Chapter II  

IMAGING AND IMAGINING THE “MALAYALI” REGION IN FILMS OF THE 1950s

In the introductory chapter, I had attempted to offer a broad sketch of Kerala, through an account of its social, cultural and political history. I have also indicated the relationship between cinema and the emergence and consolidation of a regional identity founded on the principle of linguistic identity. The current chapter attempts to develop the Malayalam film industry during its nascent stage in the 1950s. The chapter initially introduces the debates and discourses surrounding the status of the first Malayalam film, following the release of *Celluloid* in 2013, which recreated the production of the film *Vigathakumaran* (1928). Noting how such debates have been formed in retrospect, the chapter enquires into the diverse trajectories through which the region of Kerala and Malayalam cinema have been imagined. Such an investigation is prerequisite for understanding what distinctively characterizes Malayali-ness in cinema from the region. Drawing from progressive literary and arts movements from the 1930s, I have attempted to trace how the region and language have been variously imagined, and how these have been translated to the medium of film. The chapter also questions the exceptional status claimed by social realist Malayalam cinema, and understands the emergence of this particular genre as a significant factor in developing distinct sensibilities and dispositions which can be
attributed as definitive markers of Malayali identity. Finally, the chapter also closely analyses three films – *Neelakkuyil* (1954), *Newspaper Boy* (1955) and *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956) - which have produced new affiliative sensibilities and the imagination of Malayali subjectivity.

2.1 When was Malayalam cinema?

In 2013, the Malayalam film *Celluloid*, directed by Kamalwas released, which revisited the production of *Vigathakumaran* (1928), considered in contemporary times to be the “first” Malayalam film. *Celluloid* rekindled discussions on the history of Malayalam cinema, and the various factors, ways and means which went into the making of the first Malayalam language films. The current section shall attempt to read the film *Celluloid* as a text, not as a historical account, but rather in order to understand how the historiography of the Malayalam film industry has been retrogressively produced following the formation of the state of Kerala. It is, therefore, essential to map the trajectory of the discussions around the film *Celluloid*, in order to make sense of the initial understandings of the early Malayalam cinema and its concerns. These discussions attempt to respond to questions such as “When was Malayalam cinema?”, what were the concerns of the industry at that time, and when were the first attempts made in the producing the first Malayalam film.

Debates still continue regarding the status of the “first” Malayalam film; whether it was *Vigathakumaran*, a silent movie which was the first film to be indigenously produced in the geographical terrain of what was later identified as the unified state of
Kerala, or the first sound film *Balan* (1938) in which Malayalam was spoken for the first time. According to Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, the debate started with the rediscovery of J. C. Daniel, the director of *Vigathakumaran*, by the film journalist Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan, who popularized the status of the movie as he had begun penning the life story of Daniel. The debate was also fed by Kunnukuzhi Mani who brought forth the story of P. K. Rosy, the heroine of *Vigathakumaran*. It should be noted that these debates unfolded during the late 1960s and 1970s, over thirty years after the release of the film (Radhakrishnan 2015: 141). However, these debates resurfaced with the release of *Celluloid*. Due to the paucity of material related to the movie itself, the study here takes *Celluloid* into account as it brings forth at least a sense of the early history of cinema in the region, and further allows one to engage with how this narrative has been produced retroactively.

The film *Celluloid* gained several accolades and appreciations in film festivals, and more importantly was successful at the box office. The film is a biopic which sketches the life story of J. C. Daniel (currently considered to be the father of Malayalam cinema), the production of his film *Vigathakumaran* and the story of its heroine P. K. Rosie. The basic premises of the film were based on the biography of J. C. Daniel, *JC Danielinte Jeevitha Katha* (2011, *Life of JC Daniel*) written by Chelangatt Gopalakrishnan, a prominent writer of the history of Malayalam cinema.

*Celluloid* brings to screen the life of J. C. Daniel and his relentless struggle to make the first film in Malayalam. The film essays his love for cinema as he travels around to procure equipment required to make a film, writes numerous letters to experts and
technicians who had access to such technology at the time, and visits them to understand and to seek support for his efforts and entrepreneurship. In the process, he also meets Dada Saheb Phalke, the pioneer of Indian cinema. I would argue that Celluloid’s narrative locates the efforts of J. C. Daniel into a particular historiographic landscape, that of a “national” imagination. Celluloid, produced in 2013, is a historiographical effort to locate the origins of Malayalam cinema. At the same time, the film also places the Malayalam film industry in an autonomous, though subsidiary relationship, with what is assumed to be "national" Indian cinema. The film, therefore, imagines the origins of Malayalam cinema as the film industry of a sub-region, with its own particular cultural and aesthetic concerns, within the broader ambit of Indian cinema.

According to the film Celluloid, Daniel comes across as not only someone who is driven by cinephilia, but also driven by his curiosity towards the potentials of a modern technology. He is also depicted as someone who is strongly shaped by the imagination of a Malayali nation, and what it means to be a Malayali subject. The retrospective consciousness of Phalke as the Father of Indian cinema, and the ways in which it is cinematically formulated in Celluloid shows the supposed “indebtedness” that Malayalam cinema has towards what has been historically identified as “Indian cinema” and its initial patriarchs. In Celluloid, the initial trajectories of Malayalam cinema do not appear as an autonomous process, but firmly locates it as a part of the national history of Indian cinema. In part, we may recognize in this the ways in which the Malayali identity/subjectivity also self-consciously finds itself to be a part of the
Indian national identity, and therefore as a regional identity. Moreover, Daniel’s desire for an autonomous Malayalam film is constructed by positing it against the perceived hegemony of Tamil cinematic productions in the region. In *Celluloid*, therefore, the autonomy of the initial Malayalam cinema is imagined on the one hand within the larger purview of Indian cinema, while on the other as an opposition to dominant Tamil cinema.

The film projects that it was in the early 1920s that Daniel started developing his dream for making the first ever Malayalam cinema. It is notable that this was almost a decade before populist demands for a unified state of Kerala was articulated through the *Aikya Kerala* movement. Thus, Daniel's efforts may be seen as an attempt to establish a production base in Travancore, rather than an imagined region called Kerala. Even in the film as well as Chelangatt's biography, Daniel refers to bringing films produced in and for *Malayalakkara*, the land of Malayali. The linguistic therefore prefigures the territorial imagination of a communal entity.

By the 1920s, the people of the region (then comprised of the separate provinces of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar) were already familiar with the medium of cinema, with a considerable presence of touring cinemas and other makeshift film exhibitions in these regions. The films which were brought for these exhibitions were mostly from Madras and Bombay and on a thematic side, these films were mostly mythologicals, based on Hindu Puranas. A significant number of foreign films were also exhibited during the period. It is interesting to note that, when the idea of a film in Malayalam was conceived by JC Daniel, he had his reservations about the thematic and aesthetic
treatment of the films. He refused to comply with the predominant form and theme of mythologicals. The film *Celluloid* has captured Daniel’s anxieties about his venture into the production of the first Malayalam film. The character of Daniel (played by Privithiraj Sukumaran) is often seen sharing these anxieties with his wife Janet (played by Mamta Mohandas) in the film. While expressing his distaste for popular mythologicals of the period, Daniel says that he is, “tired of watching ‘Puranas’, coming from Bombay and Madras. What we need to make now is a ‘social-drama’ like Chaplin’s *Kid.*” These concerns of Daniel could be considered as his desire to bring an independent autonomous intervention, through the development of a new aesthetic flavour, in the medium of cinema as a modern institution.

Roping in a female actress to enact the lead female role was also a cumbersome task for Daniel. The prevailing social system of caste distinction and discrimination, which took on aggressive and virulent forms in Travancore (and other parts of the region comprising Kerala), deposited caste purity on the body of the woman who had to be protected from the gaze of men belonging to the lower castes. This limited women from being in the public domain let alone be part of theatre or cinema performances that were particularly designed for mass public viewing. While looking for a female artist for *Vigathakumaran*, Daniel had to face this bitter reality: In *Celluloid*, during his search for a female artist, Daniel is told “even for acting in plays, there is no female artist available. How would anybody even come to act in cinema?!?” However, Daniel’s determination was instrumental in the bringing in the first heroine in Malayalam cinema.
However, despite Daniel’s concerted efforts, *Vigathakumaran* was widely and virulently attacked by the dominantly upper caste audience across Travancore. Apart from the fact that the film was directed by a lower caste Nadar Christian, what was considered most offensive by the Nair orthodoxy was that P. K. Rosy, a converted Dalit woman, played the role of a Nair woman in the film. Rosy had to face the casteist wrath of the upper caste members of the audience, who stopped her from attending the film’s premiere at Capitol Theatre, a “cinemapura” where the film was screened in Thiruvananthapuram. Later Rosy had to disappear from Travancore as she could not withstand the witch-hunt initiated by Nair Madambis (feudal lords) who burnt down her hut and chased her away from her village (Rowena 2013: web). The first heroine of Malayalam cinema disappeared then to never be seen again. While discussing how Rosy and her role in *Vigathakumaran* have been completely invisibilized in the mainstream narrative of Kerala’s film history, Rowena notes,

> It is no wonder then that the Dalit female body of Rosy aroused such hatred and anger in the Nair landlords. She was pretending to be Nair, but even then they knew that hers was a body that they had strictly forbidden any kind of entry or space in the public sphere. Yet she was standing there instead of the Nair woman that the landlords could not bear to see on screen at that time, but demanding a legitimacy that they would not even grant even to Dalit men. The mirror that was to reflect their modern self was sending back the image of the Dalit woman that they never acknowledged even in real life except to exploit and use sexually. It is no wonder that the Nair men tore the screen in anger –
Thus the mirror that mirrored the wrong image was broken and the Dalit body of Rosy was banished from Malayalam film history itself. (2013: web)

Rowena points out that the violent disparagement of Rosy ushered in an age of upper caste actresses who would don the role of the heroine in popular Malayalam films, a trend which continues to this day (2013: web).

The first ever attempt made in the production of a Malayalam cinema by J.C. Daniel and the story of the making of *Vigathakumaran* resulted in the economic ruin of the filmmaker and the disappearance of its lead actress. The film, however, met with moderate success while exhibited in Alappuzha, Nagercoil, Thrissur and Thalassery. However, both Daniel and Rosy remained obfuscated in the annals of Kerala's film history. Nevertheless, one can note that even in the early conception of the cinema in the region, there had precipitated a quest for intervening in the medium of cinema – through the initiation of new aesthetic and thematic concerns – and its development as a modern institution. Daniel’s revolutionary act of introducing the first female lead into the Malayalam cinema, notwithstanding adverse traditional practices of caste and entrenched patriarchal notions, could be seen as one of the rudimentary interventions he made through the modern institution of cinema in Malayalam. The fate of the first film in Malayalam, because of the rejection of the rigid structures of caste dispositions, could also invoke questions about the traditional caste identities of the period. If one looks past the commercial failure of *Vigathakumaran*, one can indeed note how film as a medium could question and transform existing sensibilities,
aesthetic conventions, notions of public space and conceptions of the region and its
ethny, as shall be discussed in the following section.

2.2 Cinema and the Development of New Secular Spaces

An important intervention that cinema as a modern institution brought into the
subcontinent was that it could reconstitute the pre-existing social hierarchical orders
such as caste and class which was prevalent then, especially in the social realm. The
innate potential of the cinema was that it had to be exhibited to a mass audience in an
enclosed space. This very nature of the medium was responsible for effectively
disrupting prevailing segregations based on social hierarchies. People across different
social backgrounds like caste and class, who were otherwise segregated and separated
by the norms of pollution and untouchability, were forced to sit together and enjoy the
same film which was screened. Sivathamby notes that this breakdown of hierarchies
within cinema halls acts as a precursor to imagining the region in terms of an ethnic
community.

The Cinema Hall was the first performance centre in which all the Tamils sat
under the same roof. The basis of the seating is, not on the hierarchic position
of the patron but essentially on his purchasing power. If he cannot afford
paying the higher rate, he has either to keep away from the performance or be
with “all and sundry.”
Thus, in the history of Tamilian arts, the film has been the first social equaliser. And this had a tremendous impact both on the audience and on the medium itself as it operates in Tamilnadu.

Because of the socially exclusive character of the arts (including literature) in premodern times, it was not possible to portray any character or situation that would be representative of all the Tamils irrespective of their caste and status. It was after bringing them together as spectators under one roof or as readers reading copies of the same book (this was facilitated by the secular system of education introduced by the British) that creative artistes could think in terms of depicting and portraying characters that were ‘typical’ of the entire Tamils or characters that were typical of the various sections of the Tamilian population. (Sivathamby 5)

Cinema disrupted traditional social formations through its commercial determinism. It could be said that the introduction of cinema in Indian public life, during the early 20th century, had a significant role in constituting a market by embedding new consumerist practices amongst a wider base of subjects. The accessibility to the medium of cinema was only defined by one’s ability to purchase a ticket to watch a film. In this way, cinema as a modern institution was producing the possibility of a public sphere where other factors like social and cultural capital do not play a determining role. In this way, the coming of cinema into the subcontinent played a crucial role in destabilizing prevailing social norms and opening up possibilities to create more inclusive and egalitarian public spaces.
In the case of the state of Kerala as well, the medium of cinema had brought about changes in existing public spaces and social relations within them. The Malayalam film scholar, C. S. Venkiteswaran, while observing the changes cinema brought about in Kerala of the 1950s, notes that “like the theatre movement, cinema was actually creating a space where caste and other erstwhile identities were irrelevant.” (2013: 74) Cinema was virtually creating a “new secular” space by creating narratives and a language of its own which encompassed regional, cultural, caste and class differences, yet addressed them, one and all. Film viewers of Kerala in the 1950s were indeed entering a new secular narrative world created and propagated by the ‘talkies’ (the acronym for 'talking films' applied to permanent theatres) to watch and participate in ‘cinema’, the secular space where everyone is equal. The cinematic imagination of the region of Kerala which the films of the 1950s offered to the film audience of the state was one where they could experience (as well as participate through their very presence) the emergence of a secular nation. This experience of egalitarian existence, as much as the experience of watching a film on screen, was often felt to be surreal due to its novelty. It was an experience that was akin to a dream and yet substantiated through the haptic and tactile sensation of being seated in the theatre. Beyond this, the cinematic experience created the desire to see oneself, one’s culture and language projected on the screen, driving the film industry to explore themes and forms which were closer to their region. This desire for representation was, therefore, at the very heart of the development of a truly Malayalam cinema.
Film theorist Andre Bazin has noted in his popular work, “What is cinema?” that the medium of cinema and the exhibition of it to the audience created a sense of familiarity between the medium and the spectators. The cinema recreates or substitutes a world which is more in “harmony with our desires” (87), a new world of spectacle for the gaze of the audience of cinema. It could be said that the experience and act of film viewing can be imagined as two worlds facing each other, the one that is projected for the audience on the screen and the other one we occupy and live in. However, it could also be said that this interface between the medium of cinema, its narrative and the viewer is neither just a correspondence between nor a reflection of two mutually exclusive worlds. Rather, the modern technology of cinema and its peculiar viewing practice enabled an agency of space for the audience to negotiate with what is shown on the screen and what was represented on screen. This space between the screen and the viewer becomes a terrain of conflicts, negotiation and re-formations. So, it was not only the technological apparatus of cinema, but the public space of theatre, the spectacle, the audience and as a whole cinema that was a “thoroughly ‘modern’ addition to public life; the modernity of cinema did not merely lie in its novelty as a technological from, but in its innate capability to re-order social spaces (Athique & Hill 2009).

The discourse surrounding cinema in 1950s Kerala reveal that there was an imminent desire to imagine and bring into being a modern Kerala through the medium of cinema. The emergence of a regional, language-based cinema, it was felt, would complement a whole set of interventions which were simultaneously taking place in
the public realm. From the late 1930s, there were increasing populist demands for unified geographic state of Kerala (*Aikya Keralam*), articulated through literary productions, newspaper articles, plays, etc. The region had to imagined territorially, but taking a detour through the domain of language. What united the body politic of this newly imagined state was neither territorial integrity (as the region was already divided into the distinct administrative units of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore), nor its regional specificity (as each of these regions had its own topography and sub-cultures); what unified the populace rather was the language they spoke. Herein lay the impetus for devising a Malayalam-based cinema, which cutting across the barriers of caste and class hierarchies, could imagine and familiarize a “Malayali” citizen-subject, defined by a specific ethos and sensibility. Translating these through the new medium of cinema had its potential for a collective imagination of the region and its communities.

The foundational concept of a nation, a group which imagines a collective community, was already in existence with the advent of printing technology or what Benedict Anderson terms “print capitalism” (39). These imagined communities are formed by the proliferation of printing material of various texts which furthered an imagination of a collective identity through the dissemination of collective ideas through print material (Anderson 37-47). Even in the case of Kerala, the idea of a united region was formed largely following the emergence of print capitalism in the region. The rudimentary instances of the imagination of the region following the advent of print and the consequent proliferation of Malayalam language and literature would be
discussed further in the chapter. However, it needs to be noted that with cinema coming into the fore, the possibility of its widespread proliferation – its embedded capital of communicating new ideas and sensibilities to a larger “mass” populace – was also put to use for developing a broader collective imagination of the region, Kerala.

It has often been mentioned that the nascent film industry in Kerala during the 1950s reveals the wanting and the desire of bringing in and infusing peculiar aspects of the region comprising Kerala within the narrative, thematic and aesthetic conventions of films during the period. For instance, C. S. Venkiteswaran quotes Sobhana Parameswaran Nair, an associate who worked along with the team which produced *Neelakkuyil* (1954), who describes the attempts and objectives of the director, Ramu Kariat, while making the award-winning film. He states, “Our cinema should not be like what they are now. It should speak the way we speak, the characters in it should eat the way we eat, and dress like we do… within all the limitations of that period, it is a film that is totally Malayali. It is a visual documentation of Kerala life” (Venkiteswaran 2013: 78-83).

Vijayakrishnan offers similar views while discussing *Neelakkuyil* and other social realist films of the 1950s. He had pointed out the influence of an already existing public sphere and its literary traditions on films of the period. He also notes that radical shifts were taking place in the arena of Malayalam cinema when compared to its counterparts in other South Indian film industries. He says,
The exposure to international cinema (after the international film festival of 1952 in India) and its influence were not reflected in South Indian film industries except in Malayalam cinema. The (progressive) transformations that were taking place in Malayalam cinema were clearly noticeable. However, these changes had nothing to do with the International film festival or the arrival of (Satyajit) Ray. Rather, Malayalam cinema was gradually coming under the influence of literature... *Neelakkuyil* had a *keraleeyatha* (Keralanness) that was never seen in Malayalam films until then. Every frame of the film pulsated with the *rustic* images of a Kerala village. Characters were drawn from *everyday life*. The most important aspect about this film was that it replaced the *artificial* backdrops used in films until then, with its dynamic, vibrant and *realistic* settings... The screenplay reflects the skills of Uroob in writing touching stories about the *ordinary life of people*. However, theatricality dominates in dialogues and the conception of scenes. As was the convention in other popular films of the time, dialogues continued to gain prominence (over visual elements) in this film too... The photography signified a shift by introducing depth to images, compared to the conventional use of 'flat' images... The film also inaugurated a tradition of using *authentic* tunes and lyrics in film music. (Vijayakrishnan 1987: 74-78) (emphasis added)

Prevailing historians have largely described the 1950s Malayalam cinema as social realist cinema and considered it aesthetically superior to films produced in other regions of southern India during the same period. It is in this context that
Vijayakrishnan’s observations need to be understood. What he has pointed out, though not elaborated upon, is vital in understanding the nature of Malayalam cinema during the 1950s. As he observes, Malayalam cinema begins to form a close association with Malayalam literature and literary movements, a trend which continues into the 1970s. Furthermore, he notes the emphasis on everyday characters and the life of the common man within the narrative structure of these movies. As shall be discussed later in the chapter, this engagement with the everyday man is integral to the construction of an idealized Malayali citizenhood, wherein the characters are embedded in the ethos of rational humanism. He also notes how keralaeyatha is produced through authentic and realistic portrayals. This points towards an invested interest in building a realist mode of cinematic representation which could represent, and thereby convey and produce imaginations of, what it means to be Malayali. Thus, the presumed aesthetic superiority of Malayalam cinema had more to do with the fact that Malayalam cinema of this time was invested in the form of nationalist realism. Here, the impetus is on producing a narrative and representational structure which, drawing from existing literary forms, could represent the idea of the region, its people and its culture, and thereby imagine and realize a regional form of nationalism through the medium of cinema. The integral role that literature and literary movements played in the development of this modality shall be discussed further in the next section.
2.3 The Primacy of Language and Literature in Constituting a Regional Imagination

To get a sense of history of how the imagination of Malayalam language, the region and regional/linguistic nationalism emerges, it is imperative to look at the trajectory of historical narratives of the language which triggered the rudimentary attempts towards imagining the language, its people and the region. Such attempts, starting from the 19th century onwards, were in the form of producing Malayalam literary histories, the compilation of Malayalam dictionaries, and the standardization of grammar of the language, etc.

Herman Gundert, who was part of the Basel Christian missionary group, compiled the first ever Malayalam to English dictionary in 1872. He claimed that the dictionary attempted to incorporate words from the diverse demography of Malayalam speaking people. He noted in the preface of the dictionary,

The materials for this work have been collected during more than twenty-five years' study of language. The words have been taken from the lips speakers of all ranks, castes and occupations, from the letters and records of many different districts, and from the writers in prose and poetry of every age. (iii)

It was in 1881 that the first ever attempts of writing a literary history in Malayalam language took place. P. Govinda Pillai, a retired senior officer in the Travancore Government, published Malayalabhashacharitham (The History of Malayalam Language). The book traces the history of Malayalam literary production, from its
origin of the language to its emergence as a distinct language, and finally lists the major poets and writers who had written in the language up to the 19th century. Though there had been a large number of errors that subsequent literary historians have pointed out, all of them had paid tribute to the pioneering and difficult task which Pillai embarked upon and made into reality.

Udaya Kumar in his essay, *Shaping a Literary Space: Early Literary Histories in Malayalam and Normative Uses of the Past*, talks about Govinda Pillai’s Malayalam literary history and its main objectives as described by him in this seminal text. According to him, there were three main reasons why Pillai ventured into the task of writing the literary history of Malayalam. Firstly, Pillai wished to inform his contemporary public about the importance and the significant historical lineage of the Malayalam language, as it was then considered to be a language of “negligible importance”. Secondly, he wished to assist the standardisation of Malayalam language into a refined one, as the public of the period seemed to be largely unaware of the changes the language had undergone over the ages to acquire its current form. Thirdly, Govinda Pillai wished to pay homage to the lineage of old poets who had overcome many obstacles in the path of developing of the language.

However, as Udayakumar points out, the first ever literary history produced in Malayalam had many pitfalls. Though one can notice elementary instances of the imagining the Malayalam language and its literature, it was not a history of Malayalam language, as the title of the work suggests; rather, it was mostly a history of Malayalam literature, which also included Sanskrit literary production in Kerala,
mainly listing canonical texts which came before the emergence of ‘literature’ in Malayalam. One of the crucial drawbacks of the work by Pillai was that it was exclusionary in nature, whereby it excluded writings in English, Arabic and even Tamil produced in the region.

Govinda Pillai’s history does not address the entire corpus of literary writing produced in Kerala. He excludes not only writing in English, but also Arabic and even Tamil. The definition of Malayalam writing in his historiography seems to rely on shifting set of ideas of coherence: territorial, linguistic, and historical…they move from a history of the land to that of the language and then to that of the literature. (Udaya Kumar 22)

It can be noted that even in the first instances of imagining the Malayalam language and its literary public sphere, there were omissions of certain prevailing clusters of literary works in the contingent languages which were in use in the region, like works in English, Arabic, Arabimalayalam and even Tamil. So, one can assume that the rudimentary instances of the imagination of the language and its public was not an encompassing project which took into consideration the entirety of the region and its people.

Similar views are put forward by G. Arunima in her articles Who is a Malayali Anyway? Language, Community and Identity in Precolonial Kerala, and Imagining Communities Differently: Print, Language and the ‘Public Sphere’ in Colonial Kerala. In these two articles, she analyses how a Malayali identity based on linguistic
consciousness emerged in Kerala despite (or because of) the co-existence of diverse religious groups in Kerala. In her article *Who is a Malayali Anyway?*, Arunima looks at the ‘origin myths’ of various communities in Kerala such as the Jews, the Muslims, the Christians and the Brahmins. According to Arunima, because of Kerala’s connectedness to the wider world through the well-established trade networks, a cultural mix emerged where Jews, Christians, Muslims and Hindus lived together for more than a thousand years. This connection with the wider world is responsible for the religious diversity and at the same time the existence of many loan words that have now become integral parts of the Malayalam language (Arunima 2011: web).

Arunima notes that despite the diversity of communities in Kerala, by the 20th century, the term “Malayali” was used to designate all those who speak Malayalam, transcending community and caste differences. Thus, the term Malayali, which was initially used to refer to a person belonging to the Nayar community, became the collective identity of the Malayalam-speaking people, thereby creating a link between the language and the people. Furthermore, in *Imagining Communities Differently*, she explains how the advent of print capitalism by the late 19th and early 20th century led to the standardization of Malayalam, leading to the delegitimization of other creolized and hybridized versions of the language. Despite this, the emergence of a print culture facilitated the co-existence of distinct communitarian identities with the linguistic identity of a Malayali. The standardization of language did not imply either a total erasure of older literary, cultural practices, or a simple homogenization of an ethnic identity centred on language (Malayali). The emergence of print culture and public
sphere in colonial Kerala enabled “the possibility of co-existing and intersecting communities; based on language, kinship or faith or caste origin. The boundaries of the as yet nascent linguistic identity, which was highlighted by the language debate of the 1890s, was porous and possibly nameless.” (Arunima 2006: 74) The language, thereby, became the unifying factor for imagining a regional community which was hitherto divided by caste and communal demarcations.

The aspiration to imagine the region through language was also taken forward by the various literary and arts societies initiated by the Communist Party from the late 1930s onwards. Prior to producing a nationalist trajectory within cinematic representations, there were concerted efforts to introduce and familiarize a “Malayali” form and aesthetic within the literary sphere. The imagination of Aikya Kerala, the region, was formulated through developing sensibilities of becoming a Malayali.

Artists and writers affiliated to Progressive Writing Group and People’s Arts Club (KPAC) were the one spearheading these movements and these two bodies were closely associated with the Communist Party in Kerala. Jenson Joseph in an essay titled Revisiting Neelakkuyil: on the Left’s cultural vision, Malayali nationalism and the questions of “regional cinema”, talks about the intervention of Kerala’s Left political formation in the sphere of literature, theatre and cinema. The central thrust of the Left’s intervention through the afore-mentioned literary and cultural realms appears to be on a theoretical level; their commitment was towards social values which are prioritized above aesthetic and literary concerns. This emphasis on the social role of literary and artistic production was an attempt to reach out to the masses
and to make them aware of and educated in the “good” and “progressive” arts of the region. According to Joseph, apart from such pedagogic purposes, the movement led by the leftist artists were also concentrating on the portrayal of “authentic” images of the region’s landscape and people. The aesthetic considerations of this movement also concentrated on creating a detailed ethnographic spectacle of the proletarian mobilization through means of literature, theatre and cinema. Substantiating his claim on left’s intervention on the subject matter sans literary colouring, Joseph cites examples of E. M. S. Namboodiripad’s (the prominent Communist leader who went on the become the first Chief Minister of united Kerala) essays where EMS seems to give lesser emphasis on literariness and lays greater stress on the necessity of inculcating and reflecting on the everyday life of the common people. Locating himself as a Marxist, EMS favours a worthwhile practice of art that gives prominence and support to progressive social movements, as opposed to proponents of “art-for-art-sake”. He endorses a model of literary practice which went hand in hand with both aesthetic concerns and social commitment; however, the stress is always on the aspect of social commitment. All these concerns were to be supplemented by the “authentic” portrayal of the region in its representative aspects, its people and culture etc. This concern was so central that it could be seen even in the choice of the title for the movement. EMS was one of the founding members of – *Jeeval Sahithya Prasthanam* (*Movement for the Literature about Life*). The advocacy of a nationalist/aesthetic realism was pooled with the desire of the communists to see the organized proletariat class represented in theatre and literature. This particular aspect is seen evidently in
the essays of EMS, discussing the well-known plays penned by the writers related to the KPAC. He endorses the desired transformations that KPAC’s famous socialist plays like *Pattabakki* (K Damodaran, 1939) and *Ningalenne Communistakki* (Thoppil Bhasi, 1952) brought in to the theatre traditions, which was in existence in Kerala. (Joseph 2012: 26-54)

The emphasis on realist representations and authentic regional aesthetics produced by the progressive literary movements are reflected in the films produced in Malayalam during the early 1950s. These films are noteworthy precisely because of their temporal placement, imminently before the formation of the unified state of Kerala in 1956. The available studies on this cluster of films are time and again done in a retrospective manner, whereby most discussions are laid out according to the terms put forth by the existing dominant historical accounts along with the contemporary revivalist discourse; For both these approaches, the “social realist” cinemas of 1950s Malayalam are studied as objects of nostalgia. These approaches often have an adverse effect on contemporary writings on Malayalam films of 50s, which placed their thrust on the impulses of revisionism by way of a selective concentration on some claims that were often made by dominant historical accounts, on behalf of social realism. This tendency leads to shift focus on some of the other significant aspects of the aesthetic movement involved in the making of these films.
2.4 Region and Realism in Early Malayalam Cinema

It is often said that, immediately following independence, Indian cinema had found a new wishful vigour associated with the nation-building project of the nationalist leaders of the independent India. The film industries across the nation started venturing into a total remoulding and refashioning of the way films were made until then. The changes were imperative to infuse subjectivities, and were thematically determined to bring about nationalist hopes and aspirations through the filmic narrative. However, Malayalam industry seemed to be taking a different route at this point in time. While other film industries were producing nationalist or patriotic films, similar efforts were seemingly absent within the Malayalam film industry; rather, as Venkiteswaran observes, the industry was indulging in making films which were apparently envisaging a future for the region with a lot of circumspection (2013: 72-73). As discussed in the previous section, such a project was fuelled by the leftist cultural intervention, which already had set a ground for such innovations through progressive literary movement and theatre movement.

C. S. Venkiteswaran notes this peculiar drift in the Malayalam industry of the 1950s:

‘Nationalist’ or patriotic films were conspicuous by their absence in Malayalam and the landmark films of the period looked at the future with a lot of circumspection. As fallout of the leftist cultural interventions of the time, it was basically a class-less society that these films imagined, a notion in the future that is devoid of class inequalities, exploitation and casteism. They were
much more intensely engaged with criticism of the past than with an elaboration of possible futures. (73)

Studies on Malayalam cinema of the 1950s mostly revolve around the films which are often referred to as the genre of ‘social realism’ which is a loose term used in the Indian film studies to mark a particular category of films which show a thematic shift from the existing genres such as socials, mythologicals, stunt and adventure films, romances etc. The peculiar characteristics of these films are that they combined the consideration of the poor, the everyday, the ordinary and the exploited in the narrative schema, with the existing modality of melodramatic effect. Madhava Prasad describes ‘social-realistic’ films as characterized by “a thematic shift (from the socials, mythologicals, stunt and adventure films, romance, etc.) focusing their attention on the poor and the exploited but continued to feature a melodramatic narrative” (Prasad 1998: 160).

Though film making attempts started in the region way back in 1928, it gathered momentum mostly in the 1950s. One could see the departure from existing forms of dependency on the Tamil film industry and other such industries, by bringing out films in Malayalam during this period through the introduction of a number of local artistes and technicians who, in hindsight, would re-define the “Malayalam cinema” of the period and the following decades.

Films like Neelakuyil (P Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat, 1954), Newspaper Boy (P Ramdas, 1955) and Rarichan Enna Pouran (P Bhaskaran, 1956) were the films of this
period which could be considered the epitome of “social realism” and often cited for laying Malayalam cinema’s claim to exceptionalism. However, as had been discussed earlier, these “social realist” films may also be considered preliminary attempts towards forming a “nationalist realism” in Malayalam cinema. While these films are not overtly nationalistic as observed by Venkiteswaran, they do involve certain narrative techniques, representational strategies, aesthetic modalities and thematic concerns which enable the imagined citizen of Kerala to think in terms of his relationship to the region, its larger community and his/her own subjectivity as a Malayali. Thus, the national imaginary of the state of Kerala can be said to be encapsulated in various ways in these films. It is significant to note that these films were made during and around the time of state formation, in 1956. These films not only mirror the aspiration of the emerging middle classes and the “middle class sense of conscience and destiny” (Ravi Vasudevan 101) but also the ambiguities, apprehensions and the conflicts that the similar aspirational projects are often stuck in.

Protagonists of these films are often the typical representatives of “modernity” and modern subjectivity. For example, in the film Neelakkuyil, Sreedharan Nair, a school teacher, is the protagonist, a typical representative of modernity embodied within the self of an educated and cultured young man. However, the presumably modern, rational and progressive ethos of the protagonist seemed to be ambivalent in the film, as he lures Neeli, a lower caste Dalit woman, impregnates her and then estranges her. Despite his status as entrenched modern citizen, Sreedharan Nair is not able to escape the rigid and evil barriers of caste hierarchy and discrimination. Neeli’s illicit affair
leads to her excommunication from her own community, and following the blatant rejection by the Nair school teacher, she is left in the streets to die a wretched death. After the miserable death of Neeli, Shankaran Nair, a postman comes to the rescue of her infant son. Shankaran Nair takes the custody of the baby and brings him up. As the story progresses, Sreedharan Nair marries another Nair Woman, as mandated by customary practices. However, later moved by impending guilt, Sreedharan Nair is forced to reveal the truth about Neeli to the postman Shankaran Nair, who was taking care of the latter’s son till then. The postman hands over the baby to Sreedharan Nair and urges him to bring up the child “as a human being, not as a Nair, or Pulaya (lower caste), but as a human being”.

The film *Newspaper Boy* was the first of its kind made during the period, notable for its unique production aspect; it was produced by a group of students, an attempt that was unheard of in the history of Indian cinema. Film scholars like C. S. Venkiteswaran have noted that the film was “arguably the first neo-realist film in Malayalam” (2013: 72). *Newspaper Boy* is about the titular hero Appu, his family, its travails and its inevitable decline into poverty and deprivation. Appu’s father, who used to work in a local printing press, meets with a terrible accident which leaves him unemployed. After his father succumbs to death due to tuberculosis, Appu is forced to leaves his studies and shift to the city in search of a job and ends up doing several menial jobs to meet his family’s ends. The film follows the story of this adolescent boy and how, in the face of utter poverty and ill fate, he survives with sheer determination and hope.
The film *Rarichan Enna Pouran* also essays the story of an adolescent boy. Rarichan is the son of a peasant who is into production of coconut oil, using a traditional oil-press run powered by bulls. His father, in a fit of anger and vengeance, kills the village landlord who commits countless atrocities on his family. Following this event, they are chased away from the village. Their hut is destroyed along with the oil-press, which was their sole means of survival. Rarichan’s father is sentenced to death for the murder of the landlord; his mother is driven insane and the family is pushed to live in the streets. Rarichan continues to be haunted by ill fate; his mother dies and is soon followed by the death of his brother, leaving him alone in a world of utter distress and haplessness. Young Rarichan leaves the village to live in a small town where he finds shelter at a tea shop, run by a Muslim widow. As the story progresses, Rarichan is forced to commit a theft in order to contribute financially to the marriage of the only daughter of his surrogate family. As he was found guilty of the theft he committed, the court sends him to a juvenile home.

The figure of the adolescent Rarichan could be signifying the adolescent Kerala, as Rarichan being the centre figure of the narrative, who undergoes immense conflicts in life, only to transform himself both temporally and spatially. Utter distress and hardship at the caste ridden village forces him to move to a town where, probably the more ‘progressive’ characteristics of a town gives him a shelter, though for a short while and where again he was not at ease. The narrative of the film also seemed to be moving from rural agrarian setting into an urban industrial economy, also from a regressive casteist rural setting into a secular-modern setting of a town.
The placement of an adolescent in all these films – Neeli's child, Appu and Rarichan - opens up possibilities for an allegorical reading of these films’ narratives. It cannot be reduced to a mere coincidence. All three of these films were made during the time of the state formation and they, therefore, were articulating a critique and reflection of the past and the present of the region, while imagining a future for the region that is more egalitarian without the conflicts of caste and class dynamics. However, this representation, as Venkiteswaran notes, is riddled by ambivalence and ambiguity. The adolescent boy can be equated to the young state of Kerala, which formed through the amalgamation of three different geographical territorial units, and its aspirations and anxieties about the future. The ambivalence of the adolescent kids in the films reflects the ambivalence of the newly formed region and its people. On the one hand, it denotes a transition from the difficulties of the rural setting to the more liberating spaces of urban modernity. However, this transition and the imagined translation of the state into a form of modernity is also envisaged to be riddled with difficulties. Kerala is simultaneously imagined and represented as a “bastard” or orphaned child or an adolescent driven to the peripheries of crime through the lack of resources, and finally a child who survives through sheer hope and determination in the face of adversity. However, the films engage more deeply in the critique of the past – its engendered communal hierarchies - which lies at the root of all misfortune, while it envisages an egalitarian future to be forged through hard work and dedicated effort. Therefore, it is not the overarching idea of an imagination of the Indian nation state that these films imagine, but an “elsewhere”, where the imagination of the region is
claimed to be on principles of a classless secular society, a wishful hope for the state and its citizens pushed by the leftist cultural and political interventions.

In C. S. Venkiteswaran’s words, “these films seemed to be ‘looking forward’ to urban or secular modern spaces, though in a deeply ambivalent manner. It is not an imagination that is fired by nationalism; but one that looks out, looks forward, in search of a nation and state” (Venkiteswaran 2013: 74). The mise-en-scenes and the peculiar locales used in these films, in this context, have their own significance in mapping such tensions, conflicts and bearings. Tea shops, line buses, streets in the town, market places, etc. emerge as modern secular spaces where erstwhile caste or class conflicts are no longer visible, as opposed to the caste-bound feudal environments of rural settings from which the characters try to escape.

However, as noted earlier, the relationships with and representations of modernity in these early movies are far from idealized. They are marked by an ambivalence, a fear of residual feudal dispositions rearing their head again through decidedly modern characters and settings. Furthermore, the diegetic world of the films remains restricted to decidedly upper caste environment. The narrative of the film Neelakkuyil unfolds within the upper caste world of three Nair households: the house of the school teacher Sreedharan Nair, the residence of the postman Sankaran Nair, and the declining Nair taravadu (ancestral home) of Nalini, the Nair woman whom the school teacher marries later in the movie. Neeli’s ramshackle hut, her family and her community only figure in the periphery of the narrative.
The film begins with a motivating village song and dance by the “village community”, a song similar and typical to the progressive theatre movement of the time, the hallmark of leftist cultural interventions. Such songs often eulogise the virtue and goodness of village life where everybody indulges in the work of labour to live and co-exist in a world of “equality”. Ironically, in another scene of the film we can see, Neeli’s father pleading in front of the Nair taravadu for food. The only other occasion he is seen in the diegetic space of the film is when he thrashes Neeli, forcing her to reveal the identity of the man who impregnated her, following which he ousts Neeli from the house. The only character from the lower caste village community who figures prominently in the diegetic space of the film is Neeli, who is presented as an object of sexual desire and ownership. We could see that the community is otherwise significantly absent and upper caste men and their world dominate the narrative space of the film. These spaces are occupied in the film by the school teacher and the postman, who are embodied as representatives of modern rationality. Probably, it could be read that the absence of the village community or the lower caste community in the film signifies the discursive erasure of such communities during the time.

The character of the school teacher, Sreedharan Nair, is also interesting and paradoxical in nature. Though he comes across as an epitome of modern ideals and rationality, later it is revealed that he does not live up to his self-proclaimed ideals and ends up becoming someone who continues to be shaped by archaic caste practices. While he initially idealized romantic notions of universal love, unfettered by any moral or social norms, he abandons Neeli after knowing that she is pregnant with his
child. A number of scenes depicting Sreedharan Nair’s love for Neeli suggest that he never had any apprehensions about entering into a relationship with her; but later, he conveniently estranges her out of the sheer fear of losing his reputation and standing within the Nair community.

In contrast to Sreedharan Nair’s cynical embodiment of rational modernity, Sankaran Nair, the postman, appears as the “authentic” representation of modernity. He is someone who lives up to his ideal and brings them into practice. Beyond this, he is able to transform his convictions into effective social(ist) reform. He brings up the Neeli’s illegitimate child, after her tragic death, facing a plethora of casteist insults and attacks. Later, when Sreedharan Nair develops remorse over the estrangement of Neeli and her child, Sankaran Nair returns Mohan, the adolescent child to him.

These two Nair characters in the film are the constituents of the “determining awareness” within the narrative space of the film. Furthermore, their presence within the diegetic frame marks out and even determines the spatial limits of the other characters. However, both of them are placed “inside”, the permissible inner limits of social sanction, while the lower caste figure of Neeli is left “outside”, on the peripheries of social exclusion and ostracization. Her child, Mohan could only be brought back “inside” by the critical intervention of the “rational” Sankaran Nair, through the act of handing him over to Sreedharan Nair. Through this act, Mohan could return to his destined and designated place “inside” the Nair household as he becomes part of Sreedharan Nair’s family. Similarly, in Rarichan Enna Pouran, Rarichan’s efforts to be “inside” are never accomplished until he reaches the juvenile
home. Prior to this, he was constantly exteriorized, thrown out of his home and village, until he finally reaches the juvenile home, which though tinged with notions of criminality still emerges as an inclusive space of modernity.

The centrality of the character of Sreedharan Nair in the narrative of the film Neelakkuyil, which predominantly advocates a world of egalitarian, anti-caste world, has been pointed out as an indication of the Leftist intervention project of social realist endeavours in cinema where the upper castes or the middle classes were the primary target audience of such filmic initiation since its inception. In the meantime, the character of Sankaran Nair, who is a modern rational subject in the film, acted out by P. Bhaskaran, who also served as the co-director of the film, received only considerably lesser academic attention. This is probably because of the not so glamorous way he is portrayed in the film. This particular kind of casting the postman in the film could be seen as the commercial and aesthetic aspirations which leftist initiatives were trying out in the field of popular Malayalam cinema.

This particular aspect has been mentioned by Jenson Joseph in his study on Neelakkuyil. According to him, the dichotomy of these two characters, or rather how the audience identify with each of the two protagonists, one who embodies the self-reforming hero while the other presents the morally upright man, signifies the film’s attempt to deploy the element of the star-system model of other southern states within the modalities of Kerala cinema. He notes that this deployment, which addresses and mobilises the masses, is also used to place the middle class hero as well as middle class sensibilities at the centre of popular imagination of the region. He says:
The splitting of the audience 'identification' between two protagonists—one the self-reforming middle class hero and the other a morally resolute figure—signifies the film's attempt to combine the elements of star-cinema of the South Indian variety, addressing and mobilizing the masses (where the star protagonist symbolizes and represents the regional polity) and the elements of nationalist realism catering to the middle class audience. However, the strategies of casting suggests that the devices of the star cinema were being deployed and appropriated for reinstating the middle class hero at the centre of the cultural imaginary. (Joseph 2012: 35)

Joseph also points out the remarkable presence of the Muslim character Moithu in the film Neelakkuyil. The character of Moithu (played by Balakrishnamenon) is not a significant one in the film as far as the plot is concerned; He seems to serve the peripheral role of a comedian. Nevertheless, it seems the presence of this character has other extra diegetic purposes to serve; his presence signals the nature of the audience to whom the aesthetic reform project of social realism was addressed and how this audience was conceived. The character of Moithu and his screen presence as a Muslim is marked through the Mappila song, “Kaayalarikathu” in the film which has been a major attraction since the film was released. Apart from the poetic lyrics and its composition, Moithu’s Mappila attire, dialect, idioms and puns also define his position within the diegetic frame in the film.

As Ratheesh Radhakrishnan has noted, the placement of Moithu’s character in the film can also be seen as a strategic one. It could be read as the attempt of the film makers to
reach out to the audience from Malabar, a geographical unit of the region of Kerala which has been considered culturally and geographically away from the other parts of the Malayalam-speaking places in the region. More importantly Malabar as a region where the Communist Party had a far-reaching influence. Radhakrishnan notes that Malayalam films of the 1950s were invested in the project of assimilating Malabar into the popular imagination of Kerala. This, he notes, was also based on the necessity of a Travancore-based film industry to find its audience beyond its territorial borders. This was imperative to transform the Travancore film industry into a linguistically-based cinema which could cater to the imagined state of Kerala, glossing over, or rather assimilating, the complex cultural, topographical and societal differences of its distinct territories to produce a notion of the region of Kerala and the subjective experience of being Malayali.

Rather than an ideological investment, it was the necessity of reorganizations of its [Travancore film industry's] market into a linguistically organized one that pushed the industry into negotiating these differences... Malabar functioned on a dual, if not contrary, logic as far as cinema from Thiruvithamkoor was concerned; it was contiguous by language and hence a market, and at the same time, it had a social and cultural topography that was distinct... [F]ilms from the early 1950s [reveal] the negotiations with stardom that led up to the formation of a "properly" Malayalam cinema, one in which language, culture, and geography could be symbolically integrated... [T]he link
between these three features has been central to the discussion on what constitutes "Kerala" or the "Malayali." (Radhakrishnan 2015: 133-134)

Thus, in films from the 1950s, we find a growing interest in developing certain aesthetic conventions which could be read as representative of the Malayali body politic. In this manner, the aspect of social realism should also be seen as a modality which not only makes the regional film industry stand out from its other southern counterparts, but also an ideological intervention which imbibes a definitive, if not exceptional, sensibility of rational modernism within its viewing public. The genre of social realism therefore is integral to producing the identity of the Malayali as a rational modern citizen.

Beyond this, as noted by Radhakrishnan, the movies of the 50s also increasingly invoked idealized portrayals of Kerala's landscape and topography. The familiarization of distinct topographic features, their peculiarity and their territorial extent, plays a significant role in transforming a linguistic community into a territorial one. This is particularly relevant as the new state of Kerala was to be formed by amalgamating the distinct territorial units of Malabar, Cochin and Travancore. Thus, as Radhakrishnan cites, this integrational aspiration is evident in the title card of Neelakkuyil which reads, “Above, the unbound skied of Central Kerala (madhya Keralam); below, the expansive spread of virgin fields; in between them, the lives of human beings flow. 'Neelakkuyil' is a story woven out of their diverse and conflict-ridden lives.” (qtd. in Radhakrishnan 2015: 138) The film does not mark out its setting as Travancore, Cochin or Malabar, but rather as the central region of Kerala. The topography of the
region is further highlighted and aesthetically represented through the song “Kaayalarikathu”, which refers to the lapping shores of central Kerala's pristine backwaters.

Song and dance sequence proved to be a significant space for introducing and familiarizing the territory and its topography to the viewers. In *Rarichan Enna Pouran*, following the first scene, Rarichan breaks into a song, while working at the oil-press. The song, which begins “Thekkunnu nammaloru chakkonnu vangi” (which translates to “we bought the mill for the south”), vividly paints graphic details of the topography of the region of Kerala and its rich natural resources, while naming several places (and their associated commercial products) to mark out the territorial extent of the state. Places from the three erstwhile geographical units, Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, figure in the song with their peculiar characteristics, but are now integrated into the over-arching region of Kerala. Thus, Rarichan sings that his father procured an oil-press from the western part of Kerala, while they bought a suitable pair of bulls from Vaniyamkulam, an important cattle trading town in South Malabar. He goes on to describe coconut cakes and cattle fodder sourced from Kannur (a North Malabar town), the banana chips of Calicut, green grass fodder from the river mouths of Cochin, and the roots and bran of Kanyakumari (located at the extreme southern tip of Travancore), etc. The imagination of all of these places from, its southernmost tip to its farthest north, is produced as part of one imaginary geographical unit of Kerala, with their agricultural produce marking out their topographical, cultural and economic specificities. Even Rarichan, a young boy tied to a seemingly stagnant agrarian rural
economy, can imagine the wealth of geographic and economic resources of the new region. The invested interest in depicting topography within song and dance sequences in Malayalam cinema continues well into the 1970s. The movie Bharya (1962) opens with the song “Periyare”, set in the resplendent backdrop of the Thekkady forests, describes the idyllic purity of the Periyar river. “Mamalakalkkapurathu” from the film, Ninamaninja Kalppadukal (1963), scans through various scenes depicting the landscape from diverse regions of Kerala, while describing the verdant beauty of the region. In another song “Poonthenaruvi”, from the film Oru Penninte Katha (1971), the actress compares herself to the titular river while the camera pans across the waterfalls, rivulets and tea gardens in Munnar.

2.5 Conclusion

What emerges from these narratives is how the Malayalam film industry during the 1950s prefigures the emergence of the Malayali as a citizen-subject of the state of Kerala. This is produced through the development of certain social dispositions and aesthetic sensibilities which mark out the distinctiveness of the Malayali. Though the films are somewhat ambivalent towards the effects of modernity, the development of social realism imbibes notions of rational modernity, of egalitarian humanism, which must be seen as a continuity drawn from earlier literary interventions made by the Communists and other socialist political agents. Furthermore, the films of the 1950s are invested in the integrationist project, familiarizing the new citizens of the state of Kerala with the diversity of its cultural, topographical and societal features of these distinct regions. Through the diegetic frame, the territorial boundaries of these regions
are dismantled, their cultural specificities assimilated and the citizen-subject integrated into the framework of the democratic state. Thus, the young Rarichan emerges as a *pouran* (which could concurrently mean man and citizen) at the end of the film, not just as a grown man, but as a citizen of the state. These films, therefore, foreground the newly found state while simultaneously encapsulating the anxieties, conflicts and contradictions of economic, social and moral registers in the still-imagined state of Kerala.