Chapter 3

Man and Private Life

In gender studies, it becomes quite essential to study the pattern of relationships existing among the members of a family over a period of time and the structural transformations occurring thereby, because human beings, by virtue of being social animals, are associated and interlinked with the notion of family life. The relentless multifarious socio-political and economic changes taking place in a society are quite significant in the sense that they have a direct bearing, both explicitly as well as implicitly, on the various aspects of family life:

Among all the changes going on today, none are more important than those happening in our personal lives – in sexuality, relationships, marriage and the family. There is a global revolution going on in how we think of ourselves and how we form ties and connections with others. It is a revolution advancing unevenly in different regions and cultures, with many resistances. (Giddens 55)

Though the definition for family is varied across the countries, the most common definition that the feminists prefer to use is:

the patriarchal, Westernised, middle- to upper-class nuclear family.

Indeed, it is this family form – two heterosexual married adults and their children – that most social commentators and politicians take as the ‘‘natural’’ and ‘‘best’’ form, relegating other family forms as ‘‘broken’’ or inferior. It is precisely this isolated family unit that many feminists argue is the most oppressive for women. (Budig 417)
The functioning of a family is indeed a complex one because it subtly merges and blends the relationship among the members present, with the work, economy, and politics within it. Over a period of time, the traditional system in which the family functions as an independent socio-economic unit and the traditional method of conception and perception of family has undergone a sea change.

The dawn of the information age in the twentieth century brought about a gargantuan change as far as the notion of marriage is concerned and the traditional school of thought which regarded marriage as sacred and as an institution forming the basis of a family gradually became thwarted and has led to a scenario where, now, most of the theoreticians talk about the sole individual and his/her personal gain and satisfaction instead of talking about the family as a whole. This attitude indeed creates turmoil and troubles in the agency of family and gives rise to the necessity of individual negotiations which become mandatory, noteworthy, inevitable, and popular in this scenario.

As feminist movements gained traction in the Western countries, the concept of family, life, and role of women in the family have been interrogated in-depth in order to understand how women have been perceived by men. The different schools of feminist thoughts, such as liberal, radical, and Marxist, all consider family as an institution that has been controlled by patriarchy and ruled by men to oppress women in variegated manners.

Liberal feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft and the like argue that the incarceration of women, mostly the upper and middle class ones, in the roles of daughters, wives, and mothers, restrict them from thinking rationally and logically, thereby preventing them from becoming complete human beings with a rational ability to
think and act. Even though these women had received elementary education and were trained in music, painting, and in playing instruments, they were considered as ornamental pieces responsible for looking after the family. She is of the opinion that improving the education of these women will have a cascading effect, in the sense that, it will improve their capacity to think rationally, which in turn will help them to become better wives and mothers, thereby enabling them to lead a harmonious life. They highlight the need for equality between women and men, but fail to account for the role which men are supposed to play in the family system, thereby overburdening the fairer sex because she is now expected to do work both in the public and the private spheres without any division of labour between the man and the wife as far as the household chores are concerned.

Radical feminists argue that the source of men’s power in the family mainly lies in biology and heterosexuality and they also opine that the family system is an oppressive system as far as women are concerned and the two ways by which men control women are, “(1) through men’s exploitation of women’s domestic labor (housework and childcare) and (2) through men’s control of women’s sexuality and reproduction” (Budig 423). These are very important and relevant contributions of radical feminists which can be used to analyse the power play of men in the domestic sphere and which will help to answer questions such as, how, and by using what methods, do men control the bodies of women and also how men construct the sexuality of women to cater to their self interests and sexual desires.

Marxist feminism, on the other hand, propounds another aspect and brings in the concept of free labour provided by the women in their individual capacities as daughters,
wives, and mothers so that the capitalist society can effectively utilise this unpaid labour. They argue that the oppression of women will culminate with the emergence of communism where women will also become a part of the productive society and will start getting paid for their work.

In the traditional family setup, a wide gap and difference was starkly visible as far as gender equality and freedom were concerned, with the fairer sex being considered as an object to be possessed having no individuality and identity. Human sexuality also played a major part in the traditional family set up and the main purpose of sexuality was viewed as reproduction and maintaining the family heritage and name. Lack of freedom among women is visible here also, a case in point being Victorian England, wherein men were free to enjoy multiple relationships but women had no such freedom. A typical nuclear family setup in India and elsewhere comprises of the father, usually the breadwinner, the mother, usually a homemaker, living together with their children. However, with more and more women getting educated and becoming a part of the public sphere, the notion that house and family are women’s focal point and responsibility, began to change, albeit slowly, so much so that by the second half of the twentieth century, it started impacting men’s role and position in the family.

The traditional familial structure which was essentially patriarchal has bestowed enormous rights and privileges to men and is even now quite prevalent in the Indian societies. When and where does patriarchy originate is not specifically established, however anthropologists opine that a relatively egalitarian society was prevalent among the prehistoric humans and the period of social and technological advancements in the
society such as domestication, agriculture, and industrialisation must have been the time from which the patriarchal social system could have developed.

The matriarchal system was prevalent in the pre-patriarchal period, and around the decade of the 1980s, branches of knowledge like Primatology, Mythology, and Anthropology began to ponder deep into the existence of women authority in ancient cultures. The change from matriarchy to patriarchy can be largely attributed to the emergence of labour division in the society:

According to the division of labour within the family at that time, it was the man’s part to obtain food and the instruments of labour necessary for the purpose. He therefore also owned the instruments of labour, and in the event of husband and wife separating, he took them with him, just as she retained her household goods. Therefore, according to the social custom of the time, the man was also the owner of the new source of subsistence, the cattle, and later of the new instruments of labour, the slaves. (Engels 85)

Thus, the ownership of private property and the formation of classes contribute to the supremacy of patriarchy.

The male domination in the household and his superiority in private life have been questioned and interrogated by feminists the world over, which eventually leads to show that it is certainly dangerous to neglect the study of how men behave at home, because the private world of men is not simply about observing and analysing the practices of men and how these are accomplished, but rather it encompasses a larger realm including the interplay of power relations and sexuality:
Certainly, there is all this and more to that which we understand constitutes the ‘private’ of the public-private dualism. But there is also the apparent ‘inner’ world of the male, the points of (inter)subjectivity, the ambiguities of the self, and the emotional depths to the masculine subject, all of which we need to have some purchase on: that is, if we are to have an understanding of men and masculinity beyond that which presents itself as both material and illusory. The emotional labours of men, their intimacies, sexualities, relationships - all that is private in the personal, individual sense - require unpacking and illuminating. (Whitehead 149)

Recent studies on men and masculinities, which are typically two pronged, try to analyse men’s life and role in the public sphere on one hand and simultaneously try to fathom how men associate themselves in private life as fathers, husbands, and sons with an emphasis on truth, intimacy, and emotion in these relationships. In the rapidly evolving family structure, women are no longer ready to accept the passive role thrust upon them by the patriarchy and men who have been attuned to an authoritative position plunge into a deep crisis thereby necessitating a drastic change in their approach, from being a patriarch to being a negotiator in the family. Men and their relationships with other family members, including their wives and children, are quite crucial for analysis in situations where the private life of the man is perceived to be problematic and many notable sociologists including Victor Seidler opine that the very subjectivity of men is at stake when it comes to their emotional life:

There is a commonly held view in many societies that ‘men cannot do’ relationships as effectively as women. That is, men are seen to lack the
emotional tools, empathy, sensitivity, (self)-understanding, indeed maturity, necessary to enable a committed relationship on equal terms with loved ones and friends. In sum, masculinity may be useful for hunting, competition and climbing the career ladder, but it falls short when it comes to facilitating and enabling the emotional labour required to sustain a relationship. (Whitehead 156)

Women, breaking the age-old shackles, have started coming out of the four walls of the house, have started exercising their economic, social and political freedom, hitherto unknown earlier, making them stronger and stronger and these perceptional transformations, coupled with their entry into the public space, indeed proposes ample challenges to the other sex. These new turn of events can be considered as a double edged sword as far as men are concerned, because on the one hand, these are being a cause of umpteen psychological anxieties and psychical vulnerabilities among men, including the fear of being rejected, leading to an imbalance in their emotional state and on the other, it has led to a situation where they are finding it exceedingly difficult to express and expose their apprehension, angst, and the stress building up within themselves with no vent to let off the steam:

Men have grown up to identify with the public world of work. We have learned to be independent and self-sufficient. We have learned to go it alone and to do without the help of others. We have learned to identify with our work, even when it is not a matter of finding personal fulfilment but simply earning a wage… Often there is little that prepares us for relationships, for in learning to be self-sufficient we learn to do without
others. Often our very sense of male identity is sustained through our capacity for not needing the help of others. (Seidler 1)

In a menage, intimacy, truth and the concept of pure relationship is of utmost importance and these come into existence only when the members of this formally recognised group of people, christened a family, are unequivocally satisfied in the relationship, which is both mutual and reciprocal. This association, coupled with affinity, assumes some kind of permanence, as can be seen in the case of the traditional marriage system, however with the change in the psyche of women, this propinquity seems to be diminishing because the relationship is not being taken as seriously as it should be and these are precisely what is subtly portrayed in the films Mattoral and Adaminte Varyellu. Thus far, thrust has not been laid on the fundamental elements of a relationship like intimacy, trust, and emotions which have been omitted as mere secondary factors in men’s life, however a deep and thorough exploration of these facets reveal the manifold complicated and different aspects of the relationship existing between men and these factors and further, it becomes imperative to view these under the rubric of the changing flux of social relations instead of as intrinsic to men in isolation.

The relationship between the man and the woman and their recognition for each other in a family, play a decisive role in the formation of self among the individuals in the context of family life and it is here that the locution of the term recognition is vital because there exist at least three very different senses in which this term can be described; the first one being a kind of intellectual comprehension, the second one being a kind of recognition or rather identification of someone and the third sense being taking cognizance of someone’s position, achievements or rights and as a matter of fact, it is in
the hindmost sense that the term recognition gets frequently and largely used in the philosophical and political thought. In fact, most of the philosophers and theorists who have inquired on the concept of recognition opine that, in order to understand and determine who an individual is and to comprehend the value attached to oneself, recognition is necessary.

Johann Fitche says that the, ‘I’ or the pure consciousness should propose itself as an individual which is capable of being recognised as a free individual and further, according to him, an individual’s idea of being a free individual depends on mutual recognition (Breazeale 147). Hegel, who had been influenced by Fitche, developed his concept of self consciousness, which was contradictory to Descartes’ mind-body dualistic approach and puts forward a reliable generality that an inter-subjective conception of selfhood is possible through the concept of recognition. “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” (Hegel 111). The idea of the struggle for recognition of self consciousness is perceptibly explained by Hegel in his essay, “Independence and Dependence of Self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage”. Putting forward the above concept in a simplified manner implies that, for comprehending one’s self as a free individual, one needs recognition from the other.

The theory of recognition tries to ascertain the philosophical implication of the manner a person tends to perceive people and the impressions that s/he forms of them which is highly dependent on the inherent cognitive or perceptual powers of the mind and to some extent biased because the perception and the impression created is precisely the way s/he wants it to be, becoming the fundamental cause of self-centredness since the
subject begins to analyse the sensory inputs solely from her/his own viewpoint. The Master-Slave Dialectic, used to delineate the growth and the evolution of human culture, is an influential idea of Hegel, appearing early in phenomenology, which advocates that, initially a being, termed the self, which could be either an idea, individual or culture, upon venturing out, comes across other inhabitants also having independent self-consciousness and contradictory viewpoints, thus giving rise to a potential state of discord and the scope to establish a master-slave relationship with the other self-consciousness at this juncture. Before the Master-Slave Dialectic, even though the other self-consciousness were seen as different from the beings themselves, the fact that the beings did not want to tolerate the difference existing between them and the other beings led to a continuous tendency on the part of the beings to remake the others in the image of themselves with the sole objective of diminishing or erasing the otherness, leading to a situation where the self no longer needs to encounter the other, because there doesn’t exist one, but rather, has simply become the extension of the self and this conquest, being a continuous process, becomes redundant, meaningless, and endless.

In contrast, Hegel’s other is the one which possesses self-consciousness of its own and according to him, one self-consciousness encountering another self-consciousness is quite important because it is at this juncture that it becomes imperative for the self to acknowledge the independence and autonomy of the other and recognise its subjecthood, bringing forth an ideal relationship into existence between the two human beings (Hegel 112). This ideal scenario ceases to come into existence because the issue of preponderance comes into play, leading to a confrontational approach being adopted by both the individuals in the quest to yearn the recognition of the other and in this strife for
gaining independence and autonomy, each self-consciousness tries to negate the other self-consciousness by beginning to perceive the other as an object of negation and fights tooth and nail to prevent it from being autonomous. Expressed in a different way, what is implied is that, freedom of the self is achievable only by subjecting it to a certain degree of risk arising out of the quarrel for domination where one desires recognition without being amenable to recognise the other and this becomes essentially the crux of the matter which makes Hegel point out that the foundation for relationship among people is the desire for individual recognition. The struggle for recognition culminates at the point when the one, who prefers a life than no life at all, succumbs, becomes the slave and this precisely becomes the starting point of his/her servitude on the one hand, and serves as a harbinger of the recognition which the master can expect to get from the slave, on the other. However, the stark reality is that, this recognition which the master gets, cannot be construed to be the true recognition because the self recognising the master is not an autonomous one and hence is in violation of the criterion which necessitates that, in order for the recognition to be true, the recognising self must be independent and autonomous, thus rendering this sort of a recognition of the master by the slave to be worthless, making Hegel, in turn postulate that the relationship of domination in fact leads to a vicious circle wherein the effect of recognition becomes a cause of one’s own destruction.

*Mattoral* (1988) by K. G. George, based on the novel by C. V. Balakrishnan and very brilliantly modified by the screenplay writers who happen to be the same duo – George and Balakrishnan, is one such film which brings forth to the lime light the complex and complicated marital life of a man and his wife. George is quite successful in
realistically portraying the turmoil and troubles existing in the seemingly calm and satisfied family life of Kaimal (Karamana Janardhanan) and Susheela (Seema) and the theme is very highly relevant, both spatially and temporally. Without too much of a dramatic development, a complex plot or structure, George, to begin with, depicts the story of a man whose wife elopes with another person leaving the man along with his children alone in the house and subsequently portrays the life he leads after his wife runs away from him, the situations he encounters in life after this incident including the ways he adopts to overcome the crisis. “The director carefully and meticulously portrays how the protagonist encounters the situation, how he subsequently confronts the world, how he evaluates himself and his wife, and how he looks after his children who have lost their mother” (Shanmugadas 24). In the film, George, on one hand, by presenting the life of two different couples, Kaimal and Susheela, Balan (Mammootty) and Veni (Urvasi) picks the brain of the viewers and makes them ponder over the justification of the prevailing familial structure including the man-woman relationship in a family life, whereas on the other, by presenting the life of the third couple, Thomas (Jagathy) and Rosamma, displays to a good advantage, the fact that during every adverse circumstance there will be seemingly close associates who shed crocodile tears but are not really concerned since they will laugh at the back of the afflicted.

For the sake of analysis, it is prudent to split the entire film into two, with the two phases in the life of Kaimal as the bases. The first phase describes him as a family-man, a serious and authoritative husband and father in the house, who leads a very systematic life, and also as a very strict and straight forward officer in the office. The second phase
describes his life after his wife recklessly abandons him and starts living with Giri, a car mechanic running a workshop not very far away.

The film opens with a panoramic view of the multitude of daily routine activities being performed at the dawn of a new day in a typical housing colony; people returning from the temple, the milkman and newspaper boy doing their jobs of distributing the milk packets and newspapers respectively, some of the persons getting ready to go to their offices and it also shows the arrival of Kaimal’s servant at his residence. The servant opens the gate, picks up the newspaper lying on the ground, keeps it in the verandah and proceeds to the backyard of the house and in this same scene, the viewers are shown the car parked in the car shed for a short while in a medium close up shot and this is one of the techniques employed by the director whereby he attempts to make the viewers envisage that this car instead of being a mere vehicle, is going to act as an instrument which changes the life of the protagonist.

The entire movie revolves around Kaimal who is portrayed in his private life as a conventional patriarchal husband, a sort of an introvert very involved in his own affairs, not having many close acquaintances, and a bibliophile, on one hand, and in his public life as a strict and serious government officer holding the position of deputy director in the Public Relations Department, on the other. To begin with, a lengthy scene, which is typically male dominated and patriarchal in nature captures the morning routine in the main protagonist, Kaimal’s house and he is introduced to the viewers in a medium close up shot as he looks at himself in the mirror during shaving, after which he moves over to the front verandah, picks up the newspaper and begins reading it. Next, the viewers get to see his two children having breakfast and Susheela handing over a pot of tea to the
servant in the kitchen, who brings and serves it to the children and here, her indifferent facial expression, very aptly captured, conveys perceptibly that she is quite disinterested with her mundane chores. A long shot shows the children leaving for school and Kaimal watching them going when he is cleaning his car and then the camera moves to a medium close up shot to explicate the care and passion with which he cleans his car, signifying how obsessed he is with this possession of his.

The very next scene shows him sitting at the dining table having breakfast when Susheela comes and serves him a cup of tea quite disinterestedly without even a glance at Kaimal and when he looks in direction of the kitchen she is no longer there since she has already retreated back hurriedly and this is yet another section of the film where the director gives an opportunity to the viewers to extrapolate the growing resentment between the husband and the wife. Kaimal gets ready to leave for his office and offers a passing glance at Susheela without exchanging any pleasantries signifying the degree of emotional attachment he has with his wife and as things would have it, in spite of repeated attempts in his race against time, his car would not start up, fuelling his indignation.

Throughout the entire film, the characteristic feature of Kaimal’s innate disposition is shown as irritable which becomes grossly accentuated especially when the result of an action is not as per his intentions and he is portrayed as an individual who is preoccupied greatly with himself and his work to such a great degree that he seems to be unaware of the presence of even his spouse, leave alone her wishes and anxieties, leading to a ever widening emotional detachment and gap. This is very evident right from the beginning of the film itself and manifest in the conversation which transpired between the
duo when the car does not start, since her statement that he could go by an auto and inform the car mechanic on the way to repair the car, elicited a monosyllabic response. This sort of a response meted out by a husband to his wife clearly suggests that his mental makeup does not permit him to accept unilateral suggestions which he probably considers to be beneath his dignity and from this incident, an inherent patriarchal superiority and authority extended by the so called superior gender over the inferior one in society can also be deciphered.

He is represented as a misfit in the public sphere where others see him as a strict as well as a prejudiced man. His arrogance and haughtiness extend and spill over to his official life as reflected by the mannerisms exhibited by him in office and which is starkly visible in the incident when he scornfully glances at the peon who, seeing him reach the office in an auto, had merely enquired whether his car was not working on that particular day. The last thing he wants is somebody interfering in his personal affairs, which makes him very uncomfortable and George, very subtly brings out this predicament through the expression wrought on Kaimal’s face and the posture in which he is seated. Rendered helpless against his overpowering emotions he summons the peon at once and sharply reprimands him saying that, “you mind your business in the office” *Mattoral*.

At home too his authoritarianism is evident, be it in his relationship with his children or that with his wife and this is portrayed in the scene when he stares at his son who is playing cricket outside the house with friends and this action of the father is sufficient for the son to make him afraid and to make him run inside the house. When Kaimal enters his bedroom to change his dress, he expects Susheela to come and give
him the clothes to change assuming that it is her duty to do so. But, Susheela, who is rather fed up with the same monotonous life she is forced to spend with an emotionless husband for years together and her already traumatic life in the house, even though not obviously visible by her conduct, which gets further aggravated by Kaimal’s behaviour and actions, has become sort of estranged and serves Kaimal out of compulsion rather than choice.

Throughout the film, Kaimal seldom smiles except in a few instances and this could be because he feels that having a smile on the face may adversely affect his capacity to enforce his power and also reduce the intensity of his authoritarianism. In one of the scenes, he asks Susheela whether his car has been repaired by the mechanic and upon getting a reply in the affirmative, tries to start the vehicle. When the engine purred to life, his happiness knew no bounds and this is one of the few instances where the viewers get to see a smile on the protagonist’s physiognomy. Kaimal’s friends circle is not a large one and Balan, a writer and a voracious reader, is one of the few acquaintances with whom he has a pleasant relationship. He is a bibliophile, exhibits the characteristics of an introvert and once in a while likes to go out to enjoy the gentle breeze of the cold waves. From Susheela’s point of view, their family life is missing the zest in it because Kaimal is not a very romantic soul and the viewers get to infer this from the scene when the couple makes a sojourn to the beach after getting their car repaired. At the beach, instead of sitting alongside, Susheela sits a few steps behind Kaimal and when he reminisces and talks to her about their first visit to the beach, she pays negligible attention and instead her vision drifts away and gets focussed on a young couple walking and enjoying themselves on the sandy beach. The director’s genius conveys the fact
explicitly that there is indeed something lacking in the familial life of this matched pair and leaves it to the wisdom of the viewer to figure out the cause of this vacuum, whether it is the male chauvinist nature and arrogance of Kaimal, lack of sexuality, lack of recognition, lack of freedom or a malefic concoction of all these individual factors put together.

The cloistered life which Kaimal prefers to lead, coupled with the fact that he seldom prefers to break his routine makes him an individual who would rather not entertain guests. Given the fact that he is a high-ranking government official, people approach him to make recommendations in his individual capacity, but he categorically turns down such requests and this is seen in the case of Thomas and his wife Rosamma who come to Kaimal’s house requesting for a recommendation for Rosamma. Kaimal is a self-conscious individual who does not like to be obliged to any person and it is this attitude of his which makes him not get bothered about what others may think of him if he refuses to accede to their requests.

In the remaining part of the film, the viewers come to know more of Kaimal’s character through Balan. On one particular day, Kaimal receives a letter from his intimate friend Balan informing Kaimal that Balan along with his wife Veni will be relocating to Trivandrum in the following weekend and plan to settle down near Kaimal’s house. Upon reaching Trivandrum, Balan and Veni visit Kaimal and during the course of the conversation mention that their luggage will be delayed by one more day. Spontaneously, Susheela offers that they are more than welcome to spend the night in their house and even though as per Kaimal’s inherent nature, the viewers would have expected him to repeal the offer made by his wife, he acts contradistinctly, the plausible explanation being
that this offer was being made to Balan. It is worthwhile to note that this offer to stay was impulsively forthcoming from Susheela, but not from Kaimal and here again the director very subtly portrays the temperamental differences existing between Kaimal and Susheela. On that particular night, Kaimal and Balan engage in long conversations reminiscing their past and during the course of this friendly tête-à-tête when Balan reminds him of one Sreekumari Amma, Kaimal laughs out aloud saying those were the good old days. From this particular scene, the viewers get an impression that Kaimal’s past had been quite normal, however the director does not elucidate how Kaimal became a changed man as he is now and leaves it to the viewers to ratiocinate:

The beginning of the film itself provides an indication that as a husband and as a father he is not a tender hearted person. His face is always suffused with seriousness which is more than what is necessary. What makes him such a serious person? The background or any psychological reason for this behaviour is not being presented. (Shanmugadas 25)

There may or may not be any reasons for the present harshness and seriousness of Kaimal, which may have been acquired by him during the course of his transformation from a bachelor to a family man or upon his acquiring a high office, but whatever be the case, it remains concealed and the director does not make any attempt to reveal the same. “Though he does not abuse his wife and children directly, he is a male chauvinist and a disciplinarian. In office too he is a strict authoritarian. The role of a father, husband and officer which bestows power on him wipes out the smile from his face. He is unable to laugh and play freely while holding these positions” (Shanmugadas 25).
Kaimal’s highly conventional conservative nature is perceptibly depicted by the director during his visit to Balan’s house. When Balan offers a cup of tea to Kaimal, he enquires about Veni and upon getting the response that she has got a new job, Kaimal becomes perplexed, which can be clearly seen wrought on his face, and he inquires why she should go for a job:

BALAN. Sir, please come.

KAIMAL. It's been a while since we last met.

BALAN. I have been busy doing some translation work. A drama of Soyinka. Please sit.

KAIMAL. (Pleasantly to Balan) Sit. It is very hot.

BALAN. Yes, it is very hot this time.

KAIMAL. Year on year, the heat is increasing with no respite in sight.

BALAN. I will make tea for you

KAIMAL. Where is Veni?

BALAN. Oh! I forgot to tell you that. She has got a new job.

KAIMAL. What job?

BALAN. The job is in an advertising company. The company has not yet started. It is scheduled to open next week. The preliminary works are going on now.

KAIMAL. Who is the owner?

BALAN. One of my friends, Mahesh. I am not sure whether you know him.

KAIMAL. No, I don’t know him. (Mattoral)
Kaimal asks for a glass of cold water because he does not want to trouble Balan and when Balan goes to the dining room to fetch water, Kaimal follows him and says:

**KAIMAL.** But Balan, why are you allowing Veni to go for a job?

**BALAN.** I thought she should not get bored sitting idle at home. What to do here? (*Mattoral*)

From this conversation it becomes amply clear that Kaimal is a husband with a traditional bent of mind who prefers that women in general and his wife in particular should not go for a job, earn money and be independent, but rather perceives women as objects who cook, feed, and do various other household chores.

Meanwhile Veni comes along with her boss Mahesh, who had offered to drop her back at home, and thereafter Balan introduces him to Kaimal. In this backdrop one gets to see George’s directorial skills when Kaimal shifts a bit away from Veni when he sensed that she was standing too close to him and this incident once again reminds the viewers of Kaimal’s conservative nature. One can extrapolate this to reason out that this very same lack of proximity which Susheela may be experiencing could be one of the reasons for her dissatisfaction and alienation from Kaimal.

This film of George does not show the earlier phases in the married life of the couple whose ten to fifteen years of wedded life have passed by, but with a clever play of words and actions by the protagonists, makes the viewers interpret that their married life bygone has been the cause of growing frustration leading to trauma especially for the lady of the house, however, what it does show is the consequence of the tribulation and the life which follows this catastrophe.
Susheela’s perspective towards life is quite different from that of Kaimal in the sense that being educated she wishes to be gainfully employed and it is here that the director interjects the feminist ideal of the new woman. This attitude of hers gets revealed during her conversation with Veni during dinner when Veni and Balan spend the night at their residence:

SUSHEELA. If you get a job, then that will be good.

VENI. We don’t have to sit alone at home. Apart from that, we will have some earnings of our own.

SUSHEELA. I used to think many times that if I had a job (it would be nice). But Unni’s father does not like it. Earlier I used to mention (this to him).

VENI. Balettan is different. He tells me that whatever job is possible for me to do, I am free to do it. According to him, women are not slaves. He is a peculiar person. He has given me the freedom to choose my own path and I am doing that. *(Mattoral)*

When Kaimal and Balan enter the dining room to have dinner, Susheela exhibiting the characteristics of an obedient wife gets up and starts serving food to Kaimal which is in contrast to the action of Veni who continues to be seated without bothering to get up and serve dinner to Balan. This particular part of the film can be interpreted as a sort of submission of the wife to the power and position of the husband in a typical patriarchal society.

If one examines whether the different predicaments in which the two women are in mirror similarity, one gets to conclude that there is indeed one, and that is the
aspiration for both of them to be independent. In Susheela’s case, she has been denied the freedom to go for a job and be independent, but in Veni’s case such restraints have not been imposed on her because of her liberal minded husband Balan. The plight of Veni and Susheela are very well contrasted in the words of Veni when she comes to borrow some money from Susheela:

VENI. I cannot think of sitting confined in the house like you. Just like a museum piece. What a bore it is!

SUSHEELA. Veni you are lucky. You are flying (like a bird).

VENI. Yes, I have got wings. I like to fly. Please help me by giving some money. It is to buy some new clothes. This new job demands fashionable clothes. I thought not to ask Balettan. I will pay it back as soon as I get my salary.

SUSHEELA. I don’t have money with me. (Mattoral)

In this conversation, Veni’s independence to make decisions, including financial ones, and Susheela’s dependence on Kaimal for everything is highlighted.

The uneasiness caused due to the stifling formality of her family life reaches its zenith when Kaimal does not take Susheela to the inaugural ceremony of Mahesh’s new company. A day before his company’s inauguration, Mahesh, accompanied by Balan, visits Kaimal in his office, hands over the invitation and requests him to grace the occasion along with his family. Kaimal becomes very happy and deciding to inform Susheela then itself, dials her number, but does not get a response from the other end even after two attempts, thereby igniting his ire which is quite evident from his face.
In a bid to cover up his anger in front of his guests, he mentions to them that he will inform her later on. As if to take revenge on Susheela for this mistake of hers of not picking up the telephone, he decides not to take her to the inaugural ceremony and instead, leaves for the same along with his two children alone.

In the course of the film, Veni talks to Susheela about women’s independence and the fact that women need their own earnings. During another interaction, a stark realisation dawns on Susheela that she is financially dependent on her husband and on another occasion when she overhears the intimate talk between Balan and Veni, she realises that she is actually yearning for a happy sexual life. Each and every interaction between Susheela and Veni makes the former cogitate and probe deep into her pathetic and a kind of incarcerated life. And the resultant feeling is precisely what leads to desperation yearning to assert her individuality and also sows the seeds of revenge. What is quite surprising, shocking, and unbelievable is the way chosen by the quiet and unassuming Susheela to express her frustration and anger since the modus operandi is counter to the prevalent norms in the society and this shatters Kaimal. This action of Susheela eloping with Giri, the car mechanic, leaving behind Kaimal and her two children, is indeed a very strong, bold, and daring step from the usually calm and composed Susheela and springs up an element of shocking surprise among the audience.

When Kaimal returns from the office, as usual, he expects Susheela to give him his clothes to change and when she does not turn up, brimming with anger, he takes his clothes himself, changes and goes to the kitchen in search of his wife. He calls out her name aloud and his daughter Rajani informs him that she is not there and also that the front door was open when they returned from school. Clueless as to where she might
have gone and his mind in a state of bewilderment, he asks the children to go and search
for her in the neighbourhood and when the children return with the news that she is
nowhere to be seen, he seeks refuge in Balan, his sole friend, and rushes to his house:

KAIMAL. Balan.

BALAN. What happened?

KAIMAL. Susheela is not there in the house.

BALAN. Where did she go?

KAIMAL. Hmm…

BALAN. She will be there somewhere in the neighbourhood. Did you

inquire sir?

KAIMAL. She has not gone anywhere.

BALAN. To the cinema?

KAIMAL. No chance.

BALAN. Then (Pause). I will also come. I will just inform Veni.

KAIMAL. Balan, don’t tell this to Veni. (Mattoral)

From the moment, Kaimal apprehends that Susheela is missing, the viewers get to see a
Kaimal with a starkly different personality, a strict, emotionless and short-tempered man
transmogrified into a Kaimal who is mentally shattered, albeit not apparently visible to
the society at large. His mental agony gets significantly compounded when Raju, a
messenger, whom Susheela sends, comes and breaks the news that she has made the
home of Giri, located in Pookkaran Theruvu, her new home. On further interrogation by
Balan, the messenger adds that Susheela herself has sent him to convey this fact to
Kaimal because she feels that lack of this information will make Kaimal and her children
afflicted with sorrow. The director, in this scene, conveys that Susheela has been plagued diabolically to such an extent that it has now become a herculean task to get detached from Kaimal or her children and even after she leaves the house, their thoughts keep haunting her.

To ascertain the veracity of the messenger’s statements, Balan decides to go with Raju to meet Susheela in Pookkaran Theruvu and upon reaching there, he observes that unlike the area in which their houses are located, this is not a residential area and his observation is corroborated by the statement made by Raju’s mother when she advises Balan to take back Susheela from this place if possible. Regrettably, Balan’s meeting with Susheela is not fruitful and in spite of his best efforts in trying to persuade her to return back by mentioning that both her children Rajani and Unni are waiting at home yearning to see their mother and also that even now it is not too late to return home, Susheela remains steadfast in her decision and requests Balan to leave the place immediately.

Balan returns to Kaimal’s house with a heavy heart and no words to tell Kaimal and his children, then returns to his home lamenting on the state of affairs in Kaimal’s family and subsequently he reveals the cataclysmic sequence of events to Veni. The director makes these successive events culminate at this turning point, thus triggering a thought process in the minds of the viewers regarding how Kaimal will introspect himself. This in turn creates a curiosity as to how he will move on with his life, since this is quite a serious problem a man can encounter, as it directly questions various issues pertaining to his masculinity like sexuality, personality and the like.
In the remaining part of the movie, the audience get to see a different Kaimal who looks after his children, manages the household and the office works effectively, all by himself. As days pass by, the society conjures up different interpretations to his life; for some he has become a laughing stock and for others, who regularly see him going to his office and bringing back his children from school as if nothing has happened in his life, he is a thick skinned person.

This societal outlook is very evident from the words of Mahesh in the scene when Balan comes to meet Veni in Mahesh’s office to tell her that they have to go to Kaimal’s house to console him and in reply Mahesh says that he saw Kaimal driving to office as usual insinuating that Kaimal needs no consolation. In Mahesh’s viewpoint, the main problem in the life of Susheela is the lack of sexual gratification which a boorish and insensitive person like Kaimal is unable to provide when she actually needs a strong man capable of satisfying her desires, but as a matter of fact, this perspective of Mahesh is farcical since he only has a superficial knowledge about the nature of Kaimal, whereas Balan who has interacted much more with Kaimal and has understood his essential character and qualities that make Kaimal what he is, has a completely different stand and says that Kaimal is actually a very good man.

In the light of the current exigency, Kaimal starts becoming more concerned about his children, which, for the children, is a new face of their father that they have not seen thus far, and this is explicitly shown in the scene where he leaves his office early in order to pick them up from school. When Kaimal and his children reach home, the neighbours stare at them showing a complete lack of sympathy and concern towards them and instead mock at their present condition. The sarcasm of the neighbours is very well
portrayed in the characters of Thomas and Rosamma when they come to Kaimal’s house in the pretext of sympathising with him but their ulterior motive is to gather news from him and subsequently ridicule him for the current quandary he has put himself into:

BALAN. I thought they [Thomas and Rosamma] will sit here for some more time.

KAIMAL. Hmm...

BALAN. As Sartre says, ‘other people are hell’.

KAIMAL. Hmm... That is true. Most of the people like to see other people’s sadness, troubles and insult.

(Meanwhile Rajani comes and tells him that Rajamma is going, to which Kaimal accords his consent).

KAIMAL. Now, people have got a topic for gossipping. Because of the incapability and inefficiency of the husband, the wife has eloped with someone else. What is the use of having a good job with a respectable and high position? (Mattoral)

In the best interest of his family, he feels that there is ample scope for this present familial condition to have a significant negative bearing on his son and daughter, and in order to mitigate the risks, he carefully chalks out plans for their future. In one of his conversations with Balan he mentions that once the children’s exams are over, he is planning to send them over to his native village where his mother lives so that the children can continue their education there. As far as Kaimal’s future is concerned, he is not very sure about it and this is revealed when Balan asks whether he will return after admitting the children in the new school in his native village. In the next scene, the
viewers get to see Kaimal having an open and free conversation with Balan, sharing a drink with him, reminiscing about the past when his ex-military uncle serves him drinks for the first time and his resolve not to consume alcohol after marriage lest it should cause a dent in the conjugal relationship and this is where George has made an exquisite attempt to expound the adage, *Homo proponit, sed Deus disponit* (Man proposes, God disposes). The demeanor of Susheela becomes the cause of a paradigm shift in Kaimal’s thought process and perception towards life and this in turn makes him start assessing himself as well as his current position in the society.

Post elopement, thus far, the narrative of the film revolves around Kaimal’s life, sympathises with him and stigmatises Susheela whereas it is Veni alone who empathises with Susheela thinking about her plight and in fact Veni is the only person who mentions to her husband that it is imperative to think about Susheela’s present life with Giri, whether it has turned out to be better than her past one or worse. Even though what Susheela has done is unacceptable and not in accordance with the norms of the society, the majority have not bothered to delve deep into the mindset of Susheela, because of the prejudiced patriarchal mindset deep-rooted in the society. Veni is depicted as a liberal woman who yearns for her own freedom and identity. She can be considered to be an apt person who has the capacity to very well understand the sufferings experienced by Susheela, since both women share the same ideologies. In the next scene, the viewers get a feel of Giri’s life after Susheela has started living with him and when Balan comes to meet Giri, from Giri’s words it is quite evident that Giri has started getting bored with his new life with Susheela and in fact has started feeling her to be a burden on him. He confesses to Balan that he has run away from his house at the age of ten, has not yet
returned and adds that he is not a person suited to lead a family life since he does not
know how to express his love and affection towards anyone. From these words of Giri, it
is very doubtful whether Susheela’s expectations will be met and whether she will get
from Giri, what she finds lacking in Kaimal.

After his interaction with Giri, Balan comes to meet Susheela and to his utter
consternation, he finds that all her hopes of a better life has been shattered into
smithereens when she laments that her plight will never change and she will never get
salvation from the unglamorous grind of everyday life. These dispirited words of hers
convey very blatantly that happiness in her new life with Giri has been elusive so far due
to which she has started repenting on her past actions. The director, through this scene,
makes the viewers get a feel of the reality when they realise that this action of hers, which
was filled with hope, never fructified since its sequel has been a mere change of
confinement from the four walls of one dwelling to that of another. Balan makes an
attempt to console her by pointing out that to err is human; to forgive, divine and
persuades her to join Kaimal, but unfortunately fails in his endeavour because Susheela
remains steadfast.

Change in Kaimal’s attitude and character is augmented after he sends his
children to his native place. He meets Balan in the library, says that he is free, suggests
that they go for an outing and makes a trip to the beach where he opens up his mind
freely than ever before and philosophises that probably the greatest curse that can befell a
person is one of loneliness and it is neither hunger nor anything else. He continues his
monologue saying that at this juncture he has started learning new things. He starts
becoming timorous and the very same Kaimal who used to sit in his portico every
morning with pride, reading the newspaper, gradually gets the feeling that his ability to
face his neighbours is diminishing, withdraws more and more to himself and begins to
become sequestered.

The complex fusion of events in the life of an individual in a society has a direct
bearing on his psyche and these events form the basis on which the people co-acting with
the individual in his personal and public life interact with him and this interaction could
be either positive or negative depending on the nature of events. This aspect is presented
by the director with incisiveness and ingenuity in the scene when Kaimal scolds a junior
in the office and the immediate interpretation of this act of Kaimal is that Kaimal is
venturing out his personal frustration in the office and taking revenge on his office staff.
The fact that strictness has been his innate disposition and is not an outcome of the turn
of events in his personal life is not understood or maybe even conveniently forgotten by
the staff in his office, as is the normal characteristic feature of any society. Kaimal
quickly realises that, owing to the present conditions being what they are, he should act
with utmost restraint, since all his actions will be directly correlated to his wife’s action
of elopement and this thought arising out of the force of circumstances, makes him
change his innate nature and acts as a stimulus for his becoming a reclusive individual
seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement. One day, when Kaimal sees
Susheela while he is returning from office, there develops a desire in his faculty of
consciousness and thought to see her and this is a point where the director creates a
curiosity in the minds of the viewers as to what he is up to. He asks Balan the route to her
new house and after having some drinks with Balan, he pulls out a dagger mentioning to
him that the purpose of purchasing this stabbing instrument is to put an end to the life of
Susheela and in this scene the director shows the raging wrath of the protagonist. Balan, fearing the worst, makes a desperate bid to prevent a catastrophe by explicating that he should carefully weigh the aftermath of such a decision, since outright it will orphan his children, but Kaimal, adamantly refuses to budge from his stand. With this pre-planned desideratum, he sets out for Susheela’s place and upon reaching there, he sees her going out and hiring an auto. Kaimal follows her but loses her in the traffic and thus his bid to murder her is foiled. In a subsequent meeting with Balan, the viewers get to see a metamorphosed Kaimal who feels sympathetic towards Susheela, probably by looking at the substandard locale in which she is living coupled with the looks afflicted with sorrow visible on her face and he remarks to Balan despondently that she is actually a naive and simple-minded person and killing her tantamounts to killing an innocent lamb. In response to this remark, Balan poses a question to Kaimal by asking him that in the event of Susheela returning to him, whether he is in a position to accept her and the response elicited to this question is a counter interrogatory statement where Kaimal asks Balan whether Susheela will come back to him.

As days pass by, Susheela fathoms her standing and role as far as Giri is concerned and realises that she has condescended from the status of a wife to that of a mistress after being a witness to the incident when Giri brings another woman to his room for his carnal gratification, thus conveying to the viewers that her conditions is, slowly but surely, turning from bad to worse. One day, unable to bear the mental distress any longer, she sends a message to Balan through Raju expressing her desire to meet him and on the very next day, Balan comes to meet Susheela with a lot of hope in him. Susheela was so deep in the doldrums that she felt she had nothing to convey to Balan,
but nevertheless the only feeling she conveys to him is that she does not have any aspirations left in life except to see him. Balan consoles her and tries to provide solace to her tormented psyche by apprising her of Kaimal’s intentions of bringing her back into his life and continues by saying that she should be ready by six o’ clock that evening, at which time he will arrive in a taxi so that they can proceed to the beach for the reunion with the mighty ocean standing as witness. In the final scene, the viewers see Kaimal getting ready and accompanied by Balan going to the beach. He takes his dagger with him and this action of his instills a sense of doubt in the minds of the audience as to what role a dagger could play in an occasion of reunion of two souls. Balan goes to bring Susheela and upon reaching the beach, they are unable to see Kaimal in sight. They search for him frantically and finally locate the dead body of Kaimal who has stabbed himself with his dagger. In the closing scene, the audience gets to see Susheela, overwhelmed by the action of her husband, trying to commit suicide by drowning in the sea and Balan saving her life.

The movie culminates with the suicide of Kaimal and this is indeed an unusual, shocking and thought provoking climax which only world class directors like George can give to their audience. Susheela’s action of leaving her husband and children to live with another man can be considered as a revolutionary step a woman takes in the Indian context. During the course of her life in Giri’s house, at one point she starts getting the feeling that she has merely changed her physical location from one prison to that of another and that the same existential problem which she experienced earlier continues to haunt her here as well. This observation makes one conclude that Susheela is unsatisfied in both the houses, is unable to find happiness and that her plight continues to remain the
same in both the dwellings, and it also makes one ponder over a rather important question as to what is it that both Kaimal and Giri fail to provide Susheela.

One can make an attempt to apply Hegel’s theory to the relationship existing between Kaimal and Susheela, and one can draw analogies between Hegel’s master and Kaimal and between Hegel’s slave and Susheela, because, as in Hegel’s theory, Kaimal, like Hegel’s master, gets his recognition from a self (Susheela) which is not independent. As long as the relationship of domination stays without any impediments, Kaimal (Hegel’s master) continues to enjoy the supremacy, but when Susheela (Hegel’s slave) repudiates her family, Kaimal, who has a patriarchal mindset, finds it difficult to accept her deed and decides to put an end to his life which bears a mark of shame, indicating that when the heteronormal relationship is severed it leads to the destruction of the master (Kaimal).

On a close analysis, one gets to see that it is Kaimal who is very much afflicted by Susheela’s action and though he pretends to be normal and also pretends to lead his life as usual, from his actions, which varies from wanting to murder his wife at some point of time, to feeling that she is innocent at others, it becomes amply evident that his mind has become a battlefield of various contradictory and confusing emotions, since, after all actions speak louder than words.

Towards the end of the film, through his extraordinary direction, the director makes the viewers start getting a feeling that Kaimal is a broad minded person who will accept Susheela back into his life in spite of the grave injustice done by her towards him and this feeling is corroborated by the fact that even Balan hopes so. However the climax is startling because the reality shown is the suicide of Kaimal and this action of his
precisely gives an insight to the audience that Kaimal is also one among many men who has imbibed and has been ensnared in the net of conventional notion of masculinity which has control, power, and domination ingrained within it. Although Kaimal may have wanted to accept Susheela in his unconscious state of mind, he is not able to accept her in the conscious state, leading to a dichotomy within the same self. The current state of affairs in his family has already rendered him to be a sort of social outcast and if he now accepts Susheela, who has lived with another man, it will only add fuel to the fire since questions about his personal integrity and ontology as a man in the society will be raised and this is exactly what happens in the mind of a typical patriarchal man when the woman in the family asserts her freedom and independence in a manner contravening the existing norms in a society.

Adaminte Variyellu is George’s yet another very meaningful and thought-provoking film which explores the undercurrents in the familial life of two families belonging to two different strata of the society. Like his film Mattoral, here too, the seemingly normal, happy, and unblemished family life is being unravelled to expose the dissatisfaction and troubles in the family. The deployment of patriarchal force through domestic violence on three women and their response to this patriarchal domination is the main theme of the film around which it revolves.

Violence towards known women in the family circumstances has been used as a tool by men to control women and the two main protagonists in this film, Mammachan and Gopi, employ this tool in two different ways. This film explicitly portrays the issues pertaining to women and critics have read it as a feminist movie as well as deliberated on the woman aspects dealt with here. However, I would like to focus on a different
viewpoint and am making an attempt to explore how dominant masculinity deals with the changing circumstances in the family life and how men exercise their power through violence to sustain their authority in the family.

The film commences with a title song and marvelously conveys the important role which women play in a family, society and the nation as a whole and the opening scene shows young women, youth, adults and aged women engaged in various activities, thereby establishing the fact that women are no longer confined to their houses and have started becoming a part of the public sphere. “Set in the city of Thiruvananthapuram, with clear references to its urban location in the title shots itself, the film tells stories of three women from different strata of society” (B. Menon 113).

The next shot is a long shot in which the viewers get to see employees coming out of a government office, a typical scene during the end of a working day in a metropolis and then the focus shifts on two women going to the bus stop, one woman boarding the auto and the other, Vasanthi (Suhasini) crossing the road and waiting in the bus stop for the bus to arrive. Subsequently, a crowded bus arrives and unable to get into it, she continues her wait and in the meantime she gets to see an old lady about to be hit by a car and the driver of the car admonishing her. Alice (Srividya), a very rich and well dressed woman is seated inside the car and as soon as she reaches her residence, her servant Ammini (Surya) opens the door for her and the other servants get ready to bring her belongings inside and to make her a cup of tea. Typical troubles of a middle class working woman and the luxurious life of an upper class woman are presented alongside each other so that the disparity existing between the two life styles are well appreciated and George employs this technique throughout the film by presenting the life of an upper
class homemaker, middle class working woman and a lower class dalit woman sequentially.

The film oscillates between the lives of two families having no connection, apart from the fact that both are living in the same city. The events and incidents happening in the film revolve around the life of three women characters, but equally important are the two men characters presented in the film who are mainly responsible for whatever happens in the life of these three women. George very brilliantly portrays how these two men exhibit aggressive behaviour in their familial life to assert their superiority and it is intriguing and novel to see how abusive behaviour is portrayed in different ways by these two men.

Mammachan (Bharat Gopi) is a well known, influential and affluent business man belonging to an upper class Christian family and his family comprises of his wife, Alice and his two school going children, Nisha and Tony. To the viewers, they are presented as a well settled and rich family with Mammachan having many contacts with high ranking officials and politicians. The mise-en-scene shows the luxurious life of Mammachan and Alice very aptly. In their family, there is no dearth of materialistic possessions including a palatial mansion with enough servants to do all the household chores, but the relationship among the members of the family, especially between Mammachan and Alice is not a pure and cordial one and the discordant note in their life is explicitly portrayed from the beginning itself. Mammachan is depicted as a pure business-minded, emotionless, and selfish personality who does not care for anybody and his sole aim in life is to make money which takes precedence over everything else and bogged down by
the rat race to accumulate wealth, he neither bothers to understand his wife’s mentality nor his children’s likes and dislikes.

In the very first scene where Mammachan appears, the viewers get to see that it is evening time and Mammachan accompanied by the MLA Purushothaman Nair and a contractor Hasan Koya enters his residence to discuss about a new project. From this scene itself, one starts getting an idea of Mammachan’s business acumen, looking at the way he deals and negotiates with Hasan Koya. While having dinner, Purushothaman Nair remarks that without the help of Alice, Mammachan would not have acquired this high status as well as position and this remark makes it amply evident that Mammachan has used Alice to get what he wants.

In this film, Mammachan is presented as a very arrogant and cruel person who spends most of his time concentrating on his work, whether it be day or night and as a result, his spouse Alice loses interest in her marital life and finds solace in her relationship with Jose (Mammootty) a well known architect who is designing the plan for an auditorium in the ladies club. She desperately tries to fight the feeling of overwhelming loneliness by spending a majority of her time in the ladies club and by consuming liquor. Her situation is so bad that her dependency rests on sleeping pills even to get a sound sleep at night. Her relationship with her children is neither cordial nor loving. She seldom spends time with her son Tony who is studying in a reputed school and staying in the hostel or even with her daughter Nisha who is a day-scholar and she fails to provide the warmth and affection a mother is supposed to give to her children. This rather strange behaviour and her aimlessness in life can all be attributed to the attitude, behaviour, and treatment meted out to her by her spouse Mammachan.
Mammachan’s patriarchal nature is evident from his conversation with Tony when Tony says that he wants to study in the same school where Nisha studies and be a day-scholar just like his sibling:

MAMMACHAN. How did you come?

TONY. By bus.

MAMMACHAN. If you had informed, I would have sent the car.

TONY. Bus is more comfortable than car.

MAMMACHAN. They have gone to the church. How are your studies?

TONY. Hmm…

MAMMACHAN. Come and sit. How is the food in the hostel?

TONY. It is not good. (I am) fed up with it.

MAMMACHAN. I will talk to the warden.

TONY. Next year I will study in some school here. It is boring there.

There is no entertainment there.

MAMMACHAN. You are going to the school to study and not for entertainment. It is a good school and to study there is prestigious.

TONY. Then please send Nisha there father.

MAMMACHAN. Why should Nisha be sent there? You should study and become a respectable man. What is the use of Nisha studying in that school? Whether she studies or not someone will marry her. It is you who should look after father’s business. Father suffered a lot to study even till the eighth or ninth standard. You can study as much as you want. (Adaminte Variyellu)
Through this dialogue, the director makes the viewers aware of another aspect of Mammachan’s family through a complex interplay of relationships. The siblings are attached to each other even though they lack physical proximity, whereas the parents are mentally apart in spite of the fact that they are living in close proximity to each other.

In the above dialogue, from Mammachan’s tone, words, and mannerisms it can be noted that he is more concerned about the material comforts in the hostel. He fails to realise that children need parental kindness much more than material comforts and further it can be extrapolated that his son will also quite likely imbibe these same qualities from his father and will accord more importance to material comforts than to familial relationships.

After Alice and Nisha return from the church, Tony starts speaking to Nisha, neglecting his mother and subsequently, when Alice tries to pick up a conversation with Tony, the response she elicits is very strange and the viewers can feel that the normal mother-son relationship is absent in this family. Tony and Nisha plan to go for a movie and they request their parents to accompany them and for a change both of them agree. When getting ready, Alice remarks to Mammachan that she has lost interest in all these things and Mammachan replies that it is for the children that they are going and not for themselves, indicating that he is also not very interested. Finally, all four of them get ready and then soon after, Mammachan gets a call informing him that there is some labour problem in the estate, after which the father tells his son that he will be unable to accompany them and that they should proceed for the film with their mother. Then, Mammachan asks Alice to take the children to the film, but she also backs out mentioning that she has another commitment in the ladies club and finally the children also drop the movie plan and the whole plan fizzles out. Tony reacts to this by
mentioning to his sister that no one loves anyone else in this house of theirs and this clearly shows the lack of love between the different members of the family which hampers the smooth functioning of the household. The children affected by the loveless situation in the family start seeking love from other sources outside the family and Nisha’s elopement with a college student is a pointer towards that. Mammachan blames Alice for this act of Nisha and rebukes Alice saying that being the mother of the child, she should know how to bring up the children. This act of his indicates that he considers it the duty of the woman to look after the family and groom the children, failing which, it is quite certain that the children will go astray, thereby severing the common thread that binds the kindred together. In this scene, the director once again highlights the elements of patriarchy which unequivocally thrusts the responsibility of bringing up the children on the fairer sex and in the event of any deviation from the established norms they are singularly blamed.

Mammachan’s domineeringness and general notion of masculinity that sanctions tyranny is very explicitly depicted by the director in the illicit relationship existing between Mammachan and Ammini, the servant in his house, which is further exalted when George, through his directorial skills, portrays that all the while this improper relationship exists right under Alice’s nose. Ammini has been a part of Mammachan’s household since she was a child of 10 years and all the while she has been serving them loyally and to behave in such a fashion with her shows the obnoxious level to which Mammachan had condescended. In spite of a vivid knowledge of the transgressive deeds of her spouse, Alice chooses to remain docile which could be due to her contempt
towards her husband and in her quest to seek out her own way to get some gratification, she gets attracted to Jose.

As far as Mammachan is concerned, his relationship with Ammini is purely for carnal gratification without any emotional attachment and he continues with the association without caring for anything and neglecting even the repercussions this will have on his family. Minimal trust and intimacy exist between the husband and the wife and the situation becomes aggravated when everyone in the house comes to know that Ammini is pregnant. Alice is quite sure that Mammachan is responsible for Ammini’s conception and Alice’s contempt and sarcasm is clearly evident from her ensuing conversation with him:

ALICE. Are you not feeling well? During those pleasurable moments, you should have thought about the consequences.

MAMMACHAN. Speak softly. We will do something about it.

ALICE. What are you planning to do? Are you planning to keep her here? (Mammachan closes the door).

ALICE. From whom are you trying to hide by closing the door? Everybody knows about your nature.

MAMMACHAN. Don’t talk too much. I don’t need your advice in this matter.

ALICE. I know that. You tread on your own path. You will not hesitate to hurt anyone for your pleasure and for the sake of money you will not hesitate to sell anyone, irrespective of whether it is your wife or not. She should not be here by tomorrow morning. Think about the
children. In which backwater is her dead body expected to show up?

(Adaminte Variyellu)

The above dialogue, very skillfully not only shows the sadness, anger, and contempt of Alice but also the despicable character of Mammachan and this is another one of the occasions where the viewers get to appreciate the genius of George since he has been able to successfully employ the dictum, brevity is the soul of wit.

Right from the beginning, Mammachan has indulged in activities which are purely detrimental to relationships within a family and for his personal gain he does not even hesitate to sell his wife to different men, which is probably the worst thing one can do to one’s wife. After marriage, a woman starts living with her spouse with a lot of expectations, the foremost being that the husband will protect her chastity, but in Alice’s case something very different has happened. She has been denied value to her identity, has been exploited, and also has been used as a commodity. Fraught with disgust, Alice puts Mammachan through a series of catechisms which shakes the very roots of her husband’s integrity and identity as a father, because she asks him whether he is sure about his paternity and whether Tony and Nisha are indeed his own children or not, and that they could be anyone’s children since he has taken her to different resorts and made her sleep with other men in return of favours from them and this makes him speechless in front of her. But at the same time, there is not even an iota of remorse in Mammachan for the treatment he has meted out to Alice and Ammini.

The insensitive and uncaring relationship existing between Mammachan and Alice leads her to Jose, but this also turns out to be a fleeting one, since not before long she comes to apprehend that Jose has lost interest in her. Struck by the fact that Jose also
does not love her, she prepares to leave Jose’s office and in the meantime, Mammachan enters Jose’s office room and reminding him that Alice is his wife, threatens Jose to beware. Mammachan feels that being a man, he can have any number of relationships with other women and that his wife is his property to use and to be utilised. He has no scruples in using her and selling her to others, but his wife is not supposed to enjoy similar privileges and she is bound not to have a relationship with any other man except him. This implicitly conveys that the freedom of a woman is curtailed to a very great extent and the only identity which she is allowed to possess is that of the wife of a particular man and once again, the director brings to light the superiority feeling ingrained in the thinking of a patriarch which is deleterious to womankind as a whole.

Left with no other option, Alice decides to seek divorce from Mammachan and return to her house, but as things would have it, she faces a failure in this front also because her parents are unwilling to accept her back and instead expound that the house of her husband is her house and this is reasserted by the priest of the church who declares that as per the religious scriptures, the rightful place of a wife is with her husband. Another plausible reason, though not explicit, could be that both Mammachan’s in-laws and the priest feel that, in the event a divorce materialises, it will have an adverse impact on the reputation of Mammachan and will also be a drain on his resources and hence they vehemently oppose this proposal at the cost of Alice, which once again serves as a pointer to the supreme status of a male in the society. Yet another reason for her divorce not materialising could be that Mammachan has forewarned the concerned parties not to act in any manner which will prove to be detrimental against his interests and if this indeed is the case, then it would not be wrong to conclude that Mammachan has been
quite successful in manipulating the institutions like religion, marriage and family, through his money and power, to act in his best interest, and to make everything seem alright outwardly, no matter what the turmoil inside the house. Whatever be the case, in the end, it is Alice who gets caught in a vice-like grip and is forced to bear the brunt of her husband’s misconduct and with no other avenues for recourse open, she goes back to live with Mammachan in his house and subsequently puts an end to her existence by consuming an overdose of sleeping pills.

Alice is a representative figure, a microcosm of the entire universe of upper class wealthy women who undergo suppression and oppression leading to depression and who, in spite of all the luxuries and comforts, have only loneliness and aloofness as their companions. On the other hand, Mammachan is a representative figure of a section of men who, being patriarchs to the core, restrict the movements of their spouses, deny self respect or recognition to them and with the help of external agencies try to confine them in the family and private space.

Domestic violence based on gender, which includes wife beating, rape, and sexual abuse is quite widespread in the Indian patriarchal society and George presents the concept of masculine arrogance and feminine subjugation in the familial system through the character Gopi (Venu Nagavalli) who belongs to a middle class family and works in a newspaper office as a journalist. His family includes his wife Vasanthi who is a government employee, a small son who is studying in the lower primary class and his mother who tries to assert her superiority after her husband’s demise. After his father’s death, he becomes a full time drunkard, gives up his job and starts abusing Vasanthi.
Even though Vasanthi is having a good stable job and is financially independent, she endures the physical and mental torture by her husband and mother-in-law respectively without complaining or resisting, hoping that normalcy will return by itself in her life:

Vasanthi is perhaps representing the middle class woman who enters the service class after much struggle and ends up caught between home and work, and in the late 1970s awakens to the fact that neither the work place nor the home was a cohesive, transformative space as promised or envisaged. This narrative constructs the modern woman as facing a series of limited options - between the world of work or throwing herself into family and living through others. (B. Menon 116)

The director presents Vasanthi as a typical Indian family woman who loves and serves her husband and his family, in return for a happy and peaceful married life. At one point of time her suffering had reached its zenith and she reveals the story of her life, afflicted with sorrow and suffering, to her mother who pays a visit to her house on a Sunday. She mentions to her that she is fed up with the physical and verbal abuse inflicted upon her by Gopi and his mother and adds that this started from the very next day after the death of her father-in-law (who also happened to be her maternal uncle):

KAMALAMMA. There is no diminution in his habitual drinking. Right?

VASANTHI. No. In fact it has only increased and he starts (drinking) from morning itself.

KAMALAMMA. There is no one to be afraid of. Right?

VASANTHI. It seems he has quit his job in the newspaper office.
KAMALAMMA. Pray to god that he should change for the better. What else to do?

VASANTHI. I am fed up with the beatings and the abuses. I am only living for Unni. All these started the very next day after uncle’s (father-in-law) death. *(Adaminte Varityellu)*

Both, Vasanthi and Kamalamma invite Gopi to have lunch with them, but he does not pay any heed to their invitation and instead goes out of the house. When Kamalamma admonishes him to let go of his drinking habit, he scornfully talks back to his aunt who happens to be his mother-in-law too and this highlights his gruff as well as ungracious mannerisms.

Alice’s luxurious lifestyle and Vasanthi’s austere one are very finely blended by George and the viewers get to appreciate this when they see Alice travelling by car in contrast to Vasanthi who is one among the crowd waiting for the next bus, or the umpteen servants present in Alice’s residence leaving her with no work to do in contrast to Vasanthi who has to single-handedly manage all the chores in her household in the absence of any servants. A dissimilarity in similarity is apparent if the lives of the two protagonists, Mammachan and Gopi, are scrutinised. The similarity being that both of them are apathetic towards their respective families and the dissimilarity being that the former focusses on his business in order to amass wealth, whereas the latter focusses on swindling away all the hard earned earnings of his spouse which could be either because of an inferiority complex within him or may be because of an escapist tendency which makes him feel that there is no need for him to work as long as his wife is earning to sustain him and the family.
The director introduces Gopi to the viewers as a drunkard in the scene when he returns home inebriated and in the same scene he shows Vasanthi as a typical Indian homemaker who waits for her husband, even till midnight, to receive him and serve him food, thus projecting her as one who follows the Indian custom of serving one’s husband first and eating one’s meal only after her husband has finished his. To the viewers, Gopi appears as one who is thoroughly dissatisfied with his present job in the press and also as one who does not reciprocate the feelings of his wife and this is evident from the scene when during dinner, instead of conversing pleasantly with his wife who has waited for him so long without even having dinner herself, he keeps on talking about his anger against his boss and then gets up and leaves the dinner table leaving Vasanthi alone who is forced to have dinner all by herself. Vasanthi has no one at home to speak freely to and her only consolation is her colleague and bosom friend Devi with whom she has no inhibitions in revealing her mind.

Gopi is presented as an irresponsible and confused man who finds it difficult to work as per the instructions of his boss and as a person who desires freedom in both his professional and personal life. It is a combination of these factors which makes him quit his job in the press. Given the fact that there is none at home to control him, he does things according to his whims and fancies and his arrogant nature coupled with his increased drinking habit start affecting the familial life of Vasanthi to a significant extent. Unable to cope with the stress and strain of house hold work, office work, and the physical and mental torture, Vasanthi starts getting afflicted mentally and begins to see day dreams in which her deceased father-in-law comes and speaks to her. Soon the situation becomes worse and she starts assuming the role of her father-in-law, the
powerful ruler of the house, in her real life and this is the point where she turns into a mental wreck and is finally taken to a mental asylum for treatment. Through this scene, in which a woman starts donning the role of a paternal figure because she gets to feel that only a strong paternal figure can set right the aberrations in a family which she had failed to do, George, a very highly skilled director, very thoughtfully shows patriarchy’s role, its implicit strength and position in the life of a man or woman alike or in other words he projects how patriarchy influences the life of both men and women to a very great extent. “Meanwhile, men's violence towards women may be explained through their own childhood experiences, and, in particular, their attempts to assert an ‘exaggerated masculinity’ as compensation for their fears of femininity” (Hearn, *Violences* 22).

The above quote is very apt in explaining the reasons for Gopi’s violent acts towards his wife Vasanthi since he has been born and brought up in a family where his father used to be a powerful figure exercising complete authority over his family, including his wife and son, which is shown to the viewers in one of Vasanthi’s hallucinations. In the case of Gopi, he does not have a good job and when comparing himself to Vasanthi, feels that he is inferior to her and coupled with the fact that he has imbibed the authoritarian nature of his father, he starts asserting his power in a negative way in order to make sure that his wife always remains suppressed and never starts asserting her independence. To put it differently, the domestic violence in Vasanthi’s family can be attributed to Gopi’s frustration, stress and his financial dependence on his wife.

One afternoon, Vasanthi takes half day leave from the office due to headache and returns home and as soon as she reaches home, Gopi asks her the reason for her headache
and without any concern he forces her to have sex with him which can be termed as marital rape which forms a part of domestic violence. When Vasanthi refuses saying that she is not well, he beats her and misbehaves with her, all under the influence of alcohol. This incident indicates that men readily resort to various methods of violence when their desire is not met and left with no other alternatives to accomplish their goal, they use violence as a negotiation tool. In the patriarchal system, a man being violent is accepted as his way of life without too much fuss and furore and in a majority of the families, the violent actions of men against their wives are taken for granted as part of a normal routine.

From childhood onwards, men imbibe the notion of manliness and masculine identity which they employ in the future to assert their power over women. The concept of power relation is ingrained in the psyche of men and it is precisely this feeling that enables them to think that it is quite natural to let loose violence on women especially in a family where the stereotypical idea of the man as the head of the family is prevalent:

Men's identity usually includes an acceptance of that basic power relation. To do so is a relatively simple way of affirming a sense of, first, being a boy and then being a man. Thus a common aspect of men's identity is a taken for-granted acceptance of that power, just as it is also likely to involve an acceptance of being a boy, then a man. The psychological and social identity called 'man' says and shows power relations. It is identical. An important aspect of men's power and sense of power is the use, potential use or threat of violence. And men's violence remains a major and pressing problem. (Hearn, *Violences* 4)
In sociological studies, the resource theory is one of the fundamental theories used to elucidate domestic violence, according to which a person having more economic, social, and personal resources has potentially more power, thus diminishing the need to assert this power openly and/or forcefully. Whereas on the other hand, there is a higher chance that an individual lacking in any or all of these parameters, including education, respectable societal status, and earnings, will resort to violent conduct in order to counterpoise the deficiency in resource(s) and to sustain his authority. An in depth analysis of men’s violence towards women, which could be either distinctly expressed or otherwise, as portrayed by George, implicitly in Mammachan’s case and explicitly in Gopi’s case, indicates that it is quite rampant, especially in the domestic sphere and that men use it as a kind of strategy to assert their power over the second sex:

… it is now well known that violence in the home is commonplace, that women are its usual victims and men its usual perpetrators. It is also known that the family is filled with many different forms of violence and aggression, including physical, sexual and emotional, and that violence is perpetrated on young and old alike. (Dobash 1-2)

Among the three women presented in the film, who are victims of exploitation by men, only Ammini, the dalit woman, could withstand the patriarchal torment, whereas both Alice, the upper class wealthy woman and Vasanthi, the middle class working woman, fail to break the shackles that patriarchy has clamped on them and succumb by committing suicide and becoming mentally ill respectively. Towards the end of the film, the viewers get to see that Ammini delivers a baby whom she abandons in an orphanage and subsequently she is taken to a rescue home. The closing shot of this film has often
been identified as a surrealistic one that breaks the stereotypical depiction of women in a cinematic narration and shows Ammini prompting the inmates to stop their work, rushing past the camera and the crew, including the director, towards the gate, opening it and running out liberated.

Men’s lack of concern towards familial duties and responsibilities and their attitude that their realm is the public sphere create a lot of confusions in the minds of women whose realm is generally accepted as the private sphere, that is their home. “It is precisely this ‘home’ which is rendered as the most oppressive modern ‘Malayali’ institutions in the second wave of feminism in Kerala” (B. Menon 116)

The male protagonists in the films, *Mattoral* and *Adaminte Variyellu* use their male chauvinistic attitude with patriarchal backup to control and/or exploit women in the domestic sphere and to prevent them from attaining freedom of thought, expression, and identity. An endeavour to understand the crises, conflicts, and confusions which men may face in their domestic life needs to be seriously made because it involves issues like trauma, fear, lack of trust, and loss of freedom, authority, and power in men.