CHAPTER FOUR

THE MAKING OF THE MALE AND POPULAR ART FILMS

This chapter looks at the way in which the male in the popular art films in the 1990s was restructured so as to attune to neo-liberal global gazes of power. The co-option of the everyday multiple masculinities is a significant aspect in this regard. I would look at the process of co-option that formed part of a certain genre of films which could be referred to as popular art films that emerged in Kerala in the 1990s in particular. It has been viewed so because, firstly, these films are produced by “art” film makers, but are interested in producing films casting “mega stars” as their central protagonists, especially in as much as they facilitated the mechanism of co-option.

The idea of popular art becomes significant as it shows that there was no respite in art as well. Although there have been studies on how Malayalam popular film, unlike its Kannada, Tamil and Telugu counterparts show a certain qualitative excellence, the art realm has remained in its sacred zone. Talking about how Malayalis hold strong aspirations towards modernity and development, and distinguish themselves from other non-metropolitan Indians by virtue of their proclaimed abilities to pursue these goals and act “in pursuit of progress” – (Fillippo

---

84 The term is now used to refer to the breaking of boundaries between the art and the popular films during the 90s. Critics have made comments on the films under discussion, to this effect.
85 It is to be remembered that the boarders of art and commercial cinema disappeared parallel to the disintegration of the bi-polar worlds of Russia and America and the transition to a unipolar world as well as to the disappearance of Eisenstein and the over presence of Stephen Speilberg.
& Caroline Osella 2004), the Osellas\textsuperscript{86} discuss how Malayalam cinema is part of this modern self-identity, often proclaimed as “different” - in avoiding the excesses of Hindi, Tamil/Telugu movies and healing the split between “art” and “popular” cinema by having a popular cinema which is artistically valid.

I would argue in this chapter that the category “artistically valid” needs to be revisited as art films in Malayalam have undergone a certain shift towards the popular in the 1990s revealing its secular origins since the 1970s. Secondly, films thus produced were not so popular in Kerala, but they are widely received in global film festivals\textsuperscript{87} where Indian films are valued not on its ability to produce critical self reflexivity, but by the ability to reproduce themselves as exotic objects. The popular art films of the 1990s connive in the politics of globalization by exoticising Kerala and its regionalism for the Western eye. The heterogeneity of masculinities is compromised by such strategies of exoticisation serves the process of co-opting heterogenous masculinities, where males become lower castes, barbaric or modern only to satisfy an oriental gaze. The first section would conceptualise the category of the popular art in Malayalam film.

The second section would look at how the regionalism that is claimed to be part of the art films of those like Adoor and T.V. Chandran serves a neo-colonial purpose of

\textsuperscript{86} British Anthropologists who had been to Kerala to study about Malayali men and masculinity. See Radhika Chopra, Caroline Osella, Filippo Osella, South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity. Women Unlimited an associate of Kali for Women, 2004. 224-262.

\textsuperscript{87} Dr. Biju’s criticism in Mathrubhumi Weekly that Ray films are screened where high art films are screened and Adoor films are screened in the popular outlets. [ See Appendix] T.V. Chandran has been considered by Biju as an alter-native of Adoor. But Riju critiques Chandran as following Adoor in his recent films, in marketing Kerala; Riju, “T.V. Chandran Adoorinu Padikonno?” [“Is T.V. Chandran Studying to be Adoor?”] Madhyamam Weekly 8 June 2009. 70-71.
exoticisation rather than resistance. The third section would look at how the star persona of Mammootty, associated with a middle class, secular image, facilitates the co-option of multiple males, especially in popular art films.

**Conceptualizing the Popular Art in Malayalam Film**

By the popular art film, I refer to a certain tendency in art films in Malayalam in the 1990s, where the boundary between the popular and the art seems to be reducing significantly. The co-opting of the super stars like Mammootty by film makers like Adoor, T.V. Chandran etc since the 1990s may be viewed in such a context. However, such overlapping has not been an altogether new one as far as Malayalam film was concerned. Such overlappings may be traced back to the art/popular divide that happened in the 1970s. Films like *Neelakkuyil* (1954), *Chemmeen* (1965) etc. were acclaimed in the national level before the 1970s, not under the label of art films. But, ever since the emergence of the popular art films in the 1990s, there have been overlappings between the two. Popular directors like Jayaraj, Kamal etc. have taken the art in the realm of their popular films like *Desadanam* (1996), *Perumazhakkalam* (2004) etc. as well as moved on to the realm of art films in *Celluloid* (2013), *Kaliyattam* (1997) etc. The borrowings of art from popular have grown significantly since the 1990s. Until the 1990s, film society activists never took popular film and, in turn, popular culture seriously (Veniteswaran

---

88 Dr. Biju considers T.V. Chandran as a director who maintains some aspects of resistance in his films unlike in Adoor films. R. Nandakumar, K. Gopinathan etc. have essayed on Chandran’s pro-female stance in films.

89 Discussing about the art and popular variants in the political films of the 1970s in Malayalam, V.C. Harris asks whether these two different categories can be discussed in a common discursive platform.
However there has been an attempt especially since the 1990’s, in the way in which the popular has been assimilated by the art genre. Such overlappings demand a relooking at the purported ideology of the art genre in Malayalam film.

It was in the seventies that Kerala witnessed the birth of a new form of art house films/auteur films, a form that tried to steer clear of the clichéd narrative modes of the then existing song and dance popular films, and which gave importance to the personal touch in cinema (Harris 2006). Talking about the three aspects that contributed to the phenomenal manner in which the art film culture struck roots in Kerala, a blend of literate media sensibility, the ubiquitousness of the verbal paradigm and a micropolitanism of cultural environment enabled the kind of acceptance that art film received in Kerala (Nandakumar 17). When the print-trading culture industry of Kerala mapped out a new fabulous area of rarefied “high art” in the form of “art film” as against the “low art” of “popular film” in the early 1970s, the visual culture and sensibility associated with film viewing has not yet earned any highbrow affiliations. This change happens with the onset of the film society movement gaining ground in the state.

The film society movement contributed a lot to propagate good cinema, and the National Film Archive of India under the leadership of P.K. Nair\(^\text{91}\) played a great role in distributing classic films all over the country through the film society network. People started thronging film societies and watched the films of Ritwik


\(^{91}\) P. K. Nair is an Indian film archivist and film scholar, who was the founder and director of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI) in 1964. *Celluloid Man* is a 2012 documentary film directed by Shivendra Singh Dungarpur that explores the life and work of P.K. Nair.
Ghatak standing on their feet in reverential awe. Malayalam weeklies started carrying a new brand of film writing that was like rhapsodic reveries on the Bergmans and Fellinis that people had occasion to see in film societies and supported by desultory reading of books. The only film institute in the country in Pune then started registering the largest number of its students from the Malayalis. College after college in the state started becoming the venue of film appreciation courses that offered a crash course of nothing short of from Aristotle to Satyajit Ray in capsule against the background of venerable curios of early films many of which were classics for no better reason.

Film festivals in the country, wherever they are, saw the highest attendance being represented from Kerala. Like the Malayali devotees of Lord Ayyappa in Sabarimalai who, after observing the month-long vow of abstinence, undertake the hazardous harrowing annual pilgrimage uphill to the mountain shrine on foot, the Malayali devotees of the Film Absolute went on pilgrimage to the different venues of film festivals annually without fail under a vow (Nandakumar 16).

The “New Wave” in Kerala was initiated by those like Adoor, John Abraham etc, who graduated from the prestigious Film Institute of India in Pune. Through the works of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan, John Abraham, K.G. George and others, the films in Malayalam discovered a modernist vitality that earned it an unprecedented national and international recognition. Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s Swayamvaram (One’s Own Voice; 1972) which is arguably the inaugural film in this new genre, articulates the crisis of the middle class torn between the traditional social norms relating to family and sexuality and the modern impulse to choose for
oneself and move on. The art film in Malayalam drew parallels from its Indian counterpart.\(^{92}\)

The Indian New Wave of the 1970s was the result of many factors. An indirect influence was Film Institute at Pune which produced not only directors and scriptwriters but also technicians, who were instrumental in bringing about a qualitative change in cinema. The Pune film institute, constituted by the Government of India, framed the entire policy modeled upon the French Film Institute, their prime motive being to sanitise Indian Cinema from the clutches of popular films. They shared the attitude of the West in considering the Indians as non-realistic and non-rational beings and the cinema as melodramatic, based upon primary emotions, and above all, opposite of realist films. Screened in London Festival in 1956, the West had ruled out *Mother India*, a film inspired by the Russian Movement (Hammer and Sickle), directed by Mehboob Khan, as nonsense and considered as melodrama, a quintessential Indian cinema where a mother/India asserts her identity. *Mother India* had won an Oscar nomination for Best Foreign Film and lost to a Fellini film by a single vote.\(^{93}\)

Indian films may be largely categorized into the Satyajit Ray stream and the Ritwik Ghatak stream, although both of them owe their geneology to Rabindranath Tagore. Adoor as well as John Abraham, two prominent art film makers belong to these two streams respectively. (Although Ray was much more influenced by the Italian Neo

\(^{92}\) In *Pather Panchali*, the family moves from the village to the city. In *Swayamvaram*, we see the couple leave their village to a city.

\(^{93}\) K. Hariharan, Director of L.V. Prasad Film and TV Academy, Chennai, in his class in Pune Film Institute deliberated on this in the 2010 Film Appreciation Course.
Realist\textsuperscript{94} trend, Adoor was persuaded much more by elements of the French New Wave\textsuperscript{95}). Its ideas of the auteur had deeply influenced Adoor’s belief that film is ultimately the director’s art. Auteur\textsuperscript{96} was a significant concept as far as the French New Wave was concerned.

The art genre, in this way may be understood as part of a commercial/popular mix of the American with the French/German in its inception.\textsuperscript{97} The growth of the “New Wave” in France in the early sixties signaled the beginning of a different film in the period 1960-1980, which has been termed as the “art” film. Technological innovations, a new approach to the economics of film production, and a new sense of the political and social value of film have combined to form numerous “New Wavelets” in Eastern Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and eventually even the United States and Western Europe.

Auteur\textsuperscript{98} theory originated in Paris during the 1950s, at a moment when France was becoming increasingly Americanised and in many respects it imitated what Peter Burger and other writers have called the “historical” avant-garde\textsuperscript{99} of the 1910s and 20s. Like the old avant-garde, it posed a “left bank” aura; it made shocking value

\textsuperscript{94} Italian Neorealism (Italian: Neorealismo) is a national film movement characterized by stories set amongst the poor and the working class, filmed on location, frequently using non-professional actors.

\textsuperscript{95} The New Wave is a blanket term coined by critics for a group of French filmmakers of the late 1950s and 1960s.

\textsuperscript{96} In film criticism, auteur theory holds that a director's film reflects the director's personal creative vision, as if they are the primary "auteur" (the French word for "author")


\textsuperscript{98} French for “author”. Used by critics writing for Cahiers du cinema and other journals to indicate the figure, usually the director, who stamped a film with his/her own “personality”. The concept allowed critics to evaluate highly works of American genre cinema that were otherwise dismissed in favor of the developing European art cinema. Auteur theory emphasises the director as the major creator of film art.

judgments; it was articulated in specialized magazines; the famous of which was *Cahier du Cinema*\(^{100}\), it embraced certain elements of “pop” culture and used them as a weapon to attack bourgeois values; it published manifestoes such as Francois Truffaut’s “A Certain Tendency of French Cinema;” and it served as a kind of banner to help publicize the works of its own adherents. The term auteur appears in the theoretical writings of French Film critics and directors of the silent era.\(^{101}\) Ironically enough, during the 1950’s and 1960’s, some of the classic Hollywood directors as well as those of the international art cinema, together, came to be known as auteurs. The auteurs’ call was for a “personal cinema” which was ultimately a male enterprise. The auteur theory and idea of an author producing a work from his singular vision guided the concerns of modernist film.

This idea of the author/director as an all encompassing subject has been integral to the film making of Adoor. One can see Mammootty, while speaking about his playing the hero in *Mathilukal* (Walls; 1990) fondly remembering “The Soul Meister”\(^{102}\) Adoor in *India Today* in its 30\(^{th}\) anniversary issue on “Ageless Icons,”

---

100 *Cahiers du Cinéma* (Notebooks on Cinema) is an influential French film magazine founded in 1951 by André Bazin et al.

101 The 1920s debate was centered on the auteur – the script writer and the director as one and the same – versus the scenario led films, the distinction that fed into the high art verses low art debate. In books about classical Hollywood, the term author has been applied to writers, photographers, composers, choreographers and stars. However, it is considered that film authorship is normally associated with directors. Andrew Sarris, one of the prominent auteur theoreticians writes about auteur theory: “The auteur critic is observed with the wholeness of art and the artist. He looks at the film as a whole, a director as a whole”. It would seem that a theory that honored the personality of the director would endorse a film in which the director’s personality would be unquestionably supreme. The 1950s, a period in which auterism was originated, was also the period of “Cahier du Cinema,” edited by the French film critic Andre Bazin. Bazin was one of the prominent auteurs of the period. The German film historian Siegfried Kracauer was another principal figure of the auteur movement. It should be noted that the prominent auteurs such as Francois Truffaut, Jean-loc Godard and Claude Chabrol themselves were directors who wanted to foreground their own activity.

102 See Mammootty on Adoor Gopalakrishnan in *India Today*. 26 December 2005. 50. KavyaMadhavan in *NaluPennungal* (*Four Women*, 2007) could never imagine getting such an opportunity as she herself had once reported to have openly disclosed this in an interview.
that Adoor had bestowed on him a rare honour by letting him read the complete script in advance. Adoor normally does not encourage his crew to read the script or even the stories. The actors are told at the time of shooting about the role and the scenes before conducting several rehearsals. “[i]n movies, the actor is not performing to the audience like the stage actor. Here they are acting for me. I am the audience and I will decide whether it is correct or not, enough or not.”

Adoor has been known as a director who completely dictates every fine detail of his films. According to him, it is not the artist's job to do the detailing. He does not want different interpretations of roles that may clash with each other. It has to be absolutely unified. Adoor’s complete control over the scripts as well as the actors/actresses serves as platforms to manufacture consent, which is quite essential for the establishment and perpetuation of the dominant male ideology.

A passionate nationalist fervor was integral to the Western realism based art genre in India. There may be seen parallels in the way in which nationalists like Jawaharlal Nehru and film makers like Ray and Adoor used films. In 2000, when corporatization of the film industry had just begun, Girish Karnad had said that the uniqueness of the “Indian” cinematic idiom had been in the ways in which narrative modes had to be worked through music and therefore dance. He went on to counsel against adopting the song-less, Neo Realistic “Western” style that had been popularised by Satyajit Ray and by himself, if Indian cinema is to survive the onslaught of globalised corporate interests. However, the slant was always towards

---

the realist tradition in Indian film. Virginia Wright Wexman, a Chicago based critic, in the book *A History of Film*, begins her evaluation of Indian film with Satyajit Ray: “The industry gained western consideration through a single entry in an international film festival. In 1956 at Cannes, *Pather Panchali* bagged the “best human document” award. Appropriately, its screening followed right after a Kurosawa film. Ray's work has been described as full of humanism and universality, and of simplicity with deep underlying complexity.\(^{105}\)

His works, as well as his followers were in keeping with the nationalist agenda, which was what film was initially used. It was supposed to help document developmental schemes like dam construction, and thereby highlighting India as a developed nation. Soon after Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru realised that the newly formed country needed a mechanism to reach out to the vast population which was multilingual, multicultural, unaware of the notion of the nation – state, and mostly illiterate. He took a special interest in reviving the set-up of the former Indian News Parade. The Films Division was started in 1948 with a mainstream film producer, Mohan Bhavnani, as chief producer. As if to compensate for the slip on Independence Day, all state functions, public announcements and social initiatives in the 1950s and 1960s were documented and circulated by the Films Division with missionary zeal. The most famous among them, of course, was Nehru inaugurating the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in 1955. the newly emerging medium of cinema to effective use and gained ideological, and later political, hegemony in Tamil Nadu, which has

\(^{105}\) The Japanese director Akira Kurosawa said, “Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon. “Ray was criticised by an Indian M.P. and actress Nargis Dutt, who was in the lead role in *Mother India*, accused Ray of “exporting poverty.” After all, “he is only a ray and not the Sun,” was her comment.
seen five Chief Ministers from the Dravidian stable with a cinema connection: C.N. Annadurai, M. Karunanidhi, M.G. Ramachandran, Janaki Ramachandran and Jayalalitha.

Films were to carry the messages of anti-colonial nationalism, social reform, Nehruvian “socialism,”\(^\text{106}\) and so on. This was precisely what Adoor had in mind too. He has various documentaries like Dam, Family Planning\(^\text{107}\) etc. which are part of a modern patriarchal nationalist project.

The Indian New Wave has often been described as a middleclass enterprise an educated middleclass revolt and reaction to the post-independence socio-political situation. With the land reforms, the joint family system was in shambles which gave rise to a new sense of self (Venkiteswaran 213-14). By the seventies, the nationalist and Nehruvian dreams had set and the hopes aroused by the communist movement had drifted towards parliamentary shores.

Adoor’s clear cut notion of what is India and what constitutes Indianness talks volumes about his middle class patriarchal sensibilities. He has been an ardent supporter of Ray and his films, claiming those to be real cinema. In an interview talking about the importance of Ray films over Bollywood films, Adoor says,

> The films churned out from Bombay, by and large, are not Indian cinema in the sense that they do not reflect the truth or reality of our lives, though there may be rare exceptions. Each and every film by Satyajit Ray is Indian


cinema; it shows our life, our vision of the world and our culture. The notion that Indian cinema is nothing but song and dance, existed earlier. It is the outsiders’ notion about Indian cinema. But, of late, we too have started celebrating that notion. That is why we unabashedly promote the term Bollywood for Indian cinema. Actually, the very term “Bollywood” is a derogatory one and we should be ashamed of condemning ourselves to such subservience. It is to be studied as to why Bombay film-makers have chosen this lowly role for themselves. Now we are propagating Bollywood as a brand name. These days, in several world capitals, Bollywood is paraded as Indian cinema, and awards are distributed to oneself in a flagellatory fashion unmindful of what others think about it. Thus, the bad ones masquerade as Indian cinema to the total detriment of the genuine ones. But what we witness is the aping of violence in Hollywood films. New technology is put to use here. Gradually, surreptitiously, these films will find an audience here too, further deepening the crisis faced by genuine cinematic work.108

This idealization of Indianness is symptomatic of a middle class patriarchal perception of an Indian as to what India and Indian film ought to be. It is a perception that is against any kind of regionalism, be it gender, caste or religion. According to Meena T. Pillai,109 the much celebrated film society movement was hardly able to address the female spectator and women remained largely on the fringes of the film viewing experience. The high modernist artistic sensibilities of

the New Wave in Malayalam unwittingly paved the way for a split between art and commercial movies, the borders of which had remained rather subtle and tenuous till then. Meena T. Pillai views 1970s as a period of modernism with its dichotomisation of art and literature as high and low, privileging the former. According to her, this ushered in a space of woes to Malayalam cinema that was divided into “art” and “popular,” with art films supposedly dealing with a specific bunch of themes that offer alternative representations of reality, ... that had appeal only in the ‘West’ and film festivals” (20).

Pillai considers auteurs form Adoor to T.V. Chandran as brilliant directors providing Malayalam cinema with new idioms that earned it numerous accolades in national and international forums. The efforts taken by these art film makers couldn’t shake the bastion of the popular films. Pillai argues that "this split, in the long run, proved detrimental to wo/men. A market-oriented cinema started blatantly flaunting itself as made to the measure of popular desire where male could, of course, substitute popular. The films of this period continued the project of the eroticised family, popularising the notion that only within the confines of a home can she find true happiness" (22). Pillai’s critique of gender representation in art films articulates the hegemonic realm of such films. Though Pillai talks about gender only in terms of femininity, it is essential that the construction of masculinity in such art films has also been considered. Gendered beings, be it femininity or masculinity, are for art film makers including Adoor, objects as part of constructing Kerala as a pre modern spectacle to suit the oriental gaze of the Western market.
The Revivalism of the 1990s and the Usurpation of the Region.

A look at the 18th International Film Festival of Kerala provokes the question as to what constitutes the secular in Kerala. The inaugural ceremony was inundated with the casteist rendering of “Dasavatharam,” a performance exhibiting the glory of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu, a deity central to the defenders of Brahminical culture, followed by the National Anthem, in an apparent attempt to showcase a continuity between Brahminism and nationalism, and asserting that secularism ought to be practiced within this framework. Other religions and other backward and lower castes that are outside the ambit of this framework are left in a no man’s land. The inaugural film, Ana Arabia (2013), on the other hand was a way to cement up the last two years’ attempt to make the festival more auteur-centered than audience-centered as in the early years. The editor’s role is lessened, making the auteur-centered film a reality. The auteur gets an upperhand in the discourse of cinema and he determines the region and not the other way round. This apparent transformation of the region has a history that dates back to the 1990s.

110 Amos Gitai’s meditative if somewhat contrived drama is most notable for being constructed from a single Steadicam-shot take. This tendency to avoid the crew in the making of a film is to be note. Films are becoming more author-centered and undemocratic nowadays.

111 It is very interesting to read Shanmukhadas as this is the first time that he is writing an article that is not an author-centered. He goes a step forward and argues that a film is not auteur/author-centred one. There is always a crew (A crew is a body or a class of people who work at a common activity, generally in a structured or hierarchical organization). His article on Pather Panchali, included in the Higher Secondary School Malayalam Course Book is highly author-centred that he is unaware of the ideology at work even when a crew is at hand. A film by Ray or Adoor in their posters and last scenes is what makes Shanmukhadas uneasy. A film by Ranjith and crew is very common, as the article illustrates. But the crew consists of an all male team is forgotten. A group, instead of a single man will not guarantee changes. It is the ideology at work that is to be analysed. See Shanmukha Das, I. “Whose is cinema?,” Madhyamam Weekly 2 December 2013. 20-27.

112 In the global circuits, Adoor represents the region Kerala. But the region that gets constructed in him is an exoticised one for the market. His construction should be seen in such a context too.
The change from feudal to democratic was taken over by the capitalist structure of power resulting in a revival of Brahminical Hinduism that happened in the 1990s. There was a return to one’s own (Hindu) roots, a trend not so visible before the 1990s in Kerala. Films, novels, stories, poems and very many other discursive forms on the return of the migrants documented this in multiple ways. People who had gone abroad in search of wealth, most often to the gulf countries, return as fundamental Hindus, and become members of temple reconstruction committees.

Indians had internalized the rationality of the western enlightenment during the early 19th century itself. Since then there has been a blind adaptation of the intellectual edifice primarily built by the European Enlightenment. Concepts of an ideal society and meaningful social criticism are coloured by this heritage. But in recent years this enlightenment vision has finally come under scrutiny in the West. Moving from the realm of colonial capital and then to the market, it is this consciousness that return as revivalists with nostalgic remembrance of things past, most often criticizing secularism as a “pseudo Euro-centric shit or the vestige of Nehruvian

---

113 In films, one finds a revivalism of Nair feudal values in films that can be seen in the International Film Festival of Kerala too. P.K. Sreekumar has talked about how one can trace a fascist history to film festivals in the context of this in his “Mooladhathinte Kaattu, Vyaarathinte Kodipadam” (“The Wind of Capital, the Flag of Trade”) Mathrubhumi Weekly December 2010. 98; Also see A.C. Sreehari, “Cinimayude Pathinaaradiyantharam” [“The Death Rites of Cinema”]; https://www.facebook.com/notes/abdul-salam/132. By Abdul Salam · Tuesday, November 27, 2012.

114 The politics of the long narrative poem, “NaattilParkkaatthaIndiakkaaran,” written by AttoorRavivarman in 1994 stages a return of the middle class NRI, which I argue is also a reviving of a homogenous, religious cultural superiority, in the early 1990s. Thrissur is considered to be the cultural capital of Kerala where the temple of Shiva situates at the centre of city. In a similar way, a resident of the city AttoorRavivarman is popular as a poet of Thrissur and a patron of the new generation poets in and around Thrissur. The collection of poems AttoorKavitakal(2012) and the collection of the poems of the new generation poets edited by him namely Pathumozhivazhikal (1999) stand as testimonies to this. See A.C. Sreehari “The Return of the NRI,” Inventions and Interventions, Vol 1, ed. T. Pavithran, Payyanur College Research Series (PCRS) 2006. 45-50.

nationalism, exposing their upper caste frustrations and a claim on nation” (Nandy: 2003). Theories of emancipation, however radical they may be, may lead to sanctions for new forms of violence and oppressions. This may be seen in the revivalist phase of the post 1990s in Kerala, and films of the 1990s often voice out this authority, the losers of such a perspective always being the minorities who are turned to objects. Enlightenment values were taken up here in the 1990s as part of the global middle class culture to serve as the heart of global structure of common sense. These values have been integral in shaping concepts of the normal, the rational and the sane.

The Enlightenment vision in India, as elsewhere, was expected to initiate an unfolding of a new tradition of social criticism that sought to rid the world of the sacred and the magical. But what it effected in actuality was a shrouding of multicultural specificities which were denigrated as barbaric and uncivilized while superiorizing a unitary culture as the secular and the modern one. The tradition of demystification assumed that manifest reality, after a point, is not trust-worthy. If one tore the mask off that reality, one would be closer to the truth, or to more justifiable certitudes. After the demystification, the certitudes that sustain the manifest reality and supply its standardized interpretations would be unsustainable. It was the hope of the protagonists of this tradition that a new society, a new social vision, and even a new human personality could be built based on this new hermeneutics. But as far as religious minorities were concerned, this tradition of demystification led to their inferiorizing of their religious identities, while at the same time it led to a standardization of a homogenous religious and cultural identity.
As Kerala was concerned, this was to imply the prioritization of the upper caste Hindu identity as the marker of a modern enlightened self. Although Enlightenment reason sought to drive the gods off the temples, they remained in the consciousness of the upper caste public in a more subtle form, which was to hit back with added fervor given the situation. The angst that British and other colonial powers had plundered India during the colonial rule and had turned gods and goddesses into mere show pieces in the British Museum was taken up with more vigour by the Hindu fundamentals in India.

Organized religious and ethnic violence become one of the most secular spheres of public life. It has nothing to do with faith, tradition or community. It is a product of uprooting, breaking down of community ties and weakening of faith. Thus, expatriate Indians in the First World reportedly financed the Ram Janmabhoomi movement that demolished the Babri Masjid in 1992 and triggered countrywide violence. That is why Mr. L.K. Advani, the leader of what many consider world’s biggest revivalist formation, the Bharatiya Janatha Party (BJP) the proclaimed Hindu nationalist party in India, the man who headed the movement that lead to the demolition of the Babri Masjid, could openly say in an interview with The Times of India, that he is not a believer. The Rashtriya Swayamsevaka Sangh (RSS), established in 1925, and which became a political presence since the 1990s, has not had its head persons who could be called believers. They openly had flaunted their disbelief; often trying to show how scientifically minded they were by attacking Hindu rituals and idolatry. They believe that they were fighting for the political causes of the Hindus, not defending Hindu religious tradition. Evidently, social
scientists consider that the violent and venomous furies of religious fanaticism are the direct products of the modern, secular world.

A liberal/secular political theory in its strict sense cannot recognize the validity of any collective rights of cultural groups unless it holds as a fundamental principle the idea that the state, and indeed all public institutions, will treat all citizens equally, regardless of race, sex, religion or other cultural particularities (Chatterji 1998). None of these liberal arguments seems to have enough strength to come to grips with the problems posed by the Indian situation. Apart from resorting to platitudes about the value of diversity, respect for other ways of life, and the need for furthering the understanding between different cultures, they do not provide any means for relocating the institutions of rights or refashioning the practices of identity in order to get out of what often appears to be a political impasse. The multi-religious communities/societies are either threatened or eroticized to serve the oriental gaze. The forces of globalization and cultural homogenization replace their lifestyles. An epic culture, that does not give a linear, empirical, historical concept of culture and community that modernity perceives, is often replaced by an official, enumerative world which has no respect for such traditions, which often get exoticised in the cultural ream including films.

**The National vs the Regional**

The complex and multifaceted relationship between the global and the local need to be looked at. How symbolic forms and modalities of association with Western capitalism are transformed, localized and legitimized in most countries throughout
the world in relation to their historical narratives and changing life worlds is at the heart of the discourse of what is referred to as “glocalism.” The local is never static; its boundaries both temporal and spatial are subject to ceaseless change. It is characterized by a web of power plays, agonistic contestation of interests, pluralized histories, struggle over polysemous signs and asymmetrical exchanges.\textsuperscript{116} The local is constantly transforming and reinventing itself as it seeks to move beyond itself and engage the trans-local. The question as to how film foregrounds this complicated processes is a compelling discussion in itself.

Clifford Geertz, the American anthropologist, underlines the need, in social re-description, for a continual dialectical tracking between the most local of local details and the most global of global structures in such a way as to bring them into simultaneous view.\textsuperscript{117} Deleuze and Guattari focus on this phenomenon when they refer to the notion of deterritorialisation, where the production of the local is inflected by the nexus of activities occurring elsewhere.\textsuperscript{118} What is interesting about cinema is that it makes available a semiotic space for the articulation of the global imaginary and its formation within the phenomenology of the local. What this interplay between the local and the global has succeeded in doing is to refocus on the question of nationhood and citizenship. It is indeed true that in an age of multinational corporation hegemony, the nation-state is under siege. At the same time the growth of sub-national movements have had the effect of undermining the


\textsuperscript{117} Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures} (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

\textsuperscript{118} Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, \textit{Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature} (Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1986).
nation-state. Hence, when discussing the issue of globality in films, the question of nationhood and citizenship become significant.

The term citizenship has begun to make a powerful presence in social re-description in recent times, directing attention to issues of state, nation, human rights, identity and belonging. The citizen is neither the individual nor the collective, just as s/he is neither an exclusively public-being nor a private-being. S/he occupies the intermediate space. The space occupied by citizenship is conflictual and open-ended. The term cultural citizenship points to the cultural production of citizenship. It overlaps with national citizenship, but they are not identical. In order to understand the relationship between films and cultural citizenship, the concept of “field” formulated by Pierre Bourdieu119 is useful. His concept of cultural production should be understood as an attempt at social contextualization. This urges one to take into cognizance, the cultural productions themselves, whether it be films or paintings but also the creators of these objects, in terms of their desires and strategies; these are based on their habits, both personal and collective. This concept stresses the importance of taking into consideration what Bourdieu calls the structure of the field. In the case of films, the exhibitors, critics, publicists, financiers, academics, government officials etc, it is they who shape the cultural products. All these involve the circulation of power. This concept calls one’s attention to the web of social condition, circulation and consumption of films in within an economy of power. This discourse is vitally imbricated with films as it clearly demonstrated in the visual medium which includes films, television etc.

One finds a certain attempt of cultural homogenization happening in the popular realm during the 1990s. A neo-liberal hegemony acquired legitimacy through television and film of the period. This was the period, for instance, which saw Ramanand Sagar and B.R. Chopra, reproducing *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* to the small screen, these cut-out versions becoming the universalized archetypes of soap-opera that took over and continues to dominate television entertainment. There have been innumerable devotional serials narrating the lives of Siva, Hanuman, Devi etc. The two epics have had a sway over the plot and theme of almost every commercial Indian film with G.P. Sippy, the producer of *Sholay*, believing that Rama and Ravana are implicit in every Indian film.

This was also the time when male heroes began to achieve superhuman dimensions in film narratives and women were totally marginalised. The film industry, working within limited finance and unable to compete technically with Tamil or Hindi films, retreated for a while to the slapstick and the sleaze- the only areas where the indigenous has an assured market and cannot be combated from the outside. Thematically, the 1990s saw a spate of films centred on the upper-caste milieu; with their rituals, costumes, concerns and mannerisms usurping the normative/narrative centre. There were films like the musical comedy *His Highness Abdullah* (Sibi Malayil, 1990), in which a Muslim hero is recognised by a Hindu Tampuran (royal lord) as one who knows “Brahma” (here equated with classical music) but not as a Muslim, and *Paithrukam* (1993), in which an atheist hero is transformed to follow the brahmin superstitions/rituals. The minorities, especially Muslims, were gradually

---

120 *Sholay* is referred to as it has been included in the Kannur University M.A. English syllabus [see appendix]
marginalised and forced into stereotypes and appear as exceptions to the “norm” and the “normal.” In his study of Hindu revivalism in Malayalam cinema, T.K. Ramachandran says that the masterpieces of the ’50s like *Neelakkuyil* (1954), *Newspaper Boy* (1955), *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), etc, “combined artistic power with trenchant social criticism” (1997:10), which have vanished from cinema since an apolitical and debasing strain has replaced them. It is in such a context that the parallel/art genre in Malayalam cinema came up with novel hues of commercialization through their inclusion of super stars in an otherwise non-commercialized film, meant for the global rather than the native audience. It is in such a context that the films of the proponents of popular art cinema that emerged during the 1990s with super stars as heroes ought to be seen.

In the 1990’s, Indian film industry took a turn in keeping with the cultural globalization and commodification in society. The period saw the intensification of the interplay between the global and the local in Indian films. Indian film industry which had evolved over a period of about one hundred years, consists of the “art” tradition as incarnated in the works of directors like Satyajit Ray and Adoor Gopalkrishnan and the various regional films like those of Bengal and Kerala as well as the other large traditions of popular films in Hindi, Tamil and Kannada. Therefore, in examining the developments of the 1990s and the early years of the present century and also the ways in which they construct cultural citizenship, there

---

121 Susmita Dasgupta, Amitabh: *The Making of the Super Star*. Penguin India; New title edition (4 August 2006) A remarkable insight into the films and times of India ’s greatest star actor in an industry where fashions change every Friday, Amitabh Bachchan has been synonymous with cinematic entertainment for over thirty years. But beyond the labels of “one-man industry” and “star of the millennium”, a number of issues pertaining to the star, his films and his era remain largely unaddressed as in the case of the super stars of any region.
is a need to recognize the complex topography of the field. The fact that Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s films have been screened along with Bollywood films has to be seen as part of such a trajectory.

The next section would look at how Adoor’s purported regionalism is nothing but disguised orientalism and how his Malayali male is one who could be seen across Kerala or Indian, or in other words a nationalist-global-Malayali-male. The fundamental idea that emerges in and through his films is that despite the colonial rule and independence from it and after its move towards a progressive left society, the mentality of Malayali remained pre-colonial. This perception brings him near to the new brand of Orientalists called neo-colonial historians like Tomlinson and Charles Metcalfe. This lenience is not accidental. Rather it is a conscious act. Most commentators tend to concentrate on political relationships, trade figures and tourist numbers while analysing international relationships. The role of cinema, in inspiring interest in a nation and its culture, is overlooked. Yet films are more than entertainment; they are ambassadors that provide foreign audiences with insights and impressions of a land and its people. Since his target viewers are males from the western world who still believe that Kerala (India) is still a land of monkey gods and snake charmers, a stereotypical image getting reconstructed every now and then through the National Geographic channel. Talking about how there was a growing interest for Indian films in Germany, which started in 2004 with the blockbuster Kabhi Khushi Khabhie Gham; watched by almost two million viewers, Stuart Foster talks about how films serve as an ambassador to culture. “Monsoon Wedding,” “Lagaan,” “Kamasutra,” “Namaste London” and “Om Shanti Om” etc have found
admires because of colourful ambience and fairytale like stories. This fascination for the exotic is one of the determining reasons for the acceptance of Adoor’s films in the global arena.

The East and the Exotic.

Adoor belongs to the second generation of the reformer men of Kerala. The first generation of reformers were advocating changes in the existing social practices and relations as against the one suggested by colonial modernity. Such reform began in the early nineteenth century. The early novels in Malayalam, like Indulekha (1889), have upheld similar ideas in the late nineteenth century. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai also shared the spirit of leading the Malayali to progress. Novelists like Thakazhi became part of the movement of their respective times when novels were taken for agents of change in society. P.P. Raveendran notes while talking of films in an article that, while novel was the medium of the middle class of the nineteenth century bourgeois men, film was that of the twentieth century.

Through producing film in the second half of 20th century with the intention of reforming the “impotent” Malayali, Adoor too is not moving far away from the concepts of colonial modernity. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that Adoor’s films too satisfy an oriental gaze. His twentieth century films undertake and continue with the project of the nineteenth century novels in this respect. Derek Malcolm, a

---

British film critic, argues that Adoor films go back to the cultural past of Kerala. This cultural past of Kerala is a colonial discursive construction. It follows the European construct of the Indian society as an unchanging one, based on an oppressive concept of “Oriental Despotism,” which essentially reflects a colonial mindset. There were specific comments on India like, “unchanging stagnant India,” practice of the same religion and customs since ages. It was held Indian custom, laws and manners were unchanging and stagnant because Indians were indolent in both body and mind and hence prone to inaction. Such ideological constructs as the “Civilizing Mission,” “White Man’s Burden,” “Theory of Guardianship” etc, were created to impose an ideological hegemony on the Indian mind. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, may be seen to cater to such an orientalist taste of the West by constructing such males as may be seen in his films.

Adoor is the winner of several international awards and his films have been shown in Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, London, Rotterdam and every other important film festival around the world. To Malcolm, Adoor’s films come deep from inside

---


127 The theory of Oriental Despotism was a western construct and especially a reflection of the colonial mindset. Some of the leading propounders of this theory were James Mill, John Kaye, Montesquieu, Hegel etc. The focus of this theory is on India and China, the two major civilization of the Orient. There were specific comments on India like, “unchanging stagnant India”, practice of the same religion and customs since ages and the despots and tyrants who ruled Indians since ages and the uncivilized Indians who are fit to be ruled with an iron hand. Hegel talked about unchanging India and their unbroken superstitions. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, Tr. J Sibree, New York, 1949, pp. 154, 167., quoted in Om Prakash, “Negating the Colonial Construct of Oriental Despotism: The Science of Statecraft in Ancient India”. http://www.indicstudies.us/History/Oriental/PaperMod.pdf; accessed on 10.02.2012.

128 The British administrator historians or the Anglicists as they were called, developed related theory of “Civilizing Mission”, “White Man’s Burden”, “Theory of Guardianship” etc. to impose an ideological hegemony on the Indian mind. It has been observed that the theory of oriental despotism is being resurrected in the recent times by adding the flavor of religion in it. Ram Sharan Sharma, *Aspects of Political Ideas and Institutions in Ancient India*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 2001, 86.
his own culture and are subtle in examining Kerala’s social, political and cultural history.

Once in a meeting Indira Gandhi convened, I raised this issue, “My cinema becomes ‘Indian’ only when it goes abroad. Within India, it is only a ‘regional’ film. I don’t even have the mechanism to show it to people outside my region. And Doordarshan says it cannot be comprehended by villagers who watch television. But I don’t understand how the same villagers enjoy ‘The Lucy Show’? Please find some remedy to this.” … It was after this meeting that Doordarshan started showing award-winning films. My own film *Elippathayam* was the first film they showed. But they have made a retreat from all that again.129

Adoor’s notion of the regional as he articulates in this interview that appeared in *Frontline* is ambiguous. Here region is understood just as a geographical category, while in reality it need not be so reductionist in conceptualization. Region is also suggestive of a larger order of things that involve religion, caste, class and gender. Orientalism is not one that is limited to the Western view of Eastern culture but rather it accounts for certain Easterners’ representations of themselves as well, which can be seen in and from the works of Raja Ravi Varma, exhibited in Europe and America, which are virtually indistinguishable from some Western ‘Orientalist’ images. It is a rendering of history that narrates the story of the dominant society. A depoliticisation and exoticisation of past is part of making it saleable.

---

In this context it is significant to see how Adoor treated the men in his films. In one of his most acclaimed films, *Vidheyan (The Servile*, 1994), the protagonist Bhaskara Pattelar shoots his wife to death, and perishes towards the end, an ‘Eastern’ Lord doomed because of his “barbaric” culture. (See Mammootty in *Vidheyan* in Appendix I). Adoor, if he is dealing with the culture of Kerala, as claimed by Derek Malcolm, is catering to the taste of the West as Ray and Kurosawa did. When *Rashomon* (1950) was screened in Venice in 1951 Akira Kurosawa was giving the West what they wanted to see. From 1950 to 1960s, more than four hundred Samurai films were said to have been made across the world.

The East is demeaned and demonised, which was what the Oriental project was all about. Satyajit Ray is a film maker who can be regarded as patriarchal in the sense of consciously affirming the hegemony of the patriarchal order and consciously denying women’s position and voice even as Ray’s professed attitudes are often overtly opposed to this, and many of his films have taken up these issues as their themes. His works, generally regarded as Westernized, are actually culturally specific in that they represent many of the attitudes of both a particular class and a particular generation. While that class was partly westernized, and contributed to the westernisation of India, that class and that generation also had other features, one of

130 *Vidheyan*, like Sholay is referred to as it has been included in the Kannur University M.A. English syllabus (See Appendix).

131 Here, “Mega Star” in Malayalam film industry, Mammootty is cast in the lead role. An equation has almost been in circulation that Man = Mammootty. His box office hit movies, critics say, are those which beat his wives and women in general to his control. See Caroline Osella, and Filippo Osella. “Malayali young men and their movie heroes” in Radhika Chopra and Osella, Caroline and Osella, Filippo, (eds.), *South Asian Masculinities: Context of Change, Sites of Continuity* (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, an associate of Kali for Women, 2004).

132 This is how Satyajit Ray described the experience of watching Rashomon in Calcutta: “The effect of the film on me was electric. I saw it three times on consecutive days, and wondered each time if there was another film anywhere which gave such sustained and dazzling proof of a director’s command over every aspect of film making
which was its fixation on the father figure of Tagore, who encouraged that westernization. Chidananda Das Gupta argues that in the films Ray had made up until 1965, Ray had in fact been accepting the value laden world of Tagore, and projecting it brilliantly in terms of films, but that he had not yet managed to make films that went beyond the confines of the Tagore world. Ray’s films did not portray his contemporary Calcutta of burning trams, communal riots and food shortages. On the whole Ray has portrayed the past evolution of the middle classes as reflected in the long period dominated by Tagore.

The practice of rating the greatness of a film based on its international screenings and successes, is nothing but innocent. It speaks volume of the politics of exoticisation through which these films attract the Western oriental eye. The same can be said about Adoor and T.V. Chandran or any other director for that matter. Adoor in fact adored Ray as the father of Indian film. In an interview with C.S. Venkiteshwaran, Adoor says that Indian film began with *Pather Panchali* and Satyajit Ray, as the first complete film-maker to choose to work in cinema. All those before him were mere storytellers.

According to Janaki Sreedharan, the looking back at times of feudal conservativism and pre-modern family practices evinces a trace of relief and condescension in the attitude of the modernised, liberal film maker and spectator, thus endorsing the

---

133 Ray’s grandfather Dwarkanath Tagore, one of the India’s earliest entrepreneurial capitalists, was visited by Rabindranath Tagore, then at the height of his power as a writer, a spokesman of international humanism that broke down the barriers of nationalism. [He opposed Gandhi’s movement for non cooperationith the British in 1921, 32. Ray studied painting and other fine arts from Tagore’s University of Shantiniketan and was seen within his own culture as a miniature Tagore figure himself. 134 “Ray and Tagore,” Sight and Sound 36, No. 1 (Winter 1966-67), pp. 30-34, republished in its earlier form “Satyajit Ray: The First Ten Years” (1965) in Chidananda Das Gupta, *Talking About Films* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1981), 55-75.
formation of the patriarchal nuclear family as more enlightened and civilised (2010: 86). This is a trajectory that is followed in Adoor’s films. In Ray’s first film *Pather Panchali* (*Song of the Little Road*, 1955), it is the mother who is seen as holding the family together, while the father’s spiritual and literary idealism fritters away the family’s resources. The first film from independent India to attract major international critical attention, *Pather Panchali* won the "Best Human Document" at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, establishing Satyajit Ray as a major international filmmaker. As Satyajit Ray was actually Tagorean/Vaishnavite/Brahmanical/Masculine, he got immediate acceptance. The emergence of a nuclear family; lead by the father at the centre, casting off the barbaric past of living together in a joint family remains as the main focus of the film.

His *Charulatha* (*The Lonely Wife*, 1964), based on the novella *Nastanirh* (*The Broken Nest*) by Rabindranath Tagore, set in the late nineteenth century Calcutta, depicts the isolation of the traditional wife in a wealthy family, who must remain in the inner rooms of the house, while her husband’s social movements are unrestricted. In *Devi* (*The Goddess*, 1960), again set in nineteenth century Bengal, Ray dramatizes the plight of a young woman forced by her zamindar father-in-law to assume the role of a reincarnation of the Goddess Kali and be worshipped on an altar in the family home. In *Mahanagar* (*The Big City*, 1963) Ray explores the situation of a young woman seeking employment in contemporary Calcutta against the wishes of her traditional family. *Pather Panchali* is today considered one of the greatest films ever made. The film ran for over seven months at the Fifth Avenue Playhouse, New
York and set a record for foreign films released in the United States. *Pather Panchali* had its world premiere at Museum of Modern Art, New York. He won an Oscar for lifetime achievement in cinema Adoor’s purported regional films follow a similar ideology of exoticisation, forbidding any agency to regional endeavours.

The international film market and the festival circuits have certain defined preferences and orientations. It is the tastes and dictates of the market that determines what the indigenous, film makers in the rest of the world should produce; conditions that are in turn internalized by them. Adoor or Aravindan becomes famous outside India only when someone like Derek Malcolm (that visible god of Indian filmmakers), or when a festival like Cannes, condescend to take note of them. There remains a practice whereby Indian film makers are taken seriously or win laurels at foreign film fests only after they are certified by the West.

What happens in this process is that the international festival circuit nurtures and upholds certain stereotypes and ‘masters’: as to what or who is ‘authentic’ and ‘original’. As a corollary, the indigenous film makers, in order to be noticed and taken seriously, are tempted to obey the norms and deal with something exotic or esoteric, or politically sensational (often meant being anticommunist or to deal with superstitions, poverty or penury). Being the children or the past of the West,”

---

135 Ray talks about how he wondered while his film ran for eight months in New York: when it was thought that “...it would barely pass for a rough cut in Hollywood” (77). He had doubts as to “[W]hy should a Western audience care for a down beat tale of poverty in a remote Indian village? (71) ...[H]as any Indian film ever worked with a Western audience – especially one that eschewed all the trappings of the exotic? No tigers, no maharajahs, no fakirs, no snake charmers, no nautch girls...” (72). Ray, Satyajit. “Under the Wester Eyes,” *Deep Focus: Reflections on Cinema* (HarperCollins: Noida, 2011) 68-91.
anything contemporary for the local culture is found uninteresting in the festival circuit (Venkiteshwaran 41).

Representations of the Orient have always attracted the western gaze. The urge to present oneself as an object for Western male eyes still defines the substance of the films mainly because the target viewer of an art film, for example, of Adoor, is never the locals. It marks a snake-charmer syndrome that is characterized by the desire to present to the eyes of the Western onlooker the myths they have created about the Orient. Adoor and others thus open a door to the exotic East.

Adoor’s films, screened along with Bollywood films are a feast to the eyes of the West, and are reported to be a passion in the International Film Festivals in Europe. Much of the German public is still unaware that regional variations exist. There is a tendency to term any film from India as “Bollywood,” regardless of the film’s language or place of origin.\(^\text{136}\) *Slum Dog Millionaire* (2008) was appraised by the West\(^\text{137}\); so was *Pather Panchali* (1955), largely for poverty and for depicting an underdeveloped India. Meanwhile, *Mother India* (1957) a Hindi film epic, by Mehboob Khan, “starring” Nargis in the lead role, was never acclaimed abroad since it presents an India which does not showcase an orientalist India. But the west rejected this film by stating that it is melodramatic and it asserts the identity of an India of woman. That is, it rejects the colonial rule which was masculine on the one hand and imagines a liberated India that recaptures women’s lost space, on the other.

\(^{136}\) Adoor’s *Four Women* was screened in the Hamburg Film fest, along wit Bollywood films. See “Bollywood goes German”, Nov 2nd, 2008http://blogs.thehindu.com/delhi/?p=5270; accessed on 13/07/13.

It is difficult for the modern/western male to accept a woman/orient/India/ Nargis becoming a star. Despite her goddess-like moral character, she kills her own (criminal) son in the end, an unbearable act like killing a nation-state in the embryo state. She represents post-independent India as a nation whereas *Pather Panchali* which virtually had killed the daughter/durga/goddess for the survival of the boy child who cannot be a “Lost Child” easily gets into the good books of the West.

The Adoor School in Malayalam film, inspired and informed as they were by the culture of film studies and festivals that followed the masters, was nevertheless to align themselves probably with the auteur theory and the political supremacy that it accorded to the director. This too may be seen to be part of the project of Neo-orientalism which found its way curiously into Malayalam films whereby Western ‘classical’ standards became the models of excellence, making impossible other gazes. This was to inform the patriarchal ideology that finds its expression in Malayalam films. Adoor’s expertise has been valued as lying in his ability to create visually complex films that operate on multiple levels, that are culture-specific and yet universal in significance. However, he often draws upon the Orientalist construction of the Indian past; his films are strikingly similar to those of the Orientalists. His films are centred on men caught in a world of crumbling structures and ideologies. Women are there mostly to reflect the existential dilemmas of his male protagonists, without any inner life of their own. Mankata Ravi Varma, Adoor’s cameraman, was doing the same with a movie camera what Raja Ravi

---

138Neo-orientalism is a term, often used pejoratively, to describe modern incarnations of Orientalist thinking. The term is often used in academic literature to critique Western attitudes to Islam and the Islamic world post 9/11. Dag Tuastad, 'Neo-Orientalism and the new barbarism thesis: Aspects of symbolic violence in the Middle East conflict(s)', Third World Quarterly, 24: 4, (2003) 591 — 599
Varma was doing in the nineteenth century in painting. Raja Ravi Varma “morphed” and reconfigured his characters and Mankata Ravi Varma relocated Adoor’s characters in a similar semiotic context.

Adoor brings out two images of the Malayali in particular through his films. The first one is the image of a matrilineal Malayali with the potent female dominating over the impotent male. His films till Anantharam (Monologue, 1987) could be viewed from this perspective. The second is the image of the despotic male. The representations of the ‘impotent’ male in early Adoor films\(^{139}\) give way to a construction of the ‘potent’ male in the films of the 1990s. This is done largely through the use of the “potent Mammootty” in the films,\(^{140}\) who, being a typical representative of this masculine figure by that time, enables the reconstitution of the patriarchal mode of Malayalam films.

Thus Swayamvaram (One’s own Choice, 1972) represents, the woman who has had a Swayamvaram—a choice of one’s own—ending up in disaster. Kodiyettam (The Ascent, 1977) represents “impotent” men who are to be civilized and made macho and “progressive.” Elipathayyam (The Rat Trap, 1982) looks at the old matriarchal system as a rat trap. A new system ought to emerge in Kerala, a rat trap, or a pool of

\(^{139}\)BharathGopi, KaramanaJanardanan Nair etc. considered to be not so glamourous are cast in those films.

\(^{140}\)Mammootty as an epitome of masculinity; and not his ‘barbarous’ characters. Deedi Damodaran has talked about how the issues of Mammootty’s masculinity had disturbed her. “I used to get disturbed Mammootty shouldering the weight of masculinity, getting suffocated, unable to went out by bursting into tears, just as feminity becoming a suffocating jail. As part of my research (Film and Female: Special Emphasis on Kerala) i had made an interview with mammootty. He said the film that we men make would be like this. You may go and make your film. And that was the reason for the making of the film Gulmohar. But, getting into the domain of the male was a terrific experience,” Deedi Damodaran, “Pen Swapnangalile Gulmohar,” [“The Gulmohar in Women’s Dreams”] Gulmohar (Kottayam: D.C. Books, 2009). 5-7.
stagnant water. The film opens with the credits sequence which shows in detail the ruined state of a *naalukettu* in eighteen successive shots. Unni, the protagonist is introduced in a sequence where he is shown crying out that a rat has fallen on him. The trapping of this rat is then shown in detail and finally it is drowned in a pond. Furthermore, the film ends with a sequence where Unni himself is caught like a rat and is drowned in a pond with the same haunting background score. Thus rat and trap become metaphors for the man and the *taravad*, which are in a state of collapse. According to Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, Adoor’s film represents the ‘tragic’ end of a man signaling an equally ‘tragic’ end of a system. Ratheesh says that Adoor participates in the decline of Nair dominance narrative through his protagonist Unni who is unable to negotiate change. However, it is not the decline of Nair dominance alone, but rather an attempt to construct the male as Malayali male for Western consumption. *Mukamukham (Face to Face, 1984)* likewise suggests that the revolutionary ideas in Kerala ended up in disillusionment. *Anantharam (A Monologue, 1987)* discusses the crisis of the modern Malayali man, whose love and marriage system are haunted by primitive practices, incest and lust with no monogamous relation yet in place. The primordial instincts are yet to be exorcized. *Mathilukal (Walls, 1990)* imagines the heterosexual, male centered family still in existence with the walls between men and women intact. The heterogenous facets of masculinity extant in Malayali men, are reproduced in *Vidheyan (The Servile, 1994)*. The Master – slave relationship is still in practice. The Orientalists viewed the despot-subject relation in pre-colonial India, where the subjects remain passive and receive masters coming one after other without resistance. The ‘Purushan’ or man of
the film *Kathapurushan (Man of the Story, 1996)* is yet to emerge. His attempts have been thwarted. *Nizhalkkuthu (Shadow Kill, 2002)* describes a barbaric Kerala, which practices death by hanging, as no other developed state would do.

Adoor’s *Swayamvaram* (1972), is acclaimed to have inaugurated the new wave in Malayalam. It was produced by Chithralekha film society, and its audience was mainly middleclass male intellectuals. Its theme (personal survival and self expression, of one’s own choices etc.) and style are (self conscious, slow, ponderous; devoid of songs and melodrama), are typically new wave and markedly different from the popular/commercial fare. Moreover, it is a love story centered around the nuclear family and its struggles. Viswam and Seetha (played by Madhu and Sarada), are lovers who come to the city to be on their own (Venkiteswaran 2003: 214-15). Uprooted from their own space and milieu, they have made a choice of their own (literally ‘swayam–varam’). Viswam meets with death and Seetha is left at the threshold of an uncertain future. The external world is a threatening presence, they live in a world of their own, whether it be their existential angst (217).

Many of the new wave heroes were aspiring writers. Viswam is a novelist in *Swayamvaram*. It may be remembered that it was the novel in Malayalam that effected a change in the family life of the Keralites; Chandumenon, Thakazhi were exemplaries in this direction. The ending of *Swayamvaram* has some similarities with the ending of the popular hit *Chemmeen* where the frustrated lovers find union in death. *Swayamvaram* is replete with suggestions of death (218-219).
Adoor’s art was the product of self-expression - an ecstatic endeavour that withers in the sunlight and dust of “everyday” life. These notions of creativity and the artist as the obverse of “ordinary” life are also symptomatic of the period (219). A rootless, rustic simpleton unaware of his responsibilities (Kodiyettam/ The Ascent); a selfish, middle-aged man clinging to old feudal ways (Elippathayam/The Rat-Trap); an ex-revolutionary wasting himself, sleeping and eating and drinking, much to the disgust of his old comrades (Mukhamukham/Face to Face) – Adoor Gopalakrishnan’s cinema manages to frame details that often escape our everyday glance (Gautham Bhaskaran). References about commercial films abound in the film, reflecting the self-consciousness inherent in the new wave project and enunciating its notions about “art” and “creativity.” All these references about literature and film are in a way self-referential and point towards this.

None of the characters in his films is a “minor.” The lesser roles played by Gopi, Karamana, KPAC Lalitha, turn into wholesome characters. Swayamvaram is a landmark film about the uncertainties and apprehensions of the middleclass and the impossibility of choices; about the “intellectual crisis of the middleclass” (220). It is also worth noting that the emergence of the new wave films in Kerala, also marked the marginalization or near disappearance of protagonists from minority communities and lower classes. Barring a few exceptions, it was in a way the beginning of the reign of the middleclass in films–both popular and art (221). Unnikkunju in Elippatthaayam, and Kunhunni in Kathapurushan may be seen to be the Nair/Unni-tthaan reincarnations of Adoor himself.
One can find an orientalist and a Gandhian Adoor in his feature films while being a Nehruvian in documentaries. Edward Said analyses the discursive structures built around “Orientalism” that eventually lead to cultural hegemony. The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. The interest of the Orientalist research was on Buddhist tradition as it was similar to Christianity. The comparability of the Buddha with the savior, the translation of terms, Bhikshu and Bikshuni as Monk and Nun and Dhamma as morality and so on put these together. It was against caste as well (Muralidharan 16). According to Uma Chakravarthy, while the brahmanical system had created, sanctioned and recommended the enforcement of social hierarchy and discrimination against women, Buddhism not only did not legitimize such inequality but attempted to dilute its impact. But … this two-pronged approach had the effect of moderating and containing the extreme dimensions of poverty and oppression, rather than abolishing the institutions that gave rise to them. (135).

Puritanism in matters of sex has been a dominant characteristic of art films. There is a direct derivation from Christianity’s doctrine of the original sin.... What is more, the assertion of sexuality in woman is more sinful than in man.... Thus, the orthodoxy of St Paul and St Augustine bears antagonism towards female sexuality and its assertion. What brings it closer to closer Indian mindset, especially that of the English educated, is the Christian attitude formally upheld by the British ruling class and insinuated into the body of Indian beliefs by Mahatma Gandhi [p.16]. The prudery of art films, markedly influenced by Western models, is somewhat Gandhian (Christian) (p. 17). The educated despised cinema. Ganghi’s statement in 1939 in which he included cinema among evils like gambling and racing typified this attitude [Samik Bandopadhyay, ed., Indian Cinema: Contemporary Perspective from the Thirties (Jamshedpur: Celluloid Chapters, 1993) quoted in Theodore Bhaskaran,2009, p. 51, 90]. Ganghi’s dissent from this view was so marked that he proposed the destruction of all erotic scupture on temple walls and was preventing from carrying out his purpose by the hue and cry of artists [ Dasgupta 2008, p. 16-17] Chidananda Das Gupta, “Film as Visual Anthropology,” Seeing is Believing ( New Delhi: Viking, 2008) 107-116.


Uma Chakravarty, “The Social Philosophy of Buddhism and the Problem of Inequality,” Beyond the Kings and Brahmanas of Ancient India (Delhi: Tulika Books, 2006) 119-137.
James Mill was one of the first to start to see India in terms of Black and White oppositions; either as internal contradictions that it could not overcome, or as the other of Europe (17). The orientalists wanted to see Indian philosophy “more homogenized and there could definitely be no Indian philosophies in the plural”. Like the unchanging village-communities or the succession of despotism; internal changes were but repetitions of a single note of uniformity. When diversity was perceived and described, this was to point to hopeless contradiction and confusion (27).

Adoor’s films have been screened with retrospectives in both Europe and America at festivals and in non-commercial outlets, with British critics, like Derek Malcolm for instance, lauding him for his cultural capital. Claims have been made on his films, with recurrent images of “philosophical depth” and “political radicalism” which transcends the constraints of time and space etc. whereas T.V. Chandran’s films, seems to suggest that human personality is not any wholesome substance but merely a multiplicity of subject positions at different points in space and time. T.V. Chandran, being an indigenous film maker,144 has been considered to be ‘political’ and most often critics consider him as a veteran undoing the studied idiom of Adoor and others in films. R. Nandakumar, opines that the films of T.V. Chandran are informed by the radical urgency of conviction of a social vision and rooted in a distinctly different film aesthetics, which attempts to undo much of the studied craft of the internationalist idiom.145 K. Gopinathan has written on the female characters

144 Ragavendra refers to T.V. Chandran as an indigenous film maker in M.K. Raghavendra, Director’s Cut (Noida: Collins, 2013).
of Chandran as very much liberated, but a close viewing of the films would reveal that most of them are produced to reproduce the existing social order even when attempting alter-native narratives.\textsuperscript{146} C.S. Venkiteshwaran similarly opines that T.V. Chandran goes beyond the art in the treatment of women in his films.\textsuperscript{147} Both art and popular viewpoints objectify women either as a desirable object or as a victimized one. Both genres deny woman a subjectivity and interiority of her own. The female character turns out to be a figment of male imagination – conjured up by desire or sympathy. His films which deal with the marginalization and exploitation of women, from \textit{Mankamma} (1987) to \textit{Susanna} (2001) are also more often animated by an undercurrent of male guilt that runs through them. Neither is T.V. Chandran an exception when he tells the story of the male from \textit{Krishnankutty} in 1981 through \textit{Ponthanmada} in 1993 and \textit{Danny} in 2002 to \textit{Sanaranum Mohananum} in 2011.

Taking most of the directors of the parallel stream like John Abraham, Aravindan, P.K. Bakker, Pavithran etc. into consideration one finds that very few of them challenge the existing dominant order or imagine a different reality to the present system. The two film makers Adoor and T.V. Chandran have widely won awards, primarily because of the harping on the issues of masculinity in Kerala and not because of its becoming a “minor” discourse. Critics’ analysis of the major shift of focus in T.V. Chandran in the conception of human subjectivity with particular reference to films where Mammootty is low cast(e) ought to be viewed from this perspective.


**Mamootty and the Modern/ Secular Malabar Male**

The films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan are lauded for their so-called ‘realistic’ content, greeted for their evocation of Indian exotica abroad, and acclaimed for their ideologically acceptable “high taste” at home. He has been a stark advocate of art films. But, perceptible changes to this effect could be seen in his overall production strategies by casting Mammootty as the central figure of his film *Vidheyan (The Servile, 1994)*. Similar perception may be seen in T.V. Chandran’s *Pondanmada* (1994), who also casts Mammootty but is said to have attempted to subvert the stardom. Adoor casts Mammootty as the central figure in his three consecutive films spanning from 1987 to 1994, *Anantharam (Monologue, 1987)*, *Mathilukal (Walls, 1990)* and *Vidheyan (The Servile, 1993-94)*. T.V. Chandran further asked Mammootty in *Danny* (2001) to address the viewers of his film and declare that ‘… I’m Mammootty’. By this, Chandran and Mammootty are legitimizing their effort to subvert the masculine image. The film has already constituted Mammootty as the ideal Man. It is this image of ideal man that has been challenged and said to have subverted in Chandran’s films. It declares that Mamootty as the ideal man is a virtuality and it also suggests that, to be a male is only a display as part of his virtual roles.

The Osellas had observed that a certain flexible type of masculinity was in construction in Kerala, by studying the film buff of south Kerala/the erstwhile princely state of Cochin and Travancore. From a classical anthropological angle, they had looked at how masculinities and popular culture are configured within the arena of cinema, by focusing in on Kerala’s two major male movie stars Mohanlal
and Mammootty, and especially upon the relationship they have with their young male fans (Osella&Osella 1998, 1999, 2000b, 2001). According to them this is part of a new conception of identity as “multiple, ambivalent, contradictory, always in the process of construction, but rarely dispensible” (Gledhill 1991) as a simple one-off identification with either a star or a film character is unlikely, being unable to encapsulate the complexity of the gendered self. The masculine identities which young men are crafting are decidedly and self-consciously ‘modern’, in a state whose self-image as ‘progressive’ is over-determinedly modern. Malayali payyans are caught between aspirations towards the glamour, violence and access to sex cinematically represented by villainy or ambivalent heroes and the possibility of behaving like the wholly good character. One would want to be able to practice - or imagine oneself - speaking like Mammootty, in a voice which resonates power, warmth and sensuality; one would want to imagine oneself as Mohanlal, singing and romancing a girl; one would aspire to this one’s swaggering gait, that one’s expression of amused disdain. These shifts in masculine style refers to what it means to be a Malayali man, negotiating the demands of modernity and finding a way to move through the various arenas - family, work, leisure - around him. (April 2002 - Malayali Young Men and their Cinema Heroes: draft 3 for Kali book 42). The fragmentations of ethnic and class modalities inherent within the two-star universe eventually then have the potential to unify at the higher level of the fantasised and aspired towards ‘Malayali’ identity: different both from other Indians and from other southerners, marked out by its relationships to modernity, education, cultural sophistication, and endowed with a deep sense of irony and reflexivity. The Malayali refusal to countenance genuine rivalry between the two stars, and the
common phenomenon of switching or sharing allegiance, confirms for us that both Mammootty and Mohan Lal are necessary in a full fantasy life and that the range of characteristics which each embody need all to be kept available to young men in their street peer-performances. But as may be seen auteurs prefer the star persona of Mammootty over Mohanlal, which talks volumes about the middle class patriarchal ideology that is at work as far as the popular art makers are concerned.

Mammootty has more often ventured into ‘art’ or parallel cinema (Vidheyan/The Servant, Mathilukal/Walls - which won prizes internationally and was released in Europe) and most lately, ‘Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar’), Mohan Lal has also sought awards and international acclaim (Kala Pani/Vanaprastham (issued in Europe as The Last Dance); while Mohan Lal is frankly popular and populist, Mammootty’s main work is also in popular cinema and his fan base is similarly broad. The secular image of the Muslim Mammootty gets marketed as the progressive, secular face of Malayalam film. According to the Osella’s Mammootty the Muslim in his reassuring competence at playing the Hindu (in e.g. ‘Nairsaab’, the prototypically dominant Malayali Hindu identity) then simultaneously bolsters the dominance of ‘Hindu’ as the modal Malayali ethnic identity and acts out what Roy identifies as the duty of the minority: “the abjected who must compulsively ... keep enacting their good citizenship”, by performing as the “good Muslim”, the one who is able to assuage all anxiety about sinister difference by successfully erasing all signs of that difference.
But Kerala is diverse in its culture and North Kerala/Malabar has a culture different from the Middle or the South. A study of the popular art films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan, T.V. Chandran etc would help one address certain aspects of masculinities of South and North Kerala. (See the Appendix I for their various discursive practices in this respect), with respect to how popular actors (also actresses) are incorporated in the art film genre. What one comes to see in the films, be it T.V. Chandran or Adoor, there is an attempt at homogenization, although the males in films have been multiple entities. The secular, middle class star persona of Mammootty is often coopted for this purposes, demarcating him of any regional specificities and moulded as a fetish for the European eye. What is reproducible about Mammootty’s body is his pan Malayali masculinity, rather than his Muslimness” (2001:207).

According to the Osellas, Mammootty allows young non-Muslim men to experience a fantasy relationship with a powerful mature Muslim man, a fascinating other. This primary level secularization validates him to be a model par excellence. It is in this already permeated secular body that the mature male/star persona is inscribed. The distinguishing characteristic of the star persona of Mammootty/ Mohammad Kutty is his “family man” image (T. Muraleedharan 193). He is constantly seen as the head of a big family, a domineering patriarch who safeguards the heterosexual, middleclass family morality by disciplining everyone else with an iron hand. Occasionally the family replaced by the society and he appears as a self-righteous bureaucrat but the values he represents and protects remain by and large the same. He is rarely shown as having a male companion, but if there is one, he is mostly a
subordinate (or a younger brother who maintains a respectable distance. The rest of
the males in his films, most of the time are rivals or antagonists who strive and
predictably fail to undermine his authority. Mohanlal’s is a subversive masculinity,
in contrast to Mammootty’s normative masculinity (193). A prominent feature of the
Mohanlal star persona is his naughty, behavior. Mohanlal is most often portrayed as
a single “unattached male” – i.e., without a wife or even a girl friend (199). This
flexibility makes him unsuitable for Adoor.

Mammootty often plays a Brahmin or high-caste Nair; he is repeatedly seen in
uniform; he is also strong in “family dramas” or “sentimental films”. Young male
fans characterised him as taking roles for “tough characters and family men, a
person who is able to make decisions on his own”. He is good at playing repentant
son, tragically widowed father, capable brother. Young male fans singled out as
areas of especial virtuosity his abilities in playing “elder brother,” “policeman” and
“Christian.” We can then see an aspect of Mammootty which is his affinity with
roles implying powerful and respectable men of status in control.

Mammootty embodies, performs and alludes to a familiar style of masculinity,
popular among both men and women. In Mammootty’s picture gallery on
‘Kerala.org’ we repeatedly see him as man-of-action or phallic hero: in military or
police uniform; cocking a gun; standing in hard’ pose in vest and combat pants;
pointing an accusatory and threatening finger into a co-actor’s face; standing erect
and aloof. If we see him at all with a woman it is often a screen mother, a grey-
hared lady looking proudly at her son who finally, in mother’s presence, permits himself a smile. He was identified to us by cinema watchers as ‘manly’; ‘even in roles in which he apparently begins as powerless, viewers know that the worm will surely turn’.  

Mohan Lal began as a small-time villain or “negative hero” - characterised by one informant as an “angry young man” - who grew to stardom in the late 1980s (Chopra et. al. viii). His versatility was mentioned by many as a motivation for liking him: he is often perceived as able to “do” violence, love, comedy, drama and so on, and is put forward by his supporters as a “real” star, an actor who can constantly surprise his public and offer them new insights into his enormous talent.

Mammootty became an important part of Malayalam film industry in the 1980s. Having worked with both the art and popular directors, Mammootty’s rise to stardom was definitive. From the family roles in 1980s, he moved on to roles that demanded the show of macho masculinity through characters of police inspectors, CBI officer, historical figures etc. Mammootty is the embodiment of what a Malayali male ought to be. Gopinathan finds several parallels with the star persona’s of Mammootty and Amitabh Bachan in as much as they gave expression to the Angry Young Man tendency in films. His first film Ee Nadu (1982) stands testimony to the kind of persona that Mammootty got moulded into. He represented a gulf returnee who joined with the left movement against the capitalist leaders in the film. The


transcendental individuality that was to be the feature of his star persona accords well with his role of the comrade in *Ee Nadu*, who becomes the leader of the popular uprising against the capitalist employers. Soon Mammootty was to become the secular male star who leads the left based “Ee Nadu” (Kerala). Mammootty suggests a pan Malayali whose secular class image cannot be breached by issues of caste or religion. Mammootty’s taking of the moral high ground (in film as in public persona) removes him from the plane of the ordinary, the fallible, making him less accessible to many. The multiple males of films are copted by his secular star persona and the heterogeneity that masculinity suggests is compromised. The lower caste Mada or the subaltern masculinity suggested by Mammootty thus gets coopted by his secular star image.

According to P.P. Raveendran, the boundary between film and life and similarly between the spectators and the stars are quite porous. Just as how life experiences inspire the making of films, a film too inspires the making of everyday. The changing tastes and sensibilities are important as far as imparting authenticity to cultural icons are concerned.\(^{150}\) This accounts for the fact as to why there is no female star in the film industry despite the fact that the first star in Western film industry was a female Little Mary. It is ideology that connects the spectator to filmic interpretation, characters as well as super stars. The superstars act as intermediaries between everyday and its interpretation (20). The process of homogenization thereby often happens in a zone of conflict between the everyday masculinity and the hegemonic one of the star persona.

Talking about the characteristics of Mammootys star persona, C.S. Venkiteswaran\textsuperscript{151} says that there was a public response against him being the brand ambassador of coca cola as he, being a left brigadier as well as the chairman of Kairali channel was expected to stand his moralistic ground of not supporting coca cola. It was his progressive image that was at stake. According to Osellas this expectations of how a male actor ought to be, arises from specific socio cultural situations. The flexibility, an important aspect of the star persona of Mohanlal has much to do with his Travancore Nair identity, according to them. What underlies the star persona of Mammooty is his macho, secular middle class Malayali image, while Mohanlal gives a totally different picture. This may be seen in the way in which his stardom gets transferred to implicate the globalised era in films like Kunjananthante Kada (2013). One finds that Kunjhanandan’s journey to the supermarket\textsuperscript{152} has already been inscribed in his secular middle class star persona that had been in the making since 1980s. Babu says how the film’s pro capitalist sojourn begins from the moment Mammooty is chosen as Kunhanandan. The film illustrates Kunhanandan as a model and the value he accepts in the changing situation as an ideal. The film and its protagonist come together to concretise the idea that the only available path to development in the contemporary world is the acceptance of neo-liberal values. Neither challenging it nor building up alternative ways of survival will make subsistence possible. Mammootty, the ideal middle class male shouldering responsibilities of a nuclear family as Kunhanandan responds to the contemporary changing society not as an angry man, but as a wise individual acting rationally. Yet


another facet of the same political perception could be seen in another Mammootty film *Immanuel*.

This restructuring was to lead to the denying of various subaltern identities in terms of gender, caste, and religion. This has been achieved by creating a male whose identities is determined on the basis of class and secular images. But an attempt to create such an identity for a Malayali man could be seen in social reforms and other political activities in the early twentieth century itself. Perhaps the first Malayali film *Vigathakumaran* characterising such a male, female, and family could be viewed from this perspective. The boldness to caste an outcaste lady to play the role of a Nair heroine and a Nadar playing the role of a Nair hero must not be read as accidental and out of contingency. In this very act one could read the aspect of the internalization of the political mood of the then existing society.

More important is the fact that, it is also the year in which *Vigathakumaran* was released that Payyanur Conference took place. It is in this conference for the first time in the history of Indian National Congress and National movement, that the demand for establishing a Kerala state on the basis of linguistic unity was raised. The demand was to merge three regions, which had been evolving through different historical processes and nurturing considerable cultural and political distinctions, into a single political unity. The logic of the erasure of the multiplicity for creating a national unity to overthrow colonial rule and make a progressive “nation in the making” has been reappearing through the so called “new generation” films. Films like *Kunhanandante Kada* legitimises the erasure of “kada” (little shops at your door steps with all their local flavours) and its diversities and building up of shopping
Malls\textsuperscript{153} were one can merge with people that one is otherwise unaware of, at the same time feel that there is an elevated to a position of a global citizen. The erasure, however needs to be understood more in terms of a co-option that happens at the level of the multiple masculinities in films. The everyday, multiple incarnations of males are co opted by a hegemonic film industry to serve the purposes of their marketing both in the regional and international spaces.