Chapter 6
Man and Society

Theoreticians in the field of men and masculinity studies, opine that masculinity is not a homogenous category but rather a combination of different practices which vary as the contexts and circumstances change. Along with the concept of hegemonic masculinity, other types of masculinities come to the forefront when contextualising masculinity in the matrices of power and gender relations.

The next two films, K. G. George’s *Ulkadal* (1978) and *Kolangal* (1981), which have been chosen for this research are different from the earlier ones in the sense that the earlier ones focussed on masculinity in the familial and/or work place settings, whereas these two films give a scope for understanding the concept of masculinity when placed in a broader frame of reference moving from the closed context of the family and/or work place to a broader context having the college campus and the village as the centres of action respectively.

*Ulkadal* is one of George’s masterpieces where the campus love of the 1970s is very exquisitely and flawlessly interwoven with the main theme of the film which is the weirdly normal life of the protagonist Rahulan (Venu Nagavalli). The film is the journey through the protagonist’s emotionally disturbed life and sublimely reveals the anxieties, aspirations, and confusions in the mind of a young man coming out of college after master’s degree at the threshold of starting a new chapter in his life. In a nutshell, the film in general explicates the existential crisis of men during the decade, focusses on themes of contemporary relevance like love in the college campus, religious fundamentalism, and unemployment and the impact of these on masculinity. Unlike the usual
representation of men as aggressive, violent and sexually harassing, this hero Rahulan is a very mild person who is always represented as being immersed in his own invisible inner world of thoughts.

Most of the studies on men and masculinities associate as well as view masculinity and patriarchy as overlapping and congruent to each other and perceive them to be united together because of the existence of the notion that patriarchy represents the predominant form of masculinity and that the hierarchical form of patriarchy is created by masculinity. This film by George is somewhat iconoclastic in the sense that it is trying to portray the idea that, “men can enact non-patriarchal masculine subjectivities and thus break the real and implied nexus between men, a normative model of masculinity and patriarchal dominance” (Pease 9).

In the traditional perspective, man’s paid work bestows upon him a certain status, position, power, and identity and he has been identified as the one who steps out to become the breadwinner for his household. In this frame of reference, the concept of paid employment plays an important role in a man’s life and its absence poses a threat to the conventional conception of masculine identity because it is seen as an anomalous force in the discourse where heteronormativity prevails. George’s *Ulkadal* very thoughtfully showcases the relevance of paid work in the instance where Rahulan, in spite of being one from an affluent family, strives to be employed soon after his higher studies.

After the success of *Swapnadanam*, George directed a series of films which did not become hits and he wanted to direct a film entirely different from his previous ones. In his autobiography, George describes the events which eventually led to the birth of this movie. “We (George and Lathif) stopped the vehicle in Kottayam and got out of the
vehicle. There was a book exhibition going on by the road side. While going through the books in the exhibition, we came across a book, *Ulkadal* penned by George Oonakkoor. It was an interesting read” (George, *Flashback* 57). During the remaining leg of his travel, George read the entire story and discussed it with Lathif. When they met the producer, K. J. Thomas, George narrated the story of *Ulkadal* to the producer which was accepted by him immediately without any hesitation. This movie turned out to be a resounding success, which can be predominantly attributed to the novel treatment of the theme amalgamated with the world class directorial skills of George.

The film, which can broadly be divided into two sections on the basis of Rahulan’s life, begins with Rahulan returning back home after the completion of his graduation. Upon reaching his home and seeing that his father is sitting in front of the house talking to some people, he does not confront him directly, but enters the house through another entrance instead, and meets his mother first. It is his mother who takes him to his father and the way he presents himself in front of his father with folded hands and the way he talks to his father shows his fear coupled with respect towards his father. He belongs to an upper class family and in stark contrast to the nature of his father who is a dominant as well as an authoritative figure in the family, Rahulan is depicted as a very quiet and submissive son who is always in a state of confusion and perplexity, not quite sure of himself and his dealings:

MOTHER. Rahulan has come.

FATHER. Ok. How was the exam? Will you get a first class?

RAHULAN. (Standing with folded hands) I have written it. I will pass.

FATHER. What is the use of just passing without a first class?
MOTHER. He will get a first class. *(Ulkadal)*

Without having anything much to do, Rahulan roams around his native village and goes to the river bank where he reminisces about his childhood sweetheart, Tulsi whom he loved dearly. The memories about her make him quite disturbed and in the beginning of the movie itself the viewers get a feel of the extent to which his love for her torments him. The transition from Rahulan’s present to his past is so very mellifluous that this flashback brings to the forefront the kind of direction which George is acclaimed for. The present melancholy of Rahulan is contrasted with his happy and cheerful childhood days, especially the days he spends with his girlfriend. Memories of how she awakens him to pluck flowers during the Onam season, how he teases her on the river bank and the instances when he visits her house, all haunt him. Her very presence used to give him consolation and her absence makes him a sullen soul.

The reasons as to why thoughts about the deceased Tulsi pain Rahulan are not made amply evident to the viewers, but it is through Rahulan’s memories that the viewers come to know about the existence of such a person in his life. One day, Rahulan’s mother informs him that Tulsi’s house, which had been lying vacant after Tulsi and her mother’s death, has been purchased by them and it was being demolished that day. This triggers a fresh wave of memories in his mind and Rahulan goes to that house and recollects his last visit which he had undertaken during one of his vacations from college. When he had gone there to meet Tulsi, her sister who was morally not sound had misbehaved with Rahulan and when Tulsi witnessed this, she reprimanded her sibling for her misbehaviour. Rahulan, on his part had become flabbergasted as well as embarrassed on such a move by Tulsi’s sister and he had left the place without uttering a word. In the
very next scene, the viewers get to see Rahulan going back to the college after the
vacation and on the way he sees Tulsi who asks him how he can go without bidding
farewell to her and the following conversation transpires between them:

TULSI. You are going. Right? That too without telling me? Alas!
RAHULAN. I came to see you Tulsi.
TULSI. And then you got to see whom you desired to see! I did not expect
this from you, Rahulan.
RAHULAN. If I had known that this is the condition of your house I
would not have come. (*Ulkadal*)

After this flashback, the next scene is one in which the demolition of the house is
shown and subsequently the viewers get to see Rahulan overhearing a conversation
among the workers in which they talk about the death of Tulsi. Having shown two scenes
full of sepulchral overtones, the director sets the stage for the next scene which shows
Rahulan singing a poem which talks about his beloved who no longer has an earthly
presence. One of the reasons for the sadness writ large on his face and the gloominess
obsessing him may perhaps be plausibly attributed to his feeling of guilt that the cause of
Tulsi’s suicide might be because of his rejecting her.

After the declaration of the results, his father calls him and tells him that he has
secured a first class, but neither happiness nor joy is seen on his face after hearing this,
but rather his face remains to be filled with indifference and confusion as before. Another
instance where Rahulan’s submissiveness, confusion, and lack of determination comes to
the forefront is when his father gives an unequivocal peremptory order that Rahulan
should pursue his higher studies by joining Master of Arts Rahulan keeps quiet initially and only when his father prompts him for the second time, he conveys his consent.

The following scene is another song sequence in which the audience get to see Rahulan singing a poem which explicitly conveys his lost love and after the conclusion of the poem, Rahulan sitting on a chair in his hostel room writing something and his roommate coming along with his friends to get acquainted with Rahulan. The director does a good job of expressing how Rahulan reconciles when he feels unloved. His roommate introduces himself as Jayasankar (Jagathi) and mentions to Rahulan that his hobby is collecting love letters. As soon as he sees a white paper with something scribbled on it, he snatches it from Rahulan’s hand with the hope that it is a love letter, but his facial expression changes from that of hope to disappointment after he reads it and then he remarks that Rahulan is a poet. This is in fact the first instance where the viewers get to know that Rahulan possesses poetic abilities as well.

Rahulan’s college life does not turn out to be as lonely as his life in his village and home, especially because he gets a bosom companion Davis (Ratheesh) and it is his friendship with Davis that creates a turning point in his life. As days pass by, Rahulan gets acquainted with Davis’ sister Reena (Sobha) which later on blossoms into a love relationship thus making the love theme in *Ulkadal* evergreen in the history of Malayalam films.

George very skillfully idealises and embellishes the romance in *Ulkadal* by flipping the cliché of the romantic film genre. Unlike the usual, where the love between the hero and the heroine develop during their meetings in parks, coffee shops and the
like, the love relationship between Rahulan and Reena develops in quite an unusual way and even their meeting places are unconventional.

George has very carefully and aesthetically directed the scene where Rahulan and Reena meet in the library. Rahulan is shown sitting in the library, reading his poem titled *Ulkadal*, which has been published in a magazine and in the meantime, Reena comes and congratulates him:

REENA. Congratulations. I haven’t read such a beautiful poem till now. It is full of very powerful words which captivates the mind. (She sits on a chair, reads a magazine and asks Rahulan). Shall I ask you one thing? What is the reason for this sadness? It is very much highlighted in this poem? (She notices Rahulan’s silence). I have come looking for my brother.

RAHULAN. Davis has gone from here early. (*Ulkadal*)

One gets to see that Rahulan is quite reluctant to talk to Reena and the conversation initiated by Reena remains a monologue most of the time. Rahulan’s silence makes Reena realise that his mind is in a confused and perplexed state and in order not to vex him further, she takes his leave, stating a fine excuse that she has come to the library in search of her brother Davis which is actually a deliberate misstatement.

One of the disparate features of this film is that unlike an archetypal hero present in a majority of films, the protagonist in this one is portrayed to be a very unassuming character. However, over a period of time, he starts gaining popularity both in and out of college, albeit at a slow pace. After reading Rahulan’s poem, Davis’ father expresses a desire to his son that he would like to meet this budding poet and in order to satisfy his
father’s wish, Davis comes to invite Rahulan to his house on one Sunday morning.
Rahulan’s visit to Davis’ house enables Rahulan to get to know more about Davis and
Reena’s life and the viewers also, from this scene, get a feel of the rather contrasting
inherent natures of both Rahulan and Davis. Davis is a very open, frank and happy-go-
lucky kind of a person. He aspires to study medicine but does not get through the
qualifying exam and he also does not have enough marks to pursue his masters in any
science subject, which is his next choice. Left with no other option, he joins Master of
Arts which is actually not his cup of tea. He also considers college life to be an escape
from his father’s persuasion to manage their shop selling God’s photos. Davis belongs to
a Christian fundamentalist household where most of his uncles and aunts are either
priests or nuns and his father is also a very conventional person as well as a theist to the
core. Davis considers Rahulan to be a true friend with whom he can share everything.

During the course of Rahulan’s conversation with Davis’ father, at one point,
Davis’ father asks Reena to show her paintings to Rahulan, and even though she is a bit
hesitant in doing so, she takes Rahulan through her paintings. This opportunity makes
Rahulan get to know more about Reena, ignites a romantic spark in him and starts
painting the canvas of his life with the colours of Reena’s love. The love between Reena
and Rahulan develops deeply and garners the applause of platonic lovers. Both of them
being lonely souls, Rahulan finds solace in writing poems whereas Reena tries to conquer
her loneliness through paintings.

Meanwhile Rahulan’s exams get over and it becomes time for him to leave
college and go back home. The very thought of getting separated from Rahulan is
unbearable for Reena and she shares her confusions and fears with him. However,
Rahulan does not reciprocate and replies only after receiving a letter from her and in that also he expresses his inability to come and meet her at this juncture. This lack of reciprocation of love seems quite unnatural and can once again be probably attributed to the desolation which his mental faculty has been subjected to.

The director packs in a lot of unexpected events in the second half of the film. Davis’ getting a job as a medical representative is an important event because Rahulan and Reena feel that Davis’ freedom and independence will give him the strength and boldness to mention about their love affair to Reena’s father. As far as Davis is concerned his securing a job is an escape route from the loneliness he feels at home. He reveals to Rahulan that after his mother’s death Reena is his only consolation who provides him some solace and that he yearns for a job which, he believes, will make his life more active.

Davis’s love for Susan (Jalaja), a nun who has left the convent, can be considered as a bold and revolutionary move on the part of Davis and he voices out his trepidation to Rahulan as to whether Davis’ father will acquiesce with his decision. However the optimism of Rahulan and Reena that they would soon be able to convey their love affair to Reena’s father through Davis is short-lived and their hopes are shattered into smithereens when Davis passes away unexpectedly in a bike accident. Reena is also drawn into a quagmire since she can no longer leave her father. In the midst of all these tragic events, the only silver lining in the cloud for Rahulan, which provides him some comfort is his getting a job as a lecturer in a college which in turn instills in him a bit of boldness to ask Reena whether she is prepared to come and join him as his life partner.
going against her father’s will. Enticed by hope, he comes to meet Reena after getting the new job:

RAHULAN. I have rented a house. When will you come there Reena? I want you to be with me always. I know what you are thinking. I have come to meet your father too, to get his permission.

REENA. Don’t expect that he will give his consent. He will not bless us.

RAHULAN. Are you sure?

REENA. Sure. His mind is immersed in the religious teachings most of the time.

RAHULAN. Then what to do?

REENA. All hopes are ruined. I have no peace of mind.

RAHULAN. Will you come with me if I call you?

REENA. Then I may have to witness one more death in this house.

(Ulkadal)

When Rahulan asks Reena whether she will come with him if he calls her, she does not give a reply in the affirmative and she tells him that Davis’ death has wrecked her father emotionally. She is very much concerned about her father and unequivocally conveys to Rahulan that she is not intending to marry him without her father’s consent and hence their marriage seems to be a distant possibility. Rahulan meets her father in his shop, sees the impasse into which her father has been drawn into and being a gentleman to the core, empathises with him during his time of bereavement. During this interaction, her father mentions to him that he considers Rahulan in the place of his lost son Davis, and even requests his help for arranging Reena’s marriage. Hearing these words and
visibly moved by the condition of Davis’s father Rahulan gets choked with emotion and becomes unable to convey the fact that he loves his daughter and wants her in marriage, thus failing miserably in his endeavour due to overpowering sentiments. Rahulan retreats, a confused and a disappointed man since he is now almost certain that he will be unable to make Reena his spouse and this is when he starts facing a kind of existential problem and a dilemma as to what to do to proceed further in his life and what not to do. His gloomy countenance gets noticed by his colleagues and one of them remarks that Rahulan is quite different from the contemporary youngsters who neither are gloomy, nor are confused, but rather are a jovial and pleasure seeking lot.

Another significant development which takes place around this time in Rahulan’s life is that one of his students, Meera, belonging to a rich family and who also happens to be an ardent fan of his poems gets bitten by the love bug and falls in love with him. Her frequent coming and meeting Rahulan makes him somewhat uncomfortable and he requests her not to disturb him anymore and at the same time is unable to communicate to her the reason for his confusion.

One more turning point in Rahulan’s life is when he comes to know about the proposed marriage between Reena and Dr. Alex from his senior colleague, Paul when he visits him in his house. Instantaneously he becomes dispirited and George, very dexterously highlights the pensiveness in his mind in the scene where Rahulan forgets to take the book that he had brought along with him and it is his colleague Paul who calls him back and hands it over to him.

After hearing the news about the marriage proposal of Reena, Rahulan’s approach towards Meera gets changed considerably which might be due to his cognizance that
Reena probably can never be a part of his life and that his waiting for her is futile. Rahulan and Meera’s parents proceed with the marriage proposal and they fix the marriage date. Even at this juncture, the perplexity in his mind does not cease since he is torn between his love for Reena and Meera’s love for him. In an unexpected turn of events, one day Reena takes a bold step and comes to Rahulan leaving her father and her house. Rahulan again plunges into a crisis, gets caught in a state of turmoil because he is unable to take a decision as to whom he should accept as his life partner, Reena or Meera, and finally decides to accept the former.

*Kolangal*, produced by D. Philip and K. T. Varghese is yet another film directed by George whose screenplay has been written by the director himself. The movie which is based on P. J. Antony’s story *Oru Gramathinte Athmavu* has also been dramatised as a play *Moonnu Pennungalum Kure Nattukaarum* and it depicts the incidents in the lives of the people living in a village situated in the Central Travancore region.

Unlike the beginnings of George’s other films which usually portray a journey or a crowded street, this film commences with the pristine scenic beauty of Kerala, a fine morning with the sun rays passing through the foliage of coconut leaves, being shown to the viewers in a medium close-up shot. A close reading of this film will make one deconstruct the visual text and understand that through this film, George is trying to highlight that village life, just like city life, is also a conflict between good and evil and he is trying to break the notion that a village is always filled with innate goodness and that the villagers are the epitomes of innocence.

George presents a pure village experience and brilliantly intersperses the movie with a portrayal of culture, ways of living, and various incidents in a typical village in
Kerala, which includes, women going to the market to sell their produce, men doing some small works, duel between families in the village, the celebration of festivals, the dominance of women over men in the families, love relations between men and women, and scandals and gossips in the village. A distinctive aspect of this film is that it is difficult to ascribe the role of a protagonist to one or two single characters because the focus is on several personae in a village, each of whom contributes something different and unique and hence has equal importance. In order to project the realities of social life to the fullest extent possible, the director unleashes the power of characterisation by selecting characters like Chantha Mariyam (Rajam K. Nair), Kallu Varkey (Thilakan), Paily (D. Philip), Kunjamma (Menaka), Eliyamma (Gladis), Kesavan (Srinivasan), and Paramu (Nedumudi Venu) who are an apt representation of the cross section of the village society since each of these characters conveys a predominant quality of goodness or evilness to the audience in a very realistic manner.

The camera pans from the rising sun towards a beautiful rippling river showcasing the natural beauty at its fullest and then the viewers get to see the ferry man Paily doing his daily ablutions at the start of his day. The medium close up shot slowly changes to a long shot showing Kunjamma walking towards the boat with milk bottles in her hands which are to be ferried across to the opposite bank. In the next scene, the long shot changes into an extreme long shot where the banks of the river and the other parts of the village have been captured in order to present a feel of the village area in Kerala and this is one instance where the directorial skills of George come to the forefront. Throughout the film, the director employs long shots and extreme long shots in order to ensure that
the unmatched scenic beauty of the village bestowed upon by nature is presented unadulterated to the audience at large and their aesthetic sense is kindled.

The houses of Chantha Mariyam living with her fifteen year old daughter Kunjamma and husband Pathrose (T. M. Abraham), a daily labourer and Eliyamma living with her daughter Leela (Sumangaly) who is also around fifteen years of age, are situated on the opposite sides of the road. The central theme of this film is about the explicit quarrels erupting between these two women and the implicit tendency of one to outdo the other. Though the origin and the cause of their conflicts are not presented, the viewers are given the impression that both these women are deadly enemies and the feud between these two quarrelsome women is shown from the beginning itself:

(Eliyamma is pulling Mariyam’s calf through the road).

ELIYAMMA. Why can’t you tie it and look after it? (Beating it with a stick) Go.

MARIYAM. (Running to the calf). Don’t touch my calf!

ELIYAMMA. Tie your calf and rear it properly. If it comes to my yard, I will beat it for sure.

(Leela runs out of the house towards Eliyamma. Pathrose and Kunjamma stand behind Mariyam)

MARIYAM. (Coming forward). Will you beat it?

ELIYAMMA. What will you do if I beat it?

MARIYAM. (Coming forward). Will you beat it?

ELIYAMMA. If it enters my yard I will beat it. (Kolangal)
Mariyam is an ordinary woman from a Christian family who works very hard to make both ends meet and to save some money for her only daughter’s wedding. She is depicted as very authoritative and courageous having full control over her husband and daughter and also as a hard working woman who manages everything in the house right from the morning including waking her husband up, giving fodder to the cattle, forcing her husband to go to work and then she herself going to the market to sell sweets. In the market place also her authority is very evident and she has a separate place of her own where she sits and sells her sweets. Her daughter Kunjamma helps her mother in the household chores and also in tasks like distributing milk.

Within a single film, George is credited with portraying a range of male characters who can be broadly grouped as those who are harmful and those who are not. On the one hand, men like Kallu Varkey and Paramu are depicted as those who intend to harm and cause suffering to others by using their money power and by their voyeuristic actions respectively, whereas on the other, the male characters like Kesavan, Paily, Raman Nair, and Cheriyan, who have come from different places and settled in this village, have been shown as benevolent. In spite of the village having more good people than bad, the lives of many of the good people get destroyed because the potency of the bad is far greater than that of the virtuous.

George portrays Paramu as an embodiment of evil and he is undoubtedly the most dangerous person in the village. He derives pleasure by peeping into the lives of women, especially by watching women bathe and subsequently he destroys the lives of these women by using the information collected, thus highlighting his immoral and wicked character. “Voyeurism is the act of viewing the activities of other people unbeknown to
them. This often means that the act of looking is illicit or has illicit connotations” (Hayward 446). Voyeurism is considered to be a male prerogative and here the director, through the actions of the character Paramu, shows how voyeurism has been used for sexual gratification and to destroy the lives of women and also simultaneously reinforces the fact that many times women come under the control and gaze of men due to the masculine power inherent in the patriarchal nature of men together with their voyeuristic tendencies and this enables men to assert their power according to their whims and fancies which may be actually detrimental or against the interests of the second sex. The concept of male gaze has been coined by the feminist critic Laura Mulvey in her essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and in cinematic narrative, this concept can be coupled with the model of voyeurism. In the cinematic field where gender power disparity is prevalent, the voyeuristic objectification of women characters is very prominent.

George’s passion for watching classic Hollywood films had a great impact on his career as a film director and he adopted ideas from Hollywood films, a case in point being making voyeurism a theme in his films. In the majority of films which have voyeurism as a theme, the focus is on the body parts of the woman object, but George, in this film does not show the object which the voyeur is watching, but instead shows the actions of the subject, succinctly projecting the voyeuristic tendencies of the subject and this is precisely where the genius of George comes to the forefront when the viewers see that subtle modifications have been made in presenting the adopted ideas, thus giving a personal touch and making his films innovative and unique.
Paramu, a jobless young hoodlum in the village claims that he was in Mumbai, keeps talking about his life in the megalopolis and is considered a hero by some of the village youngsters apparently due to his exposure to city life. Being unemployed and in the absence of any other constructive ways to spend their free time, which they possess in abundance, these youth resort to playing cards and gossiping in order to while away their time. Paramu has voyeuristic traits in him and without any feeling of shame or hesitation, peeps through the bathrooms to gaze at women taking bath and his dignity has fallen to such abysmal levels that even when the women admonish him, the sense of contrition does not creep into him. He is also a malevolent human being and is fully responsible for destroying the life of Kunjamma and Devayani, two innocent women in the village, who fall easy prey to his iniquitous behaviour. Kuttisankaran Nair hailing from Malabar comes to this village as a government officer and after a period of courtship marries Devayani. On one occasion, Kuttisankaran Nair overpowers Paramu in a physical duel and this bruises Paramu’s ego and harms the heroic image which he is maintaining in the village. Reconciling himself to the fact that he will be unable to overpower Kuttisankaran Nair by force, Paramu decides to use a contemptible stratagem to take revenge on his foe and divulges to Kuttisankaran, a completely untrue fact, that Devayani had a pre-marital affair with him and goes on to substantiate his statement by describing her body and revealing the presence of a mole on her private body part which he had actually seen during one of his voyeuristic stints. This becomes a turning point and believing Paramus’s words, Kuttisankaran deserts Devayani making her a mental wreck.

Another bad personality who appears in the film is the middle aged drunkard Kallu Varkey. He is projected as authoritative and as a person who will not hesitate to go
to any extent in order to get things done according to his wishes, no matter how unreasonable they may be. In the scene which introduces Varkey, the audience gets to see him sitting near a shop, drinking toddy and on the verge of losing consciousness due to alcohol intoxication. In the meantime, his soul mate and drinking partner, Chacko, gets some snacks from Mariyam, which they share and then after finishing their toddy bottles get ready to make another sojourn to the toddy shop.

One day Varkey was traveling in Paily’s boat and seeing Kunjamma also sitting in the boat, he picks up the following conversation with her:

VARKEY. (Looking at Kunjamma) You are the daughter of Mariyam. Right?

(Kunjamma pretends that she has not heard what he said). Can’t you hear?

(Looking at Paily) Paily, she is Mariyam’s daughter. Right?

PAILY. (With contempt). Yes.

VARKEY. (Again to Kunjamma). You have grown up. How old are you now? (Kunjamma keeps quiet). (Kolangal)

From this point of time onwards, a desire to marry Kunjamma erupts in Varkey and he entrusts the job of getting the consent of her parents for this marriage proposal to Chacko. In turn, Chacko discusses the marriage alliance of Kunjamma and Varkey during his next meeting with Pathrose:

PATHROSE. From where is the proposal?

CHACKO. Not from very far away. From a nearby place only.

PATHROSE. What do you mean by a nearby place?

CHACKO. The other bank of the river.
PATHROSE. Who is the person on the other bank of the river whom I do not know?

CHACKO. You know the person. It is our Varkey.

PATHROSE. Is it Kallu Varkey?

(CHacko nods his head. Pathrose looks at Chacko with a bewildered look).

CHACKO. Do you know Varkey’s first wife?

PATHROSE. Yes.

CHACKO. She is no more. Is it not?

(Pathrose looks at Chacko again with a bewildered look).

CHACKO. Now Varkey wants to marry again.

PATHROSE. (Angrily) Chacko!

CHACKO. He is very rich.

PATHROSE. You have told this to me. It is okay. But, do not tell this to Mariyam. You know what will happen if you tell this to her. Right?

CHACKO. Varkey conveyed his desire to me and if I do not convey the same to you, that is not right. That is why I told this to you.

PATHROSE. Chacko, I have only one daughter. I do not want a widower to marry her. You know Varkey. Right? He married a beautiful woman and then killed her.

CHACKO. Is that not just a rumour?

PATHROSE. It is not just a rumour. It is true. (Kolangal)

Subsequently, Pathrose dies in an accident at his workplace and it becomes all the more easy for Varkey to fulfill his desire of marrying Kunjamma. Through Chacko,
Varkey successfully persuades Mariyam, who concedes to his request, and then Varkey weds Kunjamma. In the last scene, the viewers get to see Varkey and his young bride, crossing the river in Paily’s boat and going to Varkey’s home on the opposite bank. The film concludes with a resounding laugh from Varkey which echoes in the air and this resounding laughter can be construed as the victory of money and male power through which one can apparently fulfill all their earthly desires.

Another malicious male character appearing in this film is Chacko who lives as a parasite on Varkey and whose main job seems to be gossiping and selling news obtained from one group of villagers to another group. His crookedness becomes evident from the following conversation with Varkey wherein he explains how he successfully blocks another marriage proposal for Kunjamma:

CHACKO. I told them (Family who comes with the marriage proposal for Kunjamma) that two times she has undergone an abortion and that now she is with you (Varkey). This had its impact on them: (Varkey with great happiness embraces Chacko and kisses him on his cheek).

VARKEY. (Happily). You have done a commendable job.

(Chacko smiles with satisfaction). (Kolangal)

After blocking this marriage alliance, he brainwashes the widow, Mariyam and persuades her successfully to give consent to the marriage of Kunjamma and Varkey.

The non-native, Cheriyan hailing from Attingal is portrayed as a virtuous man and comes to the village as a bangle seller. He likes the village, falls in love with Kunjamma and decides to stay there permanently. He befriends the boatman Paily who suggests that
he can request for some land from Raman Nair, who is known to be a philanthropist, so
that he can build a house and can stay there. One day Cheriyan sees Kunjamma pass by
near his newly built house and invites her inside. This is noticed by Paramu and one of
his friends Anthony who seize this opportunity and spread rumours that Cheriyan has an
illicit relationship with Kunjamma. When this hearsay reaches the ears of Mariyam she
becomes furious and instantaneously punishes her daughter by beating her and this
rumour also actuates, in great measure, her personal animosity towards Cheriyan which
she openly exhibits by picking up a fight with him when he was returning back from
Kesavan’s tea shop. When Raman Nair witnesses this brawl, he immediately intervenes
and breaks up the fight between the two and also gives a sane advice to Cheriyan that
under the present prevailing volatile circumstances, it would be in his best interest to
leave the village for a few days and then return, by which time the dust would have
settled down:

RAMAN NAIR. You go to some other place for a few days. Come back
when things get better. We will find out solutions for everything.

CHERIYAN. Human beings exist wherever we go. Is it not? I am not
going anywhere. I will die here only. Let people from this village itself
kill me (if they want to). (Kolangal)

The troubles of Cheriyan do not cease as seen in the incident when he faces flak
from Paramu and his friends for resting his bangles as well as other trinkets on the bench
in front of Kesavan’s tea shop and through these occurrences, the director very subtly
conveys to the audience how difficult it is for an outsider, even if he is a good person, to
establish base in a close knit community like a village. Cheriyan endures the trauma and
blemishes only because the hope that he will succeed in winning Kunjamma’s hand in marriage lives with him, but when that optimistic anticipation is shattered, he himself breaks down and the roiling mess of grief and anger makes him set fire to the very house which he had built with so much of expectation and finally he leaves the village.

Raman Nair, the broadminded and philanthropic landlord is one of the important male characters who is very helpful to the villagers. He lends money and is even willing to part with a portion of his land for the homeless without any hesitation, a case in point being the land he gives to Cheriyan to build a house. Being a landlord he has a say in the day to day activities of the village, however he is not so influential that he can avert the total destruction like what happened in the lives of Cheriyan, Kunjamma and Devayani.

Paily, the boatman is a quiet person but plays an important role in the lives of the village folk because his boat is the only means of travel between the two banks of the river along which the village is situated. He loves Kunjamma and conveys his love to her, but she does not reciprocate. In spite of her rejection, being a good natured person that he is, he helps Mariyam during the last rites of her husband. At the end of the film, the viewers get to see Varkey bringing Kunjamma as his bride and travelling in Paily’s boat to the other bank. From Paily’s facial expression, it can be distinctly noted that grief is writ large on his face and the deafening silence on his part clearly conveys how he commiserates on Kunjamma’s plight.

Kesavan is another good hearted person in the village and he owns the Samthripthi Vilasam Nair Hotel, which is the only hotel in the village. His good nature is exploited by the villagers especially by people like Paramu who consume items from his shop on credit with an intention never to pay back. In the following dialogue which
transpires between Kesavan and Cheriyan, the confusions in the mind of Kesavan and his perception of the village and its inhabitants are amply visible:

KESAVAN. (Reading the Newspaper). The newspaper is filled with reports of a looming threat of war. But there is no war in sight. If they are not capable, let them step aside and give way to other capable persons.

CHERIYAN. What is the difficulty if there is no war, Kesavan?

KESAVAN. Everything will become alright only if there is a war. Now the hydrogen bomb is going to be used and the first one will fall on this village. You just watch.

CHERIYAN. Why are you so angry with this place?

KESAVAN. All the people here do not have any self respect. They do not repay their debts (to me). Hydrogen bomb should fall here.

CHERIYAN. Then will you also not die?

KESAVAN. Let me die. Who is going to lose anything? What is the point of living among these people who behave like animals?

(Kolangal)

Finally, when he raises his voice and talks back against Paramu and his friends, they ruthlessly beat him and destroy his shop. With no recourse in sight he runs away since he is unable to cope up with the misdeeds of some of the villagers.

*Kolangal* not only portrays masculinities that are bold, authoritative, and malicious but also ones which are passive. The former type is represented by Paramu, Varkey and the latter is depicted by the characters like Cheriyan, Paily, and Raman Nair.
Thus, this film clearly points to the fact that there indeed exists different types of masculinities in the society and that these masculinities coexist simultaneously. At a micro-level, if one observes the conversations, group dynamics, and the interactions between the villagers, it can be seen that Paramu and Kallu Varkey serve as the harbingers of destruction of the motley village. The men who perform good deeds, who act for the well being of others and who question the wicked deeds of the men who rule the village, like Paramu and Kallu Varkey, are placed in a subordinate position and are quite powerless. The contempt for the good non-native men who have come from other places and who are trying to dominate the unethical native villagers is viewed as a kind of questioning the very authority and power of the native men in the village like Paramu. The two outsiders, Kuttisankaran Nair from Malabar and Cheriyan from Attingal are portrayed as good persons and both of them become the victims of nefarious men like Paramu and his friends. Though women like Chantha Mariyam are presented as bold and courageous, the last scene of the movie, where the resounding and reverberating laughter of Kallu Varkey is heard, shows that women are under the control of, or rather are victims of male supremacy. Mariyam is presented as a strong woman in the beginning, but towards the end she succumbs to the inveiglement and marries off her daughter with Kallu Varkey, a middle aged drunkard thereby establishing the fact that the world is predominantly ruled by men and their idiosyncrasies.

The majority of the Malayalam films till the 1970s portray men as the saviour of women. However this stereotypical approach gradually undergoes a change especially in George’s films where he starts showing women asserting their freedom and independence and the resultant crisis among men due to this development.