

**The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Shifting Paradigms
of the Christian Hero Stereotyping in
Malayalam Cinema 1990 – 2017**

**Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH**

ROBIN XAVIER



**RESEARCH & POSTGRADUATE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)
DEVAGIRI, CALICUT**

APRIL 2025

Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis titled “**The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Shifting Paradigms of the Christian Hero Stereotyping in Malayalam Cinema 1990 - 2017**” submitted by **Mr. Robin Xavier** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy in English**, is a *bona fide* record of research work done by him in this department. This work has not previously formed the basis for any award of degree or diploma.

I also certify that the adjudicators' suggested changes/corrections/modifications have been made in the thesis accordingly, and I recommend that it be accepted in its present form.

Devagiri

03.10.2025



Dr. S. Nagesh

Research Guide

Dr. S. NAGESH. MA, PhD
Associate Professor
Department of English
St. Joseph's College
Calicut - 673 008

DECLARATION

I, Robin Xavier, hereby declare that this thesis titled “**The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Shifting Paradigms of the Christian Hero Stereotyping in Malayalam Cinema 1990 - 2017**” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of the Doctor of Philosophy in English is a *bona fide* research work carried out by me, and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any other degree, diploma, fellowship, or any other similar titles. The contents of the thesis have undergone plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found is within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

Devagiri

11.04.2025



Robin Xavier


Research Scholar





**UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
CERTIFICATE ON PLAGIARISM CHECK**

| | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. | Name of the Research Scholar | Robin Xavier | |
| 2. | Title of thesis / dissertation | The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: The Shifting Paradigms of the Christian Hero Stereotyping in Malayalam Cinema 1990 - 2017 | |
| 3. | Name of the Supervisor | Dr. S. Nagesh | |
| 4. | Department/Institution | Research & PG Department of English, St. Joseph's College, Devagiri, Calicut-08 | |
| 5. | Similar content (%) identified | Non Core | Core |
| | | Introduction/ Theoretical overview/Review of literature/ Materials & Methods/ Methodology | Analysis/Result/Discussion / Summary/Conclusion/ Recommendations |
| | | 2 | 1 |
| | Acceptable maximum limit (%) | 10 | 10 |
| 6. | Software used | iThenticate | |
| 7. | Date of verification | Fri Apr 04 2025 00:00:00 GMT+0530 (India Standard Time) | |

*Report on plagiarism check, specifying included/excluded items with % of similarity to be attached.

Checked by (with name, designation & signature)  **Dr. Nasirudheen. T**
Assistant Librarian
University of Calicut, Kerala.

Name and signature of the Researcher  **ROBIN XAVIER**

Name and signature of the Supervisor.  **Dr. S. NAGESH. MA, PhD.**
Associate Professor
Department of English
St. Joseph's College
Calicut - 673 008

The Doctoral Committee* has verified the report on plagiarism check with the contents of the thesis, as summarized above and appropriate measures have been taken to ensure originality of the Research accomplished herein.

Name & Signature of the HoD/HoI (Chairperson of the Doctoral Committee) 

*In case of languages like Malayalam, Tamil etc. on which no software is available for plagiarism check, a manual check shall be made by the Doctoral Committee, for which an additional certificate has to be attached.



Dr. BOBY JOSE
PRINCIPAL, Pen No: 469214
St. Joseph's College (Autonomous)
Devagiri, Calicut - 8, Kerala

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is shaped by the many dialogues and debates that bring to light the layered dimensions of a particular line of thought. I am deeply grateful to my research guide, “il miglior fabbro” Dr. S. Nagesh, whose unparalleled scholarship and invaluable guidance and intuitive critical mind have illuminated the development of the ideas, insights, and arguments found throughout these pages. From the very beginning, he created a space where I could freely express my thoughts, never once interrupting our discussions. He listened patiently to my enthusiasm and confusion alike, with the composed understanding of someone who truly grasps the unique journey of a research scholar.

I extend my deepest gratitude to Dr. Salil Varma R. for being a friend, philosopher and guide. His thoughtful suggestions, constant emotional encouragement, and exceptional dedication have contributed to the course of my research. I am also thankful for the generous provision of e-books, scholarly articles, and reference materials that have significantly enriched this study.

I sincerely thank the Principal, Dr. Bobby Jose, along with former Principals Dr. Sabu K. Thomas, Dr. Jose John Mallikasseri and Dr. Sibichen M. Thomas of St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Devagiri, for generously offering all the necessary support and resources that enabled me to pursue this research.

I am grateful to Dr. Vemoth Vinitha Nair, Head of the Department of English, as well as to my colleagues Dr. Remya K., Mr. Binoy Varakil, Ms. Neethu Baby, and Dr. Rachel John, for their constant support, encouragement, and understanding. I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to Ms. Jyothisana M. Ramesh and

Dr. Veena A., guest lecturers and fellow researchers in the department, whose motivation and emotional support played a vital role in helping me move forward with my research.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Santhi Vijayan, Head of the Department of English at Providence Women's College (Autonomous), Kozhikode, for her insightful suggestions, careful proofreading, and thoughtful critiques, all of which have been instrumental in shaping and refining this work.

I am indebted to Dr. Janaki Sreedharan, Professor of English at the University of Calicut for her commendable suggestions and intuitive recommendations that have contributed to the framing of this work.

I am grateful to Mr. Asish Martin Tom, Assistant Professor of English at DB College, Thalayolaparambu for the invaluable suggestions, emotional support and painstaking effort he has taken to proofread this thesis.

I am deeply obliged to Mr. Shaiju V. J., my cousin for generously providing e-books, scholarly articles, and other valuable resources that have significantly enriched this research.

I am grateful to Prof. C. S. Venkiteswaran and Blais Johny for personally supplying their articles on Malayalam cinema, essential for furthering the research.

My thanks are also due to Mr. Tomson A. J. and other staff of the library of St. Joseph's College Devagiri, Calicut. I also thank the following centres of knowledge that have enabled me to shape my thoughts with books and materials — C. H. Mohammed Koya Library, University of Calicut and Cardinal Tisserant Library, Dharmaram College Bangalore.

I also thank Mr. A.C. Shaji, the office superintendent, Mr. Shibu Sebastian and other staff of the office at St. Joseph's College, Devagiri, Calicut for their support during the course of research.

I thank Dr. Dennis Joseph, Mr. Bibin Antony and Deepa Mary Thomas for their creative contribution in translation.

I sincerely thank Dr. Jojo Joseph for standing by me through every up and down, day and night, with unwavering support and strength.

I would like to thank my fellow researchers, Ms. Roshni P., Ms. Arya A., and Ms. Krishnapriya V. V. for their continuous support and encouragement.

I also thank Mr. Balu and the staff of Bina Photostat for their services in typesetting and binding.

My gratitude goes to those authors and directors whose creative and critical works are mentioned in the thesis.

I thank all my friends, students and well-wishers who always encouraged me to write and submit the thesis in time.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to my parents — my father, V. X. Xavier, who instilled in me a passion for learning, and my mother, Thankamma Xavier, who devoted countless hours to teaching me during my school years. I am also deeply thankful to Ms. Jissa Jacob, my partner, and our son, Steve Robin Vadakkal, whose unwavering emotional support has been vital to the completion of this research.

Last but not the least, I am thankful to any reader who happens to spend their time to read the thesis.

Robin Xavier

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|----------------------|--|---------|
| Chapter I: | INTRODUCTION | 1-34 |
| Chapter II: | THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK | 35-70 |
| Chapter III: | CHRISTIAN SELF-FASHIONING ON SCREEN: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW | 71-106 |
| Chapter IV: | THE HEGEMONIC CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE ACHAYAN | 107-147 |
| Chapter V: | THE IDEOLOGICAL CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE CHRISTIAN BUREAUCRAT | 148-187 |
| Chapter VI: | THE COWBOY CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE SETTLER | 188-227 |
| Chapter VII: | THE SUBALTERN CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE CHRISTIAN OTHER | 228-264 |
| Chapter VIII: | CONCLUSION | 265-275 |
| | RECOMMENDATIONS | 276-277 |
| | WORKS CITED | 278-296 |

Abstract

Cinema, as a discourse and a praxis of representation produces, reproduces and circulates images and symbols about the self and the other, men and women, and individuals and communities. This thesis examines the representation of Christian community power and Christian masculinities in Malayalam cinema from 1990 to 2017, focusing on the construction, reinforcement, and contestation of hegemonic masculine ideals. Malayalam cinema has historically elevated Syrian Christian masculinity through archetypes such as the hegemonic “Achayans,” dominant bureaucrats, and overriding planter-cum-settlers. Drawing from film theory, cultural studies and masculinity studies, and using frameworks from Foucault, Bourdieu, Althusser, and Connell, the research explores how cinematic narratives construct selfhood and community identity with regard to class, caste, and gender. A historical survey of Malayalam cinema is carried out to reveal the evolution and self-fashioning of the Christian male as an ideologically dominant subjectivity. Critiquing the marginalisation of subaltern Christian groups in Malayalam cinema, the research traces how socio-political factors such as caste and class contribute to the formation of a hegemonic identity of Syrian Christians in the Kerala public sphere. The mainstream popular cinema becomes a tool in reinforcing hegemonies of class, caste and gender through the stereotypes of an all controlling patriarch, and thereby constructs community power. Challenging this, the depiction of subordinate masculinities such as those of Latin and Dalit Christians demonstrates the various subcultures marginalized in the process in a different genre and form. The research argues that even positive stereotypes function to homogenise community identities into a Syrian Christian one and cancel out the existence of diverse marginal communities in the 20th century. Malayalam cinema in the 21st century, nevertheless, demonstrates a contested cultural space where hegemonic Christian masculinities are both reinforced and critically deconstructed.

Keywords: Representation, Cultural Studies, Masculinity Studies, Stereotype, Subaltern.

പ്രബന്ധസംഗ്രഹം

സംവാദവും പ്രാതിനിധ്യവും എന്ന നിലയിൽ സിനിമ ആത്മം-അപരം, പുരുഷൻ-സ്ത്രീ, വ്യക്തി-സമൂഹം എന്നിവയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള ചിഹ്നങ്ങളും പ്രതീകങ്ങളും നിർമ്മിക്കുകയും പുനർനിർമ്മിക്കുകയും പ്രചരിപ്പിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. 1990 മുതൽ 2017 വരെയുള്ള മലയാള സിനിമയിലെ ക്രിസ്ത്യാനി പര്യവേഷണപ്രതിനിധാനത്തെ ആധിപത്യസ്വഭാവമുള്ള പുരുഷബിംബത്തിന്റെ രൂപീകരണവും വളർച്ചയും, വിമർശനവും അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കി ഈ പ്രബന്ധം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. പ്രമാണിയായ “അച്ചായൻ”, പ്രബലനായ ഉദ്യോഗസ്ഥൻ, സർവാധികാരിയായ തോട്ടംമുതലാളി/കടിയേറ്റക്കാരൻ എന്നീ വാർപ്പമാതൃകകളിലൂടെ എപ്രകാരമാണ് മലയാളസിനിമ ചരിത്രപരമായി സിറിയൻ ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ പുരുഷനെ പ്രതിഷ്ഠിക്കുന്നതെന്നാണ് ഈ പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നത്. ചലച്ചിത്രസിദ്ധാന്തം, സംസ്കാരപഠനം, ആണത്തപഠനം എന്നിവ അവലംബമാക്കിയും, ഫൂക്കോ, ബോർഡ്യൂ, അൽത്തൂസർ, കോണൽ എന്നിവരുടെ ചട്ടക്കൂടുകൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ചും ചലച്ചിത്രവ്യാനങ്ങൾ വർഗം, ജാതി, ലിംഗഭേദം എന്നിവയിലൂടെ വ്യക്തി-സമൂഹസ്വത്വങ്ങളെ എങ്ങനെ നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നുവെന്ന് ഈ ഗവേഷണം വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ പുരുഷൻ പ്രത്യയശാസ്ത്രപരമായി ആധിപത്യം പുലർത്തുന്ന ഒരു വ്യക്തി എന്ന കർതൃത്വമായി എങ്ങനെ പരിണമിച്ചുവെന്നും സ്വയം രൂപപ്പെടുവെന്നും മലയാള സിനിമയുടെ ചരിത്രപഠനം, വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. കീഴാള, ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ ഗ്രൂപ്പുകളുടെ മലയാളസിനിമയിലെ അരികവൽക്കരണം പ്രശ്നവൽകരിച്ചുകൊണ്ട്, ജാതി, വർഗ്ഗം തുടങ്ങിയ സാമൂഹിക-രാഷ്ട്രീയ ഘടകങ്ങൾ കേരള പൊതുമണ്ഡലത്തിൽ സിറിയൻ ക്രിസ്ത്യാനികളുടെ ഒരു ആധിപത്യസ്വത്വത്തിന്റെ രൂപീകരണത്തിന് എങ്ങനെ സംഭാവന നൽകുന്നുവെന്ന് ഗവേഷണം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നു. എല്ലാം നിയന്ത്രിക്കുന്ന ഒരു ഗോത്രപിതാവിന്റെ വാർപ്പമാതൃകയിലൂടെ സുറിയാനിക്രിസ്ത്യാനിയായ സവർണ പുരുഷന്റെ ആധിപത്യം ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നതിനും അതുവഴി സമൂഹശക്തി കെട്ടിപ്പടുക്കുന്നതിനുമുള്ള ഒരു ഉപകരണമായി മുഖ്യധാരാ ജനപ്രിയ സിനിമ മാറുന്നു. ഇത്തരത്തിൽ പ്രബലവും ആധിപത്യസ്വഭാവവുമുള്ള ആണത്തനിർമ്മിതികൾക്കു വിപരീതമായി, ദലിത് ക്രിസ്ത്യാനികളുടെയും ലത്തീൻ കത്തോലിക്കരുടെയും കീഴാളസ്വത്വങ്ങൾക്കു പ്രാധാന്യം നൽകുന്ന അരികവൽകരിക്കപ്പെട്ട ജീവിതങ്ങൾ പ്രമേയമായ ചലച്ചിത്രങ്ങളുടെ രൂപവ്യതിയാനവും ഈ പഠനം വിലയിരുത്തുന്നു. ചുരുക്കത്തിൽ, ഇരുപതാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിന്റെ അവസാനദശകങ്ങളിലെ മലയാളസിനിമയിൽ ക്രിസ്തീയ പുരുഷപ്രതിനിധാനങ്ങളിലെ സാമൂദായികസ്വത്വവൈവിധ്യങ്ങൾ റദ്ദുചെയ്യപ്പെടുകയും അവ സുറിയാനിക്രിസ്ത്യാനി എന്ന ഏകശിലാത്മകരൂപത്തിലേക്കു ചുരുക്കപ്പെടുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നതായി ഈ ഗവേഷണം നിരീക്ഷിക്കുന്നു. എന്നാൽ, ഇരുപത്തിയൊന്നാം നൂറ്റാണ്ടിൽ ആധിപത്യസ്വഭാവമുള്ള ക്രിസ്ത്യൻ പുരുഷനെ ആഘോഷിക്കുന്നതിനോടൊപ്പം വിമർശനാത്മകമായി അപനിർമ്മിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്ന സാംസ്കാരിക ഇടമെന്നനിലയിൽ മലയാളസിനിമ പരിണമിക്കുന്നതായി കാണാം.

താക്കോൽ വാക്കുകൾ: പ്രതിനിധാനം, ആണത്തപഠനം, സംസ്കാരപഠനം, വാർപ്പമാതൃക, കീഴാളൻ

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Christianity emerged over 2000 years ago as a reformist movement within Judaism, deriving its name from Jesus Christ, whose teachings were compiled and codified in the Bible. According to religious tradition, Jesus' disciples and followers began spreading his message of love, healing, and salvation across different regions. By the fourth century CE, Christianity became the official religion of the powerful Roman Empire, attaining the status of a hegemonic metanarrative. During the colonial era, the convergence of political and theological authorities led to widespread conversions, often driven by missionary efforts aligned with imperial expansion. Today, Christianity consists of a diverse range of denominations, with an estimated global following of over 2.3 billion people. In India, Kerala has the highest concentration of Christians, with religious mythology tracing their historical origins to Jesus through the apostle St. Thomas.

Recent research in cultural studies on community representation in various art forms throws light on how identities are made in connection with discourses such as gender, caste, class and ethnicity and how they are contested in the light of new scholarship. Extending the emerging paradigm of scholarship in cultural studies, the representation of the Christian community in Malayalam cinema also requires intense scrutiny and concentrated analysis. Such a study is highly relevant as little research has been done highlighting the depiction of the community, especially in film studies compared to literature and other cultural productions.

As a community, Christians are identified as an unfixed, ambivalent category in relation to social positioning. The individuals of Christian communities have been labelled as forward, while groups like Latins and Dalit Christians historically experience social backwardness. Due to this curious situation, it is argued that the visual representation of Christians in mainstream cinema has always been problematic.

Such an enquiry is definitely a demanding academic task and, necessarily, involves two parts: the first dealing with the historical evolution of the formation of a Christian identity and the second, their representation on screen. Both these are done with reference to the cross-cultural existence of various identity groups both within and outside. In exploring the first, the thesis examines the various assumptions that constructed Christianity as hegemonic and elitist by analysing a history blended with myths and legends. It also attempts to track how certain groups are underrepresented groups in popular cinema unlike in literature, and how Christianity, as a standardisation of identities, assumed the form of the Syrian Catholic formations. This historicisation also investigates whether a hierarchical division exists akin to casteism among the community, especially in Kerala.

The history, culture and religious characteristics of the Christian community, which is an active presence in Kerala society, are embedded within the regional social structure. The study of Christian culture through cinema and literature is possible because the art forms reflect how society evolves into a means of conveying the signs of a generation. The films of the twentieth and twenty first centuries are historical indicators of the forces that shaped the reality of Christian identity.

Among the different Christian denominations, the Syrian Christians form the most powerful community in Kerala, with approximately a population of around four million. The term Syrian Christians traces their origin back to the Patriarch of Antioch as spiritual head and their language Syriac was used in liturgy till recently in most churches. Though historians are divided regarding the truth value of the proposition, it is a belief widely shared among the members of the community that it was with the arrival of St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus, in Kodungallur in 52 CE to preach the gospel that Christianity entered Kerala. E. P. Anthony reports that there was a prevalent belief that “Marthoma, one of Christ’s apostles, landed at Kodungallur in 52 AD and converted a few upper caste families to Christ due to his efforts” (41). John Ochanthuruth argues that there is no ample historical evidence to verify the arrival and martyrdom of St. Thomas. However, Church historians argue, based on available literary evidence in Syriac texts *The Acts of Thomas*, *The Teachings of Addai*, and *The Martyrdom of St. Thomas*, that the disciple reached India and was martyred in Mylapore near Chennai (35). Whatever the truth, it is indisputable that there existed solid trade relations between Kerala and the then Middle East even before the birth of Christ, and therefore, in every likelihood, an early Christian community must have been here, as noted by John Pallath (106).

One of the associated myths regarding St. Thomas’s mission in Kerala was the traditional belief that a few families – Kalli, Kalikavu, Sankarapuri and Pakalomattom – of the Brahmin (Namboodiri) community were converted to Christianity from Marthoma and that he gave priestly ministry to the members of Sankarapuri and Pakalomattam families. Marthoma Nasranis, the usual way the

Syrian Christians are commonly addressed, take pride in their family history and Namboodiri lineage. In the early centuries, those who converted to Christianity held the highest social status, and with the emergence of caste-based stratification, they came to be regarded as members of the upper castes. It was also argued that the saint established seven churches in Kerala at Kottakayil, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayil, Quilon, Kodungalloor and Palayoor (Vasanthan 48). As historical proof of this upper caste conversion myth, it is evidenced that the Syrian Christian customs and ceremonies were those of the majority of Hindus. “The apostolic beginning of the Kerala church and Christians was thus built into a brahminic origin also” (Varghese K. 897). The argument also exists that St. Thomas preached mainly among the Jews who had already formed a settlement in this coastal region.

Perhaps the theory that the Christian community are the descendants of Namboodiris placed them at the top of the caste hierarchy. There were only two groups of Syrian Christian denominations in the state. Besides the Marthoma Nasranis, there also existed a Persian community, the descendants of Thomas of Cana (Knayi Thoma), who along with 72 followers, reached Kerala in 345 AD (Sreedhara Menon 108). Their descendants, who settled around the Port city of Kodungalloor, are presently known as Knanaya Christians. Beeta John in her doctoral dissertation “Christianity, Caste and Conformity in Kerala: A Historical Introspection” (2019) observes that up to the arrival of Portuguese missionaries, the Syrian Christians were treated as a significantly powerful ethnic group:

In the social structure of Kerala which is based on caste system Syrian Christians took position, over the Nairs, who were the nobility of the country and that they (sic) were second only to the Brahmins; the Kings themselves

manifested an extraordinary veneration for them. In order to preserve their nobility, the Christians never touch a person of inferior caste, not even a Nair. The style of their adaptation sought (sic) to have been conducive to the general ethos of Indian society. (59-60)

Being local in identity and Syrian in religion, the Christian community, a minority group mostly stagnant, distanced themselves from the subaltern groups and maintained a special status (Ponnumuthan 413).

It cannot be assumed that the early converts to Christianity in Kerala abandoned their unique traditional ways of life, rituals and customs and adopted a foreign lifestyle along with Christianity. “The early way of life of the Malabar Christians was similar to the indigenous style of tribal community life. This was the then contemporary social way of life” (my trans.; Kurisingal 150). The teachings of Marthoma must have existed as a cultural background integrating them. There was no formal ritual or organised religious structure in the early stages of Christianity. This is evidenced by the special status given to an archdeacon who belonged to the Pakalomattam family as the functioning head of the Church. The archdeacon was responsible for submitting the names of those who were to receive priesthood from the bishop, collecting money for ecclesiastical causes, and negotiating with the rulers on behalf of Marthoma Christians. Though it is contested, Kurisingal has argued that the “Archdeacon was, according to custom, the man to crown the king in order that the king may be recognised as king” (my trans.; 34) in some medieval kingdoms of Kerala. The distinctiveness of Kerala Christians from global Christianity was quite visible through such practices, which suggested more about localism than integration with a higher order.

Historical records like *The Knayi Thoma Cheppedu* alias The Thomas of Cana Copper Plates (354 AD), *Thazhekkad Sasanam* (C. 11 ct.), *Tharisappilly Sasanam* (849 AD), *Veeraraghava Pattayam* (1255 AD) in various phases are evidences of the relative higher social positioning of the Christian community here. The church historian Xavier Koodapuzha has observed regarding the Chepedes or copper plates: “It is clear from these copperplates that the Christians had a decisive influence in the commercial and social spheres and that they had acquired many privileges. The Chepedes are clear evidence that there was a strong Christian community with a great cultural heritage in Kerala before the arrival of the Portuguese” (my trans.; 135). Seen in terms of caste dynamics, S Harikrishnan has interpreted these privileges in connection with then social hierarchy: “[T]he absence of a sizeable trader-caste among the Hindus in Kerala unlike in other parts of India meant that this role was fulfilled to a large extent by the non-Hindu Malayalis (mostly the upper caste and upper class Muslims and Christians)” (63). This trader identity became a feudal agrarian one as time went by.

The Islamisation of Persia during the Middle Ages affected the Christian community in India. Due to this, the arrival of bishops from the Chaldean (Persian) land to Kerala stopped, and the Christian community in Kerala was in a crisis due to a lack of proper administrative leadership for centuries. The customs and rituals were interpreted according to the individual interests of the local church leaders. As priests no longer got proper religious training, the nature of doctrines changed over the years. Besides, the rituals in connection with birth, death and marriage were influenced in most cases by the native Hindu tradition.

Since the early phase, a distinctive administrative structure has existed in the organisation of the believers in Kerala Christianity. It was almost akin to the function of a caste, as there was a totalitarian structure in which the lives of believers were organised. Placid Podipara describes how Christianity in Kerala managed to function separately and distinctively in the early centuries:

The assembly of the adults and the priests ascribed to a parish administered the temporalities of the parish and looked after the Christian life of the people. This assembly had the power even to excommunicate public delinquents. Matters of a serious nature were dealt within the joint assemblies of two or more churches or parishes, while matters that pertained to the whole Church or Community were treated by the representatives of all the parishes. The Malabar Church thus presented the appearance of a Christian Republic. (3)

Christians of Malabar coast played a vital role in the maritime culture of Kerala, serving as commercial agents for medieval rulers, managing the pepper trade and port affairs. They specialised in both maritime and inland trade and were highly mobile. By the fifteenth century, they were also recognised as skilled soldiers and regarded by Indian chiefs as belonging to a ritually superior caste, equivalent to the high-status Nair warrior groups (Bayly 182). All these aspects highlight how the Christian community has gradually evolved within the socio-political landscape of Kerala over time in the higher strata of society.

The Christian social order existing similar to Hindu higher castes is evidenced by historians. Both Hindu and Christian soldiers were honoured as sworn 'chaver' warriors, pledged to serve their rulers even unto death. Syrians participated

in the military culture with Hindu Panickers teaching Christian youth, with Christians also becoming Panickers themselves. Evidence suggests that Syrians were rewarded for their military service with royal grants and privileges. Traditional accounts highlight that many Hindu rulers supported the Church, with some even actively participating as patrons. For example, the Church at Purakkat is said to have been built by a Hindu king after a victory won by Christian warriors. The Kanjirapalli Church tradition claims that in 1449, the Raja of Thekkumkur provided resources for its construction (Ancy 7).

The arrival of the colonial powers gave rise to different identity groups among the Christians in Kerala. In the tradition of Latin Christianity, the case of the Kollam Christians – the natives of the present Kollam district converted to Christianity by foreign missionaries Montecorvino and Jordanus Catalani in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – is seen as an important event (Veliparambil 39). The attempt of the Portuguese missionaries to bring the Syrian Christians under Latin tradition gave rise to confrontation and to some historical problems. Latin Catholic rites of spirituality were introduced in this phase when missionaries like Francis Xavier and Robert de Nobili converted the then ‘lower caste’ fisherfolk (John K. J. 88-89). It was also stated that the Jesuits converted some Syrian families also into Latin tradition. The emphasis on genealogy and heredity, coupled with the predominantly strong economic positions, helped the Christians to combat and resist, to an extent, the attempt towards Latinisation.

The attempt to bring the Syrian Christians of the Malabar coast who followed Syrian liturgy under the Papacy of Rome resulted in religious tensions in Kerala. Benedict Vadakkekara has noted that it is through their connections with

the Patriarchate of Babylon that the Kerala Christians were associated with Nestorianism (388). The most important event in the history of the Christian Church in Kerala during the Portuguese period was the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor) which met in June 1599. Regarding the primary purpose of the Synod, the historian A Sreedhara Menon writes: “The objectives of the council were to eradicate the influence of Nestorian teachings and bring the Christian community of Kerala under the domination of the Roman Church” (229-30). The decisions of the Synod, which was attended by priests, deacons and the influential laity, brought a section of people who were an indigenous identity group under the jurisdiction of the Pope in Rome. As the Christian way of life was inseparable from those of the natives in most aspects, the Synod considered most of these practices taboo. For instance, many sacraments were performed in a manner that was part of the local culture, which the Portuguese missionaries abolished as these were considered idolatrous. The Portuguese, who had looked down upon the Hindus until then, began to view with suspicion the closeness of the Marthoma Nasranis to the Hindus and prohibited the giving and receiving of elephants, pearls, and vows on festive occasions. The Synod also prohibited Christian men from wearing earrings and ornaments like Hindus, leaving their hair long and tying it like a ‘kuduma’. Abolition or modification of many rituals related to birth, marriage and death in the native tradition was another step in the process. Gradually, a separate identity that was distinctive from the Hindu upper caste was forged among Syrian Christians, who could hardly be distinguished from the native Hindus in matters like untouchability and belief in astrology.

However, when the Portuguese arrived in Kerala initially as traders, the Marthoma Christians hoped that their friendship with the Portuguese would help them resist the attacks of the Mohammedans and regain their monopoly of trade. The advent of Islam in Kerala in the eighth century established Muslims as a more influential trading community. K. N. Ganesh has observed how the Christians of Kerala established trade relationships with the Portuguese. “Christians must have thought that joining their friendly sect would help them in increasing trade opportunities. This was natural in the sixteenth century when the Arabs almost monopolised commerce. The Christians could only act as intermediaries with the Portuguese as they increased their dominance” (244).

The protest of a sect of Christians who resented continuing the Syrian spiritual and liturgical practices ultimately resulted in the Coonen Cross Oath in 1653. Accordingly, the authenticity of the Jesuits in Kerala was questioned. This clash between Latin and Syrian tradition had far-reaching consequences, as the Syrian Christians had a complex ambivalent identity here. The various attempts towards the Latinisation of spirituality and consequent opposition to it resulted in the formation of more Syrian churches. The Christian group which broke all relations with Rome and remained a separate entity centred around the archdeacon as in the pre-Portuguese period was known as the Jacobites, who later, in the twentieth century, split into the Syrian Jacobite church and Syrian Orthodox Church. The majority of the Syrian Christians, with reluctance, accepted the Papal rule. The major ones include the Syro-Malabar Church, the Syro-Malankara Church, and the Latin Church. During the colonial phase, the Dutch formally used the term Syrian Christians to distinguish the sect of Christians based on the language of worship.

The different groups mentioned above had different stories of origin. Moreover, different missionary groups also had some internal differences regarding the praxis of religion. The traditional Syrian Christians distanced themselves from the newly converted Christians since this period. Strict norms regarding marriage, baptism and other aspects of spirituality separated the different groups with the same religious core. As Kerala society was strictly organised around the idea of caste, the Syrian Christians, who were considered on par with the upper caste Hindus, resisted immediate merger with other factions – the caste and feudal ancestry structure in union with liturgy operated during this phase.

During the colonial period, Kerala witnessed the rise of Protestant churches. Protestantism, which began as a reform movement under the leadership of Martin Luther in the sixteenth century to democratise the Church by questioning the official creeds of the Catholic Church, quickly spread all over the globe. Protestant Missionaries arrived in Kerala as part of social reformation and religious conversion. Kerala's modernity through education came through such evangelicals. The missionaries contributed a lot to the transformation of Travancore by setting up schools and printing press, and were involved in social reforms especially against untouchability.

British rule in India affected the traditional Syrian Christian community in many ways. Groups like London Mission Society (LMS), Church Missionary Society (CMS), and the Basel Mission were engaged in social and missionary work in Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. While the Portuguese and the Dutch were mainly interested in commercial affairs, the British administrators and missionaries prioritised English education, having realised the potential of the English language

as a medium that helped in the most effective implementation of politics and religion. The schools opened by the missionaries led to the collapse of the traditional education system, as education was provided to people regardless of caste, religion, and gender. The caste-based educational structure was replaced by an individual-centric modern educational style that paved the way for intellectual advancement. Knowledge of the English language allowed Keralites to get acquainted with new literary forms and enjoy reading the classics of world literature. As educational qualification was made mandatory for government jobs, education became more than a means of acquiring knowledge and became a criterion for employment and social status.

The Marthoma Church, Church of South India, and St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India were formed as part of the Protestant faith that reached Kerala. Apart from these, different varieties of Pentecostal churches in Kerala started in the nineteenth or twentieth century, such as the Salvation Army and Jehovah's Witnesses. A common feature is that such churches were mostly attended by the poor and the Dalits, who were subjected to caste exploitation.

The Syrian Christian orthodoxy, which boycotted the missionary schools because of the perception that Protestant ideas were being spread through the English language and the possibility of Catholics converting to Protestantism, started schools attached to the churches in the model of missionary education with the aim of educating their children. Reformers like Kuriakose Elias Chavara, who founded the first Sanskrit school in the State, played a major role in modernising the community, if not the State. Plathottam CMI states how, by sending circulars to all churches under his ambit, Chavarayachan attempted to educate the community (29).

The Protestant Mission initiated English education that paved the way for the entrance of cultural modernity in Kerala. Missionaries also played a major role in the annihilation of caste by democratising the newly found schools. However, subaltern studies groups of the present view the reformation of community through education in terms of caste and claim it to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

Following the missionaries, the government and various caste and community reformist organisations of people came forward with educational activities, and a new, enlightened generation began to form by the end of the nineteenth century. The spread of printing enriched the intellectual world. Along with the translation of the Bible, the missionaries also became active in the field of literature by introducing grammar texts and dictionaries and translations of classics of world literature.

During the colonial period, especially in the nineteenth century, Kerala Christianity was transformed culturally by these steps in radical ways.

The doctrines of hegemonic origin and casteist thought were mostly imbibed through the caste structures in Hinduism; Syrian Christians in Kerala maintained their hierarchical status in the nineteenth century. The foreign powers could not completely detach the Syrian Christians from the indigenous elements that the society had assimilated through many years of interactions with the dominant Hindu community. The fact that even in the nineteenth century Syrian Christians were unable to give up casteist thoughts is evidenced by Paul Manavalan: “Many of the rites on the occasion of birth, caste, christening, initiation, marriage, death, celibacy, etc., were almost the same for the Hindus and the Syrian Christians. Only that the latter tried to Christianise and interpret everything in the light of Christian knowledge system” (27). Mathew Daniel has sufficiently demonstrated how caste-

based genealogy unified the Christians of Kerala in the nineteenth century. “A common cultural heritage, rather than unity of faith, is the main factor that holds Kerala Christians together” (13). This caste-based ideological thinking remains one of the foundational assumptions behind the Syrian Christian ascendancy in Kerala.

The number of Christians significantly increased in Kerala during the colonial phase. The statistical report of the first census in Travancore in 1875 is important documentary evidence to analyse Christian cultural power. According to the records, Hindus constituted 73.64 per cent of the population, Christians 20.9 per cent, and Muslims roughly 6 per cent (156).

In studying the subaltern origins of Christian groups, an analysis of the different Churches of the nineteenth century is essential. Protestant missionaries were prominent among the Dalit populations, and many embraced Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nibu Alexander has observed the reasons for these conversions: “The Dalits saw these movements as a liberation from the caste/social slavery experienced by them. As Pentecostal worship was able to cross the boundaries of language and culture, many Dalits joined this movement” (*qtd. in* Aloysius 37). It was in response to the casteist thinking in many Syrian Christian factions that Prathyksha Raksha Daiva Sabha (PRDS), the first Dalit church, was formed in Kerala by Poikayil Appachan alias Poikayil Sreekumara Gurudevan in 1909. Through the customary songs and sermons in his youthful days, Appachan drew the admiration of foreign missionaries who appointed him as a worship mentor. However, his vocal opposition to caste discrimination and advocacy for social equality sparked conflicts, including violent backlash from the upper classes. Aravind Raju explains the philosophical reformation that Poikayil

Appachan has proposed: “The term salvation is used differently from the Christian and Brahmanical concept of salvation and liberation. It is not the salvation of a person after death. It is the salvation of an individual while still alive. Man is not simply understood as an individual, but as a historical man” (my trans.). Appachan briefly joined the Brethren Church, where he promoted inter-caste marriages and continued his activism, yet encountered discrimination within the institution. His rejection of salaried church positions and unwavering critique of social injustices led him to sever ties with multiple organisations. Another important Dalit Christian Church was Swatantra Daiva Sabha movement started by C. S. Mathew in 1949. Branches of the Church were established in various parts of Travancore, and mission work was carried out by Dalit community members (*qtd. in* Aloysius 38). Dalits who experienced social discrimination got assimilated into the Pentecostal religious philosophy, which lacked prescribed liturgies, rituals, and traditions. These anti-caste movements working for social equality, however, remained in opposition to the hegemonic construction of the Syrian Christians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The predominance of the Syrian Christian tradition in Kerala at the time of the formation of the State made them an influential category. As a landowning farming community, Christians spread to the suburbs of Travancore and later migrated to the High Ranges and Malabar during the first half of the twentieth century. The Christian trading tradition was predominantly maintained in places like Thrissur, Angamaly, and Kunnankulam. Education through schools and economic rise made the community a significant minority in a caste dominated public sphere.

There are a number of historical reasons for Christian construction as a hegemonic group in Kerala. The liberation struggle (Vimochana samaram) was a socio-political movement that worked to throw out the Communist government led by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, which came to power through elections in 1957. It was a consortium of Syro-Malabar Church, Nair Service Society, Indian National Congress and Indian Union Muslim League that played a key role in it. The reforms initiated by the Communist Party in education and land organisation prompted the capitalist forces in Kerala to turn against it. The widespread anxiety that the economic, social and cultural capital the communities enjoyed would be mandatorily handed over to the socially marginalised others led to the liberation struggle and the subsequent dissolution of the Kerala government. The struggle ensured the unity and re-empowerment of caste elitism. The infamous slogans of the agitation, such as “We will make you call us Thambran/ we will make you drink porridge in palm spathe/ Let Chathan go and plough in the field/ Let Chacko rule the land” (my trans.), reiterate the notions of caste glorification and community hegemony that existed among the Syrian Christians (Johny B. 18). Though the Communist parties in India believed that the liberation movement was an anti-communist project planned with the financial assistance of the American spy agency, the CIA, the event formed a cultural troposphere of hegemonic ideologies.

The formation of the Kerala Congress Party on October 9, 1964, was another significant event that shaped the social power of Christians. Following the resignation of P. T. Chacko from the R. Shankar-led coalition, a faction of Congress leaders, mostly Syrian Christians, resigned from the cabinet under Dr. K. M. George. The party inaugurated by Mannath Padmanabhan indicated the strong

coalition between the Nairs and Christians as constituting the structures of power. The cultural capital of the Christian community is reflected by the fact that through the various factions of the Kerala Congress, the community had continuous access to the administrative and political structure of Kerala in both the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Left Democratic Front (LDF) governments. Leaders like K. M. Mani, P. J. Joseph, T. M. Jacob, P. C. Thomas and C. F. Thomas maintained a characteristic community identity and thus attempted to represent the community. These political leaders put forward a regionalist political agenda, often addressing the concerns of the Church, mostly in educational and land reforms.

Political power in Kerala since the formation of the state has been dominated by the traditional hegemonic communities. The Christian community has always enjoyed a significant share of political power, as evidenced by the fact that the Christian Chief Ministers of Kerala were from the Syrian Christian communities. With political parties like the numerous factions of Kerala Congress, Syrian Christians have been dominating the public sphere of Kerala, although parallelly existing counter-cultural social discourses have always been a feature of Kerala in recent decades.

A thesis that studies the self-fashioning of Christians in Malayalam cinema at present requires an inter-relational analysis of social transformation by analysing literature and cinema in connection with the community identity. The performative tradition of Christianity in Kerala began in the 17th century with missionaries integrating local art forms like Parichamutukali, Margamkali, and Chavittunadakam with Christian themes. By the nineteenth century, Christian theatre emerged through musical dramas, with P. K. Kocheppan Tharakan's *Maryamma* (1892) and

Kandathil Varghese Mappila's *Embrayakutty* (1893) being significant early works. In the early twentieth century, playwrights like V. S. Andrews and Kainikara Padmanabha Pillai expanded the scope of Christian drama, incorporating biblical narratives such as Christ's betrayal by Judas Iscariot and Christ's crucifixion. Christian poetry, similarly rooted in oral traditions, was pioneered by Johann Ernst Hanxleden alias Arnos Pathiri (1681-1732), whose devotional verses like *Puthan Pana* and *Genoa Parvam* contributed both to religious expression and the development of Malayalam literature. These community defining performative traditions of art transmitted through oral narratives, folk songs and martial acts distinctively marked the Christian identity. The community centric nature of art and music underwent radical transformations in the twentieth century in the light of the social reformist politics, cinema and film music. V. C. Harris points out the outcome of such a development in "Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema": "In formal terms, this was made possible by an apparently eclectic combination of elements drawn from a variety of sources-folk, classical, and others. The whole process coincides with the dynamics of the democratization of India society" (5).

An understanding of the evolution of the public sphere in twentieth century in the country, especially in Kerala, serves as a methodological tool in analysing community representation in a plural landscape. T. K. Ramachandran has noted a three-fold transformation in Kerala public sphere in the twentieth century.

In the first place, the anti-colonial, anti-feudal struggle radically transformed the social order and paved the way for profound changes in class relations and societal norms. In the second place, the reform movements which sought to cleanse the society of evils like untouchability, social segregation on the

basis of caste, polygamy and so on, dealt a death blow to the oppressive ancient regimen with its rigid caste stratification, female servitude and reprehensible practices meant for its perpetuation. In the third place, the struggle against the feudal mores led to a thorough restructuring of the family, not only among the oppressed classes but among the privileged strata. (118-9)

These three-fold social changes are fundamentally significant in the examination of the subjectivity of the Christian male which is continuously constructed and negotiated in popular culture – films, literature, songs and other cultural fields.

The breakthrough in cultural studies since the 1960 has radically transformed the way cinema is examined. Reviewing the past literature on subjectivity construction in Malayalam cinema is an essential part of a thesis, probing Christian stereotyping and masculinity construction.

In the Indian context, Caroline and Filippo Osella's *Men and Masculinities in South India* (2006) is an early attempt to conceptualise the changing paradigms of the evolution of notions about the images of men. In shaping young masculinities, the work – which employed a practical study through questionnaires and interviews on studying stardom – has examined the pivotal role cinema has played in the public sphere of India, particularly in Kerala. The work is particularly noted for its empirical examination of Kerala masculinity through the star images of Mammooty and Mohanlal. Osella and Osella observe that young male fans view Mammooty as embodying strong, decisive roles, often as a responsible family man, authoritative elder brother, or law-enforcing policeman (175). His ability to portray Kerala's Christian "other" remains the core of his cultural versatility (197). In contrast,

Mohanlal is perceived as “the alter-ego of the average Malayali” (181), excelling in romantic and song-and-dance roles (176). His star persona represents dominant Hindu masculinity, maintaining a stable core identity while Mammooty serves as the unacknowledged other self (196). The work brilliantly demonstrates how the Nair identity becomes the Malayali identity with reference to Mohanlal: “‘Malayali’ identity is, by sleight of hand, assimilated into a dominant community’s vision of itself. Travancore Hindu man comes to be Malayali man, and is held to be flexible yet stable, and treading an ideal path through the modern world: neither reluctant nor too eager to embrace modernity” (199).

Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film (2006) by Philippa Gates remains a classic work that explored the changing shades of masculinities in cinema from Hollywood’s early cinema to the contemporary era. Gates explores how the male detective archetype reflects evolving ideals of masculinity shaped by cultural, social, and political contexts. By categorizing detective figures such as the hardboiled private eye, police investigator, and amateur sleuth, Gates examines how Hollywood films address anxieties around power and identity. He argues that detective masculinity is a fluid and contested identity, tracing its evolution from the rugged individualism of Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson (72) to the morally ambiguous film noir detective, who later gave way to the institutionalised law enforcer (81). The hypermasculine detective of Clint Eastwood’s era symbolised patriarchal resistance to feminism (126), while detectives in the 1990s embodied psychological vulnerability and moral uncertainty, reflecting a crisis of masculinity. The inclusion of black detectives played by Morgan Freeman, Samuel Jackson, and Denzel Washington (180) and the rise of

female detectives further challenge hegemonic masculinity, despite the persistence of traditional detective heroism.

An early study of Malayalam cinema from a Marxist point of view is the one undertaken by Raveendran entitled, *Cinema, Samooham, Prathyayasasthram* (Cinema, Society, Ideology) published in 2007. The work has extensively analysed the apolitical nature of popular cinema since its inception. Rightly pointing out the ideological embeddedness of all works of art, including cinema, and influenced by the Frankfurt School and Walter Benjamin's notions, the work has heavily criticised commercial cinema for the way it kept the dominant and bourgeois hierarchies unchecked in cinema. The text also demonstrates the various ways in which the medium of cinema maintains the ideological status quo. Targeting the scopophilia – visual pleasure – ingrained in cinema, the work has demonstrated cinema as one of the primary constituents of the ideological apparatus (25). The work also discusses how the ideological surplus created by the auteur filmmakers of mainstream cinema regressively structures the popular imagination and reproduces the same by the hegemonic notions in society. Raveendran observes that the identification with the hero, in cinema, is more ideological and less psychological due to the similar platform shared by the hero and the spectator (33). The analysis of Malayalam popular cinema regarding masculinity and Syrian Christian representation depends a lot on the above configurations of the interrelationship between society, cinema and ideological frameworks.

G. P. Ramachandran's work *Malayala Cinema: Desam, Bhasha, Samskaram* (Malayalam Cinema: Land, Language and Culture, 2009) studies the politics of representation in Malayalam cinema since the days of *Vigathakumaran* (Dir. J. C.

Daniel, 1928). Despite the limitations in film technology, such as camera positioning and editing, Malayalam cinema has taken a progressive stance by being anti-caste, anti-imperial, and anti-feudal, especially in the 1950s and the 1960s. At the same time, the work demonstrates how the male gaze has denied agency to women's voices with reference to classics like *Chemmeen* (Dir. Ramu Kariatt, 1965). The most problematic phase, according to him, is the 1980s and the 1990s, which celebrated feudal elitism and revivalism on-screen, symbolised by the Valluvanadan slang and clothing style. As a point of contrast, how mainstream cinema has constructed various others, mostly Tamilians, as the ones who threaten the notion of progress and culture, is interpreted as evidence of the neoliberal, bourgeoisie mindset dominant in the Kerala public sphere (22). The text also identifies how the representation of Muslims became problematic in the post-Babri Masjid era: "After the rise of the upper caste Hindu wave that started in the 90s, Muslim protagonists in Malayalam cinema were completely absent or were only placed in the role of antagonists" (my trans.; 30). Christian representation is investigated, based on the insights provided in the text.

One of the seminal texts that studies Malayalam Cinema with regard to the politics of representation is K. P. Jayakumar's *Jathivyavasthayum Malayala Cinimayum* (Caste in Malayalam Cinema), published in 2014. He argues that more than an art form, cinema is a signification system, investigating the cultural, sociological, and economic relations in a society. Contrary to the community portrayal in the post-independent Malayalam cinema, the popular movies since the 1980s expressed the existential angst of the Savarna upper class. Their recurring themes were unemployment, loss of love, poverty of the ancestral home, and

displacement, and caste was identified as the common factor (9). Many of these texts had unemployed youth migrating to cities and becoming entangled in the metropolitan underworld. Even the lovers who were saddened by lost love belonged to the upper castes. This is because, he suggests, cinema was addressing the aesthetics of the bourgeoisie middle class and its ideological formations in the 1980s (43). Mandal-Masjid politics of the late 1980s and the early 1990s has been the source of construction of hegemonic savarna politics which Jayakumar terms as “poonool rashtriyam” (77). Such narratives present the subaltern and the Muslim other as illegal occupants of a space that ought to have been naturally the possession of the dominant upper caste.

Vellithirayude Rashtreeyam: Chalachitra Samskara Padanam (The Politics of the Silver Screen: A Cultural Study of Cinema, 2018) jointly written by Resmi G and Anilkumar K.S. deals with how commercial cinema continuously reproduces the stereotypes of good vs bad, savarna vs avarna, black vs white according to the dominant ideologies of class, caste, gender and religion. Public consciousness is a set of ‘prejudices’ that arise from the traditional understandings of the masses based on their attitudes of caste/religion/race/colour/class/ gender. “The ruling class further glorifies such ‘prejudices’ in each instance through ‘contrasts’ of ‘binary opposites’”. It is in this cultural context that elites become ‘superior’ and lower classes ‘inferior’. The dominant class strategically fulfils the task of reinforcing the public consciousness formed on the basis of prejudices” (my trans.; 17). The culture industry of Malayalam cinema, as a result, becomes a mechanism for continuously reproducing the hate culture. The alternatives based on Dalit and minority aesthetics incessantly negotiate the problematic representation on screen through counter

strategies. Similarly, the work problematises instances of body shaming on the basis of a hegemonic masculine configuration as well.

“Marriage and Family in Cinema”, written by Janaky Sreedharan and included in the collection *Women in Malayalam Cinema: Naturalizing Gender Hierarchies* (2010), is an article that interrogates the complexity in the portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema, especially in connection with family-centric (melo)dramas. The article studies how the gender stereotypes of motherhood and married women have changed in both the rural and urban landscapes of Malayalam cinema. However, despite the surface structure changes in the depiction of women as educated and employed, the narratives most often subject them to the dominant patriarchal gaze in the films since the 1980s. Addressing the centrality of marriage, she observes both the feminine and masculine as inscribed by cinema: “Marriage was posed as woman’s destiny and to get her married the holy mission of the men of the household, failing which they fell short of the patriarchal ideal of manhood” (78). The contrastive dimensions of gender portrayal is summed up when she observes the binary construction of gendered identities of the male and female in cinema of the late 1990s and the first decade of the twentieth century: “While the male stardom is born out of violent revenge action, any sign of initiative for vengeance in a woman is censured, cancelled and disciplined” (83).

In terms of community politics in Malayalam cinema, there are some important articles analysing the constituent elements of Kerala modernity, especially with regard to Nair masculinities. Dilip M. Menon examines Nair male hegemony in Malayalam cinema and literature in the post-1956 era following Kerala’s state formation. In his landmark article “Things Fall Apart: The Cinematic Rendition of

the Agrarian Landscape in South India” (2014), primarily on the basis of M. T. Vasudevan Nair’s novels and films, he explores how the Hindu upper caste landowning elites have been constructed as the norm in Kerala’s historical, literary, and cinematic narratives in contrast to Muslims, lowercaste Hindus, and Christians, reinforcing social hierarchies and exclusionary regional identities. He describes how the emergence of a new form of patriliney can be seen as a new masculine identity structure, based on J. Devika’s and Robin Jeffrey’s observations. In MT’s fictional works,

the state is significant by its absence and the community is present only in its imminent dissolution. The burden of transformation is on the new man arising from the ruins of matriliney and the structuring of the public domain around a resurgent masculinity. The new man is also the reconstructed agrarian Hindu. Living by the sea, MT has also effaced the maritime and its rhythms, silencing of the space of commerce, and therefore the Muslim and the Christian. (330)

The rise of the Christian male in the cinema of the 1980s contrastively reflects a new pattern of a landowning, power assuming, and aggressively hegemonic subjectivity.

Ambili Anna Markose has conducted an extensive study of Christian settlement and its representation in the context of national identity formation in India. “Religion, Modernity, and the Nation: Postscripts of Malabar Migration” (2017) charts the process and politics of Christian settlement in Malabar and its consequent representation in literature and film. Analysing the narratives through the cultural and political significance of the Syrian Christian community, Markose highlights the ideological framework embedded in historical writing. The work

examines how these discourses engage with concepts of modernity and the nation-state, ultimately shaping discussions on the politics of representation and self-articulation. The representation of the Syrian Christian minority is an elitist one in her analysis: migrants are perceived as more modernised than the native population of Malabar, as their migration led to the creation of secular educational institutions throughout the region (166).

Blais Johny's article "Vellithirayil Vazhunnavarum Veezhunnavarum" (Those Who Rule and Those Who Fall on the Silver Screen), published in 2019, was a pioneering one that evaluated the sense of caste in Christianity. The article investigates how Malayalam cinema celebrates savarna elitism in Christianity and ignores subaltern factions in the community. Resisting the attempt to homogenise the Christian experience, the article demonstrates how caste functions as an ideologically embedded mechanism in Malayalam cinema. The invisibility of castes among Syrian Christians is contested with regard to the feudal tropes in Malayalam cinema, and three historical reasons are observed in the process. The cultural capital through educational institutions, the anti-Left political legacy since the liberation struggle and the continuing access to the state political power are identified as the primary reasons for the hegemonic superiority of Syrian Christians (18). The celebrated masculine personas of the Christian community, Johny observes, have emerged from the landowning feudal aristocracy among the Syrian Christians. Pitching the need for a revised understanding of the social hierarchy in cinema, he brings in the impactful recent studies by Vinil Paul and the progressive religious formations undertaken by Poikayil Appachan in the early twentieth century.

Meena T. Pillai's "The Feudal Lord Reincarnate: Mohanlal and the Politics of Malayali Masculinity" (2020) throws light on the 'refeudalisation' of Kerala society through cinema by studying the screen persona of the superstar Mohanlal. In the 1980s, Pillai observed that Mohanlal's stardom became synonymous with quintessential Malayaliness as he was perceived to embody cultural traits that resonated deeply with Malayali audiences. His characters – whether as a playful prankster, a naive yet resilient individual, or an unemployed youth striving to support his family – captured the public's admiration and emotional connection (102). However, in the 1990s, "Mohanlal's cultural significance is more discursively anchored to the rise of a Malayali individualism and thus reflects upon the ideological tensions of Kerala society in the throes of globalisation" (104). Mohanlal of post-1990s reflected how "aspects of a feudal culture become imbued with desire and are exhibited and celebrated as cultural commodities" (106) and ultimately emerged as the icon of feudal masculinity haunting the modern politically conscious spectator. These theoretical underpinnings are important in evaluating the hegemonic Christian characters performed by the actor.

One of the early studies investigating the constituent elements of the identification mechanism of Malayalam cinema is Jeny Rowena's doctoral dissertation entitled *Reading Laughter: The Popular Malayalam 'Comedy-Films' of the Late 80s and Early 90s* (2002). Rowena traces the emergence of laughter films in Malayalam with reference to the arrival of Gulf money with which the liberal humanist and anti-feudal values once prominent in earlier cinema were discarded in favour of new narratives that aligned with the emerging capitalist economy. She argues that the rise of popular laughter films such as *Boeing Boeing* (Dir.

Priyadarshan, 1985), *Gandhi Nagar Second Street* (Dir. Sathyan Anthikad, 1986), and *Ramji Rao Speaking* (Dir. Siddique and Lal 1989) were the product of a socio-economic condition in which the traditional hegemonic male role as protector and provider can no longer exist without questions. She demonstrates how the caste and class centric patriarchy devised a new strategy for maintaining ideological control over women's voices, particularly those of upper caste women. In analysing the constituent structures of *Boeing Boeing*, she traces how caste was inserted into the aesthetics of laughter. The comedies of Malayalam cinema with Christian male as protagonists are analysed based on Rowena's insights.

Performing Religion: Visual Publics and Christianity in Kerala (2018) by Ambili Anna Markose offers critical insights into the study of popular culture in Kerala, examining its intersections with religion, modernity and identity formation. The second chapter "Malayalam Cinema and Christian Representations", is a detailed analysis of Malayalam films set in a Christian milieu. Markose observes, on the basis of parameters such as strong ties to regional geography and the tension between tradition and modernity, the emergence of a distinct genre named 'Christian films' with a well-defined community atmosphere (78). The Syrian identity as agriculture-oriented is reiterated by examining Christian films, and the negotiation between tradition and modernity emerges as the central conflict in many narratives. Syrian Christian assertions of upper caste status and dominance gain validation through Hindu patronage by inter-religious marriage. These were strategies employed through which a contrastive political signification is traced to the Syrian Christians in opposition to the marginal villainous selfhood given to other minorities.

Aloysius K. C. has provided insights into the representation of Christianity in his doctoral thesis *Christava Swathwavishkaram Malayala Cinemayil* (The Representation of Christian Identity in Malayalam Cinema, 2019). The work explores the myriad ways in which Malayalam cinema has constructed the specific identity of the marginalised Latin Christians. Exploring the various domains of social life such as marriage, death, and family from a cultural studies point of view, the thesis demonstrates the distinctiveness of the Latin Christian identity in a radically different way from the Syrian identity. The highlight of the study is the mapping of the coastal villages as a special geographic location and how distinctive cultural forms like ‘Chavittunadakam’ script the identity of the Latin male and female in the Kerala public sphere. The thesis observes how Malayalam cinema has adopted a language of androcentrism in the representation of Latin Christian culture: “Malayalam cinema, in which Latin Christian life becomes a theme, indicates the ideological praxis of patriarchal dominance. By allotting special places – the exterior space to the male and interior domestic space to the female – the Christian ideological consciousness has systematically regulated the gender discourses” (my trans.; 222). He argues that the popular as a manifestation of the dominant ideology has resulted in erasing the subaltern and marginal experiences, including those of the Latin Christians, from the visual aesthetics of Malayalam cinema.

The thesis investigates the history of Malayalam cinema to trace the construction of the Christian male. It also attempts to search for the stereotypes and cultural codes at work and explores how an apparent hegemonic order is maintained regarding the community representation. Though the specific period of study is three decades, the 1990s, the 2000s, and the 2010s, the thesis generally observes the

various changes that have happened in Malayalam cinema since its inception, with regard to the formation of Christian character stereotypes. The thesis analyses the major shifts in the subjectivity formation of the Christian hero in Malayalam cinema from the 1980s, when the language of cinema was renewed, in accordance with the changes in global cinema. The analysis observes how the dominant form of mainstream commercial cinema has formed a hegemonic masculine as the standard in representing the Christian male. Simultaneously, the research examines how the ideal of the hegemonic masculine takes new forms, sometimes as more toxic and sometimes as more sensitive in relation to the other. It also inspects the existence of a subordinate masculinity, in the form of non-Syrian Christian representation, and how it sociologically affects the larger public sphere of the state.

The Christian self is fashioned in Malayalam cinema through cinematic techniques, costumes, dialogues, and performances. Christians have been predominantly portrayed as affluent Syrian Catholics, particularly in the archetype of the Achayan, a wealthy Christian planter, since the late 1980s. This category is a spin-off of the struggling, hardworking planter class in the 1950s and the 1960s. As religiosity is subordinated to political power, there emerges the concept of an uncanny dualism in the Christian identity: a progressive liberal on the surface, but a hegemonic regressive traditionalist beneath. With the passage of time, the image of the Achayan has evolved into a stereotype in itself and consequently undergone transformations in accordance with the changing societal attitudes towards religion and community representation.

In Kerala, as in most societies, there are two kinds of films which are quite distinct from each other. Mainstream cinema, which is alternatively described as

popular film, commercial film, or mass film, functions by constructing, manipulating, and satisfying the desires of the spectator. There is always an avant-garde strand of cinema called art cinema or new wave cinema, something that exists parallel to the mainstream and claims modern aesthetic sensibility. The thesis does not endorse this definition strictly and focuses on all kinds of films with special reference to Christian hero stereotyping or destereotyping, as the case may be.

One of the terms that must be explained at the very outset is that of the Christian hero. Since the thesis belongs to the broad disciplinary area called cultural studies, the focus is neither on a particular director nor on a specific movement; rather, on a set of characters or heroes from the late 1980s to the present. Based on the construction of the hero, there is an attempt to identify what the Christian male has been signifying after occupying screen space for the last thirty years. Such a study assumes a special significance because though multicultural on the socio-political front, the popular culture of Kerala, in every sense of the term, has always been described to be continuously producing the casteist hegemonic code of power.

Mainstream Malayalam cinema has been read as a document or discourse that strengthens the hegemonic heroes; much has been said and written about the politics of representation of the popular cinema, how the various dimensions in which the caste hierarchy is preserved and how the minorities like the Muslims and the Dalits are represented in the fantasy that the dominant order has created. There were attempts to bridge the gap and cover up the omissions of identity groups. Still, there are allegations that the cultural studies school paid little attention to Christian culture and the Christian community.

The research gap that exists in the studies of masculinity and Syrian Christian subjectivity has drawn the attention of the researcher to the varied shades of hegemonic masculinity. An attempt has been made to investigate the patterns of subjectivity construction in Malayalam cinema with reference to the Kerala public sphere. As a corollary to the hegemony and the dominance of the feudal, upper caste male, there emerged in the 1990s onwards the notion of a Christian alpha male called 'Achayan'. The thesis will analyse the representation politics of this category by drawing insights from cultural studies and Masculinity Studies.

The dissertation on the representation of Christian masculinity consists of six chapters besides the Introduction and the Conclusion.

The second chapter will examine the theoretical frameworks on cinema, which form an important methodological background of the study. From the cultural studies point of view, the thesis will focus on the insights Stuart Hall and other cultural historians have provided. It will also examine some of the key concepts in masculinity studies and cinema in the writings of Reywann Connell (R. W. Connell), Michael Kimmel and Steve Neale.

The historical evolution of the representation of the Christian male is an integral element of this analysis. The dissertation's third chapter, "Christian Self-fashioning on Screen: A Historical Overview" will investigate the shifting hero code in Malayalam cinema since the early days marked the subjectivity of the Christian protagonist. The historical survey is carried out from the standpoint of how cinema as a medium operated and controlled by the feudal aristocracy and bourgeoisie ideologies shapes Christian masculinity in the Kerala public sphere. The contrastive narratives of settlement, law enforcement and community settlement become an

important concern when masculine representation within a community is studied. The attempt is to scrutinise the emergence of the Achayan identity as a dominant form of hegemonic masculinity in the socio-economic-political context of the 1980s.

The fourth chapter of the research titled “The Hegemonic Code: The Self-fashioning of the Achayan” will discuss how the alpha male “Achayans”, reflect hegemonic Christian masculinity in the Malayalam cinema of the 1990s. The thesis will examine the success of the genre, the frequency of such mass avatars enacted by the superstars during this phase and how such repetitions fashioned the Christian identity in hegemonies of caste and gender.

There always exists a curious relationship and exercise of power between the police/ investigating male and the investigated subjects in movies. The Christian hero, being a dominant player in this regard in Malayalam cinema, connotes hegemonic masculinity in different shades. Chapter V of the dissertation titled “The Ideological Code: The Self-fashioning of the Christian Bureaucrat” will analyse how the dominant male, representing the state, is ideologically embedded in the caste and class-based notions of hierarchy over a period of three decades.

The settler narratives, which constitute an important arena of Malayalam literature, popular culture and cinema, form an important area of investigation in Chapter VI, “The Cowboy Code: The Self-fashioning of the Settler”. The chapter will analyse how the Christian hero is represented in the history of migration and settlement. The chapter will examine the changing patterns of selfhood formation in this regard by close reading films with such themes in the background.

The last analytical chapter of the thesis titled “The Subaltern Code: The Self-fashioning of the Christian Other” is mainly about representation of minorities

belonging to the Christian community. The chapter will examine how the homogenisation of identities into economically, politically and socially powerful formulations has systematically erased the voices of the marginalised and subaltern groups in history.

Critically examining the representation of Christian masculinity in cinema, the five analytical chapters of the thesis challenge the caste-based hegemonic structures in Malayalam cinema. Historically locating the Christian male characters of the 1950s and the 1960s, portrayed as “the other” in mainstream narratives as a contrast to the dominant upper caste Hindu masculinity. By analysing select cinematic texts, the study interrogates how hegemonic masculinity is reinforced or subverted through stereotypical and counter-hegemonic representations of Christian men. It also highlights the intersection of religion, caste, and gender, revealing how Christian masculinity is negotiated within Kerala’s socio-cultural and cinematic landscape. Ultimately, the thesis seeks to redefine and expand the discourse on masculinity, questioning the exclusivity of dominant caste representations in Malayalam cinema.

CHAPTER II

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION:

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Cinema, when it emerged in Europe in the last decade of the nineteenth century, was considered an optical splendour or the crowning peak of science and technology rather than an art form. It has subsequently evolved as a medium that could successfully present various dimensions of life with a narrative from the early twentieth century in America, Europe and gradually elsewhere. In the years that followed its emergence, movies have given immemorial stories of love and loss, gods and demons, life and death, glory and fall, fidelity and betrayal, demolition and survival, and Apollo and Dionysius. However, what made the world of cinema distinctive from that of literature is the former's inherent dependence on technology and subservience to the structures of capital.

To put it theoretically in the context of Malayalam cinema, which the thesis attempts to study, certain theoretical understandings from the West are essential. Since many scholars have recently studied Malayalam cinema as a cultural text, it is imperative to know how the reformed understandings of film criticism emerged.

Cinema was first approached from an aesthetic point of view by Russian film theorists like Eisenstein and Pudovkin who were more concerned with the evolutionary ideas of montage in propagating an ideal social order. The pioneering American critic Hugo Munsterberg argued how cinema could fascinatingly engage the human mental scape by the management of time, space, and attention, and

German critics such as Rudolf Arneihm were more concerned with how cinema functions more as an art form than a mere mechanical reproduction of reality. These ideas are used in this thesis as elementary concepts.

No study on cinema can be conducted without referring to some of the foundational ideas of André Bazin, who is often considered an influential inspiration to avant-garde film movements like the French New Wave. The founder of *Cahiers du Cinema* (which means Notebooks on Cinema, in English), along with Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and Joseph-Marie Lo Duca, Bazin set a Marxist understanding of cinema differently from the Soviet school with particular emphasis on realism. Bazin attempted to find some criteria by which to evaluate films – including areas like film acting, cinematography, film structure and editing, especially film directing. In the process, he contested with the pre-war theorists of the Soviet school who considered cinema as montage and critics like Arneihm, who equated cinema mostly with photography (Rushton and Bettinson 10).

To Andre Bazin, cinema is more idealistic than technical: “The cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed so to speak fully armed in their minds, as if in some platonic heaven, and what strikes us most of all is the obstinate resistance of matter to ideas rather than of any help offered by techniques to the imagination” (17). Cinema is conceived as the fulfilment of an idea in its purest essence rather than a result of technical progress. The techniques of cinema exist only to bring closer the dream of total cinema (Bazin 22). He argued that cinema is a thought that emerges in the mind of its director, and technology is secondary in the development of this idea. The seminal essay “The Evolution of the

Language of Cinema” (1958) explicates the relationship between an idea and technology.

Being a staunch advocate of realism in cinema, Bazin always favoured narratives which reflected the lives of the commoners and the working class. He observes the significant role that cinema always played in determining the worldview of the spectator by furthering the domain of reality. In *What is Cinema Volume I*, he is excited about the possibility of cinema “to lay bare the realities” (15). Placing the medium of cinema above that of painting and photography, Bazin argues with respect to silent cinema: “The meaning is not in the image, it is in the shadow of the image projected by montage onto the field of consciousness of the spectator” (26). For instance, the French New Wave cinema, which banked heavily on his realism theories, made Paris’s Street dwellers their (anti-) heroes. Bazin, who states that the language of cinema is constituted by image and the three different variants of montage such as parallel montage, accelerated montage and montage by attraction, argues that the image is evaluated not according to what it adds to reality, but what it reveals of it (28). In short, the complexity of reality represented by the medium elevates cinema from the subjective manipulative fallacy.

Auteur theory, the concept of the auteur for the director, with which Bazin equated cinema and literature, was an innovative dimension that highlighted the creative brilliance or the imagination of the director. He borrows the notion of “camera-stylo” developed by Alexander Astruc, to finally form a theory of the centrality of the director as the organising force of a film. At a time when directors were reduced to the status of professionals who just captured the essence of a script,

as in the classical Hollywood studio cinema, a unique style for a director further makes the film distinctive and inventive, Bazin argues.

Contrary to the early theorists who conceived cinema as aesthetic and therefore focussed more on technology and its ability to fashion reality, cultural studies, which emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, approached cinema as a cultural product. Consequently, the 1960s witnessed the turn to Theory and cultural studies in Film Criticism. It approaches cinema from various perspectives, including Psychoanalysis, Structuralist Narratology and Semiotics, Poststructuralism, Marxism, and Feminism. According to Toby Miller, cultural studies “accretes various tendencies that are splintering the human sciences: Marxism, feminism, queer theory, and the postcolonial” (1). Simon During has added that the cultural studies approach “concentrated on ‘subjectivity’ which means that it studied culture in relation to individual lives, breaking with social scientific positivism or ‘objectivism’” (1). The discursive formation of cultural studies thus focuses on the connection between gender, race, class and ethnicity, and culture and power.

Marxist philosophy remains the lynchpin of the Cultural critical praxis across the globe. Marxist doctrines have influenced scholars, academicians and thinkers ever since its inception. Though initially an economic theory as visualised by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, twentieth century Marxists converted it into a methodological framework to critique art. For them, “culture is a corporeal force tied into the socially organised production of the material condition of existence” (Barker 70). In the process of social production, individuals inevitably form specific relationships that are essential and beyond their control, often aligning with a

particular stage in the advancement of their material productive forces. Karl Marx has summed up these relations, in the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859), as:

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness. (4)

This understanding envisages that the ruling class, as it determines the ruling ideas, remains a dominant intellectual force that determines art and culture.

The theory of Marxism has become a praxis in Russian cinema. In the dialectical approaches of the montage theory, Soviet Marxists like Pudovkin and Eisenstein foregrounded a propaganda dimension to early cinema. However, Marxist theory evolved differently in separate cultural contexts worldwide, often designating a redefinition of the concept of culture. In various decades of the twentieth century, Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, Louis Althusser, Jean Louis Baudry, Pierre Bourdieu, Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall blended Marxism with film analysis and social practices.

The fundamental aspect of the cultural turn in film studies is the status change cinema had from an art form or aesthetic product to a cultural artefact, which has the signification of an expressive act embedded in the socio-political matrix. Accordingly, the ideological constructedness of individuals and societies is studied

with reference to the artefact to explore how the hegemonic perspectives are justified or countered. Though culture has variously been defined in the past, one of the apt starting points to initiate a discussion in this regard is the approach of the Frankfurt school.

Adorno, one of the seminal thinkers of the German Marxist School, maintained a dismissive stance about the film by considering it a mere commercial, industrial product without any art value. Besides, he emphasised that films, which were primary commodities meant for profit, were of considerable instrumental and economic value to the ruling class. In his predominantly class-based analysis, films catered to the interests of the bourgeoisie. The psychological impact of cinema on the masses is what Adorno calls the semblance of immediacy – a presentation of a convincing look at reality. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he refers to how the masses are forced to consume what is offered to them by the term culture industry: “The mechanism of supply and demand is today disintegrating in material production; in the superstructure, it acts as a control on behalf of the rulers. The consumers are the workers, the salaried employees, the farmers, and the petty bourgeois” (106). Examining the deep-seated structures that worked in the reception process of films, he argues that the capacity of the medium to lie about the world in the guise of telling the truth could explain the fascination of the masses, which are subjugated and exploited in the process, towards cinema.

The mentality of the public, which allegedly and actually favours the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system, not an excuse for it. ... An explanation in terms of the specific interests of the technical apparatus and its personnel would be closer to the truth, provided that apparatus were

understood in all its details as a part of the economic mechanism of selection.

(Horkheimer 96)

Films are used in such a manner as powerful mechanisms through which the masses are made to accept the construction of reality passively. The willingness of the public towards subjugation is explained in *The Culture Industry*:

People give their approval to mass culture because they know or suspect that this is where they are taught the mores they will surely need as their passport in a monopolised life. This passport is only valid if paid for in blood, with the surrender of life as a whole and the impassioned obedience to a hated compulsion. (80)

Adorno was equally critical of technology, especially the introduction of music in film, though it was in its infancy when he wrote about it. Emphasising the reactionary role that film music had in making the characters on the screen appear less as shadowy ghosts and more as real human beings with emotions, Adorno argues in *Composing for the Films* that it “brings the picture close to the public, just as the picture brings itself close to it by means of the close-up. It attempts to interpose a human coating between the reeled-off pictures and the spectators” (59). Comparing cinema with the old stage theatre, he describes the social function of music as “that of cement, which holds together elements that otherwise would oppose each other unrelated – the mechanical product and the spectators, and also the spectators themselves” (59). Sound also serves the significant function of providing the illusion of a fully human articulation rather than a technical concoction and thus enhances the semblance of life. Technology is the process that

smoothens the implant of a regressive consciousness, an ideology, into the spectators:

The spectator must need no thoughts of his own: the product prescribes each reaction, not through any actual coherence-which collapses once exposed to thought-but through signals. Any logical connection presupposing mental capacity is scrupulously avoided. Developments are to emerge from the directly preceding situation, not from the idea of the whole. There is no plot which could withstand the screenwriters' eagerness to extract the maximum effect from the individual scene. Finally, even the schematic formula seems dangerous, since it provides some coherence of meaning, however meager, when only meaninglessness is acceptable. Often the plot is willfully denied the development called for by characters and theme under the old schema (109).

Subsequently, such a stance has led Adorno to address the propagandist role of cinema, which, to him, always emerged from industrial conditions rather than from art. The net result is a form of standardisation, commodification, homogenisation and stereotyping of desires, the effect of which is the emergence of a technologically dependent, uncritical populace susceptible to any totalising ideology.

Walter Benjamin, another important theorist in the history of Film studies, in his landmark essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Material Reproduction" (1935), attempted to analyse a materialist conception of art. The essay discusses how the evolution of novel technologies of reproduction, specifically the reproduction of artworks and the art of film, in the twentieth century affects the nature, aesthetics and politics of art. As a theorist, Benjamin argues that "a work of art has always

been reproducible” (2). He adds, however, that mechanical reproduction “had reached a standard that not only permitted it to reproduce all transmitted works of art and thus to cause the most profound change in their impact upon the public; it also had captured a place of its own among the artistic processes” (2). From a working class perspective, it benefited the proletariat in the dissolution of capitalism. He also has observed how film as a medium could give shock and excitement to the spectator: “Film corresponds to profound changes in the apparatus of apperception – changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passer-by in big-city traffic, and on a historic scale by every present-day citizen” (31).

Benjamin also agrees with classical authors that “the presence of the original is the prerequisite to the concept of authenticity” (3). However, he welcomed the subversion of the concept of aura – the superior value assigned to originality – in art. Consequently, he welcomes the prospect of photographic reproduction of a work of art, as the copies can be enjoyed by the ordinary masses in a much more democratic manner by defying the limiting principles of time and space. Benjamin refers to this aspect as the higher social value of the copy. By questioning the difference between high art and low art, Benjamin praised the Hollywood sound (popular) films because of the collective enjoyment possibility:

Mechanical reproduction of art changes the reaction of the masses toward art. The reactionary attitude toward a Picasso painting changes into the progressive reaction toward a Chaplin movie. The progressive reaction is characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment with the orientation of the expert. Such fusion is of great social significance. The greater the decrease in the social significance of an art

form, the sharper the distinction between criticism and enjoyment by the public. (14)

Benjamin, thus, subverts the notion of aura in art and positively welcomes mechanical reproduction for its inherent democracy.

Cultural studies gained much significance in post-World War II England as a discipline. The split in the British Communist Party in 1956 after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, the formation and development of the New Left, along with its influential journal, *The New Left Review*, which fought against imperialist and conservative practices of culture, contributed much to the development of cultural studies. However, the academic project of cultural studies begins with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) activities, established with the specific aim ‘to put cultural studies on the intellectual map’ at the University of Birmingham, established in 1964. Through the works of Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, and Stuart Hall, all associated with CCCS at various times, the various cultural practices were given a profound academic analysis.

Raymond Williams, who studied the dynamics of culture through sociological theories of culture, evaluates culture as a term with the most complex history. Insisting on the notion of culture “as a definition of the ‘lived experience’ of ‘ordinary’ men and women, made in their daily interaction with the texts and practices of everyday life, that he finally breaks decisively with Leavisism” (“The Analysis of Culture” 48). Williams defines culture in the sense of “a particular process and the result of that process” and as “a comprehensive way of life”, “signifying system”, “structure of feeling” or “culture in a particular historical

context” (*Culture* 13). Many of his observations are influential and widely used in defining culture as part of popular cultural studies.

Categorising culture into three types, Williams redefines the traditional Marxist understanding of the term in “The Analysis of Culture” (2009): in his first definition, culture is ‘ideal’ which means “culture is a state or process of human perfection, in terms of certain absolute or universal values” (32). The second understanding is culture as ‘documentary’ which means “culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which, in a detailed way, human thought and experience are variously recorded” (32). The third is a social view of culture referring to “a description of a particular way of life” (32). The third definition refers to culture – a community’s lived experiences, practices, and values – as an ongoing process embedded in everyday life rather than an exclusive domain of elite artistic production.

In *The Long Revolution*, Williams redefines culture as a reflection of the broader social structure, encompassing human relationships and activities. Examining the connection between the economic and cultural spheres, Williams advocates that while economic factors impose constraints on cultural expression and possibilities, they do not dictate cultural meanings in a straightforward, deterministic manner. Instead, he indicates that wage labour and its associated social relationships are the primary and most influential framework. Other social and cultural practices exist at varying distances from this core structure, allowing for different levels of influence, autonomy, and uniqueness in their formation. He stratifies culture into multiple levels in “The Analysis of Culture”:

We need to distinguish three levels of culture, even in its most general definition. There is the lived culture of a particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place. There is the recorded culture, of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts: the culture of the period. There is also, as the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, the culture of the selective tradition. (46)

By analysing social and cultural change and cultural products based on the relationship and interests between culture and society, Williams classifies the dynamic forms of culture into three: dominant culture, emergent culture and residual culture. The first categorisation designates the dominant condition for the cultural production of existing fixed power institutions and their forms. These institutions and the conditions that validate them are presented as natural and necessary. Emerging culture refers to a variety of new cultural products, new meanings and values which are tangible and accessible. Those cultural products that have existed once in different places and times and are available as an effective element in the present is called residual culture (*Culture* 121-3).

Since Williams's understanding of culture provides critical tools for analysing the interrelationship between culture, ideology, and power, they function as useful tools in analysing popular cinema as a codified representative system of a group. These perspectives are further extended by Stuart Hall, whose notion of cinema is revealed through his communication theories, which emphasise how film and other forms of media are deeply embedded in cultural and social contexts.

In *The Popular Arts* (1946), which was co-written with Paddy Whannel, Hall challenges the notion that all high culture is intrinsically 'good' and all popular

culture intrinsically 'bad'. They argue that "the struggle between what is good and worth while (sic) and what is shoddy and debased is not a struggle *against* the modern forms of communication, but a conflict *within* these media" (15). In this attempt, they perceive movies as more than the stepping-stones in a hierarchy of taste' and traces the differences between folk art, popular art and mass art with reference to the films of Charlie Chaplin. Influenced by the Marxist analysis of culture by Gramsci, Hall observes popular culture is a "contradictory space" (228) in "Notes on Deconstructing 'the popular'" (1981). He gives a new perspective to the popular as that which sells and adds that popular culture signifies a site of continuous negotiation which is characterised by "the double movement of containment and resistance" (228).

Through the exposition of concepts "Encoding/Decoding" (1973) included in *Culture, Media, Language* (1980), Hall narrates the 'social relations' of the communicative process in a semiotic model. Modifying the Marxist theory of commodity production based on the base-superstructure model, he equates encoding to production and decoding to consumption. In the new circuit he proposed a circuit model in which the 'sender' has become a 'producer' and the 'receiver' has turned out to be the 'consumer'. The stance of Hall could be summed up in the concept that it is consumption that determines production and the reverse. Hall comments in the essay: "Visual discourse translates a three-dimensional world into two-dimensional planes, it cannot, of course be the referent or concept it signifies. The dog in the film can bark but it cannot bite!" (131). Emphasising Althusser's concept of overdetermination, Hall argues that besides the economic, there are political and

ideological reasons that determine the values of production. He has also added that encoding and decoding are relatively autonomous.

Contemporary analysis of cinema is linked to cultural studies, which position culture as a set of practices that demand close scrutiny and explication of the production and exchange of meanings in the various sign systems, including cinema. One of the central concerns of cultural studies is the correlation between popular cinema and the popular culture that it produces. In the light of these discourses, the histories of nations, individuals and communities can only be understood by unravelling, analysing and decoding the various cinematic encryptions. Stuart Hall gives three reasons in “The ‘First’ New Left: Life and Times” due to which special importance is given to the analysis of culture in the post-war European academia.

First, because it was in the cultural and ideological domain that social change appeared to be making itself most dramatically visible. Second, because the cultural dimension seemed to us not a secondary, but a constitutive dimension of society. . . . Third, because the discourse of culture seemed to us fundamentally necessary to any language in which socialism could be redescribed. (25)

Furthering the argument, cinema is interpreted as a form of cultural production that encodes dominant cultural values and meanings into its representations, which are then decoded by audiences who bring their own cultural experiences and understandings to the process of interpretation. Hall argued that cinema is a site of cultural struggle, where dominant cultural ideologies and representations are contested and negotiated. He believed that cinema can either reinforce or challenge dominant cultural narratives and that the meanings produced

through cinema are never fixed or stable. Instead, they are shaped by the social and historical contexts in which they are produced and consumed.

French Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put forward two crucially important concepts in cultural studies: cultural capital, which is primarily legitimate knowledge of one kind or another, and symbolic capital, which is prestige and social honour (Jenkins 53). In *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984), he investigates how capital and the resulting social stratification continue in the new context of capitalist development. Central to his argument is that cultural and symbolic capital have become more importantly operational in the new social context, along with the social hierarchy that prioritises economic capital. Bourdieu contests the understanding of taste as the ability to recognise qualitative differences between various cultural products. Having identified the illusory nature of such a theorisation, he argues that distinctions of taste are socially constructed and, in turn, they also determine social status. “Being the product of the conditioning associated with a particular class of conditions of existence, it [taste] unites all those who are the product of similar conditions while distinguishing them from all others” (Bourdieu 56). Consumerist capitalist systems provide symbolic value of taste for products through social discourses such as advertisements. It is the ownership of symbolic capital that makes individuals elite and noble. As the symbolic value ascribed to products begins to determine their exchange value, rather than their cost of production and distribution and their availability, each product thus reproduces social hierarchy by conferring symbolic value on its owner and constructing adepts of taste. According to Bourdieu, this symbolic revolution takes place within a much broader framework of social exchanges and products. In this way, individuals and

social groups recognise and evaluate each other by putting their taste first. For Bourdieu, cultural consumption – whether in art, music, or literature – functions as a marker of class identity, reinforcing the dominance of the elite over the working class.

According to Bourdieu, this symbolic interchangeability of cultural forms in the context of consumer capitalism and consumer society has been transformed into a new form of capital. Symbolic capital thus occupies a central position in determining the individual's social status and social stratification. It is the realm of art and other forms of beauty that ensure social status for various social classes, and the cultural capital is primarily operational. In this sense, cultural capital is the power of exchange acquired by individuals and social groups in art, literature and beauty, commonly referred to as culture. A group can exercise hegemony when the cultural resources under their control or exchange are valued more than other cultural resources. This assertion of high value is a claim to social power, and subsequently, the inferiority of alternative cultural resources results from the inferiority of a community's social power.

The idea of habitus with which Bourdieu explains power manifestation is also an important theoretical notion to understand culture. Power is socially and culturally created and always seeks legitimisation through the interaction of agency and structure. Habitus is seen as “the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them” (Navarro 16). The power of the habitus derives from the thoughtlessness of habit and habituation rather than consciously learned rules and principles. Socially competent performances are

produced as a matter of routine, without explicit reference to a body of codified knowledge, and without the actors necessarily ‘knowing what they are doing’ (Jenkins 46). Since habitus operates unconsciously, it ensures that people largely conform to their class-based cultural expectations, thereby reproducing existing power structures.

Jean Louis Baudry, the author of the ground-breaking essay “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus”, argues that the techniques associated with the Hollywood style, based on continuity and transparency, are ideological. In other words, cinema itself – in its Hollywood form and forms that still imitate Hollywood – is an Ideological State Apparatus, an apparatus that upholds the power and privileges of the ruling bourgeois. The term ideology, which has been used in multiple ways by various theorists like Antoine Destutt de Tracy, is applied in the thesis in the Althusserian perspective. He used the term Ideological State Apparatus, which is different from Repressive State Apparatus in the sense that the former is not explicitly sanctioned under the banner of ensuring law and order; nevertheless, it refers to institutions which reinforce the functioning of those laws and that order. In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Althusser clarifies:

The State Apparatus (SA) contains: the Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc., which constitute what I shall in future call the Repressive State Apparatus. Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question ‘functions by violence’ – at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms). (136)

Althusser continues to differentiate it with what he calls the Ideological State Apparatus: the apparently distinct and specialised institutions run by ideology than by violence such as the religious ISA (the system of the different churches), the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private schools), the family ISA, the legal ISA, the political ISA, the trade union ISA, the communications ISA (press, radio and television etc.), the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports etc.) (*Lenin and Philosophy* 137). To sum up, RSAs predominantly operate by violence, whereas ISAs do function by ideology, and those values propagated by these apparatuses are the dominant, bourgeois values which ensure the continued empowerment of the dominant class.

Baudry further argues that ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence. Resorting to the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage, he defines an individual as the representation of an imaginary self which is split from the real body or condition of existence. He defines cinema as a materialistic object. Central to this conception is the thought that the cinematographic apparatus – the camera, projector and screen – is fundamentally ideological. As Baudry argues, the cinema screen provides spectators with images instead of reality, and therefore, it offers representations of reality rather than reality itself. This is done via the apparatuses of the screen mirror, camera and editing technology. With the addition of the subjective perception of reality ensured via these media, the mainstream cinema makes or interpellates individuals into self-centred, self-seeking, self-affirming identities who feel as though they are the centre of the world.

Between the two complementary stages of production a mutation of the signifying material takes place (neither translation nor transcription, obviously, for the image is not reducible to language) precisely where the camera is. Finally, between the finished product (possessing exchange value, a commodity) and its consumption (use value) is introduced another operation effected by a set of instruments. Projector and screen restore the light lost in the shooting process, and transform a succession of separate images into an unrolling which also restores, but according to another scansion, the movement seized from “objective reality”. (Baudry 40)

As the real conditions of existence cannot exist as such and are represented through these apparatuses, what the cinema supplies is an imaginary relation to the real conditions of existence. To sum up, ideology interprets reality in such a way that individuals see that reality as if through an imaginary filter (Rushton and Bettinson 36). Baudry’s analysis of working class cinema, therefore, demands an exposition of the real conditions of existence by revealing how the working classes are exploited by the bourgeoisie. In Althusser’s terminology, this would mean highlighting the ‘real relations of production’.

Regarding the subject position of the spectator, Christian Metz is a seminal thinker who brought in Freudian and Lacanian theory while ignoring the concept of ideology which was central to the analysis of Baudry. In the opening years as a theorist of cinema, Metz’s writings were primarily concerned with the film language using the structuralist reading practices for analysing the deep structuring logic of cultural products and practices. In *Film Language*, he firmly argues that the cinema can be regarded as

... a language, to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms — and to the extent that these elements are not traced on the perceptual configurations of reality itself (which does not tell stories). Filmic manipulation transforms what might have been a mere visual transfer of reality into discourse. (105)

He attempted to compare the ways in which the signification was made possible in cinema with reference to spoken or written language. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic are terms film theorists like Metz access from structuralist linguistics to help explain the connotative richness of film images and narratives. Accordingly, a spectator can take hold of connotative meanings from connections and comparisons, not necessarily consciously, of images in context. Paradigmatic structure is considered a vertical structure of choosing “what goes with what. Like Saussure, he argues: “the shot is . . . not comparable to the word in a lexicon; rather it resembles a complete statement (of one or more sentences), in that it is already the result of an essentially free combination, a ‘speech’ arrangement” (*Film Language* 100). Syntagmatic structure is conceptualised as a horizontal structure that deals with linear narrative and concerns what follows what. Addressing the syntagmatic as the heart of semiological dimension, Metz defines it as “the arrangement of the images into an intelligible sequence – cutting and montage” (*Film Language* 101).

Metz’s studies in the later phase juxtaposed psychoanalysis and cinema. However, rather than uncovering “the unconscious” of the film text and reading the psyche of the directors for motives or drives, his objective was broadening an understanding of the social activity called cinema on the basis of three conjoining machines that produced it. Based on Lacan’s essay “The Mirror Stage as Formative

of the I function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”, Metz seeks to connect the formation of identity into the film watching experience. For the French psychologist, the mirror stage identification, by which the infant achieves a mastery of the body that is impossible in actuality, metaphorically suggests a pivotal stage in a child’s psycho-sexual development. The child gets an impression of the wholeness and coherence of the human body in the process.

One of the important concerns as far as the thesis is concerned is the formation of the subject in the process of watching a film. The discipline of Film Studies resorts to a Poststructural standpoint whereby the self is studied as a non-coherent and decentred entity, constituted externally in contrast to a humanist subject position emerging from Cartesian ego in modern philosophy. Accordingly, any study of the spectator as subject demands a detailed analysis of the psychoanalytic and discursive formation of the self.

Developing further on the works of the psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Metz argues that the cinematic experience is a site where the drives of the Unconscious are acted out. Accordingly, the relationship between the cinema screen and spectator relationship is seen as the reenactment of psychological relations which are already at work in the Imaginary stage of self-formation. In Lacan, the foundation of the imaginary order, one of the central phases of his tripartite scheme, is the Mirror Stage in which the infant experiences a self-image of completion, perfection and wholeness. The cinema screen, like the mirror in the imaginary, thus, is about ever-continuing (mutual) relation between the ego and the specular image. Metz explains the scope of psychoanalytic reading in *The Imaginary Signifier*: “Reduced to its most fundamental procedures, any psychoanalytic

reflection on the cinema might be defined in Lacanian terms as an attempt to disengage the cinema-object from the imaginary and to win it for the symbolic, in the hope of extending the latter by a new province” (3).

Metz explains what is known as the cinematic pleasure, that which draws the individuals continually to the screen, as a result of the triggering of desires in the Imaginary realm in the individuals, as well. In *The Imaginary Signifier*, Metz studies “the mental leap which alone can lead [the spectator] . . . from an objectively real but denied signifier to an imaginary but psychologically real signified” (116). The structural apparatus, or the institutional features called the “filmic state”, sets the context for the unconscious drives, phantasies and desires to operate. By reinscribing the deep-seated elements of the human unconscious, cinema operates as an apparatus through which the subject is constructed.

Feminist film critics view this process of subjectivity construction in cinema as a gendered process, as well. Accordingly, they argue that it leads to the exclusion of women from the dominant discourses. For instance, Laura Mulvey, in “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” originally published in 1975 and included in *Visual and other Pleasures* (1989), makes a political use of psychoanalysis and establishes how the constituted subject is normatively male as well. According to Mulvey, the very mechanisms of cinema – the look of the camera, the look of the characters within the text, and the gaze of the spectator at the female lead inside the movie hall – are all catering to the configuration of male gaze. In her feminist perspective, the visual pleasure (scopophilia) in classical cinema is a structure which functions on the axis of activity and passivity, connotating sexual difference. In fact, the very structures of cinema, mentioned above, can constitute only a masculinised subject in

the viewing process. Consequently, the male is assigned the task to look, while the female signifies “to-be-looked-at-ness” (19). On the narcissistic domain of identity construction in cinema, she writes:

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look on to that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. A male movie star’s glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of his gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. (20)

By reading the structures of film noir with reference to Alfred Hitchcock’s movies like *Rear Window* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958) and *Marnie* (1964), she states that they are avenues for the employment of the fetishistic and narcissistic scopophilia.

In “Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” included in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Mulvey revisits her earlier arguments on female spectatorship, exploring how women engage with mainstream cinema. Initially, she had argued that mainstream cinema offers a masculine spectator position, but she later recognises complexities, particularly regarding how the female viewers interact with film texts. Key to this argument is how women navigate identification with female protagonists in melodramatic films, where the absence of a central male protagonist creates identification with the female character. Mulvey suggests that female viewers may either find themselves alienated from the pleasure of the masculine gaze or, conversely, may adopt a masculine viewing position, enjoying the power and control associated with it. She asserts by citing Freud, “there is only

one libido, which serves both the masculine and the feminine function. . . .

Nevertheless, the juxtaposition ‘feminine libido’ is without any justification” (31).

Mulvey extends her argument by analysing *Duel in the Sun* (Dir. King Vidor, 1946), where the female protagonist, Pearl is torn between two male figures representing opposing aspects of femininity. This in turn refers to the oscillation between femininity and masculinity that Mulvey attributes to the female spectator. She argues that regressions to the pre-Oedipus phase very frequently occur, by referring to Freud again “in the course of some women’s lives there is a repeated alteration between periods in which femininity and masculinity gain the upper hand” (37). This suggests that female spectators engage in trans-sex identification, shifting between passive femininity and active masculinity.

In contrast to the singularity in psychoanalytical perspective, the discursive theory argues that selfhood is pluralistic in nature as it is constructed by multiple, overlapping, and sometimes competing discourses. The disciplinary practice of discourse analysis has, as its basis, the theories of Michel Foucault who primarily viewed discourses as systems of thought or epistemological domains centred on some ideologies.

Foucault describes the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969) as “the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a number of statements” (80). It is in relation to power that discourse is primarily understood. It is the discourse of heterosexual love and marriage, for example, that determines the positions of the gays, lesbians and transgenders. What it designates is the fact that it does not function hierarchically from top to bottom, leading to the exclusion of those

on the peripheries. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I* (1976), Foucault describes the mutually interactive dimension of the concept:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised up against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. (100-1)

Accordingly, Foucault sees the disbursement of power throughout culture. In contrast to the traditional position of power as a possession, he negates the repressive hypothesis that it is a hierarchic order cancelling the individual rights. At the same time, it means that such a distribution is neither even nor equitable, but any culture is characterised by the constant exertion and struggle for power that occur continually, at every level. The multidimensional nature of power is beautifully summed up by John Frow: “if power is no longer thought simply as a negative and repressive force but as the condition of production of all speech, and if power is conceived as polar rather than monolithic, as an asymmetrical dispersion, then all utterances will be potentially splintered, formally open to contradictory uses” (206). Subjectivity, for Foucault, is the effect of the convergence of systems of discourse and relations of power. In other words, the positions of the individuals are determined by the process of normalisation, than external coercion.

Masculinity studies or Men’s studies is an important paradigm necessary for studying the shifting patterns of male representation in Malayalam cinema. From a

paradigm in which masculinity is estimated as singular, namely the masculine embodying certain essentialist characteristics against the feminine, there emerged perceptions of a fragmented masculine world of anxieties and trauma.

The ideas of the Australian psychologist Reywann Connell, a leading theorist of plural masculinities, are important methodological tools to understand the way gender is constructed. She introduces the concepts of hegemonic and subordinate masculinities in *Masculinities* (1995). Prior to her, the term was defined as “a question of how particular groups of men inhabit positions of power and wealth, and how they legitimate and reproduce the social relationships that generate their dominance” (Carrigan et.al. 592).

Connell challenges the traditional unitary approach towards masculinity and drafts an intersectional framework consisting of notions of power, patriarchal structure, and imperialism. Central to her theories is the emergence of a dominant form of masculinity that endorses certain particular behaviour patterns, and actions to be accepted as a male, across cultures almost in every society. She defines hegemonic masculinity, on the basis of the appropriated nuances of the term hegemony popularised by Gramsci as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 77). Such a configuration of masculinities includes traits like heterosexuality, power, authority, competition, toughness, sexual prowess, and financial success. As a result, it enables a select group of men to dominate everything in the society.

Such configurations of masculinity turned out to be unacceptable for every man, because the ideal defines them in a particular ideal way. Connell highlights that male dominance over women is an apparent expression of hegemonic masculinity, but its true essence lies in the control over other men who are not able to perform their masculinities. Minority identity groups whose bodies are different cannot fit within and this results in a sort of tension in them. Hegemonic masculinity thrives on the complicity of men and is reinforced by cultural practices, social institutions, and solidarity among men in subordinating women and homosexual men.

Connell emphasises that hegemonic masculinity is neither monolithic nor fixed. In different societies, dominant characteristics such as “aggression . . . competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, [and] promiscuity” (46) constituted various versions of masculinity. As this formation of masculinities is integrally related to the notion of power, some specific constructions of masculinity are made popular through screen and media to generate societal consent. Even though hegemonic masculinity is limited as manifested only in a few men, what is problematised in the process is that it assumes the tag of normalcy. But, the ideological conditions of the society force men to subscribe to it unconditionally because of the ideas of honoured and elevated construction of the self.

Opposite to the hegemonic construction, Connell introduces three modes: subordinate, complicit and marginalised. The subordinate version of masculinities is created, mostly in the context of homosexuality. Complicit masculinity refers to those versions of masculinities “constructed in ways that realise the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy” (Connell 79). This category includes particularly heterosexual men who are

benefitted from the construction of hegemony, despite that they are not enacting the same. The marginalised version of masculinity specifically mentions the situation of the superstar black athletes in the United States, associated with hegemonic order. They are treated as marginalised as “the fame and wealth of individual stars has no trickle-down effect; it does not yield social authority to black men generally” (Connell 81).

Michael Kimmel’s *Manhood in America* (1996) offers a comprehensive analysis of how American masculinity has evolved over time. Arguing that masculinity is not a fixed or universal identity but a historical and cultural construct that changes in response to economic, social, and political transformations, he traces the shifting ideals of masculinity in America from the colonial period to the present. Contrary to the early feminist understanding of a homogenous masculinity, the work underscores how different historical moments have produced distinct versions of what it means to be a man.

Examining masculinity in colonial America, Kimmel’s observation is centred around the notion that male identity was primarily defined through land ownership, self-sufficiency, and patriarchal authority in relation to the household economy. Authority within the family was hierarchical, and male dominance was reinforced by both religious and social norms. The transition from an agrarian economy to a market-driven one, the ideal of masculinity changed and witnessed the emergence of the self-made man, validated through economic success and public recognition (Kimmel 31). The rise of capitalism, urbanisation, and wage labour redefined men’s roles outside the domestic sphere. The rise of the middle class and white-collar professions in the late nineteenth century led to anxieties about the feminisation of

men, as they moved away from physically demanding labour. To reaffirm masculinity, men engaged in fraternal organisations like the Freemasons, embraced muscular Christianity, which linked physical fitness with moral and spiritual strength reflecting how masculinity evolves in response to social and economic changes (Kimmel 118).

A major shift in the conceptualisation of masculinity happened since the beginning of the twentieth century. The refined cosmopolitan new man suggests a more inclusive, stylish, and leisurely masculinity which takes into consideration the emerging women as well. However, the two world wars and the economic depression of late 1920s witnessed the emasculation of man with regard to patriotism, war and military strategies. How the shift in the notion of masculinity demanded emasculation is explained by Kimmel: “unemployed men lost status with their wives and children and saw themselves as impotent patriarchs” (132). However, the postwar period reshapes masculine ideals in response to new social and cultural forces.

The postwar period witnessed the masculinity notion of the breadwinner ideal in which masculinity was closely linked to suburban domesticity and corporate success in relation to the newly formed nuclear families. Kimmel refers to the crisis of assertive masculinity in the wake of the second wave feminism which also connoted that men were losing their traditional authority. The rugged individualism of the previous phase has been substituted in favour of bureaucratic efficiency and social conformity. The crisis in understanding masculinity also saw the rejection of middle-class conformity and performers like James Dean and Marlon Brando became symbols of youthful defiance and emotional depth. The rebel heroism of the

phase since the late 1970s was later overturned by a more sensitive version of masculinity which emphasised “a manhood based on compassion, trust and nurturance” (207). He identifies the existence of more nuanced versions of masculinities such as inclusivity which takes into consideration the diverse gender expressions and sexual identities, existing along with persistent hypermasculinity. Kimmel proposes the notion of “democratic Manhood ...that is more about the character of men’s hearts and the depths of their souls than about the size of their biceps, wallets, or penises” (254). By a close reading of American culture, literature and cinema, Kimmel demonstrated how the traditional macho hegemonic archetype of man crumbled and more complex nuanced ‘manhoods’ emerged across time.

With regard to study the representation of masculinity on screen, the 1990s witnessed a lot of new theoretical understandings of the visual spectrum. Laura Mulvey, mentioned earlier associated with the male gaze, was revised by Steve Neele and Kaja Silverman who attempted fresh readings of the proliferation of masculine bodies on screen. Beyond the theorisation of male gaze of the feminine, the more complex dimensions of the psychological process were revised.

In “Masculinity as Spectacle: Reflections on Men and Mainstream Cinema” (1983), Neele does contest the pattern of visual identification in Mulvey in terms of narcissism. Central to his argument is the construction of the heterosexual male in popular genres like the Western. Drawing on John Ellis’s *Visible Fictions* (1982), Neele argues that identification is a complex system that is closely linked to constructs of gender, sexuality, and social identity. As masculinity is often portrayed in popular genres like the Westerns as aggression, power and control, the roots of what shapes narcissism involving fantasies and aspirations rooted in power and

authority need to be explored. Neele argues that an attempt to identify with the typical Clint Eastwood heroes creates tension in the male subject as the unattainable ideal ego emerges from those masculine formulations. Reexamining Mulvey's notion of voyeuristic and fetishistic scopophilia, Neele liberates looks from the typical subject/object and active/passive domain. Revising the traditional gender binaries, Neele attempts to open up a more nuanced form of male representation in terms of subdued homosexuality: "Masculinity, as an ideal, at least, is implicitly known. Femininity is, by contrast, a mystery. This is one of the reasons why the representation of masculinity, both inside and outside the cinema, has been so rarely discussed" (16).

The politics of representation is an important conceptual framework to understand the postcolonial dimensions of cinema. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), when applied to cinema, presents how Hollywood and European films construct the other in terms of race. Robert Stam and Louis Spence in "Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction" (1985) problematise the construction of non-western cultures and people as primitive and mysterious, positioning Western protagonists as heroic saviours. Concentrating on the 'flaw' in the mimesis which derives not only from the presence of distorting stereotypes but also from the absence of representations of an oppressed group, they demonstrate how cinema has been Eurocentric all through its history (7). The erroneous representation of the conditions of the third world in cinema happened as a result of the imperial gaze against the third world other, with regard to their language and social conditions. Accordingly, "hundreds of Hollywood westerns turned history on its head by making the Native Americans appear to be intruders on what was originally their

land, and provided a paradigmatic perspective through which to view the whole of the nonwhite world” (6). Positioning that classical Hollywood and colonial cinema establish a default white gaze, forcing non-white spectators into an alienated viewing position, non-European characters are either fetishised as exotic spectacles or portrayed as dangerous threats, leaving little space for self-representation. Progressive realism was a strategic device employed by filmmakers to rewrite the history and unmask and combat hegemonic images.

The process of representation affects spectatorship in profound ways. White viewers are encouraged to identify with the European protagonists, reinforcing their sense of cultural dominance. Regarding the construction of the natives as the other, Stam and Spence have noted the ways the conventions of cinema structure the objectification and racialisation. “The possibility of sympathetic identifications with the Indians is simply ruled out by the point-of-view conventions. The spectator is unwittingly sutured into a colonialist perspective” (12). As a counter strategy, “the possibility of aberrant readings, readings which go against the grain of the discourse” (18) has been proposed as an alternative, interrogating the construction of subjectivity.

Will Right also has problematised the dichotomies of the hero/villain and the good/bad in the westerns. The genre is defined classically as “the story of the lone stranger who rides into a troubled town and cleans it up, winning the respect of the townsfolk and the love of the schoolmarm” (32). Westerns function as a version of myth addressing the conflict between individual autonomy and integration into society. Furthering the classical observations on this genre and many others Tim Jon Semmerling’s *“Evil” Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear*

demonstrates the Orientalist mythmaking in Hollywood cinema since the 1970s. Central to this argument is the proposition that Hollywood cinema has always been known for vilifying non-whites such as Hispanics, natives, African Americans and those from the Middle East (4). In American narratives, the archetypal Western hero often takes on the persona of a cowboy – embodying qualities such as charisma, dominance, scientific expertise, authoritative speech, advanced technology, and a mission to civilise – asserts control over those perceived as his opposites, reinforcing a colonialist perspective. Shohat identifies how the western hero symbolises masculine dominance against the feminised Oriental land, rescues the land and its people from perceived chaos, both physical and intellectual, thereby reinforces his own superiority (57).

The insights on black spectatorship is an important theoretical concern in the study of any minority representation. bell hooks' critical examination of the personal and political effects of contemporary portrayals of race and ethnicity within a white supremacist culture included in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) provides understandings regarding the constitution of an alternate idea of spectatorship. Challenging the notion of black masculinity – “as fantasized in the racist white imagination is the quintessential embodiment of man as ‘outsider’ and ‘rebel’ (96) – she puts forward the notion of an oppositional gaze of black female spectatorship as a counter strategy. “Identifying with neither the phallogentric gaze nor the construction of white womanhood as lack, critical black female spectators construct a theory of looking relations where cinematic visual delight is the pleasure of interrogation” (126). hooks emphatically stands for the rights of the Black American spectator to scrutinise the visuals and identification without negotiating

one's identity. In "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and Resistance", Manthia Diawara notes how the African spectator was forced to resist and contest the way they were presented on screen: "the contradiction between the rhetorical force of the story – the dominant reading compels the black spectator to identify with the racist inscription of the black character – and the resistance, on the part of Afro-American spectators, to this version of US history, on account of its Manichean dualism" (68). These perceptions of alternate spectatorship draw particular attention in the way gazes assume more ethnomorphism in cinema in a third world context.

One of the concepts indispensable in studying the subjectivity construction of a group, in association with the problematic politics of representation is that of the subaltern. Gramsci used the term to describe marginalised social groups excluded from hegemonic power structures. In his *Prison Notebooks*, Gramsci argues that subaltern classes "by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States" (53). Having systematically been denied political representation and intellectual agency, they lack autonomous political initiative and are often subject to the ideological domination of the ruling class. Kylie Smith defines the Gramscian subalterns as "those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power" (39). Gramscian analysis laid the groundwork for later scholars who examined how history is written from the perspective of the elite, erasing the voices of the oppressed.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak critically expanded the idea of the subaltern in her 1988 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in which she explores how colonial and

postcolonial power structures silence marginalised groups, particularly subaltern women. Dismissing even well-intentioned intellectuals like Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze who often speak for the subaltern rather than allowing them to articulate their own experiences, Spivak brings in some Gramscian notions to critique the silencing of the marginalised.

Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. ... On the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak? (283)

Finding the stance of the Western academic institutions and nationalist movements problematic for failing to recognise the complexity of subaltern subjectivity, she asserts that “the subaltern cannot speak” (Spivak 308). Mainstream cinema as a site of representation, it is argued, continues to mute the subaltern not only by instances of misrepresentation but also by the appropriation of their voice.

The Subaltern Studies Collective, founded by Ranajit Guha in the 1980s, applied Gramsci’s and Spivak’s insights to South Asian history. The group which consisted of Shahid Amin, Gyanendra Pandey, David Arnold and Partha Chatterjee challenged colonial and elite nationalist narratives, vindicating that history had consistently neglected subaltern resistance and self-expression. In the *Preface to Subaltern Studies I* (1982), Guha makes it clear that the term subaltern is understood “as a general attribute of subordination in South Asian society ... expressed in terms of caste, class, gender, and office” (qtd in Sen). The tension between retrieving

subaltern agency and acknowledging its inaccessibility remains central to postcolonial and film studies, influencing discussions on representation, historiography, and power dynamics in global contexts. Critical insights on the subaltern have been useful as methodological tool and applied with regard to the marginal groups within the homogenised and hegemonic category of Christianity and Malayalam cinema.

The dialectical positioning of the spectators as argued by Marxist theorists has always been central to any understanding of cinema. It was already established in connection with the Hollywood that the intrinsic structures of cinema have always been colonial and racist since its formative years. In the context of Malayalam cinema, it can be argued that the same hegemonic structures had been operating in the form of caste, class and gender, as the seminal structures of cinema. V. C. Harris has noted in “Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema” that though there existed a society based on a powerful Leftist ideology since the early twentieth century, cinema as a genre and narrative had always been an instrument in the hands of patriarchy. In and around the independence of the country, “the processes of artistic production, including cinema, were determined by the important issues of the time: caste inequality, class consciousness, nationalism, and progress” (2) in Kerala. An enquiry regarding the Kerala public sphere with the intention of studying its casteist hegemonic underpinnings and ultra-masculine dominance in Malayalam cinema is the central subject of this study. The politics of representation of the Christian male, which is a curious case of minority representation, in Malayalam cinema is investigated against this matrix of film theory, cultural studies perspective and theories of masculinity in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

CHRISTIAN SELF-FASHIONING ON SCREEN: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The self-fashioning of Christians in Malayalam cinema is a historically evolved one. The current status of the identity of a community can only be understood through an inter-relational analysis of literature and cinema. As a medium of representation, both these artforms share certain interconnected links. The historical survey begins by examining how cinema, as a medium, has been influenced and controlled by feudal aristocracy and bourgeois ideologies in shaping representations of Christian masculinity within Kerala's public sphere. Since early Malayalam cinema maintained a close association with literature, the subjectivity construction was almost in parallel lines.

Ever since the release of *Vigathakumaran*, cinema played an important role in the formation and alteration of the public sphere in the state. Unlike many other regional cinemas, Malayalam cinema opted for a social theme in the first silent film. This was primarily due to the social and political movements of Kerala which worked against colonial and hegemonic praxis. Though the film was about a lost child from a wealthy Hindu family, reasons outside the filmic narrative connoted something important about Christianity and community identity. The first director in Malayalam cinema was a Nadar Christian and the first heroine, P. K. Rosy who enacted an upper caste lady was a Dalit. In the subsequent years before independence, there were only a few films produced in the state such as *Balan*, (Dir.

S. Nottani, 1938) the first sound film and *Gnanmbika* (Dir. S. Nottani, 1940). The sensibility of the pre-independent films did not effectively mirror the sociopolitical reality of the state. *Nirmala* (Dir. P. V. Krishna Iyer, 1948), the print of which is not available, is an early movie set in a Christian milieu.

With the release of *Jeevithanauka* (Dir. K Vembu, 1951), cinema emerged as a major feature of Malayali social construction. During this phase, the energy generated by the social and caste reform movements and new political formations in the social environment of Kerala was visible in the fields of art and literature, including cinema. In “Fifty years of Malayalam Cinema”, V. C. Harris remarks that in the 1950s “the processes of artistic production, including cinema, were determined by the important issues of the time: caste inequality, class consciousness, nationalism, and progress” (2). Such stories of social changes were visible in *Navalokam* (Dir. V. Krishnan, 1951), *Neelakuyil* (Dir. P. Bhaskaran, 1954), *Newspaper Boy* (Dir. P. Ramdas, 1955) and *Rarichan Enna Pauran* (Dir. P. Bhaskaran, 1956). About the zeitgeist of Malayalam cinema of the phase, G. P. Ramachandran also has observed: “In the conflict between the rich and the poor, the cinema of that day stood on the side of the poor, in the conflict between the landlord and the tenant on the side of the tenant, and in the battle between the savarna and the ‘avarna’, on the side of ‘avarna’” (my trans.; 4). Among a plethora of progressive films of this decade, *Snehaseema* (Dir. S. S. Rajan, 1954), and *Padatha Painkili* (Dir. P. Subramaniam, 1957) deserve special mention regarding the manner in which the Christian male identity is depicted in the context of the reformist polity.

In the 1950s, the Christian heroes of Malayalam cinema were constructed as hardworking men who fought against poverty. The social and the political were

subordinate to the domain of family as elucidated in *Snehaseema* based on Ponkunnam Varkey's novel of the same name. The pioneering Christian heroes of Malayalam cinema were outsiders in the aristocratic and orthodox society. For instance, the central character Johny in *Snehaseema* essayed by Sathyan is an orphan. The mood of the art and aesthetics of the new nation, it is argued, was expressive in empathy with the social outcasts. The identity of the hero as an orphan is the social realist core of the love story with Omana. The crisis of the narrative is the unequal social status of the hero, Johny and his love interest Omana, who is the daughter of a rich schoolmaster. In relation to the construction of the hero, the text demonstrates how the social respectability of the individual is measured not against one's class position of being a teacher or a soldier, but one's belongingness to the land owning aristocracy. As V. K. Joseph has noted, "the poor and the those who fight for social equality dominated cinema in the early phase" (my trans.; 76). The argument is that early Christian hero construction as a social progressivist was not in contradiction with the portrayals of characters belonging to other communities.

Most of the narratives with Christian heroes were predominantly set in a landscape in which agriculture and associated activities constituted the field of action. However, the separation of the hero from the community was strategically ensured in the development of the plot in the early classics. The analysis of early classics of Malayalam cinema like *Padatha Painkili* attempts to establish the ways in which the hero is constructed as an individual who maintains his position of difference with others within the community, in the social and cultural domains. The identity of Christian women in the 1950s was shaped by patriarchy and the

traditional values that shaped religious consciousness. Although the narratives are firmly rooted in progressive social realism, the formation of masculinity was according to the conceptions of traditional morality.

Padatha Painkili, which won the National Award for the best Malayalam film of its releasing year, is a social drama that revolves around marriage and dowry problems. The much talked about film directed by P. Subramaniam, based on Mutthath Varkey's famous novel from a screenplay by the novelist himself, is set in a predominantly Christian background of Central Travancore. How the film presents its hero Malayil Thankachan, played by Prem Nazir, as sufficiently defamiliarised and distanced from other members of the community can be used as a starting point in any study concerning Christian heroism of Malayalam cinema.

Thankachan is positioned as a representative of the land owning planter class. But he is an atypical member of the community as his ownership of the land is contrasted with the poverty of most individuals of his community. Constructed as a man with origins and education in Singapore, Thankachan is benevolent and kind towards the poor and the destitute in the narrative. In fact, the essence of the narrative is the establishment of the Christian hero as a product of cultural modernity. It is his western education that enables him to be compassionate and mostly decisive in the end. His difference in social status with other characters makes him the most eligible bachelor of the village. Pappachan, the hero in P. Subramaniam's 1958 film *Mariyakutty* (1958), also has a similar dimension, in the sense that he is presented as the son of the rich planter, Variyelle Kuruvachan. His estrangement from the community and the silence in the face of the villainous and brutal ways of his father are the base of his being a hero.

Thankachan's first meeting with Chinnamma (Miss Kumari), the heroine, as a result of a motor bike accident reveals the essentialist ideology of the text and hero construction. Thankachan is constructed as the ideal ego of the spectator in the sense that he owns money and wields power. The only display of his heroism is in the climax of the film where he decides to marry the poor but beautiful girl Chinnamma, when her marriage with Chakkaravakkal is cancelled due to the failure of her father to arrange dowry. Though Thankachan is an indecisive hero who is reluctant in measuring his love to the Cinderella-like Chinnamma, why he decides to marry the rural girl in the end forms a crucial question.

Padatha Painkili, like other pioneering classics of Malayalam cinema, glorifies the wealth of its hero while simultaneously fetishizing its heroine's poverty. Being a film produced in the phase of Nehruvian socialism and the emergence of Communism, the contrast between the hero and the heroine is established in terms of economic difference. The narrative shows how Chinnamma, the virtue rewarded in the end, takes up the jobs of a farmhand and housemaid in contrast to the hero's leading a rather exuberant life with the wealth he has earned outside the diegesis. The crux of the narrative is the meeting between the hero and the heroine at the former's residence when Chinnamma's father is down with fever. Virtue meets wealth. Virtue meets benevolence. The agency and power of the hero, thus, are the results of his superior economic condition and social position due to education.

How *Padatha Painkili* designates the class and religious relationships also assume significance in the domain of Cultural analysis. The only Muslim in the narrative is a man who buys the goats from the heroine Chinnamma at the time of distress of her family. Thevi and her father Mylan Chathan, who are the native

Dalits are muted in the narrative in such a way that they themselves consider alienated and otherised. For instance, their way of salutation of Thankachan and Luke as Thambran (which means the Lord) is evocative of the unjust feudal landscape.

Films of the 1950s, thus, present the decline of a concept of feudal masculine identity often represented through the father figure and the consequent emergence of a newly fashioned modern self. The textures of the constant clash between these two ideologies are visible constantly in these films. Unlike the power centre of the family, which often controls wealth and power, the heroic agency of the youth believes in progressive ideas and inclusivity at the surface. The new individuals, with more of an urban kind of dressing, resist the traditionalism of the rural self. The ideological core of the films of this period declares their difference from the traditionalist authority of the father. This constant clash, in the form of an ideology, elected the first left government. At the same time, the endorsement of traditionalism existed as equally strong resulting in the removal of the government.

Mainstream literature often portrays Christians as mostly agrarian farmers and migrants to the hilly terrains, in this decade and the next. Hence, alternative narratives emerge as a response to their marginalisation or erasure within dominant literary discourse. Such narratives challenge how mainstream literature has either vilified or ignored the migrant experience. It is often argued that Muttathu Varkey, Kanam E. J. and other writers who wrote romances set in Christian community had to bear the label of popular novelists. In “Religion, Modernity, and the Nation”, Ambili Anna Markose critiqued this by stating that “popular literature is supposedly intended to titillate the imagination of the public” (166). Malayalam cinema also

constructed the Christian world with its heroes and heroines as special ever since, because the oddities associated with them offered an exotic pleasure to the spectator placed in the hegemonic caste-based identity. Regarding the migrant experience of Christians, Varghese V. J. has observed that “the literary representations of the migrants are political articulations necessitated by specific historical circumstances” (328).

The Latin Christian subjectivity in Malayalam cinema is reflected through *Lily* (Dir. H. F. Nagoor, 1958). In a narrative centred around a coastal village, the Latin Christian hero is stereotyped as illiterate, drunkard and sexual pervert, an other to the hegemonic masculine identity of the caste Hindu and the Syrian Christian heroes. In this way, cinema has constructed the myth of the ‘uncultured’ fisherfolks.

Films were not radically different in the 1960s from the previous decade. The major shift visible as accounted by Raveendran was the presentation of events of drama in a more stylised format. The *mise en scene* of most films was the domestic interior or farms outside according to studio conventions. “Scripts based on various mythologies, anecdotes from folk songs of the northern part of Kerala and historical stories were intended to surprise the audience with mesmerizing visuals, vibrant sound movements and costumes” (my trans.; 51). The mainstream of the decade shall be seen from two perspectives: The first, the Vadakkanpattu and mythological films, formally validated by the triumph of a regressive ideology following the success of the liberation struggle. Cinematic renditions of the return of traditional authoritarian power in a Christian context were seen such as *Gnana Sundari* (Dir. K.S. Sethumadhavan, 1961), *Snapakayohannan* (Dir. P. Subramaniam, 1963) and *Kadamattathachan* (Dir. George Tharian, 1966). The second, the

adaptation of literary classics into films, where popular writers like Muttathu Varkey, Ponkunnam Varkey, Kaanam E. J., Parappurath, Uroob, M T Vasudevan Nair and Vaikom Muhammad Basheer were part of the phase of the sentimentalist melodramatic film with melodious songs. In this phase, *Chemmeen* (Dir. Ramu Kariat, 1965) is the cultural dominant of tragedy in cinema and *Bhargavi Nilayam*, that of horror.

The complexity of the masculinity formation of cinema of this decade can be understood with regard to *Bharya* (Dir. Kunchacko 1962) which is the adaptation of a novel of the same title by Kanam based on the Thiruvalla Ammalu murder case. Scripted by Ponkunnam Varkey, *Bharya* tells a family drama revolving around themes of fidelity in marriage, alcoholism and the crisis generated in the wake of extramarital relationships. Benny, the central character played by Sathyan, runs a college, and the film is important in the making of Christian masculinity as it presents a shift from the wealthy landowner class hero of Nazir in *Padatha Painkili* to the emerging business man.

Benny, Sathyan's character, is a tutorial owning, English speaking man of the upper class. In the beginning, he is presented as a family man who leads a peaceful and happy life with his wife Leela (Ragini), and children Molly (Baby Seetha) and Rajan (Master Jijo). The crisis in the narrative is centred on the 'other' woman, Gracy (Rajasree), a student in his college. The narrative is positioned around the problematical concept that any attempt to eat into the wealth of the aristocracy is an awkward act and hence it should be resisted.

The narrative addresses the dimension of class in early Malayalam cinema. In other words, what makes Gracy a villainous woman in the narrative is her class.

On close explication of the narrative, any thought of the poor farming class acquiring wealth is considered outrageous and condemnable. Uthuppu and Rahel, the parents of Gracy, are presented as the nasty and ugly outsiders belonging to the farming community, marked by their unrefined language. Thus, insatiable greed is presented as one of the prime characteristics of the poor agrarian class. Benny's tragedy is presented as one that was plotted by the introduction of the 'uncultured' outsiders who are not even reluctant to sell their own daughter. The contrast between the shots of affluence of Benny's family and that of Uthuppu's household sums up the division of class in the diegesis.

Benny, being a tragic hero, is conceived in significantly different ways from heroes of romances. Though the narrative opens with images of the hero's wealth and exalted social position, it gives more emphasis to the dimension of his moral accountability. Though the text establishes the patriarchal dimension of the institution of the family by visualizing the heroine as a self-sacrificing ideal wife in a masculine perspective, the hero is positioned as the one who owns money and thus authority both in the domestic realm and in the social sphere.

However, heroes like Thankachan and Benny had one thing in common. Raveendran has observed the fundamental element of MGR's heroism – identified as 'Ezhai thozhan' and 'Makkal thilakam' in early Tamil films – is his cultural capital of noble birth as a Zamindar's son (33). The early Malayalam films also projected this feudal notion of the Christian hero even as he performed the social realist progressive man.

The heroines were the sacrificial women who were made to bear the burden of their sins. The construction of masculinity did not assume an all controlling

hegemony during the phase. The house was supervised and controlled by the dominant father figures who controlled the men, the women and the money. These Karanavars, like those in the Nair families, were traditionalists who adhered to rituals and turned their back on progressive ideas and political and social changes. The masculinity formation in *Bharya*, it is argued, is situated at an intermediary space between domination and subordination, “the conflicting trajectories of tradition and modernity” (“Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema” 2).

The conclusion of the narrative which presents the Othello like downfall of Benny is also assertive of the class question in the Christian community. What turns the hero into an anti-hero at the end of the narrative is the eternally dominant male libido. The final display of the tragedy is presented in the dying moments of Leela, when Benny shoots her under the guidance of his father, in order to create an impression of Leela’s death as an act of suicide. There comes the central question of family honour. The text makes Gracy an outsider precisely because there is a class centric political unconscious at work within the narrative. Benny’s father wants Leela to be shot and killed because ideologically any crime can be covered up in the institution of family. Family honour is the ultimate moral concern, and everything else is secondary. In short, Malayalam cinema narratives of the 1960s have been successful articulations of the aristocratic ideology, family honour and the otherisation of the farmer class and the female. In relationship with this should be seen how the two films based on the controversial Mariyakkutty murder case in Kerala reflected a perspective suitable to the mainstream ideology contrary to the police version – *Mynatharuvi Kolakase* (Dir. Kunchacko, 1967) and *Madatharuvi* (Dir. P. A. Thomas, 1967). Though both of them were patriarchal formulations, they

were different in a way; the first presented the murder of the labourer/woman as a result of capitalist exploitation, the second satisfied the spectator's patriarchal ego by further vilifying the feminine.

Althara (Dir. P. Subramaniam, 1964), *Thommante Makkal* (Dir. J. Sasikumar, 1965), *Sthanarthi Saramma* (Dir. K. S. Sethumadhavan, 1966), *Rosie* (Dir. P. N. Menon, 1965), *Bhumiyile Malakha* (Dir. P. A. Thomas, 1965) were some other representative texts that explored the gender formations from the conceptual framework of illness. In *Bhumiyile Malakha* and *Rosie* the crisis in masculinity is conveyed symbolically in the form of aging and sick characters. Addressing the crisis of marriage in *Aadyakiranangal* (Dir. P. Bhaskaran, 1964) and *Bhumiyile Malakha*, the feminine was contrastively and regressively defined by ennobling suffering as a value. The growing general resentment among the public and the failure of idealism contributed to visualising the collapsing Christian male. Extreme religiosity was manifested in the form of an ideology constructing the masculine and the feminine, as noted by Scaria Zacharia in the context of Muttathu Varkey's fictions and films:

Men and women who never remove their scapular from their necks, those who go to church with a rosary and a daily devotional book in their hands, those who recite the Angelus and the rosary without fail, those who do not hesitate to belittle the other in the name of family legacy, and above all, those who have vowed to live by the sweat of their brow, toiling hard on the earth. (my trans.; 135)

The content of Malayalam cinema became formally and structurally more organised in the 1970s with the rise of the arthouse cinema movement, the

emergence of an extreme left oriented politics and a new sensibility created by the film societies. The newly emerging arthouse cinema addressed the resentment of the young generation in a mostly minimalist and realist manner. This nuanced storytelling pattern and the revisions it brought in redefined the concept of family, and hence any assumptions on masculinity. However, in the second half of the decade, the political discontent took the form of an angry young protagonist in Bollywood and the regional cinemas. It reformed the masculinity structures in Malayalam cinema of this phase. These contrastive dimensions can be analysed mainly with regard to films with a Christian hero.

The representation of the institution of the family underwent significant changes in the 1970s. In narratives like the cinematic adaptation of Parappurath's novel *Ara Nazhika Neram* (Dir. K. S. Sethumadhavan, 1970) which is heralded as a classic in novel and cinema, the dysfunctional nature of the family emerges as the focal point of the narrative. Simultaneously, the image of the hero from an all-controlling persona gives way to that of the self-tormenting Christian hero. The film presents the aging Kunjenachan, played by Kottarakkara Sreedharan Nair as its hero. Unlike, *Padatha Painkili* and *Bharya*, which are set predominantly in the Roman Christian tradition, the film directed by K.S. Sethumadhavan presents the world of Syrian Orthodox Christians of Kerala. In a narrative which resembles Ingmar Bergman's classic *Wild Strawberries* (Dir. Ingmar Bergman, 1957), the film presents the last few hours in the life of its hero and interrogates the fissures and gaps in the institution of the family. Sensing that his family is dysfunctional, the panicked grandfather desperately wants to set things right before he dies. Thus,

Kunjenachan has the image of the self-tormenting Christian hero, in contrast to the images of the benevolent landlord, hardworking labourer and wealthy aristocrat.

Kunjenachan is a ninety-year-old patriarch who lives his life according to the Bible. In the beginning of the narrative, he sees himself in a dream, as an old man walking alone in a god forsaken place and he hears the voice of Abraham. The voice tells him: “Now your life is in my hands. You have only half an hour to live” (my trans.; 00:00:30-01:12). Despite being a tragedy which analyses the helplessness and frustration of old age encountering a patriarch against the backdrop of collapsing family, the roots of power and authority remain the same as those in the early classics of a Christian background. The film presents the vulnerable hero in relation to the doctrines of conventional sexual morality, when Kunjenachan’s tragic fall is presented as having resulted from witnessing his daughter-in-law, Deenamamma’s sexual transgression (Vijayakrishnan 110).

In the 1970s, the rise of individualism is often traced as one of the most dominant of the emerging ideologies. The structure of family is on the verge of its institutional collapse. The all pervasive, all dominating, all seeing controlling figures are paving the way for the self-defining man. Naturally, the new economic turn indicates the decisions of the heroes who reject their ancestral family property due to the crisis in the plot, but emerge successfully by other means such as job and business. The all controlling father figure gives way to a more sedate, weak, fragile, and morally tenacious concept of a man. According to V. C. Harris in “Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema”, films like *Ara Nazhika Neram* function at a broader level critiquing the traditionalism of the previous eras: “In the 1970s, there was a stiff interrogation of several modes of traditional thought (sic) and life, including the

values associated with religious beliefs and practices. The secularization and modernization of the Indian polity helped to critique the religious in more ways than one” (3).

However, the commercial cine populars of the phase presented a more vibrant and dashing form of masculinity, separated from the limitations of traditionalism. *Dathuputhran* (Dir. Kunchacko, 1970) based on a script by the novelist Kanam is a case study in the discussion of the domain of family property and financial transactions in the Christian families of the 1970s. The narrative which presents its Christian heroes as morally upright men works on the theme of love marriages better than on arranged ones by family and elders. Ponnachan (Nazir) is a hero when he decides to marry a poor girl Gracy (Sheela) against the will of his greedy and class-conscious parents. After marriage, when forcibly turned out of his ancestral house, he boldly declares that he would protect his beloved whatever be the cost. The rest of the narrative is constituted by his attempts to find a job and established social status. Kunjachan (Sathyan) who is Ponnachan’s friend since the childhood displays his heroism in emerging as the individual by sticking with his friend against the will of his dominant family members. Kunjachan’s exerts his agency and continues to provide for Gracy orphaned by Ponnachan’s absence even when the patriarch Manichan, his uncle strictly forbade him to do so. The conclusion of the narrative is a celebration of the triumph of individualism, as all is well that ends well.

The idealisation of the heroes in the imagination of the dominant order is well-essayed in *Dathuputhran*. Both Ponnachan and Kunjachan are represented as having all the attributes of a typical hero, both selfless and self-sacrificing.

Ponnachan's heroism has its basis in his renouncing all the wealth that he ought to have inherited from his parents for the sake of his love and marriage. In sacrificing his reputation and prestige in society for his best friend and his wife, Kunjachan establishes himself as the ideal ego of the spectator. It is in the refutation of the dominant economic institution of the family, to which they are part of, that the idealism of the hero construction is revealed. Both the heroic figures forfeit their inheritance and power, while upholding their personal choice, when they raise questions against the orthodoxy of paternal authority.

The films of this phase begin to disseminate the conflicts within the nation. *Karakanakkadal* (Dir. K.S. Sethumadhavan, 1971), based on Muttathu Varkey's novel, captures the settler hero Moothedath Thomas's disillusionment with migration, a year before Adoor's *Swayamvaram* (1972) in a strikingly opposite manner. Both the texts end in tragedy, as well. Despite the inventiveness of a new realist cinematic form, the new wave Malayalam cinema was still caste hegemonic. The outsider settler consciousness – the focus of the thesis in Chapter VI – has its foundation in such analyses. However, the village centric identity turns more city bound in texts like *Lora Neeyevide* (Dir. T. R. Raghunath, 1971), whose hero Bernad has his economic capital to purchase land as a result of his gulf migration. The films etch a more nuanced version of multi-faceted identity constructions of Christians.

The late 1970s witnessed a paradigm shift in the domain of Malayalam cinema. The angry young man generation which was ushered in Bollywood and other leading industries entered Malayalam cinema as well. The texts were marked with the celebration of a politics of rebellion which was the net result of social and

economic unrest and inequality. The avant-garde filmmakers used some sort of allegory to capture the fascist tendencies on the rise in Indian polity in and around the Emergency. To emphasise the unity and integrity of the nation, the narratives were arranged in such a way as to reflect the nationalist and secular interests of the country. The Christian heroes who were a product of the social realism of Malayalam cinema in its infancy were mostly erased from the mainstream films, except in family-centric melodramas like *Aval Viswasthayayirunnu* (Dir. P. G. Viswambharan, 1978).

The construction of masculinity during the first three decades was sharply in opposition to the pattern in which femininity was constructed: “The heroine of the period is a romantic ideal, with fluttering eyelids and timid gait, treated with loving reverence by the camera in soft focus and gentle backlighting. But it is her essential submissiveness and coy charm which she offers at the altar of her male ego ideal that earns her this halo of romantic reverence” (Pillai 11). The heroes of the phase, especially the Christian hero, are hardworking individuals, assuming a protector role within the family, sacrificing himself, but still being assertive in personal convictions. Prem Nazir’s Thomas/Father Clement in *Ganga Sangamam* (Dir. J. D. Thottan, 1971), a film noted for the unusual Christian imagery and the revolutionary representation of priesthood in accordance with liberation theology, sums up the emergence of this new masculinity.

The emergence of the second generation of actors happened in Malayalam cinema in the late 1970s and the early 1980s. Most of the narratives were marked with the presence of the angry protestors on screen. In “Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema”, V. C. Harris notes how “National Emergency – a constitutional move that

seriously curtailed all kinds of political and civil rights and vested unbridled power in a handful of politicians, government functionaries, and the police” (3) changed the tropes of cinema. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan interprets the change in aesthetics in the context of the changing public sphere where the Left loses its grasp: “By the 1970s, in the context of rapid shifts in the economic and demographic conditions following the collapse of the attempts at industrialization, the rise of the service sector, migration to the Persian Gulf, etc., the Left seems loosen its hold on the popular” (36). *Ivar* (Dir. I. V. Sasi, 1980) is a specimen of this emerging phase. Stanley, the character was portrayed as an innocent young fisherman whose heroism was subjected to the emerging feminine desire and anger. More nuanced forms of the representation of masculinities also emerge during this phase of cinema as Stanley and Leslie – the Latin Christians heroes with their working class identity – are stereotyped as more egoistic, and more evidently muted by aggressive feminine sexuality.

In the analytical research on the construction and repetition of hegemonic, toxic masculinities the more commercialised and westernised Malayalam cinema of the 1980s has a special significance. Regarding the construction of Christian masculinity, the 1980s introduced a radically different stereotype called the all-defying Achayan, mostly emerging from rugged individualist ideologies. As K. Gopinathan has pointed out: “The worldwide backlash to class politics and associated value systems, the decline of nationalism and the Indian National Congress, and the absence of a healthy popular culture and secular spirituality have created a favourable environment for the rise of a regressive culture industry” (my trans.; 74) during this phase. The new heroes are inseparably linked to the

emergence of new genres and a modified aesthetics resulting from it. V. K. Joseph traces three emerging styles during the period: the family films, masala films and comedy films (88). Yadukrishnan P. T. marks out the emergence of middlebrow cinema by Padmarajan, Bharathan and Kamal as the dominant form of the era (9). O. K. Johny sums up the politics of the mainstream popular cinema with regard to the institution of family: “Appropriating reality either directly or indirectly, popular films reproduce existing public consciousness and values about caste, religion, politics, government, social relations, family, marriage, women, good and evil” (113). Pramod K. S. observes the emerging popular cinema, mostly reflecting bourgeoisie and capitalist ideology as a binary against the continuance of the art cinema of the previous decade (98). Christian masculinity formation is related to the emerging ideologies which assume new genres and diegetic conventions during the phase.

The rise of the superstardom of Mammooty who essayed the emerging urban middle class and the hereditary planter class in a number of films constitutes the fulcrum of the “Achayan” identity. Mohanlal, mostly associated with the formation of the Nair self and feudal masculinity, also serves to bring in this hierarchical agency to the Christian characters he essayed, in the second half of the decade. In response to the Christian selfhood mostly fashioned in association with the progressive, liberal ideals in the first three decades, the new cinema responded by continuously circulating the apolitical rustic, macho heroism of the exotic Achayans on screen.

The first half of the 1980s, however, especially in the middle cinema critically approached the hegemonic conceptualisations of masculinity. In

Padmarajan's and K. G. George's middlebrow cinema set in a Christian milieu, the hegemonic masculinity assumed the form of an ideology of patriarchal domination and female subordination. Padmarajan's *Koodevide* (1983), and George's *Irakal* (1985) trace aggressive sexual violence as the dominant of the hegemonic dominant in narratives that question it.

Koodevide is at the same time a romance and a coming-of-age drama adapted from a Tamil novel written by Vasanthi. The film, which is set in the prestigious Good Shepherd Public School in Ooty and its outskirts, tells the tragic story of the teacher, Alice (Suhasini). The diegesis which is woman-centred is built around the helpless Alice's love towards Captain Thomas (Mammooty) and her affection towards Ravi Puthooran (Rahman), a ninth standard student of her class.

In fact, the character of Captain Thomas can be considered as one of the pioneering Christian heroes. He is one of the close friends of Captain George who was Alice's only brother who was killed during military training. He is represented in the film as an arrogant alcoholic. He is constructed as the self-styled fascist who never listens to anybody. Right from the outset, Thomas is presented as the courageous man who declares his love to Alice overtly in contrast to Captain George, his friend who fails to express his love to Daisy.

In contrast, Ravi is introduced as the spoilt child of a politician Xavier Puthooran, hailing from Kerala and residing in Ooty. He is lonely, aimless, naughty and unruly in the class. When Alice realises the tragedy of the loss of his mother at an early age, she plays a motherly role which reforms the teenager.

Padmarajan's film is one of the early instances of the construction of hegemonic masculinity that displays patriarchal dominance against woman. The

crux of the narrative is the scene where Thomas describes himself as a male chauvinist Christian from Central Kerala, when he sees his fiancée is spending too much time with her teenager student. In an uncontrollable frenzy of alcohol, he declares:

I am a Christian hailing from Kanjirappally. Do you understand who a Christian from Kanjirappally is? No, you don't understand what it means. He is the one who knows how to tame his wife. It is the definition of a Christian from Kanjirappally. I can't agree to the idea that I should talk according to your likes and dislikes. I will say whatever I like to say. Whenever I speak, your job is to listen to me. (my trans.; 01:53:16-59)

Though Thomas is constructed as an anti-hero, the film demonstrates the dominant images of hegemonic masculinity that the spectators are to witness on screen in the years to come. Apparently, the film presents a critique of toxic masculinity, often the result of male insecurity at the emergence of the new woman – a crucial awareness the import of which was ignored in the later years of Malayalam cinema. However, the display of such feudal social capital makes the life of the woman miserable in a series of family movies of the era and it exemplifies how effortlessly the spectators could identify with hegemonic, upper class heroic display. *Kanamarayathu* (Dir. I. V. Sasi, 1984) and *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal* (Dir. P. Padmarajan, 1987), both scripted by Padmarajan, display more nuanced versions of the elitist masculinity construction.

The topic – disintegration of the Christian family and the self – has only very rarely been attempted in Malayalam cinema. Settlement has been discussed and presented from the perspective of the settler, and hence most narratives in

Malayalam cinema have been a case of glorification of the plantation myth. Most Christian centric films of the 1980s and the 1990s present Crusoes setting lands in order in the high ranges and midlands of Kerala, such as Thevakkattil Kuttappayi in *Vazhunnor* (Dir. Joshiy, 1999), David John Kottarathil in *Nasrani* (Dir. Joshiy, 2007), and Pulikkattil Charly in *Natturajavu* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 2004). In *Irakal*, however, there is a scabrous assessment of Christian masculinity by foregrounding critically the violence that characterises the process of dominance over the human and the environment.

C. S. Venkiteswaran has interpreted *Irakal* as an allegorical representation of the community and the state itself in “K. G. George: Chronicler of the Moral Void”:

Irakal dissects the complex and omnipresent presence of power underlying the institution of the family and the sexual economy on which it is founded. Built on endless greed, this oppressive structure can find release and expression only in blind lust and brutal violence. The desolate biblical wail of the grandfather, the man who toiled on earth to create wealth and build the family, resonates through the film as the martyred conscience of not only that family, but also the community and Malayalee society at large.

In George’s films, the aggressive machoism and a consequent split identity, that mostly formed the settlers, be they heroes or villains, are subverted. The Christian male is shown to be nasty, brutish, and infinitely aggressive and takes the form of an ideology of dominance, be it man, woman, beast or nature on the other end. Beneath the material prosperity of the family, there lies instances of subordination, exploitation and commodification.

Irakal belongs to cinemas of naturalistic social protest. Accordingly, Babychen (Ganeshkumar) is a character destroyed by psychological, social and economic factors beyond their control. He sees himself as a victim of his upbringing. His mother is too pious and obedient, and moreover, complicit to the male chauvinistic system; his father, a brutal, ruthless aggressor; and his brothers too cruel and patronizing – all of which suggests that his demise was made inevitable by his social disempowerment. His psychic state is the result of a loveless environment where each one lies to the other and oneself, as he explains to his childhood soulmate Raghavan.

Mathews alias Mathukkutty (Thilakan) is a second generation settler with the sole motto of possessing more acres of land, money and power. His father on his deathbed narrates how Mathews, with his gun, killed the animals and cleared the land. The gun which has an integral role on the wall of the house along with the typical Jesus Christ image is symbolic of the cruelties of settlement. At the climax, when his empire is threatened, he shoots down his own son Baby who has turned into a psycho rebelling against the hardline materialism.

The violence takes the form of an aggressive madness or instinct to kill everyone including himself in Baby. The sado-masochist dual personality in him, conveyed by the symbol of a red electric wire, recurs constantly as the murder weapon. The symbolic association of latex (rubber milk), the economic foundation of the grandeur of the family, in connection with the erstwhile heroes of Malayalam cinema, connotes that the successful plantation myth was one of bloodbath and cruel aggression, be it upon land, animal, tree or woman. The symbolism of red, in association with latex and the wire, assumes great significance in the analysis of

Baby's character. "The red coloured carpet and sofa of the house reminds one of the fact that the family walks and sits over the blood of the exploited" (my trans.; Ubuntu). Baby's elder brothers Koshi and Sunny are also representatives of two contrastive attitudes towards settler life. The contented outlaw that Koshi is, throughout the narrative, carries the legacy of his aggressive father in bribing, business and illegal thug life. On the other hand, Sunny's alcoholism is symptomatic of the alienation which Babychen also experiences later in the settler way of life.

Psychopaths in Hollywood and other dominant cinemas belong to the discontented individuals of the city. *Irakal*, however, constructs Baby as a country psycho who is disillusioned with the absurdity, hypocrisy and artificiality of the settler way of life. George presents an anti-hero with a split personality who hates to be part of the empire of violence and the anti-social habits of the adults in the structures of power, but still urges to be "the source of more severe and direct violence" (my trans.; Ubuntu).

As already discussed, the 1980s marked a decisive shift in the topography of Malayalam cinema, alongside a change in the pattern of storytelling and visualisation. Adding a feminist dimension to the cinema of the phase, in *Women in Malayalam Cinema*, Meena T. Pillai refers to the films of the 1980s as "capitalistic, patriarchal and neo-conservative" (22). The films of the phase largely reflected those dominant ideological underpinnings, and the rise of Christian themed films in large numbers with the new avatar of flashy Achayans is a reflection of it. Pillai argues,

[T]he backlash against the liberal humanist, anti-feudal sentiments of the earlier decades in the wake of Kerala's transformation into semi-capitalist, 'Kerala model' economy with the inflow of 'Gulf' money, had thrown even

‘political correctness’ and ‘idealism’ to the wind, embracing with gusto the ethos of ‘apoliticisation’ as the mantra of a new global economy. (22)

The Achayan subjectivity, when analysed, glorifies the Syrian Christian identity and feudal economic structures in peculiar ways. At a time, when the normal in Malayalam cinema was upper caste feudal nostalgia, parallelly a new Christian heroism evolved on screen. *Sangham* (Dir. Joshi, 1988), a film scripted by Dennis Joseph, serves as a launchpad to investigate the construction of power of the Christian community.

The film narrates the story of the rich, wayward, and profligate Kuttappai (Mammootty), son of Illikkal Rappai (Thilakan) against the backdrop of a scenic village. Ann Mary George observes how the pattern of Achayan identity as a particular character representation for which Mammootty became popular in the coming years emerged a major trope in the constitution of the actor’s stardom: “Mammootty appropriates the cultural and symbolic capital associated with these communities to fashion his persona as a commanding figure guided by the intrinsic rational sensibilities assigned to these communal categories” (132). A detailed analysis of how the heroic in *Sangham* is constructed reveals the structures of masculinity that produced the hierarchy of Syrian Christian patriarchal authority.

One of the first Achayan heroes, Kuttappai outsmarts, with his sharp tongue and physical strength, anyone who comes his way. A narrative that is anchored on the feud between Kuttappai and the feudal lord Panicker, parades hegemonic masculinity throughout. This analysis focusses on the contrastive ways in which identities are formed differently from the hegemonic heroes. The film has a dramatic side in the second half, where the hero accidentally meets in Kodaikkanal the woman

with whom he had an uncomfortable past. He is shocked by the revelation that he has a daughter in that relationship. As a hegemonic masculine discourse, both the settings configure together to resolve the narrative crisis.

Achayans, in *Sangham* and also in the subsequent movies of this genre, are represented as law-defying influential people, having connections with the government, bureaucracy, police and the establishment of religion connoted by the church and its priests. The macho ideology is expressed in its fearless and unscrupulous resort to feud, guns, violence and treachery. Their values are bourgeois, not exactly those of an elite aristocracy, though they are basically the estate-car-hotel-hospital owning upstart big business men. Though Achayans are typified as family men, the hegemonic power they possess is mostly manifested in silencing the woman of the family (be it the wife, mother, daughter or sister) in the most crucial scenes. Social power, which is also community power, is symbolically expressed when Achayans appear in typical white dhoti and kurtas. For the Achayan heroes, life is all about the display of their chivalry which is associated with hegemonic masculine formations such as Kuttappai cutting the rubber trees in the field of Panicker or buying the snake boat by stealing money from his own father and winning the boat race against all odds by demolishing the boat of his rival in a bomb blast. *Sangham* was launching certain new traits of patriarchal hegemony for the Christian heroes.

The construction of the hero as the ego ideal of the spectator, as argued by Metz and Mulvey in their psychoanalytical interpretations of cinema, is maintained very consciously in the narrative. The spectator, irrespective of class, caste, gender, race and similar differences, is sutured into a bourgeoisie viewpoint. Apparently, the

representation matrix celebrates the rise of the hardworking man despite all odds. Contrary to the psychoanalytic stream of thought, as a system of representation, cinema industry has shaped the values and worldviews of its audience to suit its capital interests. Thus, elite middle/upper class values and anxieties are constantly placed at the centre of society through narratives. The hegemonic masculinity in *Sangham* is manifested through the powerful articulatory slow motion close-up shots of Mammooty.

However, the slight alteration in the construction of Christian herohood in terms of caste is visible when the origin of the wealth of the hero's family is portrayed. For instance, after the establishing long shot of the Illikkal house, Rappai, the hero's miserly father is introduced in a close-up with the keys of the house (00:03:00-10). In a monologue, Thilakan's character hints at the source of wealth. "I have done certain things not suitable for Christ to mint some money" (my trans.; 00:05:30). While the mainstream feudal narratives glorified and sanctified aristocratic agency through the presentation of heroes without self-critique, the narrative here rests on the axis of illustrious hard work. The text constructs Kuttappai as aggressive and ruthless, by evoking the wealth accumulated by his ancestors through sheer physical labour. In contrast, Kuttappai's father Illikkal Rappai, who created the family wealth is dehumanised through his dress and language as miserly and uncultured.

By extension, the cultural and economic history of the state also gets addressed. Rappai represents that class which made a life worthy of living by resorting to different trades which the caste Hindus scorned. In one of the monologues, he speaks of his past when he made a fortune by selling tapioca and

coconut in the High Ranges on a bullock cart driven by a single bull (00:07:20-25). Christian morality is said to be different from the caste Hindu ones, as when Rappai says that he has resorted to some illegal means to make money and become rich. In this sense, he represents the homo economicus, the rational economic being. This is the contrastive caste domain of the Christian hero construction.

The widespread anger and feudal nostalgia of Malayalam cinema are characterised by the reforms of the 1957 Kerala government, especially with regard to the ownership and distribution of land. Dilip M. Menon observes in the context of the Land Relations Bill of 1959: “Christian interests were ostensibly protected under a dispensation that declared the plantations and land reclaimed from the backwaters out of the purview of this legislation” (“Things Fall Apart” 311). This historical subtext is the political content which made the films set among the Nair community as one of elegiac nostalgia and in Christian background as one of mere physical action. The college-mill-hospital-hotel owning family in the present, that probably evolved as result of this entitlement, is different from the caste Hindu families whose source of wealth is ancient ancestry – the ownership of the resources, like the land. Thus, the Christian hero is constructed as embodying the economic and political power through narrative agency and the film exposes certain layers of their powerlessness, without causing any problem to the comfort zones of the spectator.

The text positions the Christian as excluded from the public sphere of the village, and by extension, that of the state. When the priest begins the public meeting after the Holy Mass, he says that despite being the majority in the locality, Christians are excluded from political power. The boat race that later becomes the central narrative trope is projected to negotiate this absence. The text subtly marks

the contrastive agency of the Christian minority. However, as a representation system, it is what Kuttappai does that constitutes the series of actions.

The political unconscious of the narrative is organised around the uneasy history of ancestral poverty and social backwardness of the community (indicated through the father or grandfather) in the past. For instance, the brawl scene with the wealthy neighbour, the upper caste Panicker in the club reminds the spectator that despite the white polished attire, the hero is an outsider (00:15:59-18:30). What it designates is that Kuttappai – the Achayan hero – is an upstart who lacks the legacy of the aristocratic land-owning caste Hindus. The antagonist Panicker boastfully exposes the poverty ridden days of the Illikkal family in the verbal exchange with the hero. Panicker contemptuously remarks that the Christian social power is based on illegal and fraudulent means in the game of cards and thuggery (00:16:05-09).

The narrative also ventures to address the politics of conversion, and the Christian hero does not inherit the Pakalomattam legacy, as suggested by the official version of the church. Against the church-articulated myths regarding the arrival of St. Thomas in 52 CE and Thomas of Cana in 345 CE, the narrative places the ancestors of the hero as converted for food. However, the text resists giving a subaltern identity to the hero, mostly to suit the caste hierarchy organisation. Through Panicker it is addressed that the Christian hero's agency is not based on his caste hierarchy, but on his status as social outsider. The diegesis does this by further mocking that conversion to Christianity was for the "wheat and milk powder" supplied by the foreign missionaries (my trans.; 00:17:08-15). Through Panicker, the textual (un)conscious reveals that the ancestors of the heroic Kuttappai were primarily labourers, begging for food and job at the doors of the rich feudal Hindu

families. Kuttappai's grandfather, as is revealed in the verbal exchange, would do anything for two glasses of old porridge and two pieces of green chillies (00:18:22-27). The derogatory reference to the ancestral poverty of the community by referring to the food habits is another sign to ensure the marginality of the hero. Moreover, the marginality of Illikkal family is further highlighted by Panicker stating that Kuttappai's grandfather did not have an honourable death, a ceremonial funeral and a monumental tomb, as he lost his life in a flood. Thus, the film places Kuttappai and his family in a much more ordinary social plain, thereby articulating that the power of the hero is not genealogical, but rather functional and performative.

There is another dimension to this caste-based proposition regarding the construction of the hero. Considered as a caste discourse, the hero successfully defends the caste hegemony present in Panicker's vocabulary. But, it is far from being revolutionary as the text does not demonstrate how caste hierarchies collapse under such a clash, but rather gets consolidated. Being wealthy landlords, both are entitled within the logic of the film to question the hierarchical praxis, without effectively getting concerned.

In connection with the emergence of a new kind of hero, it is observed that he is constructed as an individual situated simultaneously inside and outside the hierarchical domain of power structure. At the same time, it must also be noted that he is also positioned as not belonging to any of the new classes emerging these days, such as the working class or the newly emerging middle class. This is because it is not in opposition to the working of the caste machinery that the Christian hero is fashioned, but rather as someone equal to the hegemonic communities in the state in a different way.

The narrative moment when Kuttappai purchases a snake boat shows the transfer of community power from one caste to the other. In the Kerala feudal society, only the aristocracy owned such objects. Most of the boat races – such as Aranmula Uthrattathi or Chambakkulam Moolam – of Travancore are associated with the temples. While transferring the boat to Kuttappai, the erstwhile landowner who was forced to give up this feudal symbolic manifestation of power pleads with him: “This boat is my child. In case, the court settles the case of the plantation in favour of me at any stage, please return it to me” (my trans.; 00:47:15-24). The moment when the boat is redesignated as Illikkal Chundan, it implies that a new class/caste makes entry into the structures of power.

This practice of constructing the Christian hero as the outsider has various tropes of repetition. In “*Rajavinte Makan: The Underworld King who Unsettled the Caste King*”, Yacob Thomas observes that, what is distinctive about Vincent Gomez, the hero in *Rajavinte Makan* (Dir. Thampi Kannanthanam, 1986) also scripted by Dennis Joseph, is the construction of its hero as an individual standing outside the social hierarchy. The king (in the title and the narrative) seems to prolong the feudal cultural hegemony of kingship, but the usage is more ironic and sarcastic. In fact, the narrative displaces feudalist nostalgic identification by pointing out that the new king has actually come up from the streets. In fact, it undoes the myth of caste hegemony, contrary to the widely diegetic pattern circulated in independent India (Thomas). By quoting one of the most popular scenes from the film, Thomas demonstrates the differential construction of the new hero as the son of a local thug fighting for five rupees in the street. Joshiy’s later work *Lelam* (1997) too, presents Aanakkattil Eappachan, the hero’s father in the film, as an outsider,

lacking societal respect through origins, but compensates by making a fortune through illicit liquor. The same pattern of establishing the Christian hero or his ancestors as situated on the peripheries of the society is a recurring motif in *Mrugaya* (Dir. I. V. Sasi, 1989), *Natturajavu* and even in *Lucifer* (Dir. Prithviraj Sukumaran, 2019), to cite a few examples.

The event of exposition of the hero's social position in the narrative assumes great significance because the Christian male is structured in the unconscious of narrative cinema as the ugly savage, a man and a community which carries the cultural baggage of marginality and insignificance in a state governed by the feudal caste Hindu leaders, as the priest declares about the public sphere in the beginning. This must be seen in the context of the 1970s in which the government sector was mostly dominated by the upper caste communities. The social emergence of a community through means of education, labour, agriculture and migration was met with stiff opposition from a still feudal culture. In economic terms, films like *Sangham* and *Rajavinte Makan* connote a new social order in which one's origin – as in the feudal days – has little significance in determining the agency in the diegesis. The transformation of the identity of the Christian hero as power incarnated is visible in texts like *AK: Ayyappanum Koshiyum* (Dir. Sachy, 2020) and *Bro Daddy* (Dir. Prithviraj Sukumaran, 2022).

The hegemonic masculine Achayans are known for their ultra-masculine vigour, which fashions their selfhood. Primarily, this construction in the context of a patriarchal family is with regard to the subjection of woman. Close reading the hegemonic subjectivity construction, mostly characteristic of films set in the Christian fiefdom, it is observed that all the women characters are pushed to the

peripheries as their agency is limited. “Gender ... lends a powerful cultural metaphor to oppression, as the working class becomes the object to the economic subject, becomes objectified, “feminized”, animalized, commodified” (Kappeler 70). The Christian hero acts out by limiting the space of the woman to the inside of the household or restricted outer spaces like church and a public function like the boat race alone. Kuttappai, in his family, enjoys the respect of his wife, care of his invalid mother, and the special protective concern of his father. However, the very construction of the mother as invalid – literally and symbolically – determines the limited position of the Christian woman in the social sphere. The moments when the family pride is in question, especially when Panicker attempts to get into the Illikkal household to catch the collective of Kuttappai’s friends and also when the hero tries to purchase a boat for the family, the otherwise dominant father – the controlling figure – trusts his son more than the women. The hero displays his gun and verbosity to silence the antagonist and uses his monetary power later to challenge him. The undemocratic structure of the family is also obvious when Kuttappai silences his wife when he was armed with a gun and knife. Thus, the hero is constructed as the protector and savior of his family in moments of crisis. This replicates what Friedrich Engels noted in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*: “Within the family, he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat” (39).

The Christian hero as the dominant protective male has been widely recirculated in Malayalam cinema. As Laura Mulvey theorises, the male is active and the female is passive in these narratives. In Jeethu Joseph’s *Drishyam* (2013) and *Drishyam II* (2021), Georgekutty played by Mohanlal becomes the ultimate family-saving hero stereotype. This is the continuation of a stereotype maintained in

texts like Padmarajan's *Koodevide*, Joshi's *Sangham* and Biju varkey's *Phantom Pailey* (2002). The narratives of *Drishyam* and *Drishyam II* demonstrate the ways in which the hero construes a crisis as an opening to cement his power. For example, after the crime – the murder of Varun – the heroine Rani, played by Meena, stops arguing with Georgekutty and questioning his policies because it is tantamount to going against 'the law of the father'. Interestingly, the male hero dictates to other members of the family that he would let them know only what they should, and tell them what they have to say when they are interrogated. The rescuer/saviour role of the hero has a still assertive dimension in these movies as the crisis is established as having originated by the actions of the 'thoughtless' women in the absence of the controlling male figure.

The toxic masculinity of the rustic Christian male is often measured against how he controls the 'other' women. In his college days, Kuttappai disguises himself as Krishnakumar and 'marries' an orphan Ammini, in a community marriage ceremony organised by a magazine, to sexually exploit her. When contacted by the veteran editor of the magazine for support and willingness, Kuttappai declares that the ceremony is a fraud trick for all – publicity for the magazine and sexual enjoyment for the men (and women). For, Kuttappai says: "Some of us may do some (sexual) pranks with these women; Turn a blind eye to that" (my trans.; 01:36:02-03). The narrative structures of popular Malayalam cinema have always maintained that, whether it is the protagonist or the antagonist, the feminine body is a site of carnal pleasure for Achayans, as evidenced by the various portrayals in *Sangham*. Mathayi, who was Rappai's labourer once, has become an 'Achayan' by selling women at a brothel in Kodaikanal. Iruppungal Roy, the childhood friend Kuttappai

escapes to with his friends, also holds an ultra-masculine and opportunist attitude which projects all women as sexual objects, whether it is his girlfriend Usha or Ammini, or Ammini's (and Kuttappai's) daughter Aswathi. This trope of the Christian hero possessing the feminine body, both within and outside the established and legitimised structure of marriage, has been naturalised since the films of the 1990s.

The visual matrix tailored according to the patriarchal ideology is already cited. An examination through the lens of caste relations and social hierarchy reveals something more complex. Superficially, the film has a progressive ending, with Kuttappai realising that Aswathi is his daughter in Ammini, and saving her from the villains, while the mother sacrifices her life to protect the honour of her daughter. But, such an ending reveals two rather complex notions regarding the hegemonic Christian hero. First, he is no different from the men who attack Aswathi. Further, he is more villainous and misogynistic than them. The second, while perceived through the reception psychology of the audience, the caste issue in the narrative is problematically resolved by the death of Ammini. In the end, Kuttappai might go home with Aswathi, and she would be welcomed by his wife Marykkutty, as she once consented to her father-in-law. The death of Ammini, from a psychological viewpoint, was to solve the crisis in the spectator psyche: the hero who belongs to the hierarchical order has to do something acceptable to the ideologically conditioned spectator. The concept of the hero's girl growing somewhere else satisfies the feature of libidinal success of the hegemonic masculine hero. On interpreting the climax, it is visible that the regressive politics of caste representation initiated in *Neelakkuyil* continues in *Sangham*. G. P. Ramachandran has

problematised the death of Neeli, the Dalit woman, in Bhaskaran's film as a device to satisfy the hegemonic public consciousness. "Malayalis did not recognize that Neeli's death is an extremely dangerous narrative situation that even validates the common practice of killing the raped women" (64). The hegemonic Achayan masculinity figuratively goes back to a time before the formation of the state of Kerala.

Mohanlal, who was known for portraying savarna Hindu heroes, in genres like comedy and family centric melodramas essayed a few Christian characters during the 1980s. Vincent Gomez (*Rajavinte Makan*), Aby (*Unnikale Oru Katha Parayam*, 1987) and Freddy Nicholas (*Orkkappurathu*, 1988) maintain their outsider status, by their non-allegiance to the Syrian Christian ideology. Osella and Osella have commented on the films of the early phase in Mohanlal's career as a repetition of *Rajavinte Makan*. "The film that most agree catapulted him into stardom was 'Rajavinte Makan', in which he played an underworld don. ... Mohan Lal (sic) essentially repeated his role or played the same character but from slightly different angles—the goonda who is also benevolent or kind to the poor and downtrodden" (182). The romantic hero Solomon, he plays in Padmarajan's *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*, is the first typical Achayan Mohanlal has enacted. The 'Achayanisation' of Mohanlal as a typical hegemonic masculine Syrian Christian materialies in *No.20 Madras Mail* (Dir. Joshi, 1990) and *Lal Salam* (Dir. Venu Nagavally, 1990). Ever since the formation of this identity, Christian subjectivity has been inscribed on Mohanlal's acting body as Aanamadayil Vargheachan (*Thacholy Varghese Chekavar*, 1995), Sunny Palamattam (*Varnappakittu*, 1998),

Sooranadu Kunjipappa (*Udayon*, 2005) and Palamattathu Christy Varghese (*Christian Brothers*, 2011) in the decades to follow.

The historical trajectory of Malayalam cinema, beginning with *Vigathakumaran*, reflects significant transformations in the representation of Christian identity, shaped by Kerala's evolving socio-political landscape. This study examines how Christian masculinity has been constructed, negotiated, and redefined in response to shifting cultural and political influences. By tracing cinematic portrayals across different eras, the thesis highlights the fluidity of masculinity, exploring how Christian male figures have been positioned within dominant and marginal narratives. The analysis spans three decades and multiple genres, revealing how Christian men are portrayed in relation to hegemonic and subaltern masculinities. Each chapter critically engages with these shifts, demonstrating how cinema serves as both a site of reinforcement and contestation of Kerala's prevailing gender and religious ideologies.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEGEMONIC CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE ACHAYAN

The social fabric of Kerala underwent significant transformations by the end of the 1970s due to various reasons. The welfare measures adopted by the central and state governments enhanced education among the middle-class and lower-income groups. Consequent migration to the Middle East, America and Europe uplifted the state economically. The various social and religious groups, thus newly emerged, began to catch up with the landowning upper caste Hindus who had benefitted from modern English education since the late nineteenth century. Subsequently, in popular culture, especially in mainstream films, one can see the portrayal of two categories of citizens in the state. The first is the residual feudal aristocratic class characterised by ruthless, landowning, blatantly aggressive, power-wielding hegemonic male. The second, on the other hand, refers to the rise of a new middle class fortified by the new educational and economic policies. Thus, the social fabric of the state which continued to evolve in the 1970s, reflecting the complexities of Kerala's socio-economic landscape was modified in the 1980s.

Achayans, a term often used to refer to the Syrian Christians in Kerala, has become a prominent character type in Malayalam cinema. According to the logic of cinematic portrayal, they are affluent, influential, and deeply rooted in their cultural values. They have been portrayed in different genres, ranging from comedy and satire to serious tragedies and action films. This chapter analyses how Malayalam

cinema has skilfully constructed the Achayans as the representation of a category of hegemonic masculinity. In doing so, it also analyses how this version of the dominant masculine configuration is similar to and different from those heroic constructions of individuals of the Aristocratic class.

The representation of the community culture in cinema underwent radical transformations since the formation of Kerala, which is already discussed in the Introduction. Regarding the structural changes reflected in Malayalam cinema during this phase – the late 1980s and the early 1990s – Yacob Thomas makes three different observations in “*Rajavinte Makan: The Underworld King who Unsettled the Caste King*”. First, the films address the considerable cash inflow disrupting the traditional social/caste order. This is designated by the huge mansions, cars and the new vistas of recreational activities. Second, the films deal with the widely prevailing unemployment in Kerala society. Thirdly, the films speak about a dark force called the underworld – the presence of some external forces that are dangerous to the tranquil existence of individuals in society (Thomas). In fact, the cultural aesthetics of Malayalam cinema reveals the complex relationship between the individual and society at large. The political and sociological significance of Malayalam films from the 1980s to the present, when read in this cultural context, discloses the multiple forces at work in the culture industry of the state.

One of the notable changes that happened in this era was the rise of a new class of protagonists who belonged to a new social fabric but apparently carried forward the ideological remnants of majoritarianism. In the cine popular of Malayalam cinema, this period witnessed the emergence of a new genre, which revealed the frustrations of the upper caste male. With reference to this pattern of

films, K. P. Jayakumar has observed: “Malayalam films of the 1980s addressed a bourgeoisie middle-class aesthetics and its ideological formations” (my trans.; 43). Films by acclaimed Malayalam auteurs of this phase, like Padmarajan, Sibi Malayil, Priyadarsan, and Sathyan Anthikad reflect the hegemonic identity formations. As a popular art form, cinema is the major arena where the struggle over representation often plays out vividly, with reference to the representation politics at work. Films like *Nadodikkattu* (Dir. Sathyan Anthikad, 1987), *Thoovanmathumbikal* (Dir. Padmarajan, 1987), *Aryan* (Dir. Priyadarsan, 1988) and *Kireedam* (Dir. Sibi Malayil, 1989), and so on are studied by scholars, demonstrating the underlying regressive ideological structures. For instance, Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella point out the way the stardom of Mohanlal is constructed during this phase, playing to the accepted hegemonic notion of masculinity:

if we follow the suggestion that films speak to a nation’s dreams of modernity, the presentation of Lal—Travancore Hindu—as ‘the average Malayali alterego’ suggests a dominant reading in which Muslims and Christians are figured out of the picture for being, respectively, not modern enough or too modern. Mohan Lal (sic)—said to be, remember, reassuringly always himself, no matter what role he takes—is then called upon to represent ‘Malayali man’: a fantasy image of dominant Hindu masculinity which is able to maintain a core stable self underneath many changes, negotiating a successful and ‘correct’ middle way through the demands of modernity. (192)

In short, the educated yet mostly unemployed Nair/Namboodiri youth, sometimes an angry young man and sometimes a comic commoner, played down

and subverted the progressive ideals associated with the Kerala model of modernity. To cite an instance, K. P. Jayakumar analyses the climax, the political core of *Adiverukal* (Dir. P. Anil, 1986), thus: Balakrishnan (Mohanlal), the well-educated Nair youth, goes to work in the forest with his ‘beloved elephant’ when he fails to get the much-coveted college teaching job, which was his last hope. When he meets his old classmate Benny (Mukesh) who became a forest officer, the protagonist Balakrishnan says: “Despite having less marks than me, you got a job and for the first time in my life, I felt disgusted with myself for being born a Nair” (my trans.; *qtd. in* Jayakumar 61).

Against this backdrop of the cultural dominant, a set of movies with Achayan characters emerged, as mentioned earlier. For the analysis of the construction of masculinities in such films in the three decades, a convergence of cultural studies and masculinity formation theories is used as a theoretical postulation.

In analysing the subjectivity of the Christian male, Raymond Williams’s understanding of culture serves as a useful platform. Against the elitist values of Arnold and Leavis, he defines as anti-elitist. Culture is redefined as a site of struggle, negotiation, and contestation, where different groups and individuals actively engage with and shape the cultural landscape. Accordingly, the focal point through which the analysis is carried out is not the selected access area of the aristocracy. Williams argues that culture can be found at every layer of the social hierarchy: “Culture is ordinary; that is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, and in arts and learning” (McGuigan 2). Though Williams

maintains that those in power shape the dominant cultural norms, values, and ideologies, which in turn shape the perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours of the broader society, he recognises the existence of counter-hegemonic cultural practices and resistant subcultures. Thus, he refutes the theory that the masses and their cultural practices are inferior. In *The Long Revolution*, Williams defines culture “as the study of relationships between elements in a whole way of life” (46). This methodology highlights the concept of “cultural hegemony” to understand how dominant groups exert influence and control over culture. This hegemonic construction of identities is a complex process that reinforces and perpetuates social inequalities.

Equally important are the theories of culture formed by Michel Foucault, who attempted to define stereotyping with reference to power and knowledge. Challenging the traditional understandings of culture as a fixed, timeless entity, he broadens the idea of culture with reference to the concepts of power and knowledge. Accordingly, stereotyping can be seen as an operation of power that creates and reinforces categories of people seen as different or inferior. The recurring patterns of individual/community representation are not static or fixed in his theories, but rather, they are constantly being renegotiated and redefined through discourse and power relations.

With reference to the above notions of culture and power, the cultural aesthetics of Malayalam films featuring Christian heroes is examined to find out what constitutes the individual and community power. Historically, it is argued that the portrayal of minorities often fell into problematic stereotypes that reflected broader societal biases rather than the realities of those communities. The films,

which are set against Christian background during this period, reflect the paradoxical state of simultaneously being modern and traditional in Kerala society. With aggression, anger and wealth as constituent formations, the Achayans resemble the upper caste Hindu aristocracy at the surface level. The discourse of Malayalam cinema since 1985 attempts to form a pseudo-democratic, egalitarian society on screen by opposing caste hierarchies. However, a close analysis of the constituent elements in a film can reveal the ways in which it imposes caste hierarchies on screen and in the state. The inscription of community politics is analysed on the basis of *Kottayam Kunjachan* (Dir. T.S. Suresh Babu, 1990), *Spadikam* (Dir. Bhadran, 1995), *Lelam* (Dir. Joshiy, 1997), *Chathurangam* (Dir. K. Madhu, 2002) and *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* (Dir. Ranjith, 2011) as primary examples. A close reading of these movies reveals how the mainstream imagination has evolved on the basis of a hierarchical community code applicable to the Christians, mostly at odds with the historical and social reality.

The Achayan identity initiated and celebrated in *Sangham* and the aggressive heroism of the protagonist are expanded further in *Kottayam Kunjachan*, a landmark in the history of Malayalam cinema and Mammooty's career. At the surface level, the film tells the story of a local thug who is released from prison after serving a life imprisonment of seven years and his attempts to find a new way of life in and around Kottayam. This loose adaptation of the novel *Veli (The Fence)* by Muttathu Varkey is directed by T. S. Suresh Babu, based on the script by Dennis Joseph.

With a fusion of comedy, action and romance, the film revolves around a nuanced portrayal of the titular character. Initially portrayed as a local rogue, Kunjachan's persona is gradually revealed to be inherently benevolent, thereby

subverting traditional notions of villainy and heroism. Set in the vibrant town of Kottayam and a village outside Odaangara, the story follows his adventures and misadventures as he becomes entangled in various conflicts. A fearless and witty individual, he soon attains a cult status among the locals through his unorthodox approach to problem-solving and, compelled by circumstances he locks horns with Kanjirappally Pappan, an upstart landlord in the locality. With his unique style and comical antics, Kunjachan stands up against injustice and happens to be a protector of the family of Koonammoochi Mikhael and Aleyamma. In the process, the narrative reveals how he falls in love with their daughter Mollykutty and rescues her from villains like Jimmy, Pappan's son.

The construction of the masculine subjectivity formation is evaluated on the basis of economic relations. As heroes, both Kuttappai in *Sangham* and Kunjachan belong to the last days of the socialist economic phase of the country and the state. They are the apolitical heroes who emerged prior to the neoliberal economic transformation of the country. However, in the late 1990s, the trope of the construction of the hero in Malayalam cinema changed radically with a lot of narratives anchored on an upper class/ upper caste feudal hero nostalgic of the regressive traditional values, in a manner different from the socialist base and superstructure.

The most important aspect that is to be discussed in connection with the movie is the construction of the hero. The ownership of the cultural and economic capital was a prerequisite for heroism in texts like *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal* and *Sangham*, Kunjachan is simultaneously construed in uncanny ways as an outsider as well. Clad in white and white like many other

Christian heroes of Malayalam cinema essayed by Mammooty, he symbolises the archetype of the adventurous Christian hero (00:37:44-52). Kunjachan's rugged individualism is heroic and anti-heroic at the same time. It should be noted that the character of Kunjachan, who was the antagonist in Muttathu Varkey's novel, is made the hero in Suresh Babu's film. He is constructed as a man victimised by a cruel fate that resists all his attempts to transform himself into a good man. On his return to Kottayam straight from prison to collect his reward for the murder he committed, he is forced to enter into a confrontation with his previous master and subsequently leave the city. Even in Odaangara, he is welcomed by the local thugs with a brawl related to nokkukooli (the practice of demanding money from businessmen for the right to unload goods, even when others were doing the work). As a hero of the 1990s, Kunjachan is quite unconventional with no remarkable origin and pedigree. However, the hegemonic domain of his masculinity construction is visible in his treatment not only of the women and but also of other men within the narrative.

In his approach to woman, Kunjachan is construed as a self-centred egoist, once placed in the syntagmatic order of relations with the women in the narrative. One of the dominant traits not essentially exclusive to Christian hero, is the taming of the woman. In terms of gender, mainstream cinema presents the conventional clichéd stereotype as defined by Mulvey in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". The narrative structure of traditional cinema establishes the male character as active with diegetic agency; he is the character around whom the dramatic action unfolds, and the look gets organised. It is in this light that Kunjachan's attempts to possess Molly assume significance.

The text uses Syrian ancestry in an opposite pole in the construction of heroism. Though Kunjachan lacks the pedigree and social power of the antagonists, the Kanjirappally family, i.e., he lacks the boastful family name which is syntagmatic of an individual's communal/social power, the Syrian Christian lineage is ensured in the narrative. The family name is "an expeditious signifier that more or less predetermined the attitude of society and important social relationships of the members of the family" (Varghese 899). In Muttathu Varkey's novel, the socially recluse position of the hero as a sex worker's son who left him at young age (152) is discussed. The prefix Kottayam, which is added to his name, was attributed to him when the fatherless boy came to Kottayam and did all kinds of work. On making Kunjachan the heroic "Achayan", the diegesis of the film brilliantly hides Kunjachan's past life spent among "some Ezhava and Muslim women of ill reputation" (my trans.; 153). The text also eschews the discussion of the constitution of his apolitical nature: "I am neither a Communist nor a Congress party worker. I have to work, I have to make money, I have to do what I feel like" (my trans.; 153). These instances of editing, it is argued, are essential in the making of the Achayan identity of the protagonist. Those elements of Kunjachan's iniquitous past are censored in the adaptation to present him as a hero material to the imagination of the spectator who is situated in a hegemonic domain. Unlike in the novel, the subject who watches the film is constructed on the side of Kunjachan, the outsider, as he is interpellated as a self-made man in unfamiliar settings. The same pattern of hero construction as the dubious outsider is later used in T. S. Suresh Babu's *Kizhakkan Pathrose* (1993) as well as Biju Varkey's *Phantom Pailey*.

What Kunjachan signifies in the movie in relation to his love interest is the most problematic element of the narrative. How the belligerent Kunjachan, who came to Odaangara as the proprietor of a typewriting centre and as driving master, wins Molly, who resembles the women characters of Thomas Hardy's late Victorian novels. Molly embodies traditional domestic femininity, attending church and involving in extended community activities. In contrast, Kunjachan plays the rogue, outspoken, street-smart and tough hero that sets him apart from the educated, reformed and polished Joykutty, Molly's love interest. This unconventionality becomes his capital whereby Kunjachan saves Mollykutty from Kanjirappally Pappan and his son Jimmy. The moral ambiguity of the story is the point when Kunjachan hands Joykutty over to police even when he is convinced of the other's innocence. When he pleads to Kunjachan for a chance meeting with her, the latter sends him back by resorting to threats.

The sense of egoism in Kunjachan works as a dominant constituent in his construction as a lover. The film does not subscribe to all the conventions of a romantic comedy at a glance, but a close scrutiny shows how the element of intimacy works in Kunjachan's relation to Mollykutty. The first time he sees her in front of the church (00:51:00-52) captured in a medium shot is his moment of initiation to possess her, as he later acknowledges. However, Mollykutty was in love with the more modern Joykkutty. The film is structurally positioned in demonstrating the various points of the hero's attraction towards the heroine. "Since I am an orphan and a hooligan, nobody is ready to marry me. What can I do? ... I had a few affairs before. But they were all unsuccessful. Some of them ditched me, I ditched the rest" (my trans.; 00:51:00-52).

A close reading of what makes Kunjachan finally win Molly reveals the problematic patriarchal unconscious that shaped the narrative. Laura Mulvey has stated that the structure of mainstream cinema has always been patriarchal by concentrating on the cinematic apparatus – mechanisms and devices for producing meaning in films – rather than by critiquing the ideological content of films. In the opening sequences of the film, which is set in Odaangara before Kunjachan's arrival, Kanjirappally Pappan attempts to send back Joykutty's father, Kuzhiyil Kochu, who comes to seek Molly's hands for his son. Pappan scandalously spreads that Molly and her sister Susy have an illicit affair with his son Jimmy. (In the climax of the movie, Jimmy makes a failed attempt to rape both Molly and Susy). This is exactly what Kunjachan suggests and does when Kuttyappan, another suitor, comes to seek an alliance with the heroine later. Also, in another sequence, after Kunjachan is accused of attempting to rape Molly, he comes back drunk and says to Aleyamma: "Both your daughters will be held in my hands. And, I will not even spare you even though you are of the age of my mother" (my trans.; 01:40:20-31). What the film conveys, then, is the covert sexual desire of the protagonist, which is in no way different from that of the antagonist. It is no accident that Kunjachan was originally the antagonist in the novel. In this sense, the film is no longer seen as reflecting meanings but as constructing them about women and femininity.

According to Mulvey, within the narrative of the film, the male characters direct their gaze towards female characters. The spectator in the theatre is automatically and often unconsciously made to identify with the controlling male perception because the camera films from the optical and libidinal point of view of the male character. From a Mulveyan perspective, Kunjachan is projected as the

ideal ego of the spectator in the Lacanian Mirror stage, and Molly and the other women characters are subjected to the powerful male gaze of the spectator, through the male protagonist.

Central to the construction of the identity of the Christian hero is his being apolitical. The heroism of Kunjachan is established against the local trade union workers who are presented as cut-throat, money-minded people. The Christian heroes are epitome of an attitude where vital questions regarding capital labour are never asked. They silence all their opponents by brute force because the narrative has placed them mostly on the right side of the law. Either they have money or brute physical force with which they deny justice to the other. Kuttyappan and Joykkutty, the other suitors of Molly are denied space and rights because of this particular construction of the narrative. The scene, in which the fraudulent Kunjachan who takes the villagers on a ride by promising to bring Mohanlal for inaugurating his technical institute but brings a totally unknown Pachakkulam Vasu, may also be analysed in this regard. The hero connotes the glorification of the unchecked primal instincts of the dominant male.

What makes Kunjachan – the fraud and the thug – the hero must be seen in the context of the Foucauldian discourse of power and governmentality. Power is defined in Foucault as the ability of one entity to influence the action of another. In the *History of Sexuality Volume I*, he defines power “in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization” (92). For instance, power had been consolidated largely through the existence of a sovereign authority who exercised

absolute control over the subjects through the open display of violence, in medieval society. It is in this sense that Kunjachan's status as a hero exists.

The diegesis of the film is controlled by the all powerful narrative presence of the eponymous hero Kunjachan. He is the one who carries the narrative forward whether it is in relation to Mollykkutty's marriage or any other important choice in the family. He thus assumes power and, hence, emerges as the hero. Any society is constituted on the basis of the dissemination of power in it. How Kunjachan asserts his subjectivity over those people who come under his imaginary jurisdiction constitutes the domain of governmentality. Kottayam Kunjachan is, thus, a trademark enforcer of the dominant values and attitudes. In Odaangara, he emerges as the unquestioned law because he commands space and time.

The narrative conventions which make Kunjachan the emblematic Christian hero have to do something with the sphere of narrative action, Kottayam, a district known for its rich Christian tradition. The place name Kottayam which is attached before the proper noun Kunjachan who is an orphan, signifies a lot. In fact, how the alpha male character of the orphan hero is firmly fixed on rustic heroism is rooted in the community identity. The entire film is set in the fictional village of Odaangara (a place in the suburbs of Kottayam), a predominantly Christian settlement area marked by a church, its priest and its festival. The construction of the town, the village and its people as uneducated brawlers makes is structurally a counterpoint to the making of the Christian hero. It is a careful narrative ploy to designate the Christian hero as the cultural difference of the hegemonic upper caste Hindu heroes of the time.

One of the most defining aspects of Kunjachan's heroism is his anti-working class stance. Historically, this could be read in line with the dialectical clash between Catholic Church and Communism. The history of the Syrian Christians and (the Nairs) of Kerala cannot be analysed without referring to the liberation Struggle. The protest against the first elected government of the state of Kerala under E. M. S. Namboodiripad was actually organised by the Nair Service Society, Syrian Christian Churches and the Indian National Congress. The intersection of caste, religious hierarchy, and aristocratic political values, creates a social dynamic where working class individuals from diverse communities are marginalised and stigmatised as problematic 'others'. The heroic is, thus, defined as the establishing and sustaining of the Orthodox, right wing values. Kunjachan's heroism is built around the thrashing of the villains – labourers (presented as rogues) demanding their rights to work.

The dimensions of the construction of early Syrian Christian male show the contrastive pattern of celebrating the hegemonic masculine. Religion grants groups symbolic power which can be transformed into economic and political capital, demonstrating that the sacred realm significantly influences the secular sphere. In reality, all the films discussed hitherto show the way that community power is not derived from spiritual practices, but rather how religious practices make certain communities hegemonic. The hero's dominant masculinity is performed in terms of Syrian Christian upper caste identification and increasing misogyny. At the same time, the texts connote the socially marginalised identity within the structures of religion.

The complexity of the visual representation of the Christian hero when placed in the hegemonic masculine order and the ideological base it disseminates is established with reference to Mammooty's stardom. The kind of heroism based on ultra-masculine values celebrating the newly emerging social categories in various ways is demonstrated in *Kizhakkam Pathrose, Ezhupunna Tharakan* (Dir.P. G. Viswambharan, 1999), *Phantom Pailey, Nasrani, Thoppil Joppan* (Dir. Johny Antony, 2016) and *Turbo* (Dir. Vysakh, 2024). These representations of hegemonic masculine codes over a period of time connotes how patriarchal values are consumed unconsciously by the collective spectatorship.

The rise of the adrenaline rising political and crime thrillers, a new phenomenon in cinema of this phase, wanted heroes who could reflect the upper class and upper caste ideologies through them. The caste Hindu alpha male who owns either power or money or in certain cases both, is constructed in such a way to mirror the ego ideal of the spectator. Mangalassery Neelakandan, the titular character of I. V. Sashi's *Devasuram* (1993), an iconic macho, displays mostly the unsaid angle of caste power in the narrative. Gradually, these warring feudal lords became the primary model of a hero in Mollywood. The cultural institution of cinema has a myriad of such heroes belonging to the upper caste and class of the society like Jagannathan (*Aram Thampuran*, 1998), Induchoodan (*Narasimham*, 2000), Arakkal Madhavanunni (*Valyettan*, 2000) and Lal Krishna (*Chinthamani Kolacase*, 2006) who in simple terms symbolised power. Such a model of hero construction is read in connection with the emergence of Hindu nationalism and revivalism. Regarding the shifting patterns of hero construction in cinema of the phase, Rowena has observed:

The former ideal of ... middle-class husband (best personified by the roles of Mammooty) was no more comforting in a culture of economic instability and unemployment. Malayalam badly needed a heroic space that would be relevant to its men from different communities and castes during such a time of insecurity. The hegemonic masculine looked for ways and means to regain superiority in the face of the increasing force of non-dominant communities of men. (49)

In various avatars, such heroes and the films became ideological weapons for interpellating the subjects into ideologies. Cinema, according to Baudry,

constitutes the subject by the illusory delimitation of a central location – whether this be that of a God or of any other substitute. It is an apparatus destined to obtain a precise ideological effect, necessary to the dominant ideology: creating a fantasmaticization of the subject, it collaborates with a marked efficacy in the maintenance of idealism. (46)

It is in this sense that the thesis analyses the characterisation of Aadu Thoma (Mohanlal), endearingly addressed Thomachayan by his friends, constituting the politics of narration in *Spadikam*. The film based on a script which the director wrote with Professor Rajendrababu, is considered one of those movies with an Achayan hero in Malayalam cinema. The film which is based on the childhood experience of its director has a fictional character of Aadu Thoma at its core, typical and atypical in many respects. Analysing the construction of the hero as rebellious anti-hero, it is revealed that the text is embedded in the hierarchy, as Thoma is introjected to the hereditary lineage of Syrian Christian tradition.

Spadikam apparently presents a critique of the anti-student educational paradigm of the state in which the children are often unduly traumatised to perform what their parents desire. Deepa Soman quotes the director who has acknowledged that in an interview that the film is about those parents who fail to see “the crystals” (titular significance of the film) that their children are. The film deals with two different paradigms of the educational system and hegemonic masculinity. The first one is a teacher-centric toxic masculinity, represented by Chacko Mash (Thilakan) as its iconic symbol. The President’s award winner as the best teacher of the country, he resorts to institutional torture in the process of educating the children believing that Mathematics is the pulse of the universe (00:31:49-55). Society has cemented such a version by endorsing that “If Chacko Mash tutors Maths, even a donkey can study it” (my trans.; 00:31:46-48). The second paradigm is represented by his son Thomas Chacko who was a child prodigy with talents in subjects other than mathematics. Fed up with the inhuman designs of his cruel and autocratic father during his school days, Thomas Chacko leaves home and comes back as Aadu Thoma after 14 years. On his return, Thomachayan’s heroism is iconised and glorified by his Ray Ban glass, *thuniparichadi* (beating the opponent by covering his face with the hero’s dhoti) and a lorry named Chekuthan. The father who wanted to see his son as the best mathematician/ engineer is forced to see him as the number one rowdy in this new avatar.

In contrast to the hero construction in movies like *Sangham* and *Kottayam Kunjachan*, Bhadran’s film has its central character otherising himself from the hegemonic domain of Syrian Christian ancestry to be associated more with a subterranean world. He is portrayed on the surface as an anti-establishmentarian,

standing against the various agencies of power, and taking sides with the deprived, the poor and the street dwellers. Cinematically, this is conveyed in the theatre scene (00:25:36-30:25) where Mani Ratnam's *Thalapathi* (1991) is screened revealing the same notion of the screen persona of Tamil superstar Rajanikanth as Ezhaithozhan or the friend of the poor and needy. The anti-establishmentarian paradigm of Thoma's heroism is highlighted by the intercuts of Rajanikanth's character bashing a cop on screen, blended with a similar narrative situation in close-ups and slow-motion shots within the diegesis. As a revolt against the rigidity and orthodoxy of his boastful, arrogant and domineering father, the hero spends his days, playing cards, consuming alcohol with his friends and sleeping with Laila Beegum, a marginalised construction worker (treated as a sex worker too), during the nights.

Thoma's masculinity, it is argued, is constructed ambivalently as a hegemonic Christian and an outsider. Thoma, being a gunda, is projected as the classical rebellious outsider and a selfless man who lives his life for his friends. For instance, the opening of the narrative presents him clashing, on behalf of Basheer, with the rich trader Pookkoya, and the ruffians brought from outside. In another instance, the hero's friend who owns a light and sound shop declares to the police that Thomachayan is his God because he helped him in his moment of distress, by donating blood to his daughter (00:18:16-37). At the same time, inheriting patriarchal values he displays the protector role and confronts with the police when family pride is in question – whenever his mother or sister get insulted by the police. All these intersect with the various manifestations of power constituting the performative domain of his hegemonic heroism in what Connell terms as “the configuration of gender practice” (77) from a psychological perspective.

Middle class consciousness has been inscribed differently in Malayalam cinema with respect to caste. Malayalam commercial movies of the 1980s and the early 1990s of various genres, like the films directed by Sathyan Anthikad, Priyadarshan and Sibi Malayil with Mohanlal as the hero, explored the angst, frustration and helplessness of the jobless upper caste youth. In *Adiverukal*, *Nadodikkattu* and *Kireedam*, the Nair hero was projecting himself as a man wronged by the institution of democracy. Mostly following an atypical construction of the Christian hero in Malayalam cinema, Chacko Mash owns the same middle class aspiration of making his son an engineer in *Spadikam*.

Spadikam has a narrative similar to Sibi Malayil's *Kireedam* in relation to this theme. Both the films present the tragedy of a middle class youth, who failed to realise the dream of their respective fathers, played by Mohanlal and Thilakan on both occasions. At the core of the masculinity discourse in both the films lies the helplessness of the hero in performing successful middle class values due to contrastive reasons. If *Kireedam* is a version of Nair masculinity based on feudal and middle class nostalgia, *Spadikam* is a case of Syrian Christian masculinity, powered by upward mobility. Dilip M. Menon observes the community politics in Sibi Malayil's film in "The Outcastes of Malayalam Cinema": "*Kireedom*, (sic) set in a typical southern Kerala ambience, where the Christians are a dominant minority, perceives the Christian as a malevolent and unremittingly violent figure who has to be triumphed over. Sethu has to destroy Keerikadan Jose, much against his temperament, in full view of the populace" (9). In *Spadikam*, the community angle is reversed with the introduction of a Muslim villain Pookkoya who wants to bring the hero down. Chacko Mash compensates for his failure in making his son a world

renowned mathematician by getting his daughter Jancy married to Jerry, who is an engineer. The hero who gives up the middle class status and value system by being a rebel does not question the notion of class, anywhere. Moreover, he is emotionally wounded over the fact that he could not belong to the middle class: “Thoma could only become ginger juice, not engineer” (inchineer, not engineer) (my trans.; 00:14:21-23). Thus, caste and class are combined to essay the notion of hegemonic control in *Spadikam*, set in the Syrian Christian milieu, similar to majority centred discourses.

The construction of the hero is also linked to the name “Aadu Thoma”. The origin of the name Aadu Thoma, is visually narrated in the opening sequence (00:02:26-03:10) itself in a series of close-up shots of the face of the hero followed by the image of an eagle. He captures a fat black billy goat from the folk and consumes its blood, and gets rejuvenated. The outsider status of the hero is connoted from his habit of drinking blood straight from the body of the fat black mutton. The construction of Aadu Thoma’s herohood centres on his exotic way of life. The song “Ezhimala poonjola” (00:40:09-44:38) narrativises the carefree life style which is a contrast to the disciplinarian ways of his father.

Malayalam cinema has its own devices of designating caste and community hierarchy. George Varghese K. argues in “Writing Family Histories: Identity Construction among Syrian Christians” that “[t]he status of family was always intimately linked to the name-of-the-family, which became a cryptic notation of the values, power and wealth the family represented” (899). Accordingly, most movies set in the Syrian Christian tradition, the hegemonic social status of the hero is suggested by the usage of family name as a prefix. In *Sangham*, for instance, the

hero is known as “Illikkal Kuttappai”. Even in *The King* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 1995), the iconic hero who is a district collector by profession addresses himself as “Thevallipparambil Joseph Alex” to denote his social power emanating from his prestigious pedigree. In *Lelam*, Suresh Gopi’s character is known as Aanakkattil Chackochi, not as Captain Jacob Stephen. Similarly, Mohanlal’s title characters such as Pulikkattil Charley (*Natturajavu*), Palamattam Sunny (*Varnapakittu*), Aattiprackal Jimmy (*Chathurangam*) and Sooranad Kunjippappa (*Udayon*) and so on glorify the capital associated with family history, pride and ancestral genealogy. When Prithviraj plays the Christian hero Vadakkanveetil Kochukunju in *Thanthonni*, the house name is an indicator of the individual’s pride and social status. Varghese further observes: “Since the family name could only be inherited and the aristocratic families being few in the early days, these family names became products with a capital value” (899). In fact, the family name connotes elitism in the Christian and Muslim aristocracy. By locating him outside this paradigm, as a protest to his authoritarian father, the name Aadu Thoma defies the social status of the hero that comes from the inheritance of tradition and ancestry. Therefore, unlike the typical “Achayan” heroes, he introduces himself as “I am Thoma, Aaduthoma”, (my trans.; 00:20:09-11) instead of Padippuraveetil Thomas Chacko, subverting the mystique of the family legacy. This is the domain where his display of hegemonic masculinity takes a slightly alternate direction.

The self sacrificing kind of heroism vindicated by the climax of the film results not only from the pessimism and rebellion of the hero alone, but it is also linked to the socialist economy in which the text is grounded deeply. The profligate rebellious ways through which the identity of the hero as a dominant subject is

constructed is paradoxically dependent on the ancestral family capital in the form of the gold of his mother and the wealth owned by his paternal uncle, Manimala Vakkachan. In opposition to the other texts analysed, Thoma is not the homo economicus which most Achayan heroes are. Instead, he signifies in economic terms the negation of the heroic since *Sangham*. Though both the narratives present how the wealth of the family was spent prodigally by the heroes among his dear ones and friends, unlike Kuttappai, Thoma is economically unproductive and resorts to the feudal ancestry symbolised by his uncle.

In narrative cinema told in a Christian context, the father-son relationship is curated in two different ways. The first and the predominant strand presents the son as a rogue, lovingly adored by the authoritarian father. Accordingly, in a plethora of films such as *Sangham*, *Lelam*, *Vazhunnor* and *Varnappakittu*, the son character has the shade of the Biblical prodigal and enjoys the love and care of the dominant controlling father. Such narratives are mostly set against the feud between the hero's and the antagonist's families in which both the hero and his father are on the same side. At a crucial narrative juncture, the son/the hero takes up the central role of the family, when the father is physically too aged or is killed. The second, on the contrary, presents the son pitted against the ideology that the father represents. In *Spadikam*, the narrative presents Thoma against the all controlling dominance of the father. In a Freudian psychoanalytical sense, it designates the extension of the Oedipal terrain.

The construction of the family structure in *Spadikam* is, at the same time, one that satisfies those on the side of tradition and modernity. Aadu Thoma too, is a typically macho representative of the feudal values. A case in point is the occasion

when he encounters Sub Inspector Kuttikkadan, a representative of RSA, who attempts to molest his sister. He brutally fights with Sub Inspector Kuttikkadan, when the latter lays his hand on his sister. When the police attack his mother in a fight scene, the ideologically correct hero's machismo persona makes him ask: "How dare you touch my mother?" (my trans.; 00:56:23). The patriarchal code of protectionist ideology is repeated when the hero says: "You have laid hands on my mother ... Only upon my death can I forgive you" (my trans.; 01:12:59-13:05). The ideological correctness of the hero is constructed in the way he enacts the protector role of his family.

Though subtly different from other hegemonic heroes, Aadu Thoma is not at all a revolutionary hero in defying the hierarchical order. The hero's rebellion i.e., Thomas Chacko's transformation as Aadu Thoma which happens in the narrative is not anchored on progressive values, but the reinforcement of hegemony. He still has presence and authority in all positions of power, and so he is constructed as the agent of all regressive hegemonic values.

The text can be seen as one which makes the prodigal son hero into a family man. At the climax of the movie, the hero becomes a proper son who loves and respects the father and mother by subscribing to community values. Symbolically, the act of Thoma taking his father and mother in his lorry (which is rechristened as *Spadikam*) brings the image of the Holy Family. The image of the prodigal son is projected in the construction of the hero as he was criticised for having slept with the sex worker Laila Beegum. Moreover, the narrative projecting him as belonging to the so-called marginalised strata of the society is conversely seen as a downfall. The identification of the hero with the underprivileged is also viewed as quite

offensive and problematic from the perspective of the community as visualised by Fr. Ottaplackan who calls the hero a “rogue” or “scoundrel”. In fact, the priest was echoing the attitudes of the hero’s father, mother and the larger society. The hero’s transformation in the end as the obedient, loyal and disciplined son, in terms of cultural ideology, connotes the acceptance of an individual subscribing to the mainstream hegemonic public consensus.

Any society can be understood with reference to the hero’s syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationship with the women of the narratives. In the family sphere, Thoma is the loving son to his mother who gives him her jewellery for his wayward means of life and a caring elder brother who gives chocolate to his sister. The protagonist is made ideologically and morally correct because he fights on behalf of the family. In other words, the cultural capital that makes Aadu Thoma the hero is the well-established, ever continuing assumption that one has the fundamental duty to protect the honour of his mother and sister.

This has to be further read with reference to the other two women characters, Laila Beegum and Thulasi. Although Thoma demonstrates the guts to hold the hands of the ‘dirty’ woman upright in front of his orthodox father and the like, the narrative makes him fall for the good woman Thulasi, who was his childhood playmate. The community dimension of the relationship also assumes significance: an upper caste woman is a better match for a member of the ancestral Christian family than a ‘fallen’ Muslim woman. Though his toxicity is performed in two divergent ways upon them, both of them support the hegemonic construction of Thoma’s herohood, by being ‘the fans’ – within the narrative – of the macho hero.

Spadikam's ideological burden is the paradox it creates in the construction of the hero. Ambili Anna Markose adds in the context of movies predominantly dealing with the Christian imaginary: "The metaphors used in order to evoke this 'community atmosphere' include symbolisms of cultural modernity, agrarian pasts, and images rooted in the political economy of the region" (*Performing Religion* 78). It is through appropriation of these – his unmarried paternal uncle's wealth and influence, his father's social position as the teacher of the Chief secretary – that Thoma owns power and societal status in the text. That is, his belongingness to an upper class family is what enables him to challenge the police and the judiciary. In other words, the economic and the social capital, the class and caste, are the twin foundations that ensure the rebellion of the Christian hero as hegemonic.

Dominant masculinity has continuously manifested in Mohanlal's Christian characters in various ways in the cinema narratives of the first two decades of the twentieth century such as *Chathurangam* and *Natturajavu* in the first decade. *Christian Brothers*, *Munthirivallikal Thalirkkumbol* (2016), *Lucifer* (2019) and its sequel *L2: Empuraan* (2025) further presented the hegemonic male on screen assuming unlimited power.

Lelam, as the title suggests, is a film the plot of which revolves around the rivalry between the liquor business groups, Aanakkatil group and the Kunnel-Kadayadi group. Based on a script by Renji Panicker, the film has M. G. Soman's playing Aanakkattil Eapachan who is reminiscent of Manarcadu Pappan, the liquor baron from Pala in certain respects, as argued by Chandrakant Nair. The protagonist is Aanakkattil Chackochi alias Captain Jacob Stephen, presented as the ultimate cultural icon of courage, bravery and chivalry. He is a 'farmer' as he describes

himself, in the beginning of the narrative, before ending up as a liquor baron by fate; destiny in the form of the death of his father drags him to the despised liquor business.

In the construction of Chackochi as a captain turned planter turned liquor baron, the narrative bears some similarity to Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972). Like the young Michael Corleone in Mario Puzo's novel and its filmic adaptation, he is also kept at a distance from the family enterprise by his father himself. The similarity between them is more striking by the fact that both are war veterans. The hero's transition from being a representative of the state to that of a family constitutes the crux of *Lelam* and the Coppola film. Moreover, both the heroes function as a "state-within-a-state" (Bradshaw), as they connote anti-establishmentarian disbelief in the system. When Chackochi meets the antagonists for the first time, after the murder of his father, he says: "Chackochi is not coming to any court to give a statement, to parade evidence and carry on the case ... I am game for another game. It is Chackochi himself who is going to write the verdict of the one who stabbed my father from the back" (my trans.; 01:40:59-41:16). Like Coppola's Michael, the Christian hero has a profound distrust in the democratic structures of the state. In both the narratives, "[t]he real world is replaced by an authoritarian patriarchy where power and justice flow from the Godfather, and the only villains are traitors. There is one commandment, spoken by Michael . . . 'Don't ever take sides against the family'" (Ebert). The text thus demonstrates the strategies through which the hero maintains ideological correctness in all his avatars as the captain, as the planter and as the *abkari*.

Key to the narrative is the twin sentiments which construct the heroism of Chackochi: his father fixation and determination to sacrifice himself for his friends. What the narrative establishes is the conflict between two contrasting images of the typical Syrian Christian hero. As *Aanakkattil Chackochi*, the first part being his family name, he is the protective “Ichayan” (the elder brother) to his two sisters, to his lover, and his close friends, the stereotype of the virulent alpha male tradition who comes to their succor whenever they are in need. No wonder, he is constructed as the “double-chested symbolizing the archetypal toxic masculinity of such heroes. As Jacob Stephen, which is the repressed unsaid of the narrative, he was forced to adapt to the notion of cultural modernity. However, the only anecdotal evidence of his army life as presented through his onetime subordinate Maruthanayakam, the Tamilian who is an inspector at the checkpost, shows his rustic gusto in saving the other man at a crucial point of his life. One of the frequently used one liners in the movie is the Kottayam slang of “I will beat you down if you don’t behave yourself” (my trans.; 00:06:47-49).

The narrative which speaks of three different generations of the *Aanakkattil* family, ranging from the colonial days to the 1990s, aims at the construction of masculinity within the Christian hegemonic code. *Aanakkattil Chackochi*, who has more traits of his grandfather than his father, is not afraid of anything, even if it is to kill. He does not leave things to the law, rather he himself becomes the law. He declares his contemptuous attitude to the (corrupt) law, politics and all establishments. He resorts to the language of violence, and contempt and proclaims the greatness of his *Aanakkattil* family, whether it is to *Andippetty Veerapandya Thevar*, or *Balakrishnan*, the Excise Minister.

Chackochi's masculinity formation is contrasted with his father's image of the self-made man. Aanakkattil Eappachan claims to have no education and endorses his status as an outspoken man. The successful liquor baron that he has become is the result of his gumption and unwavering daring to take risks. The confrontation between the rival factions in liquor trade presided over by the Bishop (00:44:15-49:34) is structured to highlight what makes upper caste Syrian Christian hegemony. In the meeting Eappachan clearly declares his outsider status in terms of community identification: "Yes, your highness, Eappachan could not attend school in my childhood. My father was a woodcutter" (my trans.; 00:47:12-17). Furthering the argument, he states how his family was separated from the colonial legacy which made his opponents and the church rich and powerful. The self-made rugged individual heroism is dialectically opposite to religion as Eappachan lacks the heredity and traditional wealth of his opponents. Though he claims to be the outsider, the cinematic conventions and the narrative structure present him as the "liquor king", and "community chief" and situate him in the hegemonic order. Eappachan's later success is based on a benevolent display of humanism in the way he treats the poor considerately like his predecessor Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*. It is also argued that the kind of rustic outsider father figure introduced in *Sangham* is reproduced and negotiated in *Lelam*. What makes the construction of masculine hegemony in the film special is the way it is defined in opposition to the dominant structures of religion and ideology based party politics.

Benevolent supremacy which is the ideological prerequisite of the powerful extending help to others out of one's bounty is the condition that governs most of the Christian heroes. Melani McAlister has proposed the concept in *Epic Encounters*

(2001). She argues that Hollywood Biblical epics like *Ten Commandments* (Dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1956), *Quo Vadis* (Dir. Mervyn LeRoy, 1951), *The Robe* (Dir. Henry Koster, 1953) and *Ben-Hur* (Dir. William Wyler, 1959), emphasise the ideology with phrases declaring the humans as “souls under God” destined to “be ruled by God’s law” (44). Accordingly, the hero – by his all controlling protective gaze like that of the eternal superpower, God – stood up against tyranny over the helpless, weak and the meek. The same can be argued with reference to the construction of herohood in *Spadikam* and *Lelam*. Both the protagonists – Aadu Thoma and Chakkochi – establish themselves as the protectors of the people around them. While the narrative of the Bhadran film is centred around the benevolence of Thoma in helping Basheer to marry his lover and secure his rights from Pookkoya, the influential businessman, the charity driven mindset of Aanakkattil Chackochi compels him to depend on the illegally smuggling spirit from Tamil Nadu for his friend Sunny, in *Lelam*. Towards the end of the film, Chackochi has romantic ideas to pull apart his business empire in favour of Sunny, Hussain and Oommachan. Similarly, the visual matrix of *Spadikam* is built around Thoma’s closeness with Kunju Mohammed, Chandy, Kuttappan and Lukachan – the outsiders belonging to the underbelly of the system. In Joshiy’s film, the heroic masculinity is constructed in terms similar to Chackochi’s, who is also presented as the protector archetype of his poor and orphan friends. To wind up the argument, the paradox of toxic masculine heroism and the self-sacrifice of the hero is resolved in connection with the protagonist’s assuming a controlling protector role in the lives of the petite other on his side, in both the films.

The Christian hero construction, when analysed in terms of religion, is an ambivalent one. Aanakkattil Chackochi, at the very beginning of the movie, stops his lorry in front of the grotto of the Blessed Virgin and prays. The narrative presents him seeking her help, whenever he is in trouble. He is more morally upright, like his father, who is a believer but “irreverent” and “outspoken” against the church authorities. Moreover, Chackochi’s legacy is that of his grandfather who was hanged by the state for murdering the foreign Ranger, presumably in the pre-independent era. In fact, the anti-colonial past of the Aanakkattil family is the ideological capital which establishes the difference between the hero and the villain, among many other realms.

Regarding the way romance is structured in films such as *Lelam* and *Spadikam*, the Syrian Christian hero has an upper caste Hindu woman as his partner. The pattern of representation used in a series of films since the 1990s can be considered as the way in which hegemonic community identification is asserted in films. In *Lelam*, Chackochi’s girlfriend belongs to the Kshathriya community and he is against her conversion to Christianity for marriage. In *Performing Religion*, Ambili Anna Markose explains about the tradition of Syrian Christians marrying upper caste Hindu girls as: “The Christian male, baptized into the Hindu fold by marrying an “upper caste” modern woman, become (sic) part of the national community. Thus, the marriage metaphorically stands for the “unfulfilled desire of modernity” which is taken as a move towards tradition and thereby towards a hegemonic idea of self-fashioning” (111). The visual matrix of inter-religious marriage is a recurring idea in films such as *Manichithrathazhu* (Dir. Fazil, 1993),

Veendum Chila Veetukaryangal (Dir. Sathyan Anthikad, 1998) and *Avan Chandiyude Makan* (Dir. Thulasidas, 2007).

In fact, the mainstream Malayalam cinema of this phase has always been constituted by a feudal hegemonic code. Mohanlal's Devanarayanan, in Priyadarshan's *Aryan*, is a poor temple priest belonging to the Brahmin community, and is forced to go to the Bombay underworld, when accused of theft in his locality. For the Christian heroes, of which Chackochi is an example, the narrative ensures a rightful ideological reason that when the establishment fails to ensure justice, as in *The Godfather*, Chackochi has to find out the murderer of his father. The hero code has established it as his duty more as a son and less as a citizen. Like the angry young man characterisations of Amitabh Bachan, Suresh Gopi also essayed similar toxic Christian heroes who mistrust the police and judicial systems and become the 'vigilantes' in *Rashtram* (Dir. Anil C Menon, 2006) and *Kaval* (Dir. Nithin Renji Panicker, 2021).

Specifically addressing the changing political conditions of the new millennium, the concept of Achayans of the 1990s has gone through minor changes. The anti-hero cult as manifested in Kuttappai, Kottayam Kunjachan, Aadu Thoma and Chackochi is carried through films of the era in a much stronger dimension. This must have been in accordance with the political and economic changes introduced since 1991. The new nation which was emerging radically redefined gender roles in society as the old capitalist model was replaced by neoliberal practices. In the context of Kerala, the Christian identity formation has been linked to the elitist Christian political party, Kerala Congress and its various factions. Two

films which have responded to this and formed its Achayan heroes announcing the shift are *Chathurangam* and *Nasrani*.

In *Chathurangam*, Mohanlal's Attiprakkal Jimmy alias Jimmy Jacob who is portrayed as a gang leader and a thug politician of the Keraladesam party under the leadership of K. C. Kora, connotes the changing dynamics of feudal elitism. Set in Kottayam and its suburbs, the film deals with how Jimmy displays his masculinity in its hegemonic form against his political opponents, the police commissioner and local people. The narrative revolves around the functioning of a bar, situated in the premises of a church which involves two conflicting factions of Keraladesam party. The antagonist in Jimmy's political career is SP Nayana Pillai, a police officer, who contemptuously treats Jimmy's arrogant ruffianism. The analogy of the game of chess, that is incorporated into this conflict as signified by the title, leads the rest of the narrative and the crisis.

The construction of regionality and myths associated with it has always been integral in inscribing a community. Blais Johny has noted how films set in a predominantly Syrian Christian Mileu, like those set in caste Hindu aristocratic feudal landscape, sets apart a geography for the performance of Christian herohood.

The locale which is made up of many elements such as language practices, dress, vehicles etc. is another factor that shapes the phenomenon of Achayan. Superstar films with a Christian backdrop repeatedly depict areas like Meenachil river, Pala, Kanjirappalli and Poonjar, similar to the way upper caste Hindu Nair-dominated films celebrated Valluvanad, Varikkasseri Mana and Bharathapuzha. (my trans.; 22)

Furthering the argument, there are instances of historically marking Malappuram which is known as the only Muslim majority district as the place where bombs are available in plenty in *Aram Thampuran* (00:49:12-14). On the contrary, the Christian feudal landscape is encoded as one where the heroes perform in an imagined landscape dominated by the upper class and feudal caste. The mainstream of Malayalam cinema as argued by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan is constituted in the upper caste imagination since its inception and became increasingly visible by the 1970s. Subsequently Valluvanadan landscape and language mirror the reality of Kerala on screen. As an emergent cultural trope, the Syrian Christian culture with Kottayam and its suburbs has assumed increasing perceptibility. Accordingly, the political landscape mimetically portrayed in cinema addresses the political feud, mostly between the Kerala Congress factions.

The landscape functions as the core of the hegemonic masculine formation. In a confrontation scene with the police officer Nayana Pillai represents the new educated woman appearing on Malayalam screen since the 1990s. As a discourse, patriarchy sought new strategies since the 1980s to silence and tame the new woman who defied traditional domesticity. Janaky Sreedharan's observation regarding the family movies in Malayalam cinema reveals how the hegemonic masculine codes are operative in the narrative so that the objectification of woman continued despite socio-economic transformation in society. "Cinema becomes a very important site of male backlash against women who have, in their social and political lives outside, become vociferous about their rights and self-respect" (83). In a confrontation scene (00:28:41-29:32), the hero lectures the upper caste heroine about her supposed gender role to be performed. "This is the problem if a woman joins the police force.

You don't think before you leap. At a time when you are supposed to eat home cooked traditional food with rice and curry and get married to a nice Nair boy and give birth to 10 to 12 children, why are you suffering like this?" (my trans.; 00:28:08-17). The basis of Jimmy's herohood is the anti-woman stance which translates as rugged individualism and courage. He treats other women characters also in an objectified manner indicated by his superior ideological positioning over his grandmother and sisters.

The hero defines the cultural space where his herohood is played out in opposition to the metropolis or similar big cities of the country. "Dear IPS girl, this is not your Delhi or Patiala. This is Kottayam, Kottayam which includes Kanjirappalli, Pala, Meenachil and Changanacherry. ... This land is not governed by the wrecked democracy or judiciary, but by some wrestling-knowing Keraladesam workers like us" (my trans.; 00:28:19-32). The same narrative device of establishing Kottayam as a distinct fiefdom is continued in *Nasrani*, whose landowning Achayan hero David, played by Mammooty, boastfully proclaims: "This goonda might be sufficient enough to guard your cannabis cultivation in the eastern hilly ranges. ... but not here. This is Kottayam. When you start to seriously play here, bring someone a little more capable enough to battle with" (my trans.; 01:2:21-44). Attiprackal Jimmy is constructed as a self-styled warlord, frequently confronting with the police and the rival minister, amidst the green imagery of rubber plantations and the red coloured board of Volga bar. These narrative tropes clearly indicate that the structural dimension of herohood of the new century is not one of radical difference with that of the previous decades.

The most striking aspect of this heroism is the hero's dialectical positioning against the Kerala Congress centric hegemonic and religious structuring of politics. In *Praja* (2002) and *Nasrani*, both directed by Joshiy, the representation of the hegemonic political structures has emerged as a cultural dominant in the decade. Incidentally, the phase witnessed the deterioration of the rightist political faction in numbers. However, Jimmy's heroism also is firmly anchored ironically on the doctrine of patriarchal and caste dominance, as indicated throughout the narrative.

The melodramatic portions of the film convey the cultural myth regarding the apolitical construction of the hero and the society to which he belongs. The hegemonic Christian hero initially falters when his sister falls in love with someone beneath her class (02:04:24-45). The axis of hero construction problematises the organisation of the public sphere when measured in terms of caste identities with the Christian hero's surrender before the upper caste Nair woman. There are countless articulations of this pattern in films like *Pothan Vava* (Dir. Joshiy, 2006) and *Ezhupunna Tharakan*. In terms of community representation, this constitutes the flawed mimesis of Malayalam cinema. In "Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema", V. C. Harris has observed the complex and erroneous mimesis of representing Kerala in Malayalam cinema: "Demographically, Kerala is different from the rest of India in that its population is nearly 40% non-Hindus (predominantly Muslim and Christian), while among the 'Hindus' themselves it is the 'backward' caste called Ezhavas who predominate" (5).

Another category of the Achayans in Malayalam cinema is the Thrissur based Christians. Contrary to the representation of the traditional Achayan heroes, this category of the "Ettans" constitutes the description of the Christian hero with

reference to the business ethic. Christians belonging to the trading community are predominantly visible in *Pranchiyettan and the Saint*. The stereotype is further expanded in *Punyalan Agarbathies* (Dir. Ranjith Sankar, 2013), *Swarna Kaduva* (Dir. Jose Thomas, 2016) and *Jomonte Suvisheshangal* (Dir. Sathyan Anthikad, 2017).

Pranchiyettan and the Saint, written and directed by Ranjith with Mammooty in the titular role, is a satire which tells the story of the eponymous hero who is a wealthy businessman with minimum formal education but is constantly seeking ways to enhance his social status. The narrative is structured in the form of a conversation between the protagonist and St. Francis who is the hero's patron saint. In a narrative mixed with satire and humour, *Pranchiyettan* describes his journey of self-discovery where many of his shortcuts to gain social acceptance fail miserably. Cherammal Eanashu Francis, the protagonist, is an affluent merchant born into a business family in Trichur. He is nicknamed as 'Ari Pranchi' as he hails from a family of rice traders. He is addressed as *Pranchiyettan* only by those who admire and love him. The narrative discusses the hypocritical protagonist's insecurity about his low societal status on various grounds.

Given the premise that the hero belongs to Trichur which is more a city than a village, the fashioning of identity has taken the form of parody or satire that mocks the narrative construction of family and individual identities. Narrativisation is a strategy adopted in discourses through which the social power of the individuals and communities is constructed. One of the central events, as part of the plot of the film, is *Pranchiyettan's* desire to be honoured with the Padmashree. As part of it, the protagonist's history/biodata is artificially constructed by the writer Achutha Varrier

through narrative measures, with Pranchiyettan being positioned at all historical junctures as the voice of truth, contrary to reality (00:53:10-57:46). The diegesis critiques the constructedness of subject positions and hegemonic identities apolitically through narrativisation. However, this construction of the identity of the hero turns out to be problematic. Analysing the politics of satire and parody, Linda Hutcheon argues that while they can serve as an effective tool for social commentary, it can also perpetuate stereotypes or reinforce prejudices if not handled carefully. It is a “form of repetition with ‘critical distance’ that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In historiographic metafiction, in film, . . . this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity” (26).

What the film critiques as the erroneous misconstruction of social identities can be argued against the plot of *Pranchiyettan and the Saint*. Though the text mocks the demeanours of the hero and his community as people devoid of taste in art and aesthetics, it is argued that the film is anchored on the fallacy of the marginality of the hero and his people. In terms of class, he lacks social power and hence feels permanently insecure. This is projected as his lack of education and the opponent’s social prestige. In other words, the text describes Pranchiyettan and his community as descendants of a tradition without a recognizable ancestry unlike the hegemonic communities.

The construction of masculinity in *Pranchiyettan* is not typically hegemonic, but one that is slightly at odds with the domain of upper caste versions visible in narratives mostly set in Kottayam and settler villages. The film can be perceived at a certain level as expressing the crisis of masculinity because the Christian hero is

represented as suffering from various inferiority complexes. He is haunted by the loss of his childhood sweetheart Omana who later became the wife of his arch rival Jose. The hero's insecurity can be equated with the castrated angst of the male hero. His lack of education is presented as the core of his absence of societal acceptance. Jose, since school days, employs a seemingly innocuous story concerned with feminine sexuality in the most crucial junctures in Pranchi's life. The narrative, which is noted for the absence of a woman in the protagonist's life, can also be read as emblematic of his helplessness in establishing a meaningful association with the opposite sex. This castration complex prevents the hero from declaring his love to Padmashree. Pranchiyettan's sexual castration complex is manifested with reference to the lines that he reads from *The Song of Solomon*, in a parodic cross reference to *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*. Thus, the mainstream hero centric narrative presents a more sensitised presentation of the Christian hero characterised by multiple forms of insecurity. Ambili Anna Markose has argued about the way in which this lack of Pranchiyettan is filled in the narrative:

The parallel established between nation and the Hindu woman by calling the nation and the woman Padmasree has to be noted. . . . The lack Francis suffers can be filled with tradition/nation signified by the Hindu woman. Here too the Christian subject is legitimised in the cinematic dialectic of secularism through the marriage of Christianity with Hinduism. (*Performing Religion* 114)

Pranchiyettan as a Christian hero turns problematic, once critically analysed as a counterpoint to the boastful, megalomaniac, power-wielding heroes of the past and the present. In the opening dream sequence, his ancestors are proud of the fact that

he multiplied family wealth (00:04:44). He himself reports to the saint of his name that he has made a mountain of wealth from the small hill handed down to him by his father (00:08:40-44). In a way, the glorification of the hero in terms of financial success also works in a satirical way as mocking the community. In other words, Pranchiyettan as Christian hero reveals the politics of community stereotyping. In one of the scenes, a minor character makes a seemingly innocent reference that only Muslims and Christians have the money to buy large properties (00:10:40-43). Also, in *Spirit* (2012), scripted and directed by Ranjith himself, the Achayan is satirically exposed by its upper caste hero Raghunandan as a 'secular' term connoting anyone who mints money unscrupulously: "The Achayan is a common name for those businessmen who rises up with a penny even when they fall. It includes not only such Christians, but also the Nair and the Muslim who mint money easily" (00:37:36-44). The objectification of the economic success of a community thus produces a regressive and reactionary stereotype.

Pranchiyettan connotes a critique not only of caste hegemony, but also of financial clout. The stereotypical portrayal of Syrian Christians in Thrissur, as egoistic, money-mongering and boastful people is repeated in Jose Thomas' *Swarna Kaduva* and Sathyan Anthikad's *Jomonte Suvisheshangal*. Stuart Hall rightly observes in "Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices": "Stereotypes get hold of the few 'simple, vivid, memorable, easily grasped and widely recognized' characteristics about a person, reducing everything about the person to those traits, exaggerating and simplifying them, and fixing them without change or development to eternity" (258).

The basis of all satires is in fact a kind of stereotyping of an individual or a community, race, tribe or gender. Satire, as a genre, employs humour, irony, sarcasm, and ridicule to expose and criticise human follies and vices. *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* is constructed similarly as the stereotype of the successful and wealthy businessman, with no formal education. In the process, the film makes him a character type of the hypocritical, insecure egoist.

Hegemonic masculinity construction in Malayalam cinema has at its core the interplay between two dominant ideological formations: gender and caste. In narratives like *Pranchiyettan* which apparently critique the elitist casteist formation of Christian subjectivity, there undergoes a slight shift in power of the manifestation regarding the agency of the hero. Hutcheon has again pointed out the syntagmatic connections of such representations with those in the past and future in *The Politics of Postmodernism*: “Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference” (94). The politics of representation of non-Syrian Christians will be discussed further in Chapter VII.

Generally, the argument regarding the construction of Christian heroism is that it is done as a hegemonic elitist discourse. In the 1980s, the heroes in Malayalam cinema mostly belonged to the upper caste elite communities. The innumerable examples which can be elucidated from the films directed by Sathyan Anthikad, I. V. Sasi, Hariharan, Priyadarshan, Thampi Kannanthanam, Kamal, Sibi Malayil, P. Padmarajan among others generally discuss the bygone feudal nostalgia and the enforcement of values associated with the same. The Christian hero stereotype as Achayan developed during the same phase mostly constitutes the

characteristics of hegemonic masculinity with the strong endorsement of the idea of caste and class. However, this identity construction has become marginally different from the other hegemonic manifestations: The Christian male in such narratives performatively connotes caste hierarchy despite the community's social and economic rise identified by education. In the era of the revivalist renditions of caste Hindu subjectivities, such a construction becomes the preferred minority representation that could be the ideal ego of the spectator. With a slightly altered version of the hegemonic masculinity construction, the heroism in films discussed above such as *Sangham*, *Kottayam Kunjachan*, *Spadikam* and *Chathurangam* delineates and perpetuates the stereotype of a hegemonic masculine hero placed within caste structures. *Pranchiyettan and the Saint* is an attempt to discuss a deviant mode of masculinity characterised by insecurities, despite economic success. The politics of stereotyping of the law enforcing Christian heroes is analysed in the next chapter to discuss how the construction of masculinity works in films set mostly in an urban space and time.

CHAPTER V

THE IDEOLOGICAL CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE CHRISTIAN BUREAUCRAT

The social power of a community and the construction of heroic masculinity in cinema are two interconnected areas in the study of humanities. The relationship between the individual and the institution of the state in the context of the operation of power, hence, assumes great significance. It was Michel Foucault who focused on the analysis of the effects of various institutions on groups of people and the roles that those people play in affirming or resisting those effects. One of the major categories in Malayalam cinema to explore this complex web of the articulation of power is the category of thrillers with power-wielding bureaucrat/investigative heroes.

It was in the 1980s that investigative thrillers emerged as a popular genre in the history of Malayalam cinema. These films often involve a central mystery or crime that needs to be solved, with unexpected twists and turns along the way. One of the characteristic features of investigative thrillers is their fast-paced storytelling, often with a series of intense action sequences or tense moments that build up into a climax. A complex plot with many twists and turns, red herrings, and false leads, set in a dark and gritty atmosphere, with themes of violence, corruption, and betrayal is the hallmark of the narrative style. This genre in the context of Malayalam cinema included those films where the heroes, irrespective of their official position, scrutinise murders, forgery and thefts. The movies are noted for unpredictable

narrative twists and surprises which may involve the identity of the perpetrator, the motives behind the crime, or the fate of the protagonist. In these movies of interrogation, the subjectivity of the spectator is temporally projected on to the ego of the investigating officer who reveals the covered dark secret layer by layer. Thus, the perspective by which the spectator is sutured into the narrative action is mostly that of the protagonist who is characterised as intelligent, resourceful, and driven by a strong sense of justice. The focus of this chapter lies where the Christian hero is positioned with reference to the social power of the heroes of these films.

Though Malayalam cinema did have some early investigative thrillers like *Kannur Deluxe* (Dir. A. B. Raj, 1969), *Danger Biscuit* (Dir. A. B. Raj, 1969), *CID Nazir* (Dir. P. Venu, 1971), *Maravil Thirivu Sookshikkuka* (Dir. J. Sasikumar, 1972), *Panchathanthram* (Dir. J. Sasikumar, 1975), *Puthiya Velicham* (Dir. Sreekumaran Thampi, 1979) in the 1960s and the 1970s, these never formed the core of Malayalam filmography. Most of the films were exactly like the mystery films of Hollywood mixing the genre elements to a plot set in Kerala. In terms of community politics, these films had a hero from the majority community except in *CID Nazir*.

The first of the investigative thrillers that mark a significant change in the community representation in Malayalam cinema is K. G. George's masterpiece *Yavanika* (1982), which revolves around an absconding artist from a theatre group. Though it is a whodunit, without a typical protagonist, its investigating hero is Inspector Jacob Eeraly (Mammootty). The Christian hero investigates the case of a missing tabalist named Ayyappan. Exposing the complexities associated with the institutions of marriage and family, the hero, like a modernist uncovers the hidden truth. Captain Roy Jacob Thomas (Mohanlal) in Anil's *Douthyam* (Dir. P. Anil,

1989) can be considered as another bureaucrat Christian hero. The film being more of a drama than an investigation thriller, Thomas is portrayed as resilient, intelligent, and unwavering determined in the face of danger to save his friend Suresh Nair. At the same time, he represents the patriarchal order in all its authority. Since then, there has emerged a series of films articulating the discourse of the power assuming agents of the state.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, Malayalam cinema witnessed the popularisation of the thriller genre, mostly in line with the developments in Hollywood and other dominant industries. *Kariyilakkattu Pole* (Dir. P. Padmarajan, 1986), *Oru CBI Diary Kurippu* (Dir. K. Madhu, 1988), *Jagratha* (Dir. K. Madhu, 1988), and *Utharam* (Dir. V. K. Pavithran, 1989) are some examples which mostly dealt with crimes arising out of the changing dimensions of the circulation of money due to the Gulf migration and the emergence of a new class resulting from the ensuing migration to urbanised city centres. The changes happening as a result revised the conceptual frameworks of class and gender within the mysteries (Thomas 112). In the 1990s, the genre became established more stylistically further with the central motif of unveiling the mystery behind an unnatural death (Thomas 112). The pattern of investigation of the American film noir appeared in varying shades in *Ee Thanutha Veluppan Kalathu* (Dir. Joshi, 1990) *Mukham* (Dir. Mohan, 1990), *Oru Abhibhashakante Case Diary* (Dir. K. Madhu, 1995), *The Truth* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 1998), and *Crime File* (Dir. K. Madhu, 1999).

However, any study of the community politics of the heroes of the thrillers of this phase demonstrates that they play out the dominant structuring of power in Malayalam cinema without fail. Naturally, most of the heroes of the investigative

thrillers belonged to the upper caste Hindu community. For instance, the most typical of bureaucrats who investigate murders and crimes in Malayalam cinema is Sethurama Iyer of the CBI Series films. *Oru CBI Diary Kurippu* directed by K. Madhu based on S. N. Swamy's script, the first of the series, with Mammooty in the lead role is often cited as an example of the then community politics in Indian cinema. The hegemonic elite characterisation of Iyer was necessitated by the conventions of mainstream cinema. In a *Times of India* article, S. N. Swamy, the writer of the movie states that the lead character in the CBI series was written as a tough daring Muslim cop named 'Ali Emran': "After pitching the script to Mammooty, he made a suggestion as to rewriting the lead character as a pious and intelligent-looking Brahmin, so that the film will work and it will be a unique character".

The fact that the hero who played out the myth of the intelligent Brahmin had subsequent avatars in the following year – *Jagratha*. The commercial success of films of the franchise such as *Sethurama Iyer CBI* (2004), *Nerariyan CBI* (2005) and *CBI 5: The Brain* (2022), is a testimony to the politics of acceptance in Malayalam cinema. Equally popular is the character of Bharath Chandran, enacted by Suresh Gopi in *The Commissioner* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 1994). The much celebrated avatar too had his success of continuity in movies like *Bharath Chandran IPS* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 2005) and *The King and the Commissioner* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 2012). The characters of ACP Hariprasad (*Mukham*, 1990) and Baba Kalyani (*Baba Kalyani*, 2006) played by Mohanlal, DSP Haridas (*Ee Thanutha Veluppan Kalathu*, 1990) and the eponymous hero of *Inspector Balram* (Dir. I. V. Sasi, 1991), played by Mammooty and numerous police officer characters enacted by Suresh Gopi are

examples of the manifestation of a dominant ideology and hegemonic masculine power on screen.

Key to this analysis of power is Michel Foucault's oeuvre in which he theorises the different dimensions of the manifestation of power. By moving beyond the classical Marxist analysis of power as something which a group of people or an institution possesses and the notion that power is only concerned with oppressing and constraining, Foucault examines how power operates within everyday relations between people and institutions. In the process, he refutes the time-old assumption in Western philosophy regarding the fundamental opposition between knowledge and power. He also dismisses the claim of purity of knowledge that can exist in conflict with the machinations of power. In *The History of Sexuality Volume I*, he identifies power as performative and strategic rather than something certain individuals possess:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies.

(92-93)

Accordingly, the medieval sovereign who enforced his power through structures of violence was replaced by the mechanism of power supported by surveillance techniques in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This mechanism is ably supported by scientific discourse and institutions, and is reinforced (and redefined) constantly through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies.

Marxist theories, especially those by Foucault's contemporary Althusser's, are centred on the processes of ideological control of the masses. In the classical Marxist sense, power is defined as the capacity of powerful agents to realise their will over the will of powerless people in the Classical Marxist sense. In *For Marx*, Althusser redefined the concept of ideology with a structuralist approach, viewing it as a pervasive system of representations that shapes individuals' perceptions and behaviours unconsciously.

Ideology is indeed a system of representations, but in the majority of cases these representations have nothing to do with 'consciousness': they are usually images and occasionally concepts, but it is above all as *structures* that they impose on the vast majority of men, not via their 'consciousness'. They are perceived-accepted-suffered cultural objects and they act functionally on men via a process that escapes them. (233)

By ideology, he explains the means whereby oppressed people accept the dominant views of the world which are not accurate and which are not in their interests.

It is in this context that the performative space of the Christian investigative officers of Malayalam cinema since *Yavanika* are analysed to dissect the various shades of the ideologies, power structures and discursive formations which

constructed the hero. While such narratives address the personal sphere of the crimes committed, Malayalam cinema since the 1990s have used the hero image as a metaphor for the institution of the state.

Christian hero, as represented in movies in Malayalam, demonstrates how the notion of power is reciprocally linked between society and individuals. In this sense, it addresses the question of the agency of the hero and other characters within the narrative. The hero is the centre around which the social relations between different characters are analysed. To explore this, *The King* is intensely close read. A similar explication of *Olympian Anthony Adam* (Dir. Bhadrán, 1999), *Memories* (Dir. Jeethu Joseph, 2013) and *Action Hero Biju* (Dir. Abrid Shine, 2016) is employed to measure how the Christian selfhood is enacted against the background of a larger society. The common element that links the central figures in these films is that they are typically individuals who stand out from their faceless peers through their moral integrity, courage, and willingness to challenge the status quo.

The King is a political action thriller film, penned by Renji Panicker and directed by Shaji Kailas. Having the structure of an investigative whodunit, the film revolves around the character of Thevalliparambil Joseph Alex, the firebrand district collector of Kozhikode. *The King*, which has more of the structure of a crime thriller than of an investigative suspense thriller, at the surface level, showcases the battle between good and evil, highlighting the struggles of an upright officer in a system plagued by corruption and communal violence in a crime-ridden society.

Underscoring the impact of personal conscience against oppressive regimes, the film is an endorsement of hegemonic social power manifested through an ideologically embedded bureaucrat. How the stereotype of the power wielding Christian hero

works within the domain of popular cinema in the portrayal of Joseph Alex is an intriguing concern in any study of community power. Focussing on how upper caste elitism is essential in sketching the idea of the post-globalised nation, such an analysis also investigates the wider webs of cultural meaning, identity and power structures that constitute Joseph Alex's heroism.

Heroes are stereotyped in a particular format in films. For Joseph Campbell, the hero might mean an individual who bestows boons on his fellow men after a mysterious adventure (28). In the contemporary scenario, he represents the relation between the individual and the social order. The principal function of the hero in the modern era, as it appears in cine narratives, is to demonstrate that the social institutions are significant and they are here to stay. However, not all bureaucrat heroes are just emblematic of the system. The rise of bureaucrats as heroes happens simultaneously with the advent of modernity in any society. Bureaucratic heroes, thus, present a central paradox at the heart of modernity – the clash between the ideal and the practical. In this sense, many heroes are part of the system and outside the system. This contradictory domain of the bureaucrat hero is analysed in the light of *The King*.

One common stereotype, about this type of heroes, is the “rebel bureaucrat” who operates within a flawed system. The basic premise in such narratives is the framework of a state that is often inefficient, corrupt, or oppressive. In fact, it is the failed nature of the system that makes such heroes operational. All rebel heroes are individuals with unwavering integrity and a deep sense of civic duty, willing to stand up against formidable opponents. Joseph Alex, is constructed as the ultimate rebel hero whose mission is to set order in the state of Kerala, by defeating the

forces of evil. He tackles not only the antagonist who is a corrupt political giant but also demonstrates the power of individual tenacity and ethical commitment in exposing wrongdoing and achieving justice. Using his resourcefulness, shrewdness and strong determination, the hero exposes corruption and injustice and the fundamental weaknesses of the (un)democratic system based on rigid hierarchies, outdated procedures, or unethical practices. By breaking the status quo, the hero establishes what is heralded as the socialist ideal of justice.

Despite being a rebel, the hegemonic construction of a celebratory Christian hero is what enables Joseph Alex to command unlimited power within the system. What is presented as the sphere of action in the narrative unconsciously assumes the shape and texture of the reality of the state. As K. P. Jayakumar notes about the general formation of the idea of reality in Malayalam cinema: Instead of portraying the land in all its ethnic diversity, the cine narratives focus on certain cultural identities, and ethnic/linguistic communities. This imaginary space permeates and envisions itself as Kerala's cultural public consciousness. As a result, the inequalities and alienations in society continue to be alienations in the film as well (42). It is in this context that the performativity of the Christian hero in Joseph Alex becomes one that visibly reflects the hegemonies of gender, caste, and class.

To begin with an investigation of the source of power for the display of heroism reveals the domain of the aristocratic belongingness of the hero. As already discussed in the previous chapters, most heroes of popular cinema in India generally and especially in Malayalam are constructed as belonging to the upper class and upper caste. For example, M. Madhava Prasad, in his examination of Indian cinema, critically observes the dynamics of caste representation, noting, "in a society of

castes and traditional ruling élites, the ‘private’ cannot be represented in public (or, to put it differently, images cannot be represented from a ‘private’ point of view) because such a representation violates the ruling class’s scopic privileges” (78). In other words, the hero’s belongingness to the upper strata of society makes their actions heroic. Though caste, community and class do not constitute an essential element of the narrative process of films like *The King*, the text ensures the social privileges of the hero. Accordingly, the narrative establishes the social and cultural capital of its hero in the opening scene itself. Though the hero’s father Thevalliparambil Alexander (M. G. Soman) who is an influential revolutionary politician of the opposition front states that any intervention to save or protect him might incur the wrath of the hero, he remains protected from his enemies because of his class and rich heritage (00:21:30-46). It is also revealed that Joseph Alex, the radical, inherits the much desirable aristocratic pedigree as the nephew of a Bishop (00:20:30-36). The combination of political and religious status which functions as the social capital, makes Joseph Alex, the hero, who holds agency and power.

In Malayalam cinema, especially those of the 1980s and the 1990s, the socialist and the leftist leanings of the hero are always exercised as a tool to establish his societal power in an ideological stance and hence his identification with the spectators. The origin of the heroic in the character of Joseph Alex is his revolutionary past in which he renounced the various forms of the establishment. The narrative places him as a progressive liberal by presenting him as a teenager who left the conservative institution of a religious seminary under the influence of liberation theology. Another reference to the extreme idealism and radicalism of the hero is his attack on a police station in the Naxalite fashion. The incident is told

rather than shown and this firmly establishes Joseph Alex as an upright extreme leftist of the Maoist school. Moreover, he is established as a Lohiaite, an ideology that endorses social justice, equality and redistribution of wealth, still suitable and venerable, in the capitalist liberal economy of the country. The idealisation of the hero as having an aristocratic background, yet radical in spirit and attitude is the strategic device through which he emerges as the ideal ego of the spectator in the cinema hall. Writing on Hollywood films dealing with the question of terrorism, Robert Cettl argues:

The protagonist often had the simple virtue of facing down the villain in the name of goodness, law and order. He was in that sense both unambiguous and morally heroic, a selfless but proud warrior. He was unquestioningly righteous—the good patriarch out to cleanse and restore the smooth operation of American patriarchy by purifying it of malfunctioning (usually male) egos. (11)

In the discourse of nationalism, the meaning of a character – be it the hero, the heroine, or the antagonist – is contextual. As Susan Hayward argues in the Preface to *French National Cinema*: “Film functions as a cultural articulation of a nation . . . [it] textualises the nation and subsequently constructs a series of relations around the concepts, first, of state and citizen, then of state, citizen and other” (x).

The heroism of Joseph Alex is analysed not in his capacity and position as an individual, but rather as an instance in the context of the reformulation of the nation.

The presentation of the hero as an individual who prevents the fragmentation of the nation was necessitated in the early 1990s when India faced threats of political disintegration. The assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1991 created a

power vacuum at the centre. Following the economic crisis in the country in 1991, the liberalisation of the economy was initiated by the then Finance Minister Manmohan Singh under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. This step marked a pivotal shift from a predominantly state-controlled economy to one open to foreign investment and market-driven principles. Additionally, the period saw the rise of communal tensions, notably with the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, which fuelled widespread religious riots and had a lasting impact on India's social fabric. The secular fabric of the country was severely torn with the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 and the riots in Bombay in 1993. It is in this context that, how a socialist and nationalist framework is embedded in the heroism of Joseph Alex, becomes worthy of analysis.

Paradigmatically, such a construction of the bureaucrat hero who belongs to a minority religion, it is argued, is part of the mainstream that has been formed as manifesting the majoritarian. It was the cultural dominant of the 1990s commercial popular cinema, cutting across genres, as heroes resisted illegal encroachments within the nation. The savarna heroes of the phase like Narasimha Mannadiyar in *Dhruvam* (Dir, Joshi, 1993) and Bharath Chandran in *Commissioner* etc. connoted an ideal hegemonic formation of masculinity by waging a war in the name of ideological correctness. Joseph Alex as hero, successful in projecting a perfect toxic display of masculinity, is the way his community identity assumes power.

The very opening of *The King* itself presents a series of moving shots in which the corruption and the degeneration of the state are exposed. The closeup shot of giving a 500 rupee note as bribe at a police check post is emblematic of the nation which is collapsing due to various forms of corruption (00:02:54- 03:01). The

following series of incidents involving one of the antagonists, the police commissioner, demonstrate that the whole machinery of the state is an ally to widespread corruption. Accordingly, the photographer named Madhu who attempted to capture and expose the wrongdoers in action is betrayed and killed by the corrupt administrative machinery (00:04:48-08:34). In the aftermath of the demolition of Babri Masjid, when history witnessed a series of communal riots across the country, the film uses the paradigmatic axis of chaos. The text has its narrative firmly anchored in a succession of montages – mostly long shots – of a riot in which the official agencies of the state are muted (00:09:31-11:42). The mediated reality which is conveyed through the shots of newspapers and television footages reveals that the locale of action is the city of Kozhikode in Kerala. It is into this pandemonium of smoke and fire, that the hero, as a dissenter in a couple of slow-motion shots, makes his grand entry (00:13:23-14:12) – setting foot on the riotous land to set it in order – enacting the macho heroism, the spectator has been waiting for. The first diegetic action, the hero does, is to break the status quo or the normal protocol in addressing a chaos. The title card, *The King*, (00:17:00) appears, when the heroic collector who sets things in order, assumes charge from the corrupt Police Commissioner, connoting the symbolic association of a feudal nostalgia for bygone days when democracy fails. The climax shot of the film, when co-read with this, is an extension of the hero walking in another slow motion close-up shot after solving the ‘temporary’ crisis that has fallen upon the state’s democracy and secularism, thus ensuring its safety and integrity (03:04:03-05:38). In a display of hegemonic aggressive heroism, the bureaucrat hero has either killed or put all the evil incarnates behind bars to ensure justice to people so that the octogenarian freedom fighter

chants the nationalistic slogan “Bolo Bharath Mata Ki Jai” (03:04:49-05:16). The narrative action thus establishes the hero as a formidable and uncompromising district collector who is fiercely dedicated to his job, displaying an unwavering commitment to rooting out corruption and upholding justice.

The film is a classic example of constructing its hero as the rebellious bureaucrat in the line of national integration. The image of the country shaped through freedom struggle existed in the collective memory in the 1990s. The second instance of the grandeur of the rebel hero is in the context of him helping a poor disregarded freedom fighter (00:59:52-01:03:41). The hero’s presentation as a caring, charitable administrator – a display of benevolent masculinity – is bound with his part Ex-Naxal and part Lohiyite idealism. This sequence is structurally contrasted with the inefficiency, hypocrisy and failure of the political executive of the country. The complete significance of this heroism is revealed only when the antagonists of the narrative describe themselves as the monopoly rulers in the crony capitalist neoliberal country. This is the ideological construction of the angry young man hero who acts as the singular moral force within the system against the evil doers, part of the institution of the state. In “Bearing Witness: Malayalam Cinema and the Making of Keralam”, Meena T. Pillai observes the socio-political context, contributing to the rise of such an ultra-macho hero during the period:

Political and legal corruption, lack of transparency of the state machinery, the failure of democratic processes, the widespread violation of human rights, the rise of hidden economies like smuggling, drug trafficking and the criminalization of politics all contributed to the rise of new cinematic codes during this period of the late 1970s, ‘80s and ‘90s. Rising economic

insecurity, a growing disillusionment with the state ... fuelled Malayalam cinema's conformism to dominant ideologies of the market and society.

(247)

The construction of the hero is also linked with the definition of the nation. The crisis in the political fabric of the country is addressed through the clash of two ideologies: socialism and crony capitalism. The hero defines the country as a socialist paradigm based on the redistribution of wealth, in his exchange with the heroine Anura Mukherjee (Vani Viswanath), at a different narrative juncture. The narrative, which is set in the neoliberal phase, defines the nation as belonging to the wretched, hapless poor in the hero's perspective. In a series of close-up shots in front of the heroine-cum-subordinate, a misogynistic Joseph Alex defines the nation:

IAS – Indian Administrative Service, do you know what it means? To know that, you must know India first. It is not the India that you learned from books which print mere letters. It is an India of crores of the illiterate poor; an India of the sexual pimps, prostitutes, scavengers and lepers; an India where the rickshaw pullers are forced to spit blood. . . . It is an India of those mothers who sell their womb for feeding their children at least once a day. It is an India of the sacrifice and sufferings of freedom fighters like Krishnetten whom you insulted yesterday. (my trans.; 01:07:06-55)

This exchange, besides revealing the political and gender prejudices of the hero, reveals how the nation is constituted, in the socialist imagination of its hero, through narration. In another instance too, the hero preaches over phone his socialist ideology of development and city planning which focuses more upon the destitute and the poor than on the peripheral beautification at the expense of the hapless.

Moreover, the hero is constructed as the representative of rising nationalism, by getting equated with the concept of the nation. If observed rightly, as a pattern, the heroes of Malayalam cinema in the 1990s belonged either to the Hindu Aristocratic class or to the upper caste Christian community. Such heroes are further counterpoised against the negative stereotyping of Muslim characters. Joseph Alex in the narrative can be seen as obliquely articulating the mainstream sentiments, especially when he defines a nation. Besides the text articulating the nexus between corporate corruption with international terrorism, the narrative has the specific instance of the hero chastising a corrupt Muslim Minister for inter-state corruptive links (02:07:25-49).

Joseph Alex who operates as the enforcer of law for the state in the film is also problematic. He rather boastfully confesses that he was anti-state in his adolescent years. What makes him morally upright in the narrative present of the text is his position as the civil servant. But if the hero's current influential status is the product of the political and financial influence of his father, the kind of idealisation of his persona turns out to be highly challenging.

The concept of the heroism of the anti-establishmentarian bureaucrat is, paradoxically, built on hegemonic masculinity. In other words, the hero signifies traditionalism which is evident in his treatment of women and sexual minorities in the narrative. The ultra-leftist hero carries ultra-rightist stances as the text unfolds gender prejudices. The hero is an embodiment of patriarchal prejudices against women as it is evident in his perception of Anura Mukherjee, the heroine. In fact, the heroine provokes the hero by her position, her attire and her attitudes. The hero chastising her in the confrontations exposes what the Christian hero is made of. In

fact, the heroine is reminded that she is just a woman and, hence, she is supposed not to enter the domain of the hero. The ideological correctness, community position and narrative conventions like editing and close-up have enabled the hero to abuse the woman, but when she retorts he silences her by playing to the hegemonically masculinised whistles of the spectators: “You will never raise your hand against a man again. I know well how to do that. But, you are simply just a woman. Just a woman” (my trans.; 01:08:15-28). Moreover, every now and then, the hero displays through his powerful rhetoric his privileged and powerful masculinity. Regarding how masculinity is constructed as hegemonic in opposition to the feminine, Sreedharan has noted: “Mainstream cinema hit upon a successful formula with the first half of the film focusing on an encounter between a self-willed heroine and a macho hero, while the second half witnesses a systematic and extremely popular process of breaking her down into either a neurotic, an orphan or any other kind of weakling” (83).

Toxic masculinity remains the key ingredient of the Christian hero construction, even when the hero represents the democratic establishment of the state, as evident in his devaluation of the beauty contest. V. C. Harris has pointed out in “Engendering Popular Cinema in Malayalam”: “Even when you acknowledge the unmistakable presence of a senior woman police officer, administrator, lawyer or journalist, they have to be exposed for what they ultimately are – mere women” (62). In *Pullingathinte Nottangal*, Yacob Thomas has observed that the politics of gender discrimination in narratives functions as the constituent of spectator reaction: they “firmly believe that a woman is just a woman and is not meant to act like a man and call men bad.... the dangerous message they convey is that action films are

reproductions of male action” (my trans.; 119). Joseph Alex in *The King* signifies the underlying masculinist version of heroism, aligning with a dangerous patriarchal sense of public consciousness.

In a close analysis, the female lead is construed as the object of the male gaze. The text makes her fall for the hero’s mass appeal when he almost singlehandedly fights against the establishment from within the system. The feminine is devalued as the one who craves for the care and attention of the male. The text also demonstrates the strategies through which the taming (shaming) of the woman happens against masculine power. What Preeti Kumar has observed in the context of cine comedies is valid in this context: “In films, characters on screen represented types, with strong and independent women traditionally depicted as ‘bad’, while ‘good’ women have been suffering victims. The portrayal of the threatening female subject was a cinematic backlash against the autonomy of the urban educated working woman” (35). Further, the text wilts under pressure when the show-girl connotation of the heroine is exploited for the sake of the hero who wants a sneak into the world of the baddies. Consequently, the idealism of the hero turns quite regressive the moment the heroine is used as a sexually objectified bait against the villains. Joseph Alex, thus, signifies the man of law in the symbolic order with reference to the construction of femininity.

One of the corollaries of gynophobia, in cultural representations, is transphobia. The sexual minorities and trans-people have never constituted any major portion of the imaginative world of mainstream Malayalam cinema. In a verbal exchange, Joseph Alex calls John Varghese, a Minister of Kerala cabinet, a “hijra” (00:27:57-59), insultingly. If the woman exists in the narrative as a tool for

Joseph Alex to establish his prejudices, the transgender is brought from outside to do so. The Christian hero is thus constructed as anti-women and anti-transgender, in a way to satisfy the dominant ideology that shapes the spectator.

Narrative cinema has hardly been political in India. The apolitical nature of the hero was a pre-requisite for cleaning up the erratic system. The nature of the heroism of Joseph Alex is established along those lines. The hero who becomes the law and the state, instead of addressing the gynophobia, situated at the core of *The King* reveals the hegemonic image of the hero with which alone the spectators could identify as their screen surrogate. This was part of a larger scheme of the search for fictional and illusory solutions in the form of an ultimate protector in narrative cinema. Having learned that the elected representative is corrupt and villainous beneath his humanitarian masquerades, the hero exposes him by all means possible.

The construction of Joseph Alex as a morally upright hero is thus contestable on various levels. The investigating heroes of the cinema of the 1990s, if closely inspected, are all revealed to belong to the upper class hegemonic communities. It is argued that similar to the construction of the Christian hero analysed in the previous chapters, the hero here performs his identity in hegemonic terms. As Christian Metz has theorised, cinema functions as an apparatus of the imaginary by discussing the “cinematic apparatus” which positions the viewer as a passive recipient of the visual narrative, thus aligning their vision and response with the camera’s perspective. Accordingly, the process which projects the hero as the mirror image of the psychoanalytical process and the screen surrogate of the spectator certainly allows for a certain gratification of unconscious desires in the spectator. In other words, it is

the spectator who interrogates, inspects and controls the subjects of the narratives through the hero.

Joseph Alex's characterisation, however, is morally ambiguous. He embodies the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, who creates his own values and lives by them, often in defiance of societal norms. This makes him a complex and layered character, as his actions, while aimed at achieving justice, often mirror the tactics of those he opposes. His approach to justice repeatedly involves authoritarian and brutal methods. His willingness to bend or break the rules to achieve his goals places him in a morally ambiguous light. The hero's vigilantism that resorts to violence, intimidation, or extrajudicial measures to ensure that justice is delivered reflects a Machiavellian belief that the end justifies the means. In the context of Foucault's conceptualisation of power, vigilantism can be seen as an assertion of personal or communal power against state authority. In short, the duality in the Christian hero invites spectators to question the nature of justice and the ethical implications of using morally dubious means to achieve noble ends.

The hegemony in cinema is not just about passive viewing but about the active construction of a worldview that aligns with certain power structures. By consistently depicting certain roles, actions, and values as normative and desirable, cinema plays a critical role in the reinforcement of societal norms and power relations. The regular depiction of certain communities as heroic and certain others mostly as non-heroic is the reflection of the power structure of a society at a particular phase. This positioning of the Christian community in heroic terms in Kerala is hegemonic because it naturalises and legitimises the dominant ideology, making alternative viewpoints seem marginal or radical.

The performance of physicality is also a constituent element of male heroism. In *Detecting Men*, Philippa Gates argues by quoting Rupert Wilkinson that the notion of toughness has been essential in the visual representation of the hero as idealistic. The toughness was pronounced and demonstrated through styles of walking (such as strutting) and through acts like cigar-chomping, jaw-working, and squinting while smoking (35). Joseph Alex as hero, for instance, performs his ultra-masculine vigour in confrontation with his opponents consisting of the political executive by saying: “Don’t you dare to rub me on the wrong side, either, sir. You know why? Because I have an extra bone, as you said” (my trans.; 00:28:18-26), and walks off from the scene in a medium shot. In the construction of Joseph Alex as hero, thus, the narrative and shot composition in the form of extreme close-ups, along with a pulsating background score often highlight the performativity domain of masculinity.

The bureaucrat Christian hero is stereotyped in another domain. The references to religious and Biblical imagery, when analysed in the context of the films of the 1990s, reveal the development of heroism catering to the doctrines of right wing nationalism and counter-terrorism in shaping a hero. Such constructions of heroisms, as Raghavendra has observed, bridge the gap created following the collapse of the grand narrative of Nehruvian socialism (262). Malayalam cinema has resorted to two different ways to counteract this loss: a refeudalisation of the imagination as in *Devasuram* and *Aram Thampuran* or an excessive masculinisation of public sphere as in *The King* or *Spadikam*.

Similar to the politics of representation in *The King*, Bhadran’s *Olympian* *Anthony Adam* constructs its protagonist, Chakkumveetil Anthony Varghese

(Mohanlal), as a hegemonic masculine figure within the framework of nationalism, religion, and law enforcement. Anthony is introduced as a champion bullock cart driver from an affluent farming family with feudal leanings as cultural capital, reinforcing his dominance and agency. His undercover operation at a boarding school in Ooty to expose a terrorist plot intertwines action, romance, and investigative elements, positioning him as both a protector and an enforcer of state power.

The film reflects patterns in Malayalam cinema where Christian heroes, particularly police officers, are granted ideological legitimacy through their alignment with national security. Like Joseph Alex, as a police officer, Anthony has unrestricted access to personal and institutional secrets, strengthening his omnipotent presence. His role extends beyond law enforcement to moral guardianship, aligning with the structures of governmentality where state intervention is justified under the guise of protection. The subjectivity construction paradigm highlights the film's nationalistic discourse which constructs its antagonists – linked to terrorism – as anti-nationals, further legitimizing Anthony's victory over them.

A key aspect of Anthony's masculinity is his assertion of power over women, exemplified through his interactions with Angel, a teacher, and Susan Roy, the school principal. His romance with Angel is framed as an act of sympathy upon learning of her tragic past, paralleling Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), where the detective-hero exerts obsessive control over the heroine. The hero's investigative role transitions into voyeurism, reinforcing patriarchal dominance supplemented with his more authoritarian subjection of individuals. His construction as a hero has

a more Biblical domain of symbolism than Joseph's in *The King*. Anthony's recitation of *Obadiah*, *Psalms* and *Isaiah* positions him as an Old Testament heroic figure ensuring justice and protection, especially in moments of crisis. The final biblical citation "Though thou exalt thyself as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the Lord" (Obad. 1: 4), during the climax establishes him as a prophetic enforcer of divine justice, consolidating his moral and ideological superiority.

As in *The King*, the hero in *Olympian Anthony Adam* is portrayed as a politically incorrect nationalistic hero. His caste and class privilege, combined with his institutional authority, shape the spectator's perception, making him the focal point through which society and justice are analysed. The narrative, thus, reinforces dominant power structures while justifying the hero's interventions as necessary for restoring order. These narratives with Christian investigative heroes are not exceptions in the context of the cinema of the 1990s: they constitute the dominant of cultural production of this stage emphasizing caste and gender hegemony.

Analysing the deep structures of all these discourses reveals how the state is designated as the ultimate source of power. The heroes of the narratives – in their critique, interrogation and exposition of the state – function as the symbolic redeemer and cleanser of a damaged and dysfunctional system. By extension, these narratives construct the body of the state or the nation. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities* (1983), argues that the nation is formed by cultural forms such as nationalist novels and newspapers (46). In "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema'", Philip Schlesinger adds the constituents of the imagined order of the nation to the twentieth century art form of cinema and the domain of media

communication (20) as also constituents of the imagined order of the nation. On examining how the production, circulation and consumption of the moving image are constitutive of the national collective, it is argued that in film narratives such as *The King* and *Olympian Anthony Adam*, there emerges an image of the nation of India, in which the rebellious bureaucratic Christian hegemonic hero functions as the structural device of integrating the nation.

The hegemonic construction of the Christian hero in the twenty first century also follows the narrative conventions of dominance produced by the thematic and formal elements of cinema. In *Vargam* (Dir. Padmakumar, 2006), hegemonic heroism assumes the form of corruption and redemption in the anti-establishmentarian police officer Solomon Joseph (Prithviraj) in the High ranges and Kasargod. *Ben Jonson*, (Dir. Anil C. Menon, 2005) constructs a non-elite police officer as a carrier of hegemonic masculinity.

Antony Punnekkadan of *Twenty:20* (Dir. Joshiy, 2008) can be seen as the most dominant representation of the Syrian Christian masculine identity. Being a multi-starrer in Malayalam cinema produced on behalf of AMMA, the film has three heroes enacted by the superstars – Mammooty, Mohanlal and Suresh Gopi. The narrative action which is centred on a famous Hindu upper caste family, when considered as a crime drama, has a powerful police hero who represents the state and justice. He is constructed as a bureaucratic hero who embodies intelligence, authority, and moral resilience.

The narrative revolves around a series of crimes happening in Kerala and Bangalore and the perpetrators are members of the influential Thiruvambadi family. The criminal nexus is revealed through the perspective of the investigating officer

Antony Punnekkadan who is sharp tongued and brilliant. The actions of the other two superstar heroes – revenge over the death of their only siblings – are mediated through the institution of law controlled by this cop hero. Thus, as the narrative progresses, Antony transitions from an enigmatic bureaucrat to an authoritative force who dictates the resolution of the central conflict. The personal and the political converge in the climax when he shoots down his arch rival, the chief villain from the aristocratic Thiruvambadi family.

As a police officer, Punnekkadan represents the power of the legal system. Unlike conventional police or military heroes, he does not merely rely on physical violence but instead wields bureaucratic influence to outsmart his savarna adversaries, Ramesh Nambiar (Mammooty) and Devaraja Prathapa Varma (Mohanlal), and the villainous gang represented by Madhava Menon (Siddique) and family. The narrative takes place in the urban context of a neoliberal economy where Christianity has been reduced to a spectral presence. However, what enables Antony Punnekkadan to fight against the system as an angry cop is a caste-based genealogical power. Antony's heroism, therefore, is not about the display of brute strength but about his ability to navigate the legal and political framework to ensure justice. Although embedded in the bureaucratic structure, he remains untainted by its corruption, positioning him as both a part of the system and a force for its reform. What Raveendran has noted in the context of the emerging new masculinities in cinema of the 1980s is applicable to heroes like Antony who connote the dominant ideology: "The violence the hero represents and performs, sometimes unabashedly, is part of the legitimate violence of the state. The value subversions the hero

‘performs’ are also overturned by the ultimate value preservation of hegemony he later performs” (my trans.; 41).

Caste is marked as an integral part of the construction of heroism. The contrastive portrayals of hegemonic and non-hegemonic groups in the narrative indicate the underlying structures of ideology that form the text. For example, Induchoodan (Salimkumar), another IAS officer is mocked at in the narrative as in casteist remarks: “the ancestral caste job cannot be forgotten” (my trans.; 01:26:21-25). The text makes anti-ethnic anti-racial jokes in a series to construe the inefficiency of an IPS officer of the force. On the other hand, Antony is presented as the sharp, morally intact super-efficient cop, following the dominant ideology. The same structure of the performativity of caste and class makes Solomon Joseph in *Vargam* a distinctive hero. Applying to the core of Malayalam cinema of the phase, this explains why most of the police heroes (as well as villains), belong to the upper caste Hindu or Christian communities.

The construction of masculinity has undergone significant changes in general in the New Generation Malayalam cinema. Hegemonic domains of community identifications have been replaced and subsequently a new category of heroism, secularised and at times self-doubting, has emerged. Such texts have begun to address both the symbolic and the realistic domains of castration anxieties. However, with the exception of a handful of narratives, cinematic renderings of police actions of this phase in the context of Christian representation have echoed the ideological renditions of community hegemony. A close scrutiny of *Memories* and *Action Hero Biju* explicates the minor alterations in the presentation of Syrian Christian hegemonic masculinity.

One of the most popular genres in international cinema, especially in Hollywood is the film noir. The term, according to Paul Schrader, “refers to those Hollywood films of the forties and early fifties that portrayed the world of dark, slick city streets, crime and corruption” (Braudy 582). Originating during the period of World War II, it addressed the cynicism, disillusionment and pessimism of the people. In the “Introduction” to *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*, Andrew Spicer observes that “most noirs take place in dark, nighttime cities, their streets damp with rain that reflects the flashing neon signs where the alienated, often psychologically disturbed, male antihero encounters a deceitful femme fatale leading to his doom” (x1). *The Maltese Falcon* (Dir. John Huston, 1941), a black and white film produced by Warner Bros. is considered the first of the genre. The adaptation of Whit Masterson’s novel *Badge of Evil* with the title *Touch of Evil* (1958) written and directed by Orson Welles is regarded as the last film of the classical Noir movement. Frank Tuttle’s *This Gun for Hire* (1942), Billy Wilder’s *Double Indemnity* (1944), Fritz Lang’s *Scarlet Street* (1945), Robert Aldrich’s *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955) are some of the broadly discussed noir films. The resurgence of the genre since the 1980s is called neo noir which blends classic film noir aesthetics with modern themes, often incorporating morally ambiguous characters, urban decay, and stylised cinematography with high contrast lighting and unconventional camera angles. Exploring psychological depth, unreliable narration, and contemporary socio-political anxieties, this subgenres highlight is the coupling of non-linear storytelling and digital effects.

Malayalam cinema which had not evolved significantly in the classical noir period, has had a few classical Neo noir films since the 1980s. While *Mukham* and

Ee Thanutha Veluppan Kalathu are two early examples, *The Grandmaster* (Dir. B. Unnikrishnan, 2012), *Mumbai Police* (Dir. Rosshan Andrews, 2013) and *Joseph* (Dir. M. Padmakumar, 2018) constitute some of the examples in which a tragic, dark, surreptitious world is narrowly unveiled. The concept of the Christian hero, with reference to deep-rooted Biblical imagery, is examined against the backdrop of the genre concerning Jeethu Joseph's *Memories*.

Memories is an investigative murder mystery with elements of classic noir and neo noir, accompanied by rich Christian imagery. Sam Alex, the protagonist in the narrative is uncharacteristically constructed as a widower, a chronic drunkard and an irredeemably lost person encountering an existential crisis, being haunted by the tragic memories of the brutal murders of his wife and daughter by a terrorist. Contrary to the upbeat, macho supercops, the hero of the text is introduced in a self-imposed claustrophobic existence. Despair, lack of confidence and total withdrawal from society make him the typical hero of a neo noir. In the Introduction to the *Encyclopedia of Film Noir*, Geoff Mayer observes: "seriousness and a guilt-ridden protagonist, it would seem, are essential attributes of film noir" (10). However, rather than the guilt-induced insecurity, the hero signifies the disorientation resulting from the irrecoverable loss. As Paul Schrader has observed: "Noir heroes dread to look ahead, but instead try to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, they retreat to the past" (Braudy 587). Unlike Joseph Alex and Antony Punnekkadan, the heroes of the films already discussed, Sam Alex has the archetypal Christ image. As in police narratives like Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, the core of his heroism is the spiritual, psychological and professional resurrection of the protagonist from the unfathomable melancholy that surrounds him from personal loss. Sam Alex as the

hero follows the narrative arc of redemption or transformation, where the protagonist evolves significantly throughout the film.

The representation of the hero in *Memories* is different from the films already analysed. While *The King*, *Olympian Anthony Adam*, and *Twenty:20* have constructed the heroes as apolitically hegemonic warlords against the system, the hero in *Memories* is constructed apparently as more democratic and less power assuming. Depicted with his casual carelessness, his liquor bottle in his hand, and an intensely serious gaze, Sam Alex conveys the sense of loss, but remains a sturdy icon of tough masculinity. But, when the film is subjected to close scrutiny, one can see that the heroism is established in terms of caste and class. The narrative has very convincingly, but subtly, established the respectable lineage and elitist social status of the hero.

The first shot of Sam Alex is a frozen close-up shot in an encounter taking place in the memory of the protagonist himself (00:01:45). Once the narrative moves forward to the present, he is reintroduced in a dim lit medium shot as a shabby, disoriented man, lost in the trauma of the loss of his wife and daughter (00:13:58-14:15). His disheveled appearance, constant drinking habits, and withdrawal from social interactions – accompanied by an eerily sad background score – paint the picture of a man engulfed in grief and self-destruction. Living in the cocoon of past memories, with nothing to be hopeful about the present or the future, he withdraws himself from family and society. Overcoming this nihilism and pessimism, part of the conventions of the film noir, the last shot is a long shot of the hero with his adopted girl child, who is an innocent victim. Reading the images together, it is evidently suggestive that the hero has a different shade of hegemonic masculinity,

though he is seemingly withdrawn and nihilistic. Following the conventions of film noir of the 1940s, the classical detective as hero of a film is defined “by his superior intellectual capabilities and a desire to restore order to a world temporarily disrupted by murder” (Gates 69). Like the classical detectives, figures like Sam Alex, offer “the reassurance that the evil in his society is manageable and stoppable by the individual” (Gates 69).

The protagonist’s heroism is established following the conventions of film noir in which a serial killer takes away the lives of young married men. The presence of the serial killer, as in most noir films, symbolises the dark and inhuman side of human nature. Gates has observed that many of the noir films are rooted in the notion of the *femme fatale*. *Memories* also follows this obliquely, as the leitmotif of crime is traced back to feminine guilt and sexuality (01:19:40-20:05). The combination of extreme religiosity and feminine guilt has made the antagonist a serial killer in the end. Such a domain of the moral code necessitates the positioning of the hero in the dominant order.

The point where the professional converges with the personal is the defining movement of Sam Alex’s heroism. After solving the puzzles of the crime based on biblical verses, the brilliance, responsibility and gumption of the hero are summed up in a gunshot by which he saves his brother. In other words, the construction of the hero in the text entices its spectators to a false sense of gratification with the promise of a land purged of evil and terror. Thus, the fundamental dimension in which the hero code is built is that of narcissistic identification so that the ego-formation and reinforcement of the spectator are done with ease.

The political construction of the hero is that of the quintessential modernist who apparently questions the logic of religion. However, the critique of all religions based on their fatalist undertones by the hero cements the agnosticism of the hero. The inefficacy and cruelty of God with reference to the suffering of the people is the foundation of Sam Alex's heroism. This Christian hero here symbolises the futility of the belief in and the absurdity of divine justice in shaping the destinies of the individuals. In a typical noirist medium, with his mother and the priest also captured in the frame, the hero argues: "If the righteous poor suffer, religion would say the way to heaven is full of stones and thorns. On the contrary, if a thief or a murderer leads a luxurious life, the answer would be that the wicked spread like a palm tree. And if this is your notion of divine justice, I don't believe in it" (my trans.; 00:21:15-42). By refuting the theological dogma of blind submission to the divine will, the spectator is made to identify with the Christian hero.

There is the convergence between state power and theocracy within the discursive formations of the text. The hero whose life has become tragic as a result of the failure of the state questions the authority of God. Even though fatalism is unacceptable to the hero initially, he is stimulated to action by resorting to the divine. In fact, when the hero performs on behalf of the state as a police officer, he is made equally religious as well. Overcoming of trauma and grief means to Sam Alex, his assertion of the hegemonic religious identity and the professional identity.

The archetype of Jesus Christ is the central constituent element in defining the heroism of Sam Alex. The film's crime/suspense thriller pattern assumes a narrative structure with the descriptive arc of repentance, forgiveness, and redemption. From the perspective of the spectator, it appeals to universal human

experiences of guilt and atonement. On a religious terrain, Sam Alex has many parallels with tragic Biblical images like Job of the Old Testament. At one point in the narrative, he questions the priest by questioning the doctrine of divine justice, with reference to the death of his wife and child: “If it was meant for to be taken back, why was I given all the happiness, why was I given a false impression of lasting happiness?” (my trans.; 00:20:43-52). But what keeps the narrative together is the fanatic villain whose victims are hanged after the murders in a posture which resembles the crucified Jesus. The prevalent imagery of crosses and crucifixion throughout the film mirrors the passion of Christ as well as of the hero, laden with suffering, sacrifice, and a quest for redemption. The murder scenes where victims are posed in crucifix-like positions connotes the heavy burden of sin and atonement that Sam carries. The summing up of the narrative is met with another religious image of the resurrection of the hero. Sam’s final act of saving a potential victim is a form of redemption, aligning him with Christian themes of salvation and renewal.

Central to the development of heroism is the religious identity of the hero as a Christian. The motive and modus operandi of the crime are identified with reference to Bible and Christian theology, especially with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Apparently, it is the villain Anand/Peter who has become a maniac obsessed with revenge based on the regressive morality of the religion. However, Sam’s identification with the suffering man, a befitting religious image, is the core of his identity. The realisation of his physical inability in capturing the villain forces him to turn to religious ways. In Padmakumar’s *Joseph*, the image of the self-tormenting police hero reappears and performs his usefulness to the society by exposing the

layers of medical corruption, after becoming the ideal of spiritually transformed man.

Such an attempt to construe the hero is also to make him more sensitive and it involves, according to Philippa Gates, two things: “The movement to the sensitive hero can be regarded not so much as a concession to female power as an attempt to deny it by incorporating it into masculinity itself. But the shift to a more vulnerable hero can also be regarded as positive by offering audiences models of masculinity alternative to that embodied by the retributive hero” (146). The protagonist in *Memories* displaying less of male aggression and physical dominance and more of emotional and physical vulnerability, experiences a transformation toward sensitivity as the narrative unfolds. However, playing within the structures of cinema, Sam Alex’s transition from an emotionally distressed person to a stable and towering self at the end reinstates him to a position of hegemony in the police, family and society as the protector.

One of the most unexplored aspects of the film is the setting. The narrative unfolds all over central Kerala with the final action taking place in Kottayam. Moreover, the director withholds the traditional establishment shots in the narrative to hide the details of the place of origin of the hero. The status of Kottayam as the predominant locale of Christians has already been discussed in the previous chapter. The narrative action thus asserts, not merely in the dimension of archetypal Christian symbolism, but also the cultural geography as well. Moreover, the symbolism throughout the movie is dominated by Christian images like Churches, biblical verses, paintings and architecture.

Tania Modleski's "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and the Postmodern Theory" is an analysis of the constituent structures of pleasure with reference to the horror genre. The writer argues that pleasure is theorised as antithetical and adversarial to modernism and further to postmodernism. Pleasure, as Modleski argues, "remains the enemy for the postmodernist thinker because it is judged to be the means by which the consumer is reconciled to the prevailing cultural policy, or the 'dominant ideology'" (Braudy 620). Like Hollywood horror films, the neo noir films in Malayalam can be placed in a conventional value system in which the narrative, through the placing of its hero, provides the ultimate "specious good" (Trilling 182) and "bourgeois taste" (Trilling 182).

The binary construction of the hero and the villain is further accentuated by the admirable physiognomy of the hero and the physical disability of the villain. At the climax of the narrative, the spectator's identification is with the hero, while the villain has enough credentials to be a violent psycho. In order to neutralise the possible identification with the villain, he is represented as a psycho indoctrinated by excessive religiosity. If the hero has a wounded past, so has the villain. But the problematic politics of the narrative is further revealed with reference to the legitimisation of the hero by denouncing the villain. In other words, the discursive structures construct the villain as absolute evil who needs to be annihilated for the smooth functioning of the institution of state and government. Body politics thus also enforces the hegemonic status of the hero.

Narrativisations of police actions are examples of the working of the repressive state apparatus of prison and the police machinery. A deeper analysis shows how films project the numerous tracks through which the dominant ideology

that constitutes power in the societal framework operates at large. *Action Hero Biju* which is episodic in nature and set in Ernakulam is analysed in terms of how religion and state converge to form a different pattern in the representation of its hero. Chronicling the day-to-day life of Sub Inspector Biju Paulose, the film blends together his personal and professional life. In an Althusserian perspective, the film with its tagline ‘A ride with a police officer’, could be cited as an example of how the apparently decentralised portrayal of a hero engenders caste and religious hegemony.

The title *Action Hero Biju* is a rather ironic one for a movie in which the hero is constructed devoid of the usual heroic traits of the conventional police stories in Malayalam such as *Inspector Balram*, *The Commissioner* and *Baba Kalyani*. These supercop films which are labelled as action hero movies consist of scenes that “represent a hero’s fearlessness, bravery, courage and aggression” (Panda et. al.). It is argued that the superheroism of these morally upright police officers of regional cinema emerges from numerous factors, including the caste and religious position of the heroes. The psychological mechanism of the spectators, when converged with the larger political contexts, places those police officers in the dominant order which is the incarnation of power resulting from one’s caste and religious position. In a close reading of the narrative instances that constitute the film, Biju also can be considered as a miniature action hero. The ironic playing down of the hegemonic code in the title – due to the camera angles, editing techniques and location changes due to the episodic plot – in effect, does not happen and Biju Paulose remains a representative of the sovereign power of the state.

The police station in *Action Hero Biju* is depicted as a system rather than a space. Both the hero and the numerous antiheroes who include snatchers, pan masala sellers, drunken exhibitionists and local drug dealers are part of the system itself. Most of the time, the interior of the police station becomes the trope of action as the events are construed from the perspective of its eponymous hero. Thus, unlike in the police based thrillers of the previous era which use repeated low angle shots in the exterior where the heroes make slow motion entry with fiery verbal exchanges and electrifying background, *Action Hero Biju* mostly deploys eye level shots to suggest the ordinariness of the hero. The repeated shots of the interior of the police station are denotative of the hierarchical power structure prevailing in the institution of the police in which each and every individual is placed under the control of his/her superior officer.

Analysing the events which constitute the diegesis, it is observable that the caste-cum-class-cum-gender hegemonic consciousness is at the core of Biju Poulouse's representation. In one of the instances, he humiliates two youngsters on the basis of their colour and class origins. Yvonne Tasker's analysis of the action films of Hollywood states how selfhood is constructed in opposition to otherness: "blackness is understood within Hollywood's symbolic in terms of marginality and criminality" (32). The text constructs its fictional world of the police station with characters from the underbelly of society. This marks a deliberate shift from the normally visualised hegemonic constructions of masculinity with upper class elite villainism. The taming and shaming of the powerless functions as the cultural capital of a hero who identifies himself in the unconscious with the elitism of middle class family and marriage. The hero says vehemently to one of his opponents in classist

language: “I who was a college lecturer after completing postgraduation and MPhil has become an SI not to *shave* lapdogs like you” (00:33:18-24). His concept of the police rooted in hegemonic aggression is manifested in his statement “there is room for only one thug in my station limit (my trans.; 00:07:31-34). Even those instances of the display of benevolent masculinity are indirectly the assertion of his elitist class and caste manifested as police power. Asserting the protector role, he declares his philosophy of violence: “The district court, high court and supreme court of poor people is this police station. There will be solutions for every case here, and we undertake take all kinds of quotations” (my trans.; 00:16:48-53).

Biju is constructed as symptomatic of Malayali middle class elitist consciousness. The working of the Ideological State Apparatus could be explained in the context of his treatment of the women characters in the narrative. Since Biju is positioned in a dominant order, the women characters get often abused and harassed by him. For example, in the instance where Biju settles a conflict between Kumar an auto driver and Shirley his mistress, the hero construction of the film is revealed to be misogynistic and anti-ethnic. Ensuring justice for the complaining woman, he humiliates the man by slapping him, says: “You should be punished for two things. One, you slapped her face in public. And secondly, you fell in love with such an item” (my trans.; 00:46:51-57). The objectification of the female bodies, markedly visible for their non-fairness, is the constitutive dominant of Biju’s heroism. Also noteworthy is the construction of the women as lustful against that of the hero who believes in mainstream values. Again, in the scene in which two women named Mary and Baby come to file a complaint against their exhibitionist male neighbour, there is the exposition of Biju’s elitist playfulness. When the accused is negatively

described, the hegemonic patriarchal heroism is revealed, as sexually teasing the women, in a close-up shot: “Had he been handsome, it would have been fine, right?” (my trans.; 00:39:29-33). When Mary says that both of them have been afraid of the police and police station since childhood, Biju tells them: “In my station limits; I won’t tolerate any kind of violence against women” (my trans.; 00:39:47-50). The hegemonic masculinity is constructed on his casteism and misogyny.

Biju is an embodiment of all ‘morally correct’ attitudes, characteristic of mainstream Kerala society. This attitude is manifested in the contemptuous treatment and the regressive portrayal of the human rights activist. Thus, Biju is given a sort of moral superiority which enables him to make sexually explicit comments to negate the issues of custodial violence raised by the lady human rights activist. When the repressive mechanism of the state is raised as an argument, the Christian hero glorifies violence instead of containing it. What constitutes the Christian hero in the dominant order is the most striking part of this analysis. Unlike his predecessors Sam Alex and Joseph Alex, he is presented as distanced from his religion. Still, the text denotes how the police being an institution of power, his subjectivity is sutured into the dominant ideological structure. Ideology, argues Althusser, exists before the individual. If so, ideology has ‘always already’ determined a specific set of roles, a particular subjectivity, into which the individual will be placed. The representation of the body on screen invites a reading by the spectator through which assumptions about the character’s interiority are made from examining his exteriority (Gates 37). In *Action Hero Biju*, it is this conferred, celebrated subjectivity which makes him a surrogate of the mainstream consciousness.

The text is also noteworthy for the secularizing of its hero whose religious status is never discussed not even in terms of cinematic imagery. Although there are no obvious visual indications of his upper caste Christian status, his hegemonic superiority is revealed in the way he behaves with his social inferiors. The series of actions performed during the ride with the police officer constitutes the core of the 'upper casteness' of the hero. Gates has observed the magic of such movies on investigative heroes: "Images of 'musculinity' are geared toward action cinema's dominant heterosexual male audience ... to induce admiration and the desire for emulation, evoking the notion of the ego ideal" (40). The formation of the hero as the ego ideal in narrative cinema has always marked the caste/class hegemony in the form of a presence even when it is not specifically addressed.

It might appear quite casual and incidental that all the above narratives of police actions discussed have minimal presence of the female. In other words, there is the construction of a masculine sphere of action erasing the female. It is a strategy of the patriarchal forces in Malayalam cinema to systematically erase the increasing number of the feminine in the Kerala public sphere through education and employment. In a state where women are not an insignificant part of the police force, police action films negotiate this paradigm shift by making the women in the force invisible.

Regarding the emergence of the cop action heroes in the American cinema of the 1980s, what Gates has observed is true of Indian cinema in general: "The cop action hero of the 1980s resurrected many of the same traits as the vigilante cop hero – the law was often seen as ineffectual and the hero had to break the rules or bend the law to successfully bring the villain to justice" (128). The heroes discussed

above – Joseph Alex, Antony Punnekkadan, Sam Alex and Biju Paulose – are ‘vigilantes’ who appear to save society in moments of crisis through right intervention. The politics of representation which is in accordance with the congealed sense of societal expectation and ideological embeddedness requires an elitist Hindu or Christian male to enact the sense of justice. Thus, the hegemonic masculine Christian hero becomes a cult, with subsequent police avatars, like Rajan Zachariah in *Kasaba* (Dir. Nithin Renji Panicker, 2016), Joseph in *Joseph*, and Abraham Mathew Mathen in *Pappan* (Dir. Joshiy, 2022). The spectator can only be oriented psychologically to identify with the hegemonic ideal ego in the twenty first century narratives is the bedrock upon which conservatism regressively exists and is perpetuated.

Another domain, in which the politics of the hegemonic community representation is investigated to study the shifting patterns of masculinity construction, is the cinematic narrativisation of settlement. The next chapter of the dissertation will sociologically analyse the archetype of the settler code.

CHAPTER VI

THE COWBOY CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE SETTLER

Kerala, often referred to as “God’s Own Country”, is known for its rich cultural heritage, scenic landscapes and diverse population. One of the significant aspects that formed the social fabric of the state is the phenomenon of continuous migration and settlement. Traditionally defined as “the permanent change of residence by an individual or group” (Britannica), and “the movement of large numbers of people, birds or animals from one place to another” (Oxford) due to factors such as lack of employment and rampant poverty the process of migration has profoundly influenced and shaped the demographics, economy and culture of the state.

V. J. Pradeep Kumar attempts to broaden the semantic nuances of the term, “settlement” by analysing the two morphological components of its Malayalam translation. *Kudiyettam*, the Malayalam equivalent of ‘settlement’ is a combination of two Malayalam words: *kudi* and *ettam* meaning setting up a house by a poor man (2). Adapting to the new environment, building infrastructure, integrating culturally, and contributing to the development of the region, settlement suggests the integration of a group. This is especially true in the case of the Christian community of Kerala which had multiple kinds of mass movements within the geographical boundaries of the country. In the context of settler migration, this nuanced understanding of the process is culture-specific.

The geography of Kerala, with its strategic coastal location, was a centre for ancient trade routes and attracted settlers from various parts of the world, including Arabs, Chinese, and Europeans. As a result of the interactions with varied sections of global communities, in history there are cases of people moving in and settling in the state. Historical records point out similar accounts of people migrating to faraway lands, especially during the colonial period. *Migration and Economic Development of Kerala* written by K. V. Joseph categorises the migration in the twentieth century as having three different patterns (1). The first is the large outflow of a section of educated people and skilled workers in search of better careers and lives to Gulf countries, Europe and the US (8). The second is the movement of a large section of skilled Malayali labourers to industrially developed Indian cities like Bombay, New Delhi, Bangalore and so on. As a sub-category to this, there occurred the migration of a large number of people, mostly belonging to the forward communities, from rural areas to urban centres that eventually transformed cities like Kochi, Thiruvananthapuram and Kozhikode into bustling hubs of economic activity (9). The third is the internal migration of people mostly of Syrian Christian communities from the rural areas of central Kerala to Malabar and High range regions in the 1940s, primarily due to poverty, the shortage of land and hostile social conditions (22).

Swapnabhumiyl: Malabar Kudiyetta Charithram (The Dreamland: A History of Migration to Malabar, 1978) written by Pazheparambil Thomas records Christian migration from Central Travancore to Malabar. The farmers who lived on agriculture, due to the shortage of cultivatable land, first migrated to places on the north-eastern hilly regions, like Arakkulam, Moolamattam, Velliamattam,

Udambannoor, Peerumedu, Mundakkayam, Kattappana and Kumily (1). The Malabar Migration which began in 1928 and continued upto 1955 is said to have a great role in the social organisation of a community which was proud of farming. Thomas is quoted by the website of Kerala Tourism in the section on “Christianity in Kerala”: “Only 20 families and a few planters were there in the first batch. The migration slowed down from 1930 to 1935 owing to the deaths of some of the migrants due to malaria and the return of some others. It again gained momentum for 10 years from 1945.” The migrations to Malabar and to the High Ranges were socially and structurally different. The plantations of High Ranges were under the British and it was mostly the Dalit labourers who migrated there first. The Christian migration was different and mostly happened to places where crops like cardamon, pepper, coffee and other valuable spices could be farmed. The settlement in Malabar was more like an Exodus to the Christians in search of a “land flowing with milk and honey” (Exod. 33:2).

Despite the fact that migration has always been polymorphous in the context of Kerala, the chapter primarily analyses what triggered the mass movement of Christians from certain landscapes to certain other terrains within the state in the twentieth century. It focuses on what constitutes the different shades of the Christian hero stereotype in the settlements inside and outside Kerala.

There are two paradoxical constructions of Christian settlements which are part of the hero construction, as well. They are simultaneously anchored in the hegemonic order and in the objectification axis. Because of the Syrian Christian tradition in Kerala and the continuous practices to historically align them with the upper caste Hindus, they were structurally placed as different from other minority

groups – the Muslims, the Dalits and, the other subaltern groups. This is more identifiable with the settler planter class of the High ranges, where there could have been a difference in the social formation at the time of migration. On the contrary, Markose argues in “Religion, Modernity, and the Nation” especially in the context of Malabar settlement in contrast to the landlords, the Christians who opened up educational and healthcare institutions were positioned as the other of the dominant order (166). However, with the formation of the Kerala state in 1956 both these identities coalesced into each other.

Malayalam literature and cinema have played a crucial role in depicting and preserving the narratives about individuals and communities constantly on the move. Through compelling storytelling and vivid characterisation, Malayalam films have not only reflected the realities of migration but also moulded public perceptions and societal attitudes towards it.

There are a good number of Malayalam novels and short stories written on settlement by the writers of this era and later. *Vishakanyaka* (*Poison Damsel*, 1948), written by S. K. Pottakad, *Orotha* (1982) by Kakkanadan, *Bespurkana* (2006) by K. J. Baby, *Vagdatha Bhoomi* (*The Promised Land*) by Muttathu Varkey, *Kaatumanka* (*Wild Woman*) by Kaanam E. J., *Valli* (2018) by Sheela Tomy and *Puttu* (*Ant Hill*, 2019) by Vinoy Thomas are narrativisations of the history of migration and settlement with the innumerable subtexts associated with them. While novels like *Vishakanyaka* maintain the phenomenon as “a piece of social history in which the mankind do not bow their head before nature” (Ajith) later novels like *Valli* subjectively analyse the process from a personal point-of-view.

A number of Malayalam films since the 1980s such as *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal* (1986), *Mrugaya* (1989), *Vidheyam* (Dir. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, 1991), *Soorya Manasam* (Dir. Viji Thampi, 1993), *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* (Dir. Lal Jose, 1998), *Manssinakkare* (Dir. Sathyan Anthikad, 2003), *Vellimoonga* (Dir. Jibu Jacob, 2014), *Iyobinte Pusthakam* (Dir. Amal Neerad, 2016), *Jallikattu* (Dir. Lijo Jose Pellissery, 2019) and *Churuli* (Dir. Lijo Jose Pellissery, 2021) have variously portrayed the Christians as one of the most important settler communities in Kerala. They demonstrate that migration to the Malabar region, the High Ranges and to places outside Kerala and the establishment of settlements have become a familiar trope in Malayalam cinema. However, since the 1980s, the settler myth has undergone a significant change in narrativisation. As cinema was attempting to construct and document the changing dynamics of social and economic power, it has moulded a special class of the settler hero – ambivalent as the ideal ego figure in the surface text and the insignificant other in the deep text. The examination of the roots of the settler code and the ideological assumptions responsible for the self-fashioning of the settler is, therefore, a necessary domain of identity analysis.

Generally, two contrastive patterns of Christian settler stereotyping are identified in films that discuss the socio-political dimensions of settlement. The first pattern is that of the ideologically hegemonic settler who is established as the dominant subject, enforcing his perspective, beliefs and politics on others. *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*, *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* and *Manssinakkare* are examples of the dominant alpha male settler. The second is the critique of the conception of the settler as the representative of the hegemonic code visible in the

narrative. In *Iyobinte Pusthakam*, the ‘settler other’ is more objectified than glorified in the visual spectrum.

The chapter equates the films set in the fictional High Ranges to the Hollywood Westerns and the movies discussing the geographical problematic in the context of colonialism, imperialism or neoimperialism. The Western genre which is described as ‘the American epic’ by Stuart Miller (*The Guardian*), emphasises its essential rootedness in the nation’s history. The Western is:

a particular cinema set on the American Western frontier mostly during the second half of the nineteenth century. Such stories followed a clear pattern of conflict and resolution revolving around stock characters such as the rancher, the gunslinger, the good wife, the drunken Indian, and the prostitute with a heart of gold, treating common themes such as the conflict between nature and, with good (civilization) inevitably triumphing over evil (nature).

The Great Train Robbery (Dir. Edwin S. Porter, 1903) is generally considered by film critics as the pioneering western film. After the second world war, Westerns emerged as a very dominant genre, creating an image of American self-reliance and manliness in films such as *Stagecoach* (Dir. John Ford, 1939), *High Noon* (Dir. Carl Foreman, 1952) *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Dir. Sergio Leone, 1967) and *The Wild Bunch* (Dir. Sam Peckinpah, 1969). Traditionally, Westerns were “a form of modern mythology that offers narrative representations of Americans as rugged, self-sufficient individuals taming a savage wilderness with common sense and direct action. The concept of the frontier as a sort of societal blank slate is at the heart of this mythology” (Barsam and Monahan 96).

The generic significance of the Westerns in American cinema has been a well-researched topic. Brian Neve reads the political meaning of the Western in *Film and Politics in America* (1992) as follows:

The Western is often seen as part of the populist cultural tradition in America, favouring as it does the west over the east, and with its suspicion of large landowners, bankers and politicians. Some of the most successful Western films dramatize the conflict involved in the taming of the frontier, and the arrival from the east of 'civilisation'—and its discontents. (34)

Will Wright theorised the genre of Western as the myth of American individualism. According to him, the lone cowboy emerging from a vast wilderness, riding a horse, wearing a gun represents freedom and equality and serves as a cultural guide to the assumptions and concepts of individualism, to what individualist theory asserts as well as to what it hides (1-2). The Wild West is an exotic, still dangerous place, offering “the hope of a new social order built on an open frontier” (Wright 1). The cultural story that the Wild West symbolises is, Wright argues, that of building a new society, a new society in America, and this new society rests on the theory of market individualism (1). The traditional Christian hero of the migration centric narratives in Malayalam also embodies the cultural ideals of rugged individualism, masculinity, and violence.

Analysing the racism in the history of cinema from a postcolonial perspective, Stam and Spence focus on the flawed mimesis of mainstream (Hollywood) cinema: “Hundreds of Hollywood westerns turned history on its head by making the Native Americans appear to be intruders on what was originally their land, and provided a paradigmatic perspective through which to view the whole of

the nonwhite world” (6). The history of colonialism and the dominance it brings in are justified through the glorification of the adventurous white man on galloping horses and his thundering gunshots piercing the body of the multitude of natives as part of the gold rush in the frontier town and surrounding landscapes. Due to the denial of concrete history and alternative construction of a pro-conquistador history, the Westerns are, as Stam and Spence argue, filled with “the innumerable ethnographic, linguistic and even topographical blunders in Hollywood” (6).

Ella Shohat blends postcolonial studies and cinema in the light of Said’s *Orientalism*. Her pioneering article “Gender and Culture of Empire” which is a reading of the Western as an instance of Orientalist mythmaking, holds some methodological value in defining the structural format of the genre. The structure asserts that the allegorical Western hero, being of very virile nature, travels to and engages with the outside world (Shohat 20). Key to this study was the positioning of the American cowboy as situated on the right side of the law, established by ideological conventions. “This hero exerts his sex appeal, colonialist gaze, scientific knowledge, authoritative language, technology, inclination to civilize, astuteness, and rectitude over people that are his binary opposites” (Semmerling 34). Like the colonising hero in nineteenth century European imperialist novels, the hero strips the land of its enigma as he opens it up to discovery, appropriates its mysterious treasures that its indigenes cannot fully appreciate, and saves it from its own fate of physical and mental disorder.

Andre Bazin who opens up the scope of the genre in “The Western: Or the American Film Par Excellence” (1953) included in *What is Cinema, Volume II* (1972) speaks of the possibility of assessing any narrative which is set in a landscape

like the American West. The premise, or the essential principle of the Western is, according to him, the clash between “the forces of evil of great epic Manicheism and the knights of the true cause” (145). The Westerns are, it is argued, characterised by “immense stretches of prairie, of deserts, of rocks to which the little wooden town clings precariously (a primitive amoeba of a civilization)” (145). Bazin explains how this landscape becomes the location of a clash of ideologies:

The Indian, who lived in this world, was incapable of imposing on it man’s order. He mastered it only by identifying himself with its pagan savagery. The white Christian on the contrary is truly the conqueror of a new world. The grass sprouts where his horse has passed. He imposes simultaneously his moral and his technical order, the one linked to the other and the former guaranteeing the latter. (145)

It is with reference to this historicity of the Westerns that the chapter studies the significance of the settler hero stereotype. The analysis places the hero in the cultural, ecological and political structures which are read in the context of hegemonic and subversive versions of masculinity. Malayalam cinema does not have the formal features of a cowboy western like the wide-angle shots of vast landscapes, the quest for hidden treasures and the figure of the wandering cowboy with guns. However, the thesis argues that there are narratives of the quest for the land and subordination of the natives, emphasizing the basic feature of the American genre. The popular films of the 1980s onwards, with dashing Christian heroes in the High Ranges are based on the same premise of the westerns. Central to those narratives are the adventures of the migrating heroes to a land apparently occupied by the natives who are the ‘ugly’ outsiders.

Lal Jose's debut movie, *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*, written by Sreenivasan, set in a border village between Kerala and Tamilnadu, about a crisis of a settler family is an interesting text to explore the dichotomous binary of the settler hero versus native villain. This settlement narrative can be seen as a local western by analysing the structure of the character arc of Chandy (Mammootty). The narrative structure of the film is a fusion of the western and the traditional Malayalam cine popular. The film opens with the generic wide angle long shots of a florally decorated bullock cart carrying a coffin, later revealed to be that of Michael. After a series of long shots of the cemetery, mixed with the close-ups of the community, the hero Chandy is seen by Sonu, and through him the spectators also in another long shot. The formal ambience of the Western is created through Vidyasagar's haunting background score. Although Chandy is a misunderstood hero of the "family cinema" at this stage, the technical conventions of the genre enabled the reception of the movie as a Western.

Mainstream Hollywood cinema, since its inception, functioned as a majoritarian visual spectacle that voyeuristically subjected Blacks and Native populations to intense scrutiny. In "Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction", Stam and Spence inspect how the media and western cinema have been misrepresenting minority ethnic groups. Since D.W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* (1914), a controversial narrative called out as a racist film by NAACP and other black activists, the practices of representation in cinema placed the white heterosexual male as the norm in Hollywood and other dominant cinemas, by masking the actual reality of colonialism and imperial practices. Stuart Hall's insightful observation, in "The Spectacle of the 'Other'", on the flawed and

ideologically embedded structures of the visual representation of black athletes in the popular media, reveals how racism is at play in media and cinematic discourses:

[P]eople who are in any way significantly different from the majority ‘them’ rather than ‘us’ are frequently exposed to [a] binary [to be both villains and heroes] of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarized, binary extremes – good/bad, civilized/primitive, ugly/excessively attractive, repelling because-different/ compelling-because strange-and-exotic. And they are often required to be both things at the same time! (Hall 229)

Just as the early Hollywood classic glorified the white hero and his people for being progressive and integrational, early Malayalam cinema also inscribed heroes like Sankaran Nair in *Neelakuyil* as progressive social realists. About the perpetuation of this aesthetics initiated in P. Bhaskaran’s film which is considered as the first major Malayalam cinema with a “progressive” protagonist, K. P. Jayakumar notes thus:

The history of subsuming Dalit and subaltern cultural diversity within the geographies of the caste system, which class politics has refused to address, problematizes the ‘public’ construction of ‘Malayali’. Such discourses are built on the need to define all Malayalam speakers as a single community. Caste groups, losing their positions of power in the social hierarchy, are universalizing the culture of inclusion. Language, literature, music, and film all become different forms of elite logic. (my trans.; 133)

Thus in Malayalam cinema, hegemonic heroism and its multiple renditions become the preferred narrative form to the spectator without class and caste differences.

Accordingly, heroes belonging to an alternate identity group in terms of caste or

religion, in common, were “Nairised” to an extent. In turn, this representation matrix naturalised the construction of hegemonic practices in Malayalam cinema of the following decades.

As already discussed, the migrations to Malabar and the High Ranges were pre-independent or an immediate post-independent phenomenon. *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* that came out in the late 1990s, at a time when migration of the Christians to the far-away-land or “the last frontier” in the Kerala context ceased assumes special significance. At the outset, it could be argued that the film serves as a reminder of the historical reality of migration, which largely contributed to the economic wealth of many ancestral Christian households. Thus, the film is read as a combination of the old colonial values of domination and subjugation, and how it generates a revivalist myth of settlement among the Christians of the contemporary era, deserves scrutiny. However, as the narrative discusses tropes like disputes over land ownership and scarcity of water, the setting of the story in the 1990s disseminates another level of signification. With the nation becoming neoliberal thanks to the open door economic policy, and the Dalits, Adivasis and natives in different parts of the country demanding an equitable distribution of all natural resources including land and water, the text can be seen as an allegory of the politics of land acquisition.

Christian migration has parallel temporal and spatial dimensions. Outside literature and cinema, there were many parallel narratives which documented the popular plantation and settler myth in church histories, family histories, individual biographies and regional narratives. For instance, church related literature in the form of the aforementioned work *Swapnabhumiyl*, the historically important record of migration to Malabar written by Pazheparambil Thomas and *Daivam*

Namodukoode: Malabar Kudiyetta Charitram, Atmakathayum by Mar Sebastian Valloppilly the first Bishop of Tellechery record such a list of success stories. The works, which initially sought to fictionalise experiences, eventually evolved into stereotypical narratives infused with a new form of heroism. These narratives replaced the image of the settler as a mere survivor of natural disasters with a more dominant archetype in the 1990s. They redefined the settler as the antithesis of feudal lords, carving out a popular mythos that positioned the settler as a heroic figure in opposition to traditional power structures.

The politics of representation in the settler narrative films is multi-faceted. There are three different patterns of subjectivity constructions in *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*. The first deals with how the hero's selfhood is fashioned in opposition to the dominant other. The second sees how the hero's selfhood is hegemonically constructed in opposition to the other within the community. The third positions the texts paradigmatically with similar narratives in which the settler hero becomes the other of the civilised, modern archetype in the mainstream cine-populars.

The first is similar to the typical narrative arc of the American cowboy cinema. All narratives work by structurally creating an inferior other as Stuart Hall observes in the aforesaid quote. In Malayalam literature, like in the colonial English texts such as William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and so on, there was an attempt to construct a binary other. In similar terms, Palanichami and Maruthu form the binary other in the settlement narrative against the dominant ideal order. Chandy is represented as loving, virile, selfless, practical, responsible, flexible and physically macho. In opposition Palanichami is selfish, greedy, scandal mongering and physically disabled. While Chandy acts as

Ichayan (elder brother) to Michael and family, Palanichami, being Maruthu's uncle, is constructed as an opportunist and exploitative womanizer. Maruthu is frequently addressed by Chandychan, as "pulunthan" (idiot) or "pulunthankiriyan" (idiot-faced) which illustrates one of the myriad ways in which the natives are Calibanised in the process. Regarding such deliberate constructions of the bodies of the other, K. P. Jayakumar observes: "Views constructed by the logic of market economy of the elite mainstream construct subaltern images with a very precise ideological aim. Such characters are often mentally or physically 'disabled'. Such expressions mark the status of 'subordinate' bodies who have 'undeservedly' attained status" (my trans.; 69). Thus, the identification matrix of the text is generally in sync with the mainstream popular cinema that, over the years, produced a number of stereotypes of the sexual minorities, subalterns and Muslims. This reification of the non-Malayali natives in *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* sanctifies the ideological domination and the resultant taming of them.

Further extension of this is observed in *Phantom Pailey*, another narrative set in the High ranges, when Lalu Alex's Dhimdhi Mathai, being on the side of the titular hero calls the Tamil villain character Varadaraja Perumal "Pandi Karimpara Pulayadimone" (02:14:11-13) an offensive obscene remark, racially abusing the villain. As the settler's heroism is defined in opposition to the natives, such narratives ignore, consciously or unconsciously, the organic vibe and rhythm of the latter's lives. Since the 1990s, Malayalam cinema used this stratified trope to represent myriad Tamil villains. Reshmi and Anilkumar observe that the "Tamil antagonists are personalities who disrupt the contented family life and social conditions of Malayalis" (33). Perumal in Bhadran's *Udayon*, Pandi Durai in Rafi

Mecartin's *Pandippada* (2005) and Vatti Raja in Alphonse Puthren's *Neram* (2013) are some of the otherised Tamil antagonists, threatening the safety and happiness of the Malayali heroes.

The settler hero code of the film is evolved in the context of some of the genre conventions of the Westerns. Central to the American genre, is the realm of identification of the spectator with the hero. The point of Chandy's first entry to the land is in the midst of a feud between a teashop owner and a driver. Maravathoor is established as a raw landscape with its people constituting largely the migrants or the ethnic natives. There are innumerable long shots of the land which convey not only the remoteness of the place, but also the absence of law. A locale with no controlling presence of the state, Maravathoor emerges as the magical island of Crusoe for the hero of the film for the manifestation of his individualism.

This invites comparison with the Hollywood westerns which subverted history against material evidence: "Many of the misconceptions concerning Third World peoples derive from the long parade of lazy Mexicans, shifty Arabs, savage Africans and exotic Asiatics that have disgraced our movie screens" (Stam and Spence 6). When observed in the context of the demand for land and resistance to displacement from the point of view of the natives, the construction of Palanichami and Maruthu as the other becomes problematic, creating a sense of "flawed mimesis". Furthering the argument, the film uses contrastive shots: one which panoramically captures Palanichami's house and property in wide angle and long shots connoting wealth in opposition to the initial barrenness of Michael's. Such flaws result from these distorting stereotypes to represent an oppressed group.

The representation of Maruthu, as already explicated, played by Sreenivasan as the binary other can be paradigmatically read in the context of Priyadarshan's *Thenmavin Kombath* (1994). Yadukrishnan traces the hegemonic Namboodiri / Nair individual to whom the Dalits are subordinated frequently as a recurring trope in Priyadarshan films especially with reference to *Aryan* (1988) in which Sreenivasan plays a Dalit character (9). Appakkala in *Thenmavin Kombath*, the vicious scandal-mongering simpleton in the narrative is pitted as a binary opposite, a foil to the heroism of Manikyan, played by Mohanlal. The aesthetics of the Priyadarshan film is the tragicomic expression of the desire of the 'undesirable' other to replace Manikyan, as the best bullock cart driver. Studying the Sreenivasan characters of Malayalam cinema, U. Rajeev traces the formation of an alternative masculinity in *Janapriya Cinemayile Malayali: Sreenivasan Cinemakalil*: "Those Sreenivasan characters who are black in colour question the exchange value and meaning of blackness as a social reality in the cultural context of narrative cinema. It is done by the insertion of his black body into the symbolic system that prefers whiteness and beauty" (my trans.; 82). Maruthu and Appakkala are structurally designed as the other of the elitist upper caste Nair and Christian heroes in both the films to satisfy the ego ideal of the spectators, positioned in the hegemonic order.

Chandy and Palanichami, as argued, represent two different ideological positions: domination through benevolent humanity versus capricious greed. However, both the character types converge at the point of imposing one's version over the other. What positions Palanichami as the villain of the narrative is not only his insatiable greed for the six acres of land that Michael purchased and the actions that he does to own it but also his libidinal drives. The hero is idealised in his

sublimation of the erotic drives in contrast to the villain whose libido is profoundly expressive. Even the scandalous stories of adultery between Chandy and Mary (01:43:50-59) spread by Palanichami can be seen as an expression of the sexual libido. In other words, greed, miserliness and the absence of faith in human nature can be extensions of unsatisfied sexual energy. The spectator who is sutured into the settler consciousness is made to see Chandy's benevolence and sacrifice, so that he/she is sympathetic to him. In fact, this legitimises any attempt of the hero to dominate others.

The process of migration, as in the Hollywood westerns, is glorified and the settler emerges as the hero against the primitivism of natives like Palanichami and Maruthu. In texts like *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*, the hero is characterised, as Robin Wood argues, "the virile adventurer, the potent, untrammelled man of action" (62). What gives the hero legitimacy and authenticity in the narrative is the native's desire for possessing land through fraudulent means. Consequently, the land which Michael owns operates as the site of the film's structural oppositions. Hence, it may be observed that as a cinematic discourse, the settler hero's perspective about the land is characterised by benign desire for possession and that of the villain as one of malignant greed.

This visual representation pattern, as formed with regard to the popular, grants Chandy every right to subject the other. The moment he arrives in Maravathoor, after Michael meets with an accident while digging the well, he establishes his ideological set of rules. Chandy who was assisting Kora sir, the politician, as a goonda or bodyguard, at his home village in the mainland continues his resilient fight in the village settlement to make the land fertile. He transforms the

new site and its people outside his homeland, by the imposition of his settler ideology,

The second level of subjectivity construction is the hero's difference with the members of his own community. Accordingly, Michael in the text is positioned as the binary other of the hero. Of the two brothers, Michael represents the lazy, drunk, reckless and irresponsible settler who is a colossal failure in managing both family and property. On the contrary, Chandy, is responsible, hardworking, pious, and caring. The climax of the film is a clash between these two ideological positions – Chandy's magnanimous selfless love towards his brother versus egoism and alcoholic paranoia. The narrative successfully plants this by a series of cross-cutting shots between Jesus on the cross and Chandy entering the church in the song "Karunamayane kaval vilakke" (00:10:00-14:30). The illustrious and imaginative Chandy, with his friends, completes digging the well, waters the plantain trees and captures the villains. This contrast empowers him to domesticate and ideologically tame Annie and the other women of the narrative, as well.

In continuation with the dominant practices of hegemonic settler hero is the endorsement and amalgamation of the androcentric ideology. Though the flashback is organised contrary to the fundamental structures of identification in mainstream cinema, the hero is visualised from the feminine perspective of Annie which glorifies the hero through the devices of framing and the structural mechanisms of cinema. It could be argued that Chandy sees everyone through the way he objectifies the natives like Maruthu. This enables him to morally instruct and thereby dominate Annie, Mary and her grandmother.

Interpreting Lacan, Laura Mulvey observes how the narrative film is codified as the manifestation of patriarchal desire. The moment Annie's vulnerability as a woman is exposed, when Johnykutty and gang attempts to rape her, Chandy becomes her protector. This going back to the primal male ego might have unconsciously empowered him to take an ideologically embedded position and exhort her regarding the role of woman in society. The patriarchal hero's advice to Annie in the middle of the narrative underlines the deeply Christian, but hegemonic patriarchal value system of submission: "Girls from good families should get up at 4.00 am. Clean up the house and its premises. Should take bath. And must make a cup of coffee for their husbands, if married" (my trans.; 01:00:04-14). In another narrative instance, Chandy advises Annie in a sequence of long close-up shots to wear a half saree connoting modesty in the patriarchal ideology: "Girls should be careful about their attire after a certain age. Else men will be provoked. That provocation leads to rapes and molestations. Kora sir's daughter Rosy who has not turned fourteen yet, won't go out without wearing half-saree always" (my trans.; 01:08:27-54). After saving her from the villainous gang of Devassykkutty and gang, he asserts himself over her by saying that "a girl's life is like an egg. It may look really good, but it is fragile" (my trans.; 01:16:49-58). Being an integral feature of the settler ideology, all the women characters in the text are confined to the domestic interior space. Even in Chandy's absence, at the climax, as in the beginning, the heroine secludes herself in the church.

Essential to the settlement narratives and to westerns is the centrality of the land – the motif around which the crisis is formed. The settlers come to a land with aspirations to make it big through physical work. Michael and Mary, the couple are

the primary settlers in this narrative. Agriculture and allied activities, central to Christian identity in Kerala, act as the central focal point of the narrative.

Accordingly, the land assumes immense significance in the construction of the settler hero type. There lies the central contrast between the hero and the other.

Chandy valiantly puts it in the narrative that he would surrender to neither man nor soil (00:54:12-16), echoing the sense of ‘gumption’ embedded in the American plantation myth in *Gone with the Wind* (1936), which is also a text with racist implications: “Land’s the only thing in the world that amounts to anything ... for ‘tis the only thing in this world that lasts, and don’t you be forgetting it! ‘Tis the only thing worth working for, worth fighting for – worth dying for” (Mitchell 36).

Yet another aspect of settlement is the objectification of nature. The settler having been constructed as anthropocentric is a problematic proposition in Kerala. While the mainstream socio-historical perspective, endorsed even by the progressive left equates, settlement with encroachment, the subjective narrativisations of the phenomenon perceive agriculture as essential to the survival of humanity. Chandy is an archetypal Adam from *Genesis*, reiterating the human centric myth of domination of the biosphere, when he explains to Annie, after forcibly capturing her cock: “All the vegetables, birds, fishes and animals in the entire world were created for man to feed on” (my trans.; 00:48:47-54). Similarly, he confidently remarks to Mary and Annie: “it is certain that nothing can stand between me and the land” (my trans.; 00:54:12-16). These scenes designate the Christian hero as both anthropocentric and misogynistic. On both the occasions the camera, changing its angle, captures the hero in a medium shot to connote his command over other characters. The outcome is a narrative in which the settler dominates the space, the people and its bio-world.

The third pattern of subjectivity construction of the settler hero in settler narrative is the basic primitivity of the settler himself. The general visual framework of the High ranges in Malayalam is that of the uncivilised other, standing in opposition to the city dweller. In *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*, being looked at in this fashion, similar to a noble savage, represents the settler hero as an alternative to the urban bourgeois existence, embodying a raw, unfiltered approach to life that prioritises practical survival over societal conventions. The narrative traditions in cinema constructs this primitivity not as weakness but as strength, manifesting as an innate ability to navigate challenges through folk wisdom, local knowledge, and a deep communion with the natural environment. It is due to this that Chandy is proud of being a “worker of the Thiruvithamkoor Congress party” led by his heroic leader K C Kora. But, it is implied that he must be a successful farmer who could not go down easily to wily men and natural forces. This agrarian spirit manifests as an ideology guiding him in everything, as exemplified in his recommendations of the traditional “ottamooli” to all problems of health. Rooted in a belief of divine entitlement to land and resources, he considers settlement as a natural right for sharing basic necessities like water and shelter (00:59:15-01:04:12). To explain this further, the scene (00:49:30-52:00) shall be investigated. This is where the conception of the settler hero works slightly deviant from that of the cowboy. When he fights, he is presented mostly in medium close-up shots, beating down the lorry driver to pieces. After the scene, he is presented from the point of view of Annie and Mary who with nauseating disgust perceive his savouring a few raw eggs with soda (00:52:20-55). The film incorporates such conventions to connote the settler other and subverts the hegemonic code in mainstream cinema.

Examining the ideological problematic of the film, it is argued that despite the narrative unfolding in a feminine perspective, it is the controlling gaze of the hero towards the natives that binds everything together. The spectator consumes the visual spectacle through this point, and therefore, settlement – conquest and subordination – of natives, women and even the environment is validated unproblematically in the cinema halls.

The ambivalence of the settler to be the good, the bad, and the ugly is what distinguishes him from the hegemonic hero archetype of Nair masculinity which was characterised by an emphasis on progressive liberal thinking and modernist values. This can be extended further by a cursory analysis of *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*, directed by P. Padmarajan, based on the novel *Namukku Gramangalil Chennu Raparkkam* by K. K. Sudhakaran. Examining the narrative trope of Christian settlement history and plantation, the Biblically allusive text lays bare the hegemonic code as the origin of social power. Different from the conventional settler movies, due to unconventional plot settings and the romance genre of the film, the narrative demonstrates the *raison d'etre* of plantation myth. Examining the narrative, it is argued that the cultural capital of settling enables the hegemonic masculine hero to “possess” the girl.

The hero of the movie is Solomon Mathai, a rich unmarried planter, owning a vineyard in the outskirts of Bangalore. He is different from the typical Christian settler heroes at the outset as the diegesis mostly unfolds in his Mysore home where his widowed mother stays. The text deals with two parallel levels of migration: First, that of the protagonist’s family which migrated to Mysore and second, Solomon’s resettlement to his vineyard in Bangalore. Like the mythical Solomon, who was

considered as the wisest among the Israelite kings, he falls in love with Sophia (“wisdom” in Greek), a neighbouring girl. The rest of the narrative of the romance is about how Solomon wins the girl, triumphing against all the odds.

Edward Said’s “Jane Austen and the Empire”, an essay included in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), studies the postcolonial dimensions of settlement during the colonial era in the context of Caribbean plantations and the Metropolis with regard to the classic novel, *Mansfield Park* (1814). He argues that empires depend on colonial estates for their sustenance and the perpetuation of the civilised order at home. Accordingly, the absent Sir Thomas Bertram at the imperial household of Mansfield Park assumes power because of the way he could regulate the slaves in the estate at Antigua. For Said argues: “Whatever was wrong there – and the internal evidence garnered by Warren Roberts suggests that economic depression, slavery, and competition with France were at issue – Sir Thomas was able to fix, thereby maintaining his control over his colonial domain” (87). In similar terms, the capital which enables Solomon to rescue Sophia at the end of the film is the way he exerts his control over the workers in the plantation situated far away from home. At the beginning of the film, Solomon explains to his younger cousin Antony who comes from Mavelikkara to Mysore for higher education the vastness of his plantation, how he manages his workers there and so on. In a medium shot inside the house during the night he boastfully claims: “I have planted vines in 56 acres. I own 56 acres of vineyards alone, besides pepper, passionfruit, mulberry and corn” (my trans.; 00:11:40-52).

Central to this argument of plantation and possession is the reference of the trade unions and how they would adversely affect his plantation in his absence: “If

there is no one to supervise, it is better not to plant at all. These days are not like my father's. Though not as powerful as in Kerala, there are unions and wage boards there as well" (my trans.; 00:12:06-19). By such a reference the deep-seated anti-working class sentiments among the landowners is passed on to Antony. Although his community capital elevates him as a settler hero, the film presents him as an equal through eyeline match shots. Similar to Sir Thomas Bertram in Jane Austen's novel, Solomon is foregrounded as the dominant, authoritative, power-wielding settler. Antony's visit to the plantation later gives hints of the split persona of the hero as an aggressively hardworking planter, managing the labour force and the Bohemian settler indulging in carnal pleasures.

In reality, the narrative is structured around the dominant controlling gaze of Solomon over Sophia. It is through the voyeuristic glance that he wins the hardworking girl's love. He repeats his hopes of having a partner who likes to assist him in the vineyards. As Mulvey argues, what works in the film is the psychological structuring of all narratives which satisfy the patriarchal ego. The dimension of power which is specific to the hero is the individualism that he owns from his success as a planter.

The cinematic conventions of mimetic realism tend to hide the domain of hegemonic subjectivity of the hero by the constant use of eye level match shots. In fact, the middlebrow cinema popularised in Malayalam by Padmarajan, Bharathan and Kamal in the 1980s, changed the visual grammar of cinema, not only through the hitherto unaddressed themes, but rather in the form. However, two instances in the narrative locate Solomon, the hero, in the symbolic order of ideological dominance. Solomon's mother Reethamma marks the superiority of the educated

planter class, by calling their neighbours “cultureless people” (58:40, 01:03:00 and 01:06:05) three times. Despite the fact that the two families stay in the same neighbourhood, and belong to the same religious community, the planter class status of the hero and his family place them in a privileged position. Moreover, the otherwise progressive hero is unable to interfere and correct his mother like the way he does when Sofia was harassed by her stepfather. Thus, the political unconscious of the narrative makes him consume and act in a subdued manner whenever class is played out. This can be read together with Solomon’s resisting his possible marriage with a society lady by using the familiar trope of toxic masculinity: “If anything she says irritates me, I would kick her out” (my trans.; 00:21:22).

Solomon is considered a revolutionary hero for his dashing gesture against the mainstream public consciousness. The economic capital of the vineyard and the social capital as a successful planter make the hero finally take the raped Sophia to the vineyards as initially promised. Solomon’s hegemonic masculinity as a hero is established, not only through an expressively violent narrative actions but also through his embeddedness in the dominant ideology.

Though the masculine in *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* and *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal* are settler heroes bearing many of the typical character traits of dominance, in the twenty first century, the narratives of hegemonic subjugation undergo a sort of nuanced subversion. It is evidenced by *Manassinakkare*, set in an imaginary village named Kinassery somewhere in Kerala. Identifiable as sensitive masculinity, it encompasses a more humane and emotionally intelligent approach in the representation spectrum of the Christian hero. The attempt is to analyse how the

stardom of Jayaram is differently constructed, unlike the typical hegemonic versions of the superstardom of Mohanlal and Mammooty.

The emotional core of Reji's subjectivity is his filial love towards his father. After colonial interactions, Christianity absorbed a European concept of monogamous family. Chacko Mappila and Reji are projected as an ideal father-son duo in the cinematic imagination: a sacrificial widower father who lived for his son and a motherless son who lives for and suffers on behalf his father. In another Christian themed film, *Veendum Chila Veettu Karyangal*, directed by Sathyan Anthikad himself, the narrative presents a similar father-son duo, in which both are characterised by mutual love, care and concern, signifying a more nuanced portrayal of sensitive masculinity that deviates from a traditional hegemonic one.

Examining how Reji's subjectivity is constructed, paradoxically against the signifying practices of the dominant settler code, it is clear that the contextualisation denies the centrality of the Syrian Christian family genealogies. Such glorification of the family tradition was an attempt to distinguish one community from the other. It is with regard to this that Chacko Mappila tells Reji that the most glorious years of his life were the ones with his wife and how it all ended with her early death. Accordingly, Chacko Mappila and Reji are represented more as individuals than community centric. Extraneous to the power structure of the hegemonic identification matrix, Reji and his father live in a completely heterogeneous cultural immigrant environment. Regarding the organisation of the public sphere in Kerala, S. Harikrishnan observes: "The traditional order where the laws of purity and pollution defined spatiality meant that caste-Hindus dominated the distribution of social spaces through carefully crafted spatial practices" (3). Reji's social sphere is

mostly seen in the form of relationships to Kunji Khader, a Muslim marriage broker, and the working class/ farming communist family of Sreedharan, Shanthamma and Gowri. On a number of occasions, the text demonstrates Reji and his father getting a share of fish and rice from their communist neighbours. However, this is in contrast to *Nadodikkattu* – an early film by Sathyam Anthikad himself – where Dasan (Mohanlal), the hero, borrows rice and kerosene from Radha (Shobhana), designating the insecurity of the unemployed educated Nair. This mode of identification of the Christian self with regard to a heterogeneous environment contests the hegemonic code revived through the mainstream spectrum of Malayalam cinema.

It is this denial of the hegemonic matrix that gets reflected in the form of the eye level match shots through which Reji is presented differently from the feudal aristocratic lords and the protagonists of the hegemonic movement. When confronted by the law, he submits and remains subordinate. Even when he resists the physically dominating structures of elitist versions of masculinity, he is not the unconquerable cowboy.

The spatio-temporal aspects of the narrative can also be close read to disseminate the distinctiveness of the filmic text as marking the struggles between the state, religion, and neoliberalism. The time frame of narrative action is Kerala of the first decade of the twenty first century. Like *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*, the narrative action addresses the crisis of the post-globalised scenario with the reference to Global Investment Meet (GIM). The neoliberal subtext shows how the communist practices fail to sustainably hold in a changing economy. Moreover, the narrative action happening in the new millenium at a time after the release of

Narasimham designates the return of the revivalist ideology in the state. It is in such a context, symbolised in the end by the dissolution of the ancestral household, that the key domain of the disintegration of the hegemonic ideology is inscribed. Reji, as the protagonist, emerges as the compassionate stereotype of masculinity constructions, significantly different from Solomon and Chandy.

How the idea of gender is addressed quite differently in the narrative is also interesting. Reji is nostalgic about Clara who as the idealised ultimate fetish structured his libidinal ego. Quite interestingly, his relationship with Gowri is more platonic and less libidinal, until the climax. Moreover, he is seen more in the company of Kochuthresia with whom he visits the movie theatre, plays cards and gets jailed. Gowri is never the girl of his interest as she is always presented from an omniscient point of view in the diegetic arc. She never appeals to him as a sexual object.

The setting of the film is a fictional settler village, Kinassery where migration and settlement started long ago. It has evolved as a settler haven, rich in flora and fauna. The song “Marakkudayal Mukham Marakkumm” (00:14:42-19:31) which at the surface attempts to describe the subjective sense of beauty of the feminine metaphorically visualises the landscape designating the agricultural prosperity of this migrant village. The director constructs his signature notion of rural beauty through images of lush green paddy fields, banana plantations, coconut groves, tapioca orchards and references to rubber and pepper plantations owned by settler families.

The Kombanakattil family – often referred to as Kombanakkadans – has entered a transformative stage in this agricultural prosperity. The second generation

among the settlers, Tonykutty (Siddique) has renewed his identity as an abkari and Benny (Madhupal) as a politician. There are also signs of resettlement in the film – when the children, born during the settlement migrate to metropolitan centres like Bangalore and abroad, and resettle there. Although the second generation is emblematic of hegemonic masculinity, there exists a latent layer of the hard working and successful planter archetype in Mathukuttichayan, who is the deceased patriarch of the household, as he is always nostalgically presented through Kochuthresia's (Sheela) perspectives. Significantly, in contrast to this absent settler Chacko Mappila by his very name suggests the presence of a lower social class within the same community.

The opening of the film is a tight close-up shot of the name board 'Kombanakkattil' a settler house whose exterior is panoramically shown in the next few seconds. This shot can be read as a parallel to the ways in which the feudal aristocratic 'Manas', illams, and traditional bungalows, nostalgically owned and maintained by the patriarchs among feudal aristocracy are represented as exemplified in *Devasuram*, *Aram Thampuran* and in the thematically similar family drama, *Rappakal* (Dir. Kamal, 2005). Contrastingly, the ultimate father figure Mathukuttichayan who built Kombanakkattil house is absent. In the aforementioned films, while the feudal houses offer a nostalgically binding space even to the outsiders, Kombanakkattil ancestral house in *Manassinakkare* suffocates and repels its present generation. This image making contrasts the settler as inheriting modernity through education against the feudal Lords who claim it through ancestry.

However, Reji's subjectivity construction also is not completely free from being hegemonic. This can be seen further with the contrastive portrayal of the

Christian self with the Muslim self in a narrative that happens, in post-Babri Masjid and post-Godhra India. Kunji Khader, the marriage broker, is the perpetual other of modernity. Mamukkoya's character, described as uneducated (00:13:28), says to Reji:

You learn from me. The love between you and your Clara was the same as that between me and my Jameela. So what? I married her uncle's daughter, Suhara. Then I divorced Suhara. Jameela's nikkah was on the day I married Beevathu. Do you know with whom? With Abubakar. When Abubakar deserted Jameela, I left Beevathu to marry my first love. (my trans.; 00:13:54-14:05)

Hegemonic structures of Malayalam cinema have also been using this opposition between the Christian other and the Muslim other. As argued earlier, the cinematic structures constructing herohood objectifies the libidinal economy of Muslim men and, hence, the spectators automatically identify themselves with the Christian hero.

Another site of the cultural problematic within *Manassinakkare* can be identified using *Narasimham* as a paratext. This film is currently interpreted as a perfect example of Mohanlal's evolution from an actor to a superstar, enticing the hegemonic upper caste masculine herohood which Kochuthresia celebrates along with Reji. The scene in which Reji takes the Kombanakkattil family matriarch to watch the Mohanlal starrer follows a discussion between them about the class difference inherent in the theatre architecture. Here, Kochuthresia distances herself from the hegemonic ideology by cherishing a "settler nostalgia" due to which she constantly reminisces the days with her lover, enjoying movies in the first class level. Consequently, she detests watching movies with the sophisticated Tonykkutty

who prefers only the balcony. Naturally, she identifies herself and Mathukuttichayan in Reji. These twin dimensions of the spatial and the temporal contextualise the crisis at the heart of the settler hero archetype by bringing forth the two divergent versions of the settler stereotype.

Food plays a major role in advancing the Christian spectrum of hero formation as already discussed, but its preparation, sharing and serving render an endearing quality to the masculine. In *Manassinakkare*, this takes the form of a denial of scientific modernity. One of the most important scenes in the film is that of Kochuthresia forbidden by her daughter-in-law from eating mutton curry because of her high cholesterol (00:35:25-40). Contrastively, in another scene on arriving at Reji's house, she cooks delicious beef fry with him (00:50:25-51:31). The scene concludes with Reji defining the core of the Christian social life: "The Lord prefers Nasranis like us to consume some beef and pork along with two pegs" (my trans.; 00:51:25-31). This presentation of the core Christian practices pitted against medical modernity is what places him often as the settler other, as well. This combination in the presentation of the Christian self is evident in all his relations. Reji's empathy enables him serve toddy to his alcoholic father. Both these acts of serving beef and toddy are seen against the modern scientific versions of knowledge. The Christian hero exists by the denial of such discourses as the Christian moral code is basically anthropocentric.

The two families are united by the cow which in the twenty first century emerged as a central point of the majoritarian value system. But neither Reji nor Kochuthresia feels any qualms about consuming beef, in spite of a filial love towards the cow, Malu. This reinforces the hedonistic values cherished by the

Christian hero, exemplified as later as in *Jallikattu* where images of raw beef are juxtaposed with those of Sunday Mass (00:08:43-45). What marks off heroes like Reji from the caste Hindu groups and the orthodoxy of the Church is the acceptability of meat and alcohol inside home. In Padmarajan's *Thoovanathumbikal* (1987), the contrastive treatment of this inside/outside binary is seen in the representative of upper caste Hindu masculinity, Mannarathodi Jayakrishnan who had to leave his village to consume alcohol.

Reji's representation as hero, when read in conjunction with the relationship between the Church and the feudal upper class among the immigrants in Malayalam cinema, is as an outsider to the social hegemony. In the film, the priest of the parish is represented in relation to the Kombanakkattil family home. When the house is auctioned, the vicar of the church is present with Kochuthresia. The small hut in the middle of the field, which is the first asset of Kochuthresia and Mathukuttichayan, is offered to the church at the end of the story. In contrast, Reji's sensitive masculinity is formed by his being placed as an abstention from centres of authority like the church. He is shown as visiting church only occasionally. It is his discontentment with the authoritarian ways of the Church that forces him to bring his father out from the corrective home alias retreat centre twice. Perhaps because of this strange intervention of the film's unconscious, Chacko Mappila's funeral is not visibly shown. However, at the end of the story, Reji is able to marry Gauri, who has a communist/Hindu identity, at a registrar office, resembling the pattern of hegemonic herohood in *Lelam* as argued in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, in contrast to *Lelam*, as Reji, Gauri and Kochuthresia unite in a secular trio at the film's climax, *Manassinakkare* achieves a smooth transition of the Christian hero from the

hegemonic masculine to a sensitive masculine, revealing the crisis at the heart of the settler hero code.

In the second decade of the twentieth century, there are a few texts dealing with the settler code such as *Vellimoonga*, *Iyobinte Pusthakam* and *Jallikattu*. Amal Neerad's *Iyobinte Pusthakam (The Book of Job)* is a different exercise in this regard as it is a historical narrative that explores the various forces at work in the formation of the settler-empire in Munnar. It discusses the arrival of the British in Munnar in the early twentieth century, the formation of settlements of the natives and Tamil migrant groups, the two World Wars, Indian independence, the first general elections and the Emergency. The film is reminiscent of many classics, most notably Akira Kurosawa's *Ran*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*.

The titular character Iyob is constructed as a non elitist settler hero in terms of religious identity. The film constructs a non-aristocratic genealogical origin for its protagonist and subsequently denies the hegemonic narrativisation of the Syrian Christian tradition of inheriting the caste hierarchy through the conversion of Namboodiris. Denouncing such a history, it defines Iyob as an outsider hero, a converted Christian during the colonial era. Such an identity formation for the eponymous character is a radical subversion of the plantation myth discussed in the context of *Oru Maravathoor Kanav*.

The film chronicles different stages in the life of the titular character Iyob. As a child, he was liked and rescued by Harrison 'Sayip' physically and spiritually. Through baptism, he becomes Iyob, an Adam figure in the Eden of Munnar. Hence, the first transition in the life of this orphan boy was from being the prey to that of

the aggressor. He signifies the colonised black man in a postcolonial perspective. He inherits the colonial value system of aggression, torture and violence when he assumes the position of Thasho, the foreigner's trusted lieutenant. From being the close attendant of the foreigner, he becomes the inheritor of everything that his master had. He possesses his bungalow, his bedroom and his desires. After the death of Sayip, Iyob mimics the aggression of the colonial planter class. Iyob justifies his settler code of aggression by throwing the foreigner's native partner Kazhali out of the mansion reasoning that he is more entitled to the colonial mansion and settlement than the woman (00:14:57-16:13). Iyob's inherited notion of land possession is less community specific and more English and imperial. Such a construction of the settler hero as an opportunist unsettles the typical plantation myth of hardwork and reward.

Around the time of Indian independence, Iyob is transformed into the typical all possessing Christian hero who resists other settlers and mighty opponents. He also avoids the Tamil Muslim businessman from Madurai, Ankur Ravuthar, for no reason other than a conception of the entire Munnar as his own. He is contemptuous of the migrant people who came from "Vaikom and Pala" for land, as he believes, like his previous master, that the entire Munnar, the hills, the plains and the lakes belonged to him. Also, when an influential politician comes to Munnar to plant weed in order to raise money for campaigning in the election, he too is dismissed with contempt. His toxic and hegemonic masculinity is viciously manifested against Kazhali who might threaten his status as a plantation owner. Iyob is a ruthless aggressor and hence he is quite dismissive of the rights for workers. This subtext which presents the rise of communism in the hilly high ranges, is introduced through

the historical character of Rosamma Punnoose who became the first MLA of Devikulam in 1957. He is constructed like a hegemonic other with established links to the Church and the police force after the disappearance of his foreign master.

The value system of Iyob is inherited by his two sons, Dimitri and Ivan. The film could be structurally analysed as the difference between the possessive materialism of Iyob, Dimitri and Ivan and the liberating materialism of Alosi (Fahad Fazil). What makes the brothers villains in the narrative is their aggression with which they possess land and women. An analysis of the scene in which the three dine together positions Alosi's subjectivity differently from that of his brothers (00:48:10-55). When Dimitri expresses his interest in rape and Ivan in murder in the context of war, the hypermasculine identity deeply rooted in patriarchal dominance, material greed, and violence is conveyed. Alosi leaves the table in protest, maintaining a muted silence, critiquing the politics of subordination through coercive means. The language that marks the elder brothers also is filled with abusive words like 'bitch', 'dog', and 'to kill'. Dimitri is characterised as a voyeur and a sadist, and eventually gets killed by his wife, Rahel when the clandestine sexual affair between her and the physically and mentally superior Ivan is known.

It is against this hegemonic value system that Alosi, the other Christian hero, designates what Iyob is not. Captured in attractive long shots, riding through the picturesque landscape, he does not subscribe to the hegemonic settler ideology and its regressive value system. Often associated with a feminine version of subjectivity, he is neither interested in land nor in the possession of wealth. He is the 'prodigal son' if Iyob can be considered as the father of the Biblical parable. Unable

to shoot animals, he becomes a laughing stock both to his father and aggressive macho elder brothers. The sight of his sister like girl, raped and killed by his brothers, forces him to leave the household at a very tender age. What is said as a general characteristic of the Fazil's hero is evidently visible in his non-masculinist conception at the beginning as the hero "has employed his body as an object for contempt and castration within the film narrative. In this way, he deconstructs the notion of masculinity to which stardom in Malayalam cinema is inseparably linked." (Sooraj et.al.)

However, there is the domain of transition at times visible in Aloshi's construction as a Christian hero. When he returns after serving in the British Indian navy for some time as a war veteran, much to his father Iyob's chagrin, he carries communism with him. He is also an outlaw who defies any law implied by the state or his paternal father. He is constructed as one who does not believe in the overarching family myths of superiority, and therefore dedicates his life for his girlfriend Martha and childhood friend Chemban. What bell hooks observed about the gendered relationship in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity and Will* might have triggered the sudden change: "When culture is based on a dominator model, not only will it be violent, but it will frame all relationships as power struggles" (115). The moment he embraces the Fanonian ideology of violence, he becomes the cowboy of the high ranges, battling the wrongdoers: "With no law in existence, violence is the best defence" (my trans.; 01:40:00-12). Parallely, there exists a romantic construction of Aloshi, as diametrically opposite to Iyob and his ideology, that makes him silently walk off, rather than ride away at the end to unknown pastures with Martha, leaving the settlement and all its wealth.

The settler representatives in films are identified by qualities of toughness, bravery, and the ability to use strenuous activity to define one's masculinity (Limbrick 37). Iyob fits into this stereotype role almost perfectly except in the last dimension. On the contrary, Aloshi displays the exact opposite of these skills and it is due to the training that he received from the Royal British army that his persona of the hero is constructed. Contrary to the settler narratives in early Hollywood cinema like *The Four Feathers* (Dir. Merian C. Cooper, 1929), *The Lives of a Bengal Lancer* (Dir. Henry Hathaway, 1935), *Gunga Din* (Dir. George Stevens, 1939), the naval training and the subsequent mutiny have equipped Aloshi to lead the counter lifestyle of the rebel. In other words, having been part of the Royal Mutiny in the Navy, his identity is that of a Communist rather than of a typical hegemonic Christian hero. Thus, Amal Neerad's film challenges the regular dimensions of the settler code in Malayalam cinema by reversing the pattern of the settler hero with that of a leftist revolutionary.

The clash between Iyob and Aloshi has a psychological dimension that goes beyond the familiar father-son conflict. Apparently, it is a clash of two world views: the all-amassing father and the all-relinquishing son. It has an Oedipal dimension, in the psychological perspective, as Aloshi lost his mother in early childhood. He leaves his house immediately after his mother's death and he could never reconcile with his father completely during his entire life time. On his coming back, though he is not afraid of his father's patriarchal power, his unconscious prevents him from saving his father, after having known the sinister intentions of his elder brothers. In opposition to the hegemonic Christian code, he says that he is not interested in the land, when his father who assumes hegemony through wealth and vast possessions

of the land asks him to survey and mark their land (00:58:32-59:09). Reading together, the transfer of the colonial bungalow to the working class organisation is another trope used to convey the deep seated working class/ anti-establishmentarian cause in the film. In all these respects, Aloshi's masculine formation is a threat to the dominant order and its core values.

The narrative of *Iyobinte Pusthakam* is problematised by the presence of the intradiegetic narrator, the veteran communist leader. What happens in the process is a terrible misrepresentation of two communities as fetish. The flawed mimesis of representing Chemban and his gang as people who stand against the mighty feudal power of Iyob's family is an apolitical fantasy. Aloshi's heroism as constructed as an episode in the working class annals, is a misrepresentation of the communist cause in Munnar, as revolutionaries ensuring justice in a fictional way: "If anyone asks what happened to the finger, just tell them that you shook hands with Aloshi in Munnar" (my trans.; 02:14:48-59) This must also be read in the light of the construction of Ajippan in Amal Neerad's later film *CIA: Comrade in America* (2018) and Paul Varghese in Tom Immatty's *Oru Mexican Aparatha* (2017). Though the narrative romanticises the subaltern groups by conceiving them as outside the structure of history and power, the process makes them existing in the fantasy of the spectator, satisfying the subject position of a politically correct man or woman. The glorification of the heroism of Christian characters, though positioned as communists, thus raises potent questions regarding the construction of the Christian hero.

Aloshi represents a nuanced and complex construction of masculinity and heroism, in contrast to the hegemonical dominance of his father. His progression

from familial discord and internal conflict to self-awareness and redemption reflects a redefinition of heroism where vulnerability and moral strength take precedence over dominance and aggression. His body language conveyed by a diffident, feeble and melancholic posture places him in opposition to hegemony. Moreover, unlike the typical heroes, he does not dominate the women and the oppressed, but rather understands them empathetically. His moral battle conveys the sense that masculinity is a constantly shifting collection of meanings that we construct through our interactions with ourselves and others. What Michel Kimmel observes as the characteristics of the men of the 1960s in the feminist wave are traced in Aloshi, who represent “loneliness, emptiness and ... a ‘pursuit of loneliness’” (176).

According to James Monaco, popular films, like popular novels, depend on the motivating forces of the twin libidinal impulses of sex and violence (276). He points out the complexity of the problem by arguing that “film satisfies the libido not only by giving a kind of life to fantasies, but also more formally—the style of a film, its idiom, can be either romantic or active, sexual or violent, without any regard to its content” (276). The ending of *Iyobinte Pusthakam*, a film that discusses the political condition of Kerala, specifically that of the hilly Munnar with the history of trade union movements, from the 1940s to the 1970s, caters to the popular rightist imagination of the spectator. The construction of Aloshi as the winning hero smoothly ensures the surrogate mechanism through which the spectator replaces the experience of reality with that of the film. It cannot be done without the physical, psychological and political power of the hero and a hero who belongs to the dominant order alone can facilitate it.

However, the representation of Iyob, Dimitri and Ivan as constituting the hegemonic domain is not one of the superior subjective order. Rather, the hegemonic conceptualisations are met with stiff opposition in the narrative when Aloshi is projected as the hero because of his political leanings towards communism.

But, in later movies *Varathan* (Dir. Amal Neerad, 2017), *Kala* (Dir. Rohith V.S., 2020), and *Bougainvillea* (Dir. Amal Neerad, 2024), the settler portrayal has radically shifted from the heroic endorsement of hegemonic masculine values to a converse projection of the settler as the villain.

Analysing the various domains of Christian herohood in the three decades, it is argued that the domain of hegemonic masculinity that constituted Malayalam cinema is of varying kinds and shades. Though the visual grammar of most of these films designates the notion of a masculine affair – adventure stories generated around an almost exclusively male world that privileges masculine power – they vary in the treatment of different subjectivities. What began as a dominant version of masculinity aided by wealth and elitist notions of gender and community identity in *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu* is radically transformed into a much more subjugated and sensitive one in recent narratives like *Iyobinte Pusthakam*. Gender stereotyping has changed significantly and the caste-based identity construction has lost its hegemonic status. The following chapter of the thesis further enquires the changes in the visual grammar and ideological underpinnings in relation to the Christian ‘other’ on screen.

CHAPTER VII

THE SUBALTERN CODE: THE SELF-FASHIONING OF THE CHRISTIAN OTHER

There always exists a reciprocal relationship between the mythification of events and the social construction of identities. Historically, the myths and legends that shaped a social group were transmitted from one generation to the next primarily through oral narratives and vocal performances. In the contemporary era, visual narratives and written accounts like family and community history, fashion the identity of various communities. Cultural studies analyses not only how and why the discourses of the dominant hegemonic community assume significance in the world, but also how the marginalised communities and their representatives are inscribed in the mainstream media and cinema discourses.

The previous chapters have traced the process by which the doctrine of hegemonic masculinity with subtle variations constitutes Christian representations in Malayalam cinema. A community known for its hegemony through mythifications is written on screen as mainstream in genres such as action films, romances, investigative thrillers, family movies and others. This chapter analyses the narrativisation of non-hegemonic communities in the cinematic imagination and how they add a different layer of signification in the construction of masculinity.

As already discussed in the Introduction, Kerala has the presence of three notable categories of Christian identifications: Syrian Christians, Latin Christians and New Christians (Harikrishnan 64). The status of Syrian Christians as the

equivalent of hegemonic Hindu groups due to Namboodiri lineage exalted them in caste hierarchy. This cultural capital, coupled with the socio-economic capital in the form of educational institutions and rich rubber/spices plantations, ensured community power and the community is represented as dominant in literature and cinema (Johny B. 18). Harikrishnan lists out the genealogy and features of the two marginal groups in Kerala Christianity as:

The second group, Latin Christians, largely converted from erstwhile fishing castes along the coastal belt ... underwent conversion after the arrival of the Portuguese and as a result of their missionary endeavours. The last group—New Christians—were mostly oppressed caste-Hindus converted by missionary activities led mainly by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS) in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. (64)

In the preceding chapters, the consistent practice in Malayalam cinema to record the Christian hero as incarnation of the hegemonic ideals was analysed. These narratives of communal hegemony were mostly set in the High ranges and in agriculture centric feudal landscapes of central Travancore and consequently displayed the chivalrous toxic masculinity of the Syrian Christian heroes. Though, there was an attempt to homogenise most narratives centred around the Christian identity into the structure of dominance, there have been a few counter narratives focusing on the lives of the marginalised within the community. The representation of various minorities such as Dalit Christians, Anglo-Indians, and Latin Christians who defied and subverted the macho stereotypes of the Christian heroes, is analysed

in the process. Instead of glorifying the Christian hero, such narratives represent heroes whose feet are firmly placed in the soil both figuratively and literally.

The hero centric Malayalam cinema offers a paradigm of social progression on the surface. As discussed in the previous chapters, the heroes appear on the side of progressive social values. However, the analysis of the deep structure demonstrates a regressive social perspective as the texts finally uphold the emergence of a champion of the oppressed who solves the narrative tension in a flash.

The subjectivity of the non-hegemonic characters in Malayalam cinema is formed and consolidated according to a sense of public consciousness that is continuously disseminated through popular narratives and social formations. Uma Chakravorty observes how the subaltern bodies are inscribed in literature: The first is a power structure based on ritualistic purity in which the Brahmins are placed on top as the norm and the untouchables on the outside. The second is the power structure based on the landowning elite class constituting the surface and the landless poor situated on the peripheries (24). In fact, as a representation system, the inclusions and exclusions of the marginalised existences constitute the significations.

The reading of the Anglo- Indian, Latin, Dalit and other subaltern versions of Christianity assumes great significance in the light of contemporary attitudes regarding equality and justice. In the line of the theory of the subaltern in cinema, the thesis raises questions about access and representation within Malayalam cinema focussing on the Christian hero. Addressing issues of power, privilege, and

inequality, the analysis highlights the scope of inclusivity in both the creation and consumption of films.

The Syrian Christian identity has produced time and again innumerable number of settler narratives ceremoniously dealing with the combination of hegemonic masculinity and elitist feudal ideologies. The persona of a muted subaltern, lacking agency among the settlers, was hardly represented on screen in Malayalam cinema. *Vidheyan*, the national award winning masterpiece by Adoor Gopalakrishnan based on the story *Bhaskarapatelarum Ente Jeevthavum* (*Bhaskarapatelar and My Life*, 1986) by Paul Zachariah is one such narrative that portrays its Christian settler hero as subjugated and subordinated.

The film investigates the history of settlement of the Christians in the hilly terrains of Karnataka, though it is apparently about the psychology of servitude. As an example of an early settler narrative, *Vidheyan* is analysed to uncover how the Christian (hero) is represented as a muted submissive settler known for his helplessness and servility resulting from socio-political and psychological reasons. Such an analysis demonstrates the myriad ways in which the film is constituted through a complex web of material – master versus settler ‘encounters’ in which Thommi and Patelar are constructed as figures rooted in history.

When examined from the point of view in which Thommi (Gopakumar) is seen as the protagonist of *Vidheyan*, how the narrative has placed the migration of Christians is important in the cultural analysis of the film. Of course, Thommi is an atypical Christian hero to the audience of the 1990s when the Syrian Christian male was constructed as the aggressive, possessive, all pervasive alpha male in *Kottayam Kunjachan* and *Sangham*. In other words, most Christian heroes of the phase

resembled Patelar, the feudal land owner rather than Thommi. The only instance Patelar calls his serf by name is towards the end when they wander through the forests of Kodagu, escaping their prospective murderers (01:45:05-07). From this angle, Thommi is symbolic of those without a name, marginalised by the structures of power in both society and literature. Hence, Thommi as a servile is examined with reference to the construction of the Christian hero.

Thommi designates a dimension of the marginalised masculinity that never dominates his wife or any other woman or man in the narrative. He is the titular servile who can never display any kind of hegemony. Here, the construction of herohood contradicts the numerous versions of the settlers acting on their own will as rugged individuals, celebrating a metanarrative of success. Additionally, Thommi is characterised by fear and lack of confidence. The only instance where he is jubilant comes at the end when he throws his master's gun into the river (01:50:30-46). At the end, the text demonstrates the symbolic and literal demonstration of Thommi's freedom in the absence of the master. He exclaims in wild happiness as he runs through the forest, bathed in sunlight: "Omana, Patelar is dead" (01:51:22-28). The ending of the film offers a perspective on

the life of the servile narrator who lives his life to quench his master's ruthless thirst for violence and deprivation. In spite of his introspective awareness about serving the devil, the narrator cannot act as a conscientious individual until the master is murdered, which leaves the servile man rather perplexed by the newly gained freedom. (Joshi and Venkiteswaran 24)

Two reasons necessitate Thommi's migration to settlement in Ichilampady in Karnataka – one, personal and the other, social After his marriage with a beautiful

and much younger Omana (Sabitha Anand) who was a poor orphan, he was forced to leave Wayanad. After having sold everything he has owned in Wayand, he buys five acres of land in the new place and thus he becomes destined to bind himself with Patelar who starts humiliating him right from the first meeting. Patelar uses the word ‘encroached’ instead of ‘purchased’ or ‘bought’ designating Thommi’s illegal ownership of land (00:05:09-10). The protagonist is introduced in the narrative as syntagmatically opposite to the symbols of the chair and the gun, the master owns. He is portrayed as an individual, a settler who is physically and mentally dominated by the hegemonic structures of power. According to Gautaman Bhaskaran, the story of *Vidheyam* takes place in the 1960s. Food scarcity and unemployment rampant in his native land are the social reasons which force Thommi’s escape in search of a promised land in Southern Karnataka (Bhaskaran 185). Quite uncharacteristic of most Christian heroes, Thommi signifies fear and submission before the authority of Patelar. From the opening scene to the end, Thommi is presented as a persona devoid of agency within the narrative which is underscored by his posture – a bent back with a scared look towards Patelar begging for sympathy. The first sight of Patelar in the narrative is the one where humiliates the hapless servile by verbal and physical aggression.

Patelar-Thommi relationship is not merely a master-slave one. It is marked by a kind of love-hate relationship on both the ends. Thommi wants to kill Patelar once he knows that the master has raped his wife, but instead, he gets conditioned/resigned to the routine as a matter of pride. While sleeping with his wife, Thommi says: “Now, your body smells only of Patelar’s scent. I like this smell. Still, you are mine alone” (my trans.; 01:07:51-08:04). What follows next

underscores the settler spirit: “One day I’ll buy this scent for you” (my trans.; 01:08:07-11). Thommi’s ego ideal is not the ugly, powerless self that he is, but the dominating Patelar who rapes, kills, hunts, fishes and owns everything. Patelar’s toxic masculinity suggested via his gun, chair and jeep works as an obsessive haunting tool in establishing the perfect servility of Thommi. When Patelar’s sadistic instincts are combined with Thommi’s masochistic instincts the psychology of servitude is established. The psychological split in his personality, a kind of dualistic divide as obsessive love and contemplative hatred actually makes him immobile and powerless without assuming the role of the doer as the subject. He is constructed in the mould of the heroine of most mainstream Malayalam movies – a perfect image of submission. In Adoor’s adaptation of Zachariah’s story, unlike in the original, Patelar’s wife Saroja (Tanvir Azmi) is suffocated to death as she occasionally attempts to control his ego. Where Saroja fails to fit in, Thommi easily does. Patelar demands unqualified submissiveness from his servile and when Thommi bows before Yusuf, he is kicked for this breach. This abject submissiveness is what makes Thommi a muted subaltern.

The process of objectification in *Vidheyam* is through Thommi’s point of view. In the movie, the spectator is placed in Thommi’s position and sees what he sees. Patelars were historically the last remnants of British colonialism as people appointed to enforce law and order among the natives and to collect taxes from them (Bhaskaran 185-6). Presented as the dominating ideal ego in a Lacanian perspective, his power arises from the colonial rule of aggression and forced submission. And, it is from Thommi’s point of view that the spectator sees Patelar’s arm chair which symbolises his bygone feudal and bureaucratic power and the phallic gun with

which he asserts his authority now (Bhaskaran 188). The imagery of the chair and the gun works to confirm the masculine adventurous affair in the narrative happening in an almost exclusively male world.

Thommi is positioned as an outcaste in terms of his relationship with the Church. When the priest asks him to confess, he leaves without giving an answer at the very sound of Patelar's jeep. Though the mise-en-scene of Thommi's house presents the image of Jesus and a Bible, he does not seem to be a part of the community. Thommi's predicament, as reviewed by GF, is spiritually equated in a Biblical allusion: "Cast out from the garden (presumably their native Kerala) and into the hands of a vicious being with no regard for human life, Thommi and his wife are a kind of Adam and Eve seduced and destroyed by Patelar's devil." A close examination of the liberation of Thommi at the climax of the narrative can explain the domain of religion more. Though he throws the gun – the symbol of his servitude – into the river from the side of Patelar's body, the concluding visuals are those of the rich areca palm plantations through which the liberated servile keeps running to the sound of church bells. In Gautaman Bhaskaran's study of the film, he differentiates the climax with the beginning where the church bells ring in the tone of a Christian funeral (188). The element of the Church and characters associated with it adding to the construction of the settler's subjectivity is the director's addition not found in the original novella.

Thommi's construction as a character with no agency, when subjected to the light of subjectivity construction of women in the film, assumes great meaning. He never manifests libidinal desire towards any woman including his wife in the narrative. Moreover, his relationship with Saroja, his master's wife is one of

submission. On the contrary, Patelar emerges as a towering figure of authority in his perspective, suggested by the use of point-of-view close-up shots. The moment Thommi is abused sadistically by Patelar, the settler becomes a site of masochist enjoyment. The most notable scene in this regard is the one in which Thommi faces his sobbing wife who was raped by Patelar. In the article “When Mammooty Played the Tyrant: Revisiting Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s *Vidheyan*”, Neelima Menon analyses the impact of psychological tyranny in the character:

Thommi is greeted by his wife’s weeping on reaching home. In the next scene they show Patelar crossing the river. She has been raped by Patelar. And all Thommi does is sit in front of his hut and vent his anger as his wife looks on. Soon after, the same Thommi looks on powerlessly as Patelar selects a sari for Omana and states that she is beautiful. He offers him a job and Thommi lets out a grateful smile. That’s when we know Thommi has already yielded to Patelar’s tyranny.

The Christian male’s construction as the incapacitated mute witness to violence is supplemented by his guarding of Patelar who forcibly grabs a farmer woman carrying firewood and goes over the rocks to rape her. Though Thommi has Patelar’s gun with him, he is unable to act like heroes in movies.

Thommi’s distinctiveness from similar suffering Christian heroes can be established by comparing him with the Christian hero Puttu Urumees in Viji Thampi’s *Soorya Manasam*. Set in the then contemporary Kerala, the film presents how its hero of subnormal mental growth, is forced to migrate from Kuttanadu to Nilgiris in search of land. However, his construction as a hero differs from that of Thommi in the sense that Urumees is situated as the alterego of the spectator and,

therefore, instead of succumbing to the authority of the villain, Manager Sivan, he does the hero function of killing the tyrant. Nor is Sivan a Patelar, because unlike the latter, he is constructed as a usurper who never repents.

The submissive and subordinated masculinity formation in Thommi is placed diametrically opposite to that in mainstream Malayalam cinema. Unlike Thommi's subjugated settler, the titular character in *Iyobinte Pusthakam*, the converted Christian, appropriates the language of power through the economic capital of colonialism. Iyob thus assumes the identity of an elitist Syrian Christian at the dawn of independence. Thommi, however is self-alienated from religion, despite the attempt of the priest to make him attend church and confess (00:29:41-30:48). The settler is psychologically subordinated more by the dominance of Patelar than that of the Church. This makes his identity construction as something placed outside the domain of religion than inside.

Though the Syrian Christian other is rare in Malayalam cinema's visual domain, other identity groups like the Latin Christians and Anglo Indians suggest a different spectrum of identification. The Latin Christians maintain a lifestyle and culture different from that of the Syrian Christians of Kerala. The aggressive agricultural commitment of the Syrian Christians towards land and the ensuing narratives of family feuds are mostly replaced with stories set on the seashores. While the Syrian Christian tradition is mostly Antiochean and Asian in the spiritual realm, the Latin culture is more Portuguese and hence European. Similarly, the Anglo-Indian culture which is the antonym of most Christian traditions is stereotyped by westernised drinking, partying and loose living. Dalit Christians who belong to the Protestant churches or the Syrian church itself pose a serious threat

once the politics of representation is examined. These cultural differences, when narrativised as cinematic discourses seek a form distinctive from the action packed hyper masculine narratives. This is explained in the context of *Dany* (2001), *Ee. Ma. Yau.* (2018) and *Achanurangatha Veedu* (2006).

However, the politics of representation of the heroes on the periphery of the social sphere constitutes a curious dichotomy. While these cinematic discourses ensure the marked difference in the stereotyping of the Christian hero, quite ironically, they make sure that the status of the 'other' as non-hegemonic caters to the imaginative fantasies of the dominant order. At the same time, quite paradoxically, the camera with the operation through the perspective of the central characters provides them with a story/history, however alienated it appears.

There are only a few historiographic attempts in the cinematic universe of Kerala which analyse the social and political changes in the state with reference to its central character. Similar to what Salman Rushdie attempted in the domain of narration in *The Midnight's Children* (1981), T. V. Chandran's *Dany* (2001) masterfully intertwines Indian history with brutally poignant social realism, creating a narrative that captures the nation's transition from British colonial rule to independence and beyond. The narrative specifically chronicles Kerala history from 1930 to 2000 through the eponymous hero essayed by Mammooty. Such a hero in the context of the historical reality of the nation reveals the subaltern construction of marginal Christian groups.

One of the intriguing starting points concerning Chandran's film is the question why Daniel Thompson alias Dany, the central character, is an outsider or the other to the prevailing stream. His being positioned as a Latin Christian hero

who is a witness playing his symbolic saxophone at every historical juncture is an interesting trope in the analysis of history and in the examination of the principles of Christian hero construction. The marginality of the protagonist is conveyed in the climax after death when he is described as “a mere someone who lived somewhere” (my trans.; 01:43:26-28).

The diegesis of the film attempts to craft Dany’s identity by situating him in the history of the nation and the state. There have always been attempts to write together the body of the protagonist in relationship with the national identity. Dany is presented as a tragic hero through the lens of history in the guise of a voice over commentary and an arresting photograph of the event in black and white. His birth happens on 12 March 1930, the day of the Dandi Salt March, on a coastal village in Kerala. His destiny is closely tied with the history of the state as his mother died on 21 September 1932, the day the Guruvayur Satyagraha commenced. One of the landmark events in the history of Kerala, the widow remarriage among the Namboodiris, the upper caste, 15 September 1935 was the day Dany’s father died. In another tragedy, his brother died at sea on 30 July 1947, the day Sir C. P. was attacked by the communist K. C. S. Mani. On the day when the Kerala state was born, 1 November 1956, Dany lost his sister in the fire that consumed his house. The man who witnessed so many deaths in the family and outside becomes a guitarist who plays his own songs in English at the houses of the dead. He makes his debut on the day of the swearing in of the first communist government in Kerala under E. M. S. Namboodirippad. These references, however, do not position Daniel Thompson alias Dany as the ideal citizen, but rather makes him a symbolic spectacle as the prologue of the film visually demonstrates.

Wimal Dissanayake's notion of the interrelationality of cinema with other art forms is used to decipher the meaning of the heroism in *Dany*. In "Issues in World Cinema", Dissanayake argues: "Film is not an isolated art form; it inhabits a common expressive culture fed by tradition, cultural memory, and indigenous modes of symbolic representation. Therefore, films and other arts are mutually implicated in the production of meaning and pleasure, and this deserves to be examined more closely" (883). Thus, the eponymous hero's role as a saxophone player symbolises the crisis in macho heroism in the postcolonial scenario. *Dany* becomes a trope for the representation of the cultural history of the land because he never functions in the narrative as a successful saxophone performer. There exists no relationship between *Dany*, the performer and national history, except that he connotes a decisive moment in modernising the public sphere, but is still excluded from it as he is most often seen in the interior of the house or hospital.

The contrast in the representation of the hero is traditionally seen as one between art film and popular film. However, it can be argued that the marginality of *Dany* in the narrative is a result of his community identification, a form of the way in which caste is addressed in Christian representations. The camera positioning, the narrative structure, plot and other aspects of film rather construct the hero as muted. Thus, the text is not about how *Dany* became a saxophone artist; but rather about how the newly ushered in democracy failed to be inclusive of the marginalised. When the parish priest Fr. Simon hands *Dany* a saxophone, *Dany* becomes a performer for any occasion, be it a marriage, funeral or church choir. But, the Latin Christian hero, *Dany*, is characterised as a man suffering from an inferiority complex, especially in his relations with women, in sharp contrast to the self-

imposing Syrian Christian heroes. The camera is statically positioned at the cycle repair shop and on Dany to show mostly his immobility to catch up with the changes outside. Even after India becomes independent and Kerala elects a Communist government, Dany's destiny never changes. He is constructed as aimless, insecure and incapable of success in love.

The diegesis of *Dany* establishes the rise and fall of the Communist government, as an allegory of Dany's first marriage. For instance, the dysfunctional family that the insecure Dany builds up, under the insistence of his best friend Freddy, comes to a halt on 31 July 1959. Against the backdrop of the sloganeering of the Kerala liberation struggle, and Dany's and Freddy's celebration of the dismissal of the first Communist government by the invoking of Article 356 of the Constitution by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Clara leaves the house with her daughter Lucian. The narrative blends politics and family in such a way that Dany becomes the symbol of the Latin Christian community which was forced into the struggle against the Communists organised by the forward, Orthodox, powerful communities, mainly the Nairs and the Syrian Christians.

Dany's second marriage to Margarete, the daughter of the wealthy man Chavero, also is symbolic of the socio-political transition that was happening after the downfall of the E. M. S. government. Dany, who is symbolic of the state, is forced by circumstances to meet, to drink with and to marry the daughter of the 'Latin Christian' identity conscious Chavero, in order to save the honour of the family. The dysfunctional nature of Dany's second marriage begins on the very first night when Margarete dismisses him from sex or any other right of the husband position within in the family. With Chavero's suicide the following day, Dany's

story of loneliness and orphanhood is reiterated. Contrary to the Christian hero construction in mainstream films like *Ezhupunna Tharakan*, *Vazhunnor* and *Natturajavu*, which has an extrovert hero surrounded by the loyal public, the Latin Christian hero is deliberately portrayed as a powerless orphan. Right from the opening close-up shot of Danny's face, he is presented as mostly cut off from the world. At the height of the dramatic irony of the narrative, Margarete gives birth to the boy Robert, symbolically an illegal child outside marriage, on the day of polling of the second general election to the Kerala State Legislative Assembly. In fact, Dany is conceived as the exact opposite of a typical hero, as he is insecure, defeated and even sexually frustrated.

Karl Marx's perspective on history in *The German Ideology* can be useful in defining Dany's herohood or, rather, the subversion of the heroic in the marginalised Christian hero. "The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals. Thus the first fact to be established is the physical organisation of these individuals and their consequent relation to the rest of nature. . . . By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their actual material life" (7). Dany, the individual disregarded by historical forces, is an outsider to history. As K. T. Thomas observes in his online review of the film, "Dany remains blissfully ignorant of these historical happenings and travels alone, all alone in life". In other words, the function of the omniscient narrator who reports Dany's life is to ironically emphasise that the hero never knows or realises the importance of history.

The text can be read as an allegory of the rise and fall of the Congress party as well by reading the historical references against narrative action in the film. How

the Latin Christian identity of Dany emerges as an apt symbol for an individual silenced and muted by the permeation of autocracy in the country is the crux of the narrative. It is in the context of the rise of Sanjay Gandhi during the Emergency that the marriage of Lucian, Dany's first daughter is informed in the form of a letter. Margarete, being a power wielding lady, denies him the freedom to attend the marriage at Bangalore. Dany consoles himself by playing some rhythms on his saxophone. The only occasion when he acted "deliberately" is when Padmanabhan sexually assaults his wife. The only demonstration of Dany's heroism is thus both personal and political, literal and symbolic.

The static characterisation given to Dany permits other characters to assume their performing roles. During the events after the Emergency, Dany's subjugation and silence is continued in the symbolisation of A. K. Antony as Robert, the "idealism incarnate". In fact, Robert's birth coincides with the rise of the Congress Party to power in the second general elections. The son leaves the family the day Antony resigns as the Chief Minister. Though his return home from oblivion coincides with Antony's alliance with the Left in Kerala, his marriage and journey abroad have resonances of the events happening in the Nehru-Gandhi family. Similarly, when the personal tragedies of Dany are woven into the fabric of the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The saxophone is the image through which the disintegration of the nation and democracy is conveyed. Dany does not move, whereas others including his wife, her son and the nation do.

Dany is shaped also as a symbol of Kerala as his personal tragedy is linked to the history of Kerala and India. The narrative chronicles his birth to death in the

context of the transition of the nation from the Salt Satyagraha to the rise of the right wing Bharathiya Janatha Party (BJP) to power. Having been abandoned by all, Dany ends up in a hospital for heart patients on the day E. M. S. died, and A. B. Vajpayee is sworn in as the Prime Minister of the country. This is the last historical reference the narrative has.

Dany's childhood and adulthood are presented in the Latin Christian tradition, but his last moments are shown in a multicultural milieu, when his mortal remains are cremated by an upper caste lady on her land against the tradition. Of this peculiar construction of Dany's identity, C. S. Venkiteswaran has observed in "Dany: Life, Narration and History": "In the conflict between the individual and history, the fact that Danny is a Latin Catholic is also an important political statement. The fact that they are one of the most marginalized communities in Kerala casts a red line on Danny's character in the midst of our public discourse and imagination" (135). According to Venkiteswaran, Dany functions simultaneously as a "nobody and an everybody" (141).

T. V. Chandran's narrative, however, reiterates the stereotype of the chronic drunkard and aimless wanderer of the Latin Christian hero. Dany's space becomes the inside of Margarette's bungalow each time his drinking crosses the limit of what the lady has allowed him. The dishonourable death of the self-sacrificing hero at a nursing home in Bangalore, abandoned by his wife, illegitimate son and long-lost daughter makes him not only a tragic hero but also a prototype of the newly emerging twenty first century subaltern Christian hero.

The subalternisation of the hero is established in the narrative in a paradoxical way. The reference to the lack of education of the protagonist, his friend

Freddy and Chavaro reveals the ways in which the primitivity of the other is addressed. Dany's relationship with Clara, his first wife designates the image of the aimless wanderer and failed citizen as the relation has its tragic climax on the day of the removal of the E. M. S. government, highlighting the break up of federalism. Dany's second marriage also connotes an unholy bond created out of lovelessness. The text captures Dany, the castrated male, denied sexual rights by his wife. Quite aptly, he is represented by the tragic musical notes from the saxophone rather than by any screen presence.

The construction of the hero is oppositional to the main current of the patterns in the dominant cinema. He is essayed with a kind of irony in which the women characters' androgyny problematises his existence. Dany is not the lost, tormented existential hero, but a victim of historical and cultural events. Clara, Margarete and Anna are oppressive to Dany contrary to the social, cultural and political reality of narrative time.

The masculinity construction in a text like *Dany* is far from being hegemonic. The protagonist does not embody hegemonic masculinity characterised by physical strength, dominance, or authority. Instead, his masculinity is constructed through vulnerability, resilience, and a quiet defiance against systemic oppression, aligning with R.W. Connell's concept of marginalised masculinity. "The creation of ... respectable, orderly masculinity had, as its dialectical opposite, the development of rough, disorderly masculinities among the marginalized 'dangerous classes'" (197). As a passive observer of history, Dany's life is shaped by forces beyond his control, reinforcing his status as a subaltern figure. His lack of ambition, refusal to conform to traditional masculinity, and his reliance on music as a means of survival

further detach him from the conventional hero mould. What C. S. Venkiteswaran observes about the complex structure of the film, in “Dany: Life, Narration and History”, explains the complexity of individuals situated in history, and history fashioned through individuals: “*Dany* deeply shakes our fixed habits and comforts that naturally explain and complement each other by interpreting the life and experiences of individuals through historical fiction, and history through the biographies and events of individuals, thereby obscuring the vitality, indefinability, and characteristics of both” (my trans.; 135-6). The Latin Christian hero as the subaltern figure facilitates a historiographical focus for the film which would have been impossible with the hegemonic masculine Syrian Christian hero.

The pattern of establishing the Anglo-Indian (Franco-Indian) characters as similarly marginalized and devoid of agency has been in existence in literature as evidenced by M. Mukundan’s novel, *Daivathinte Vikruthikal (God’s Mischief)*, (1984). The film adaptation of the novel by Lenin Rajendran has also portrayed its hero Alphonsachan as a foreigner, lost in his love for Mayyazhi (Mahe), as a drunkard and drug-addict magician. The simplistic portrayal of its hero as a man who lives with no sense of time matches up with the way Dany also is constructed. In fact, these two remain examples of the otherised Christian heroes in Malayalam popular cinema.

As a system of representation, however, the narrative works on the domain of the formation of the hero. Even though told from a detached third person perspective, resembling the style of voice-over narration in some instances, the narrative has Dany as the anchor whose eyeline constitutes the angle of vision. In other words, typically of film narratives, the point of view of the unheroic portrait is

inscribed in the development of the plot. The spectator is confined to the hero's vision of events. Thus, the critique of hegemonic ideology is made possible within the diegesis.

The Latin Christian milieu is not something entirely new to the twenty first century. This does not mean that all discourses represent the Latin identity in subordinated or marginalised ways as in Chandran's *Dany*. Very often, mainstream cinema resorts to a sort of hegemonic jingoism to strip away the subjectivity of the minorities. Consequently, Latin representations – Freddy Nichols in *Orkkapurathu* (Dir. Kamal, 1988), Vasco da Gama in *Chota Mumbai* (Dir. Anwar Rasheed, 2006), and Daniel D'Zousa in *Anaswaram* (Dir. Jomon, 1991) – are codified in the way upper caste hegemony is constructed. However, *Ee. Ma. Yau. (Jesus Mary Joseph, 2018)*, directed by the National award-winning auteur Lijo Jose Pellissery with a cast which includes professional and amateur performers like Chemban Vinod Jose, Vinayakan, Kainakary Thankaraj, Dileesh Pothan and Pauly Wilson portrays the lives of the ordinary individuals of the community, placed against cosmic fate. Central to the narrative is the perennial theme of death and the paraphernalia which surrounds it as indicated by the title which is an abbreviation of "Eesho Mariyam Youssepe" a prayer, whispered in the ears of the deceased, according to the Christian tradition. An artistic blend of tragedy and dark humour in form, Pellissery's film which is adapted from two of P. F. Mathews' novels, *Iruttill Oru Punyalan (A Saint in Darkness)* and *Chavunilam (Land of Death)*, based on a script written by the author himself foregrounds the Latin Christian 'other' situated in the margins of Kerala society.

Though as texts, both *Dany* and *Ee. Ma. Yau.* are set in the Latin Christian sub-culture and have the narrative form of a tragedy, they differ in the treatment of history. In contrast to *Dany*, the narrative time of Pellissery's film is limited to nearly 24 hours, placing it in the contemporary political milieu. The narrative space in *Dany*, as already discussed, is quite extensive covering many locations across Kerala and Bangalore over a span of seventy years. While the structure of *Dany* denotes the tragedy of the individual getting erased from national and family history, *Ee. Ma. Yau.* highlights the protagonist's insignificance in resisting dominant forces and exposes the inherent darkness within human nature. When read together, the texts offer two distinctive instances of the community history, one that deals with the past and the other with the present.

The film which is set in the coastal village of Chellanam in Ernakulam district of Kerala, mostly populated by the Latin Christians is centred on the death of Vavachan Mesthiri, a mason by profession and a performer of Chavittunadakam. *Ee. Ma. Yau.*, the title which has resonances with the Swedish auteur Ingmar Bergman's classic *The Seventh Seal* (1957), demonstrates how the death of a common man can wreak havoc in the lives of everyone around, especially family and friends. Both the titles are symbolisation of death and the final judgement, central to Christian cultural mythology. The narrative centres around the attempts of Eeshi to give a ceremonial funeral to his deceased father, while the authorities and fate deter him in the process.

Eeshi, the protagonist of *Ee. Ma. Yau.*, is shaped as a typical tragic hero in the Greek tradition. He is caught up in the domain of moral undecidability as he pledges to fulfil his father's dream of a spectacular funeral visualised in the dream sequence that opens the film with the traditional mourning songs and blessings by

the Bishop (00:17:18-35). Though he assures his father that he would conduct the funeral with a first class coffin, music band, and the escort of people carrying the golden cross, in such a way surpassing the feast of St. Xavier who is the icon of Latin identity (00:18:02-25). The film demonstrates how miserably he fails to keep his promise – of a ceremonial funeral – given to his father on the eve of his death because he has only a little money to meet the requirements. He is constructed as a man trapped in his obligations as a son, husband, and member of his community, reflecting a masculinity shaped by emotional burden rather than physical dominance. Challenging the traditional domain of manhood as action and control, his character offers a subversion of masculinity that Malayalam cinema has been portraying since the 1980s. Specifically, Eeshi's masculinity is marked by his helplessness, frustration, and a quiet endurance that challenges dominant patriarchal ideals. How his Latin Christian identity plays a role in his performativity as a subdued individual reveals the contradictory dimensions of caste politics within Christianity.

The first shot of Eeshi in the film is a medium shot in semi darkness in the evening which captures him in the queue to purchase liquor (00:12:58-13:15) followed by his sitting on his old scooter driving home. He is constructed in these static eyelevel matching shots contrastively to the much dominant hero construction in mainstream films. In the dimension of economics, he functions antithetical to the neoliberal principle of self-interest. By having helped Lazar, a co-villager in times of necessity, Eeshi not only finds it hard to manage affairs in his small household but also loses his friendship. Even when he is presented the demonetised currency by his father, he is neither sad nor angry. Being an extremely simple ordinary person who

is unaware of the legalities and formalities after death, Eeshi becomes a scornful object to everyone. In all the various images, his masculinity which is beyond the traditional arch of religion is addressed. The protagonist's madness in the climatic scenes is typically Shakespearean, on being deserted by all, including the institution of the Church. In the way Eeshi is pitted against the authoritarian church in his attempt to give a ceremonial funeral to his deceased father who carved the altar of the church from a single piece of wood, Baradwaj Rangan observes an element of similarity with the muted masculinity of Solomon in *Amen* who was the son of a legendary clarinettist and who wants to win a music competition for his father. The only instance of usual cinematic heroism in *Ee. Ma. Yau.* is when Eeshi, out of desperation kicks down the authority incarnated parish priest. However, the realistic medium shot which captures this instance is not one of affirmation of masculinity and rebellion, but one that leads to chaos and ultimate madness.

Eeshi's struggles are exacerbated by the systemic failures and social hierarchies beyond his control. The church and police which represent hegemonic power, continuously obstruct his attempts to fulfil his duty. The priest, who is considered in any ideal situation as a source of moral guidance, instead represents institutional authority, corruption and bureaucracy. The police, another pillar of authority, is also instrumental in the harassment of the protagonist, questioning the circumstances of his father's death. These barriers reinforce Eeshi's powerlessness, demonstrating how his masculinity is constructed through vulnerability rather than control.

Eeshi's character is seen as an extension of the values his father Vavachan held. Situated on the margins of society, Eeshi and Vavachan Mesthiri are social

outsiders. The father figure is construed as someone who defies the socially constructed legal system and the conventional sexual mores of the society, by having another wife and son. When he is told by Chavaro that his daughter Nisa was having an affair with a Hindu boy of the Araya community, he is reluctant to question her. In psychological terms, he believes in the materiality of human existence and feels that sexual drive is a fundamental drive in all. Just as he occasionally leaves his household to stay with the 'other' woman, he thinks, Nisa too wishes to stay with the man whom she loves. He is also constructed as a clownish persona, unaware of social, political and historical realities. The prohibited notes he carries as his savings for his own funeral (00:18:38-19: 20), and the arrack which he has stored for drinking demonstrate his non-awareness of the state of things (00:18:30). In essence, Vavachan is as inconsequential as his old photograph that Eeshi brings out from, among the old records, after his death. Towards the end, Eeshi also meets the same fate of oblivion and madness that characterised his father.

As a marginalised character, the construction of Eeshi's religiosity is complicated. Though he is the son of an artist who carved the altar of the church, his spirituality is portrayed as beyond the conventions of the establishmentarian religion, in his non-attending of Church services. The notion that Vavachan believed in his cultural identity as a Latin Christian is evidenced by his desire for a ceremonial funeral and festival references. The text discusses an instance from his past which outrightly demonstrates that art is his spirituality and it is superior to religious customs. Moreover, as an art form, Chavittunadakam stands outside the premises of the churches. The text suggestively demonstrates how Vavachan Mesthiri and Eeshi are pushed outside the borders of the establishment of the church

because they follow the art form which is more integral to them than the rigid ritualistic conventions of the church. Central to the conflict in the narrative is the positioning of stamping drama as an art form of survival and protest of the poor Latin Christian communities. It is this being an outsider in terms of community identification that forces Eeshi to symbolically bury his father in the premises of his house which has always been designated as having an outside status.

Elitism, which is caste and class combined in the Kerala scenario, is attacked at micro and macro levels in the film. At the micro level, it is accomplished with unparalleled subtlety. For instance, the politics of hegemonic nationalism is indirectly attacked with reference to the historical reality of demonetisation. After identifying the absurdity of his father carrying the prohibited currency notes, Eeshi makes a poignant comment that demonitisation has made his life, as a commoner who works at a co-operative society, miserable. At the macro level, this critique is carried out through the hegemonic authoritarianism symbolised by the vicar, the antagonist of the narrative.

This pattern of constructing the heroism within the text has as its corollary the interchanging of the value systems in the film. For example, the church vicar Fr. Zacharias Parappurath (Dileesh Pothan), who thinks of himself as a Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot, is a villainous psychopath who ironically has all the attributes of the hitherto glorified heroes of Malayalam films. The character himself affirms that he should have been a police officer rather than a priest, highlighting the investigative instinct of the heroic code. Though he is also a member of the Latin Christian community in terms of caste identity, his position as the investigating church vicar and his body language sets him apart class wise. The long shot of the

priest walking with his torchlight just before the film's intermission is precisely infused with the authority of an investigator. It is against this authoritarianism that Eeshi asks in his frustration and desperation, when the priestly authority denies his father, the deserved funeral: "Is the cemetery your father's property?" (my trans.; 01:28:04-05). Of the series of events which climaxed in slapping the megalomaniac priest, Shamil Francis observes: "In declaring Vaavachan's death a suspicious one, the priest completes a cycle begun by the unavailable doctor, the insensitive moneylender, and the fed up suspecting nurse. Eeshi's slap is the Dalit Christian's response to a Church that has abandoned him" (5093). However, these utterances lack the agency of the hegemonic hero to be converted into affirmative action.

Eeshi's subjectivity, when analysed in the context of the biosphere, is more complex and varied, dissecting the elitism of hegemonic heroism. The text's placing of the human world simultaneously with the nonhuman emphasises not only the parity of all species but also a way of understanding the fictional world beyond the anthropocene. The final shot of the text which presents four of the dead of the village in the narrative time and space is more than a magical realist narrative technique. In terms of class and caste, it assumes the special significance that the marginalised heroes are imagined as part of the animal world. In terms of the scale of characters in the text, the bigger scale of the frame given to the non-human suggests the equality of all.

One of the important dimensions of cultural studies is the exploration of various subcultures. Subcultures, according to Toby Miller, "signify a space under culture, simultaneously opposed to, derivative of, and informing official, dominant, governmental, commercial, bureaucratically organized forms of life – a shift away

from culture as a tool of domination and towards culture as a tool of empowerment” (2). The motif of the performance of stamping drama is an intrinsic element of Latin subculture. And, the analysis of various cultural practices like ‘Chevittomma’ (the habit of uttering the prayer – ‘Jesus Mary Joseph, protect this soul’ – in the ears of the dying person) and kannokkupattu (mourning song in the form of the loud wails in synching tune) within Latin Christianity is essential to understand the plural dimensions of their cultural existence. The centrality of the institution of the Church is subverted in the text powerfully by incorporating myriad elements of the subculture, like the subversion of hegemonic heroism.

The correlation between the medium and the message in *Ee. Ma. Yau.* substantiates the blending of magical realism and realism as essential for exploring the marginal dimensions of the Latin Christians. The realism of the text is sandwiched between two surrealistic shots. In the prologue at the beginning of the text which is Vavachan’s dream, a static camera in a long shot captures a hyper-slow funeral procession moving in a straight line along the beach. Similarly, the epilogue of the text is a few montage shots which present Vavachan, Simon the gravedigger, the duck and the dog – everyone who is dead in the narrative time and space – waiting for the boats to the mythical other shore along with the two men who play cards nonstop on the beach that rainy night. Between the two ethereal scenes, the text uncovers in realistic sequences, the premises of Vavachan Mesthiri’s house and the surrounding village. Thus, rather than being a narrative on the morbidity of death, *Ee. Ma. Yau.* questions the construction of hegemonic heroism, at a structural level, in the context of marginal representations.

The alienated visual world of the subaltern Latin identities is subtly produced in texts like *Thottappan* (Dir. Shanavas K. Bavakkutty, 2019) based on Francis Norohna's short story and *Kumbalangi Nights* (Dir. Madhu C. Narayanan, 2019). In a compelling narrative detailing the relationship between a godfather and a stepdaughter, *Thottappan* demystifies the authoritarian connotations of the term "godfather". The person is also expected to support the child's parents in raising their child in Christian faith. Playing down the domain of aggressive connotations of Francis Ford Coppola's classics *The Godfather I* and *The Godfather II*, the text focusses on the marginalised identity construction of the protagonist. *Kumbalangi Nights*, with its focus on a dysfunctional family signalling the collapse of dominant structures associated with patriarchy, demonstrates the convergence of a hitherto negated/exploited landscape and objectified people assuming speaking subjectivity. These variations exemplify the myriad novel ways in which Latin Christian subjectivity is pitted against the elitist Syrian tradition.

The curious identity of the subaltern within Christianity functions as a trope in Lal Jose's critically acclaimed *Achanurangatha Veedu* translated as *The House Where the Father Doesn't Sleep* written by Babu Janardanan. The film has its narrative set in the High ranges of Kerala which ironically has been the centre of many (action) thrillers in which the Syrian Christian settler heroes like *Phantom Pailey*, *Kizhakkann Pathrose* and Georgekutty of *Drishyam* displayed their heroism. The film is analysed to demonstrate how the stereotype of the macho aggressive male is significantly replaced with an image of a muted subaltern whose agency is curtailed.

The film narrates the story of Samuel (Salimkumar), a devout Pentecostal Christian and a widowed government clerk, who raises his three daughters alone after his wife's death. His youngest daughter, Lisamma (Muktha), is the brightest among them and harbours dreams of higher education, despite their financial struggles. The lives of his elder daughters, Treesa and Shirly, are also in crisis. However, their fragile world shatters when Lisamma mysteriously disappears. Samuel, desperate and powerless, searches for her, only to uncover the grim reality of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. As he navigates a corrupt system filled with apathetic authorities and opportunists, he faces societal judgment, religious constraints, and personal despair. His anguish intensifies upon discovering that his daughter's suffering is not just physical but also psychological, rendering her broken beyond repair. With the system failing to bring justice to his abused daughter, he attempts to commit suicide with his elder daughters whose lives have also become tragic. The film ends up in a tragic climax, where once again Lisamma is left to her fate among the abusers.

Throughout the diegesis, there is an attempt to discuss the hostility of structures like the government, hegemonic churches and judicial system alienating Samuel. Having been moulded as a tragic hero, he is introduced in a couple of aerial shots lying on a stretcher being taken to a hospital. A voice over from television reveals that Samuel and the two daughters attempted to commit suicide due to an unfavourable court order in a sexual assault case. This introduction is a narrative device to connect Samuel's life history in relation to the complex social and political history of the state which remains anti-Dalit. Reading together with early classics, it

can be argued that Samuel is equated with Neeli of P. Bhaskaran's 1954 film in the sense that the lack of agency has converted them into tragic visual spectacles.

Samuel who was Prabhakaran by birth is a converted Dalit Christian who belongs to a Pentacostal church in the diegetic time. He is portrayed as having converted twice – from Hinduism to Christianity initially to marry a 'white' Catholic Christian girl' and then to Protestantism, because the hegemonic versions considered him and his family as otherised (00:12:45-55). The song "Seeyon Manavalan" (00:07:46-11:40) choreographs the vitality and energy of the subaltern version of spirituality, different from the Syrian and Latin versions which had hitherto dominated Malayalam cinema. The next sequence in the Electricity Board Office where he works, presents how his religious identity converges with his social identity. He contrasts himself with the mainstream Christians by addressing himself as 'the black Christian' against the 'white Syrian Christians' (00:12:20-30).

However, it is contrasted with the mainstream Christian perspective of Saramma, the Syrian Christian, when she says that Jesus would run out of church as the Pentecostal prayer was too loud. (Christy 137) This exoticisation of Samuel's religion necessitated in the discussion of the victimisation and objectification of a gang raped girl and her family requires a hero who belongs to a Dalit Christian family, and not a Syrian one. The film, as argued by Navaneetha Mokkal, "poses the difficult transactions of telling the story of a masculine subject who is bereft of authority, embodied as different and branded by his caste, and yet remolding this figure in such a way that it can appeal to a large body of viewers" (2).

The discussion of the politics of conversion with reference to its Christian hero in *Achanurangatha Veedu* is problematic in the sense that it further takes away

Samuel's narrative agency. It is evident as the narrative is firmly placed on a quote by Poykayil Appachan alias Poykayil Yohannan given by Samuel's friend and trade Union activist Sekharan Nair (Murali) that the Dalits are neither Hindus nor Christians and they are accepted to be a part of neither (00:12:57-13:30). Though, the politics of conversion is argued as a form of resistance against the elitist formations in mainstream Hinduism and Christianity, Samuel is not at all heroic in any sense of the term. His masculinity, which can be contrastively described as Dalit masculinity, has structured the film as a tragedy. It is quite ironic that the narrative requires an upper caste Nair to speak for the subaltern and to disseminate 'the caste politics' and 'the politics of caste discourses'. In many other instances in the plot too, Samuel is silent and Sekharan speaks for him, be it in the meeting with the minister, or at the police station. However, the social reformer's words to justify the choice of Samuel's conversion do not match with the main current of the diegesis. In other words, with limited narrative agency, he is an objectified tragic spectacle, rather than a subject – the doer of the narrative action. As Gyanendra Pandey has opined: "the subaltern is a necessary presence, s/he cannot be wished or spirited away; and yet he or she cannot fully belong. S/he has to be the same – and yet different at the same time." (280-1)

The domain of the hero being exoticised is best evidenced in the pre-interval sequence in which Lisamma is escorted to the Idukki Sessions Court in a police van. Filmed with rapid editing and intense camera movements, the scene is paradigmatically situated amidst a hostile mob, referring to the hegemonic patriarchal spectator who voyeuristically consumes the female body on screen. As observed by Navaneetha Mokkil:

This is cut to a slow-motion sequence of Samuel and Lisamma stepping out of the bus. Lisamma's face is covered with a green blanket, but one of the men in the crowd brusquely pulls down that covering. This is cut to a series of close-up shots of a weeping Lisamma and the sound of her loud cries resonate in this scene. Samuel's hands encircle her and hold her close as he pulls the cloth back on to her face. The slow motion allows us as spectators to pause and dwell on this tableau of the father and daughter's humiliation.

(4)

It is the objectification of the female face coupled with that of the muted male that situate the traditional spectator in *Achanurangatha Veedu*. The visual dynamics of hegemonic masculine formation, because of the identification matrix with the dominant male, does not effectively produce such a case of reification.

The perspective through which the Dalit identity is presented in the narrative is a contestable one. In other words, the racist/ethnic preferences regarding the Christian versus the Dalit Christian are strictly asserted in the text of the film. Ania Loomba, the postcolonial critic, defines the other as "everything that lies outside the self." (123). Despite the fact that *Achanurangatha Veedu* is a narrative with a Dalit hero, it is not a politically correct one or a pro-Dalit one because the text projects the fantasies of the hegemonic into the constructed other. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said has defined the self as the familiar and the other as the strange (43). The frequent inclusion of Pentecostal prayers not only connotes the irony of the inefficacy of religion, but also places the marginalised religious practice as a performance in itself. Carmel Christy observes the difference in significations of the Protestant prayer: "The movement of the bodies dressed in white with occasional screaming of

hallelujahs in the film invited criticism from the Pentecostal sections for allegedly caricaturing them and their prayers. The visuals of the prayer song, if read with Saramma's comment on Jesus, is a pointer to how the prayer is seen as a marker of 'difference'" (138).

It is evident that Samuel is estranged and alienated in the text due to his complex Dalit Christian identity. The absence of Lillykkutty – his wife who once belonged to the hegemonic Syrian denomination – makes the protagonist an 'irresponsible' father unable to properly look after the daughters. Samuel's masculinity is an ethnically marginalised one rather than racial. This limited agency of the Dalit poses a problem which Carmel Christy has noted:

According to the narrative of the film, the girl's mother dies when the children were young. Mother, a Syrian Christian, and father, a dalit (sic) Christian, in the film – being a transgressive union – do not exist together in the visuals of the film, except during the occasional mention of the mother character. . . . The incomplete family with a dalit Christian background is rather sympathetically portrayed to narrate the suffering of Lisamma, the sexually-harassed daughter. (138)

What the text connotes in the realm of subaltern masculinity is the tragic melodrama, the genre. Samuel is portrayed in contrast to Sekharan Nair and Harikrishnan (Prithviraj). While the latter enjoys the privileges of caste to overcome the tragedy, the protagonist plunges deeper and deeper into catastrophe without a cathartic moment. The muted father figure is supplemented with further miseries in the family: Treesa is separated from her husband and her daughter, and Shirly's engagement gets cancelled.

The Dalit representation in Malayalam cinema consists of its own domain of inaccuracy. Unlike characters belonging to the hegemonic identity groups, the Dalit characters undergo a process of objectification by the addition and attribution of ethnographic features. Such practices were aimed at producing preconceived notions about a community and its people. In other words, subalternity is inscribed through “indirect yet legitimized narrative/visual signs like name, habits, body and occupation” (Parayil 68). The liberal gaze of the hegemonic spectators often demands a body which is otherised enough. P. K. Ratheesh has questioned such a stance of ethnographic voyeurism in spectatorship in the context of *Kammattippadam* (Dir. Rajiv Ravi, 2016):

The ‘liberal’ gaze that extends to the bodies of other identities (here, the subaltern/Dalit) requires a customization of realism. Embracing the digital hyperreal state that is a step beyond reality But it is a complete absurdity to try to make these people, who have been only subjects until now, an ethnographic object or subject of study.

A comparative analysis of films on the same theme can be used to explain the politics of the narrativisation of the hero as an ‘other’. Ever since the origins of cinema, one of the common plotlines of (Malayalam) cinema is the image of a ‘raped girl’, who evokes sympathy among the spectators. According to Mulvey in her landmark essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, the image of the castrated woman forms the crux of scopophilic pleasure of the spectator which is organised around the notion of the male gaze and works either by voyeurism or narcissism (14). She argues further that in devaluing the image of the woman by

presenting her as a rape victim, the male (spectator) fantasy is shaped and satisfied (21-22).

However, there always exists class and caste-based difference in the discourses of Malayalam cinema. *Achanurangatha Veedu* is thematically similar to Jeethu Joseph's *Drishyam* and Haneef Adeni's *The Great Father* (2017) in the context of the image of the 'sexually abused' girl, told against the backdrop of a Christian hero. Nevertheless, Lal Jose's film demonstrates a differential location of power of the hero which can be explained with reference to Mulvey's statement in *Death 24x a Second*: "The extraordinary significance of the human figure in cinema, the star, its iconic sexuality, raises the question of how desire and pleasure are reconfigured in . . . cinema, as stillness both within the moving image and within a changed power relation of spectatorship" (164). Mokkil presents a comparative analysis of the concept of sleepless fatherhood, explicating the differences in the construction of the hero between *Achanurangatha Veedu* and the Jeethu Joseph-Mohanlal film.

In *Drishyam* and its sequel, the abused girl's father, Georgekutty, Mohanlal's superhero, takes up the moral responsibility of the murder committed in the process and rescues the family. Both the narratives are similar as far as the locale of action is concerned – the remote villages of Idukki district, but dissimilar with respect to the status of the hero. Samuel is a government employee whereas Georgekutty is a self-employed 'uneducated' cable operator and farmer. What makes Samuel a suffering hero and Gerorgekutty an 'acting' hero is the caste difference. In other words, the political unconscious of Malayalam cinema necessitates a Dalit identity to the Christian hero when his daughter becomes a rape victim. As Mokkil has pointed out:

“In sharp contrast to this in *Drishyam* the star presence of Mohan Lal (sic) as the guardian of two daughters is deployed to effectively reassemble the domestic sphere and insulate it against all crisis, including the potential threat posed by the state machinery” (7). The businessman David Ninan, the protagonist of *The Great Father*, played by Mammooty traces and kills the man who molests his daughter. In both these superstar centric narratives, the cinematic apparatus works in such a manner that the heroic action generates visual pleasure to the spectator. The low angle shots, slow motion moves, and zoom in on the face and body of the hero are the essence of these superstar films. In contrast, the camera moves in such a way that Samuel is deglamourised and his ‘immobile’, fragile body is fetishised enough. Georgekutty and Ninan take an ‘apolitical’ revenge upon the bad guys and criminal system whereas Samuel deranges into a sort of mental disorder, when his family collapses. The cinematic apparatus of *Achanurangatha Veedu* is conceived by way of top angle and eye level shots which ensure the protagonist’s inferiority. Samuel signifies what Georgekutty and David Ninan do not: the lack of political agency of the hero.

Most films shot in the Christian background since the 1990s do not seriously make use of the religious imagery in a significant manner. One of the striking aspects of the plot construction of *Achanurangatha Veedu* is the way in which the religious imagery is employed. Unlike most narratives in which the hero merely assumes a Christian name, Samuel’s character is built around the cinematic images of his conversion to Protestantism, the birth of his third girl, the pastor’s prayer to forgive Samuel and the community prayer before Samuel and family go to listen to the final verdict. It is through the camera positioning in these shots that Samuel’s subaltern identity is enforced in these narratives. The repeated long shots in dim

light or in low light in which Samuel is presented mostly as one in the crowd show how he is constructed as a muted hero. The Pentacostal background, in fact, is a trope to ensure the marginality of Samuel cinematically and culturally. Thus, the deeply embedded conventions of a universal narrative defining manhood through decisiveness and dominance are subverted in subtle and uncertain ways in Samuel in *Achanurangatha Veedu*.

As a mode of representation, naturalism is often seen as a counterpoint to the mainstream narrative cinema. It is also argued that the naturalist realism of the narratives mostly followed in these films is intrinsically related to the ordinariness or subalternisation of the individuals, including the heroes, who populate the narratives. Thus, unheroic central characters like Dany, Eeshi and Samuel are the subaltern perspective of a hero, both through theme and form.

The representation of minorities within the hegemonic formation of Christianity in Malayalam cinema broadly opens up the complex configurations of masculinity. What appears as the toxic manifestation of hegemonic masculinity is subverted into many deviant versions with reference to the Latin Christian and Dalit Christian identity formations. The process supplies new ego ideals for the spectators who were until recently positioned in patriarchal and hegemonic subject positions.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

The concept of community power and its representation in cinema has always been an intriguing and multi-dimensional area of study. In the context of the evolving socio-political landscape of post-independent India, such analytical studies mark the complexities of subjectivity construction. Cinema, as a powerful medium of mass communication, has the unique ability to reflect, influence, and shape societal norms and power dynamics within communities. Since the construction, articulation, and evolution of Christian masculinities in Malayalam cinema assumes special significance due to the complex social organisation and peculiar demography, the thesis has sought to examine the shifting codes of the hero construction in Malayalam cinema 1990-2017 in order to examine to discern and dissect the multiple diegetic encryptions of selfhood formation which shaped Christian agency as hegemonic.

In its history of more than seventy five years, Malayalam cinema has produced certain inauthentic representation of caste and community relations. The plural male subjectivities represented in the cinema of the 1950s voicing the ideals of the progressive liberal have been transformed into an upper caste Nair identity connoting a homogenous Malayali male experience. Until the 1980s, Christian presence in cinema had been minimal and mostly represented as the binary other of the normal Malayali envisioned as the savarna Nair masculinity. In terms of Christian subjectivities, the Syrian Christian alpha male was endorsed as the authentic norm in mainstream Malayalam cinema for decades. By the 1980s, the

masculinisation of the planter-cum-settler Christian as “Achayan” was formed as a dominant, but regressive ideological structure. This thesis has been an examination of the divergent strategies in terms of class, caste and ethnicity to project the Syrian Christian male on screen as the ideal ego of the Malayali spectator. The homogenisation of identities that produced the hegemonic masculine, along gender and casteist lines, gave rise to the near erasure of the identities of Dalit Christians, Nadar Christians, and Anglo-Indians under the hegemonic and elitist Syrian Christian identity. In the second decade of the twenty first century, there occurred a significant shift in the selfhood fashioning of the Christian male, especially that of the heroes; the dominant masculine formations which garnered scopophilic visual pleasure so far have been subverted to a more inclusive and revisionary conceptualisation.

This research is positioned at the intersection of film studies and cultural studies, looking into the field of cinema as an art form, and also delving into the broader discussions of power and representation in media. Methodologically, this research has employed a combination of qualitative content analysis and theoretical framework application to analyse the narratives, character development, and visual symbolism used in films to represent community power. Theoretical frameworks such as cultural studies, film theory, power dynamics theories, and contemporary understandings of masculinity have been pivotal in interpreting the data. Utilising the lens of cultural studies, the thesis has examined how films reflect and shape the cultural identities and power structures within various communities, highlighting how media representation influences societal norms and values. Aspects of film theory, especially those of Laura Mulvey, Christian Metz, Robert Stam and Louis

Spence have provided tools to analyse cinematic techniques and narratives, facilitating an understanding of how filmmakers use the medium to portray or contest community power dynamics, thereby affecting audience perception and interpretation. Meanwhile, power dynamics theories of Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu and Louis Althusser enabled a critical analysis of the relationships and hierarchies depicted in films, examining how these representations reinforce or challenge existing societal power structures and contribute to public discourse on authority and resistance. The masculinity theories of Reywann Connell, Michael Kimmel and Steve Neele provided novel understandings regarding the changing domains of masculinity constructions, denoting a subversive change from hegemonic formations to alternative and subordinate ones.

The Christian experience in movies is homogenised and limited to the elitist subjectivity constructions of the Syrian Christian masculinity within the discursive structures of Malayalam cinema, since the 1950s. The mythification of the Syrian Christians as belonging to the dominant caste structure in the Kerala public sphere was narrativised in history over the last two millennia. The accounts of the arrival and martyrdom of Jesus' disciple St. Thomas and the stories of conversion of Namboodiris formed the roots of this hegemonic self-fashioning. In a society, where caste origin assigned meanings to the individuals, the Christians – the then trader class – were placed in the hegemonic higher strata, and enjoyed the goodwill of the kings. How the colonial phase in Indian history cemented Christian social power, despite their minority status in terms of population, was evaluated as a foundation to the construction of the social and cultural power of the community. The influential patronage of the western colonial powers and the Romanisation of the liturgy of the

majority of Syrian Christians after the Synod of Diamper established them as associated with and belonging to the hegemonic world order. Although the nineteenth century reformation movements, both within and outside Christianity, resulted in massive social transformation through education, the problematisation of the notion of caste, and the consequent formation of Christian subaltern groups, colonial modernity as an evolving framework established the social, economic and cultural power of the Christians. In the post-independence phase, Christian hegemony was reinforced with the liberation struggle in 1959 against the first communist government of the country and the formation of the Kerala Congress as an elitist political party mostly led by aristocratic Christian leaders.

The historical construction of hegemonic masculinity in the late 1980s was observed to exist more among Christian heroes than the traditional caste Hindu feudal aristocracy. The early constructions of Christian identity were those of the hardworking farmer/soldier/ labourer in *Snehaseema* and the progressive social reformist planter youth, questioning conservatism and social evils such as dowry in *Padatha Painkili*. The sentimental wave of the 1960s denoted the failure of individualism in the tragic portrayal of the helpless male in *Bharya* and the glorification of the self in mythologicals, idealising the emblematic religious virtues. The Christian heroes of the 1970s represented the collapse of moral certitude in the physically and morally vulnerable portrayals in *Ara Nazhika Neram* while contrastively performing the young radical, who was rebelliously declaring his independence from the archived value systems and the dominant social institutions like family and the church in *Dathuputhran*. It was in the 1980s that the aggressive, adventurous, rough macho male configuration embodied as the Achayan, populating

the silver screen emerged as a counterpoint to the liberal humanist heroes of the previous decades. The analysis of *Sangham* confirmed how the films simultaneously address male hierarchy and caste supremacy, even with the textual unconscious problematising the Christian constructions of selfhood. These representations of the hegemonic masculine, analogous to the educated and (un)employed middle class Nair hero of the family dramas and comedies, were responses to address the changing gender politics.

The third chapter of the thesis analysed the making of the Achayan identity of the Christians of Kerala. The comparisons and contrasts with the then dominant upper caste Hindu heroes, designated Christian protagonists like Kottayam Kunjachan, as signifying an uncanny duality – embodying rugged individualism and street smartness that made them heroic despite the anti-hero characteristics, both as outsiders and less modern figures. The newly emerging Christian hero whose diegetic sphere is the agrarian landscape lacked the remarkable pedigree of the upper caste Hindu heroes, in their self-centred egoism and anti-working class stance. Although *Spadikam* demonstrated further the evolution of anti-hero characteristics, the endorsement of hegemonic patriarchal elitism in the protector archetype of the hero subverted his renunciation of the family name and genealogy. The ultra-masculinisation of the Christian hero was furthered in *Lelam*, with the contrastive representations of benevolent supremacy and the rugged individualism in the formally uneducated father figure and in the modern educated captain-turned-planter-turned-liquor baron son, and their assertive performativity of masculinities against the powerful religious and political establishments. It was revealed that all these narratives are anchored in the devaluation of the woman and the various male

others. Twenty first century narratives of the first decade further accentuated the hegemonic 'Achayanism' in relation to the regional mythification of a Christian landscape in central Travancore in *Chathurangam* for heroic performativity. The classical Christian Achayan, characterised by physical prowess and unwavering courage, has gradually given way to more complex and flawed characters in the 2010s, destereotyping and unmasking the roots of traditional hegemonic heroism in the satirical construction of Pranchiyettan in a less hegemonic fashion. Although, there are occasional connotations of the archaic historical marginality of the Christians, the research has demonstrated that, the "Achayans" in cinema, like the hegemonic Hindu aristocratic heroes, are naturalised as the ideal ego of the spectator.

The analysis of the bureaucrat heroes who form the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatus further highlighted the hegemonic organisation of community politics. Having functioned as the solitary, morally right men against a corrupt system, the Christian heroes were identified with the rising nationalism across the country in the 1990s. The angry, firebrand, socialist district collector Joseph Alex of *The King*, the product and inheritor of masculine and Christian hegemony, represents the ideological consciousness of the spectator by embodying gynophobia and transphobia. Like the Hindu heroes of the 1990s, inheriting the much 'desirable' aristocratic pedigree enables the hero to perform the saviour of the nation archetype against corruption and disintegration. In Chakkumveetil Anthony Varghese in *Olympian Anthony Adam*, the Christian religious imagery and the discourse of nationalism combine in peculiar ways to produce masculine hegemony, by subjecting women to objectification by the dominant gaze, and enforcing the

canon of divine justice on the anti-national villainous other. Antony Punnekkadan's hypermasculine significations of domineering heroism against the elitist heroes and antagonists demonstrate how Christian social power is hegemonically equivalent to the performativity of caste in Hinduism. The thesis has identified two notable stereotypes of the bureaucrat Christian hero in the twenty first century cinematic imagination in Mollywood. The first is that of the hero critiquing religion and the politics of domination through the subversive use of religious imagery. The second is the complete disavowal of the discussion of religion in the texts. Although Sam Alex in *Memories* who comes across as the shabby, and aimless agnostic police officer lamenting his personal loss, the strong religious symbolism of the text in combination with the class and caste hierarchy empowers him to perform the ideal hero of the spectator's imagination. Contrastingly, the eponymous protagonist in *Action Hero Biju* who is constructed as subversive of the components of the dominant masculine at the surface level, the Ideological State Apparatus of class, caste and gender relations constitute him in the hegemonic masculine order. Many of the contemporary bureaucrat heroes are found to be less religious and more urban and cosmopolitan, with middle class values interpellated in the hierarchical symbolic order. The fourth chapter of the thesis, thus, charts the trajectory of the ultra-masculine hegemonic of the 1990s evolving into a more subversive and nuanced performance of hegemony in the young bureaucrat Christian heroes.

Migration and settlement were two dominant ideas against which Christian heroism was explored in Malayalam literature and cinema. The protagonists of early settler narratives were stereotyped as typically rugged, morally upright men who embodied individualism, bravery and justice. However, when the settler texts were

co-read with the American Westerns, the Christian settler heroes of the late twentieth century narratives connoted hegemony through the glorification of settler brutality and lawlessness. The history of migration was narrativised from two divergent perspectives: the dominant settler-centric and the victim-centric. Chandy in *Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*, is the ultimate hegemonic settler hero who establishes his authority over the human world, the flora and the fauna of the Edenic settlement, and tames the woman and the natives with his verbosity, physicality and stubborn determination. Solomon in *Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*, a hero of the previous decade, is identified with a subjugated version of masculinity; however, his economic capital from the vineyard of the settlement enables him to perform his modern image of a refined and romantic planter. Though still hegemonic, there have been more nuanced versions of the settler nostalgia in films like the new millennial narratives like *Manassinakkare*, with the Christian hero Roy connoting a critique of the plantation myth. Violence which was associated with colonialism and migration is powerfully symbolised by the image of the gun in narratives like *Iyobinte Pusthakam*. The convergence of two contrastive ideologies – hegemonic Christianity and working class communism – is the ideological framework on the basis of which a novel complex masculine heroism has been traced. The discourses of settlement and migration became more subversive in the twenty first century narratives as the settler was vilified in contemporary revisionary narratives.

The last analytical chapter of the thesis is about the representation of non-hegemonic Christian heroes. The close scrutiny of the timid, uncouth, insecure, sexually inferior, victimised and permanently servile protagonist of *Vidheyam* has given the image of ‘the settler other’ as a counterpoint to the glorification of the

category in the hegemonic imaginary. The counter discourses of the new millennium, with a renewed sense of cinematic realism focussing on the lived experience of the Latin Christians, set on level plainlands and seashores, represent the heroes as subordinate masculinities. The hero is stereotyped as a loser playing his saxophone, the loner in a family dominated by wealth and class, in an allegory of the marginalised subjectivities of a new nation. The tired, 'black', muted, non-performative Dalit Pentecostal hero was necessitated, in a narrative that discusses the victimisation and objectification of a gang raped girl, as a device around which the subordinate masculinity of helplessness due to the lack of agency is registered. The crisis of the hegemonic masculine is represented as non-elitist and subordinate to the grand narratives of religion in a series of static eyelevel matching shots of the Latin Christian protagonist and Jesus' namesake Eeshi deteriorating into Shakespearian madness, in *Ee Ma Yau*. The thesis has demonstrated how these non-elitist masculinities, while connoting marginal Christian identities, destabilise the homogenous hegemonic stereotype.

The Covid pandemic has produced a new kind of masculinity across Indian cinema. The changes in gender perspectives due to feminist activism and introduction of new academic vistas like intersectionality have produced a new understanding of masculinity and femininity. Cinema has responded to it in two contrastive ways. The first is the subversion of hegemonic gender constructs in films such as *The Great Indian Kitchen* (Dir. Jeo Baby, 2020), *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (Dir. Vipin Das, 2023), *Sara's* (Dir. Jue Anthony Joseph, 2022), *Biriyani* (Dir. Sajin Babu, 2020) and *Kathal: The Core* (Dir. Jeo Baby, 2023). These movies address the crisis of hegemonic masculinity and they address subordinate and subversive masculinities

forcing the male to give up the traditional heroic paradigms in shot composition, camera angles and body language. On the other hand, across south Indian cinema, there emerged a new superheroic masculinity, highlighting hegemonic heroism. The *KGF* franchise (Dir. Prashanth Neel, 2018 and 2022), *Jailer* (Dir. Nelson Dileepkumar, 2023), *RRR* (Dir. S.S. Rajamouli, 2022) and *Bheeshma Parvam* (Dir. Amal Neerad, 2021) are some such examples across southern India. During this phase in Malayalam cinema, the aristocratic Hindu identity was replaced by an equally dominant Christian identity in films like *Kaduva* (Dir. Shaji Kailas, 2022), *RDX: Robert Dony Xavier* (Dir. Nahas Hidayath, 2023) and *Marco* (Dir. Haneef Adeni, 2024). Hegemonic masculinity is manifested along with its various subversive critiques in Malayalam cinema. The perspective argued here is that caste dominated androcentric ideologies are perpetuated with a shift in community identifications.

Cinema, as an image making process, (re)produces the positive and negative stereotypes of a community. People might feel jubilant and congratulatory on the repetitions of the positive stereotypes. In fact, the thesis has argued that even the positive images are a kind of reductionism, and thus an attempt to construct a singular homogenous identity of a caste, race, gender or ethnic group is problematic. This is mostly in association with the mainstream societal perceptions underlined by the dominant ideologies. Whether the heroes are represented as dominant Acharyans, powerful settlers, or cute romantic heroes, the so-called positive stereotypes of Christians in Kerala only attempt to minimise the diversity of the spectrum of identities. Just as the negative stereotypes perpetuate the images of eternally diabolic and sinister figures, the positive stereotypes mark a community erroneously as a

homogenised identity group. Both are equally contestable in terms of the politics of representation.

Hegemonic masculinity has always been a pervasive presence in Malayalam cinema, but the current century has witnessed the formation of more masculinities. The visual pleasure of popular cinema anchored in narrativizing the battle cries of the feudal warlords and Syrian Christian aristocracy was radically subverted by a new identification matrix that has effectively enabled identification with the alternate masculinities. The rugged individualism of white clad Achayans, the enforcement of rustic settler ideologies and the execution of bureaucratic dominance, the hereditary genealogies are being increasingly contested and negotiated, making way for alternative hero constructions from the 'other' identity groups within Christianity. Observing the conflicting terrain of masculinity construction across history, the research has highlighted the emergence of a new cinematic realism that complicates the traditional hero code of dominance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Furthering the research on the Christian hero representation in Malayalam cinema, there are some possible developments. In and around the Covid Pandemic, the diegetic and ideological framework of cinema has changed radically. The study proposes four different alternatives for extending the scope of community representation.

The first is the proliferation of Christian subjectivities in Malayalam cinema during the Covid phase. Some of them have disturbed the hegemonic social stratification by critiquing caste and gender politics. The alternative formulations of Christian masculinities and the critique of the hegemonic masculinities in mainstream texts like *Kathal: The Core*, *Sookshmadarshini* (Dir. M. C. Jithin, 2024) and *Ponman* (Dir. Jothish Sankar, 2025) can be scrutinised.

The further exploration of Christian femininity is as significant as that of the construction of masculinity. A simultaneous historical enquiry on the representation of the Christian female can be undertaken by examining films since *Padatha Painkili* in an intersectional feminist axis. The research can also analyse the evolution into new gender roles, the female agency and whether these representations reinforce the stereotypes of passivity and suffering. *Susanna* (Dir. T. V. Chandran, 2000), *Kappela* (Dir. Muhammad Musthafa, 2020), and *Sara's* might serve as a foundation of such an analysis.

Malayalam cinema explored Christian iconography in a fashion extending beyond the population distribution of the state. Hence an analysis in terms of audience reception of Christian identity in popular culture can be further researched.

A quantitative and sociological study may reveal how these representations shape the perceptions of the society in the larger context of the public sphere.

New directions in masculine representation in the post-pandemic era have witnessed the massive production of violence on screen. The glorification of violence functions as a tool in inscribing the superstardom of the actors and the subsequent significations of what they perform. In Malayalam, many among such heroes assume a Christian identity as in *L2: Empuraan*, *Marco*, *RDX* and *Bheeshma Parvam*.

The possibilities and future directions of the research are not limited to these themes. However, the attempt in all such cases must be to critically negotiate the sources of hegemonic constructions and to ensure the inclusion of marginalised subjectivities in academia and the public sphere.

WORKS CITED

- Achanurangatha Veedu*. Directed by Lal Jose. Griha Mithra & Shirdhisayi Films.
YouTube app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoeAUMpm8Wg.
- Action Hero Biju*. Directed by Abrid Shine. LJ Films & Tricolor Entertainment.
2016. *JioHotstar* app. www.hotstar.com/in/movies/action-hero-biju/1000160435.
- Adiverukal*. Directed by P. Anil. Cheers Films and century Release. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DSVU7vRqvY.
- Adorno, Theodor W., and Hanns Eisler. *Composing for the Films*. Continuum, 2005.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*,
Routledge, 1991.
- Ajith, Aparna. "S.K. Pottekkatt's *Vishakanyaka*." *Boloji.com*, www.boloji.com/articles/52123/s.k.-pottekatts-vishakanyaka. Accessed 13 Jan. 2025.
- Althusser, Louis. *For Marx*. Translated by B. Brewster, Verso, 1969.
- *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by B. Brewster, New Left
Books and Monthly Review Press, 1971.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread
of Nationalism*. Revised ed., Verso, 2006.
- Antony, E. P. *The History of Latin Catholics in Kerala*. IS Press, 1992.
- Ara Nazhika Neram*. Directed by K. S. Sethumadhavan. Manjilas Cine Enterprises.
1970. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHiAK-JaqBM&t=129s.

- Aram Thampuran*. Directed by Shaji Kailas. 1997. Revathy Kalamandir & Swargachithra Release. 1997. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=voqw9TB1in4.
- Barker, Chris. *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*. 2nd ed., Sage Publications, 2003.
- Barsam, Richard, and Dave Monahan. *Looking at Films: An Introduction*. 3rd ed. W. W. Norton, 2010.
- Baudry, Jean-Louis and Alan Williams. "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus". *Film Quarterly*. vol. 28, No. 2, Winter 1974-1975, pp. 39-47.
- Bayly, Susan. "Hindu Kingship and the Origin of Community: Religion, State and Society in Kerala, 1750-1850." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1984, pp. 177-213.
- Bazin, André. *What Is Cinema, Volume I*. Translated by Hugh Gray, U of California P, 1967.
- . *What Is Cinema, Volume II*. Translated by Hugh Gray, U of California P, 1972.
- Bharya*. Dir. Kunchacko. Udaya Pictures. 1962. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCgAHy_p5Ss.
- Bhaskaran, Gautaman. *Adoor: Cinemayil Oru Jeevitham*. Translated by N. P. Sajeesh. Mathrubhumi Books, 2011.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. Translated by Harry Zohn, edited by Hannah Arendt, Schocken Books, 1969, pp. 1-26.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*.

Translated by Richard Nice, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984.

Bradshaw, Peter. "The Godfather Review – a Brutal Sweep of Magnificent Storytelling." *The Guardian*, 23 Feb. 2022,

www.theguardian.com/film/2022/feb/23/the-godfather-review.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 1949.
Reprinted in 2004.

Carrigan, Tim, Bob Connell, and John Lee. "Toward a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society*, vol. 14, no. 5, Sept. 1985, pp. 551–604.

Cettl, Robert. *Terrorism in American Cinema: An Analytical Filmography, 1960–2008*. Mcfarland, 2009.

Chathurangam. Directed by K. Madhu. Nia Release. 2002. *Prime Video* app.
www.primevideo.com/dp/amzn1.dv.gti.deba5a61-83d3-2449-f4f2-bd44830acf96.

Christy K. J., Carmel. "The Politics of Sexuality and Caste: Looking Through Kerala's Public Sphere." *Kerala Modernity: Ideas, Spaces and Practices in Transition*, edited by Satheesh Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varughese, Orient Blackswan, 2015, pp. 126-45,

Connell, Raewyn. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed., U of California P, 2005.

Daniel, Mathew. *Kerala Christava Samskaram*. Christava Sahithya Samithi, 2015.

Dany. Directed by T. V. Chandran. Film Commune. 2001. *Prime Video* app.
www.primevideo.com/dp/amzn1.dv.gti.d4f9250c-77d2-412d-ab8b-e72a79832738.

Dathuputhran. Dir. Kunchacko. Excel Productions. 1970. *YouTube* app.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=AG3bpfXfmaM.

Diawara, Manthia. "Black Spectatorship: Problems of Identification and

Resistance." *Screen*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1 Oct. 1988, pp. 66–79.

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*. Athlone Press, 1986.

"Did You Know 'Sethurama Iyer' Was Initially Named 'Ali Emran'?" *The Times of India*, 23 Nov. 2021,

www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/malayalam/movies/did-you-know/did-you-know-sethurama-iyer-was-initially-named-ali-emran.

Dissanayake, Wimal. "Issues in World Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism:*

Introductory Readings, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 7th ed.,

Oxford UP, 2009, pp. 877–85.

Douthyam. Directed by P. Anil. Saffron Movie Makers. 1989. *YouTube* app.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4sbszp3Rb8.

Drishyam. Directed by Jeethu Joseph. Aashirvad Cinemas & Maxlab

Entertainments. 2013. *YouTube* app.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=wC3bEnfik8U.

During, Simon, editor. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 1999.

Ebert, Roger. Review of *The Godfather*. RogerEbert.com. March 16, 1997.

www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-the-godfather-1972.

Ee. Ma. Yau. Directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery. RGK Cinemas & OPM Cinemas

Release. 2018. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=mZNDgzLsPZ8.

Engels, Friedrich. *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Translated by Alick West. International Publishers, 1942.

Francis, Shamil. "Ee Ma Yau: A Cultural Voicing of Life through Death". *Studies in Indian Place Names*, vol. 40, no. 50, Mar. 2020, pp. 5082–95.

www.tpnsindia.org/index.php/sipn/article/view/5188/5022.

Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*.

Translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith, Pantheon Books, 1972.

---. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert

Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990.

Frow, John. "Discourse and Power." *Economy and Society*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1985, pp.

192–214.

G. Resmi and Anilkumar K. S. *Vellithirayude Rashtreeyam: Chalachitra*

Samskarapadanam. Desabhimani Bookhouse, 2018.

Ganesh K. N. *Keralathinte Innalekal*. Department of Culture, 1997.

Gates, Philippa. *Detecting Men: Masculinity and the Hollywood Detective Film*.

State U of New York P, 2006.

George, Ann Mary. "Starring Cinema Production and Stardom in Malayalam

Cinema." 2017. English and Foreign Languages U, Hyderabad. PhD dissertation.

"GF Reviews 'Vidheyam'". *SATYAMSHOT*, 27 Aug. 2013,

satyamshot.wordpress.com/2009/03/13/gf-visits-vidheyam.

Gopinathan K. *Cinemayum Samskaravum*. Current Books, 2005.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*.

Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Orient Longman, 1996. Reprint 2007.

- Hall, Stuart. "The 'First' New Left: Life and Times". *Out of Apathy: Voices of the New Left Thirty Years On*, edited by Oxford University Socialist Group, Verso, 1989, pp. 11–38.
- . "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'". *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel, Routledge, 1981, pp. 227–40.
- . "The Spectacle of the 'Other.'" *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, edited by Stuart Hall, Sage Publications and The Open University, 1997, pp. 223–79.
- Hall, Stuart, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, and P. Willis, editors. *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies*. Hutchinson, 1980.
- Hall, Stuart and Paddy Whannel. *The Popular Arts*. Duke UP, 2018.
- Harris, V. C. "Fifty Years of Malayalam Cinema", *The Spectres of Writing: Selected Critical Works of V. C. Harris*. V C Harris Samskarika Samithi, 2019, pp. 1–5.
- . "Engendering Popular Cinema in Malayalam". *Women in Malayalam Cinema: Naturalising Gender Hierarchies*, edited by Meena T. Pillai. Orient Blackswan, 2010, pp. 57–66.
- Hayward, Susan. *French National Cinema*. Routledge, 1993.
- hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. South End Press, 1992.
- . *Will to change: Men, masculinity, and love*. Atria Books, 2004.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Stanford UP, 2002.
- Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 1989.

Irakal. Directed by K.G. George. MS Films and Gandhimati Release. 1985. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3jT2Ily0rs&t=1036s.

Iyobinte Pushthakam. Directed by Amal Neerad. Amal Neerad Productions & August Cinema. 2014. *JioHotstar* app. www.hotstar.com/in/movies/iyobinte-pusthakam/1000105376.

Jallikattu. Directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery. Opus Penta & Friday Film House. 2019. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNFo8iPE4w.

Jayakumar, K. P. *Jathivyavasthayum Malayala Cinemayum*. Olive, 2014.

Jenkins, Richard. *Pierre Bourdieu*. Routledge, 1992.

John, Beeta. *Christianity, Caste and Conformity in Kerala: A Historical Introspection*. 2019. U of Kerala. PhD Dissertation.

John, K. J. "Origin and Growth of Christianity in Kerala" in George Valiapparambil (ed) *Christian Heritage*, Cochin, 1981, pp. 81-92.

Johny, Blais. "Vellithirayil Vazhunnarum Veezhunnarum." *Madhyamam*, no. 1127:22, 7 Oct. 2019, pp. 12–25.

Johny O. K. *Cinemayude Varthamanam*. 3rd ed. Olive Publications, 2017.

Joseph, K. V., *Migration and Economic Development of Kerala*. Mittal Publications, 1988.

Joseph, V. K. *Desam Pourathwam Cinema*. Chintha Publishers, 2010.

Joshi, Lalit Mohan, and C. S. Venkiteswaran. editors. *A Door to Adoor: Cinema of Adoor Gopalakrishnan*. South Asian Cinema Foundation, 2006.

Kappeler, Susan. *The Pornography of Representation*. U of Minnesota P, 1986.

K. C. Aloysius. *Christava Swathwavishkaram Malayala Cinemayil*. 2019. Sree Sankaracharya U of Sanskrit, PhD dissertation.

Kimmel, Michael S. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. 2nd ed. Oxford UP, 2006.

Kireedam. Directed by Sibi Malayil. Kripa Films and Seven Arts Release. 1989.

YouTube app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKfWUtMp7Rc.

Koodapuzha, Xavier. *Bharatasabha Charithram*. Oriental Institute of Religious Studies, 1980.

Koodevide. Directed by P. Padmarajan. Prakash Movietone. 1983. *YouTube* app.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fQO9X_NJHgc.

Kottayam Kunjachan. Directed by T. S. Suresh Babu. Sunitha Productions & Aroma Release. 1990. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8rrbVA10mk.

K. S. Pramod. "Malayala Cinema Enpathukalil." *Marunna Malayala Cinema:*

Bhasha Samskaram Samooham, edited by Jose K. Manuel, Sahithya

Pravarthaka Co-Operative Society Ltd., 2015, pp. 95–103.

Kumar, Preeti. Hegemonic Masculinities in Two Comic Films in Malayalam: *Meesa Madhavan e Rajamanikyam*." *ArtCultura*, vol. 17, no. 30, Jan.–June 2015, pp. 32–42.

Kurisingal, Jacob. *Marthoma Christianikalum Thomasleehayum*. Jeevan Books, 2008.

Lelam. Directed by Joshiy. Seven Arts Films. 1997. *YouTube* app.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YH-H1ReP_Q.

Limbrick, Peter. *Making Settler Cinemas: Film and Colonial Encounters in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Loomba, Ania. *Colonialism and Postcolonialism*. Routledge, 1998.

- Manassinakkare*. Directed by Sathyan Anthikad. Varnachithra Release. 2003. *Prime Video* app. www.primevideo.com/dp/amzn1.dv.gti.64ba5a60-6a9c-43dc-8bc3-77a2fa7aee09.
- Manavalan, Paul. *Keralasamskaravum Kristavamissionrymarum*. DC Books, 1990.
- Markose, Ambili Anna. "Religion, Modernity, and the Nation: Postscripts of Malabar Migration." *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2017, pp. 161–170.
- . *Performing Religion: Visual Publics and Christianity in Kerala*. 2018. U of Hyderabad, PhD dissertation.
- Marx, Karl. *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. Edited by T. Bottomore and M. Rubel, Pelican, 1961.
- . Preface. *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by S. W. Ryazanskaya. Progress Publishers, 1977.
- Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. Transcribed by Tim Delaney and Bob Schwartz. Foreign Languages Press, 2022.
- Mayer, Geoff. Introduction. *Encyclopedia of Film Noir*. Geoff Mayer and Brian McDonnell. Greenwood Press, 2009.
- M. A. Ancy. *St. Thomas Christians in Kerala: The Process of Incorporation and Resistance (1599–1786)*. 2016. University of Calicut, PhD dissertation.
- McAlister, Melani. *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000*. U of California P, 2001.
- McGuigan, Jim. *Raymond Williams on Culture & Society: Essential Writings*. Sage Publications Ltd eBooks, 2014. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473914766>.

- Memories*. Directed by Jeethu Joseph. Murali Films & Tricolor Entertainments.
2013. *JioHotstar* app. www.hotstar.com/in/movies/memories/1000080775.
- Menon, A. Sreedhara. *Keralacharithram*. 1967. DC Books, 2008.
- Menon, Dilip M. "Things Fall Apart: The Cinematic Rendition of Agrarian Landscape in South India". *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2014, pp. 304–334.
- . The Outcastes of Malayalam Cinema. 2008, pp. 1–11.
www.academia.edu/5094514/The_outcastes_of_Malayalam_Cinema.
Accessed on 12 January 2025.
- Menon, Neelima. "When Mammooty Played the Tyrant: Revisiting Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Vidheyan*." *The News Minute*, 30 Jan. 2022,
www.thenewsminute.com/kerala/when-mammooty-played-tyrant-revisiting-adoor-gopalakrishnans-vidheyan-160384.
- Metz, Christian. *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor, OUP, 1974.
- . *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and Cinema*. Translated by Celia Britton et al., Indiana UP, 1982.
- "Migrations to Malabar." *Christianity in Kerala, Kerala Tourism*,
www.keralatourism.org/christianity/malabar-migration/19. Accessed 17 Feb. 2025.
- Miller, Stuart. "The American Epic: Hollywood's Enduring Love for the Western".
The Guardian. 21 Oct. 2016.
www.theguardian.com/film/2016/oct/21/western-films-hollywood-enduring-genre.

- Miller, Toby, editor. *A Companion to Cultural Studies*. Blackwell Publishers, 2001.
- Mitchell, Margaret. *Gone with the Wind*. 73rd ed. Macmillan company, 1963.
- Modleski, Tania. "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and the Postmodern Theory." *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, 7th ed., Oxford UP, 2009, pp. 617–26.
- Mokkil, Navaneetha. "Sleepless fathers in Malayalam Cinema: Unraveling the Dynamics of Caste and Masculinity." *South Asian Popular Culture*, vol. 18, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2020.1733807>.
- Monaco, James. *How to read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History and Theory of Film and Media*. Oxford UP, 1977.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Palgrave, 1989.
- . *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. Reaktion Books Ltd, 2006.
- Nadodikkattu*. Directed by Sathyan Anthikad. Casino Productions and Century Films. 1987. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsIAZ7AlaQo.
- Nair, Chandrakant. @reduvid. Now, how else is Manarcad Pappan ...". *Twitter*, 28 September 2020. <https://x.com/reduvid?s=08>.
- Namukku Parkkan Munthirithoppukal*. Directed by P. Padmarajan. Ragam Movies & Century Release. 1986. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=FECEc-Iq61w.
- Narasimham*. Directed by Shaji Kailas. Aashirvad Cinemas & Swargachitra. 2001. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3g5qGQK7eI&t=1153s.

- Nasrani*. Directed by Joshiy. Marikkar Films. 2007. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdGG_6vvg4o.
- Navarro, Zander. "In Search of Cultural Interpretation of Power." *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 37, no. 6, 2006, pp. 11–22.
- Neve, Brian. *Film and Politics in America: A Social Tradition*. Routledge, 1992.
- Neale, Steve. "Masculinity as Spectacle." *Screen*, vol. 24, no. 6, Nov. 1983, pp. 2–17.
- Ochamthuruthu, John. *Adiverukal*. 3 ed. Ayin Publications, 2017.
- Olympian Anthony Adam*. Directed by Bhadran. Pranavam Arts. 1999. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=DU2e-yc-h_I.
- Oru Maravathoor Kanavu*. Directed by Lal Jose. Kokers Films and Anupama Release. 1998. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFnglMyO5Eo.
- Osella, Caroline, and Filippo Osella. *Men and Masculinities in South India*. Anthem South Asian Studies, 2006.
- Padatha Painkili*. Directed by P. Subramaniam. Merryland and Neela Productions. 1957. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=v5VgzZceQDE.
- Pallath, John. *Portugal Yugathile Bharathasabha*. Pellissery Publications, 1992.
- Panda, Pallavi, Vasava Mithunbhai Gambhirbha iand Urvashi Kaushal.
 "Commodifying the Quintessential Masculine Hero: A Study of the Cop Saga of Bollywood." *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*. Issue 50, December 2023.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. "Subaltern Citizens and Their Histories". *Intervention*. 2008: 10(3), pp. 271–84.

- Parayil, Sujith. "Visual Perception and Cultural Memory: Typecast and Typecast(e)ing in Malayalam Cinema." *Synoptique*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2014, pp. 67–98.
- Pazheparambil, Thomas. *Swapnabhumiyl: Malabar Kudiyetta Charithram*. Mar Mathew Press, 1978.
- Phantom Pailey*. Directed by Biju Varkey. Aparna Silver Images & Swargachithra Release. 2002. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=kVJ42dl0Euu.
- Pillai, Meena T. "Bearing Witness: Malayalam Cinema and the Making of Kerala". *Beyond Bollywood: The Cinemas of South India*. M K Raghavendra (Ed.), HarperCollins, 2017, pp. 207–56.
- "Becoming Woman: Unwrapping Femininity in Cinema". *Women in Malayalam Cinema: Naturalising Gender Hierarchies*. Introduction. Orient Blackswan, 2010, pp. 3–24.
- . "The Feudal Lord Reincarnate: Mohanlal and the Politics of Malayali Masculinity." *Indian Film Stars: New Critical Perspectives*, edited by Michael Lawrence, Bloomsbury & British Film Institute, 2020, pp. 99–108.
- Plathottam CMI, Fr. Valerian. *The First Indian Saint*. Sanjos Bookstall, 1938.
- Podipara CMI, Placid. *The Malabar Christians*. Prakasam Publications, 1972.
- Ponnumuthan, Selvester. "Impact of Christianity as a Liberative Force in the Social Milieu of Kerala." *Mission and Conversion: Towards a New Ecclesiology*, edited by Selvester Ponnumuthan and Shaji Jerman, Asian Trading Corporation, 2008, pp 412–27.

- Pranchiyettan and the Saint*. Directed by Ranjith. Capitol Theatre & Playhouse Release. 2010. *Sun NXT* app. www.sunnxt.com/malayalam-movie-pranchiyettan-and-the-saint-2010/detail/13331.
- Prasad, M. Madhava. *Ideology of the Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*. 10th ed., Oxford UP, 2013.
- P. T. Yadukrishnan. *Cinematic Renditions of Nair Masculinities: Analysis of Select Films of 1980 Ind 2000*. 2022. Manipal Academy of Higher Education. PhD dissertation.
- Radhakrishnan, Ratheesh. "What Is Left of Malayalam Cinema." *Cinemas of South India: Culture, Resistance, Ideology*, edited by Sowmya Dechamma C. C. and Elavarthi Sathya Prakash, Oxford UP, 2010, pp. 25–48.
- Raghavendra, M. K., *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema*. Oxford UP, 2008.
- Rajavinte Makan*. Directed by Thampi Kannanthanam. Sharon Pictures and Jubilee Productions. 1986. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0z9DAxZ5wA.
- Raju, Aravind. "Poikayil Appachan and PRDS: Art Gallery." *Nava Malayali*. 17 February 2019. <https://navamalayali.com/2019/02/17/art-gallery-poykayil-appachan>.
- Ramachandran, G. P., *Malayalam Cinema: Desam, Bhasha, Samskaram*. Kerala Bhasha Institute, 2009.
- Ramachandran, T. K. "Notes on the Making of Feminine Identity in Contemporary Kerala Society." *Social Scientist*, vol. 23, no. 1, 1995, pp. 109–23.

Rangan, Baradwaj. "Ee Ma Yau Movie Review: A Delightfully Humorous Take on Death." *Filmcompanion*, 26 May 2018. www.filmcompanion.in/reviews/ee-ma-yau-movie-review-baradwaj-rangan.

Ratheesh, P. K. "Kammatipaadam: Atidalitham, Aswadanam, Akhosham." 7 June 2016. <http://utharakalam.com/2016/06/07/14981.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2024.

Report on the Census of Travancore. 1875, Trivandrum, 1876.

Rowena P., Jenny. *Reading Laughter: The Popular Malayalam Comedy Films of the Late 80s and Early 90s*. 2002. Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, PhD dissertation.

Rushton, Richard, and Gary Burston. *What is Film Theory: An Introduction to Contemporary Debates*. Open UP, 2010.

Said, Edward W. *Culture and Imperialism*. Vintage Books, 1994.

---. *Orientalism*. Penguin Books, 1978.

Sangham. Directed by Joshi, KRG Movie Enterprises, 1988. *YouTube* app. https://youtu.be/x4F49KyfqU?si=EEeDeq_i5ozqsbj3.

Schlesinger, Philip. "The Sociological Scope of 'National Cinema.'" *Cinema and Nation*, edited by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie, Routledge, 2000.

Semmerling, Tim Jon. "Evil" Arabs in American Popular Film: Orientalist Fear. U of Texas P, 2006.

Sen, Arindam. "Ranajit Guha and Subaltern Studies: Genesis, Key Concepts and Contemporary Relevance." *Liberation Central Organ of CPIML*, www.liberation.org.in/liberation-2023-july/ranajit-guha-and-subaltern-studies-genesis-key-concepts-and-contemporary.

- Shohat, Ella. "Gender and Culture of Empire: Toward a Feminist Ethnography of the Cinema." *Visions of the East: Orientalism in Film*, edited by Matthew Bernstein and Gaylyn Studlar, Rutgers UP, 1997, pp. 19–66.
- Smith, Kylie. "Gramsci at the Margins: Subjectivity and Subalternity in a Theory of Hegemony." *International Gramsci Journal*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2010, pp. 39–50.
- Snehaseema*. Directed by S. S. Rajan. Associated Productions. 1954. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=HmnAo7Gnvrw.
- Soman, Deepa. "Spadikam Is a Film that Is Inspired by My Own Life". *Times of India*. 15 Nov. 2019. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/malayalam/movies>.
- Sooraj S. S., K. R. Kavya Krishna & Ajit Kumar Mishra. "Undoing the Masculine Hero: Fahadh Faasil's Stardom in Contemporary Malayalam Cinema." *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, no. 50, Dec. 2023.
- Spadikam*. Directed by Bhadrán. Shogun Films & Manorajyam Release. 1995. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=349z-tk5RUM.
- Spicer, Andrew. *Historical Dictionary of Film Noir*. Scarecrow Press, 2010.
- Spirit*. Directed by Ranjith. Aashirvad Cinemas & Maxlab Entertainments. 2012. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=qnumRvim-sA.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 271–313.

- Sreedharan, Janaky. "Marriage and Family in Malayalam Cinema". *Women in Malayalam Cinema: Naturalising Gender Hierarchies*, edited by Meena T. Pillai. Orient Blackswan, 2010, pp. 69–91.
- Stam, Robert, and Louise Spence. "Colonialism, Racism and Representation: An Introduction." *Screen*. vol. 24, no. 2, Mar. 1983, pp. 2–20.
- Thalapathi*. Directed by Maniratnam. GV Films. 1991. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=orvVdGJvfhY.
- Tasker, Yvonne. *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*. Routledge, 2002.
- The Great Father*. Directed by Haneef Adeni. August Cinema. 2017. *Prime Video* app. www.primevideo.com/detail/The-Great-Father.
- The King*. Directed by Shaji Kailas. MAK Productions. 1995. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=otD42K8QKVg.
- Thenmavin Komabath*. Directed by Priyadarshan. Prasadhi Creations and Surya Cini Arts. 1994. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=IrXWUs-coIg.
- Thomas, K. T. "Dany Movie Review." *Nowrunning.com*, 4 Apr. 2002, www.nowrunning.com/movie/26/malayalam/dany/4/review.htm.
- Thomas P. J. *Malayalasaahithyavum Kristhyanikalum*. DC Books, 1989.
- Thomas, Yacob. *Pullingathinte Nottangal*. Vidyarthi Publications, 2011.
- . "Rajavinte Makan: The Underworld King Who Unsettled the Caste King." *Truecopy Think*, 5 Apr. 2022, <https://truecopythink.media/rajavinte-makan-mohanlal-movie-analysis-by-yacob-thomas>.
- Thoovanathumbikal*. Directed by P. Padmarajan. Sarita Pictures and Gandhimati Release. 1987. *YouTube* app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvqfcqCFZcg.

- Trilling, Lionel. "The Fate of Pleasure: Wordsworth to Dostoevsky." *Partisan Review*, vol. 30, no. 3, Summer 1963, pp. 174–192.
- Twenty:20*. Directed by Joshiy. AMMA Films, Grand Production & Kalasangham Release. 2008. *Sun NXT* app. www.sunnxt.com/malayalam-movie-twenty-twenty-2008.
- Ubuntu, Gayya. "Poornathayilekk Uyarthunna Yavanikakal: K. G. Georgente Chalachitralokam". *Nava Malayali*. 20 Jan. 2017.
<https://navamalayali.com/2017/01/20/kgg-ubuntu>
- Vadakkekkara Benedict, *Origin of St. Thomas Christians*. Media House, 1995.
- Varghese K., George. "Writing Family Histories: Identity Construction among Syrian Christians." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 39, no. 9, 28 Feb.–5 Mar. 2004, pp. 897–900.
- Varghese, V. J. "De-scribing Self: Reading Migrant Novels on Malabar Migration." *Thapasam: A Journal of Kerala Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2005, pp. 26–348.
- Varkey, Muttath. *Veli*. 2nd ed., H & C Publishing House, 2022.
- Vasanthan S. K., *Nammal Nadanna Vazhikal: Keralacharithravum Samskaravum*. Malayala Padana Gaveshana Kendram, 2011.
- Veliparambil, George. *Kerala Sabha Charithram*. Carmel Publishing House, 2010.
- Venkiteswaran C. S. "K.G. George: Chronicler of The Moral Void." *Sahapedia*, www.sahapedia.org/kg-george-chronicler-of-the-moral-void.
- . "Dany: Life, Narration, History". *Malayala Cinema Padanangal*. DC Books, 2011, Pp.135–42.
- Vidheyam*. Directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan. Ravi. 1994. *YouTube* app.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nXsYXRF5d7A.

- Vijayakrishnan. *Malayala Cinemayude Katha*. Poorna Publications, 2017.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture*. Fontana Press, 1981.
- . "The Analysis of Culture." *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, edited by John Storey, 5th ed., Pearson Education, 2009, pp. 44-48.
- . *The Long Revolution*. Chatto & Windus, 1965.
- Wood, Robin. "Ideology, Genre, Auteur." *Film Genre Reader III*, edited by Barry Keith Grant, U of Texas P, 2003, pp. 60-74.
- Wright, Will. *Six Guns and Society: A Structural Study of the Western*. U of California P, 1975.
- Yavanika*. Directed by K. G. George. Carolina Films and Apsara Pictures. 1982.
YouTube app. www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhIHm7EvOZ4.
- Zacharia, Scaria. "Muttathu Varkeyum Malayalapananthile Velluvilikalum."
Jamnapriyasahithyam Malayalathil, edited by A. G. Sreekumar, Sahithya Pravarthaka Sahakarana Sangham, 2014, pp. 132-42.