Chapter 4

Man and Public Life

The ideology of separate spheres which is also recognised as the domestic–public dichotomy is essentially an ideology that strives to define and ordain sequestered domains for both women and men individually. However, men in the public sphere, undoubtedly, are a much more discussed lot mainly because men attain their manliness and masculinity by the position and status they hold in the public realm. In such a scenario, along with a study of men in the private sphere, critiquing men and masculinities in the public arena becomes all the more relevant so that the ways and the means in which men present themselves in the public sphere are fathomed more keenly. Jeff Hearn elucidates public domains as, “the term ‘public domains’ I mean all that happens in public, and not domestically, not in private; that which happens in organizations, militaries, public workplaces, factories, offices, churches, and other corporate institutions, and in the street and other widely visible open spaces” (Men 1).

During the second half of the twentieth century, a lot of research has been conducted by several feminists and pro-feminists regarding the issues of men and their interconnections with the other members of the society, both within the family and outside. This invariably leads to the conclusion that, “the public sphere is, by any definition, a powerful one; being the malestream-informed historical vehicle, space and catalyst for determining and conditioning patriarchal relations and the gender order” (Whitehead 114).

From time immemorial, men have been working in the public domain and now women have also started gaining a foothold in this area which had remained uncharted
waters for them hitherto, and it is in this context that a study about how the superior sex deals with this ever changing circumstance becomes quite compelling. The private and public life of men are two sides of the same coin, but in order to perform a successful analysis of these two aspects of the same personality, different sets of factors need to be anatomised. Whereas on the one hand, the study of elemental factors including truth, intimacy, pure relationships, recognition, power relationships, and superiority over wives can assess the private life of a man, in order to assess his public life, one would need to examine whether the subject in question is associated with the concept of heroism, notion of men as builders of empires, and notion of men as workers in organisations where the dominance of men is prevalent either explicitly or implicitly.

Till the entry of women into the public domain, the role, behaviour, engagement, working and relationship of men were considered to be non-problematic, an extension of mere personal traits and did not warrant much attention. But, the inclusion of women has changed the landscape and now it has become mandatory as well as very relevant to analyse the change in the behavioural pattern and approach of men in the public domain, which in turn leads to theorising and problematising the very concept of public domain. Since then, the role of men in the public domain has been criticised from the feminist, psychoanalytical, and the sociological perspectives thereby placing the question of gender roles at the centre of inquiry.

The distinction between the public and private spheres has been dealt upon and discussed from the time of Plato and Aristotle itself and it has been a topic of discussion in various branches of knowledge like Philosophy, Politics and Economics. Most of these studies explain the rationale behind keeping women a part of the private sphere alone as
preserving their inherent purity and goodness, while men, by virtue of their domination in the public sphere, provided the social norms. In early times, a subordinate position was accorded to women:

In *The Politics*, Aristotle (1962) placed women alongside children and slaves. He believed that women needed a certain amount of coercion to maintain their inherent goodness and purity within the private domain. Meanwhile men provided the social norm through their domination of the public domain of ‘politics’. The dichotomy continues in the liberal political tradition of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and David Hume. For example, Locke promotes the distinction between reason and passion, knowledge and desire, mind and body, so reproducing the public-private division, …. (Hearn, *Men* 23)

With the dawn of the Age of Enlightenment, the progressive power of the public domain and the men in it were identified and the belief that only men were capable of bringing forth changes in the society gained traction. Historical changes like the change from traditional to modern, are highly gendered and most of the progressive social theorists do not find the incipience of public domains as problematic because they are congenial and congruous with the norms of masculinity. “The optimistic progressive, whether Weberian or Marxian, sees the change to the increasing domination of the public domain as operating under the rules of the public domain—rational, bureaucratic, bourgeois, revolutionary, and usually ‘male’”(Hearn, *Men* 25).

There is yet another group of social theorists who analyse the importance of public domain in its relation to and association with the private and personal lives of men
and these theorists reduce men to a psychological entity. The transcending nature of the public domain and the men in this domain can be considered to be political and this discursive transformation of the public-private division is not merely the shifting of a boundary, but rather refers to problematising the very public-private divide.

The feminist theorists on their part have adopted and appropriated the concept of gender relations with reference to the public domain and have analysed the interrelations of women therein. They have tried to bring forth issues related to men in the public-private domain which the malestream theorists have not done so far:

There are several reasons for feminist concern with the issues of the relationship of the private domains and the public domains. One is summed up in the phrase, ‘the personal is political’. Indeed, there are all sorts of ways in which what is personal or private is potentially political or public. Then there is the related argument that the movement of women’s experiences, problems, and struggles from the private to the public domains is a vital part of the process and progress of women’s liberation. This can be seen most obviously in the way that problems that were seen as private, outside the law, or ‘had no name’, such as men’s domestic violence to women and young people, may become public(ized) at particular historical times. It is partly for this reason that the boundaries between the public and the private domains are especially important practically, politically, and theoretically for all interested in gender construction. (Hearn, Men 32)
Some of the major questions encountered by the feminist theorists regarding the public-private dichotomy are the ways in which the private and public spheres are gendered, whether it is getting changed and its relationship with patriarchy. The ideological critique of the public and private domains also helps to analyse the relationship of men and women in these realms and makes one conclude that the underlying and governing principle of the public-private divide is the power relations in a discourse. In the light of the above, patriarchy, with the support of power, has had a direct impact on various bases like the concept of sexuality, economy, and the issue of class. Some feminists of the 1970s tried to deconstruct the patriarchy that had been considered as a single entity so far and started talking about multiple patriarchies in the public and private domains like capitalistic patriarchy, public patriarchy, and private patriarchy. These different types of patriarchies are very much relevant in order to understand the concepts of masculinities in public domains and in gender relations. In capitalist patriarchy, men are of prime importance predominantly because of their involvement in labour production and here the divide between public and private is implicit. Public patriarchy is the existence of patriarchy with reference to the public domain. It is often characterised by the change in the nature of the oppression towards women and:

changes in the form of public patriarchies and in the oppression of women therein necessarily mean changes in oppression by men. And changes in oppression by men necessarily mean changes in men, or at least in some men. A focus on public patriarchies thus also produces a case for the examination of masculinities. Such masculinities in public
patriarchies may themselves be public or private, hegemonic or non-hegemonic. (Hearn, *Men* 52)

From the gender point of view, it is imperative to address the various organisations in the public domain and the men who are a part of these organisations. In various social groupings, the demarcation and division between the public and private domains clearly exist and in this division it is observed that in the public domain there is comparatively more movement and access than in the private domain. The basis of supremacy of men in the public domain can be viewed as an extension of their supremacy in the private domain. The term, ‘public’ attains different meanings and associations in different contexts and both the public and private domains can be viewed in four different levels, spatial-temporal level, organisational level, interactional level, and on the level of selves. All these observations lead to the understanding and experiencing of masculinities, whether it be public or private, as an association with or in relation with the experience of becoming a man and as always, engaged in constant interrogation with changing social relations which include social institutions like the state, the notion of heterosexuality, and the pattern of economy prevalent in the society.

One of the main ways in which men in the public domain cope with the increasing women participation is by way of sexual harassment towards them. Men, because of their inherent nature of aggressiveness, notion of hegemonic masculinity, power supremacy and physical superiority, take it for granted that sexual harassment will weaken women and stunt their growth in the public domain. The entry of women into the work scenario in the new millennium has become a common factor and the sexual harassment of women in the workplace has got represented in the popular literature from the twentieth century
onwards and has become a topic for wide discussion. “Many of these feminist writers have used the concept of patriarchy to delineate the recurrent and pervasive nature of men’s workplace power” (Collinson and Hearn 63).

Man’s sexuality and subjectivity in the work place, which is usually associated with his power, complicate his behaviour in the public domain, and thus reveal the complexity of power relations. This assertion of power in the work place invariably leads to the creation of various identities which are adopted by men and the process of building up these multiple identities is often marked by ambiguity, stress, strain, anxiety, and doubt. Similar to all other identities, masculine identities are also composed, constructed, mediated, and reconstructed through different associations in the society and various aspects like unemployment, adoption of new technologies and the like interrogate and examine these gender identities in detail.

With increasing instances of sexual harassment in the work place, it has become inevitable to understand the nature of men’s sexuality and this in turn has opened up a broad area of study:

Analysis of sexual harassment raises a number of paradoxical questions for men and men’s sexualities. On the one hand, sexual harassment is usually an instance or a commentary on men’s sexualities; on the other, sexual harassment is often understandable as about violence, power, authority, labor-power, protection of space and wage levels, economic discrimination, rather than just sexuality in any kind of isolation.

(Collinson and Hearn 64)
K.G. George’s *Yaavnika, Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback* and *Mela* are three important films which show the intricacies and complexities of man-woman relationship in the public sphere through the life of the male protagonists. The first two films portray the assertion of male power whereas the last one shows the self destruction of the male protagonist because he is unable to assert his male power.

Generally, in everyday life, in various workplaces, some of the men assert their power, authority, and their dominant nature and this is unconditionally accepted without any questioning by the remaining members of the organisation. Ayyappan, the villainous hero in the film *Yaavnika* is one such person who is seen wielding such power.

Conceived as a thriller movie, each and every scene in the film creates suspense in the minds of the viewers and undoubtedly this is one of the films that has been discussed widely by the intelligentsia. This movie is indeed an extraordinary one, given the fact that the main hero is an artist, a tabla player. “In the usual auteur-centred and formalist film criticism in Malayalam, *Yaavnika* is considered as George’s best work. Narrated as a thriller, *Yaavnika* is also a psychological exploration of character and dramatic conflict” (B. Menon 110).

In fact, George, many a time treads the untrodden path in order to provide some novelty and uniqueness in the selection of characters and themes for his films, thus making his films a thought provoking visual treat for the viewers most of the times. In his autobiography, George remarks that when he was a student in the Pune Film Institute, there was a burning desire in him to direct a film based on the lives of drama actors so that he will get an opportunity to present the lives of these actors realistically. *Yaavnika*
which means curtain in English, is that film of George in which this desire of his gets fulfilled.

Starting from a very superficial level and moving on to an in-depth coverage, the movie deals with the life of theatricals in a theatre group named Bhavana Theatres and the very first scene shows the troupe in their camp preparing themselves and getting ready to go for a performance. In the next shot, the director very ingeniously, through the conversation between the owner of the troupe Vakkakan (Thilakan) and the manager Chellappan (Srinivasan), throws light on how popular this art form, which is collaborative in nature and uses performers, is in the Kerala society and also highlights the challenges and hardships involved here. Theatre, as a performance art has a great influence in the realm of creativity and this genre witnessed a gradual and steady growth in the state of Kerala. The theatre actor’s change over from reality to fiction when he is off stage and on stage respectively is so very intricately interwoven in the film that the move from one situation to another happens seamlessly in the eyes of the viewers.

Unlike his other films, George employs a different narrative technique in this film wherein the presence of the hero is felt through his absence because from the beginning itself, the protagonist is absent from the narrative space and the audience gets to know the details about him only through a series of flashbacks. George mentions in his autobiography that several viewers, after watching Yavanika, have asked him whether he had been influenced by Akira Kurosawa’s eponymous film Rashomon which also employs several flashback sequences to which he responds that it is not Rashomon, but rather Citizen Kane by Orson Welles which had influenced him. The technique of
employing flashback sequences by George to reveal the nature of the character Ayyappan has been used by other directors like John Abraham, in his film *Amma Ariyan*.

The other important filmic characters are the dramatis personae Joseph Kollappilly (Venu Nagavalli) and Rohini (Jalaja). The viewers get to see that the drama troupe is ready to leave their camp for their next performance and they are seen waiting for their colleague Kollappilly. In the next shot, Kollappilly is seen getting down from an auto and rushing towards the drama company owned bus which is about to depart and upon enquiry by one of the co-artists about the reason for his delay, Kollappilly answers that he had misplaced the key of his box and that he had gone to the town to get a new one. This apparently silly excuse turns out to be quite significant as the audience get to realise as the narrative progresses. After departing from the camp, the bus containing the actors in the troupe goes to the house of the heroine, Rohini. Not finding Ayyappan the tabalist along with Rohini, Vakkachan enquires from her about his whereabouts because Rohini and Ayyappan were staying together. The disinterested answer in the negative which he elicits from Rohini creates a tension in his mind because Ayyappan is a key player in the troupe and it also tends to bring in an element of curiosity in the minds of the viewers as to what has happened to Ayyappan. Thus, from the beginning itself, an element of suspense is injected into the film by George.

In his autobiography, George writes about how he conceives the main character Ayyappan:

> The credit of conceptualisation of the character Ayyappan in *Yavanika* goes to my production manager, Lathif. When he came to know that I am working on a film which is based on a theatre troupe, he shared all his
experiences, which he has had with various theatre troupes and artists, with me. During this interaction, he cited reference to one tabalist Alleppey Usman, by name, who had been associated with many theatre troupes and went missing one day under mysterious circumstances. That was the last, people knew about him. I was quite fascinated with this story and this is where the seeds of Yavanika, a suspenseful narration dealing with the finer aspects of the theatrical world, the ruthless life of an artist and his ruinous end, were sown. (George, Flashback 66-7)

In the subsequent scenes, the director presents a character revelation of Ayyappan through a narrative maze in the voices of the other co-artists revealing their individual experiences. The viewers get their first cue about Ayyappan’s nature from Varunan (Jagathy), an actor in the troupe, who enunciates that quite likely Ayyappan will be in the toddy shop which brings forth the actuality that Ayyappan is a drunkard. Vakkachan gets piqued and wonders aloud how a tabalist will be able to deliver optimally under the influence of excessive alcohol. Varunan allays Vakkachan’s fears by remarking that given the nature of his superior tabla playing skills, whether Ayyappan is in an inebriated condition or otherwise, is quite inconsequential. This is another instance where the audience get to know a little more about Ayyappan, specifically that he is a tabla maestro. The group then proceeds to the toddy shop, the most probable rendezvous of Ayyappan, but to the utter dismay and surprise of Vakkachan and the other members of the troupe, fail to find his presence there. Upon reaching the place of performance, the artists, especially the backstage crew comprising of the singers become disheartened and crestfallen because they feel that without the tabla in the background, their vocal efforts
will only yield suboptimal results, highlighting the fact that Ayyappan is one of the members of the group whose presence is absolutely necessary. Amidst this prevailing state of disorder in the troupe, the drama opens with a song which very aptly recognises the dichotomy in life like man/woman, public/private, and presence/absence. This sets the tone not only for the ensuing drama, but also for their future life, which is, as a matter of fact, the theme of the cinematic narrative as well.

The scene in the drama immediately succeeding the song depicts an affluent family in which the parents of Sridevi, who are about to leave for the temple, summon their daughter. In the filmic narrative, Rohini is portrayed as a very quiet person with introvertly traits, whereas as a persona in the drama, she plays the role of Sridevi who is a bold character having negligible hesitation in disobeying her parents. When the play is being staged, Rohini finds it a bit difficult to concentrate on acting and the most plausible reason which crops up in the minds of her fellow artists and the viewers for this abnormal absent-minded behaviour of this thoroughbred artist is that the thought of Ayyappan being missing is weighing on her mind, but the reality, which the director chooses to divulge during the climax of the film, is quite different.

The main subject matter in the first couple of scenes in the movie is Ayyappan going missing and the consequences arising thereupon which includes the major psychological quandary the members of the theatre troupe are in, how it downplays the morale of the artists and also how the quality of the drama goes for a toss. Seeing that Ayyappan has not returned so far and in order to mitigate future problems, Vakkachan arranges for another tabalist in time for their next performance. Most of the artists are hopeful that Ayyappan will return very soon, but their hopes and expectations are belied.
After the completion of the performance, on the same night, the troupe prepares to return back to their camp. En route, Vakkachan, knowing that there is nobody else in Rohini’s residence, asks her whether she would prefer to come with them to the camp or whether she would like to get dropped at her residence. In reply, Rohini addresses her colleague Rajamma and asks her whether she would like to accompany Rohini to her house, to which Rajamma concedes. This action of Rohini can be construed to be a sort of an automatic reaction due to a fear of the unknown lurking in her consciousness:

(Inside Ayyappan’s house at night. Rohini enters the house, switches on the light and the light engulfs the room).

ROHINI. (To Rajamma). You please sit here.

(Rohini keeps her bag in the corner of the room. Rajamma sits on the cot and takes things out of her bag and keeps them on the cot).

RAJAMMA. (To herself). He should have remembered that a woman is living with him. At least he should have informed her where he is going. (To Rohini). Didn’t he tell you anything Rohini? All men are like this only Rohini. (Sighing). My husband deserted me on the fourth day after my marriage taking away all my jewellery. Almost seven years have passed by since then and he has not returned so far. Cruel man. (After some time). You should not have entered into such a relationship, Rohini.

ROHINI. It happened so. (Yavanika)

When fifteen days pass by and nobody has even the slightest clue about Ayyappan’s whereabouts, pressure from the troupe artists starts mounting on Vakkachan
to file a missing person complaint in the police station and ultimately seeing no other option in sight, he does so. Very soon, a missing person advertisement along with Ayyappan’s photo gets published in the local newspaper and it is here, that for the first time, the viewers get to see how his face looks like.

Jacob Eerali (Mammootty), crime branch inspector, is the police officer who has been entrusted with Ayyappan’s case and in the subsequent scene, the viewers get to see him discussing the finer aspects of this case with his wife Moli:

(One night inside a room in Jacob’s house. Moli, crime branch inspector Jacob’s wife, is perusing the photos of Ayyappan and inspector Jacob, sitting on his chair, is examining the investigation report of the case).

MOLI. (Looking at the photo) Face of a drunkard.
JACOB. A criminal’s as well.
MOLI. He is a famous artist. Right?
JACOB. Many of the artists are criminals too.
MOLI. Whatever it is, he has a strange face.

JACOB. There is something unusual in the report too. (Yavanika)

Ayyappan’s childhood days were not quite normal and after the demise of his parents he ran away from home when he was a teenager. He married a woman in Lucknow and has a child born out of this wedlock. After spending about fifteen years in exile, he returned to his native place and married another woman Ammini who bore him a son, Vishnu (Asokan). From the dialogue transpiring between Jacob and Moli as well as the investigation report, a somewhat clear picture of Ayyappan’s personality emerges in
front of the audience and in this indirect manner, George, very ingeniously, presents details about the tabalist.

Ayyappan is least bothered about his wife and child, as is evident from the perspective of Ammini and Vishnu, and in fact, the attitude of Vishnu towards his father is that of anger and contempt. The father fails to command the desired love and respect from his son because the father neglects his son and does not provide the much needed care, love and affection which a father is supposed to provide to his child and this in turn boomerangs on him because Vishnu starts vehemently protesting against Ayyappan. Leading an abnormal family life and shirking all familial responsibilities, Ayyappan, who remains intoxicated most of the time, takes refuge in Vakkachan’s rehearsal camp. On one occasion, Ammini comes to Vakkachan’s camp in search of Ayyappan, to ask him some money for her expenses. But Ayyappan who squanders all his money in buying liquor has nothing to give, and instead he drags her out from the office room and beats her severely in front of the other artists. Shocked by this savagely action of Ayyappan, his fellow troupe members try to intervene and prevent him from thrashing the visibly petrified Ammini, but he defied their action averring that it is not their business to interfere in his family life which blatantly exhibits his audacity and arrogance.

Ayyappan’s orderless life, promiscuous life, and his alcoholic nature are some of the negative habits which he possesses and the only positive aspect seen in his life is that he is a very skilled tabla player. Vakkachan and the other troupe artists regard Ayyappan’s unique tabla playing skills to be *sui generis* and thus he is considered to be a very important part of the group. But at the same time, he possesses qualities of vice and wickedness which make him very unpopular among the artists in the troupe.
George introduces the protagonist Ayyappan in flesh and blood to the audience, somewhere in the middle of the film, through a flashback where he is seen completely engrossed playing his favourite membranophone percussion instrument. He demonstrates ethically dubious workplace behaviour which is grossly unacceptable. Irrespective of whether she is a co-artist or not, he considers women as objects to be utilised in order to satiate his carnal desires, and the viewers get to see this aspect of Ayyappan in the scene where he tries to molest Lalita, a fellow artist. Abhorring such a despicable demeanor, Vakkachan decides to part ways with Ayyappan and informs him that he will not be in a position to accommodate him in the rehearsal camp any more for want of good conduct from him. Ayyappan being a person who does not like his self respect and dignity to be questioned by anyone, and brimming with confidence that with his extraordinary tabla playing skills it will be child’s play for him to find a job in some other theatre troupe, leaves Vakkachan’s camp after giving him a piece of his mind.

The director very skillfully continues using third person flashback to present further incidents which happen in the life of Ayyappan ultimately leading to his murder. On being interrogated by inspector Jacob Eerali, Vakkachan says that, a few days after leaving the camp, Ayyappan returns with a plea that he has overcome his alcohol addiction, has completely relinquished it and hence Vakkachan should take him back since he has been unable to find a suitable opening for himself in any other theatre or dance troupe. Some days pass by with normalcy prevailing in the camp and then suddenly crisis befalls Vakkachan’s troupe when one of the female actors decides to leave the troupe because of her marriage. This causes a shortage of one artiste in the troupe and everybody in the camp becomes tensed since the day of the performance is not
too far away. In this time of exigency, Ayyappan offers his help and says that he will bring a substitute artiste.

Ayyappan’s contemptible bent of mind is shown to the viewers in the next incident when he lures a hapless young woman, Rohini, in the pretext of providing succour to her and her family and then exploits her for his own sensual gratification. On one of the previous occasions he had played tabla for Rohini’s dance performance and this is the first time he had got acquainted with her. His carnal desire arouses and he meets Rohini in the dressing room, congratulates her and inquires about her whereabouts. Later on, he pays a visit to her house, befriends her mother, Bhavani, and instills a lot of hope in her, promising a bright future for Rohini, thus creating an impression of a genuine well wisher of their family and slyly masquerading his villainy in a brilliant manner. Oblivious of his ulterior motives and compelled by poverty, the mother and daughter duo fall an easy prey to Ayyappan’s wicked intentions and the mother sends Rohini along with him to become a member of his drama troupe, when, he donning the garb of a protector and a well-wisher of Rohini’s family, reaches her home where she is living with her ailing mother and two younger sisters conveying the news to them about the vacancy of an artiste in his drama company:

AYYAPPAN. (Vakkachan’s theatre troupe is) one of the biggest theatre troupes in Kerala with at least three hundred bookings every year. You will get good remuneration also. One actress in the troupe is getting married (and leaving) and it is Rohini’s luck (that this opportunity has arisen).
BHAVANI. We know that you will not share information which is of no use to us. That is why I am agreeing to send Rohini with you.

(Looking inside). Aren’t you ready?

(The voice of Rohini is heard: Just coming mother).

AYYAPPAN. (Looking at Sumati, Rohini’s sister). You are also there in the list Sumati. I have not forgotten you.

(Rohini, with a small packet in her hand, comes to the verandah.

Ayyappan goes outside and the others follow him).

BHAVANI. (To Ayyappan). Son, we hear a lot about theatre troupes. (In a negative sense)

AYYAPPAN. (Suddenly turns) That is not true. These are statements spoken by envious people. (To Rohini). Come, let us go.

BHAVANI. (Controlling her sadness) she is our only treasure and hope. I am sending her with you as I will send with her father. Please look after her. (Yavanika)

The rest of the film is the narration by Rohini about how the obdurate Ayyappan breaks this trust and belief, her phenomenal rise as a main artist in Vakkachan’s theatre troupe, her personal destruction as a woman and her pathetic end as a murderer. After bringing Rohini to the rehearsal camp, from the very first day itself, Ayyappan starts exercising his masculine dominion over her and this action of his, makes the viewers, just like the troupers, doubt the veracity and genuineness of his intentions.

In the camp, Vakkachan, liking Rohini’s histrionic skills admits her in his troupe. Next, Ayyappan conjures up a cunning plan, exploiting Rohini’s poverty, to extract some
money from Vakkachan for meeting his needs. Without the knowledge of Rohini, Ayyappan informs Vakkachan that Rohini needs some money in order to buy some costumes since she does not have any and also that she has to send some money home and citing these pretexts, he gets five hundred rupees from Vakkachan. Instead of utilising the entire amount of money for which it was supposed to be used, he buys just a single saree for Rohini and spends the remaining buying alcohol for himself.

Vakkachan offers that Rohini can make the rehearsal camp her home just like the other actors, but Ayyappan denies this proposal saying that some people in the troupe are of a questionable character and that he does not want to take any chances lest his worst fears come true, since Rohini’s mother has entrusted her daughter to him with utmost confidence. Saying these words, he asks Rohini to come with him and believing him to be a good person, she accompanies him after the rehearsal. Upon reaching his house and seeing the house without any occupants, Rohini inquires about the inhabitants of his house to which he replies that his wife and son who have gone out, will return by evening or by the next day. Even though Rohini is not fully convinced with his reply, she is forced to believe that what he told her is correct and true.

Rohini gets to know of a different kind of Ayyappan when she sees him return, with dinner for her, in a completely intoxicated condition and this makes her feel more and more uneasy and makes her start suspecting his ‘good’ and ‘noble’ intentions. With her mind in turmoil due to apprehension and dread, she somehow manages to start having her dinner and in the midst of it, Ayyappan, who is seated in the adjacent room, summons her to bring the glass which is kept on the table. Seeing him in a complete drunken state, Rohini latches all the doors and windows of her room except for one door which she is
unable to fasten since the latch has been removed. That dreadful and absolutely appalling night Ayyappan raping her is a fait accompli and he had successfully accomplished his desire, whereas for Rohini, the worst that she had anticipated had befallen on her that night. This episode exemplifies and candidly affirms that the remorseless Ayyappan, in order to satisfy his desires, will not hesitate go to any extreme and will not hesitate to play any role even if it means exploiting the belief and faith that another innocent may have placed on him.

On the following day, the disgusted Rohini mentions to Ayyappan that she would like to go back to her home and that she no longer wants to be a member of this drama troupe. His cruelty reaches its zenith when he, assuming unconditional authority tells her that she will not be allowed to leave the troupe and also threatens her by saying that if she makes any attempt to leave, then he will destroy her whole family including her sisters within no time. Rohini, apprehensive about her sisters’ future, decides to continue living with Ayyappan and she confesses to Jacob Eerali that left with no choice and becoming a victim of blackmail, she obeyed him blindly.

In the next few scenes, George reveals the circumstances which lead to Ayyappan’s murder and this is undoubtedly the most crucial and unexpected twist in the film. He exploits Rohini not only sexually, but also financially by looting whatever little money she earns and she is subjected to continuous ill treatment in his hands. The mental and physical affliction of Rohini reaches its climax when Ayyappan takes away the gold earring, which she has purchased for her sister.

Rohini’s wrath and damnation, which had so far been hidden in her subconscious, gets the better of her and erupts on that eventful night. Ayyappan returns to his dwelling
fully drunk and there ensues a verbal duel between Rohini and him. This culminates when Rohini, in a fit of rage, takes a broken alcohol bottle and stabs him, killing him on the spot, thus heaving a sigh of relief that she has put an end to a tormentor who may have ruined many other lives like hers. After a few seconds, when she came to her senses, she realises that she has committed a horrible crime and with the help of Kollappilly destroys the dead body. What is noteworthy here is the technique which George uses to unravel the secrets in the mind of Rohini, who reveals the truth about Ayyappan’s murder by fumbling on the stage while the play is being staged. Her soul has become troubled to such a great degree that instead of uttering the dialogue in the normal course of the play, she blurts out that she is the one who has committed the murder and that nobody else should be punished for what she has done:

In the field of arts, artists enjoy unconditional freedom as well as independence and this has been observed by Gustave Flaubert way back in the nineteenth century itself: That is why I love Art. There, at least, everything is freedom, in this world of fictions. There one is satisfied, does everything, is both a king and his subjects, active and passive, victim and priest. No limits; humanity is for you a puppet with bells you make ring at the end of his sentence like a buffoon with a kick. (qtd. in Stallabrass 134)

The society at large, including the artists themselves, consider the artists to be holding a special position which is somewhat different from that of the ordinary folk and this viewpoint is echoed by the American scholar Ruby Rich in her article, “Dissed and Disconnected: Notes on Present Ills and Future Dreams”:
Unlike other professions the arts occupy a special, anomalous position in our society. Practitioners aren’t licensed. Its members are entirely self-declared and self-anointed, lacking any visible signs of status or ordination, devoid of licenses or union cards. The field lacks even the most minimal forms of regulation. (235)

Ayyappan can be considered to be a true embodiment of such an artist who uses, or rather exploits, his freedom and status as an artist and as a man in the society. There seems to be a striking semblance between the character Ayyappan and the Italian painter Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, who also led a bizarre and notorious life style, and it is possible that George has drawn inspiration from this real life artist in carving out the character of the protagonist, Ayyappan.

Another highly acclaimed and controversial film directed by George is *Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback* (1983). It elucidates the inherent exploitation behind the screen, the resultant psychological trauma, suffering, and dilemma of women, who aspire to make their career in the film industry. It was one of the most debated films when it was released in the year 1983 because of its thematic resemblance with the real life occurrence of suicide of the Malayalam film actress Sobha in 1981. George himself mentions in his autobiography that the demise of Sobha had a bearing on him when directing this movie. The flawless and intact screenplay written by the director himself accompanied by the dialogues written by S. L. Puram Sadanandan make the film a resounding success.

The main theme of the film is the cause of death of the popular film artist Lekha (Nalini). She had committed suicide on 06 September 1980 and the first shot shows her
body lying in repose and people including film personalities paying their last tributes. The film has been divided into four sections with clear cut demarcations, each of them dealing with a specific time span in the life of Lekha indicating in detail the ups and downs in her family life and career, all narrated in flashback, as the name of the film itself signifies.

The period spanning from July to October 1977, which comprises the second section in the film depicts the gradual transformation of an innocent virgin village lass Lekha, to an experienced sex worker practicing in the streets of Kodambakkam, Chennai, at a first glance, and at a deeper level, it highlights the male supremacy and exploitation of women in the public domain. Lekha whose real name is Santhamma comes to Chennai from Kerala along with her parents with a lot of hope and aspirations of becoming a film star in search of one Mr. Kurup who had visited them in their house in Kerala and introduced himself as a person having contacts with people in the film industry. George has very intelligently employed the technique of flashback within flashback in the scene where Mr. Kurup visits the house of Lekha, interacts with all of them and provides instructions that they should reach the People’s Lodge situated in Chennai to proceed further in the matter of Lekha making her career in the film industry. Upon reaching Chennai, the father starts inquiring about Mr. Kurup but fails to make any headway in locating the gentleman. Not quite happy with the tardy progress made by her husband, Lekha’s mother, Vishalakshy (Subha) herself embarks on the attempt to locate Kurup. More than Lekha or her father, it is Vishalakshy who possesses a greater zeal that her daughter should become a film star and it is this desire of hers which makes her start searching for Kurup with renewed vigour after the failed attempt of her husband. Very
soon she meets Sahadevan, an actor, who had accompanied Kurup during one of the visits to their residence:

VISHALAKSHY. Good morning sir. Hope you recognise me. Some time back you had come to my house along with Kurup.

SAHADEVAN. Oh yes. Please pardon me. I could not recognise you immediately. Please be seated. Why did you come?

VISHALAKSHY. Kurup had told me that if we come to Madras (Chennai), he will help to get a chance to act in a film.

SAHADEVAN. Do you want to act at this age?

VISHALAKSHY. It is not for me. It is for my daughter Santhamma. Both she and her father are in the lodge. I came searching for Kurup. Where is he staying?

SAHADEVAN. You cannot go to the place where he is staying now.

VISHALAKSHY. Why is it so?

SAHADEVAN. He is not my close friend. Some time ago we had met by chance and he had forced me to accompany him when visiting your house. He is in jail now.

VISHALAKSHY. (Shockingly). In jail?

SAHADEVAN. He is an agent of a sex racket and was caught by the police.

VISHALAKSHY. Oh god!

SAHADEVAN. Anyway, good that you did not fall into his clutches.

VISHALAKSHY. What will we do now?
SAHADEVAN. Nothing to think. It is better you go back to your native place. *(Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback)*

In spite of being aware of these circumstances, Vishalakshy is somewhat hesitant to go back and expresses this thought of hers to Sahadevan who subsequently advises her to meet different directors in order to fulfill their ambition. In this endeavour of theirs, to gain entry into the world of cinema, they start experiencing the cruelties and exploitations which women face in the public sphere. This bold and candid approach of George in showing the plight of women who reach this mesmerising place called Kodambakkam, considered to be the Hollywood of South India, is remarkable.

Being unacquainted with the industry, they are unaware of the prevalent practices which calls for being a subservient woman at the disposition of the men in this field offering sexual favours to them. Even though Lekha, at the behest of her mother, does not succumb to these circumstantial pressures initially, but as time passes by, greed gets the better of the mother, and she offers little resistance when her daughter is made a part of the sex racket. Lekha and her mother meet different producers and directors in search of a role, but in spite of their best efforts they do not meet with any success. It is during one such meeting that they come across Paul Raj (Nedumudi Venu) who is working as an assistant director and this encounter with him becomes a turning point in Lekha’s life.

Paul Raj is not as straightforward as he claims himself to be, but rather is a person with ulterior motives and this aspect of his has been very clearly portrayed by George in the association and interaction of Paul Raj with Lekha and her parents. He inveigles Lekha by giving her false hopes, mentioning to her that she will be the heroine of his next film and that they will tie the knot on the very day this film is released. The naive village
girl Lekha believing his words, gradually falls into his clutches and in due course of time
he leads her to his room where she loses her virginity. He suggests that an aspiring young
artist will become successful if there is a positive review about her in a film magazine
and in order to proceed along these lines, he introduces Mr. Kottooran, the famous film
journalist, to Santhamma and it is Kottooran who christens her Lekha. Next, Paul Raj
arranges a rented house for them in Kodambakkam and explains to them that most
women yearning to become an actress come and live here and following his instructions,
Lekha and her family relocate to this new place from their lodge. Lekha’s father starts
feeling something fishy about this whole affair and he returns to his village whereas
Lekha and her mother continue to live in Chennai. Just like many of the other women
who stay in Kodambakkam cherishing the desire of becoming an actress some day, Lekha
being no exception, starts earning money by becoming a prostitute.

The period spanning from March to August 1978 saw the rise of Lekha from an
extra artist to that of a leading actress and it is during this same period that she gets to
meet and interact with good people like Ansari (P.A. Lathif) who is a production manager
and Pushpa, the cabaret dancer. It takes almost two years for Lekha to get a small but
good and noticeable role in a film. This is another turning point in her life and slowly but
steadily, with the help of Ansari who recommends her name to other producers, starts
ascending the steps of glory, fame and success and very soon she gets a chance to act in a
commercial film, that too as the heroine of Prem Sagar.

The period of her life from May to September 1980, which the viewers get to see
in the last section of the film, brings about a significant change in her career as well as
personal life. Just like her meeting with Ansari opens up a new chapter in her life, her
meeting with a renowned director of art films, Suresh Babu (Bharat Gopi), makes her reach new heights as far as her career goes and at the same time becomes the cause of her tragic death as far as her personal life is concerned. Through her bosom friend Pushpa, Lekha comes to know that Suresh Babu is interested in meeting her in connection with his next film. During her meeting with him, he mentions to her that he is fully aware of the initial hardships and lifestyle which a young woman striving to enter the film industry has to undergo and believes that since Lekha will not be an exception and would have endured similar trying circumstances, she will be a good fit as the heroine for his next film since its theme also runs on similar lines:

SURESH BABU. I have seen your photos, but have not seen you acting in any film. Do not feel sad, I do not watch Malayalam movies because they are not worth watching. Do you have any difference of opinion? I also make Malayalam movies, but different ones. I do not know whether you understand, leave it. Shall I order anything to drink?

LEKHA. No sir.

SURESH BABU. Alright. I am in need of an actress for a new movie which I am going to direct. I have already seen many but none of them are up to the mark. Then, I remembered you, Lekha. When I came to know that you are Pushpa’s friend, I asked her to bring you to me. Yes okay. I like you. This face was there in my mind.

(Pushpa comes in between and asks him how is Lekha, Suresh Babu replies that she is apt. Pushpa conveys her best wishes to Lekha on being selected by Suresh Babu for his next film)
SURESH BABU. When did you reach Madras?

LEKHA. It is almost two years now.

SURESH BABU. Good. So you will have no difficulty in understanding the character in my film. I do not have to teach you what grief is. I know the initial period and life which women, who come to Madras aspiring to act in films, have to go through and I think you will not be an exception. (Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback)

When Lekha decides to act in the new film, her mother is not quite happy and she calls up Prem Sagar seeking his advice. However, Lekha decides that, irrespective of Prem Sagar’s opinion, she is not going to budge from her decision and it is this instance which shows Lekha asserting her individuality and identity as an actor, for the first time.

The new settings, experiences and methods of direction attract Lekha and this novel exposure injects a new life into her. She goes ahead and puts her best foot forward when acting in Suresh Babu’s film Oru Vesyayude Katha and wins the national award for the best actress, adding a feather in her cap. During their stay in Ooty, in connection with the shooting of the film, they get to know each other better and this in turn strengthens the bond between Suresh Babu and Lekha. During one of their morning walks, he reveals that his marriage was a compromise and that his wife is not capable of understanding the mind of an artist. The apparent incompatibility between Suresh Babu and his wife, Lekha’s admiration for his directorial skills, Suresh Babu’s revelation to Lekha about the feeling of closeness towards her, all lead Lekha to a dreamy world where she starts thinking and feeling that Suresh Babu will be her saviour and protector from her monotonous and loveless life devoid of any identity. Her expectations are high and it is
quite likely that she does not need money from him, but as she reveals to Pushpa, she feels that he will be able to give her the love and affection which have been denied to her from her own kith and kin.

Lekha, leaving her house as well as her parents and carrying all her possessions with her, comes to stay with Suresh Babu. Considering him to be the person who will be able to pacify her mental turmoil, expresses her anxieties and fears to him guilelessly just like an innocent child does to its parents:

LEKHA. I used to see that particular dream on almost all the nights. A big hand with wings carries me and soars high in the sky. When I am flying in the midst of the clouds, I get to feel that I am weightless, I start feeling that I no longer need the hand which is carrying me and I break free from those shackles. Soon afterwards, like a piece of wood, I fall down and shatter into smithereens after hitting the rocks. Then, from these rocks thousands of hands rise, pound each other and I wake up hearing that sound. When I wake up, I feel suffocated and then cry a lot… (sobbing). Nobody has loved me. This is the first time I am experiencing what it is to be loved. Will you be with me always? My house is like hell. If I continue to stay there, I will become mad. I want to escape from there. Will you save me?

SURESH BABU. I will try. Let us see. (*Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback*)

Through the above dialogue, the director very clearly shows the degree of insecurity and confusion in Lekha’s mind, to the audience.
Lekha’s decision to come and stay with Suresh Babu can be construed as the assertion of her freedom and an escape from a life devoid of love, but Suresh Babu’s reaction is not reciprocal, leaves him in a predicament, and in fact creates a sort of disarray and dilemma in his mind which becomes precariously suspended between the thought of being a married man on one hand and the thought of leading a live-in relationship with Lekha on the other. George’s directorial skills once again come to the forefront in the scene where he ingeniously and lucidly presents this current conflicting mental state of Lekha and Suresh Babu, through an interview which both of them give to a group of journalists. The former faces the volley of questions pleasantly and remarks that they are a wedded couple, whereas the latter faces them with tension, confusion and anxiety writ large on the countenance and mentions about the existence of just an informal living arrangement where the two of them are living together as friends.

After Lekha comes and starts living with Suresh Babu, there is a marked change in his behaviour, attitudes and actions and he starts behaving like a conventional man with a traditional bent of mind. Lekha’s future course of life culminating in her suicide can be considered as the direct fallout of Suresh Babu’s hypocrisy:

(One morning his wife Geetha (Sarada) and her son reach the house where Suresh Babu and Lekha are staying. Lekha gets up from bed hearing the sound of the calling bell. She opens the door and sees a woman and a child).

GEETHA. Lekha?
LEKHA. Yes. Who are you?
GEETHA. I will tell you. Can I enter the house?
(They enter the house. The child looks around).
SON. Where is my father, mother?
GEETHA. He is here. It is not yet time for him to get up.
(Lekha understands who they are, keeps quiet and moves a few steps backwards).
GEETHA. Please stay there. You have understood who I am. Right?
(Lekha tries to go inside to call Suresh Babu).
GEETHA. Please stay there. Do not call him right now. He does not like to be woken up early. Meanwhile, I want to tell you something. We will sit down and talk. Please sit.
(Lekha continues to stand).
GEETHA. I know you will not be able to sit in front of me. Do not worry. There is no one who has never made a mistake. I know the drawbacks of an artist and I also know that I am not suitable to be his wife. But still, after marriage, a woman becomes a wife and if a man and his wife stay together, the wife will deliver a baby and become a mother. I am such a mother. I become weak when my son enquires about his father. You have not yet seen what life is. You have started acting by the time you got to know what life is. You have already lost your connection with reality.
(Suresh Babu enters).
SURESH BABU. Geetha, why did you come here?
GEETHA. Where else should I go?
(His son runs to him).

SON. Come father, we will go home.

SURESH BABU. I will come, son.

(Lekha goes inside followed by Suresh Babu. Then he gets ready and leaves for his home with his wife and son leaving Lekha all alone).

(*Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback*)

After some time Suresh Babu returns and the following dialogue ensues between them:

SURESH BABU. I thought you might have gone for the shooting. Why did you not go? Some of my files are here. (Lekha is sobbing. Suresh Babu comes near her bed and sits on a chair). You are a fool. I have to go with my wife and child when they come and call me. Right? Don’t worry. I will come as and when I get time. You need not disclose this to anybody.

LEKHA. Only as per your convenience?

SURESH BABU. I have already told you that this is only an adjustment. It is your fault that you have taken it (this relationship) seriously.

LEKHA. Were you not serious?

SURESH BABU. See, I love you. But I cannot marry you leaving my wife. Marriage is a serious issue.

LEKHA. Then, I am no one to you. Right?

SURESH BABU. You…

LEKHA. Mistress. Right?
SURESH BABU. You call it whatever name you want. It is not possible for me to explain everything to you. You will not understand it. I will come on Sunday.

LEKHA. For what?

SURESH BABU. Should I not come? Then no need. I have not forced anyone to do anything. You did everything according to your wish. If you are feeling distressed now, you may go back home. According to me, I will consider this as an aborted adventure. Lekha, I don’t have the time to be here. You think and take a decision. We will meet again.

*(Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback)*

Uttering these words, he leaves the house leaving Lekha in utter consternation. His attitude and reply, which is undoubtedly within the accepted social and familial norms, leaves Lekha in the doldrums without any place in his life. Deeply traumatised, unable to come to terms with the appalling predicament she has landed in and knowing fully well that she will be unable to secure a legitimate place in his life, she takes the extreme step and ends her life by committing suicide.

The dramatic turn of events serves as an eye-opener for Lekha and she starts realising how trivial her role is in Suresh Babu’s life and also how trifling she is to him. All the high esteem and admiration which she has for him, crumbles within no time when his hypocritical attitude becomes evident and this makes her feel demeaned. Suresh Babu’s action of turning his back on Lekha and rejoining his family, without a second thought or an iota of remorse, makes her conclude that the statements made by him during various interactions with her, mentioning that he is a different person, that he is a
lover of exotic places, that he perceives life differently and likes to live a different kind of
life, that he is one who enjoys the freedom of an artist and finally that he is a person who
does not want to compromise his life as an artist for his family, misrepresent his
intentions, and were made with the sole objective of justifying his feigned emotions.
George presents Suresh Babu, “as a pseudo intellectual without any individuality of his
own and as a hypocrite who considers himself to be a great artist” (Venu 54) and through
this character, the director has been very successful in explicating the nature of a specific
category of men in the public sphere using the medium of cinema.

The next film which has been analysed in this chapter is *Mela* (1980), in which
the director narrates the life story of a dwarf, and shows the crises and perplexities he
faces and the manner in which he negotiates these circumstances.

Since time immemorial, the mind/body dichotomy has been a controversial area
of interrogation and inquiry in several branches of knowledge including social sciences
and René Descartes, in the seventeenth century, with his illustration that mind and body
are really two different entities, propagated the concept of mind-body dualism. Descartes’
famous dictum, ‘I think therefore I am’ is considered to be one of the most important
steps which distinguish the human mind and the human body and consider them to be
two discrete and distinct things with independent existence. His theoretical and
philosophical inquiries paid attention to the conceptualisation of mind which is endowed
with the capability of thinking rationally and logically. Reading Descartes, whose notion
of dualism shook the entire Western philosophical world, Ian Burkitt opines that, “people
experience and understand themselves in two different ways: first, as bodies occupying a
specific location in space and time, and, secondly, as persons or selves who are
associated with the processes of thinking” (8). Bodily changes do not affect the thinking process, but on the other hand, once the thinking ability of a person ceases due to some accident or any other cause, his body will be considered as a living dead body capable of doing nothing productive and this embodies the importance and superiority of the mind over the body. In his book Meditations, Descartes conceives body as:

But about the body itself, on the other hand, I had no doubts, but I thought I distinctly knew its nature, which, if I had attempted to describe how I conceived it in my mind, I would have explained as follows: by body I mean everything that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of existing in a definite place, of filling a space in such a way as to exclude the presence of any other body within it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell, and also of being moved in various ways, not indeed by itself, but by some other thing by which it is touched; for to have the power of moving itself, and also of perceiving by the senses or thinking, I judged could in no way belong to the nature of body; rather, I was puzzled by the fact that such capacities were found in certain bodies.

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In his “Second Meditations”, he considers himself as a thinking subject and feels that, “I am, I exist, this is certain. But for how long? Certainly only for as long as I am thinking; for perhaps if I were to cease from all thinking it might also come to pass that I might immediately cease altogether to exist” (19).

A human body cannot be considered as a mere medium capable of giving a definite form and shape to a human being but rather it is embedded in a symbolic
structure having a far greater significance, where the meaning of the body can be interpreted as and ascribed to the functioning of psychological, social, political, gender, and power relations. In other words, a human body is not just mere flesh and blood, but rather can be a productive body, a communication body and a thinking body as the situation warrants, thereby making it a social and natural construct. “What will be explored here is the notion that the body is made active by social relations because it is brought into being and mobilized by its positioning in the interweaving networks of human interdependence” (Burkitt 7).

Till the twentieth century, the notion of mind as the seat of rational thinking was prevalent, especially in the branch of psychological cognitivism and studies had been focussing only on the rational thinking of the mind rather than the concept of the body and its role in the sociological and psychological studies had not been taken into account very seriously. Subsequently, there was a gargantuan effort put in by most of the social scientists to rework and reconstitute the Cartesian division of mind and body and as Ian Burkitt succinctly puts it, “the ‘mind’ is an effect of bodily action in the world and of becoming a person from the recognition of one's position in a diverse network of social relations” (12).

Being a social animal, human beings are constantly entwined in the flux of life which is progressing in a myriad of dimensions. The notion of humans possessing the capability of understanding through the use of thought, intelligence, and observation cannot be considered as existing a priori. Human beings cannot be excluded from social relations and according to Norbert Elias, “all the three basic coordinates of human life: the shaping and the position of the individual within the social structure, the social
structure itself and the relation of social human beings to events in the nonhuman world” (97) play, influence, and affect human life in multiple ways. In the ecosystem, of which Homo sapiens form an integral part, social relations are indeed heterogeneous, fragile and flexible and this is one of the factors responsible for the creation of new identities, anxieties and confusions in humans. The idea that human beings are a part of the society, automatically brings into the forefront that body is not only a biological but also a social phenomenon. Chris Shilling opines that, “the body is not only affected by social relations but forms a basis for and enters into the construction of social relations” (173). It is in this backdrop that I would like to contextualise the human body which is in a fluid state having a constant interaction with the social, political, and historical scenario prevalent at that point of time and to study how, “the mind can be reconceptualized as an emergent effect of a body active within the social, historical and biological dimensions of space and time” (Burkitt 15). During the past three centuries, the concept of body and that of the mind have been a subject matter of scrutiny and various view points regarding these concepts have been put forward by the literati. Descartes’ conception of human body as an automaton which is nothing more than mere flesh and blood and the mind as the instrument through which we identify ourselves has led many theoreticians in the field of Humanities and Social Sciences like Ilyankov, Foucault, Bhaktin to put forward their opinions about what the body meant to them.

The mind-body dualism in the Western philosophical tradition provides ample scope for perceiving the body in different ways, such as a body which is active, body as an object, and as a thinking body which considers the body as a subject. In fact, when we think of the body, it is relevant to understand how the grotesque medieval body has been
transmuted to the modern disciplined body. As far as the representation of body by Bakhtin is concerned, “the material body appears in exaggerated form, and can be linked to the festive world of giants, monsters, dwarfs and fools” (Burkitt 46). The grotesque image of the material body is construed to be a positive one and is not viewed as the body of a single person but rather as a universal body open to the world.

Gradually, during the late Renaissance period, the body became more privatised as well as individualised and all the drinking, eating, laughing, rejoicing, sexual life, and giving birth became confined to private chambers and rooms after losing their symbolic nature and significance which was evident during the carnivals. The eighteenth and nineteenth century with its pre-romanticism and romanticism tried to revive the grotesque body but in a different way that expressed a subjective and individualistic outlook of a man whose interior is emotive, “with hidden and unfathomable inner depths” (Burkitt 49) heralding the notion of the modern man where the body could be perceived as an object of the mind standing at a distance and the mind as one which is entrapped in this body. The thoughts in such a closed body were also restricted to more of a private space, thus leading to the formation of certain norms so that individuals may conduct themselves in the society. It is these norms, that enable the individual to regulate his/her behaviour and it is through various institutions like family, educational institutions, asylums, hospitals, prisons, and even one’s own culture, in a broader perspective, that this kind of normalisation takes place.

*Discipline and Punish* (1975) by Michel Foucault is one such significant work which describes his perceptions of the body. “One of Foucault’s major achievements has been his ability to isolate and conceptualize the way in which body has become an
essential component for the operation of power relations in modern society” (Dreyfus 112). Foucault defines bio-history as “the pressures through which the movements of life and the processes of history interfere with one another” (1:143) and here it is the body which serves as the vital connecting axis between life and history. The human body is formed in these movements of life and upon a scrutiny of this remark, one can interpret this to mean that there is a constant interrelationship between human life, other forms of life and the environment. Thus, in order to understand the nature of the body the study of bio-history becomes imperative and this further leads to the Mellor and Shilling’s concept which recognises the human body as a re-formed one shaped by the social influences of each generation. Bio-history does not approve the basic split between the mind and the body and this dualism gained wide popularity throughout the centuries only as a result of the power relations which existed in the society. According to Foucault, power is not something which can be possessed, held, obtained or lost but rather, it is an ever-changing relation and the concept of bio-power which he promulgates is nothing but a form of power which can be exercised on human bodies to regulate and discipline them, thus making them a kind of machine which is trained to do activities by rote (Burkitt 18). Thus, all the dichotomies which are found in the contemporary western philosophy like mind/body, private/public, spiritual/material, subject/object can be considered to be the outcome of this armoured and divided body:

According to Francis Barker, while the self becomes expressed in discourse, the body is excluded as an expressive being; instead, it becomes the object rather than the subject of discourse. Through those discourses, as Foucault suggested - discourses of medicine, of wealth and populations,
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economics and sexuality - the body becomes regulated and disciplined, the subject of various relations of power. (Burkitt 58)

Another aspect which comes to light in the wake of modernity is the emergence of a closed body which emphasises on the body’s surfaces, as opposed to the emphasis laid on the openings in the grotesque body and this closed body considers itself as a communicative body possessing the ability to simultaneously express and conceal itself. Among many other philosophers who have presented their theoretical and philosophical ruminations on the body as a thinking body and as an active body, Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu are quite noteworthy. It can be noted that a fusion of both ontological and epistemological realms can be obtained through an active body having the powers of transformation and such a body, which is entangled in the realm of power relations and interconnections in a society, is responsible for determining an individual’s, identity, subjectivity, and sexuality.

Against this theoretical backdrop, the current section is an attempt to analyse, interpret and unravel the role of the male body in gender relations with a special emphasis on how this male body, a biologically constructed aspect, correlates with masculinity, a socially constructed aspect. Further this section probes into how the concept of normative masculinity is problematised in a highly power centric and dominating society.

Cultural, geographical, temporal and spatial aspects play a significant role in determining and delimiting the notion of masculinity. Invariably, masculinity is often perceived and associated with certain macho qualities like strength, courage, physique, rationality, practicality, and logic and as a corollary, it is taken for granted that
masculinity and the male body are intertwined. It is the physical features of the male body, which men flaunt, that often tend to endow them with a kind of power, hegemony and dominion over women. Also, the role of culture in ascribing meaning to the male body and the construction of the normative male body are so very relevant that, upon the deviation from normalcy, it leads to the generation of anxieties, confusions and an identity crisis in men.

Masculinity is not one unified and coherent attribute and the male body which is just one aspect of it, “appears to be the most natural element of masculinity: after all, almost all men have a penis, testicles, facial hair, an Adam's apple, a prostate, and the Y chromosome” (Reeser 91). Now the question arises as to how, irrespective of the above mentioned biological features, the male body can be considered to be an unstable, fluid, and constructive entity and to decipher what meaning(s) a male body can disseminate. The male body’s masculinity and its ontological existence are not only determined by the fact that a body has a penis, but also its relationship with the culture in which it has been placed and hence it becomes very relevant to perceive the male body from the point of view of power, gender performativity and dialogic relationship.

According to Mosse, it is during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century that the notion of a new stereotypical masculinity emerged, got systematised in the wake of the modern age and considered the human body as important (5). The popularity of visual culture during the second half of the eighteenth century was responsible, to a major extent, for popularising the modern stereotypical masculine notion and, “Stereotyping meant that men and women were homogenized, considered not as individuals but as types. The fact that stereotyping depended upon unchanging mental images meant that
there was no room for individual variations” (6). Though the society and its structure vary from place to place, the male stereotype possesses certain features which are common to all societies. The notion of normative appearance and a certain advisable comportment are defined and men are supposed to possess these in order to be recognised as ideal men, irrespective of the society they live in. During the middle ages, chivalry and male honour were considered to be important as far as masculinity is concerned, however this undergoes a change during the modern age because the physical appearance and posture of a man also become quite important in establishing the masculine stereotype. As a consequence of this, physical appearance gains importance and the entire male body can be viewed as a source of virility, strength, and courage which are properly articulated through the physical appearance of a man. With reference to K. G. George’s film *Mela* (1980), this section tries to give a detailed account of how the body, especially the male body, has been treated in a different manner and where these perceptions lead us to.

*Mela*, a filmic adaptation of a story written by Sreedharan Chembadu, directed by K. G. George and produced by Siddarthan, Sydu Muhammad and Prabhakaran is a rare, unique and unparalleled film from the oeuvre of George’s films because he makes a real dwarf as the protagonist of the film and is in fact a perfect case in point for the study of masculinity since it highlights the negotiations of a man with dwarfism. The entire movie revolves around the events occurring in the life of the dwarf, Govindan (Raghu) and George in his autobiography opines that, “through the dwarf protagonist Raghu, the so far accepted heroic notions have been deconstructed and rewritten. *Mela* could portray the life and love of such people, who have been marginalised by the society in a different manner” (*Flashback* 59).
The film can be broadly divided into two parts, wherein the first part showcases his return to his native village, on leave, after almost twelve years and his marriage with a beautiful girl in the village whereas the second part concentrates on his return back to the circus troupe which is located in a city and the post-marital crisis which he experiences. The opening scene shows a close up of a board game and then a group of youngsters sitting in the verandah of a house playing the game which could be construed as an indicator showing the high level of unemployment of men prevalent in the society during that time. Subsequently, a postman comes with a telegram and inquires the house of Nani Amma. During the 1980s, telegrams served as a telecommunication mode to convey urgent messages especially that of death and when the postman comes to the village with a telegram, it triggers the inquisitiveness of the village folk. Finding it difficult to understand the location of Nani Amma’s house as provided by the youngsters, the postman requests one of them, Balan (Srinivasan), to deliver the telegram to the recipient and with a little bit of hesitancy, the youngster accedes to the request. The genius of George is projected anew, since through this very simple incident he conveys a very profound philosophical truth that ultimately everyone is afraid of the debt to nature. To maintain the gravity of the current situation, the director employs an ingenious technique where he shows the viewers that, Balan, instead of handing over the telegram directly to Nani Amma, sends a boy to search for her and in the meantime, he himself starts making inquiries as to whether any of her kin is living in the city. Getting a response in the affirmative from a passerby who mentions that her son is working in a circus company in the city, he becomes almost certain that the worst has befallen her son Govindan. As soon as the information about the telegram reaches the ears of Nani Amma, she spontaneously
starts lamenting and here is where the director captures, to the benefit of the viewers, the
innate simplicity of the village folk. Soon, one among the crowd acts logically and
advises that Balan should read the telegram, however, language becomes an impediment
and Balan and others in the group are unable to read the contents since the matter is
written in English. Gopalan master becomes the natural choice of the group since he is
conversant in English and as soon as he reads out the contents, the mood which had thus
far been sombre, turns into one of jubilation within no time, when the contents reveal that
Govindan is arriving on the coming Friday. In this manner, George, very skillfully,
allows tension to ebb and flow among the viewers by leveraging the negative sentiments
associated with a telegram.

Govindan becomes the talk of the village and in the next scene the director
presents the information about him, to the audience, through the conversations, among
the natives who have gathered in a teashop run by Aandi, that ruminate on what might be
Govindan’s present position. It is from these conversations among the villagers that the
viewers are apprised of the fact that Govindan has left his native place almost twelve
years back. The villagers hypothesise that Govindan might have earned a considerable
amount of money by working in the circus company for all these years. In the midst of all
this excitement, his arrival is keenly awaited.

Unlike a majority of the films, where the physical presence of the protagonist is
revealed to the viewers in the beginning itself, here, the director uses a novel approach of
indirectly introducing the central character initially and presenting him at a later stage.
The camera focusing on a steel trunk with the name G. Vinde, circus artist, painted on
the right bottom of a black steel trunk, being carried by Nanu, a helper in Aandi’s tea shop, foreshadows the arrival of the hero.

The naive villager Govindan returns to his village transformed into a perfect gentleman with an anglicised name, donning a two piece suit, wearing sunglasses, and carrying a radio in his hand. He gives an opportunity to the villagers to get a glimpse of some of the luxuries one can acquire by working and living in a city and within no time he becomes a reputable person in the village. As he walks through the road, the villagers are eager to meet this alluring young man possessing new gadgets, having an exposure to big cities, and who is superior to them in terms of money and in the meantime Aandi approaches him and starts a conversation with his old friend by offering him a cup of tea. As soon as Govindan reaches his house, he distributes toffees to all those who have gathered there to meet him, offers a cigarette to Balan, and gives a ten rupee tip to Nanu and all these actions of his make him the person that everyone talks about, within a short span of time. In an informal chat which happens at Aandi’s tea shop, one of the villagers describes with awe, the number of things present in Govindan’s trunk including the ten sovereign gold chain which he possesses. Gradually, Govindan earns the respect and affection of the majority of the villagers and he starts being considered as a saviour who has the potential to solve the problems of unemployment by recruiting men from the village to the circus.

The extent to which people love Govindan, the heroic aura about him in the minds of the villagers and his standing among the village folks are quite evident from the reception which he gets in Aandi’s shop when he goes there in search of Nanu. Upon seeing Govindan, Aandi immediately rushes and offers a chair to him and soon after
makes him a cup of special tea. In the meantime, Balan and his other friends reach the tea shop and when Govindan offers this special tea to Balan, Aandi vehemently opposes this action of Govindan’s saying that the cup of special tea is specially made for Govindan and as a reply, Balan mentions indignantly that this world is only a place for the rich and not for the poor. The reactions of a section of the society towards two individuals, Balan, who is a normally built man but with no job or earnings and Govindan who has a job and money, but does not possess normal masculine attributes are being very cleverly compared and contrasted by the director. There is a considerable contrast between the subjectivity of Govindan in the circus troupe and in his native village as can be observed from the fact that in the former place, he is considered to be just a clown whom people give little value or respect, whereas his position in the village is starkly different because of his wealth and exposure to different parts of the country.

As a responsible son, he gives new clothes to his mother and shows his photo album containing his photographs in the circus, which he considers as very precious, and explains his heroic deeds in each photo to his mother with passion. With affection, he tells her that she is the mother of master clown G. Vinde and that there is no need for her to do laundry for money anymore. Out of concern for her son, his mother asks him whether he is indulging in risky and dangerous activities in order to make the audience laugh, and to that he replies that his very appearance makes people laugh.

Govindan’s affluence and mentality to help others are seen when he helps an old lady in the village with some money and also helps Sarada, Balan’s sister, who comes to Govindan’s house to borrow some money on the behest of her mother. Knowing that Govindan has the capacity to give money and also knowing that he will not refuse money
for a well deserving cause, the villagers, including Balan, approach Govindan for a donation for conducting the festival in the local temple, and Govindan readily obliges. These generous actions of his further raise his position in the villagers’ mind. Govindan’s heroism reaches its zenith when he starts capturing the attention of the villagers, including Balan, Nanu, and Aandi, by performing small magical tricks like creating a cigarette from smoke and by taking their photographs using his camera. “Govindan spends his vacation as a hero in his village. He roams around the village with his transistor radio, taking photos of the villagers and showing small magic to them” (Venu 31).

Contrary to the men folk, the women in the village are not very much impressed by Govindan and they are very reluctant to consider him as a hero and this attitude of women is explicitly shown in the scene where the women folk, who are washing clothes in the river make fun of him when Govindan goes to catch fish in the river with Nanu. The only exception is Ammini, who talks in favour of Govindan by commenting that there is nothing to laugh about him except that he is a bit short and this attitude of hers could be because she prefers wealth over looks. In the scene where Govindan takes the photos of Aandi, his wife, his daughter, and Nanu, the viewers get to see the difficulties which a short man has to face, in practical life, due to his short physique. Till this point of time, Govindan had never considered this aspect as a disadvantage for him, but he starts pondering about his physical stature when his mother, wishing to see her son getting married, moots the idea of marriage. Even though Govindan is a bit confused and reluctant to get married, his mother infuses confidence in him by citing an example from their own neighbourhood itself:
NANI AMMA. Do you know how old you are?

GOVINDAN. I forgot that.

NANI AMMA. You have crossed twenty seven.

GOVINDAN. I thought I would have crossed forty.

NANI AMMA. You consider whatever I tell as a joke. Please listen to what I say. There should be some one to cook and wash for you.

GOVINDAN. You are here for that. Right? And when you are not there, I will do it by myself.

NANI AMMA. Son, do you understand what I said?

GOVINDAN. Yes, I understood.

NANI AMMA. Then stop joking and tell me (consent for marriage).

GOVINDAN. Will any girl like to marry me?

NANI AMMA. Why not? Don’t any short men get married? Do you know the well known goldsmith in Vadakkemuri? He is shorter than you. His wife is taller than him and they have four or five well built and normal children… There will be many girls ready to marry you.

(Mela)

Nani Amma informs Govindan that she has requested Ammini to find a suitable girl for him from the village itself. Ammini earnestly starts inquiring for a suitable alliance for Govindan and to begin with, she approaches Aandi and his wife to talk about this matter. Initially, they are not quite inclined to marry off their daughter to a dwarf, but Ammini persuades them saying that this is the best alliance their daughter Suhasini can get and this is the point in the film where the first traces of Govindan’s masculinity being
questioned is visible. In the meantime, Govindan’s meeting with Sarada in his house ignites a desire in him for her and he bribes Ammini to obtain Sarada’s consent at any cost. At first, Sarada rejects the proposal, but later upon Ammini’s persuasion, she concedes, and Govindan marries Sarada as per his yearning. Govindan’s marriage with Sarada can be seen as an end of one phase and a turning point in his life.

George presents a new turn of events in the life of Govindan and Sarada after marriage when he takes her to the city and he also presents the various challenges which they encounter in their life and how these affect their personal life. Upon the arrival in the circus tent, the very first interaction of Govindan with one of the workers there shatters the heroic image of Govindan which Sarada has in her mind. Govindan calls one of the workers in the tent to help him carry his luggage, but the response of the person is very insulting and he does not obey Govindan’s words. Here, it is shown that the male body of Govindan enters a different discourse and the dialogic relationship between the body and the surroundings creates a kind of confusion and dilemma in the mind of Sarada because she finds that the perception of a dwarf in the circus tent is very different from that in her village. As a part of the circus troupe, she experiences the wonders and excitement of circus life on the one hand, but also gets a taste of the varied nature of people, especially the virtues and vices of men, on the other. The only close friend of Govindan is Vijayan (Mammootty) and he is introduced to the viewers as a motorcycle rider in the circus, one of the jobs filled with perils and one which provides ample scope for the expression of masculinity in its complete sense.

The life of Sarada in the circus tent is entirely different from the one she was leading in the village and she slowly starts realising that Govindan is viewed as a comic
figure by the public. She also realises that there is a fundamental difference in the outlook towards Govindan in the village and in the city because in the village people looked at his money as well as possessions and considered him to be a heroic figure, whereas in the city, he is a small fish in a big pond due to which, the very same person is considered to be insignificant and incapable of doing much. Govindan’s helplessness due to his short stature is explicitly shown in the scene when he is unable to protect himself and Sarada when they are attacked by two well built men while coming back from the market after buying utensils and provisions to cook in their tent. By chance, Vijayan happens to pass by that way and rescues them from these attackers. It is after this incident that Vijayan starts emerging as a hero in the mind of Sarada, one who has the capacity to perform dangerous acts as a part of his profession and as one who is capable of protecting herself and her husband. Because of this incident, Sarada starts perceiving masculinity in a different way, that it is not mere money or material wealth alone that makes a perfect man, but rather the capacity to protect is also quintessential. A dwarf is perceived by the society at large as a laughable character and the viewers get to see this aspect in the incident when Govindan, Sarada and Vijayan go to a hotel after watching a movie and when Govindan bumps into a waiter, both of them fall down and everyone present there, including Sarada and Vijayan, laugh at him. This hurts Govindan’s sentiments and on that night Govindan and Sarada engage in the following dialogue:

GOVINDAN. Are you not well?

SARADA. I have no problem.

GOVINDAN. Then why are you not speaking anything?

SARADA. What is there to speak?
GOVINDAN. Did you like the film which we saw today?

SARADA. Don’t mistake me if I tell you something. When you go out why can’t you be careful? People are laughing at you when they see your actions.

GOVINDAN. Oh, people will laugh at my very sight and they will laugh more if something happens to me. Like others, you also laughed today. Right? It is nobody’s fault. Saru, I don’t feel anything when others laugh at me but when you laugh at me, I feel something. (Mela)

This, in fact, can be considered as the beginning of the confusions and troubles that engulf Govindan’s life.

The life and the daily routine in the circus tent create a kind of boredom in Sarada which makes her lose interest in circus life and she starts talking to Vijayan very frequently whom she considers a good man to interact with. The presence of Vijayan in Govindan’s tent, in the absence of Govindan, gives scope for people like Rameshan, the unscrupulous manager, to manipulate stories about Sarada and Vijayan and very soon, rumours about their relationship start floating in the circus tent. Rameshan along with his friends tease Govindan and this indirectly questions Govindan’s capacity to lead a normal family life. Govindan starts suspecting that Sarada has a relationship with Vijayan and slowly starts feeling that she is getting separated from him. Govindan loses faith in his good friend Vijayan and his wife Sarada and gets the hunch that they are deceiving him, which in turn creates a lot of frustration in him. A gradual change is observed in Sarada’s behaviour as well. She begins to experience a sort of awkwardness and hesitance to go out of the circus tent with Govindan because of his physique which she feels is
inadequate to save both of them in the event of an attack from mischief mongers and also because she does not want to face the mockery by the people any more.

A rude remark from his boss, which has a direct bearing on his body structure, makes Govindan feel very dejected and makes him realise the important role which the concept of a normal male body plays in the life of an individual in a society and this is explicit in the following scene. One day, when Govindan returns to his tent, he sees Vijayan coming out of it and when he enters it, he sees Sarada in tears. Upon asking the reason for her distress, she informs that Rameshan tried to misbehave with her and that Vijayan saved her. Govindan complains about Rameshan to his boss and when Rameshan is summoned by the boss, he presents an entirely different picture of the incident blaming Sarada and Vijayan for the misdeed. This leads to further problems in the tent and the boss summons Govindan to tell him that these types of issues have not been encountered by him so far in his tent. He further says that he had foreseen these issues the very moment Sarada reached the tent and remarks that events like marriages are suitable only for a normal man and will not work out in the case of people like Govindan, who is a dwarf.

In order to make life smooth and trouble free for all concerned, Vijayan decides to leave the circus company, but upon knowing his decision, Govindan objects and tells that instead of Vijayan, it is rather he who should quit and substantiates by telling that since there are enough clowns in the circus, his absence will not make any difference, whereas Vijayan is an important player who cannot be substituted so easily. The decision of Govindan to leave the circus is a symbolic one because he has decided to depart from this world and move on to another one where power relations and discrimination of any kind,
including that on the basis of body, does not exist. He requests Vijayan to come to the beach where they had gone together and enjoyed themselves during the beginning of their friendship. Govindan reaches there with Sarada and sees that Vijayan was already there waiting for them. Then Govindan asks Vijayan to explain the friendship existing between them to Sarada and he starts walking towards the cliff. A short while later, when Vijayan and Sarada see him standing on the cliff, Govindan waves his hand and jumps into the sea leaving this world forever. Govindan’s decision to commit suicide can be read as his revenge on the whole world which fails to accommodate people like him in the mainstream of masculine notions. As far as Vijayan and Sarada are concerned, even if they decide to live together, they cannot do so peacefully because the suicide of Govindan will haunt them in their future life. Govindan’s feeling that he and his body structure are not in accordance with the notion of stereotypical masculinity is the main cause of distress and doubt in his life and when he compares himself with others who possess a normal physical body, anxieties and confusions arise in him and he feels that he is marginalised. Thus, the concept and role of the body plays a vital role in the construction of masculinity and in the formation of social and gender relations, and failure to match with the stereotypical masculine body creates problems in men’s life, Govindan being one such case in point.

In the light of the above mentioned films, a comparative investigation of the three main characters, Ayyappan, Suresh Babu and Govindan, stands as a testimony to the ingeniousness and originality of the directorial skills of George and in this way, he tries to cinematically deal with important and weighty questions pertaining to men and masculinities.