and concerns regarding cultural pollution. In this period, television and cinema as the prominent forms of visual media formed their aesthetics by addressing this split in the cultural self. Therefore, the formal and thematic output from these two visual media forms can be the result of the split in cultural self.

The present dissertation considers this period as a formative period or a period of transition that sets the premises for the paradigm shifts in the last decade of the twentieth century. Before making conclusive remarks on the last decade of the twentieth century, the state of visual media aesthetics and cultural self can be summarised as follows:

1. A split cultural self is evident in the visual media aesthetics of this period.
2. This split is the result of a conflict between tradition and modernity.
3. As a measure to overcome this conflict, the tradition is reinvented to accommodate new practices of modernity.
4. The dominant middle-class became the cultural agent and the visual media began to address their moral anxieties.

The second phase of modernity in Kerala is associated with globalisation that brought the visual media to centre stage at the turn of the century. The difference between colonial modernity and the modernity that ensued from globalisation lies in

its correlation with tradition. “There is some agreement that the older modernism functioned against its society in ways which are variously described as critical, negative, contestatory, subversive, oppositional and the like”(Jameson, “Postmodernism” 125). This statement, which is evidently from a Western context, cannot fully acknowledge the cultural context of Kerala under discussion. But it parallels the first phase of modernism in which modernity emerged as a criticism of tradition. In the second phase, tradition is assimilated into the structures of modernity so that it functions as a corollary of modernity. Here, the presence of tradition is felt by a continuous erasure of it, because globalisation as a cultural process started to negotiate the tradition for its commodity value. In visual cultural practices, this is reflected in the absence of textual anchoring as it is found in the previous form of modernity. Visuality occupied all walks of everyday life in this period. The process of visualising itself became the dominant cultural practice because of the overbearing presence of visual media. Since the reality conjured up by perspectivalism loses ground, the position of the viewer loses all empirical references and is taken over by the media itself. “As perspective's claim to be reality lost ground, film and photography created a new, direct relationship with reality such that we accept the "actuality" of what we see in the image”

(Merzoeff, *Introduction* 8). The authorship of the visuals is beyond the perceivable field of experience happening in the process of mediation. Visual media, especially television, conquers the field of cultural production in which the floating cultural self is filled with aspirations to contain the image universe. “Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin. Always carrying the sense of distance between viewer

and the event, these media nevertheless compel the transformation of everyday discourse” (Appadurai, *Modernity* 3). The only thing that matters in everyday life is the events of communication. Baudrillard writes poetically about this in his essay “The Ecstasy of Communication”:

Something has changed, and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the "proteomic" era of networks, to the narcissistic and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication. With the television image the television being the ultimate and perfect object for this new era our own body and the wholesurrounding universe become a control screen.(127)

The entry of television marks a rupture from the former practices of culture and a reformulation of a new cultural self. Therefore, the visual cultural practices in the wake of globalisation in Kerala coincided with the emergence of a new aesthetic engendered by television. The cinema, on the other hand, renovated itself according to the aesthetic practices proposed by television. In this context, this dissertation considers television and cinema as two important spaces where a new visual media aesthetic practice emerged.

2. The Visual Media Aesthetics and the Emergence of a New Cultural Self at the Turn of the Century

The division between the visual experience of film and television is only nominal because the film can be watched on television and television is used in cinema as an important factor of *mise en scene*. Lisa Cartwright finds the convergence of media reaching its peak in the 1990s in the West (416). The effect of

such convergence at the industrial level was a pattern of interconnected visuals. Merzoeff writes: "A painting may be noticed on a book jacket or in an advert, while television is consumed as a part of domestic life rather than as the sole activity of the viewer, and films are likely to be seen on video, in an aeroplane or on cable as in a traditional cinema" (*Introduction 7*). In this manner the different forms of visual media merge to form a continuous string of visual experiences fostering a new visual media aesthetics.

The rise of the middle-class as a powerful agent of social change was one of the important factors that contributed to the visual cultural practices in the last decade of the twentieth century in Kerala. The aesthetics of television and cinema addressed the middle-class desires controlled by consumerism. The values of tradition cannot be appropriated easily by consumerism. Therefore, consumerism addressed this by appropriating the value system reinvented by colonial modernity. This aesthetics also shows how the tradition reinvented by colonial modernity served as a model for the middle-class to imagine a traditional value system. Appropriation of the elite value system by the middle-class consumer in various forms may illustrate this process. The middle-class tried to appropriate the elite family value system for two important reasons. One was the newly acquired wealth which made them capable of living the costly lifestyle of the elite. The other, more significant, was related to the refined model of social status.

The elite castes practised certain values that were believed to be an inevitable display of their high social position. At the time of colonial modernity and the first phase of modernity, these values were reinvented according to the needs of the new social system. The elitist family values were reinvented by colonial modernity into a

blend of the old and the new. For instance, it rejected some rituals and displays of extreme caste hatred by giving all of them a modern outlook. The traditions of marriage were kept intact with all the ritualistic aspects of caste but invited all types of people for the ceremony across caste boundaries. They let the women to get educated but kept their job opportunities restricted. These reinvented elite values were appropriated by consumerism in various forms. They are presented by the visual media for the middle class-to consume as traditional values. The middle-class developed a nostalgic belonging to this imagined past in which the elite life exists as the model of refined life.

Various types of Malayalam cinema like the class films, the mass films, and the comic popular approached this idea of tradition differently. For instance, the idea of *tharavaditham* contains so many attributes of tradition in popular culture. It is related to luxury, social status, high morality, and a strong commitment to family values. While the aesthetics of class films was emulative of *tharavaditham*, the mass films celebrated the hedonistic pleasure of consumerism. In the class films, the values were followed silently by the hero who is afraid of any moral infringement. The values, thus, become a way to fulfil the nostalgic affiliation to the elite culture mentioned before. In mass films, these values are either rejected or transformed into a space for celebration. Colin Campbell thinks that there is a mystery in the behaviour of modern consumers that makes their insatiability different from their predecessors. He writes about the “inexhaustibility of wants” that leads the modern consumer (78, 79). Aesthetics of the mass film celebrates this insatiable craze for consumption as a criticism against ethics that failed to transform the social structure. The heroes of such films are often haunted by their heredity. Hedonism is carried out

as revenge against the ethical principle that has been referred to as a sacred text. In many films, in this category, tradition is pictured as a burden that one should give up enjoying the pleasure of a new floating life.

A similar but comical rejection of tradition is found in the comic popular films. In these films, life is no more related to any value system. The tradition and its ethical connection are visualised as a joke and its sanctity a mere principle of social stability. Thus, every principle is either reduced to a nostalgic commodity or rejected as ineffective. The aesthetics of comic popular cinema is similar to that of an amusement park. According to Darley, cinema and the amusement park have the same origin so both function on the fundamental aesthetic principle of "direct spectacle and sensation" (47). Contextually, all the categories mentioned here propose an aesthetic that emphasises the primacy of spectacle by rejecting or transforming the textual (traditional) roots to justify the consumer aesthetics. "The semantic dimension has become so attenuated that whilst interpellation may not entirely disappear, it would, all the same, seem to be reduced or simplified. Here, it is the senses that are directly hailed – thereby making it more appropriate to speak of physical pleasure that is more immediate and unalloyed in character" (Darley 172).

In the case of television, rejection of the text is more direct and sensuous as the experience of television viewing is more private and domestic and thereby allows an increased possibility of individual choice. With the entry of satellite television, the viewing experience underwent a total change. Without any governmental control, private television channels from within and outside the country provided the viewer with a lot of visual content. These channels did not have any cultural commitment or moral obligation. The social status of the television owner was

doubled by becoming the viewer and consumer of an alternate reality of refined modernity. Television image in domestic space gives, according to Darley, a “kind of auto-sensualism of repetitive and superficial play in which the room and the image coextend into a cocooned space of solitary diversion and enjoyment” (184). Visuals on television become “images telescoping into a reality where everyday life becomes a cinema” (Baudrillard, *Evil Demon* 26). This reality is more intense and real than actual reality because of the fascination and wonder they can generate in the viewer. The origin of visual modernity projected by satellite television visuals was rooted outside the culture and was not bound by tradition or any sanctified texts. Unlike cinema, televisual modernity in this stage was a form of imported modernity that did not have any commitment towards the existing culture.

The aesthetics of television as a visual media was outright consumerist from every angle as it projects an aestheticised version of everyday life. As Philipson argues, techno-science supports the everyday aestheticisation of life as cosmic capitalism appropriates aesthetics. He states: “Everyday life becomes both a site for and the object of remodelling, redesigning of being, under the general rule of research and development. In this process barriers between ‘aesthetic and other dimensions of practice, of everyday life, are inevitably dissolved” (204).

After globalisation in 1990s, the consumerist turn rejects or commoditises the idea of tradition. This was a step forward from the previous form of modernity in which a conflict between tradition and modernity remained as the core principle of cultural self. The core principle of this aesthetics is a complete rejection of tradition or textuality. The visual practices ensued by the media filled this void with

'imaginaries' to pursue a fantasy where the spectacle becomes the norm. Baudrillard writes:

The immense majority of present day photographic, cinematic and television images are thought to bear witness to the world with a naive resemblance and touching fidelity. We have spontaneous confidence in their realism. We are wrong. They only seem to resemble things, to resemble reality, events, faces. Or rather, they do conform, but their conformity itself is diabolical. (*The Evil Demon* 14)

Imagination as a social force is found to be the fuel for action but the way in which it functions in this new scenario is different from the past, because new mythographies are created for new social projects and the images and narratives come through mass mediation in realistic and fictional forms (Appadurai, *Modernity* 6, 7). Conceptualising the *Mediascape* he writes:

What is most important about these mediascapes is that they provide (especially in their television, film, and cassette forms) large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed. What this means is that many audiences around the world experience the media themselves as a complicated and interconnected repertoire of print, celluloid, electronic screens, and billboards. The lines between the realistic and the fictional landscapes they see are blurred, so that the farther away these audiences are from the direct experiences of metropolitan life, the more likely they are to construct imagined worlds that are chimerical, aesthetic, even fantastic

objects, particularly if assessed by the criteria of some other perspective, some other imagined world (*Modernity*35).

This complex blend of images and narratives creates the rules by which people live and are taken into action for social change. The visual media aesthetics in the 1990s, unfettered by tradition, could rewrite the norms of modernity and generate a new form of cultural self.

The cultural self of Kerala at the turn of the century was invariably expressive of these additions and losses. Since the concept of cultural self cannot be limited to a chronological frame or related to a special signifier like the historical context of a particular geographical or political space, it is impossible to reach specific conceptual derivations for Kerala. Therefore, this attempt aims to make a statement on the concept of cultural self grounded on the ideas of media aesthetics already reached and their interrelatedness thereof. Aestheticisation of everyday life imposed by the mediation of consumerism leads to a continuous self-reflection of the individual self. Darley writes: “Little space is allowed in the ephemeral and semantically exhausted form of meaning making on the spectator’s part. They do not propose spectators who are bent on interpretation, or who are looking for semantic resonance. The activity mobilized in this instance is not primarily intellectual, not reflective or interpretive in character, but rather sensual and diverting in various ways” (168). Rupture from tradition and text, which is identified as the primary quality of the cultural milieu called modernity, frees the individual spectator from the meaning that presupposes an anchorage. In the context under consideration, the cultural self is strongly mediated so that it finds itself in a constantly shifting state since its ephemeral nature is easily contaminable.

The new forms of culture are informed by consumerism exerting a compulsion on the individual not only to consume but to consume in a way that is as ostentatious as possible. "As more and more classes could actually engage in consumption, it became essential to be able to show that one consumed in a manner that left no doubt about one's ability to pay" (Corrigan 24). The cultural choice of the individual is disconnected from his or her self in the traditional form.

Expressions of the individual are now controlled by a pattern of appearance forced on him or her by consumerist desires. Before this consumerist turn, they were restricted by ethical and aesthetic values that went beyond economic considerations. The difference lies in the form of response that the individual develops towards these two different limiting principles. The individual's choice, as Guy Debord argues in his *The Society of the Spectacle*, indicates a shift from 'being' to 'having':

An earlier stage in the economy's domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of *being* into *having* that left its stamp on all human endeavour. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails a generalized shift from *having* to appearing: all effective "having" must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d'être from appearances. At the same time all individual reality, being directly dependent on social power and completely shaped by that power, has assumed a social character. Indeed, it is only inasmuch as individual reality *is not* that it is allowed to *appear*.(16)

Self, as an expression, is a creation outside his or her perception of reality which, in this context, is mediated and thereby definitely illusory. It is different from the

previous forms of aesthetic choices as it does not have any ethical values associated with it. Unlike in the previous stages where the aesthetic choice comes from the idea of common good, here the choice is a result of a compulsive appearance controlled by the market. As the consumerist compulsion functions on the social plane rather than on the individual level, the choice is not initiated by individual consciousness at all. The agency felt by the individual in making the choice is learned and deceptive. This disjuncture is different from the evaluative distance kept by the Kantian aesthete but indicates a mechanical reduction of the role of the self in the expression of cultural choice. When individuals are forced to make their cultural choices outside the reality of their experience, they are forced to learn the rules of a new aesthetics proposed by consumerism. The cultural self is, thus, outside, separate, and learned rather than anchored in the individual expressions. Appadurai writes: "The world we live in now seems rhizomic (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other. Here we are close to the central cultural problematic in today's world" (*Modernity at Large* 29). This dissertation analysed the *raison d'être* of the emergence of a new cultural self at the turn of the century in Kerala concerning visual media aesthetics. It can be concluded that the cultural self of Malayalis at the turn of the century was learnt, simulated, and deeply informed by reoriented visual media aesthetics.

Recommendations for Further Research

The present study could reveal how the aesthetic sensibility is related to the cultural shifts happened at the time of colonial modernity. The paintings of Ravi Varma is used for the purpose of contextualising the idea of aesthetic change. The nineteenth century India and its image market can be studied further. The printing of images and their widespread popularity in the second half of nineteenth century can be studied further. The calendars printed at Sivakasi have been popular in the households of Kerala too. They were sold in various formats and spaces like temples and streets acquiring different meanings. The Calendars are used as gifts for promoting business relationships. This is an interesting area of research. The emergence of new gift culture in the twentieth century can also be studied in detail. At the time of colonial modernity traditional gifts like clothing and agricultural products were replaced by new items brought from the market. The emergence of a gift market can also be studied.

The twenty first century showcased an increased pace in the changing the cultural attitude and aesthetic preferences. With the widespread presence of visual media a number of paradigm shifts occurred at the beginning of the twenty first century. The influence of television in brining attitudinal changes oriented towards market can be explored further. The mutual relationship between cinema and television is another area of research extended from the present study.

In the twenty first century communication technology and visual media witnessed a huge jump. Introduction of internet altered the way in which the members of a society communicate. Social media platforms emerged to form new

types of gathering that are structured in the form of tribal communities. Such groups replaced many of the social organizations that existed before. Organization of such virtual communities and their aesthetic attitudes would form an interesting area of research. The changes in the culinary habits and clothing preferences after globalization would lead to the nuances of aesthetic preferences and the essence of cultural self.

Apart from approaching all these topics from the perspective of popular culture they can also be studied from the point of views of Feminism, Dalit Studies, Green Studies and many other theories. Comparative studies with other neighbouring cultures like Tamil culture are also possible. For example spectator studies of Tamil movies in Kerala at the period of globalisation may shed light to the formation of new types of character formations, fan culture and formation of stardom in Malayalam cinema.

The present cultural scenario of Kerala is predominantly visual. Owing to fast urbanisation it witnesses people from all economic strata sharing this visual order more or less frequently in everyday life. Subsequently novel forms of expressions that use the digital technology are emerging which cater for the fast changing aesthetic preferences. All these changes offer a lot of areas of research and epistemological exploration.

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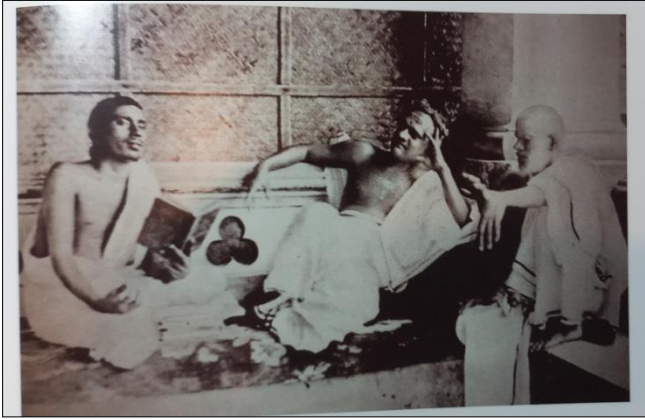
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Appendix A



(Fig. 1)



(Fig. 2)



(Fig.3)



(Fig. 4)

Fig. 1: Year.1900. Enjoying recital of a classical text . (Page 239)

Fig. 2: Year 1894. Varma in his studio. (Page 244)

Fig. 3: Year. 1904. The official photograph after receiving Kaiser-I Hind Medal. (Page 239)

Fig. 4: Year 1902. Ravi Varma as gentleman-painter posing before a portrait. (Page 239)

The figures above show Raja Ravi Varma in various appearances. In Fig. 1, Varma appears in the traditional clothing of a land lord. In Fig. 2, he is seen in his studio. In this photograph his clothing is a mixture of both the traditional and the modern. In Fig.3, and Fig.4, he appears in the urban style. In Fig.3 he appears in the modern style but keeps his traditional *bindi* on his forehead.

Source:Neumayer, Erwin and Christine Schelberger.,editors. *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist. Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma*,edited by, Oxford UP, 2005.

Appendix B



Galaxy of Musicians 1889

Source: Neumayer, Erwin and Christine Schelberger.,editors. *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist. Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma*,edited by, Oxford UP, 2005, pp. 239.

The facial features of every figure appear the same though they are supposed to represent different regions of India. The difference is shown through clothing style. Varma tried to create a particular type for the artistic representation of the female figure.

Appendix C



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig.4



Fig.5

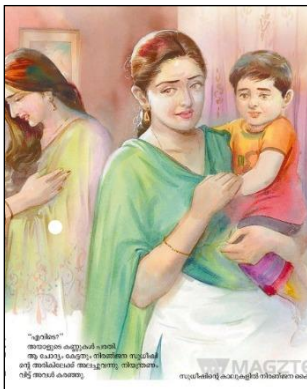


Fig.6

Fig.1, is the photograph (1893)that Varma used as a model for his “There Come Papa”(1893) in Fig.2. **Source:** Neumayer, Erwin and Christine Schelberger.,editors. *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist. Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma*,edited by, Oxford UP, 2005, pp. 252.

Fig.3. In 2020 photographer G Venket Ram has tried to recreate some of the popular paintings of Raja Ravi Varma for a limited-edition calendar. Actress Shobhana simulated the painting, *There Comes Papa* for this event.

Source:<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/Malayalam/movies/news/shobana-lissy-lakshmi-nadiya-and-aiswarya-m-town-actresses-doll-up-to-match-raj-ravi-varmas-paintings/photostory/73935441.cms?picid=73935489>

Fig.4 : The cover of Malayala Manorama Weekly , March 14, 2015.

Source:https://www.magzter.com/IN/Malayala_Manorama/Manorama_Weekly/Entertainment/89947

Fig. 5 and 6 shows the illustrations for painkili novels .

Fig .5. **Source:** Source : <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/my-reference--12103492739033474/>

Fig.6 .**Source:** <https://in.pinterest.com/pin/745627282052706236/visual-search/?x=16&y=16&w=532&h=472&surfaceType=flashlight>

Appendix D



Fig.1

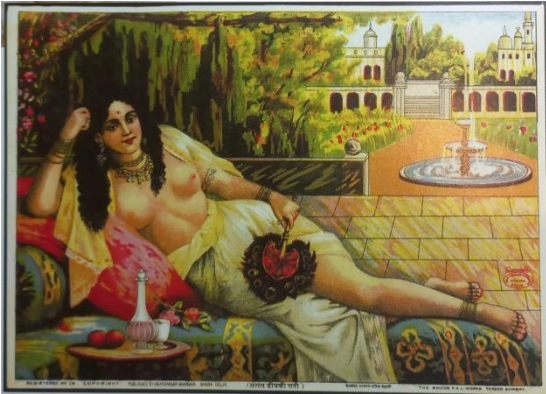


Fig.2



Fig.3

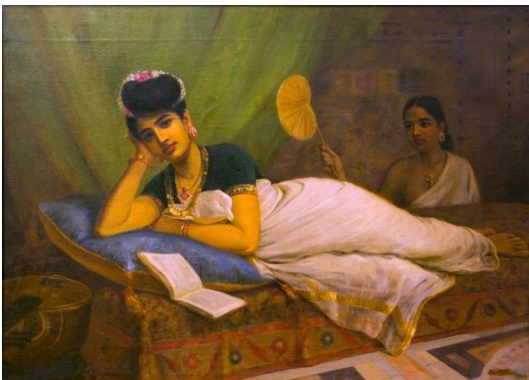


Fig.4



Fig. 5

Fig. 1 Photograph. Year .1900

Fig2. "Sangal Deepaki Rani", 1920 The Bolton Press Bombay.

Fig.3." Nude" by RaviVarma

Fig.4. "Reclining Lady". The painting is popularly known to be done by Varma.

Figs 1 to 4 .Source: Neumayer, Erwin and Christine Schelberger.,editors. *Raja Ravi Varma: Portrait of an Artist. Diary of C. Raja Raja Varma*, edited by, Oxford UP, 2005,pp.274

Fig. 5.An illustration from a *painkili* periodical.**Source:***Janapriyasahithyam*.Facebook Group.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2920006131463796&set=gm.2076328246045108&idorvanity=1223467971331144>. Accessed 14 May 2021.

Appendix E



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980



We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980

Various shots of a single scene from the movie *Angadi* (1980) by IV Sasi. This scene is famous for the dialogue “We are not baggers” by actor Jayan. It is only 60 seconds long but comprises of nineteen shots from various positions and angles.

Source :Scube Films.You Tube. We are not Beggars | Angadi Malayalam Movie Scene | Jayan Punch Dialogue | Sukumaran | Seema | 1980. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Htv-fTyUh7Q>. Accessed 25 April 2020.

Appendix F



Fig.1



Fig.2



Fig. 3

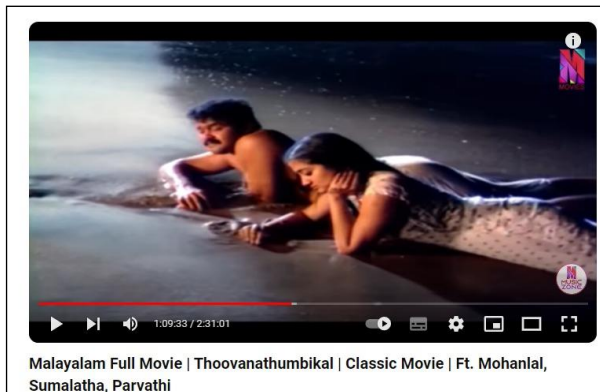


Fig.4

Shots from films of Bharathan and Padmarajan:

Fig. 1. Shot from *Thakara* (1979) by Bharathan (
Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pb6fU9FaZR8> .Accessed on 21 June 2021)

Fig.2. Shot from *Namukku Paarkkan Munthirithoppukal* (1986) by Padmarajan
(Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ToqcwJQ3NOo>. Accessed on 4 May 2021)

Fig. 3. Shot from *Vyshali* (1989) by Bharathan.(
Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wJpnY0oNepE>. Accessed on 5 June 2021)

Fig. 4. Shot from *Thoovaanathumbikal* (1987) by Padmarajan (
Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0FcohtjXcM>. Accessed on 19 July 2021)

These directors were famous for their *middle brow*(Madhyavrthy)films. These films were appreciated for their artistic merit and commercial success attained by combining the elements of art film with popular cinema. They thrived by creating a visual experience of romantic version of the tabooed sexual desires in the society.

Appendix G



Fig.1



Fig.2

Mass Films:

Fig.1. Mohanlal in *Narasimham* (2000) by Shaji Kailas

Source :<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3g5qGQK7eI>. Accessed on 6 June 2021

Fig.2 Mammooty in *Valiyettan* (2000) by Shaji Kailas

Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c0E6C6CNYko>. Accessed on 14 June 2021

The mass- films were superstar films that offered a cocktail of entertainment for the mass to celebrate and enjoy. Stylised presentations of long dialogues, violence, elongated stunt scenes in which the hero fights several persons alone, and voluptuous representation of women are some of the features of such films.

Appendix H

YouTube™ thoovalsparsham full movie



Ramji Rao Speaking | Saikumar, Mukesh, Innocent - Full Movie

Fig.1



Malayalam Super Hit Comedy Full Movie | Thoovalsparsham [HD] | Ft.Mukesh, Jayaram, Saikumar

Fig. 2



Mimics Parade 1991 | Malayalam Full Movie | Malayalam Movie | Jagadeesh | Sunitha|Innocent|Siddique

Fig. 3



In Harihar Nagar Malayalam Full Movie 1080p HD | Mukesh, Siddique, Jagadish, Ashokan

Fig.4

The Comic Popular movies:

Fig.1 Shot from *Ramji Rao Speaking* (1989) by Sidique – Lal. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Sj8pOBBDP_k. Accessed on 18 June 2022

Fig. 2 Shot from *Thooval Sparsham* (1990) by Kamal . https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_xvEh2jf_E. Accessed on 21 March 2021

Fig. 3. Shot from *Mimics Parade* (1991) Thulasi das. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtwFuuCJmHg> Accessed o 20 March 2021

Fig. 4. Shot from *In Harihar Nagar* (1990) by Sidique –Lal. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBfMNU8a4mo> . Accessed on 30 May 2021

These movies revolve around the life a group of youngsters who do not show any serious commitment to traditional values. Life is pictured as a leisurely experience. Many of these movies were inspired by comedy movies from the West. The core plot of the movie *Ramji Rao Speaking* was inspired by the 1971 American TV movie *See The Man Run* and the plot of *Thooval Sparsham* was taken from the 1987 American film *Three Men and a Baby*.

Appendix I



Fig1



Fig2



Fig.3



Fig.4



Fig.5 Fig. 6



Fig.1: Screen shot of Doordarshan Ident in 1990s.

Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PjSYpWFKzbl>. Accessed on 4 April 2021

Fig. 2: Screen Shot of STAR Asia Ident in 1990s.

Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPRpQovz9pA>. Accessed 13 May 2022

Fig. 3 and Fig. 4: MTV India Made in India screen shots.

Source:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-fNnSGnpt80>, and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=naUrttw__uw, respectively. Accessed on 16 May 2022

Fig. 5: Channel V Jokey in 1990s. **Source:**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Oodlkn-p40&list=PL3gcBuaOibxHYxq7sZyVICy1e2QqDmskK> Accessed on 29 June 2022

Fig. 6: First news bulletin of Asianet. **Source:**<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KibNXWKOSKw>. Accessed on 25 May 2021