THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF THE POLITICAL OUTSIDER REFLECTED IN THE SELECT MALAYALAM FILMS

Thesis submitted to the
University of Calicut
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

By

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DECLARATION

I, **Shibu. B.,** hereby declare that the thesis entitled **The Evolution of the Idea of the Political Outsider Reflected in the Select Malayalam Films** submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by me under the guidance of **Dr. Sajitha. M.A.**, Assistant Professor of English, Farook College and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled **The Evolution of the Idea of the Political Outsider Reflected in the Select Malayalam Films** submitted by **Shibu. B** to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of observations and bona fide research carried out by him under my supervision and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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I, **Dr. Sajitha M.**A., Research Supervisor, Farook College, hereby certify that my Research Scholar Shibu. B has incorporated the changes suggested by the adjudicators of this PhD Thesis **The Evolution of the Idea of the Political Outsider Reflected in the Select Malayalam Films.**

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21-03-2018   **Research Supervisor**

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A Note on Documentation

The Researcher follows *MLA Handbook Eighth Edition* for the purpose of documentation in this thesis. Maximum care has been taken to make this thesis faultless in terms of documentation.

INTRODUCTION

It is incontestably true that being one of the most popular media of the present century cinema remains a unique site where ideology, aesthetics, and politics are inextricably intertwined with each other. No wonder, as the brain child of European bourgeois modernity cinema tends to satisfy bourgeois capitalist goal of making profit. The mass appeal of this new medium is sustained mostly by the deliberate inclusion of entertainment elements like songs, choreography, and well-knit narratives. While resorting to such popular ingredients cinema, in effect, transports the ideology of the dominant class that eventually reinforces existing power relations. Therefore it has been a recurring practice at the site of cinema that any idea that tends to challenge the hegemony of the dominant class would be represented in negative stereotypes. In the context of Malayalam cinema, it can be argued, the idea of the Left has been represented in complete conformity with the perspectives maintained by the dominant ideology characterised by upper caste feudal values as it was the Left that questioned those values. Majority of the filmmakers - the proponents of commercial cinema - situate the viewers in an illusory world and thereby disengage themselves from the socio-political reality outside. While doing so they ensured large returns from the industry on the one hand and performed an ideological function by maintaining the status quo, on the other. Cinema that prioritises and reinforces the value system of the dominant ideology can be termed as dominant cinema. In the particular context of Kerala, it can be assumed that, dominant cinema has functioned as an ideological apparatus in the hands of the dominant class by preserving its value system through its narratives, images, dialogues, casting, songs and other factors specific to this genre.

As a result upper caste Hindu feudalist sentiments have been frequently reproduced and rendered immortal in Malayalam dominant cinema. Anything that comes in the way of the dominant class is repudiated as worthless to be filmed. As a result Malayalam movies, by and large, ignored alternate counter narratives like Communism until up to 1950- in a time when communist movement had a strong presence in Kerala, since the basic premises of the communist movement like social equality and social justice were diametrically opposite to the value system of the dominant feudalist hierarchy. In the post-1950 scenario, as a result of gradual transformations taken place in the socio-economic scenario of Kerala consequent to the growth of bourgeois capitalism, Malayalam cinema tend to accommodate communist discourses but only after diluting its political intensity in a considerable way. It was only after the emergence of Naxalite revolutionaries as new political outsiders that authentic representation of the idea of the political outsider occurred in the context Malayalam cinema. Post-seventy political movies try to represent the trials and tribulations of the Naxalite revolutionaries in realistic terms devoid of superficial entertainment. That again was strategically contested by the makers of commercial cinema by adopting various techniques in their films. A close observation of the trajectory of Malayalam cinema invariably proves the fact that right from the formative years Malayalam dominant cinema has been dealing with the Left as a political outsider, apparently owing to socio-political and economic factors that control film industry in Kerala. Later, it can be seen that this practice has been contested by the intervention of political films which opened up a counter discursive platform that destabilised such stereotyping tendencies. There again the forces of capital intervened that completely diffused the political content of the idea of the left and transformed it as one of the much sought-after commodities available in the cultural industry.

It is also worth pointing out that cinema offers a turbulent site where, art, politics, capital, and power complement and contradict each other. As an art form it is endowed with certain aesthetic qualities that enable the spectators scale lofty heights. As a political phenomenon cinema performs contradictory ideological functions by ascertaining the ideology of the dominant class and on the one hand and by effectively resisting such forms of domination on the other. As the product of bourgeois capitalism cinema has always been a ploy in the hands of the entertainment industry as a means to further capital and has been consumed as a product available in the market. Dominant cinema etherises the audience by situating them in a totally unrealistic, make-belief world that detaches them from the socio-political and economic conditions of the society. Radical filmmakers, on the other hand, politicise the entire site of filmmaking by rejecting the conventional methods often followed by the makers of the dominant cinema. Films made in such an environment can be called political cinema. Still there is another stream that totally disregards both politics and profit and concentrates on purely aesthetic objectives. Mutually contradicting approaches intertwine and intersect with each other at the site of filmmaking which makes it impossible to approach this medium with any preconceived notions. It has been a customary practice to categorise cinema as mainstream or commercial movies and parallel or offbeat movies. In the particular context of this study, the term dominant cinema is preferred over other variables like mainstream or commercial cinema as this term succinctly exposes the dynamics of power evident in the field of filmmaking. In order to identify counter initiatives that rupture from the dominant cinematic practices, the term political cinema is used here as it deals with the idea of power and tries to unveil the reasons behind the dichotomous distribution of power and economy in a given society. Mostly political cinema relies

heavily on Marxist perspectives on power and society. They disregard conventional formulae pertaining to filmmaking, both on the thematic and structural side. So the idea of the political cinema always faces challenges from film industry as the term industry preconceives the idea of profit. Mainstream/dominant movies, which are made to engender money and profit, usually follow certain set patterns that ultimately create a hiatus between the spectator and the society they live in. They strategically employ certain techniques like carefully crafted plots, continuity editing, linear narratives, and songs to ensure the total involvement of the spectators so that they remain thoroughly cut off from the society around. By doing so, the mainstream popular films preserve the value system of the dominant ideology. For example the big budget movies from Hollywood ultimately uphold the pan-American sensibility over anything else. This pan-Americanism is characterised by patriarchal white interests that are preserved at the visual level by most of the Hollywood movies. Whereas the political movies from Russia, Latin America, and France, for example, introduced parallel forms of filmmaking that constantly set the spectators in interactive terms with the society and the hostile social order. The revolutionary terms like Dialectical Cinema, Third Cinema, Imperfect Cinema, Cinema of Hunger, Counter Cinema and the likes emerged from the site of such filmmaking problematise the preconceived notion of mainstream narrative cinema. It must be said that such counter aesthetic initiatives are very few in number as it requires exceptional guts to surpass the constraints imposed by capital in the field of filmmaking. When the apostles of entertainment industry, with its huge production, distribution and exhibition circuits define and determine the sensibility of the spectators, political filmmakers recognise the intellectual potentiality of the viewers and consider them as co-makers or participants. Such films are unique in terms of their explicit revolutionary

tendencies. It can be understood from the discourses pertaining to political cinema that the ultimate aim of such films is to liberate the spectators from the clutches of big-budget narrative cinema and also to attribute agency to the hitherto de-subjected common folk. As a result political films are considered artistic rejoinders against the dominant paradigm of filmmaking on the one hand and they initiate a counter discursive platform to challenge the dominant ideology on the other. The symbiotic relationship between the interests of the dominant class and the ideology of its cultural products is very much evident at the site of filmmaking. Political films try to subvert this symbiosis by exposing the modes of its operation.

Most of the political films have an ideological inclination towards Marxism and theories of films are developed on the basis of Marxist positions on art. Usually such movies tend to invoke political themes into their narrative. On the contrary, because of the overwhelming presence of capital in the process of filmmaking and films have an ideological function to perform, political themes have been carefully kept outside the realm of dominant cinema for decades. If at all such themes are incorporated, the political content of such themes are grossly rarefied before placing them into the visual narrative. Thus the idea of the 'outsider' is constructed by the film industry to deal with the threat posed by such counter currents sprung from the leftist platform. The idea of the political outsider denotes the political positions assumed by an individual or group which are pitted against the mainstream dominant ideology. They are political activists who digress from the conventional paradigm of political action by adopting methodologies outside the dominant political narrative. Every society dictates a set of norms to establish a divide between 'desirables' and 'undesirables'. Those who adhere to this preconceived pattern or norms are appreciated as 'insiders' and those who do not are despised as

'outsiders'. This binary is evident in all social institutions like religion, family, and politics. The mechanics of the construction of this binary is aimed to preserve the status quo as the status quo always ensures the hegemony of the ruling class. All age produces outsiders of various kinds to protect the status quo and thereby protect the interest of the dominant group. Outsiders give voice to those who are voiceless as victims of the hierarchical structure of social relations in a given context.

Towards the end of the 19th century and during the early decades of 20th century, it was the communists who questioned the status quo worldwide by dismantling the existing power structure - feudalist or bourgeois - through revolutionary means. Marxism had influenced many disciplines like art, culture, political economy, philosophy and others. Cinema, the most popular medium of the 20th century, was also greatly influenced by Marxist thoughts and the importance of films for political propaganda was recognised by leaders like Vladimir Lenin. The filmmakers from Russia like Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, and Vsevolod Pudovkin developed a kind of film aesthetics derived from their understanding of the dialectics inherent in Marxism. Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, Jorge Sanjines, Fernando Birri and others from Latin American countries revolutionalised the process of filmmaking by totally rejecting the narrative centered films propagated by the Hollywood film industry. French filmmakers like Jean Godard redefined filmmaking in Marxist perspectives.

In this context, it will be academically relevant to investigate how Malayalam cinema negotiated the idea of the political outsider. This thesis therefore attempts to map out the trajectory being taken by the idea of the political outsider with respect to the changing political scenarios of Kerala and the metamorphosis of the same in terms of its cinematic representations. Nowadays the word 'political' is used to denote more elusive

and amorphous conditions because in the post-modern context every instance of resistance is implicated by this term. But in the particular context of this thesis it is strictly used to denote leftist ideological positions that were manifested either in the form of moderate leftism or in the form of leftist extremism. In order to understand the various stages in the evolution of the idea of the political outsider in Malayalam cinema, an examination of the forces of power operating within the realm of cinema worldwide and the ideology of resistance pitted against it are needed. In addition to that, an understanding of the socio-political situations in Kerala in different stages of its development remains an important prerequisite for identifying the transformations of the left and its corresponding filmic representations. Like all other art forms cinema maintains an implicit, at times explicit, connect with the society. As the product of technological modernity cinema's indebtedness to capital cannot be overruled. At the site of cinema, technology and creativity merge with each other in a constructive way. But technology, as the product of European bourgeois modernity, engenders the idea of monopoly which has its own repercussions in the field of filmmaking. So it is essential to analyse the forces of capital working behind the entire gamut of filmmaking and instances of resistance pitted against it to bring cinema into close affinity with social reality.

Not many studies have been carried out by academicians in the specific context of Malayalam Films on this particular area so far. K. P. Jayakumar's study *Udalil Kothiya Charithra Smaranakal* tries to unveil some of the major flaws and lacunae evident in the representations of Naxalite movement in Malayalam films. His major concern in this book is to understand how both art films and mainstream films have engaged the Naxalite movement in Kerala. He does not attempt to investigate the

transformations undergone by the idea of the political outsider. His main objective is to observe closely the strategies of containment employed by the mainstream filmmakers to sideline the Naxalite movement during 1960s and 70s. K. P. Jayakumar's text neither tries to define what political outsider is or nor does it venture into account for the emergence of the idea of the political outsider in the context of Malayalam cinema during the first half of the twentieth century and the transformations it underwent in different phases of the political history of Kerala. *Red on Silver: Naxalites in Cinema* edited by Pradip Basu displays a fecund engagement with the representation of Naxalism in Indian Cinema with special reference to Bengali cinema. Benedict Varghese thesis "Rethinking Religion Redefining Politics: Malayalam Cinema 1970s, 1990s and Beyond" attempts to situate Malayalam cinema within the amorphous and heterogeneous idea of the 'political'. In her essay "Between Personal cataclysms and National Conflicts" Gayatri Devi explores the reasons why the mainstream Indian Cinema is so reluctant to represent the mass movements and struggles carried out by the marginalised and labour classes. Her observation holds significance in the context of this study as it unveils, to a certain extent, the relationship between mainstream cinema and capitalist ideology.

The methodology being applied in this study is primarily textual studies which involve applying forms of textual analyses to a series of printed and visual texts which are relevant in the context of this research. Here, texts are regarded as cultural documents that reflect the socio-political situations of their production. Texts are considered the key indicators of their contexts of production. Possibilities of genre approach are also explored to elucidate the terms political films, political melodrama, and narrative films. The ideological/ theoretical approach helps to explain cinema as an ideological tool, and

to identify counter ideological attempts. A conflation of these diverse approaches as part of textual analysis helps extrapolate sensible arguments. The genre approach functions to "describe film forms and types" and help "classify and analyse the elements found in formula films" (By water and Sobchack 81). Ideological approach situates film in the context of mutually contradicting power relations and unveils the mechanism of power that caters to the domination of certain privileged groups. Textual analysis seeks to highlight how cinema, with its unique devices, reflects/contests the domination of a particular ideology. It further attempts to probe how this ideology is challenged by the forces outside the dominant discourse and how such constant conflicts result in the evolution of turbulent politico-cultural situations. This thesis is premised predominantly on Marxist theories, especially on post-Marxist theoretical perspectives enunciated by Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci that facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the context of films' production. As cinema is a cultural product, always in constant interaction with the varying socio-political situations of its immediate society, an understanding of the society from where films are emerged is a prerequisite for the proper evaluation of any given movie. Texts, other than films, will come handy in this situation. Close reading of texts written by prominent political writers, thinkers and historians on Kerala gives sufficient information regarding the socio-political conditions of the time under investigation. Many political memoirs have been written by eminent personalities like A K Gopalan, E. M. S. Namboodirippadu, Thoppil Bhasi and the likes. Ajita's memoir, *Ormakkurippukal,* deals with the turbulent socio-political conditions of the 1960s and 70s that paved the way for the emergence of extreme leftist organisations in Kerala. But none of these texts deals with the cinematic representations of such movements. R. K. Biju Raj's *Naxal Dinangal* and Joshy Joseph's *Vasanthathinte*

Idimuzhakkangal are the latest attempts to recapture the politically charged past. *My Life Story* by A. K. Gopalan and *Olivile Ormakal* by Thoppil Bhasi are some of the texts under close analysis. As a social and cultural document film reflects and affects society as an institution. Therefore reading a film is also an attempt to excavate the many histories of a particular social group in terms of its cultural, political and sociological existence. At times it can be seen that, creative texts like films, autobiographies, literary texts, and even photographs tend to destabilise the official historical narratives maintained as absolute. Throughout this thesis a dialogue between creative texts and socio-political contexts of their production is carefully maintained. The importance of literary works in understanding the socio-political conditions of the past is an area already explored by eminent New Historicist philosophers like Stephen Greenblatt. Former police constable Ramachandran Nair's memoir, *Njan Jeevuchirunnu Ennathinte Thelivu*, was instrumental in rewriting the official history maintained by the police about the murder of former Naxalite leader, Varghese. Here the privileged position of the official history is challenged by the individual memory of the ordinary policeman. Related literatures produced with respect to the political conditions of the period can also be analysed. *Prakriti Niyamam* by Parameswaran, Stories by U. P. Jayarajan and P. K. Nanu, poems by K. G. Sankara Pillai and K. Sachidanadan are relevant in this respect. Perusal of these texts gives an idea about how literature had reacted to the political turbulence of the period. In addition to that newspapers, journals and letters collected from various reliable sources are also brought under scrutiny.

The major focus of the study is the representation of the idea of the political outsider in Malayalam cinema. So a detailed analysis of some of the representative Malayalam films is to be carried out. Twelve movies have been selected for major study-

five representing mainstream/dominant cinema and six offbeat/political films. All those movies represent various stages in the representation of the idea of the political outsider for a period of 40 years ranging from 1968s to 2008. Pre-seventy movies like *Navalokam* (1951) directed by V. Krishnan, *Punnapravayalar* (1968) directed by Kunjakko, *Mooladhanam* (1969) directed by P. Bhaskaran, *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1970) directed by Thoppil Bhasi, and *Anubhavangal Palichakal* (1971) directed by Sethumadhavan are of great importance in this respect. From these the last three films are analysed to explicate how the idea of the political outsider is negotiated in pre-seventy movies. In the second phase the idea of the political outsider assumed different forms and meanings in films like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannapppol* by P. A. Backer and *Amma Ariyan* by John Abraham. *Margam* (2003) by Rajeev Vijayaraghavan and the 2007 movie *Thalappavu* by Madhupal excavate the interiors of the protagonists to unveil the traumatic experiences of the political outsiders. In the third phase, a close reading of popular films like *Aranyakam* by Hariharan and *Ithiripoove Chuvanna Poove* by Bharathan categorically brings into light how those films have managed to disseminate antipathy towards Naxal movement. Two movies by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, *Mukhamulham* and *Kathapurushan*, are particularly significant as these two movies amply recapture the subtle complexities of the evolution of the Left. The selection of films for major studies is based on their thematic engagement with the idea of the political outsider and how those movies dealt with the idea of political outsider in various phases of its development within a time span of thirty two years. In addition to that passing references have been made on other movies having thematic resemblances to those movies selected for major studies. Reading of these select movies will be useful in mapping out the trajectory that the idea of the political outsiders underwent over the

course of time. Since most of the political filmmakers across the globe are fascinated and impacted by the Marxist perspectives on art, Marxist critique on film will be of great use to unravel the convoluted site of cinema. Post-Marxist cultural critic Antonio Gramsci's clinical analysis of the functioning of power in a given system will come handy to decipher the complexities of feudal power relations in Kerala. Louis Althusser's reflections on Ideological State Apparatus open up new possibilities of analyzing cultural product like cinema as an ideological apparatus. Frankfurt school critic Adorno and Horkheimer in *Culture Industry* has succinctly identified how the interests of the capitalists are preserved and disseminated by the culture industry. Arguments in this respect are also made based on film theories of leftist filmmakers like Sergei Eisestein, Jean Godard, Fernando Soalanas, Octavio Getino, Fernando Birri and the likes. Detailed analysis of theoretical postulations made by Michel Foucault and Edward Said are useful in identifying the strategies being employed by the dominant class to thwart the challenges of resistance from the less powerful. Foucault in his work *Madness and Civilisation* clinically analyses the dynamics of power that systematically controls the outsiders in any given system. Emily Durkheim's *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Note Books*, and Louis Althusser's *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* are all useful texts to decipher the mysteries related to the workings of power in cultural contexts.

Apart from 'Introduction' and 'Conclusion' this thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter entitled 'Conflicts and Compromises: Ideological Dominance and Politics of Resistance in Cinema' clinically analyses the dynamics of power lying latent within the site of cinema that constantly tries to preserve the interest of the dominant class. As cinema is the brainchild of technological modernity orchestrated by European

bourgeoisie, the urge to make profit is innate to this new medium. Just like other art forms the primary concern of cinema is also man and his relative position in this universe. Filmmakers try to represent visually the complexities of human life in diverse ways. However, as cinema required the support of capital in every aspect of its production, the thrust point of filmmakers started shifting towards making profit. When the potential of cinema to attract popular imagination has been realised, professionals and technicians associated with this new medium started exploiting its market possibilities. Bourgeois capitalists held a firm grip in the field of filmmaking by monopolising both technology and the entire process of filmmaking. The chapter tries to examine how the forces of capital wield sway over the field of filmmaking and the kind of resistance such hegemonic institutions had to meet with. Even from the advent of cinema as a unique art form, big businessmen tried to monopolise various aspects of filmmaking. The growth and expansion of Hollywood film industry explains how the dominant cinema marginalised the other industries with its huge production circuits and its ability to manipulate state's support. It is through Hollywood films that the ideology of the West and the idea of pan-Americanism are being disseminated worldwide. But, as Foucault has pointed out, "Where there is power, there is resistance" (95). Daring cinematic attempts from Latin America and Russia were instrumental in redefining the entire gamut of filmmaking by incorporating leftist perspectives. In India, the Mumbai based Bollywood holds centrality in the industry by producing an average of more than 1000 films yearly. Other regional film industries were dominated by the powerful presence of Bollywood with its huge production and exhibition circuits. When most of the films followed the dictates of the industry without resistance, a few daring attempts from filmmakers like Satyajith Rai, Mrinal Sen, Budhadeb Bhattacharya, Ritwik Ghatak

and others challenged the mainstream popular paradigm. As a result cinema remains a contested site where the conflict between capital and politics is plainly visible. This chapter further tries to define what political film actually is, at least in the context of this particular investigation. At the conclusion of the first chapter the ideological function of cinema is closely analysed. Cinema, when it becomes an inseparable part of the entertainment industry, usually preserves the ideology of the dominant class. So the dialogue between cinema and ideology is to be deconstructed in order to establish a counter ideological paradigm.

The second chapter entitled 'The Emergence of the idea of the Political outsider and the Early Political Melodramas in Malayalam' defines the term 'political outsider' and presents the socio-political context that facilitated the emergence of political outsiders. In addition to that this chapter tries to explore the various forms of representation of the idea of the political outsider in early Malayalam cinema and tries to analyse the influence of Communist movement in shaping the thematic content of those movies. Each society maintains the hegemony of the dominant class by marginalising the less powerful classes. While doing so it constantly encounters resistance from the deprived classes, either in the form of political revolution or in the form of cultural resistance, and thus keeping the whole atmosphere politically turbulent and tensed. Society, in general, considers such rebellious uprisings as threats to the smooth functioning of the status quo. So the members of the revolutionary groups were regarded as outsiders since their aim has always been to challenge the existing power structure. The chapter draws on Michel Foucault, Howard S. Becker and Edward Said who have conceptualised the power dynamics operative in the formation of the idea of the outsiders. Howard s. Becker argues, "Social groups create deviants by making rules

whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders" (9). Edward Said lays bare the strategy of "Othering" by which the idea of the Orient was constructed by the West as a weak, under privileged and archaic society to accord privilege to the West. Anything other than the West is represented in negative stereotypes in order to ascertain the civilisational and intellectual supremacy of the West. Just in the same vein the supremacy of the feudalists are discursively asserted either by coercion or by narratives of domination. This is how the idea of the political outsider was constructed in the context of Malayalam cinema/Kerala polity whereby the dominant power structure of feudalism was privileged over any other alternative systems like that of Leftist counter ideology. Kerala witnessed many leftist uprisings during the first half of the twentieth century. Places like Punnapravayalar, Kayyur and Onchiyam witnessed mass movements against inhuman feudal landlord system some of which turned violent - at times causing bloodshed. Communist wave, which had different manifestations like trade union organisations, revolutionary activities, and cultural as well as literary expressions, had swept across the political consciousness of Malayalees much before its inception in 1939. However Malayalam cinema kept reasonable distance from such political activities initially. But later, a situation was emerged so that the industry could no longer neglect the growing leftist inclination of the people. As a result film industry was compelled to accommodate political discourses to capitalize out of the popular support being enjoyed by the Left. But, as leftist politics poses threat to the status quo, the cinematic representations of the leftist political outsiders were carefully crafted with a view to diffusing the intensity of their positions. They employed various strategies to neutralize the political content of the movement. The strategy of 'conscious ignorance', strategy of 'neutralised

accommodation' and strategy of apolitical criticism were some of such strategies. The family socials of the 1950s and political melodramas of the late 1960s were effectively used for these purposes. As a result, cinema, basically a product of capital, continues to serve the cause of the dominant ideology.

Chapter three entitled 'Emergence of the new political outsider: Representation as Resistance' brings under the scanner the political situation prevalent during the post-1970s that catered to the emergence of extreme leftist positions. The alleged digression of the political left from the much proclaimed revolutionary path engendered severe criticism from the youth who wanted to set immediate revolution as their primary agenda. The decision to join the bandwagon of parliamentary democracy, for them, was derived from Lefts' ideological deterioration which resulted from parliamentary greed. The growing disillusionment experienced by the educated youth during the reign of the leftist governments of the 1950s and 60s coupled with the apathy of the organised Left towards the sufferings of the backward classes, resulted in the formation of radical groups in several pockets of Kerala. As Ajita in her memoir, *Ormakkurippukal*, has remarked, the disgruntled youths were exhorted to "rebel against the revisionist policies and reactionary stand against the armed struggle of the Marxist party and to organize Naxalbari model peasant revolts" (48). The organised Left was split into CPI and CPI (M) in 1964. The CPI was criticised for its pro-right wing policies. The growing discontent of the youngsters in the policies of the CPI (M) resulted in the large scale renunciation of the party by the youth leaders like Kunnikkal Narayanan, K. Venu, Varghese and other youngsters. Under the leadership of Kunnikkal Narayanan they formed a radical group in Calicut. They were influenced by the teachings of Mao tse Tung, the leader of Cultural Revolution in China on the one hand and by the Naxalite

movement lead by Charu Majumdar in West Bengal on the other. They drew support from Peoples Radio of China. This radical group organised various activities like police station attack at Pulpally and Thalassery and carried out attacks against feudal landlords in Wayand and some of them were murdered. They continued such activities until leaders like Kunnikkal Narayanan, Ajita, Philip M Prasad, and K. Venu were arrested. Naxalite movement was not only a political movement; rather it was also cultural movement. A fresh wave of sensibility was given vent to in the literature of the time. Cinema tried to capture the political turbulence of the situation in mutually contradictory ways. Offbeat attempts realistically tracked down the trajectory of the political outsiders. For the first time in the history of Malayalam cinema, authentic representatives of the political outsiders were seen on the silver screen in films like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannapppol* (1975) and *Amma Ariyan* (1986). Such films tried to maintain equidistance either from the *avant-garde* pretensions of the art house movies or from the industry equations of the dominant cinema. *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* directly intersects with the political situations of the time of its making. It captures the agonizing experience of being politically conscious at a time when the state becomes more and more oppressive and undemocratic. The adventurous task of making a political film during the time of emergency had to confront many impediments before being released with numerous censor cuts. The unwavering optimism shown by the political outsider at the site of imminent danger underscores his readiness to sacrifice even his life for a prospective socialist society.

In the fourth chapter entitled 'Haunted by Eternal Memories: Outsiders in the Post- Revolutionary Gloom' elucidates how memory acts either as a tool to retain the political consciousness of the outsiders or as a source of eternal pain in the wake of

foiled revolution. Here *Amma Ariyan* (1986) by John Abraham, *Margam* (2003) by Rajeev Vijayaraghavan and *Thalappavu* (2008) by Madhupal are selected for close studies. In the movie *Amma Ariyan* a group of former revolutionaries was embarking on a journey to meet a woman, mother of one of their comrades, to inform the news of his son's death. The journey assumes allegorical significance as it later turns out to be a journey into the past. The comrades, however disgruntled they are, cannot dispense with the memories of their revolutionary past. The movie stands out from other mainstream movies as it was produced outside the dominant production mode by mobilising fund through mass collection. The movie *Margam* also tries to portray the agony of a former revolutionary, Venukumara Menon (Nedumudi Venu), who is haunted by the tormenting memories of the past. The more he tries to free himself from those memories, the more he gets hopelessly entangled by them. The movie thus delineates the fatal realisation of the failure of the Naxalite movement by a former ideologue of the revolutionaries and the consequent psychological derangement he experienced that eventually prompts him to resort to his feudal ancestry. Beneath the veneer of revolutionary ideology, Venukumara Menon conveniently hides his feudal identity that is getting uncovered at the time of his acute existential dilemma. The third movie *Thalappavu* deals with the sensational revelation made by a former police constable Ramachandran Nair about the murder of former Naxalite leader, comrade Varghese. Raveendran Nair, the fictional counter part of Ramachandran Nair, was ordered to kill Joseph, against his will, the fictional counter part of Varghese. Life becomes horrible for him as he cannot bear the brunt of that gruesome incident. He always felt the presence of the dead man, Joseph, around him. He could hear him talk like a real man. To relieve himself of this psychological trauma he resorted to liquor that had eventually taken his otherwise happy family away from him.

After thirty five years of that unfortunate incident, he uncovered the mystery pertaining to the death of Joseph before the public. In *Thalappavu* the recurring presence of the deceased Naxalite leader in the hallucinatory experience of the protagonist situates the movie in a totally complex situation where facts and fantasy conflate to expose the lacunae left in the official history. Here personal memory problematizes the authenticity of official history by putting across an alternate narrative.

In the fifth chapter, 'Idealisation of Family: Political outsiders as Romantic Daydreamers' attempt is made to uncover how the dominant cinema, the loyal servant of the dominant ideology, successfully performed its ideological function by employing sophisticated strategies to sideline the threat of the propagation of the extreme leftist positions. It is by projecting the idea of the family that mainstream political movies point accusing fingers towards radical activism. Movies like *Aranyakam* (1986) by Hariharan and *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove* (1984) by Bharathan tacitly idealise family in order to develop the idea of the political outsiders as the eternal disturbers to the family. In *Aranyakam* the anonymous radical activist disturbs the serenity of a feudal family by mistakenly killing a young man. In the case of *Ithirppoove Chuvanna Poove*, the political activism of the youngest member of the family creates unwarranted complexities in the family. In *Aranyakam* strategy of rejection through apolitical criticism is carried out by means of ahistoricisation and romanticisation that further corners the Naxalite movement as the 'other'.

In a nut shell, political outsiders were emerged in various phases in the changing socio-political conditions of Kerala in various forms. The fundamental feature of the political outsiders has always been their conspicuous proclivity towards leftist political positions. During the early decades of the twentieth century they were emerged as a

result of the communist revolutionary ethos that reverberated all across Kerala. But their cinematic representations appeared much belatedly. Malayalam cinema reconciled with the idea of the political outsider only after the process of political neutralisation. They carefully situated them in creatively crafted narratives, giving prominence to the movement of the narratives rather than to the political content. As a result the viewers were tempted to follow the twists and turns of the story line, forgetting the forces of power working behind the creation of political outsiders. When the communist party became a part of the established political discourse followed by its split in 1964, the leftist representations in Malayalam cinema acquired the quality of being insiders as it was evident in many mainstream movies produced during the late 60s. The transformation of the erstwhile outsiders as insiders was meticulously carried out in the cinematic space by the forces of capital and thereby reiterating the hegemony of the dominant ideology. It was the emergence of the extreme leftist discourses that heralded the rebirth of the political outsiders, both at the political sphere and at the cultural level. Filmmakers like John Abraham and P. A. Backer created a radical wave that distabilised the conventional notions pertaining to filmmaking. Even then, the dominant cinema with its huge production system and marketing strategies, coupled with the support mechanisms of stars and absorptive narratives enthralled the popular imagination that eventually weakened other alternate initiatives.

The representation of the idea of the political outsider in the post-globalised context acquires altogether different manifestations. Insofar as Left remains a staple item in the culture market, Malayalam film industry succinctly commodifies this fetishistic aspect of the Left. The commercial potential of the idea of the Left is vigorously exploited by the industry even more strongly than ever. The resurgence in filming the

idea of the Left is explicit at the site of Malayalam cinema in the recent times that

exploits the collective political nostalgia of Malayalees. Those films are made well

within the dominant production system and are consumed as essential commodities in

the culture market with huge turnover. Those films could only offer adrenalin pumping

experience to the spectators as an exchange value for the money they spent. Politics has

been, thus, advertently displaced by economic objectives that eventually consolidate the

power of the dominant ideology.

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Chapter 1

CONFLICTS AND COMPROMISES: IDEOLOGICAL DOMINANCE AND POLITICS OF RESISTANCE IN CINEMA

Cinema is undoubtedly the most popular medium of the present century. Within a span of around one hundred and thirty years after its birth in 1895, cinema has already exerted overwhelming influence upon the people worldwide. Being a cultural product, cinema constantly interacts with people and their lives in complex ways. Its engagement with the mass does have decisive influence on their modes of taste, ways of thinking, and political and cultural behaviour. As a signifying practice it engenders possibilities for various interpretations. Because of its proximity with people, and its pre-eminent stature as a towering item in the whole arena of mass culture, an in-depth analysis of cinema naturally produces discourses on society from which it is made. While it influences society it is also influenced by society. This symbiotic relationship between 'real' and the 'reel' renders it the site of constant cultural investigation. It is a complex and multifarious entity which is circulated among society and consumed by social members according to their tastes and preconceptions. Sometimes it satiates the desire of the people for spectacle and entertainment. Occasionally it poses serious questions about man and his existence. At times it functions as a political tool to resist the power structures and quite often it provides aesthetic experience to the viewers. Like all other art forms cinema acquires different forms in different contexts and is shaped by the convictions of its maker. Its appeal to the masses - and sometimes only the intelligentsia-situates cinema either within the terrain of high culture or along with other products within the mass culture. Filmmakers and critics across the globe approach this medium in different ways according to their proclivities. The majority of them acknowledge the

potential of cinema as a commercial product and treat it as a lucrative medium. Another

sect of filmmakers approaches the medium as a purely aesthetic exercise and tries to

experiment with the genre peculiarities of the medium to enhance the artistic quality of

it. Yet another group of filmmakers exploits the potential of cinema to propagate their

political convictions to resist uneven dynamics of power with a view to attributing

agency to the underprivileged. As a result categorical terms such as commercial/

dominant cinema, parallel/offbeat cinema and political cinema appear in the cinematic

discourses. But these categorisations do not make watertight compartments. A parallel

cinema can also be commercially successful whereas political films often follow the

methodologies of parallel movies. In the particular context of this study categorisation of

the medium into dominant cinema and political cinema makes more sense since such a

division, to a great extent, uncovers the forces of power inherent at the site of

filmmaking and the consequent emergence of counter forces of resistance acting against

them. Mutually contesting, cancelling, and at times supplementing, models of

filmmaking render cinema as a turbulent site where politics, profit and aesthetics are

intertwined with each other in complex relationships. A comprehensive understanding of

this turbulent situation prevalent in the world of cinema is a prerequisite while

attempting to study the representation of communist movement in Malayalam cinema in

relation to the shifting power dynamics along the socio-political contours of Kerala. Such

an attempt uncovers the dynamics of power lying latent within the site of cinema that

categorises the privileged classes as 'insiders' and the rest as 'outsiders.' This sheds

more light on how the communist movement in Kerala was strategically represented in

Malayalam movies over the years.

1.1 Cinema: Technology and Monopoly

The important factor that renders cinema a unique art form is its overwhelming dependence on technology. No other art form is so much dependent on technology as in the case of cinema. An ample technological environment had been a prerequisite for the evolution of cinema as a modern era art form. In 1860 Thomas Alva Edison developed Kinetoscope, a box like viewing device meant for a single customer at a time. The viewing device quickly became popular in amusement centres, Kinetoscope parlours, carnivals, and sideshows for a number of years. The experiments of Etienne Jules Marey in France and Edward Muybridge in America during the 1870s and 1880s paved the way for the development of motion picture camera. Almost at the same time two brothers from France, Augusto Lumiere and Louis Lumiere, invented a device by which they could take photos and process them in the morning and project them in the evening. This device is later known as Lumiere's Projector. The first film made by Lumiere Brothers, *Arrival of the Train at La Ciatot*, was projected on December 28, 1895 in the basement of the Grand Café number 14 Boulevard des Capucines, Paris. The duration of the film was just 49 seconds. The wonder and excitement aroused by the first show of the film revealed cinema's unique capacity to attract popular imagination. The Lumieres were simply capturing events such as a train arriving at a railway station or people leaving a factory after a day's work. But movie camera's ability to reproduce a place, time and atmosphere was so unique that people flocked in front of the café to view this wonderful phenomenon. George Melies, another French filmmaker of the time, on the other hand, exploited film's ability to manipulate reality to create fantasies with illusionary effects. Melies' films like *Voyage to the Moon* (1902) and *The Kingdom of the Fairies* (1903) reveal cinema's ability to transform reality. Edwin S. Potter, known as the inventor of

film editing, produced *The Life of American Fireman* (1903) and *The Great Train Robbery* (1903) which are considered the milestones in the history of cinema. The invention of sound recording machines, technicolour films, sophisticated cameras, editing machinery and digital technology further contributed to the development of film as the most popular art form of the twentieth century. The intervention of the digital technology and cybernetics in the field of filmmaking still accords this privilege to it. That means cinema, as a medium, has been always in the process of evolution along with the various stages of the development of technology.

History of the origin and development of cinema is coterminous with the history of the origin and development of European technological Modernity. Modernity, technology and cinema are inextricably interconnected in terms of their growth and their global expansion. At the same time it should be remembered that European modernity is actually a technological enterprise enunciated by European bourgeoisie. German philosopher Martin Heidegger criticised the instrumentalist view that technology is neutral. The truth unconcealed in technology, according to Heidegger, is determined by humanistic interests and therefore highly alarming. "Heidegger calls this entire calamitous conclusion of the technological modernity 'Enframing' (*Ge-stell*), which means that 'challenging claim,' or that inevitability of technological conditioning, 'which gathers man thither to order the self- revealing as standing reserve" (Dabashi 73). So to speak, technology tempted us to deal with things as resources to be used. Dabashi goes on to explain Heidegger's positions on the relationship between technological modernity and aesthetics: "Technology occasions the *dis-closure* of things in existence, having just been revealed as *instrumental.* So if the only way that things can be revealed is for them to be revealed as instrumental, then technological modernity has spread its

instrumental epistemics beyond mere technology and into the realm of life as a whole, including, indeed in particular, the realm of the aesthetic" (142). Heidegger's perspectives on technology may shed more light upon cinema's unique engagement with reality. Following his views on technology it is reasonable to think that cinema, as the product of technology, captures reality in its own way, as a resource to be used later for the purpose of making profit. As man's relationship with technology is determined by profit motive, he can no longer consciously and rationally control the operation of it. Following Heidegger, Gregory Bruce Smith observes:

> We cannot rebel against [this] technological revelation of reality for we ourselves are revealed to ourselves and understood to ourselves in the same way. We have no alternate way to stand whereby we could take up a critical attitude toward the technological revelation of reality as standing reserve. Consequently modern technology is no mere instrumentality that man can consciously and rationally control by imposing values upon it. We stand within its mode of revealing and cannot stand outside it. (377)

Naturally our claim of being the master of technology proved baseless and man became more and more subservient to technology in his pursuit of profit. It becomes quite obvious that there is umbilical cord relationship between European modernity and technology. As a result the wonder and excitement aroused by this new medium are meticulously exploited for attracting popular attention. Soon the bourgeois class started planning strategies to convert popularity into profit making.

The first to realize the economic potential of the motion picture was Thomas Alva Edison. Apart from projecting films he was more interested in selling his

Kinetoscope. Later, with the active support of Edwin S. Porter, Edison embarked on the projection of his short films. His Kinetoscope began commercial operation in 1894. Lumiere Brothers on the other hand, with the advantage of having a more comfortable and handy camera, the Cinematographe, started to manufacture their invention at home and sought market worldwide. They realised the economic potential of cinema at the time of the projection of their first ever movie in 1895. Lumieres' *Le ciotat* was projected to a group of paying audience and the success of that projection encouraged Lumieres to concentrate on the projection of film to a larger audience. They toured all over Europe with his Cinematographe and made immense riches. They even sent their men all around the world with a direction to shoot and exhibit films locally to earn maximum profit. Their men were even directed to send those footages after screening so that they could sell those footages for the needy. George Melies, better known for his expressionist visual experiments, realised the illusionary power of the medium and entered production. Such earlier initiatives from the precursors of world cinema contributed much to the growth of this new medium despite the fact that their real intention was to exploit its potential for enhancing profit.

Monopolising the various stages of filmmaking was the initial step taken by the precursors of film industry to hold sway over the new medium. Talking about the French filmmaker, Pathe, James Monaco observed: "Unlike his competitors Pathe was able to find large amounts of capital backing, which he used to establish a near monopoly, vertically integrated. He controlled the French film industry from the manufacturer of equipment to the production of films (in his large studio at Vincennes) to distribution and exhibition and his influence was felt widely in other countries as well" (58). Gradually strategies for dominating various phases of filmmaking became the regular practice of

those who were associated with cinema. Patent on technological inventions and innovations, theatre system, star system, film journalism, etc. were strategies experimented by the big players in the field of film industry of which some are still continuing. As Monaco points out, "European film industries were under the pressures of monopoly as early as in the early decades of twentieth century" (266). In America situation was almost similar to that of Europe. By 1912 the Patent Company and the General Film Company controlled more than half of the ten thousand exhibition outlet in the country. Aristides Gazatas describes the tension prevalent in the field of filmmaking due to the urge for monopoly:

> To maximize control over this new economic structure, Edison merged his company with nine other producers into a combine or trust company called the Motion Picture Patents Company. . . .
>
> A number of independent producers, namely Carl Laemmle, William Fox, and Adolph Zukor, openly challenged the monopoly of the trust. Their suits brought about legal and illegal battle for the next six years in what was called the Patents War, in which the trust hired gunmen to seek out the independent producers and try to put them out of business. Some independents sought better locations for all-year shooting and settled in a remote town in California called Hollywood. There in the sunny warm weather they built outdoor sets and historical locales to meet the growing demand for films created by the nickelodeon boom. (24)

Monaco summarises the gravity of the situation as follows: "In all, more than five hundred legal actions were instituted during the first decade of film industry" (260). These observations reveal the fact that cinema had become a major point of commercial

attraction, both in Europe and America, even during the time of its inception. Cinema's ability to attract popular imagination and the prospect of profit accompanying with it prompted filmmakers across Europe and America to experiment with this genre. Italian and French filmmakers introduced the concept of feature films which very quickly replaced short films. The unprecedented financial success of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) by D.W. Griffith underscored the prospect of feature film. This film "set the pattern for the "blockbuster", the film project in which huge sums of money are invested in epic productions with the hope of even huger returns" (Monaco 262). His other films, known as epic melodramas, like *Intolerance* (1916), *Broken Blossoms* (19 19), *Way Down East* (1920), *Orphans of the Storm* (1921) were all financial success stories. On the one hand technological innovations like technicolour, sound track, sophisticated editing, improvised camera etc. improved the experience of filmmaking. On the other such innovations further enhanced the popularity of cinema which ultimately brought about immense profit to filmmakers. Profit always gives rise to monopoly.

Monopolising technology as well as monopolising the entire process of film production, distribution and exhibition in an extensive rate continued. In America businessmen like Adolph Zukor and Jesse Lasky of Paramount Pictures Corporation, Harry Warner, Albert Warner, Sam Warner and Jack L Warner of Warner Brothers, William Fox of Twentieth Century Fox were very soon attracted towards film industry. "The urge to monopolise, however, was irresistible. The Great War immobilised film production in the European countries, and the dominance of France and Italy was soon overcome. Through a series of merges, the new independent American companies moved quickly to supply world markets and consolidated their position at home" (Monaco 262). The emergence of studio system during 1920 and 1930s was a strategic move from

American film industry to dominate the entire gamut of filmmaking and as a result capital was accumulated in Hollywood. The emergence of Hollywood during 1920s and 30s as the stalwart industry with its scintillating array of stars, publicity machinery, governmental support, promotion strategies, psychological influence and technological advancements illustrates how popular imagination can be mobilised and manipulated to monopolise a terrain of huge capital inflow. The dominant paradigm of Hollywood cinema entered the territories of other nations and aggressively consolidated its structural and ideological dominance unchallenged for a considerable time. The vertical structure dominated by the capital interests started having its counterparts in many other nations. Minor replicas of the Hollywood production, distribution and exhibition systems have emerged from various countries. Apart from being a colossal paradigm of filmmaking that exerts an overarching authority over the rest of the world, Hollywood even started infiltrating the cultural territories of third world countries and thereby dismantling the regional industry of those countries. It has been argued that by the 1920s, "35% of its [Hollywood] profits were generated overseas and notably it secured early governmental support as realisation of its importance for trade and cultural promotion became apparent" (De Zoysa and Newman 190). As observed by Semati and Sortirin, in Europe and other third world countries "Hollywood becomes "ours" and the nationalism of cinema collapses into the transnationalism of Hollywood" (180). By expanding its influence across the globe irrespective of the political boundaries of nation states Hollywood could ,on the one hand monopolise trade and disseminate an ideology that is essentially Western, patriarchal, anti-communist, and capitalist. In the like manner dominant film industries of other nations consolidated the ideological dominance of the

powerful class in the respective locations by popularizing entertainment variety of cinematic practices.

The model set forth by the Hollywood industry carries within itself a well-defined pattern of filmmaking that simultaneously reproduces capital and ideology. At the pretext of satiating popular cravings for entertainment the Hollywood model, that infiltrates other nations' cultural boundaries, ensures huge capital return on the one hand and ideological domination of the powerful class on the other. Its remote replica in Indian film industry, known as Bollywood owing to its structural indebtedness to Hollywood, more or less caters to the cause of the Indian bourgeoisie and continuously reinforces the value system perpetuated by the dominant class, i.e., upper caste Hindu feudalists. In India, history of cinema dates back from 1896 when films shot by Lumiere Brothers were shown in public in Mumbai. Films were widely exhibited in India during the heyday of twentieth century under the active interest of filmmakers like J.F. Madan and Abdulla Isufali. The first original full length Indian film, *Raja Harischandra*, was released in 1913 directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. Phalke is hailed as the father of Indian cinema. Most of the earlier films made in India were simply the mechanical reproductions of theatrical initiatives. In addition to that, those films reenacted fictional situations from Indian mythologies. In *Raja Harishchandra*, Phalke invoked a popular Indian mythology of King Harishchandra. He had in mind a political aim rather than an economic one while producing *Raja Harishchandra*. He thought that by invoking an Indian mythology he could instill nationalist spirit within the viewers that could be further channelised into anti-colonial struggle. He was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi and Balgangadhara Tilak, the result of which an undercurrent of nationalism was conspicuously embedded in Phalke's cinematic attempts. So Phalke's cinematic

initiatives were instrumental in constructing a metanarrative of nationalism that is conceived squarely on the idea of geographical boundary. A slew of mythologies followed *Harischandra*, *Mohini Bhasmasura* (1913)*, Sathyavan Savitri* (1914), *Lanka Dahan* (1917), *Sreekrishna Janma,* (1918) and *Kaliya Mardhan* (1919) served taht purpose. Even if Phalke's films were political in nature in terms of their anti-colonial positions, political discourses evident in those movies were not strictly based on the realistic understanding of Indian socio-political conditions. He resorted to mythology as a means to inspire anticolonial sensibility among the exploited Indian masses but he failed to probe the real issue of exploitation already embedded in the Indian society based on the hierarchical structure of caste. In that sense such films were not strictly revolutionary in nature however political they were. P. S. Radhakrishnan observes: "*Raja Harischandra* was an epic representation that can be put forth from the part of the people against company rule. Phalke was neither attracted by the megalomania of the Brahmanical priesthood nor by their anti-people measures. On the contrary, cinema and theatre were presenting such nationalist assets as alternatives to imperialism" (16). Despite the fact that earlier movies in India were instrumental in creating a nationalist consciousness among viewers, a mode of filmmaking either partially or totally subservient to the pressures of economy became dominant in India. J.F.Madan was one among the few who realised the economic potential of cinema and later monopolised the theatre system in Mumbai. He established his company Elphinstone Bioscope Company in 1905. He rented out bioscopic machine and films for the needy. He was successful in converting the contradiction prevalent in the foreign-indigenous binary in his favour. P. S. Radhakrishnan gives a graphic account of the way J.F. Madan had monopolised the theater system during 1920s:

When he [J.F. Madan] realised the change in mindset of the viewers he reconstructed his theatres. During that time 175 theatres were screening movies that were imported by Madan. Among them were the prints of First World War he bought from British Film Company. He had built huge theatres for entertaining British soldiers by using war time concessions. Later he signed contracts with Metro Pictures and United Artists. The terms and conditions of the contracts were aimed at appeasing the interest of the Anglophile urban class. Indian Silent films were excluded from the production and distribution empire of Madan.[1] (12)

 The one-sided monopoly enjoyed by Madan was later challenged by Phalke before the Indian Cinematographic Investigation Committee lead by the British government. Phalke was apprehensive of the upper hand being enjoyed by the foreign movies over the Indian silent movies. Madan, by owning one third of the film theatres, could put Indian film industry in crisis by screening imported foreign movies in all his theatres. In Calcutta, Royal Bioscope Company run by Heera Lal realised the market potential of the film version of plays and started filming some scenes of his plays and screened them for the public. Even Phalke, a practitioner of anti-colonial politics in cinema, did realize the economic potential of cinema when his film *Lankadahan* (1917) grossed unexpectedly. Hollywood model studio system was prevalent in India during the 1930s with huge studios like Madan Theaters and New Theatres held an upper hand in production. The introduction of sound technology brought about tremendous changes in the field of filmmaking. Cinema has become the most popular form of entertainment among both the urban and rural population. The first ever Indian talkie *Alam Ara* (Dir.Irani, 1930) hit the box office that grossed Rupees 2.89 billion. *Indrasabha* (Dir.

Madan, 1932) came out with 72 songs. *Shirin Farhad* (1931) produced by Madan Theatres with 17 songs reaped huge success. That trend, in turn, gave birth to a kind of film genre that can be termed as musicals. K.P.A. Samad says that the success of *Shirin Fahad* "encouraged Madan Theatres to include 22 songs in *Laila Majnu* (1931) and forty one songs in the next film *Sakunthala* (1931). These two films repeated the success story of the former films. With these films a formula with familiar plot, stars, melodious songs and attractive backgrounds came into existence. This trend is still continuing"[2] (46). It is quite natural that repeated box office success stories of similar cinematic attempts would give birth to a formula that would be imitated by others till it reaches a point of saturation. The treatment of the theme, the stars, the genre type etc. would hold the popular imagination for some time consequent of which the filmmakers will be forced to reproduce the same with an aim to garner profit.

The 1930s saw a fascination for social themes and feudal patriarchy was rigorously questioned by filmmakers like Bimal Roy. Historical films with patriotic undertones started projecting national identity. Films like *Sikandra* (1941), *Bandhan* (1940), and *Kismat* (1943) were instrumental in constructing a national identity that had catalytic influence in the struggle for independence. Other films like, *Shaheed* (1948) and *Mother India* (1957) were characterised by their allegiance to the concept of free India. As long as those films were made within the garguantan structure of production industry, priority was often given to entertain the viewers rather than politicizing them. It can be seen that, gradually Indian cinema tilted towards the pressures of the market and indulged in producing popular cinema without acknowledging either the aesthetic aspect or political possibilities of the new art form. The film started addressing the taste of the visually illiterate masses, newly migrated from rural retreat to the urban space in search

of jobs, without attempting to transform their sensibility. Instead of challenging their level of intelligence popular cinema started producing trivial visual narratives meant for superficial appreciation consequent to which romantic melodramas mixed with fragile social realism dominated by music became the principal film genre of Bombay Cinema. Bollywood cinema became a vulgar combination of songs, dance, stunts, and other popular ingredients. Raveendran, the renowned Malayalam Marxist Critic of culture, made the following observation on Indian cinema: "Indian cinema, may be because of its commitment to entertain the masses, has borrowed formal and modal ingredients from Indian folk tradition. Story with a beginning, middle, and an end, ethereal heroes and heroines, plain and explicit thematic statements, musical simplicity, lengthy execution, exaggerated colour and sound, are all attributes that make cinema a folk performance even today"[3] (202). Since the target audience of such movies was the urban masses recently migrated from villages in search of jobs a form of cinema was getting shaped that ultimately entertains the mass audience. As a result movies became replete with phantasmagoria of visual images that pushed the spectators into the abysmal pit of inactivity. Such images were consumed by newly urbanised population without any intellectual resistance as their prime objective was to get relieved of their daily burden. The illusory world of cinema tempted the masses with its unreal settings, music, costumes, larger than life heroes and heroines. As it has been witnessed in the case of Hollywood, cinema in India was also carried away by business motives as big tycoons from the world of business tried their luck in cinema. K. P. A. Samad rightly pointed out, "After partition many artists and businessmen from newly born Pakistan had migrated to Mumbai. Artists and war beneficiaries from other parts of India also flowed to Mumbai. Cinema production from Calcutta totally shifted to Mumbai. Mumbai became the Mecca

of filmmakers" (48). As in the case of Hollywood that exerted as overarching influence upon other nations' industry, Mumbai film industry gradually swallowed other Indian language films. Bollywood colonised most of the Indian regional film industries like Thulu, Konkani, Kashmiri, Rajasthani, Bhojpuri, etc. Most of these regional industries are in moribund stage. Bollywood, with its marketing strategies and huge capital backing, monopolised the entire process of filmmaking. Unlike other languages, Hindi cinema enjoys huge spectatorship. There were producers who could effectively utilise the business possibility provided by the Mumbai film industry. It has a very powerful foreign market. It is said that Bollywood has become a safe haven for even underground mafia kings to invest their countless black money to convert it into white money.

When Bollywood expands its industry base with slew of box office hits wrapped in musicals, family melodramas, thrillers and mythologicals that transcend both the cultural and geographical boundaries of India, the lives of major chunk of Indian population are either ignored or misrepresented in cinema. Indian dominant cinema has been reluctant to accommodate discourses pertaining to the lives of poor and destitute multitudes that comprised of more than eighty percentages of Indian population. They are normally considered cinematic outsiders and their predicament is neglected as non-cinematic. It is in this context that the films of Satyajit Rai, Ritwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani and the likes stood apart. Ritwik Ghatak, a maverick filmmaker from Bengal, delineated in raw visual terms the penury and social fragmentation of post-partition Bengal in his films like *Nagarik* (1952), *Subarna Rekha* (1962)*,* and *Jookti Thako ar Ghappo* (1974). Most of his films are visual attempts to assimilate the struggles for survival of immigrants from Eastern Bengal. It was Mrinal Sen who had radicalised the act of filmmaking by introducing many techniques like

voice overs, Brechtian alienation, intermittent breaking of the narrative, documentary shots, and film within film. Mrinal Sen can be considered the first Indian political filmmaker who was influenced by leftwing political positions and radical leftist ideology. He refused to follow the pompous and over embellished paradigm of Bollywood with its mixture of rapid action, violence, erotic dancing and singing. In addition to that he introduced a new way of treating political issues by defictionalising his themes. His films like *Bhuvan Shome* (1969), *Interview* (1971), and *Kolkata-71* (1972) were daring explorations of the class realities in Indian villages. It was *Bhuvan Shome* which is considered the forerunner of New Cinema film movement in India. He made films during the heyday of Nexalite movement in Bengal which remained as the backdrop of most of his films like *Padatik* (1973). Mrinal Sen's films carefully depicted the socio-political commotion experienced by the politically intense angry young men of the seventies in Naxalite Kolkata. He was a strict adherent of Marxist aesthetics and tried to incorporate political debates in his movies. Like the proponents of Latin American Third cinema he invited audience's active intervention in producing meanings in his visual narratives. Even though films made by other filmmakers like Kumar Shahani or Mani Kaul were failures in terms of box office collection, their films were successful in establishing a counter aesthetic sensibility which was essential for challenging the onslaught of mainstream Bollywood films with preconceived market formulae. Films of Shyam Benegal (*Ankur* [1974]*, Nishant* [1975], and *Bhumika* [1977]) and Govind Nihalani (*Akrosh* [1980] and *Ardh Satya* [1983]), were also socially relevant in terms of the political debates those films could generate. But such attempts are seen losing their momentum when the film industry is being carried away by the call of the capital. "New Wave and the Middle Cinema wilted under the impact of multi-channel television,

commercial cinema, the commercialisation of the National Film Development

Corporation (N F D C) and above all the abysmal lack of exhibition outlets. The gradual

decline of the film society movement too had a role in the fading away of Parallel

cinema" (Varghese 36).

Some of the regional film industries in India which were more or less eclipsed by

the gargantuan big brother, Bollywood, made some inroads in politicizing the art of

filmmaking by introducing novel ideas like voice overs, long takes, spectator's

participation, slow pace, broken narratives etc. in addition to their inclination towards

political themes. Filmmakers like Jabbar Patel (Maharashtra), Ketan Mehta (Gujarat), B.

S. Narayan (Andhra Pradesh), K. Balchandran, Bharati Raja, Balu Mahendra (Tamil

Nadu), Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan and John Abraham (Kerala) from other

regional film industries approached the medium without being bothered about the

economic aspect of it. Cinematic initiatives from Bengal and Kerala stood apart from the

rest of the regional language cinemas in terms of experimental initiatives those

filmmakers pursued. Most of those filmmakers have enjoyed international acclaim. Rai

won Academy Honorary award and France's Legion of Honour award and Mrinal Sen

won French distinction of Commander of the Order of Arts and Letters and the Russian

Orders of Friendship. But, as time goes by, a gradual deterioration of Bengali cinema in

terms of aesthetic quality and political content is taken place as a result of which it tilted

towards the demands of the market. Later Bengali films have started imitating Hindi

films in order to guard themselves from being marginalised by Bollywood industry.

Bollywood, with its mammoth production units, huge distribution circuits and exhibition

systems, spreads all across the cultural geography of India pushing the other regional

industries to the fringes. Today it is inextricably linked with the market by its advertorial

activities, stardom, product promotion, publicity stunts etc. It is intertwined with the movement of other products along the trade routes. Occasional attempts of resistance are ignored and neglected not only by the media but also by film critics and even by the policy makers of the cultural industry. Indian cinema, as in the case of cinema in other nations, reiterates the dominance of capital over aesthetics and politics. This statement is true in the case of Malayalam films too.

Kerala society is largely considered a political society because of historical reasons. It witnessed numerous uprisings from the deprived classes aimed to attain equality and social justice. Most of those movements were directly or indirectly influenced by the Communist Party which was officially established in 1940. The leaders of this organisation were able to enjoy popular support that eventually brought Communist Party into power in the first ever election held in Kerala in 1957. As a result the sufferings of the exploited classes became a dominant theme in all forms of cultural discourses, be it theatre, literature or cinema. Social realism was the predominant literary practice during the 1940s and 50s which had its remote reflections in social melodramas made during the same time. But, at the pretext of providing a platform for political discussions, it can be seen that, those social melodramas performed reactionary ideological function by grossly rarefying the effective politics lying latent within them. In effect cinema maintained an ambivalent position in dealing with the idea of the Left. Even though the Party enjoyed huge popular support, Malayalam cinema was reluctant to accept explicit political themes because the dominant ideology represented by feudal landlord power relations considered the proponents of communist ideology as 'outsiders' as they posed threat to the status quo. Films produced during 1950s dealt with themes of social equality and social justice but, since such themes were placed in melodramatic

filmic context, the spectators were denied opportunities to encounter the worst forms of such social evils and exploitations in a realistic way. During the second half of the 1960s direct political themes were brought into the filmic narratives. Films like *Thulabharam, Ningalenne Communistakki, Mooladhanam,* and *Punnapravayalar* were released in successive years. Here again, the representation of the communist movement was done only after diluting the political content in a significant way. But during the 1970s - the heydays of leftist extremism -Malayalam cinema underwent drastic changes and it started addressing direct political issues. Filmmakers have started disregarding the formula-ridden conventional patterns of dominant cinema and began to experiment with the genre peculiarities of the medium. Once again it provided with fertile soil for accommodating political discourses that disturbed feudal and bourgeois interests and aesthetics. Some of the films produced during that time daringly incorporated explicitly political dialogues in a totally unconventional cinematic language. The political outsiders were re-emerged and asserted themselves in those films in an altogether different form. But it can be observed that such attempts were quickly diluted by the active intervention of the popular mainstream films that ultimately displaced the very idea of political outsiders. Containment strategies were subtly executed and the whole idea of revolution is counter posed with the eternal values of peace and serenity.

It can be assumed that in every society a mechanism is always at work that tends to guard itself against any interventions of alternate belief systems. Such a mechanism is capable of converting social, economic, political and cultural entities of that society for its own favour. As the product of bourgeois modernity, and because of its close proximity to capital, ideological servility to the dominant class is always inherent in the domain of cinema. In the context of mainstream Malayalam movies, cinema functions as

the carrier of dominant ideology either by disengaging with political themes or by diluting the political intensity of counter ideology. The idea of the political outsider is evolved out of the convoluted socio-political conditions of Kerala characterised by feudal social system of the early 20thcentury followed by bourgeois capitalism of the post-1950s and the cinematic representations of the same in different phases of its evolution were greatly manipulated by the dominant ideology comprised of the state, feudalism and bourgeois capitalism. In order to uncover the dynamics of power and ideological tendencies operative in the field of Malayalam dominant cinema, it needs to be evaluated by placing it within the broader spectrum of world cinema.

1.2. Ideological Versus Political: Cinema as a Site of Constant Conflicts

It can be seen that, as the product of technological modernity, cinema provides the emerging bourgeois class with a suitable platform for accumulating capital. Production methods and stylistic, thematic, and marketing aspects of cinema are conceived in order to ensure maximum return from the industry. Expressing loyalty to the dominant ideology in all these aspects of filmmaking guarantees popular attraction towards cinema as the idea of the popular is an ideological construct of the dominant class. At the same time, it must not be ignored that, like all other art forms cinema can also be considered an effective medium for propagating ideas and political convictions of the filmmakers. One way or the other cinema negotiates the complex relationship between man and his external environment. Environment, in this context, is the sum total of the complex amalgam of social, cultural, political and economic relationships exists among people. So, explicitly or implicitly, cinema deals with these relationships by situating the viewers in a narrative context that may be either realistic or imaginary based on the attitude of the filmmaker. In that sense cinema can be negotiated as a politico-

economic institution where the claims of both politics and economics conflate each other and render it a tumultuous site. As an art form cinema can also be looked at as a social document however negligible its political engagements are. It reflects society in general. Whatever be the nature of cinema, one way or other, it represents/distorts reality in its own way. Since politics is embedded in reality in all its nuances, representation/ distortion of reality is also an attempt in political discourse. So cinema can also be approached as an art form where discourse on politics is either explicitly or implicitly embedded. "Although film is predominantly perceived as a cultural discourse, social and political discourses are, of course, equally present," (88) observes Susan Hayward. But in order to represent or attempt to represent reality through film, a filmmaker needs to invest money. In other words, cinema provides a space where the demands of both politics and economics confront constantly. As a political institution committed to social issues cinema tries to expose the imbalance in power relations evident within the socio-political environment where people in general inhabit and as an economic endeavor it constantly tries to conceal such realities and attempts to improvise its genre peculiarities in order to pursue profit. But a close observation of the entire history of filmmaking will expose the fact that cinema, by and large, has been more subservient to the demands of economics than the demands of politics and aesthetics. It is a fact explicitly articulated by the apostles of the entertainment industry that mainstream cinema is produced for the passive consumption of the spectators. The economic viability of the mainstream cinema is thus decided by the spectators' desire for pleasure. "Cinema in this respect becomes an exchange commodity based on pleasure and capital gain-pleasure in exchange for money" (Hayward 16). The theme, style of making, formulae adopted and character representations are all shaped by the social forces being at play in the society. Complying

with the popular taste is always a prerequisite for capital. Since cinema requires huge capital, anything and anybody capable of pumping money decides the overall nature of filmmaking. Even in Hollywood, "Financing is difficult to find for political works, indeed for any work which in form or content deviates from the standard comedic or melodramatic conventions of realism. Radical variations in form and content are condemned as being "unrealistic" and not entertaining. The mainstream cinema in Hollywood and elsewhere has always promoted the dominant ideology" (Varghese 23).

In such contexts the creative freedom of the artists will be grossly compromised. Filmmakers are forced to employ certain tactics that ensure capital return. As a result, formula- ridden movies are produced one after the other that retain more or less same thematic as well as stylistic pattern. Formation of type characters, stereotypical representation of certain groups, and superficial delineation of human relationships are all results of such compromises. The value system of the powerful group in a society will always have its bearing upon the cultural products it produces. In the context of cinema, because of its virtue of being a mass medium, it is quite clear that the interventions of the social forces are stronger and irresistible. The abstract system of ideas and values of a particular social group who dominates the social system and shared by the other members of the society without resistance is called the ideology of that society. As in the case of all art forms, in cinema, especially because of its overdependence on huge capital, the ideological predispositions of a society determine the stylistic, thematic and formalistic aspects of them. While doing so the dominant ideology preserves the value system that caters its dominance and disapproves any attempt that destabilises it. For example, the Hollywood film industry always elevates the white American male in the privileged positions and female/ black/characters are represented as weak and flat. The

script, camera angles, dialogues, lighting and costumes are all designed to accomplish this objective. One who wishes to digress from this conventional paradigm normally has to confront many hurdles like the mobilisation of funding, ensuring the participation of leading casts, finding out distributors and finally getting theatres for the exhibition. So the overarching influence of the dominant ideology always weakens the less powerful groups who attempt to experiment with the medium to conceive a counter aesthetic discourse and forces them to accept either the hegemony of the dominant class or to get perished.

According to Louis Althusser, the French Post-Marxist thinker, the ideology of a given society would be the ideology of the dominant class of that society. Talking about the repressive machinery of the state, Althusser identified two forms of super structural state apparatus, one is Repressive State Apparatus and the other is Ideological State Apparatus. By Repressive State Apparatus he meant Police, state, military, church etc. and by Ideological state apparatus he meant the educational ISA, the communication ISA, the family ISA, the legal ISA, the cultural ISA, etc. Althusser laid down two important differences between these two apparatuses. For him "while there is one Repressive State Apparatus, there is a plurality of Ideological State Apparatuses'. While the former 'belongs entirely to the public domain', 'much the larger part of the Ideological State Apparatuses (in their apparent dispersions) are a part, on the contrary, of the private domain. Churches, parties, trade union, families, some schools, most newspapers, cultural ventures, etc.; etc. are private" (Althusser 97). It is through these Ideological State Apparatuses that the interest of the dominant ideology is transacted as it is "attenuated and concealed, even symbolic" (98). Thus dominant ideology finds its expressions in all forms of cultural practices including cinema.

According to Althusser, Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), interpellate

individuals as subjects: that is, as pre-existing structures, ISAs function to

constitute the individual as subjects to the ideology. ISAs manifest themselves as

the institutions of the state. . . . The individual is, therefore, an effect of the ISAs,

not an agent. As subject-effects, individuals give meaning to ideology by

colluding with or acting according to it. . . . Applied to film this means that

cinema, in terms of meaning production, positions the spectator as a subject-

effect who takes as real the image emanating from the screen. (Hayward 26)

Thus meaning is received, but not constructed, by the subject. By passively receiving the

meanings generated by the filmic narrative the ideologically subservient spectator

facilitates the perpetual reproduction of the values of the dominant ideology. Being the

carrier of the interests of the powerful class and also as the most popular art form,

cinema, thus, performs ideological functions. It is one of the most successful cultural

tools for the dissemination of dominant ideology without being explicitly ideological.

Louis Althusser defines ideology as a "practice through which men and women live their

relations to the real conditions of their existence" which is not a "conscious' process;

ideology is 'profoundly unconscious" (233) in its mode of operation. The inhabitants of a

particular value system naturally assimilate that value system as their own. "Ideology do

not just convince the oppressed people that all is well with the world, they also convince

the ruling groups that exploitation and oppression are really quite different acts of

universal necessity" (Storey 72) . It provides false solutions and believes.

In movies that perpetuate the ideology of the dominant class, a parallel reality is

constructed in fictitious terms to suit the claims of the dominant ideology. They

accomplish this objective by means of manipulating the diegetic world of cinema. Anthony Easthope argues:

> What the camera in fact registers is the vague, unformulated, untheorised, unthoughtout world of the dominant ideology. Cinema is one of the languages through which the world communicates itself to itself. They constitute its ideology for they reproduce the world as it is filtered through ideology… So when we set out to make a film, from the very first shot, we are encumbered by the necessity of reproducing things not as they really are, but as they appear when refracted through the ideology. (46)

The symbiotic relationship between cinema and ideology has been under critical scrutiny over the years. Cultural critics' perspective on cinema as a cultural product opened up numerous tendencies that evaluate the ideological functions of cinema in a substantial way. Jean-Louis Comolli and Jean Narboni have also approached cinema as an ideological product:

> What is a film? On the one hand it is a particular product, manufactured within a given economic relations, and involving labour (which appears to the capitalist as money) to produce – a condition to which even 'independent' filmmakers and the new cinema are a subject –assembling a certain number of workers for this purpose (even the director whether he is Moullet or Oury, is in the last analysis only a film worker). It becomes transformed into a commodity, possessing exchange value, which is realised by the sale of tickets and contracts and governed by the law of the market. On the other hand, as a result of being a

material product of the system, it is also an ideological product of the system

which in France means capitalism. (24)

Comolli and Narboni here try to underscore the intricate relationship between ideology,

cinema and capital. They counter the argument that all cultural products are produced in

order to satiate the demands of the cultural consumers:

Certainly there is such a thing as public demand, but 'what the public wants'

means 'what the dominant ideology wants'. The notion of a public and its taste

was created by the ideology to justify and perpetuate itself. And this public can

only express itself via the thought pattern of the ideology. The whole thing is a

closed circuit, endlessly repeating the same illusion. (28)

For them the idea of public demand is also an ideological construct. It is the capital that

ultimately decides and set agendas for the propagation of the dominant value system.

One of the definitions defines ideology as "ideas which help to legitimate a

dominant political power" (Eagleton 14). According to the above definition the

dominant power tries to legitimate itself by promoting values and beliefs congenial to it.

It naturalises and universalises such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and

inevitable. The dominant power denigrates ideas which might challenge it and excludes

rival forms of thought. For example, during the Second World War Hollywood made

new combat films to fight a psychological war against the enemies of the United States.

New trends in filmmaking emerged from European cinema were meticulously exploited

by them. During the time of Cold War, it is argued that American war paranoia was

created by Hollywood to construct pseudo nationalism:

. . . Storylines very often revolved around the idea that anyone – your husband, your son, your daughter, etc. – could turn into a Communist. For instance, in the movie *Conspirator* (1949) by director Victor Saville, Elizabeth Taylor's character shockingly learns her husband is a Communist spy agent. In other films such as *My Son John* (1952), families are broken up by one member's allegedly brainwashed behaviour of allying with the Communists. Movies as a result become an effective device to portray the traditional American family who must face painful treason due to communism. (*Cold*)

So keeping communist ideology out of the realm of film discourses as the outsiders was started in Hollywood as a part of its conservative agenda which was later spread out to other industries as well. Films like *The Red Menace* (1945), and *The Girl in the Kremlin* (1957) replete with anti-communist ideology deeply imprinted in the political psyche of the mainstream bourgeois capitalists.

But power cannot always maintain itself forever. The less powerful may tend to challenge the more powerful and thereby making the social scenario more turbulent and chaotic. Conflicting and contradictory ideological discourses often encounter each other for social legitimacy. Power manifests itself in various forms like state, family, culture and politics. So power tries to preserve its dominance by actively intervening in these institutional forms in subtle ways. Subtle interventions in the field of such institutional mechanisms always maintain power in the hands of certain classes. It is against this ideological domination, manifested in the form of capital, that political filmmakers have to fight against. In order to subvert the well-established, well-circulated, and well-consumed dominant model, the political filmmakers needed to think about unconventional ways of funding and had to undertake rigorous experimentation with the

formalistic aspects of the medium. A counter hegemonic aesthetics is the only panacea for effectively defending the onslaught of capital in the field of artistic expressions. To politicise the field of filmmaking strenuous efforts from the part of the filmmakers are needed. Critics like Walter Benjamin were dubious about the artistic fundamentalism of the movie makers of the time. For him film, as a mechanical product, should politically demystify the aura inherent in the traditional art form. According to Benjamin, capitalism resorts to the strategy of aestheticisation of politics. He realised the danger ingrained in the notion of 'art for art sake'. In his monumental work "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin argues that this notion was inadvertently a dangerous supporter of apolitical forces, particularly of fascist politics. He says, "The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetic into political life" (Benjamin, *Work* 222). His argument is that such a view encouraged political disengagement that aided the interest of those who wanted to divert the masses away from political action. For Benjamin "the First World apolitical artistic *avant-garde* are promoting anti-revolutionary ideological tendencies" (Ben-Shaul 86). By employing esoteric artistic expressions they alienated major section of the general public from this medium. So those aesthetically inclined filmmakers failed to portray the imbalance of power relations existing in the socio-cultural milieu of their production. Benjamin preferred politicising art other than aestheticising it. The *avant-garde* filmmakers on the one hand, and the exponents of film industry, manifested in all its magnitude in Hollywood, on the other, constantly disseminate apolitical views and thereby perform its ideological function as the mouthpiece of dominant ideology.

As a medium always under the dictates of capital, cinema can never fulfil the creative potential of the filmmakers. Horkheimer and Adorno have already observed that

"Technology opens up unlimited opportunity for art in the future and even in the poorest motion pictures there are moments when such opportunities are strikingly apparent. But the same principle that has opened up these opportunities also ties them to big business" (75). This business orientation lying latent within the terrain of filmmaking makes it impossible for a committed artist to move along a creative trajectory of his own design. The constraints imposed by the interventions of the capital usually limit the aspirations of the filmmaker in such a way that a realistic depiction of the socio-cultural environment of the artist remains unassailable. Consequently they are forced to create an illusory world far removed from the actual world they are situated in. Apart from being in full control over the extra-genre entities like technology, production and distribution circuits, the apostles of industry designed a paradigm of filmmaking-both thematically and structurally-that disregarded all kinds of resistance forms of politics. Spectators are induced for total involvement throughout the movie and thereby getting alienated from the real world. For example, the dominant genres of films in Hollywood during 1930s and 40s were Westerns, Musicals, Horror films, Gangster films, comedies and Film Noir. Those films were characterised by their critical disengagements with political discourses. Most of the Hollywood films produced during these times became subservient to the cause of the capitalist ideology, distancing themselves from realistically social themes. The ideological hegemony that renders the idea of politics as neutral or irrelevant pervades discourses pertaining to cinema. A culture of filmmaking that prioritised American values more than anything else gradually conquered the conscience of people across the globe by means of structural and thematic improvisations and extra-genre strategies like sophisticated marketing techniques, trade related agreements and government subsidies. Ideology wrapped in scintillating visuals is being exported to

other countries so that people around the globe share similar views pertaining to international politics. In his reading of *Rambo* (1985; Dir. Sylvester Stallone) Douglas Kellner pointed out that"…the militarism and imperialism of the film serves capitalist interest by legitimating intervention in such places as South East Asia, Central America or wherever (3)." He further observed that films like *Rocky* (1976), *Star Wars* (1980), and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), and *Superman* (1978) were actually nurturing the political current that ultimately catered to the cause of the capitalists and conservatives. Such films, produced in the guise of political films, were also thematically apolitical and ideologically reactionary. Those Films which claim to have "explicitly political content but which do not effectively criticise the ideological system in which they are embedded because they unquestioningly adopt its language and its imagery. They express, reinforce, strengthen the very thing they set out to denounce" (Kellner 4). Such films cannot be labeled as political because ultimately they are the carriers of the values of the dominant class. Since the majority of films belong to this category, apolitical reception of reactionary values is rampant in the field of popular versions of dominant cinema.

1.3. The Idea of Political Cinema: Parallel Forms of Resistance

Filmmakers across the globe are radically different in their approach towards the medium based on their political positions and aesthetic inclinations. An overarching paradigm of filmmaking carefully developed and propagated by Hollywood has always been dominating- of course with occasional vicissitudes- the other smaller industries of Europe and Asia in a significant way. At the same time an elitist kind of *avant-garde* filmmakers have tried to develop a unique language for cinema by experimenting with the medium. This attempt from European filmmakers, to a great extent, perfected the

medium but was instrumental in alienating the ordinary people from cinema. Even though some of the *avant-garde* filmmakers were influenced by Marxist perspectives, they have fallen into the pit of too much formalism that diminished their popularity. Joseph Stalin was critical about Dziga Vertov and Sergei Eisenstein because of their experimental filmmaking without considering popular tastes. Theoretical positions on Latin American Third Cinema categorically dismissed both *avant-garde* cinema and First Cinema in their attempt to uphold a genuine political cinema with popular support in all aspects of filmmaking. The proponents of Third Cinema were greatly influenced by Marxist positions on society, art, politics and power. They conceived dominant cinema, as represented by Hollywood, as the realm of false illusion and attempted for a realistic portrayal of social relations without revolving around a single protagonist. Those films were able to maintain a dialogue between the medium and the social reality of the time without being fallen into the trap of superficial sentimentalism. Instead of forgetting what is happening around, the audience realistically confronts the hierarchical system that exploits the ordinary working class people. Latin American Third Cinema, characterised by their anti-colonial standpoints, minimised the presence of fiction as far as possible. Fiction, music, Choreography, impeccable cinematography, melodrama and high sentimentalism were all anathema to Third Cinema. European and Latin American filmmakers Jean Godard, Fernando Solanas, Getino, Gabriel Rocha and the likes have also tried to invoke radical political elements in their films. Godard was actively involved in radical collectivist filmmaking under the banner Dziga Vertov Group (DVG). In India, films of Mrinal Sen, Govind Nihalani and Shyam Benegal are deeply political as their films were conceived not as a flight from reality but as a direct confrontation with it.

It is very difficult to define what a political film really is. In the particular context of this study, films that engage the imbalance of power relations prevalent in society in an explicit way and attempt to realistically portray such imbalances can be considered political films. The primary objective of political films is not profit or monetary outcome. Instead it probes in realistic terms the reasons behind the unequal distribution of power and economy. Filmmakers worldwide, from the time of the inception of the genre itself, were divided on the basis of their approach towards politics: One who reckoned the political possibility of the medium to transform the society and others who explored its potential to further capital. Those who consider the medium for engaging politics had to confront the demands of the huge capital it required and its consequent claim for dominance. Very few could actually transcend the pressures exerted by the capital and made films according to their own convictions. Those filmmakers who are insulated from the clutches of capital and produce films with a view to questioning the existing imbalance in power relations can be called political filmmakers. They consider film as a vehicle to subvert the hierarchy that is instrumental in producing such imbalance; they are committed to bring forth a revolutionary spirit in their movies which, they think, will instill a revolutionary spirit within the spectators. Fernando Birri, Argentine political filmmaker and thinker says that they need:

A cinema which develops them.

A cinema which brings them consciousness, which awakens consciousness; which clarifies matter; which strengthens the revolutionary consciousness of those among them who already possess this; which fires them; which disturbs, worries, shocks and weakens those who have a 'bad conscience', a reactionary consciousness; which defines profiles of national, Latin American identity; which

is authentic; which is anti-oligarchic and anti-bourgeois at the national level, and anti-colonial and anti-imperialist at the international level; which is pro-people and anti-people; which helps the passage from under development to development, from sub- stomach to stomach, from sub-culture to culture, from sub-happiness to happiness, from sub-life to life.

Our purpose is to create a new person, a new society, a new history and therefore a new art and a new cinema. Urgently. (41)

Here Birri tries to enlist, the features of a true political cinema. Films either imported from Hollywood or made in lieu with Hollywood model conquered the markets of Latin America during the thirties and forties. Such movies culturally enslaved the Latin American public which indirectly legitimised imperialism under Peronism. Cinema, by means of camera, with its ability to capture material reality as it is, tends to make the viewers believe that whatever they see on the screen is a replica of reality. By carefully employing genre possibilities peculiar to cinema, this material reality is subtly distorted to suit the cause of the dominant ideology. For Birri,

The problem is that cinema is a cultural product, a product of the superstructure. So it is subject to all the superstructure's distortions. In the case of cinema these are exacerbated further than in the other arts due to its nature as an industrial art. In countries like ours, which is in the throes of incipient industrialisation, political shocks make this condition chronic. (42)

In order to shake the masses out of their political slumber the revolutionary filmmakers had to invent a visual language for themselves. For him a new consciousness needs to be developed among the people by watching truly political movies. Such movies should

have the capacity to liberate people from their cultural enslavement. Stylistic innovations, unconventional production and exhibition methodologies, and experimentations in form are required to challenge the dominant form of commercial cinema.

A movie cannot be called political merely on the ground that it engages a political theme. There are plenty of examples in the history of filmmaking where mainstream filmmakers have filmed political issues. But while doing so the interests of the filmmakers usually tilt towards commercial aspect of the issue rather than the political side of it. In such cases politics seems to be pushed into the background and ideological interest of the powerful class assumes predominance. Such films thrive on emotion rather than political consciousness from the part of the spectator. Talking about Gillo Pontecorvo's political movie *The Battle of Algiers* Mike Wayne underscores this point: "This then is a spectatorship that is not being asked to be conscious of the politics of identification; it is an identification made largely at the level of the emotions" (18). It is not on the emotional aspect that a true political film should concentrate but, it "should seek to bring cognitive and intellectual powers of the spectator into play" (18).

The entire mode of production including financing, planning, production and distribution should be politicised and the filmmaker should be creative enough to sever himself/herself from conventional style of filmmaking by reinventing new ways of sound design, camera work, editing and so on. Political messages wrapped in mainstream popular narratives, in effect, will be ideologically pro-capitalist. For Godard, making films politically is more important than making political films. As suggested by Anthony Easthope in *Contemporary Film Theory*, "They [political filmmakers] do not just discuss an issue, reiterate it, paraphrase it, but use it to attack the ideology. Politically effective if

it is linked with a breaking down of the traditional way of depicting reality" (47).

Political films should evolve innovative and unique language of their own by means of

carefully crafted camera angles, shots, editing, etc. in order to subvert the dominant

paradigm of filmmaking. Talking about the camera style of Godard, Brian Robert

Henderson notes that "Godard, like Eisenstein, repudiates the individualist concept of the

bourgeois hero and his tracking shots reflect this. His camera serves no individual and

prefers none to another" (424). He goes further to compare the style of camera

movements in Godard's and Fellini's film: "Difference between Fellini and Godard:

Fellini introduces depth, Godard avoids depth. Fellini's camera affects his characters

while Godard's camera does not affect the reality it unfolds. Fellini's tracks are often

subjective; Godard's tracks are long shots" (424). Godard tries to dismantle the idea of

filmmaking as an interpretation of bourgeois world. The illusion of three dimensional

spaces is replaced by two dimensionalities of the screen. For him screen provides a two

dimensional space without depth and intricate spacing. Spectators are not tempted to

being lead to another world through the window of the screen. Here screen limits the

viewer's willingness to submit himself/herself to the illusory world of the fiction. The

very idea of bourgeois world view is thus rigorously challenged by his camera:

> What are the implications of these shifts from three dimensions to two, from
>
> depth to flatness? An ideological interpretation suggests itself-composition – in-
>
> depth- projects a bourgeois world infinitely deep, rich, complex, ambiguous, and
>
> mysterious. Godard's flat frames collapse this world into two-dimensional
>
> actuality; thus reversion to a cinema of one plane is demystification, an assault on
>
> the bourgeois world- view and self- image. (Henderson 436)

The basic drive that all leftist films share in general is that of dismantling the dominant ideology by inventing and employing counter aesthetic initiatives, both structurally and thematically. A true political movie, thus, has to generate counter discourses on ideology by moving away from the accepted mode of filmmaking. One has to redefine mainstream aesthetical positions and reorganise the conventions regarding the use of camera, lighting, editing etc. to transcend the constraints imposed by ideology. A counter filmmaking culture was later evolved from the tumultuous site of these countries that challenged the ideological dominance unleashed by the Hollywood film industry. This counter culture was extensively indebted to the Marxist theory of class and cultural aesthetics that reiterated the inseparable link between an art object and its mode and historical moment of production. Filmmakers from Latin American countries developed a kind of film culture during 1960s and 1970s that thoroughly destabilised the overarching paradigm of Hollywood that "not only imposes its model of form and language, but also industrial, commercial and technical structures which include the festivals, magazines and even film schools which perpetuate its values" (Chanan 3). Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino (Argentina), Glauber Rocha (Brazil), Julio Garcia Espinosa (Cuba) and others were the major figures from Latin America who challenged the dominant model of Hollywood and the consequent forms of imperialism. Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino wrote a manifesto, entitled "Towards a Third Cinema", for the unique kind of filmmaking they intend to pursue. They termed their style of filmmaking as Militant Cinema or Guerrilla Cinema which was,

> A collective endeavor that opposed itself not only to First Cinema but also to the
> prevailing Second Cinema notion of the film d' auteur. In order to accomplish
> their task the film crew needed to operate with a radical conception not only of

the content of the film but also the production process, including the team's

internal relations, the role of the producer and the director, and of individual

skills. (Chanan 2)

For them Third Cinema was also a cinema of decolonisation aimed at liberating the

nation from the clutches of the transnational bourgeoisie. They had the opinion that such

films should nurture national cultural tradition. So Third Cinema was resisting an

aesthetics which was projected as dominant and hegemonic on the one hand and on the

other it was conceived as explicitly political by posing itself as anti-imperialist. It is a

cinema of social and cultural emancipation. For them, "The camera is the inexhaustible

expropriator of image weapons; the projector, a gun that can shoot 24 frames per second"

(Solanas and Getino 58). They ensured the active involvement and political participation

of the viewer rather than simply documenting a situation. Argentina had a healthy First

Cinema rooted in national culture that engaged in social and political criticism. Talking

about Argentinian national cinema Mike Wayne argues that "[Argentinian] progressive

First Cinema culminated in a 'golden age' in the 1930s before being displaced by a more

bourgeois and Europeanised cinema as the industry became dominated by large capital

and a new generation of filmmakers drawn from the ranks of Argentina's expanding

middle class" (118). The non-commercial cinema was encouraged by the government

after the military coup in 1955 and a National Cinematographic Institute was established

for this end. But the group known as cine liberation realised the fact that neither

Argentine First Cinema nor the non-commercial Second Cinema was capable of

engaging the contemporary socio-political condition of Argentina in a meaningful way.

Fernando Solanas and Getino, active members of the group, came up with a ground

breaking experimental movie in 1968, *The Hours of Furnace*, and an equally serious

theoretical reflection about Third Cinema. *The Hours of Furnace* offers a classic example of a complete break from the conventional notion of filmmaking by all respect. Through this film Solanas and Getino wanted to contribute to the political process of liberation. They have revolutionalised the entire process of filmmaking by resorting to unconventional ways in terms of capital investment, distribution and exhibition. It was made well outside the dominant production system. The cost for the movie was raised by crowdfunding. The movie was marked by a complete disregard for fictional elements. It was never shown in any closed theatres. There were plenty of public screenings for the movie which was attended by hundreds of viewers. The movie could instill national spirit within the viewers by exposing the evils of imperialist exploitation they were subject to under the fascist regime supported by imperialist forces. Julio Garcia Espinosa, who conceived the idea of Imperfect Cinema, argued that the peripheral experience of perfection in the commercial cinema was a way of lulling the audience into passive consumption and that perfection was a myth created and propagated by the apostles of commercial cinema with a view to commodify the medium. Films of Fernando Birri from Brazil, which were considered Second Cinema by Solanas and Getino, can also be taken as forms of resistance against capital-driven model of Hollywood. Another Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha's Film of Hunger based on his theory of 'aesthetics of hunger' strove for social and cultural justice. According to Rocha films with an aesthetic hunger " narrated, described, poeticised, discussed, analysed, and stimulated the themes of hunger: characters eating dirt and roots, characters stealing to eat, characters killing to eat, characters fleeing to eat" (Rocha 68). For Rocha, the very crux of Latin American experience is defined and determined in terms of this organic entity called hunger. He called it as the essence of Latin American society. His films like

Black God, White Devil (1964) and *Entranced Earth* (1967) illustrate the growing fervor

for emancipation from the hegemonic, institutionalised presence of First Cinema.

Filmmakers like Mario Handler (Uruguay), Carlos Alvarez (Colombia), and Jorge

Sanjines (Bolivia) were keen in exploring the political complexities that were

characteristics of their respective socio-political scenario instead of sandwiching their

movies with popular ingredients to satisfy the need of the market. It can be concluded

that filmmakers and film theoreticians from Latin America during 1960s and 70s

introduced an alternative model of filmmaking and viewing practice that challenged the

uncritical assimilation of the product of the dominant film industry. It should be noted

that this movement had its precursors in 1920s Russia where intellectual stalwarts like

Lev Kuleshov, Sergei Eisenstein, and Pudovkin had sculpted a kind of cinema which was

both aesthetically and politically socialist in nature.

The most important theoretical perspectives on cinema emerged from Russia

during the 1920s. Inspired by the liberating aspect of October Revolution, filmmakers in

Russia tried to invoke the spirit of revolution in their films. Under the leadership of

Vladimir Lenin cultural constructivist revolutionary movement was reflected in arts and

film. Lenin considered film as the most important art and therefore promoted cinema by

implementing effective policies. Filmmakers like Dovzhenko, Dziga Vertov, Pudovkin,

Eisenstein et al devised innovative methods to visualize that zeitgeist. Anna Lawton

argues:

> [In Russia] the great directors of 1920s –Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov and
>
> Dovshenko tried to accomplish three things at one time. As *avant-garde* artists
>
> they developed the aesthetics of cinema in daring experimental styles; as Soviet

artists they conveyed the substance of their revolutionary philosophy; as

democratic artists they wanted to reach and educate the masses. (2)

 They only failed in the third, because they were unwilling to appease popular tastes.

They have devised a unique language to carry their ideas to the audience. Voice overs,

Brecht's alienation technique, montage, jump cuts, documentary style of narration were

some of such strategies carefully experimented by Leftist filmmakers. But as the viewers

were familiar with the light genres of pre-revolutionary cinema they found it difficult to

enjoy this new language of films experimented by those filmmakers. Vertov was

interested in exposing naked reality through camera without cinematic manipulation. He

conceived abstract images as carriers of a socio-political message. Vertov's monumental

work *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) explains the theoretical position he stood

for. Lev Kuleshov, on the other hand, had taken a middle path where he blends popular

genres and experimentation in a reasonable fashion. Sergei Eisenstein, the most

influential filmmaker ever, was particularly inspired by the Marxist concept of dialectical

materialism and tried to give a visual version to it in his films by a new kind of editing

technique he had developed, known as 'montage'. He was against the American

paradigm of filmmaking based on an illusory continuity and centred upon single heroic

individuals. He based his theory and filmmaking on the idea of conflict. For him conflict

was the mental and artistic manifestation of the process of dialectical materialism.

Eisenstein "linked the conflicts between joined shots to the collision between thesis and

antithesis and their resulting fusion in the spectator's mind to synthesis," (Ben-Shaul 75).

The 'Odessa steps' sequence in his classic movie *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) illustrates

the power of montage technique in conveying the dialectics of visual experience. Themes

of most of his films like *Strike* (1925)*,* and *October* (1928) were also directly political in

nature. In his later film career, Eisenstein had severed his relationship with Communist Party under Joseph Stalin. Even then, he was so adamant in his political position that he refused a lucrative invitation from Hollywood without a second thought. "His conflictual montage was", says Nitzan Ben-Shaul, "aimed at finding an optimal dynamic rhythm to convey the film's revolutionary content by sweeping over the spectators physiologically, emotionally and intellectually" (77). In Eisenstein we find a rare blend of ideological vision and aesthetic acumen.

Comolli's and Narboni's understanding of the subtle relationship between film and capital is evident in the following statement: "Because every film is a part of the economic system it is also a part of the ideological system, for "cinema" and "art" are branches of ideology" (45). Any cinematic attempt capable of undermining this relationship is considered truly political. Subverting the capitalist mode of production is a major attempt in political filmmaking. It is in this context that the films from Latin American countries during 1960s and 1970s and Russian films during 1920s and 30s stood apart from the conventional way of filmmaking. They made extremely and explicitly political movies with revolutionary content to inculcate Left-wing counter politics as well as aesthetic ideology within the viewers. Left-wing political filmmakers either abandoned the very concept of fiction in their movies or deconstructed the notion of fiction in such a way as to treat films as an effective vehicle for their political ideas. Leftist filmmakers carried out ground breaking experiments to facilitate the propagation of their counter ideology most of which were criticised by the apostles of First Cinema/Aesthetic school as rubbish and as mere visual exercises. Regarding Jean Luc Godard, who made films with Maoist sympathies, the eminent filmmaker Ingmar Bergman made the following comment: "I've never been able to appreciate any of his

films, nor even understand them… I find his films affected, intellectual, and self-obsessed and, as cinema, without interest and frankly dull… I've always thought that he made films for critics" (Marshall). The Free British Cinema, term coined by Lindsay Anderson, dates back to 1956, was made outside the framework of film industry and repudiated the commercial aspect of filmmaking. It upholds the social commitment of the filmmakers and emphasised on the need to establish an organic link between art and society. The independent film-making prevalent in America during the 1960s, which is also called New American Cinema Group, was "bold, outrageous and scornful of dominant cinema practices" (Hayward 444). Radical cinema movement, Cinema Novo, from Brazil, influenced by Italian Neo-realism, was both populist and revolutionary by conflating history, myth and popular culture with the rights of the marginalised peasants. French New Wave filmmakers of the 1960s, some of them influenced by the cinema-verite, challenged the Hollywood notion of continuity editing, seamless narrative and oedipal trajectory. But the proponents of the dominant cinema always misrepresent such political and cultural resistance by depicting them in grotesque ways. Communists and other revolutionaries were quite often regarded as the enemies of the system and their filmic representation is born out of Hollywood's imperialist and capitalist logic. During the 1940s and 50s there was a practice in Hollywood film industry, which is known as 'entertainment industry blacklist', to deny opportunities to stars, artists and other technicians because of their alleged sympathy to communist movements. Talking about the representation of Latin American reality in Hollywood films Sergio Roncallo and Juan Carlos Arias Herrera argues that it "presented a distorted image of the Latin American reality not only when the films tried to directly depict the people, but also by offering an idealist image of progress and civilisation" (98). By creating such a binary

they were represented as outsiders to a system dominated by American Values of bourgeois capitalism. The same methodology is adopted by Hollywood while depicting Russians and Vietnamese, as explained by Douglas Kellner: "The Vietnamese and Russians are presented as alien Others, as the embodiments of Evil, in a typically Hollywood Manichean scenario, that presents the Other, the Enemy, "Them" as the embodiment of evil and the "Us," the good guys, as the incarnation of virtue, heroism, goodness, innocence etc." (5). The dominant cinema of Hollywood and its countless minor replicas in other nations have been doing the same ideological function in their respective film industries to target the counter revolutionary initiatives originated from their particular socio-political contexts. But these containment strategies are being challenged by radical filmmakers, at times, whose theoretical underpinnings were mostly grounded in Marxism.

The world of cinema is a complex amalgam of mutually conflicting interests operating simultaneously for legitimacy. Filmmakers involved in the activity of making films have to perform their creative roles in different ways according to their temperament. The genre peculiarities of the medium demand huge capital support from the industry that ultimately make cinema subservient to the dictates of the dominant ideology. Since capital is the prerogative of the dominant class in a given system, the value system of that class holds sway over other elements. As the brainchild of the technological modernity, in the context of Europe and America, cinema satisfies the urge of the bourgeois class - the harbingers of modernity - for reproducing capital. They conceived an idea of filmmaking that anticipates the viewers' total absorption to the illusory world of the visual narratives and their complete severance from the external reality. Thus the value system of the dominant class has always been consumed without

resistance consequent to which the status quo is preserved and protected. But at the same time, attempts were made by filmmakers from various corners to politicise the cinematic space by situating the spectators in interactive terms with the films they make. In the specific context of Kerala, the dominant ideology, marked by feudal landlord power relations, exerts it supremacy in all forms of cultural practices. It is very much conspicuous in the field of filmmaking as it requires huge capital input which is affordable only to the affluent classes. As a result, anything that questions the authority of the dominant class is either assimilated to cinematic space after being ideologically diluted or denied entry by castigating them as outsiders. In the context of Malayalam dominant cinema, it is apparent that, because of its innate ideological indebtedness to the dominant class, communists were initially ignored as outsiders and later various strategies have been adopted to assimilate them into the filmic narrative.

End Notes

Translation of the following Malayalam texts appeared in this chapter is done by the
researcher:

1. Radhakrishnan, P.S. "Thirakkazhchaude Hrithubhedangal." *Samakalika Malayalam
   Varika*, 31 May 2013, pp. 7–41.

2. Samad, K.P.A. "Popularitiyude Nooru Varshangal." *Mathrubhoomi
   Varshikappathippu*, 2013, pp. 42–51.

3. Raveendran. "Cinemayum Prathyayasastravum." *Kalavimarsam Oru Marxist
   Manadandam*, edited by Raveendran, Chintha Publishers, 2012, pp. 190–212.

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Chapter 2

EMERGENCE OF THE IDEA OF THE POLITICAL OUTSIDER AND EARLY POLITICAL MELODRAMAS IN MALAYALAM

Political thinking and political activities have always been an organic part of Kerala society. Except for a very few, our civil society, in general, is politically conscious and is aware of its political rights and privileges. The economic disparity between people is not as worse as it is in other states of India. The people belong to the lower strata of the social ladder are enjoying equal opportunities with the members of the higher stratum of society. Discriminations based on caste, religion, class and gender are comparatively lesser in Kerala. These are all made possible by a number of collective drives for justice carried out in the past by former social reformers and political leaders. Kerala witnessed many struggles fought for upholding the dignity of life of the people at large. Prior to such mass initiatives and collective uprisings, society was structured around a well-defined hierarchy where the landed gentry enjoyed unlimited power over the rest of the population. This system, which was cemented in the social psyche for ages, was considered the normal social order and was deeply cemented in the social psyche as sacrosanct. The upper caste Hindu male landlord was the absolute beneficiary of that system wherein the dependent class belonging to the backward classes had to withstand the repercussions. The social reformers of the late 19th century and the revolutionary political activists of the early 20th century organised various activities which in turn authenticated agency to the hitherto underprivileged classes. Those reformers and political activists, since they challenged a system projected as normal and absolute, were considered outsiders by the beneficiaries of the prevalent system. The communists, whose political positions and ideological orientations were entirely in

discordant with that of the dominant ideology, were dealt with as 'political outsiders' because of their unwillingness to comply with the terms dictated by the ruling class 'insiders'. This chapter seeks to define the term 'political outsider' and tries to identify the cinematic mis/representation or exclusion of the idea of the political outsider in the context of Malayalam cinema.

2.1. Political Outsider: Definition

Albert Camus' brilliant novel *The Outsider* begins as follows: "My mother died today. Or may be yesterday, I don't know. I had a telegram from the home: 'Mother passed away. Funeral tomorrow. Yours sincerely.' That does not mean anything. It may have been yesterday."(1) The protagonist of the story Meursault lives a life of principled sincerity and honesty without compromise. Society expects some coded behaviour from the part of every individual but, here, Meursault is not hypocritical to comply with such presumptions. He does not understand the reason why he is expected to act in ways alien to his dispositions. His realisation of the absurdity of existence naturally made him unwilling to stay tuned to the social norms. He is considered an 'outsider' as his behaviour is conceived outside the pattern set by the dominant group. As a result an 'insider-outsider' binary is evolved out of the system that favours the interest of the dominant group that accords privilege to the insiders. The mechanism of conceiving a binary between the insider and outsider operates with a view to preserving the state of discipline of a society. Oftentimes the idea of discipline is directly proportional to the well- being of the ruling class. Howard S. Becker defines outsider as follows:

All social groups make rules and attempt, at times and under some circumstances, to reinforce them. Social rules define situations and kind of behaviour appropriate

to them, specifying some actions as 'right' and forbidding others as 'wrong'. When a rule is enforced, the person who is supposed to have broken it may be seen as a special kind of person, one who cannot be trusted to live by the rules agreed on by the group. He is regarded as an outsider. (1)

The rule makers are often the powerful classes who enjoy pivotal positions in the social discourses. For example, in a capitalist system revolutionaries are considered outsiders. In a communist state class enemy of the proletariat is treated as outsiders. A feudal system deals with both the bourgeois class and the communists as outsiders. A patriarchal system often find female as subordinate class. In every society the value system conceived and propagated by the dominant class remains the value system of the whole society. Those who are unwilling to comply with such a value system will be made to accept it either by means of coercive forces or by means of subtle acts of negotiations. An outsider is an outsider by virtue of his/her ability to problematize the notion of value system dominating the society in which he/she is a member of. The value system can be manufactured by social institutions like politics, culture, family, religion etc. that can draw materials from traditions and belief systems to perpetuate it. This value system can be either neglected by members of a society because of their particular psychological dispositions (as in the case of Meursault in *The Outsider*) or challenged by certain groups as a result of the realisation of their identity and predicament while being part of that system. Any threat to the status quo is, then, usually considered a threat to the existing system of power relations. So such threats are negotiated by the ruling class with utmost care. They employ various containment strategies to negotiate the threat posed by the rising revolutionary groups. It can be either by way of using the repressive machinery of the state like police or military. There has always been an unholy nexus formed

between the state and the class dominating the society. So such functionaries are always at the disposal of the dominant ideology. At times, as observed by the Italian Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, they subtly use negotiations to arrive at certain consensus that ultimately preserve the value system of the powerful groups. He observed that "no social order can survive without social legitimacy based upon a wide social consent. So the ruling classes manage to persuade the ruled classes that the mode of production exploiting them is natural and even desirable" (Ben-Shaul 86). As a result, the victimised would be made to believe that this system, however hostile it is to them, is more or less perfect. They even assimilate the values of the hostile system as the only possible thing and accept it as their predicament. Gramsci's observation has relevant political connotations in the context of Kerala society which was dominated by feudal system characterised by casteism and untouchability. The hegemony of the upper caste Hindu feudalists was assimilated as normal by the whole system in general, and an accepted sense of inferiority is internalised by the lower caste people. Edward W. Said in his monumental work *Orientalism* lays bare the mechanism of power operative in the construction of the irrational, under civilised 'other' that accords privilege to the rational and civilised West. This carefully crafted binary is instrumental in according centrality to the West in comparison with the underprivileged 'rest'. In the same way, the intellectual, aesthetic and epistemological discourses produced in the feudal social system for ages legitimised the superiority of the upper caste Hindu feudalists by privileging it over the rest. Such a system will be intolerant to any interventions that tend to destabilize the status quo. Feudal system accorded tremendous power to the landlords who would normally be an upper caste Hindu male. R.S. Sharma explains the nature of Indian feudal structure:

The feudal social structure is based on dominant class of landlords and a subject

class of peasantry. It is headed by the king who symbolizes the state power

depend upon primarily on the landlord class. But neither the class of the landlords

nor that of the peasants has the same socio economic status. The relation between

the two broad classes is established through the grant of fiefs and the process of

subinfeudation. Subinfeudation gives rise to regular hierarchy which includes

those who live on rent and pay a part of it to the state and also who cultivate the

land and pay rent. Sometimes as many as five degrees of subinfeudation can be

traced in the land grants … This landed hierarchy does not necessarily

correspond to the caste hierarchy, although superior landlords belong to higher

caste or are raised to it on the basis of land and power. (455)

The landlord would be always at the zenith of the social ladder in terms of the social and

economic power vested upon him. He would be the unchallenged master of the system

who wields special prerogatives. A landlord would possess immeasurable acres of land

where multitudes of people were forced to toil day in and day out. Those people had to

live a life without dignity coupled with total penury and sufferings. Since feudal

hierarchy "was based on unequal distribution of land, and since it was combined with

caste system, there was little scope for mobility in it. This hierarchy gripped the mind of

the people in a manner which left no room for equality or democracy" (Sharma 456). A

large number of lower caste peasants and agriculture labourers had to accept their

miserable living conditions as part of the 'god given system.' It was in this context that

the communists intervened into the socio-political environment of Kerala and exhorted

the working class to unite with them. Inspired by leftist political positions, many

challenged the established power structures like religion, caste, feudalism and even state.

Such acts of resistance have always been conceived as violence and the perpetrators of such counter positions were treated as outsiders. Most of the social uprisings masterminded by leftist activists aimed to materialize the idea of social justice, socialism and equality were thus either treated like acts of crime or as absolute threat to social well-being. So communists were designated as outsiders to the normal system and were denigrated for their revolutionary activism. Their unwillingness to submit to the dominant discourse created social tension that led to the widespread witchhunt of the communists orchestrated by the combined forces of state and feudalists.

Even before the dawn of the 20th century, the socio-political landscape of Kerala had already been tilled, ploughed and made receptive for any progressive ideas to flourish by the revolutionary interventions of the great reformers like Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928), Ayyankali (1863-1941), Chattambi Swamikal (1853-1924) and many others. They fought against the oppressive structures of casteism and authenticated agency to the historically de-subjected sections of the society. Reformist movements like Malayali Memorial (1891), Ezhava memorial (1896), Nivarthana Agitation (1938), Temple Entry Movement (1936), etc. along with Indian National Movement gave added momentum to revolutionary outlooks and triggered strong faith in collective struggles and movements. Communist movement took over from where the reformers had stopped. Moreover, October revolution (1917) in Russia that unequivocally asserted the power of the proletariat kindled the revolutionary spirit in youths. Receiving impetus from such historical uprisings Kerala fraction of the communist party was formed in 1939. Even before the formation of the party leaders like A. K. Gopalan, E. M. S Nampoodirippadu, P. Krishnapilla, and K. Damodaran were spearheading various struggles pitted against colonial rule. Most of those leaders were active members of the Congress Party who

became dissatisfied with the pacifist attitude of it. They argued for more extreme line of action and constituted Congress Socialist Party, a forerunner of the Kerala fraction of the Indian Communist Party. It was a fact that the upper caste feudal landlords were sympathisers of the Nationalist Movement led by the Congress. At the same time it was alleged that they were blind towards the sufferings of the peasantry and working class people. The pro-nationalist, yet pro-feudal group was dominating the Congress party during that time. So a major fraction of the Congress Party was critical about new political formation. A. K. Gopalan explains the attitude of the moderates in the party against this new trend in his autobiography:

> The influence and strength of the Congress Socialist Party transformed Congress into a mass movement. The Congressmen, other than socialists, started questioning and attacking this trend. They were more apprehensive and desperate in the growth of the Socialist Party than becoming happy about the growth of the Congress. They argued that workers and peasants need not be organised separately. Since congress represented the entire population of India, it was enough for them to join Congress. They proclaimed that Socialism wasagainst non-violence. They hated red flag. They further propagated that socialists would hammer the head of the landlords into pieces and the feudalists would be beheaded by their scythe. They campaigned that Socialists were making problems in the society and declared that students should not have any participation in politics.[1] (80)

This testifies the fact that even within the dominant political narrative of the Nationalist Movement led by the Congress Party, the idea of the left was considered problem makers and therefore outsiders. Despite such negative propaganda unleashed against the

Communist movement, it could attract popular imagination by way of well organised social activism. They questioned the atrocities perpetuated by landed gentry against the labouring class. They organised peasants and working class and helped them realize an identity of their own. Even before the establishment of the Kerala fraction of the Communist Party, labour unions started functioning from different parts of Kerala. The first trade union was established in 1922 as Travancore Labour Association. Alappuzha witnessed a major strike by coir factory workers in 1925. Strike of the Commonwealth Workers Union (1939), Punaloor Paper Mill Workers Strike (1942), 110 days strike by the workers of Aron Mill, Pappinassery were all part of our trade union history. All these strikes were either inspired or masterminded by communist leaders. A. K. Gopalan recollects the political leverage the party enjoyed during that period:

> Trade unions were formed all across Kerala after Cotton Mill Faroke strike in 1935. New unions were formed. Weaver's Trade Union, Beedi Labourers Union, Rickshaw Workers Union etc. worked actively. Slogans like "Exterminate Feudalism," "Exterminate Capitalism"; "Exterminate Imperialism"; "Make revolution successful" resounded everywhere. Bourgeoisie and feudalists were frightened. Youth desired a new community to be created…Class consciousness and Class struggle were deeply rooted among millions of peasants and workers. This movement immensely attracted the middle class too". (83)

Such activities brought about immense popular support to Communist Party. K. Damodaran, one of the founding leaders of Communist Party in Kerala, talks about the unbelievable growth of the party during the initial phase of its inception, in his interview with Tariq Ali.: "The membership of the Party increased from about 150 in 1934 to more than 3000 in 1939 and its influence multiplied at an even more rapid rate" (70). Party

also carried out some of the bloody revolutions that Kerala had witnessed. The Punnapravayalar Agitation (1946), Kayyur Agitation (1941), Karivallur Struggle (1948), and Onchiyam firing (1948) were all propelled by the collective urge for liberation from the authoritarian structures imposed by landlords and Devans. The communist wave that swept across the political consciousness of Kerala ultimately culminated in the victory of Communist Party in the first assembly election of Kerala in 1957. It was like history in the making since it was for the first time in the political history of the world that a Communist party came to power through ballot paper.

The political activists who digress from the conventional paradigm of political action by adopting methodologies outside the dominant political narratives can be called political outsiders. There are various strategies being adopted by the dominant class to label some individuals or groups as outsiders based on their political inclinations. Whatever such individuals or group do against the interest of the existing system may be considered criminal activities. The atrocities perpetrated by the ruling class continuously for ages had been blatantly ignored and the counter forms of resistance from the part of the revolutionaries were considered criminal activities. Crime from top to bottom was treated as normal and therefore legitimate. Acts of resistance against inhuman system of feudalism was regarded as a crime against the supreme power. As Michel Foucault has observed in his speech delivered on 29 June 1975, "The crime was crime in so far as it attacked the sovereign: it attacked his rights and his will present in the law and it thereby attacked his strength and physical body. In every crime, therefore, there was a clash of forces, a revolt or insurrection against the sovereign. There was a fragment of regicide in each crime" (82). In the context of Kerala during the early decades of the twentieth century, the sovereign power was held by the landlords. The institutions of power were

able to propagate the reactionary idea among the masses that the hierarchical social structure prevalent during the time was the only normal and acceptable system for all. Even people at the nadir of the social order had assimilated the ideology of the dominant class. The ruling class set certain principles of conformity to safeguard their interest breaking of which was considered an act of breaching the law since "it was in the law that the will of the sovereign is present" (Foucault 82). So any insurgency pitted against the feudal system is considered an act of crime that challenged the 'normal' order. As Kerala society which was predominantly an agrarian society and the hierarchical structure of power was determined by feudal-landlord power relations that system was conceived as 'normal' as it provided comfort and satisfaction to the upper caste Hindu landlords. They dictated terms for the society to comply with as those terms were tailor-made to suit the need of the ruling class. Those dictates were propagated among the social actors with a preconceived notion of discipline associated with it, endorsed by endless array of social discourses generated over the years. Fatalism, servility to the authority, sense of inferiority, and cultural appropriation are some of the strategies imposed upon the lower strata to sustain the hegemony of the upper strata. The ruling class tried to preserve the stability of that system. Leftist political interventions in the socio-political discourses of Kerala were instrumental in redefining these power relations and the inhuman structures of casteism to a great extent. The political storm unleashed by the Communist movement had thoroughly shaken the ideological superstructure. The close affinities of the party leaders with the people, their readiness to sacrifice anything for the welfare of the common people, their ability to act in accordance with the aspirations of the underprivileged were all factors that made the communists enemy of the upper class.

The leftist political activists of the time worked among the masses for the upliftment of the downtrodden. They spend much of their time with the working class people to understand their problems, to educate them and to organize them against the inhuman treatment of the   owners. The physical as well as the emotional proximity the leftist leaders established with the working class people made them political outsiders because their personal connections with the lower strata of the society were viewed suspiciouslyduring that time. A. K. Gopalan recollects his idea of the leader as follows: "One's co-workers should be taken into confidence. A leader should live like them. He should play with the children of the workers. He should tell stories to their grandmas. They should treat him as a member of their family. He should acquaint himself with the family of each worker." (74). Such relationships between party leaders and the working class people were taken as a major threat to the sustainment of the status quo. They chalked out containment strategies to evade the emerging threat posed by the left. The communists were eve hunted thoroughly by the state with the active support of the upper caste landlords. A discourse was evolved out of the power politics around the problem of social danger that aimed to corner communism. As stated by Foucault a "discourse of fear whose function is to detect danger and to counter it" (35) was perpetrated among people with the help of media. E. M. S. Namboodirippad, the greatest ideologue of the Communist movement and the first Chief Minister of Kerala points out the reactionary stand taken by the leading Malayalam newspapers during those times:

> Even before the completion of one month after its [Congress Socialist Party]
> formation, Kelappan, who had presided over the Kozhikode meet, started
> aggressive campaigning against party. After someday he, who was also the editor
> of Mathrubhoomi, had written an editorial entitled 'Beware of Them.' It was a

precaution that Socialist Party was working against the Gandhian ideals and programmes of the Congress Party and if it became stronger it would be dangerous to the entire nation.

It was the beginning of the constant propaganda unleashed by Mathrubhoomi against Congress Socialist Party and Communist party. Like Mathrubhoomi other newspapers had also declared a crusade against this new organisation.[2] (233)

While reporting the Onchiyam Struggle of 1948, *Mathrubhoomi Newspaper* used the term like *akrami* ('attacker', ie, who destabilises the order) to denote the communists as if they were the perpetrators of violence. The reporter quotes one of the revolutionaries screaming for the blood of the police men, "We will be dispersed only after drinking the blood of the M S Ps"[3] (Pathinezhu 6). M. Jayaraj observes:

> It is interesting to see how media reported the Vayalar-Punnapra struggles. Because of the censorship, the press could only rely on the statements of Sir C P and the information given by the police. The titles appeared in the newspapers regarding this incident were like 'Blood thirst', 'Bloody Mutiny', 'Massacre and Arson', etc. Sir C P and his coteries tried to look down the glowing model of the struggle undertaken by the coir workers of Ambalapuzha and Cherthala taluk as part of the movement for the liberation of the princely states from the rule of the king by propagating rumours and misinformation campaigns. (97)

Such discourses generated around the communist movement as the propagators of violence conferred legitimacy to the state machinery for the kind of violence it had inflicted upon its own citizen. So the ruling power comprised of bourgeoisie (for organizing the working class), feudalists (for organizing the peasants and agriculture

labourers)and the state (for disturbing the status quo) started a witch hunt of the political

left to eliminate them. They had to suffer tortures from the state and the feudal landlords.

Most of the communist leaders had to go underground in order to evade police arrest.

Leftist leaders like Thoppil Bhasi, A. K. Gopalan, E. M. S. Namboodirippad and others

in their memoirs narrated the kind of suffering they had undergone. For example,

Thoppil Bhasi recounts the terrible experience of lockup tortures undergone by Sooranad

Surendran who willingly surrendered in order to protect his fellow people from police

atrocities. Surendran was taken to police custody at ten in the morning and was found

dead before seven in the evening on the same day consequent to police tortures. His post-

mortem report goes as follow: "Multiple contusions over body probably due to injury

from long stick like weapon and heavy blunt weapon. There are six different fractures in

humerus, radius and ulna. He has a cervical vertebra fracture with significant dislocation.

There is a contusion involving major part of the liver."[4] (Bhasi 127)

Theatre and literature of that time had undergone tremendous transformations

owing to the inspiring influence of Marxism. Progressive writers of the time were quick

to respond to the leftist political interventions and accommodated leftist ideology in their

narratives. Receiving impetus from the Russian writers like Maxim Gorky, a new school

of literary writing known as Socialist Realism was emerged during 1940s and flourished

during 1950s. 'Leftist outsiders' found literary expressions in most of the outstanding

literary products of the time whether it was theatre, fiction or poetry. Leftist writers

directly intervened in the cultural domain by the formation of *Jeeval sahitya Samiti* in

1937 and Progressive Writers Association in 1944. But it seems quite clear that cinema,

still in its period of infancy, was not fascinated by the struggles and sufferings of the

communist activists even if the miseries of the deprived classes were recurrent themes in

the films produced during 1950s and 60s. A close analysis of the texture and structure of those movies give the idea that the invocation of the political themes into the narratives does not find a political expression in the making. Such movies, instead of generating a counter methodology in filmmaking, remained as popular forms of entertainment and thereby functioned as carriers of the dominant ideology. In the end they were also consumed as popular political melodramas other than serious cinematic discourses on politics. It can be deduced that Malayalam movies strategically ignored the idea of the political outsider in the initial phase and when the idea was accommodated in the second phase, political outsider had lost much of their political content.

2.2. Pre-Seventies Malayalam Cinema and the Idea of the Political outsider

The history of Malayalam film is officially heralded by the release of *Vigathakumaran* by J. C. Daniel in 1928. Paul Vincent, a native of Thiruchirappalli, was the first cinema exhibitor in South India. With his projector named Edison Bioscope he toured South India, including Kerala. Varunni Joseph, a native of Thrissur, bought films and bioscope from Paul Vincent and started exhibiting films in Kerala. J. C. Daniel, who was deeply attracted by the magic of the new medium, learned the technology of filmmaking from Bombay and came back to Kerala with all the technological accessories for making a movie of his own. He made his first movie *Vigathakumaran* (1928) after a lot of hardships. When the makers of other Indian language films inclined towards mythological themes for their debut film attempts, J. C. Daniel was very much particular about filming a social theme for his first movie. Apart from being innovative in his selection of theme he dared to caste a lower caste girl, Rosy, to perform the female lead role. The upper caste Hindus could not tolerate a coloured girl in the guise of an upper caste woman. While screening the movie at Thiruvananthapuram Capitol theatre, the

enraged spectators vandalised the entire premises and tried to manhandle J. C. Daniel and Rosy. The personal and creative life of J. C. Daniel ended up as a tragedy as he could not successfully screen his movie anywhere in South India.

A penchant for social themes has always been there in Malayalam cinema ever since its birth. Early filmmakers were more interested in humanist discourses derived out of the complex socio-political milieu of Kerala emerged during the early decades of the 20th century. Malayalees' perspectives and discourses on society were very much influenced by the ethos of reformation that permeated the socio-cultural atmosphere of Kerala during the first half of the twentieth century. It was followed by the emergence of communist movement that carried forward the legacy of reformation more intensely. The value system envisaged by the communist movement, including dignity of labour, dignity of human life, and social equality had its reflections in most of the films made during the time. The first box office hit in the history of Malayalam cinema, *Jeevitha Nouka* was produced in 1950. The film dealt with the issue of casteism and the demolition of joint family system. The protagonist of the film married his lower caste lady love neglecting oppositions from his friends and relatives. The film narrates the challenges confronted by the protagonist consequent of the bold decision he had taken. The tale of human sufferings told in a melodramatic vein, attributed a sense of reformist aura to *Jeevitha Nauka*. This was a new experience. Another movie *Navalokam* released in 1951 talked about the tense relationship between the haves and have-nots. Movies like *Neelakkuyil* (1954), *News Paper Boy* (1956), *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (1956), *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (1968), *Thulabharam* (1968), *Punnapravayalar* (1968), *Mooladhanam* (1969), etc. were eloquent visual representations of progressive ideas of communism. Those social realist political melodramas engaged at the same time pleasure

seeking as well as politically conscious spectators and educated rural middle class. *Neelakkuyil* won the President's Silver Medal in 1954.

Early Malayalam cinema was blessed with a handful of talented directors like Ramu Karyat, P. Bhaskaran, Vincent and others. In addition to that many gifted writers of the time like Uroob, Ponkunnam Varkey, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and the likes were also actively contributing their creative outputs for the growth of Malayalam cinema. Lyricists like Vayalar Ramavarma, O. N. V. Kurup and music directors like K. Raghavan, Devarajan, et al. provided sublime music experience to the theatregoers. The drama *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1952) by Thoppil Bhasi, which is considered a powerful theater attempt that expanded the popular base of the communist party, was filmed in 1967. The communist wave unleashed all across the socio- political landscape of Kerala was a driving force that inspired most of the filmmakers of the period. They lost no time to invoke themes of social importance like untouchability, class difference, poverty and secularism into cinematic narratives. Movies like *Mooladhanam* (1969) and *Punnapravayalar* (1968) dealt with explicit political themes which really questioned the very edifice of upper caste, feudalist ideology. The protagonists of such movies have displayed the general sense of wrath prevalent among the deprived classes against the hostile system of feudalism and casteism.

But having said this, it will be pertinent to investigate how authentic those films were in delineating the socio-political situation prevalent in Kerala during 1950s and 60s. It may be admitted that the characters in those movies bore remote similarities with the actual left revolutionaries working in the society for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Just like the actual revolutionaries, instead of being content with their predicament, those protagonists dreamt of another world devoid of discrimination based on class, caste,

religion, and capital. They were not ready to be confined within the system crafted by the ruling class for their well-being. But such representations were not worked out in a manner that inspired the political consciousness of the spectators. A close observation of the entire scenario reveals the fact that a dynamics of power operating within the system, by adopting effective strategies, either ignored or diluted the political content of the communist movement while filming such narratives. Just in same the way the dominant ideology - feudalism and caste Hindus in this context - dealt with the rise of communism in Kerala during the early decade of the 20th century, cinema, the organic product of superstructure dominated by upper caste right-wing value system, employed various containment strategies to dismiss the threat of revolutionaries being represented in films.

New genres, better known as the 'family socials' and 'political melodramas', that could reconcile the call for political themes on the one hand and guarantee the return of the capital investment on the other, were born out of such a circumstance. The family socials were dominant during the 1950s before being replaced by political melodrama of the late 1960s. The family socials conflate political and familial themes and situate the narratives within the everydayness of the family lives. The predominantly agrarian backdrop of those films is projected in romantic vein. In political melodramas overt political issues are addressed but the narratives remain flaccid and melodramatic. In fact, both are basically the different incarnations of the basic genre, melodrama. Susan Hayward pointed out that "melodrama was developed in 19th century in line with the progress of bourgeois capitalism in Europe" (215). In the context of Kerala, still predominantly a feudal society tilting towards bourgeois capitalism in the mid-20th century, both family socials and political melodramas ideologically functioned as the mouth piece of bourgeoisie by its humanist content on the one hand and as the preserver

of feudalism by its value system on the other. They represent class and caste but deliberately ignored class struggle. Instead of challenging the capital such movies naturalised capital and feudal power. The filmic representations of those political outsiders lack genuine political intention as those films in which they appear follow the conventions of mainstream paradigm of filmmaking.

2.3. Strategies of Containment: Political Outsiders as Cinematic Insiders

Malayalam Cinema was a bit late to acknowledge the commercial prospects of political outsiders. Political outsiders stormed into the arena of Malayalam cinema during 1960s in films like *Mooladhanam, Thulabharam, Ningalenne Communistakki, Punnapravayalar* etc. Despite the fact that most of these films were mouthpieces of leftist ideological positions, cinematic representations of political outsiders were not materialised in a fixed, unified manner. As cinema needs to obey the dictates of capital, political themes and therefore political outsiders were always under the close scrutiny of the dominant class. This class employed various strategies to do away with the threat posed by political outsiders. Consequent to these strategies it underwent transformations of various kinds before being completely rerefied by the impact of capitalist ideology. Foucault identifies three major procedures of exclusion as "prohibition," "division and rejection" and "opposition between true and false." (*Order* 48-78). Just in the same way, three strategies can be identified by which Malayalam dominant cinema negotiates the idea of the political outsiders to diffuse the dissent and resistance they represent. The first is that of 'conscious ignorance' where the crucial presence of political outsiders is deliberately ignored by the dominant cinema. The second strategy is the strategy of 'neutralised accommodation' which is followed by 'strategy of rejection through apolitical criticism' wherein the romanticised and ahistoricised versions of political

outsiders are depicted as threats to the family and system. Here again it should be borne in mind that the evolutionary stages identified do not observe any linear progression or teleological development. When the dominant cinema tries to capitalise out of the ambivalence pertaining to its engagement with the idea of the political outsider, the political cinema reminds the significance of such interventions by contextualising them in a concrete socio-political environment. The evolutionary process of the idea of the political outsider has gone through all these phases in the context of Malayalam cinema, acquiring different forms and manifestations in different political situations of Kerala. It should be noted that in some cases these strategies overlap and intersect each other occasionally.

2.3.1. Strategy of Conscious Ignorance

Foucault in his *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France* maps out two models for the control of individuals in the West: "One is the exclusion of the lepers and the other is the model of the inclusion of the plague victims" (44). During the seventeenth century lepers were driven out of the territory in order to purify the community. At the beginning of the eighteenth century this was substituted by inclusion of plague victims within the closed off territory designed by the authority. These two models of containment strategies employed by the Western system of disciplinary institutions have its parallels in Kerala in the context of Malayalam cinema. In the first phase, the political outsiders were completely excluded from cinematic expressions. Thus the threat of the outsider was deliberately ignored and thereby kept squarely away from the field of cinema in a time when communist movement was instrumental in bringing about tremendous changes in the socio-political milieu of Kerala. Trade union movements and the struggles they carried out were totally ignored by the filmmakers of

the time. The dangers inherent in the communist political activities were neglected.

Bloody revolutions pitted against the inhuman structures of feudal authority were also

kept outside the field of cinematic discourse in a time when literature and theatre of the

period genuinely accommodated the revolutionary aspect of the leftist politics in their

narratives. They even functioned as the propaganda machinery of the party in their urge

to materialize a society devoid of class difference. Dr. D. Benjamin in his article entitled

"Arunayugavum Yadharthyabodhavum" makes the following observations about the

poets of the time:

> The new generation poets of the time imitated Changapuzha in form and mood
>
> and wrote plenty of revolutionary songs. They were eloquent about a future
>
> dominated by the proletariat where whatever we reaped would be ours. They
>
> exhorted for bloody revolutions. They were thrilled about the insurmountable
>
> strength of the organised proletariat and the imminent downfall awaiting the
>
> feudal- bourgeois nexus. They wrote songs for those martyrs who lost their lives
>
> while participating in the mass movements and revolutionary struggles. They
>
> considered man not as one but as two: haves and have notes. They argued that
>
> poets should take side with the deprived classes politically and ideologically.
>
> Poetry became filled with rhythmic and thrilling slogans. They became eloquent
>
> and conversational. They designed a poetic language marked with the
>
> pronunciation defects inherent in the language of the lower class. Blood, red flag,
>
> and scythe became recurring images in poetry.[5] (37)

Poets like P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Ramavarma, O. N. V. Kurup; novelists like P. Kesava

Dev, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Ponkunnam Varkey; playwrights like K. Damodaran,

N. Krishna Pillai have redefined the conventions pertaining to the appreciation of

literature by introducing a totally new aesthetic discourse which was known as socialist realism. Fifteen years that fall between 1937 and 1952 was thus known as 'red age' in Malayalam literature. But movies produced during 1930s and 1940s had maintained a conscious ignorance about the political turmoil of that period.

Marthanda Varma by Nottani (1932), that followed *Vigathakumaran*, was the visual retelling of the novel written by C. V. Raman Pillai. The third film *Balan*, directed by S. Nottani (1938) - also the first talkie in Malayalam, produced by T R Sundaram - dealt with the theme of cruelties of a stepmother. The plot was unrealistic and the theme was totally melodramatic. The second talkie, *Njanambika* (Dir.S Nottani; 1940), was also produced more or less the same way. This movie also took no step to reflect the social realities of the time. *Prahlada*, directed by K Subrahmanyam in 1941, was based on a Hindu mythology. After a long gap of seven years, the sixth movie *Nirmala* (P. V. Krishna Iyer) was screened in 1948. The movie was also aesthetically despicable due to excessive sentimentalism. The amorous relationship between a police officer and a female burglar was the theme of *Nirmala*. So it becomes clear that movies produced during 1930s and 1940s were reluctant to establish a meaningful dialogue with the socio-political environment of Kerala, in a time when Kerala witnessed mass uprisings against authoritarian power institutions. In 1946, at Punnapra, people were organised against the American model inhuman administration of Diwan Ramaswami Iyer. When people voiced their grievances against his fascist rule, he perpetrated a fierce crackdown upon the revolutionaries with the help of the police and reserve military. On 27 October 1946, the police and reserve battalion used machine guns against unarmed crowd that took the lives of more than 600 people. Punnapravayalar agitation was one of the major bloody struggles unleashed against the organised power of feudal-bourgeoisie-state nexus. This

struggle could have evoked instant responses from the leftist filmmakers of the period.

But surprisingly enough, no filmmakers of the time were politically motivated to bring

the struggles and suffering of the political outsiders involved in that movement into the

filmic narrative. Same was the case with political struggles at Kayyur and Onchiyam.

Malayalam cinema was hesitant to accept impetus from such uprisings. It consciously

ignored and neglected the awakening sense of liberation ignited by communist ideas

among the working class and lower castes. When literature and theatre were replete with

leftist discourses, cinema maintained a strategic silence from directly political themes.

Instead of politicising the spectators it provided them with an illusory world totally

detached from the political realities around. The movie goers' world continued to remain

as a wonderland without being desecrated by political debates. Thus, cinema had been

successful in manufacturing a parallel society devoid of rebellious functions. As a means

to preserve the interest of the dominant class, celluloid remained as a 'pure' cultural

product without being 'adulterated' by political dialogues. It can be deduced that the

narrow market of Malayalam cinema might not be alluring to the filmmakers of the time

to thematically engage with a counter ideology like communism because they were

apprehensive of the huge losses that might bring about.

In this early phase, Malayalam cinema initially ignored the presence of leftist

politics even when cinema remained moderately realistic and socially committed. Leftist

political discourses were kept at a safer distance from the cinematic space at a time when

the socio- political situation in Kerala was reinvigorated by communist movement. Real

life Communists were considered outsiders who were not eligible to be given a space in

cinema. But communist movement had become so popular during 1950s and 60s that the

filmmakers of that time could no longer ignore it. Later they realised the economic

potential of the movement and became ready to accommodate the political outsiders within the cinematic narrative. But before doing so they wanted to ensure that the intensity of the political position had to be neutralised. So instead of realistically portraying the political environment of the time Malayalam cinema started engaging the leftist politics in a fictionalised, melodramatic environment, replete with song sequences and unrealistic plots. As a result politics was pushed into the fringes and the viewers were placed within the magic world of fictional narratives. This can be called strategy of accommodation through neutralisation.

2.3.2. Strategy of Accommodation through Neutralisation

Until the close of 1940s Malayalam cinema kept its doors closed against the entry of Communist ideas into the sphere of the silver screen by consciously ignoring the political reality of the time. But the wave of social change that swept across Kerala during 1950s and 60s made it compulsory for the film industry to accommodate leftist discourses to a certain extent. As observed by Prof. K Gopinathan:

> During 1950s and 60s Kerala society, slowly but steadily, started accepting the interventions of history in terms of relations of production and class. The rural space in Kerala, that remained inert due to feudal landlord power relations and value system based on casteism, gradually tilted towards bourgeois capitalist relations and conceived the idea of man based on liberal humanism.[6] (27)

1950s and 60s witnessed a gradual transition of power from the hands of feudal lords to bourgeois capitalists who emerged as an economic force due to the spread of education that enabled them own the means of production. Just as it happened in the European countries during the aftermath of industrialisation, the emerging bourgeoisie wanted to

redefine the social structure in order to make the economy more dynamic. "Post feudal hierarchy was based on merit, open competition and public examination system which are vitiated by gross economic inequality. Though a good number of people cannot take advantage of competitive examinations because of limited access to education or of complete lack of it, there is considerable scope for mobility in it." (Sharma 456).The interventions of the bourgeois ideals in the social scenario had tremendous repercussions in the feudal structure. They wanted to make the social system more democratic and flexible. It is in this context that "secular spaces where people of all castes and classes mingle, like the tea shop, line bus, town streets, markets etc. abound in these [*Neelakkuyil* and *Rarichan Enna Pouran*] films" (Venkiteswaran 4). As a result the rigid structures of feudalism and caste hierarchy gave way to the humanist ideas of social equality and social and political democracy. But, "The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppressions, [and] new forms of struggles in place of the old one." (Marx and Engels 1) The social changes issued forth from the leftist revolutionary intervention on the one hand and the active involvement of the bourgeoisie on the other, made their marks in the socio-political discourses of the time. The working class and agriculture labourers, more or less, became more conscious of their identity and political rights. They started actively participating in the social interactions as a result of which Kerala witnessed a social mobilisation unprecedented in its history. The assumption into power of the first ever Communist ministry in 1957 created immense hopes and expectations. Writers of the time actively engaged in explicitly social issues and depicted in their narratives the lives of marginalised classes. Poetry, theatre and fiction galore with political contents that further boiled the already

tumultuous scenario. Literature continued to portray the struggles and sufferings of the political outsiders and they became insiders in literary works. *Randidangazhi* (1949) by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1952) by Thopil Bhasi, anthologies of poems by Vayalar Ramavarma, P. Bhaskaran and O. N. V. Kurup and short stories of Kesava Dev and Ponkunnam Varkey invoked the revolutionary spirit of that time.

As it has already been observed, until 1950 Malayalam cinema maintained a conscious ignorance in terms of its leftist political orientations. But the situation had been changed after 1950 when it had become impossible for the filmmakers to ignore the strong presence of communists in the political scenario of Kerala. Even though the upper caste feudalist sentiments continued to dominate the social system, the Communist movement started redefining and reformulating the erstwhile socio-economic relationships. The filmmakers realised the profit potential of communism and started assimilating the humanist positions of its ideology in their narrative. But before being accorded a space in the visual narratives the political outsiders and their ideological positions were tactically negotiated. In this phase Malayalam dominant cinema "assimilate, filter and replace the unwanted discourse, rather than erasing discourse altogether" (Thiesmeyer 13). The family socials of the 1950s like *Jeevitha Nouka* and *Navalokam* are the end products of this assimilation. When the pre-1950 Malayalam cinema totally ignored the presence of political outsiders, the protagonists of the movies *Jeevitha Nouka* and *Navalokam* (post-1950 movies) recognised their presence and gave them ample space in the narratives. The first box office hit in the history of Malayalam cinema, *Jeevitha Nouka*, was produced in 1950. The melodramatic narrative dealing with the love story of an upper caste young man, Soman (Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair) and

Lakshmi, (M. S. Saroja) is replete with progressive ideas of caste equality and social justice. But the story is told in a conventional style without having any experimentation. The inclusion of fourteen songs in the movie is suggestive of the fact that the ultimate objective of the movie was to entertain the masses. In the guise of displaying revolutionary world view, the film was indirectly catering to the designs of the profit mongers. Such superficial romantic idealisation of revolutionary ideas was a recurring practice of the early Malayalam films. They were reluctant to move beyond sentimental humanism to expose the structures of power and its dynamics operative in the socio-political domain of Kerala. In *Navalokam* it was Gopi (Sebastian Kunhu Kunhu Bhagavatar) who organised a collective struggle against the Zamindar, Kurup (Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair) who disowned Devaki (Miss Kumari) after seducing her. He went on to marry another educated girl named Radha which was eventually thwarted by the timely intervention of Gopi. An emphatic voice against Zamindari system and caste hierarchy was articulated by the protagonist of the movie. But, as observed by Vijayakrishnan, "later we would be dumbfounded to see the feudal landlord singing a song with the labour class to welcome a new social order" (56). It should be noted that the scripting of the movie was done by Ponkunnam Varkey, one of the leading figures of Progressive Literary Movement of the period. Such unrealistic romanticisation situates the spectators well within in a dream world of class co-operation and universal fraternity. Thus cinema functioned as a site for class reconciliation instead of motivating the spectators for class struggle. It can be seen that even the functionaries of the state had taken a proactive position in regulating the revolutionary aspiration of the filmmakers. As noted by B. Vijayakumar, "The screenplay was heavily loaded with pro-labour dialogues. This resulted in the censor board inflicting heavy cuts. This must have been

the first Malayalam film that was clipped by the censor's scissors" (*Hindu*). The active

intervention of the state to neutralise the revolutionary spirit of the political outsiders in

films through technical or governmental regulations in itself is suggestive of the unholy

nexus operative against the progressive ideas of social justice and social equality.

Protagonists of these movies can be considered the early representatives of

political outsiders in Malayalam cinema as they do not uphold the value system of the

dominant ideology represented by the upper caste Hindu feudalists. They are inspired by

the revolutionary ideals of social equality, socialism and social justice propagated by the

communist movement. They are anti-establishment in their outlook and they battle

against the conventional and traditional way of looking at things. Instead of serving the

powerful at the zenith of hierarchy, they try to give voice to the hitherto voiceless section

of the social ladder and fight for the dignity of the working class. But attributing such

qualities to the protagonists would not alone make those movies political. The humanist

rhetoric emanated from the representatives of the political outsiders in those movies is

not synchronous with both the narrative and structural aspect of those movies. As it is

obvious that alternate ideology always needs alternate way of expression, subversion of

the overarching presence of the absorbing narrative is a prerequisite for making political

movies. But no experimentation, inevitable in the context of political filmmaking in

order to awaken the spectators from their ideological slumber, is worked out in those

films due to the fear of economic debacle. Jenson Joseph talks about the economic and

cultural imperatives that prompted the filmmakers to resort to 'family social' of the

1950s:

> The incipient industry identified the "family social" as a convenient format to
>
> negotiate with the industrial and aesthetic terms set by South Indian cinema,

mainly based in Madras, and the cultural demands placed on it by linguistic

constituencies and elite patronage in the 1950s. The industrial constraints of

small budgets and a narrow linguistic market necessitated an aesthetic that could

cater to a socially and regionally mixed audience. (31)

He identifies *Jeevitha Nouka* as the right model that represents this reconciliation. The

melodramatic sequences and histrionics characteristics of those movies still situate those

movies within the aesthetic domain of the feudalist age. The flaccid and linear narrative

with shallow verbosity, theatrical artificiality in acting, visual images lacking depth,

mellifluous songs, and intricate plots are all characteristics of the inert consumption of

those movies. They can be better called family social melodramas owing to this

ambivalent attitude. The viewers are not challenged to participate in the process of

cinema getting unfolded to expose the reasons for the dichotomous distribution of

economy in the immediate society. However political the thematic engagements of such

movies were, they failed miserably in authentically representing the idea of the political

outsider.

Instead of undertaking a close scientific analysis of the hostile social structure

that had given rise to the birth of political outsiders, the filmmakers embarked on

treading the same old trajectory of popular entertainment. The subterranean link between

capital, cinema and power became conspicuous in this attempt to commercialise the

counter ideology. Unlike literature, it is obvious that, cinema requires the support of

capital. Only those who are capable of investing big capital can set out to make movies

and those who spend capital expect huge return. This vicious circle, which is ubiquitous

in the process of filmmaking, kept the question of the authentic representation of the

political outsider outside the cinematic discourses. As a result, cinema became an

ideological apparatus in the hands of the emerging bourgeoisie who incorporated discourses on progressive values of social change without attempting a "communist decoding of reality" (Ben-Shaul 78) as suggested by the Russian filmmaker Dziga Vertov. In Vertove's view "such decoding had to derive from Marxism's perception of humans as being in constant dialectic process of change through their labour and its derived types of social interactions" (79). He further argued that the use of film to imitate life through fiction was "an anti-revolutionary violation of real life" (79). Vertov may sound overtly theoretical in his argument, but fictionalisation of reality without subjecting it to the close scrutiny of political and historical perspectives would definitely neutralize the politics inherent in it. Mere incorporation of political themes and political thoughts will not make a film political. In order to become political the filmmaker should be able to deconstruct the hierarchical structure of power relations and unveil the intricate and complex networks of social relations. Fiction combined with techniques specific to cinema like editing, grading, special effects, rerecording etc. then thoroughly hijacks the political consciousness of the spectators. Restructuring the language of cinema as a counter ideological apparatus requires incorporation of alternate aesthetic perceptions. The Russian filmmakers of the 1920s like Sergei Eisenstein, Lev Kuleshov, Pudovkin and the likes have devised a unique language to carry their ideas to the audience. Voice overs, Brecht's alienation technique, montage, jump cuts, and documentary style of narration were some of such strategies carefully experimented by Leftist filmmakers. Later the French filmmaker Jean Godard did almost the same experimentation in his films to deal with political themes. He believed that political themes can only be communicated through politicizing the whole process of filmmaking. But even the self-proclaimed Leftist filmmakers of that period from Kerala like P.

Bhaskaran, Thoppil Bhasi, Ramu Karyat and Ponkunnam Varkey were reluctant to design a new cinematic language to disseminate their revolutionary ideas. Fictionalisation and excessive sentimentalism neutralised the burning issues of class struggle and authoritarian power dynamics. This new sensibility perpetuated by the emerging bourgeois class was effectively transacted and preserved through the late 1960s political melodrama. As stated by Susan Hayward, "Melodrama as a popular cultural form takes this notion of social crisis and mediates within a private context, the home. Melodrama, then, reflects the bourgeois desire for social order to be expressed through the personal" (216). Political melodrama situates political discourses in the restricted space of family by grossly neglecting the convoluted socio-political conditions that determine the supremacy of certain classes. It challenges the feudalist structure as it is developed alongside of bourgeois capitalism, but since capitalism was still in its infancy in Kerala during the middle of the 20th century, maintains an ambivalent stand of rejection and sustenance of feudal value system at the same time. *Punnapravayalar* (1968), *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1970) and *Anubhavangal palichakal* (1971) can be categorised as political melodramas.

Punnapravayalar (1968) produced and directed by Kunchakko is another movie that fictionalised one of the goriest episodes of political uprisings in the Kerala history. The American model rule adopted by the oppressive regime of Divan Sir C P Ramswami Iyer was totally anti-people and inhuman that instilled anger and dissatisfaction among the peasants and labour class. The feudal landlords exploited the masses physically and economically and oppressed all forms of resistance with the help of the police force. The atrocities and violence unleashed by the unholy nexus formed between feudal landlords and the police paved the way for social unrest and retaliation from the suffering masses

that culminated in the mass uprising at Punnapra and Vayalar, two coastal areas in Alappuzha. It is said that around one thousand people were dead during the upheaval. The movie, in the guise of visualising a historical event, fictionalised the entire episode by putting it into a narrative ensuring popular ingredients for entertainments. When history is put into a narrative it usually acquires the quality of a fiction. Then truth claims of history become doubtful as it negates scientific approaches. Here cinematic remembrance of the past fails to problematize the official history. Past does not seem to expose gaps and hiatus for the filmmaker to reconstruct it. The recalling of the past thus becomes an exercise in fictional narrative. The last documentary footage in the film showing the floral tribute being performed by the real life political leaders like E. M. S. Namboodiripadu, Gouri Amma, and A. K. Gopalan makes a desperate attempt to establish a link with the political past of Kerala. But the politically dispassionate treatment of the struggle does not communicate with the socio-economic turmoil of the past. When talking about Yugoslavian cinema Nevena Dakovic made the following comments: "Their manifold effects include the re-evaluation of the past, the correction of official public and private history through metaphorical and symbolic restructuring, the emphasis on the repetitive model of events, and the circular temporal regime as well as the mapping of individual and private remembrance" (123). No such attempt was made by the makers of *Punnapravayalar*. They were simply manipulating nostalgia to fictionalize the entire political episode of the past to garner popular appeal. They "did not reinvent a picture of the past in its lived totality; they do not reconstruct the past but rather invent the feel and shape of the characteristics of art objects in order to evoke the feeling of the past" (Dakovic 125). As a result, the past thus recreated became bereft of its political implications and turned out to be a sugar coated fictional narrative. The

famous filmmaker from Chile, Miguel Littin during his interview with Samik Badyopadhyaya made the following remarks about people's inability to read history when they are in the process of rapid change: "The reading of history is manipulated by political and economic interest or the cultural interest of the dominant class. People, in general, have no idea of change except the mere impression of a cloud that passes by. For example, if you ask the Chilean about the socialist revolution in 1932, few people will be able to tell you anything because they have no memory of it" (158). So a film based on the historical incident should be able to give back people a forgotten history with all its political dynamics. But the movie in question here desperately disengages such serious polemical debates and wallows in melodramatic vein.

The movie *Punnapravayalar* establishes a link with the past by making explicit suggestions like place names and historical events. But at the same time a story thread with melodramatic possibilities - that does not have any relationship with the actual historical events- is woven to ensure spectators' turn out. Invoking the past should not be an exercise in capturing the past with all its minute details as the reality of the past may be a constructed reality evolved out of the trials and tribulations orchestrated to sustain the interest of the dominant group. Hence there are chances for historical objectivity to be swayed by the constructed history popularised by the ruling class. But movies *Ningalenne Communistakki* and *Punnapravayalar*, while embarking on the act of revisiting the past, reconstructed the past with all the gestures of ideological servility. Thus those movies, however popular they were as political melodramas, functioned as catalysts to neutralise the intense political debates they ought to have generated. Walter Benjamin has already envisaged this danger when he says:

> To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" (Renke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain the image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger. The danger affects both the content of the tradition and its receivers. The same threat hangs over both: that of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it. (255)

Visuals of labouring bodies, collective social struggles, political processions, police atrocities and cruelties of the feudal landlords are effectively used to maintain an atmosphere of political unrest. Achuthan (Govindan Kutty) represents the newly emerged bourgeois class who struck an alliance with the feudal class. People are already dissatisfied with the inhuman treatment unleashed by the landlord Mariyaveedan (Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair).They were politically organised by comrade Prabhakaran (Prem Nazir), the communist leader of Punnapra. The formation of union had already provided the working class with confidence and a sense of unity. Fed up with the suppressive regime of Divan and the exploitation of the landlord, the people of Punnapra and Vayalar demanded for Responsible Governance. The landlord and his coteries formulated many plans to reject such demands. But they could not silence the growing clamour for political freedom and Responsible Governance. As a last resort the landlord, with the help of the Divan, could gather the support of the military that were deployed along the coastal regions of Punnapra and Vayalar. The angry mob and the well-equipped military fought a pitched battle resulting in the murder of large number of revolutionaries.

The movie begins with a series of montage shots of a mammoth procession organised against the British rule which is on the decline. The voice over narration accompanying the visuals accurately declares the spatio-temporal location of the movie. Even during the waning hours of the British colonial rule the king of Travancore, one of the princely states of Kerala, was reluctant to accept the political changes and continued with his despotic rule. The credit titles give way to a series of panning shots that captures the visual beauty of Vayalar. The background song describing the political importance of the place attributes a diegetic quality to the movie. The opening song acts as a key to open the doors to the fictional world of Vayalar rather than engaging the spectators politically. The folklorist atmosphere thus created has been maintained throughout the filmic narrative by means of song sequences, improbable love, and by the creation of hero/villain binaries. The comedy scenes performed by the duo Adoor Bhasi (as Gopalji) and Adoor Pankajam (as Sulochana) have pernicious effects on the gravity of the political debates the movie ostensibly tries to open up. The movie does not purport to realistically depict political activities of the communists anywhere in the movie. Praphakaran is seen addressing the public gatherings exhorting political propagandas, but none of his followers are registered as totally developed characters. Most of them are pictured as mere mute followers. The focus of attention is centred upon Prabhakaran and Chellamma (Sheela) who are in amorous relationship. The political theme of the movie is rendered irrelevant due to the priority given to the theme of love between them. Their relationship is depicted in such a way that the spectators' sympathy is aroused towards their unfulfilled love rather than the foiled revolution. By making the leader of the revolutionary less aggressive and more obedient, the ideology he represents lost much of its vigour. Contrary to the character of Prabhakaran, Chellamma's character is conceived

as more vibrant and dynamic. She was the leader of female workers in the coir factory. She could instigate courage and revolutionary spirit within her fellow workers. But the strength in her character is diffused by portraying her body in song sequences with voyeuristic implications. The camera in those song sequences follows the female body as an object of "male gaze" (Mulvey 306) and male pleasure that ultimately disregards the life of toil and the sweaty body of the working class. The shift in the focus of camera from labouring body to drenched body of the female artist invariably shifts the focus of spectators' attention from politics to pleasure. Fictionalisation of the actual historical events stripped the movie of all its political implications. The fundamental requirement of a political movie is to bring the spectators into active interaction with the visual narrative that authorizes them to engender meaning instead of being remained as a passive consumer. Colin MacCabe observes:

> If the film chose to represent political struggle unproblematically without engaging the viewer in the construction of the meaning, then the spectators would learn nothing about their specific situations, indeed in so far as they accepted the images and identification of the film they would lose their capacity to act in a revolutionary manner, for such action depends on attraction to the concrete situation which the Hollywood film could only ignore. (61)

What he argues here is that without disrupting the traditional Hollywood paradigm of all absorbing narrative, one cannot politicise the entire site of filmmaking. For that intentional gaps should be left by the filmmaker for the spectators to intervene in his pursuit of construction of meaning. The apolitical rendering of a truly political incident by putting it into a manipulated reality ultimately disengages the movie from its revolutionary overtones. The socialist agrarian realism maintained throughout the movie

attributes a romantic mood which again situates the spectator in a totally fictional world. The unholy nexus existed between the feudalists and bourgeois class is adequately represented in the characters of Valiyaveedan and Achuthan. But the cruelties they committed were depicted as personal aberration rather than as the ill effect of the system they both represent. The delicate nuances of the working of these systems are not debated with all its subtle complexities. The victimisation of the lower caste Hindus, the psychological oppression they meted out and the organizing strategies of the revolutionaries are seemingly kept outside the inhospitable space of the fictional narrative.

The movie is released in the year 1968, some twenty two years after the event. Even though many leftist filmmakers like P. Bhaskaran and Thoppil Bhasi were active during that period none of them was ready to film that incident. It was Boban Kunchakko, a businessman from Travancore with explicit business orientation, who realised the profit potential of such a historical uprising, came forward to visualise it. The movie is produced inside the dominant production system with private capital from a single producer. In the absence of alternate systems of production and making, *Punnapravayalar* provides the same visual experience heretofore extended by the mainstream cinema. The representation of the idea of the political outsider is thus tacitly neutralised by diffusing much of their political vigour. An incident that challenged the feudal hierarchy and the suppressive regime of the Divan at the cost of the lives of more than thousand people was thus cinematically narrated as a fictional melodrama with ample room for theatrics. The strategic silence maintained by the leftist filmmakers for almost twenty two years on a political incident splashed with blood explains the dominance of ruling class interests in the realm of filmmaking. The communists were

evidently considered outsiders for a long period in the field of filmmaking and only when the market potential of the ideology was realised were they given cinematic spaces. But by the time they were accommodated, the political content of their ideology went through implicit process of neutralisation.

The film *Ningalenne Communistakki* by Thoppil Bhasi was released in 1970. The film was based on a play with the same title by Bhasi. The play, which was staged in 1952, was instrumental in invigorating the communist movement as it addressed issues related to the lives of the common folk during that time in realistic terms. But the film version of the same play produced after twenty years diffused much of the political content and incorporated many techniques aimed to garner profit. Paramu Pillai (Sathyan) is an aged farmer who is pondering over the lost glory of his feudal ancestry. He lives in a small village with his wife Kalyani (Vijaya Kumari), son Gopalan (Prem Nazir) and daughter Meenakshi (K P A C Lalitha). Gopalan and his friend Mathew (K. P. Ummer) are political activists who work for the welfare of the agricultural labourers and small time farmers. Valiyaveetil Kesavan Nair (Kottayam Chellanppan), the local landlord, exploits the poor peasants and labourers and enjoys unquestionable authority over land and women. Because of his political activism, Gopalan becomes Kesavan Nair's bitter enemy. Sumavally, Kesavan Nair's daughter is fed up with her father's reprehensible ways. She falls in love with the young and charismatic Gopalan who initially discouraged her entreaties. Mala (Jayabharathi), a young Harijan girl, is also in love with Gopalan, who later has to bury her love in her heart after hearing the news of Sumavally's love for him. Kesavan Nair, through foul means, takes possession of the lands of Paramu Pilla and Karamban. This was a shocking experience to Paramu Pillai who favours Kesavan Nair and the system of feudalism he

represents and is always critical against the policies of his son and his party. In the last sequence of the film we find Paramu Pilla joins the party procession that moves through the village, holding the Red Flag upright. Thus he turns communist.

The seemingly revolutionary nature of the story thread has been neutralised in the film version of the play by manipulating techniques specific to cinema like camera movements, shots, editing, background score, songs etc. The thrust areas of the filmic narrative often get shifted from the political debates to personal emotionality to ensure viewers' total absorption into the narrative. The focus of attention thus falls on the close-ups of the heroines who are either heart broken when their love is denied by the protagonist or becomes ecstatic at the prospect of the gratification of their love. Instead of highlighting the political content of the play the movie revolves around the triangular love between Gopalan, Sumavalli and Mala. Politics has been pushed into the background and melodramatic love sequences coupled with melodious songs are foregrounded. The viewers were situated in a narrative with full of suspense and intricacies. They were more anxious about the future of the love relationship between Gopalan, Sumavalli and Mala rather than about the future of the Communist movement. The songs are rich with intense emotional expressions made possible by close-up shots of the artists that, in the end, effectively cancel the political implication of the theme. The character of Paramu Pillai is conceived in such a manner that sympathy is aroused in the minds of the viewers towards him. He always basked in the lost glory of feudalist past where he enjoyed all the privileges of an upper caste male. His vociferous lament for the fading system of feudalism reminds the spectators of Madame Lyubov, a character in Anton Chekov's play, *Cherry Orchard*. He recollects and recounts the golden days of feudalism where his great grand uncle, the powerful patriarch of the family, held

supreme power. He is portrayed as a complaining veteran who always sighs, "time has changed, and it is doomsday"[7] (*Ningalenne*). Paramu Pillai's individual memory is strategically manipulated to invite viewer's sympathy towards the dilapidated structures of feudalism. A binary is carefully fabricated between Paramu Pillai and Kesavan Nair, both represent feudalism, which eventually exonerates the inhuman structure of feudalism and diverts the attention from the system to the individual level. Insofar as the incompatibilities of the system in question are not clinically exposed, the cruelties inherent in the system would be perceived as individual aberrations. In the end the red flag representing the leftist ideology has been handed over to the former feudalist Paramu Pillai who became a part of the communist movement. This along with Gopalan's love for Sumavalli, daughter of Kesavan Nair, creates a scenario where the Leftist political positions were gradually tilted towards feudal values.

Mala, the lower caste girl, did not reveal her love to Gopalan who realised her social inferiority as the reason for her silence. She cuts a sorry figure in the movie as her sincere love was rejected by the protagonist. Gopalan's love towards Sumavalli exposes his deeply rooted upper caste feudalist inclination where he weighed education and physical beauty more than anything else. Mala's inability to learn the teachings of Gopalan is juxtaposed with Suamavalli's pleasant college experiences that create a feeling of mismatch between Mala and Gopalan within the minds of the viewers. The appearances of Paramu Pillai at the beginning and end of the movie in close-up shots further reiterated the dominance of upper caste values. Paramu Pilla's transition from a feudalist to a communist is not a political transformation. When the Red Flag is handed over to a former feudalist, and the film ends with his close-up shot the centrality often attributed to class war in communist discourses is substituted by class reconciliation.

Nowhere in the movie were collective struggles of the peasants and labourers for their rights and justice visualised. Instead the camera revolves around the amorous relationship between Gopalan and Sumavalli and the tormenting emotionality of Mala. By juxtaposing scenes where Gopalan appears with Sumavally and Mala intermittently, an intrinsic element of suspense is developed for inviting the spectators' total involvement in the narrative. Immediately after the scene where Sumavally reveals her heart to Gopalan which he denies politely, Gopalan is found in the hut of Mala where he does not deny Kesavan Nair's allegation of their love relationship. The conversation goes like this:

> GOPALAN. By the by, what was the quarrel about at the field today?
>
> MALA. The Landlord alleged that there were study classes here during
>   the nights.
>
> GOPALAN. So what? It is a fact.
>
> MALA. I asked him what it mattered to him if it was so. Then he made
>   some wrong comments.
>
> GOPALAN. What did he say?
>
> MALA. That I am in love with you.
>
> GOPALAN. With me? You are a working class woman and I am a social
>   worker. Landlord cannot love me in the way you love me.
>
> MALA. Beisdes, he said you loved me too.
>
> GOPALAN. That's also true. All good minded people would love you.
>
> (*Ningalenne*)

Mala, the illiterate lower caste girl, mistakes these comments from Gopalan for his expression of love for her. The spectators would normally conclude this scene as the

empirical fruition of Mala's desire for Gopalan. The next song sequence, as it is seen in the imagination of the day dreaming Mala, reiterates the spectators' anticipation, where Gopalan and Mala are found involved in intensely amorous gestures. Thematically these juxtapositions function as a building block to step up viewers' anxiety which is broken in a later scene where Gopalan revealed his love for Sumavally to Mala. The intricacies pertaining to the triangular love between Gopalan, Sumavally and Mala are thus resolved as the lower caste girl, Mala turned out to be on the receiving end. The narrative thus performs its ideological function in two ways: first, by portraying Mala as a mismatch (because of her caste/illiteracy) to the educated upper caste Gopalan, it upholds the feudal value system. Then, by putting this triangular love sequences as the linchpin of the narrative, it cancels out much of its political implications. The film begins with the voice over by the scriptwriter Thoppil Bhasi where he extended his whole hearted gratitude to Boban Kunchakko, the producer of the movie. It is highly paradoxical to see a film charged with revolutionary political theme begins with thanks giving voice over to a bourgeois capitalist of the period. This gesture itself is a cogent evidence of cinema's servility to capital even when it deals with political themes.

The same trajectory is taken by another movie directed by Sethumadhavan, *Anubhavangal Palichakal*. The film is considered one of Sethumadhavan's best works. Released in 1971 the film tells the story of a worker committed to trade union activities who suspects his wife's fidelity. Chellappan (Sathyan), a dedicated Communist lives with his wife Bhavani (Sheela), son Kuttappan (Baby Shelvi) and daughter Kumari (Baby Sumathi). Chellappan smells adultery between his wife and his friend and co-worker Gopalan (Prem Nazir). The relationship between Chellappan and Bhavani is marked by quarrels and physical abuses. Chellappan gets into a tussle with his employer

once and was chased by the police. He went absconding and stayed with the family of another party member Kochitty (Sankaradi) in a nearby village as a temporary hiding arrangement. Kochitty's daughter Parvathi (K P A C Lalitha) falls in love with Chellappan who makes a foiled attempt to seduce her. Despite this initial rejection Parvathi develops love for him. But Chellappan, on the other hand, realised how cruel he was to his wife, returned to his home. But there he was shocked to see Bhavani living with Gopalan. The desperate Chellappan later gets involved in a tussle with the goondas of a factory owner consequent to which he was arrested by the police. Eventually the factory owner dies and he is sentenced to capital punishment. His body is received by Bhavani and Gopalan.

Chelleppan is portrayed as a brave union leader ready to question the inhuman behaviour of the bourgeois factory owners. But at the same time he is bestowed with all human weaknesses. He is suspicious about the fidelity of his wife Bhavani. He tried to seduce Parvathi during the time of his hiding. The character of Chelleppan was brilliantly given life by the compelling performance by the acting legend Sathyan. As a result, as in the case of other movies already discussed, the spectators' attention revolves around the inevitable tragedy of the protagonist, keeping the political content at the fringes. The political backdrop of the film became irrelevant leaving the stage for the human emotion to play its part. Political struggle gave way to emotional struggles. Chellappan came to know about the relationship between his wife and his friend Gopalan (Prem Nazir) while he was in the hiding. But contrary to everybody's apprehensions he seemed emotionally well composed. Those sequences are marked by their cinematic excellence that eclipsed squarely the political subplot of the movie. The movie is based on a successful novel written by Thakazhi Sivasankarapillai, a prominent Malayalam

writer of the time. Producer of the movie O. P. Joseph was admittedly attracted by the market potential of the theme other than by the political content of it. The act of projecting a larger than life hero at the centre of the action, who could single handedly manage to overpower his adversaries, anticipates spectators' adoration. Portrayal of the protagonist endowed with such superhuman abilities is part of the market tactics. When Chellappan was sacked from his job in the factory he threatened the factory owner without seeking the help of the union. A film that ignores the power of the collective struggle and conceiving the idea of the superhuman protagonist can never be considered a true political movie. Here once again a communist is given a space in the celluloid, but by means of various strategies the representation of the political outsider is carefully crafted to fictionalise his personality. The technique of accommodation after neutralisation is effectively employed in this movie as well.

So, the filmmakers of the period had to address these conflicting situations where on the one hand they wanted to accommodate the idea of the political outsider in their films, and on the other, they wanted to display their loyalty towards the dominant ideology. In order to resolve this dilemma, as seen in the context of films like *Punnapravayalar, Anubhavangal palichakal, Ningalenne Communistakki*, filmmakers of the time employed the strategy of neutralising the political implications of the historical events before accommodating them into the body of the filmic narrative. Renowned Brazilian filmmaker Glauber Rocha argues:

> I think that cinema today should fundamentally reflect upon the diverse and non-
> normative aspects of political reality, and that is not possible unless one produces
> new schemas and cinematic forms that are completely subjective. They should
> not rely upon conventional cinematic language to convey their message... In each

case, being political means the way in which each of us sees his own class

relations, our individual sociological context, and our personal sense of history.

(103)

Rocha here tries to ascertain the importance of subjective interpretation of social forces

as a prerequisite for the act of political filmmaking. He further adds:

In as much as I am a filmmaker, I am able to use my filmmaking "politically" to

record reality directly or to recreate my subjective vision. Besides reflecting the

world in both of these activities, the subjective act is present in some form or the

other. If I "record", I am not really being "objective"; I have merely recorded the

reality that interests me. In all cases, there is a politically viable alternative

between documentary cinema and a certain types of fiction film that has

developed in Europe, which can be used in the third world. (103)

He was emphatically vocal about the creation of a popular revolutionary aesthetics to

counter the commercial popular aesthetics of Hollywood, the populist demagogic

aesthetics of Russian films, and the bourgeois-artistic aesthetics of Europe. His films like

Terra em Trance (1967), *O Dragao da Maldade Contra o Santo guerreiro* (1969) are

classic examples of these theoretical positions. But in the context of Malayalam cinema,

the filmmakers adopted a strategic way of accommodating such political positions

without destabilising the power relations. They fully exploited the popularity of leftist

ideology for commercial purpose and at the same time diffused the political intensity of

the leftist movement for ideological purpose. On the contrary none of the Malayalam

films mentioned above dares to interpret reality in a political way. Those movies, at the

pretext of presenting history realistically, actually represent history in grotesque ways

mixing it with fictional elements for melodramatic effects. When history is fictionalised

its truth claims will be compromised. So those movies that visualised the political events

of the past problematised the political content by foregrounding the fictional elements

instead of subjectively interpreting the political reality. While thematically accepting the

historical events with political content they did not fail to employ popular ingredients

like melodious songs, unrealistic stunt scenes, melodramatic plot, and decorative

treatment. Many of the movies produced during 1960s and 70s depended heavily on

songs which still remain in the collective memory of music lovers. Renowned poets like

P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Rama Varma, and O.N.V. Kurup penned enthralling lyrics for the

movies and the greatest music directors of all time like Devarajan, Dakshinamoorthy,

and M. S. Baburaj put them into ever memorable music compositions and blessed singers

like Kozhikode Abdulkhader, K. J. Yesudas, S. Janaki, P. Jayachandran and many others

rendered those songs as evergreen music experience that reverberated the atmosphere of

Kerala until recently. Those songs further enriched and diversified the already rich

tradition of indigenous music of Kerala. But a close observation of the lyrics and song

sequences of those movies will expose the subtle operation of dominant ideology in

seemingly self-proclaimed leftist movies. For example, as noted by Malayalam media

critic N. P. Sajeesh, in his article in *Bhashaposhini*, the song "Ambalapparambile

aaramattile…" sung by the protagonist in the movie *Ningalenne Communistakki*

describes the beauty of his lady love in beautiful poetry. But the images and symbols

used in this song represent an aesthetic premise which is marked with upper caste feudal

sentiments. The visuals are galore with shots that highlight the life of dominant class that

ultimately preserves their values. In the guise of propagating the lives of the lower class,

the images ingrained with the ideology of the dominant class pervade the entire visual

narrative. Songs in the movie *Punnapravayalar* also perform the same ideological function. For example "in the song sequence 'Kanniyilam kili Kathirukanakkili Kolothum padathu koyyan poyi' camera captures the sumptuous body movements of the heroine,"[8] (184) and thereby rendering the female body as an object of male desire. Since "The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form" (Mulvey 307). Sajeesh adds that "In another song sequence 'Angoru nattilu Mannukondu Poothalika Ingoru/Nattilu Ponnukondu Poothalika,'when the lyric represents the dichotomy in the distribution of economy and the resulting class difference, the visuals represent the female bodies with all their tempting mannerisms" (Sajeesh 184-185). Most of the films produced during 1950s and 60s were brimming with songs that diluted the ideological steadfastness represented by the political outsiders in those movies.

Songs were instrumental in diluting the political content of the movies, on the one hand and on the other they functioned as the carriers of ideological dominance. The outsiders accommodated within the visual narratives thus lost all their political implications. According to Adorno film music has the exceptional ability to transcend the spatial separation between the screen and viewers so as to immerse them into the diegesis. Following Nietzsche he observes that, "when Nietzsche condemned the "intoxication" which music produces as an unproductive intoxication, incapable of activation, impure and dangerous, he correctly recognised the relation between the satisfaction of need and the ideological obscurement – the basic law of bourgeois music practices – and further identified the unconscious as the setting of that relation" (Adorno 422). Thus film music fulfils a potent ideological function: to promote the audience's

absorption into the film. The audience is thus positioned to accept, uncritically, the ideology circulating through the film. Indeed, Eisler and Adorno refer to film music as a drug. In addition to that some of such song sequences induce voyeuristic pleasure within the spectators as a result of which the focus of attention shifted from the political content of the narrative.

Eminent Bengali director Ritwik Ghatak was a supporter of the role of music in cinema. He was of the view that music and song could be made a part of cinema since we Indians realize our emotions in "typical melodic note-combinations" (41). Citing the example of the great Greek filmmaker Micheal Cacoyannis's *Electra* he pointed out the importance of music in cinema. In the context of Indian cinema since we Indians are an epic people who like melody and folklore he "always insisted that melody and music as such have a place in films, in their own right" (41). Despite his support for the role of music in films he never failed to criticise the Bollywood cinema for its being excessively musical for the sake of mere entertainment. He writes:

> The tradition of Indian films, especially as practiced by Bombay filmmakers, is a monstrous tradition. Moreover it is a most unfilmic tradition. Over and above that, this tradition directly stems from the corrupt inartistic and vulgar art forms of jatras, nautankis, opera plays and other hybrid stage productions. These forms were holding sway in our land just before the advent of talkies. (41)

According to Ghatak songs and dances can be included in films only if the theme and approach call for them. But the movies cited above, in fact, assimilated music as a means to entertain the audience other than performing any thematic function like emphasizing the political content of the movie. Rather those songs depoliticised the entire narratives.

In the post-1950 scenario either political outsiders or their ideological positions were taken into the cinematic narrative in such a way that they were eventually politically castrated. Inclusion of melodious songs, featuring stars of the day as the protagonists, insertion of the political theme within the melodramatic fictional narratives are some of the strategies employed by the dominant cinema to neutralize the political debates lying latent within those movies. This neutralisation of political function of the political outsiders being represented help sustaining the supremacy of the dominant ideology. Intensive political discourses expected to be emanated from the political outsiders were neutralised by means of economic regulation by the funding agency whose main objective is to reproduce capital. As a politico-economic institution, cinema occupies a space where the demand of the capital intersects with the urge for self-expression from the part of the individual film makers. Since filmmaking is predominantly an economic activity, to express loyalty to the source of capital, cinema becomes subservient to the value system perpetrated by the dominant ideology. The mechanics of power that lead to the tragic end of J.C.Daniel's *Vigathakumaran* was setting up a norm for filmmaking. There were no conspicuous initiatives from filmmakers in Malayalam to disturb the structures of power after the economic debacle of *Vigathakumaran*. The fate of J.C.Daniel has been looming in the air that compelled the filmmakers to embrace the *status quo* and comply with the popular tastes. Nobody dared to transgress the safe and secure path of following the silent decree of the dominant class for fear of economic disaster.

Lumiere Brothers, after realising the market potential of cinema, toured all across Europe for the intention of making profit. In India J.F.Madan monopolised one third of Indian theatres and distribution network for a long time and made immense riches. Early

Malayalam filmmakers, much before the idea of Kerala had been geopolitically carved out had to depend upon production system outside Madras and later studios in Tamil Nadu, for their production works. The idea of an 'autonomous regional cinema' was still a distance dream during 1930s and 40s. Technician and directors, mostly from Tamil Nadu, were attracted to Malayalam Film industry because they realised its potential to make profit and were insensitive towards experimentations. They were apprehensive of the fact that such attempts would alienate the audience from films as a result of which they would end up as economic disasters. That is the reason why Malayalam cinema was not free from the melodramatic and overtly conversational style of Tamil theatre and Cinema. They extensively drew from the visual registers employed by the Tamil filmmakers to address the plebeian audience. The early talkies of Malayalam, *Balan* (1938) and *Njanambika* (1940) were produced in Modern theaters Selam and Neutron Studio in Chennai. They had an intention to monopolize Malayalam Film industry. *Balan* became a box office success. *Njanambika* that followed *Balan* was like an old wine in new bottle. Excited by the unexpected success of the movie the distributors of the movie, Symala Pictures, came forward to produce another film. But such economic considerations imposed constraints on the form and contents of the genre in such a way that film produced one after the other resembled each other, both thematically and structurally. Filmmakers were striving to identify themes of popular interest and framed usual formulae to attract mass audience to the theatre. The marketing strategies were devised in such a way as to thrive upon the popular desire for tragic melodramas. Captions for the posters were designed to exploit this penchant for tragedy and melodrama. The caption for the 1952 film *Athmasakhi* goes like this: "A life story full of pleasant amorous scenes and tearful life experiences" (Jayaraj 97). The caption for

another movie *Achan* highlights the tragic intensity as well as the hilarious comedy marked the story: "You will definitely cry however self-controlled you are. However tight lipped you are, you will break into laughter. Your body and mind will be thrilled. Emotions will expand"[9] (97). Such marketing techniques along with combination of tragedy and humour found their successful expression in *Jeevitha Nauka* released in 1951. "It provides wings to the industry aspirations of Malayalam Cinema" (50), observed Vijayakrishnan. The film marked a successful combination of popular interests with due care to invite spectators to the unreal world of cinema. The authoritarian intervention unleashed by the capital in the process of filmmaking, thus, transformed it as a means to further reproduce capital. Such a view of art does not encourage political engagements as a result of which political activists are either dismissed from cinema as political outsiders or assimilated in to the narrative after thorough rarefaction. In order to dismantle the hegemony of the capital, one has to design counter hegemonic techniques of production. But as found in Malayalam filmmakers like P.Bhaskaran or Ramu Karyat or Sethumadhavan who had made some laudable inroads in filming political themes at least superficially, tilted towards the call of the market during the concluding years of their career. Chelangad Gopalakrishnan's following observation reveals the wide gap existing between ideology and dominant cinema: "Satyanesan Nadar [former Sub-Inspector of Police], who way vying for the blood of the communists [during the Punnapra Vayalar Struggle], became the closest friend of communists like Thoppil Bhasi, P. Bhaskaran, Ramu Karyat, Vayalar, and Devarajan after he became an actor!"[10] (63). It is interesting to point out that P. Bhaskaran, who wrote a poem titled *Vayalar Garjikkunnu* (Vayalar roars) in response to the atrocities unleashed by the landlords and police against the communists in Vayalar, could not retain the same vigor in any of his

movies. As Vijayakrishnan rightly observed, "during1970s P Bhaskaran basked in remakes"[11] (91). Despite the fact that those films harvested immense capital, he lost the privilege of being considered the maker of quality films. Same was the case with producers of quality films of the time. P. K. Pareekkutty, producer of *Neelakkuyil* (1954), was trying to capitalise from the popularity of the drama written by Thoppil Bhasi while producing *Mudiyanaya Puthran* (1961). He had to produce a low quality movie, *Nadodikal*, which contains popular ingredients like stunt scenes, rape scenes and cabaret, in order to overcome the economic debacle he suffered consequent to the box office failures of two consecutive movies he produced, *Rarichan Enna Pouran* and *Minnaminungu*. Later he was seen making films like '*Thacholi Othenan*' and '*Kunjali Marakkar*', stories based on the lives of chronicle heroes of the past without subjecting them to historical scrutiny. Pareekkutty constantly swung from his position as the producer of quality movies and entertainment flicks due to the pressure exerted by the demands of the capital. *Nallathanka* was the Malayalam remake of *Nalla thankal*, the blockbuster Tamil movie. K. V. Koshi, the director of the movie was aware of the impact it had created in Tamilnadu. "His aim was to emotionally exploit the audience by exposing them to the sufferings of an ordinary woman" (Vijayakrishnan 45). Early film studios in Malayalam, Merryland and Navodaya, failed to contribute to the growth of Malayalam cinema as an art form but those were instrumental in expanding the industrial base of it. At the bottom line, even during 1950s and 60s, films continued exhibiting commercialising tendencies explicitly by adopting populist formulae. The structure of most of those films remained more or less the same with sub plots, intrigues, theatrical style, and endlessly talking characters. Producers of the time were very particular about ensuring the presence of stars of the time like Sathyan, Prem Naseer, Miss Kumari,

Ambika and others, in their movies without considering the aptness of casting. The

audience of the movies could not identify themselves with the artists donning the role of

the revolutionary heroes because of their physical appearance and the elitist brand of

Malayalam they used. The body features of the fair, handsome figures of the protagonists

like Gopalan (*Ningalenne Communistakki*), Prabhakaran (*Punnapra Vayalar*) were in no

way similar to that of the hardworking agriculture labourers. K. V. Raman Kutty, by

citing the example of *Chemmeen*, made the following observation on this tendency:

> *Chemmeen* looked at the fishermen of Kerala from a distance and all the
>
> established actors looked separated from the rest of the fishing community and
>
> their environments. Its characters very often appeared before the camera in
>
> frontal shots their faces fully lit though set in fishermen's thatched dwellings, in
>
> the theatrical style of the earlier decade. Its music was unrelated to the cultural
>
> milieu though the songs tuned to the score originally done for non-Malayalam
>
> films were lilting and pleasing. (354)

A feeling of alienation was felt by the spectators with the protagonists because of their

glamorous physical features. However political the theme is, the presence of the stars of

the day transcends the realist settings of those movies and places them in a world of

illusion. In addition to that other technical aspects of those movies followed the

Hollywood tradition of seamless narrative no matter how technically imperfect those

movies were. Frontal shots projecting the physical beauty of both heroes and heroines,

excessive use of artificial lighting, linear narrative and continuity editing were some of

such examples. As in the case of *Chemmeen*, the political movies discussed above

observed the conventional ways in terms of camera angles, shots, editing, lyrics, lighting

etc. The high sounding standardised mellifluous Malayalam was unfamiliar to the

ordinary working class people. That created a hiatus between the everyday experiences of the laymen and the idealist world order being represented in the theatre screen. They failed to identify the heroes with their own fellow people. Political outsiders appeared in the political melodramas of the 1950s and 60s were made to display the physical attributes of the upper caste Hindus as a result of which the aesthetic values of the dominant ideology became reiterated. As the funding system of the time favoured typical characters an alternate idea of the hero seemed almost impossible. Producers were willing to fund big budget movies with political themes as they realised the economic potential of such themes. But before accommodating politics they were careful enough to attribute qualities to the political outsiders that eventually converted them into cinematic insiders. Gradually outsiders became insiders as a result of carefully crafted inclusion strategies discussed earlier. Once they were made insiders, it became apparent that, the political questions usually raised by the outsiders would no longer inspire the downtrodden who felt physical, linguistic, political and emotional disconnect from them.

Malayalam Cinema until 1970s was characterised by excessive lyricism, melodramatic treatment, artificial dialogues, sentimental humanism and grotesque version of social reality. Film producers' pursuit for profit at the expense of quality of the art form had a catalytic effect on diluting the effective politics of the genre. As the result, the customary separation between art and politics, cinema and society became deepened. Capital inflow into the production of movies guaranteed the entertainment of the masses by eliminating the spectator's awareness of reality. Like all popular arts, the aesthetic value of cinema became superseded and determined by its marketing potential. Cliché-ridden, apolitical, reactionary films reaped box office success forcing the production companies to follow the earlier models. Politics had been forgotten and

economics has become the rule of the day. Since filmmaking is predominantly an economic activity, to express loyalty to the source of capital, cinema becomes subservient to the value system perpetrated by the dominant ideology. In the context of Kerala during the first half of the 20thcentury, the socio-economic structure was dominated by feudal power relations that were at the service of Hindu upper caste sentiments. The value system conceived and propagated by the dominant class remained the value system of the whole society. For Gramsci, the dominant class sustains its hegemony through "coercion" and "persuasion" that ultimately resulted in "consensus" (Gramsci 236). This observation holds relevance in the context of Kerala society which was dominated by feudal system characterised by casteism and untouchability. Such a system will be intolerant to any interventions that tend to question the feudal values because a consensus had already been discursively constructed about the hegemony of those values. That may be the economic reason why no filmmakers were ready to make films with explicit political contents that questioned the feudal power structure. Later they were forced to accommodate political discourses in their movies because of the gradual transition of the economic system from feudalism to bourgeois capitalism. Market possibilities of communism, heretofore unrealised by Malayalam cinema, were tacitly exploited by the dominant cinema during this transition period. The bourgeois economic system entertains humanist ideas like social justice and social equality, which were considered the preconditions for a buoyant economy, to intervene in the socio-cultural discourses in order to make the economy more dynamic. But insofar as the value system remained the same as earlier (*In Ningalenne Communistakki*, comrade Gopalan, the self proclaimed liberator of the working class, is addressed by his lower caste followers as *thambran* [lord] because of his upper caste pedigree), none of those movies

was made to penetrate into the deeper layers of power relationships that produced such economic disparities to subvert such values. The aim was not to stimulate or provoke the spectators politically but to entertain them with a view to accumulating capital. In addition to that, those movies performed ideological functions by distracting popular attention from serious political debates. While summing up the thematic orientation of the Frankfurt School writing on popular American culture, Jeff Lewis observes that because of entertainment industry "social class and individuals will necessarily be distracted from serious social and political issues as they are constantly seduced by superficial entertainment and consumer hedonism" (89). The same is true in the context of 1960s political melodramas and mythological flicks as they functioned as a 'safety valve' to neutralize the intensity of the political debates. Thus the initial phase of conscious ignorance gave way to accommodation after neutralisation.

In the third phase, rejection through apolitical criticism, political outsiders are placed within sentimental narratives whereby an element of romanticism or exoticism is added to them. In order to heighten the impracticality of their ideology they are positioned within the confinement of family which demands subjugation and submission from individual member, failure of which is normally considered unpardonable aberration. Films like *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove* (1984) and *Aranyakam* (1986) subtly exploit this reactionary function of the family to thwart the threat posed by political outsiders in the post-Emergency context. But at the same time a tendency was emerging in the context of Malayalam cinema during 1970s and 80s parallel to the practices of dominant cinema that accorded privilege to the emerging political outsiders and to their political convictions. Films like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1975) and *Amma Ariyan* (1986) are significant in this respect.

End Notes

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Chapter 3

EMERGENCE OF THE NEW POLITICAL OUTSIDER: REPRESENTATION AS RESISTANCE

It becomes apparent that the family socials and political melodramas of the 1950s and 60s represent the idea of the political outsider by grossly neutralising the political orientation of the characters. The major concern of those movies was not to invigorate the political consciousness of the viewers but to gain maximum profit by way of resorting to political themes. Politics was meticulously manipulated to further the capital of the funding agency. Those movies lack investigative vigour to probe into the deeper layers of societal organisations and economic relations that are instrumental in the creation of socio-economic disparities. Movies produced during the 1960s like *Thulabharam* (1968), *Punnapravayalar* (1968), *Mooladhanam* (1969), *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1970) invoked political themes into their narratives but much before such movies were made the Communist Party had undergone tremendous transformations. The radical position of the Party had been compromised for participating in the parliamentary democratic process. The ideological preconceptions of class struggle and revolutionary political activism were given lesser prominence and Party's approach towards other rightwing bourgeois parties had been redefined. A more or less pacifist approach had gradually taken hold of the steadfastness of the Party functionaries. In 1964, Communist Party split into CPI and more radical CPI (M). But this split, driven by ideological differences, later gave way to inter fractional feuds. In their pursuit for power, both fractions allied with bourgeois parties. It is in this context that the idea of the political outsider was represented in the aforesaid films as politically much diluted and diffused. The political moderation assumed by the outsiders in those

movies resonate with de-radicalisation of the party that begun during the 1960s. But when the organised Communist Party had started tilting towards ideological moderation, a nascent group of radical activists were gradually emerging in the political cauldron of Kerala inspired by the revolutionary exhortations of Mao in China. It was the birth of new political outsiders who are distinct from organised communist parties on the one hand and pro feudal right wing political parties on the other. The filmic representations of these newly emerged extreme leftist radical positions in post-seventy films assumed different manifestations in different films and these representations acted as resistance to the dominant ideology.

3.1. Outsiders /Insiders: Period of Transition and Emergence of the New Political Outsiders

The socio-political condition of the time was conducive for the bourgeois class to flourish owing to the shifting political equations prevalent during 1950s and 1960s. The euphoria that followed national independence from the colonial power did not last long. Large section of Indian population comprised of peasants and underprivileged were disillusioned due to the failure of government machinery to address their predicament. Famine, unemployment and price hike of essential commodities have worsened the living condition of the rural poor. They lost faith in conventional political rhetoric and they aspired for an alternate political articulation to address their issues. Communist Party, which acted as a panacea for the sufferings of the poor, has been criticised for its degeneration as a ruling party with bourgeois inclinations. The internal ideological contradiction of the party manifested in the split of 1964 that resulted in the formation of more radical outfit, CPI (M). CPI (M), with its pro-Chinese orientation, could attract the support of youngsters with revolutionary aspirations. But very soon those youngsters felt

themselves disillusioned with the alleged compromise politics of the CPI (M). A section of the educated middle class had a sinking feeling that both Communists Parties were lacking in revolutionary spirit that was necessary for the liberation of the downtrodden. For them both Communist Parties became degenerated into a bunch of power brokers whose ultimate objective had become sustenance of power rather than the formation of classless, stateless society. The alleged degeneration of the Indian Communist Party was coterminous with the political scenario prevalent worldwide. Wherever Communist parties ascended power, it is argued that, they had to discard their revolutionary leanings and forced to become a part of the status quo. The world witnessed a gradual but conspicuous change taking place in the international politics that promoted political edge to the capitalist players over the socialist regimes. Russian revolution of the 1917, with all its limitations, created a strong optimism among the socialists that a socialist world would be possible. The emergence of the Soviet coalition and the triumph of Soviet Union against the fascist forces during the Second World War reiterated the expectations of the labouring class. But at the same time the capitalist, imperialist countries were threatened by such victories. "It was this apprehension towards the ghost of communism that lead the capitalist coalition to give new form and shape to exploitation by establishing innovative strategies to colonialism under the leadership of American imperialism" (13), observes K. N. Ramachandran, former Secretary, CPI (ML) Red Flag. Cold war coalitions, McCarthyism, Bretten Woods Agreements, Truman Theory, Neo Keynesianism, the idea of the Welfare State were all strategies established by the imperial powers to economically circumscribe the third world countries. The established Communist Parties all across the world failed to negotiate meaningfully the tacit and subtle mode of imperialist political operations. K. N. Ramachandran criticised

"Krushchevian revisionism that was instrumental in capturing power in Soviet Union and East European countries and made them digress from the socialist path" (14). Krushchevians have initiated the strategy of class co-operation and coexistence with the imperialist countries. For example, Josip Broz Tito in Yugoslavia started retreating from the socialist path. It was in this context that the Chinese Communist Party under the leadership of Mao tse Tung came publicly against the Krushechevian counter-revolutionary theories.

The significant changes taken place in international politics had its repercussions in Indian politics too where the official Indian Communist Party, CPI, had totally embraced Krushchevian path. K. N. Ranachandran observes:

> Even when they (CPI) claimed pro-Leninist inclinations they were reluctant to declare openly the broker attitude of the Indian bourgeois and the limitation of the bourgeois lead congress to lead India to freedom. They also failed to assert that only the working class and its frontal political organisation, the Communist Party, can undertake the task of national liberation. They became nothing more than an extension of the Congress. (14)

As a result Communist Party under the leadership of Sripad Amrit Dange advocated counter-revolutionary theory of class co-operation that encouraged the task of national freedom movement under the leadership of the Congress. A large section of Communist Party members, including E. M. Sankaran Naboodirippadu, A. K. Gopalan and Jyothi Basu, were against this reactionary political position. This hiatus continued to persist in the party even after independence that ultimately led to the split in 1964. The revolutionary aspirants of the newly formed CPI (M) believed that the split group would

be able to develop true revolutionary line by maintaining Leninist party programmes. But contrary to such expectations, as observed by K. Venu, "they were also becoming like a conventional party by being part of the bourgeois parliamentarism" (8). Even though CPI (M) could attract the dissenters by way of its pro-China attitude, the 1967 election made it clear that this new political formation had no immediate revolutionary programmes in its agenda. Even a decade before that the organised Left had already realised the limitation of being in power in a bourgeois political environment.

As a logical outcome of its decades' long mass mobilisation, Communist government came to power in Kerala in 1957 election under the leadership of E. M. S. Namboodirippadu. The government initiated many pro-people policies like Land Reformation Act, Karshika Bandha Bill (Agrarian Relation Bill) and introduced minimum wages for the workers in the private owned industries. But weeks after assuming power the communist party realised the constraints of state governance when the absolute power is vested in the central ministry. Within the bourgeois federal system having a bourgeois government at the centre, it was not possible to materialize its dream of proletariat state through parliamentary democratic system. At the same time, contrary to the party's avowed position, it failed to mobilize extra-parliamentary mass struggle to achieve its absolute goal. The euphoria following the electoral victory in 1957 election turned to depression. The general perceptions on party's victory were divided on ideological ground however intensely the Kerala faction tried to legitimate its position on the participation in electoral process. Jaideep Nair points out:

> But the questions being asked were regarding whether the revolutionary approach
> of communism would lose some of its fervour, which would make the people
> subservient and submissive to the party? The Manchester Guardian in its issue of

March 26, 1957 mentioned that the Kerala victory would result in taming the Indian Communist Party. The American authors of "communism in India" published in 1958 thought that Kerala posed a clear challenge to Marxist-Leninist orthodoxy. The Kerala occurrence was unprecedented in the sense that it was the first capture of power by a communist party under the ordinary circumstances of functioning bourgeois democracy. But the West Bengal unit of the party decried the tendency that Kerala seemed to have heightened towards parliamentary illusion. (38)

Course of events taken place immediately after the party's assumption in power proved that such apprehensions were not totally baseless. K. Damodaran recollects the disillusionment prevailed in the political atmosphere: "Nothing radically new happened and after a while the novelty of having a Communist government began to wear off. In some cases jubilation turned to passivity and in others to open and bitter disillusionment" (81). The government for the working class turned anti-working class in Quilon where the police shot down three workers agitating against their factory owner. Even though the party's initial response was to condemn the firing and declare compensation to the bereaved families, later it decided to defend the police action. K. Damodaran recollects the mental agony he experienced while defending the police action:

> The final resolution passed by the party defended the police action. It was then decided that someone must go to the spot to explain our point of view, attack the RSP and defend the police action. I was supposed to be the party's effective Malayalam orator and I was asked to go and speak on behalf of the Kerala CP. My response was to refuse and maintain that I had been unable to digest the decision taken by the council and therefore I could not defend it. I was then

formally instructed by the party leadership to go and defend the party. I went. I

spoke about for an hour and half and it was pure demagogy. I blamed the death of

the three workers on the irresponsibility of the RSP and asked them to explain

publicly why they had leaded these workers to be shot. I made vicious attacks on

the strike leaders. That night when I returned home I really felt sick inside. I

could not sleep. (82)

This incident shed light on the emerging tendency within the party mechanism that

promoted pragmatism over idealism. In spite of the government's groundbreaking policy

interventions the ministry was dismissed by the central government on July 31, 1959,

consequent to 58 days struggle, known as Liberation Struggle, organised jointly by Nair

Service Society, Catholic Church, and Indian Union Muslim League and supported by

the Indian National Congress. The powerful communal groups along with the support of

the bourgeois class unleashed uncompromising tirade against the Communist

government. The quality of being political outsiders was still attached to the members of

the Communist Party in all political discourses during that time. The communist

government was presented as the enemy of the public who brought havoc upon the well-

being of the status quo. The government was castigated for all the pro-people policies it

had enunciated because for the propagators of the dominant ideology such policy

measures were against their vested interests. The proposed Land Reform Act,

Agriculture Friendly Bill and Education Bill came diametrically opposite to their

interests. The powerful class succeeded in mobilising the public support for their favour

that eventually ended up in the dismissal of the first ever democratically elected

government in Kerala. Dileep M. Menon summarises the entire scenario as follows:

The Communist ministry introduced the Land Relation Bill in 1959, proposing

the abolition of landlordism and transferring the land to the tiller: a measure that

threatened the hegemony of the Hindu landed households in particular. Christian

interests were ostensibly protected under a dispensation that declared the

plantations and land reclaimed from backwaters out of the purview of this

legislation. However the ministry's attempt to regulate private education

institutions intruded into a realm in which the Christian church as well as Hindu

reform organisations had been historically active. This and other radical measures

like preventing the police from intervening on the side of industry in the case of

strikes led to a social movement bringing together conservatives among Hindus

and Christians against the ministry. For the first time since independence in 1947,

the central government in Delhi interfered in 1959 and removed the ministry on

grounds of the breakdown of the machinery of law and order. (3)

The 1995 movie, *Ormakulundayirikkanam* by T. V. Chandran, is set in the

backdrop of the Liberation Struggle that costs communist Party its power. The story is

told in the perspective of a boy, Jayan (Master Nithin), who, as per the initial voice over,

has "lost his childhood at the age of twelve in 1959" (*Ormakal*). The boy gained both

personal and political experiences from his immediate environment which was vibrating

with political debates. He befriended Bhaskaran (Mammootty), known as Bhasi, a

staunch communist. Even though the movie moves along with the personal life of Jayan,

his association with Bhasi welds him inevitably to the political developments of the time.

The nascent communist government was criticised for its lack of political maturity while

implementing policies pertaining to sensitive issues. The public perception of

communists as dangerous presence in the polity was continuously reiterated by constant

propaganda let loose by the dominant ideology. Temples and Churches became centres

of mass campaigning which again constructed the idea of the outsider for the left. A

sermon in the church in the movie goes like this:

> Never before has the Catholic Church in Kerala had to face a crisis like this. The
>
> communists, who believe in an ideology which is against those values we
>
> consider as sacrosanct, who are atheists and anti-religious, became the ruling
>
> party of Kerala. We can strengthen our belief in God the Almighty and struggle
>
> to preserve and protect our faith. Don't send our children to communist teachers
>
> for education. It is akin to throwing our kids to the poisonous serpents. (*Ormakal*)

Whereas the exhortation from the other platform almost dittoes and reinforces this fear

campaign:

> The Christians and Nairs have decided to work together in the case of Education
>
> Bill. Today the Nair community is caught up with fire. If anybody is influenced
>
> by communism let them leave the party and purge themselves of such impurities
>
> by visiting temple. Septuagenarians are not supposed to participate in the strike
>
> now. The vibrant Nair youths ready to sacrifice their lives for the community
>
> should join the strikes in thousands. (*Ormakal*)

The Left was thus identified as the enemy of the system. The shot accompanied this

diegetic voice-over shows a proletariat hut being set ablaze - a clear indication of the

predicament of the working class people whose dreams were going to be shattered by the

Liberation Struggle. So mass mobilisation had been made possible by promoting

religious sentiments by various communal and caste based organisations. On the other

hand the Communist Party failed to convince the people about the progressive nature of

their policies. It is evident from the movie that only a very few people, especially those who belonged to the deprived classes joined their procession. The systematic interventions of religious sentiments within the Kerala polity gradually diluted the political consciousness of the people. The local leader Bhasi could only mobilise a negligible portion of the population. He was brought up by his brother Velayudhan (Soman) who was later killed in a political tussle. Bhasi is called a '*themmadi* (Ruffian) Bhasi' by the people. His brother Velayudhan is called goonda Velayudhan. These attributes prefixed to the names of these local communists suggest the public perception of communists as trouble makers. Actually it was because of their guts to question the powerful class that they were thus called. Here the perception of the dominant ideology is shared by the public as the perception of the entire society. Those who are reluctant to share the perceptions of the powerful class would normally become the outsiders. The unholy nexus between the communal organisations, feudalists and bourgeois industrialists at last has succeeded in toppling the democratically elected government. Bhaskaran was soon arrested for a murder case. An enigmatic scientist of a sort, Dr.Tharakan, who keeps a laboratory in his house, has already predicted an inevitable and immediate Doomsday. Indirectly the film tries to suggest that the dismissal of the communist government is akin to Doomsday.

The year 1959 was crucial for the Communist Party. The idealist position they have always pursued turned out to be worthless in the context of Indian parliamentary system. They churned out more pragmatic solutions for effectively managing their political operations within the confines of a parliamentary democracy-but at the cost of their ideological steadfastness. The post-1959 scenario witnessed a process of gradual transformation from the part of the Communist Party who became adaptable to the

ground realities of political activism. As seen by N. S. Madhavan "it is through Liberation Struggle that communist party realised in experience that the Marxist-Leninist point of view offers the impossibility of vital reformation within a bourgeois parliamentary democracy. Thereafter successive governments in Kerala function in agreement with communal-caste leadership" (Madhavan, 8). The party designed various strategies to come back to power after being out of power for eight long years. One of the ways by which Communist Party came to power was by forming electoral alliances and united front tactics. But such tactics had inherent dangers inherent. The Party naturally had to refrain from pursuing its unique revolutionary agendas. As observed by K. Damodaran, "Electoral alliances are made not based on principles, but to get government office" (47). The split in 1964 and the CPI (M) strategy to form united front with quasi-communal and bourgeois parties further exacerbated the disillusionment of the people. *Mukhamukahm* (1984) by Adoor Gopalakrishnan clinically follows these developments evident in the communist movement during the fifties and sixties. It comes like a scathing critique of the alleged ideological deviation undergone by the party during 1950s and 60s.

The entire narrative in *Mukhamukham* is woven around the memories of local people about Sreedharan (P.Gangadharan), a former revolutionary and the charismatic leader of the tile factory workers who had been missing for almost ten years. The plot of the movie can be divided into two temporal units; the first part of the film is set around 1955 and the second part begins from 1966. In that sense the movie can be perceived as a political statement made by the filmmaker on the transformations undergone by the Communist Party after its ascendancy in power in 1957. In other words the film flags arguments as to how the idea of the political outsider is evolved out of the turbid political

situation of the 1950s and 60s. Pro-workers' collective struggles undertaken by the communist movement, its ascendancy in power, the split in 1964, ideological dilemma and alleged degeneration of the party are all debated in this movie.

Sreedharan, the protagonist of the movie undertook fast unto death in order to settle a prolonged worker's strike in the tile factory. It is followed by a montage sequence of still photos of Sreedharan wherein it becomes clear that he was already dead. The sequence ends in a newspaper cutting with a title 'who is Sreedharan?' Characters appearing in the next few scenes attempt to give answer to this question by recapturing their memories about comrade Sreedharan. The enigmatic personality of Sreedharan is evolved out of the various layers of memory articulated by those characters close to him. A tea shop owner, Savitri (Kaviyur Ponnamma), Sreedharan's wife, her father (B. K. Nair), another female worker (Lalita), a young comrade Sudhakaran (Ashokan) and a beedi-maker (Krishnankutty Nair) recreate in their memory the elusive idea of the missing comrade. As per their versions Sreedharan was the prime suspect in the murder of the factory proprietor consequent to which he had gone absconding. When a favourable political atmosphere is created after the assumption of power by the communist party in 1957 other accused in the case returned to their homes. But Sreedharan had not come back. The mysterious disappearance of Sreedharan from an intensely political environment elevates him to the stature of a mythological figure. But his return demythifies and demystifies the iconic proportion of Sreedharan's personality. His prolonged sleep coupled with political indifference disillusioned his erstwhile followers and family members. Gradually he turned to liquor. He becomes completely insensitive to the political developments happening around him. One day he was killed

by unknown thugs leaving his body on the road side. His death under mysterious circumstances again elevated him to the position of a charismatic hero.

The film opens up fresh debates on the growth and decay of an ideology that articulates immense confidence to the working class people across Kerala. The first few shots elaborately depict the interior of a tile factory where man and machine are inseparably intertwined in the emerging bourgeois economic system. The inhuman structure of this system is made evident in the way the workers struggle was treated by the industrialist. The montage sequence that shows the newspaper reports of the death of Sreedharan attributes a tinge of realism to the whole narrative. The compelling influence of Sreedharan, the harbinger of communism in that village, is implicated in the dialogue spoken by a beedi-maker: "The system must change. It is the only solution" (*Mukhamukham*). This statement is suggestive of the fact that as a result of the teachings of Sreedharan even the ordinary people in that village believed the need for a counter ideology to change the system thoroughly. They found Sreedharan as an outsider to the system who could effectively subvert the equilibrium of the system that preserves the interests of the insiders. During the time of Sreedharan's critical absence from the village tremendous transformation had taken place in the Party. It came to power in Kerala and later was dismissed by the central government following the Liberation Movement. After the split in 1964 each fraction tried vehemently to take over Party machinery. Sreedharan returned from his mysterious disappearance to this chaotic political scene where he still remained as an outsider. Contrary to the expectation of the people he kept aloof from political discourses. For his dismay he found his ideology gone astray. The following comments made by right wing communist leader (Karamana Janardhanan Nair) encapsulate this conceptual shift: "I am not that active in Trade Union works these days.

Where have I got time? I do what I can to help the party with funds. When the party split the problem was which side to join. Then I decided on the Right Wing" (*Mukhamukham*). The radical change occurred in the party's attitude towards the bourgeois class is evident in his comments on the industrialists: "Why make a permanent enemy of factory owners?"(*Mukhamukham*) Instead of toppling down the hostile system the party leaders fall back on the restitution of the system. The leader of the other fraction (Thilakan) pleaded for Sreedharan's support and requested him to sign a statement favouring his faction. Sreedharan still remains as a perpetual outsider without showing any pronounced proclivity towards any factions. Sudhakaran (Asokan), the young comrade, representative of the emerging extremist political formation, expresses his total dissatisfaction with the bleak political situation: "It is all rotten-stinking. There is no link between what they say and do. I can't accept it. It is against my convictions. Who can I talk to of all these? Only you will understand. Because you taught me." (*Mukhamukham*)

While talking about the political content of the movie Adoor Gopalakrishnan partially disavows the claim that *Mukhamukham* is a political film. He says:

> Frankly I do not know if *Mukhamukham* is a political film. There lives a revolutionary-not necessarily political-in every individual. But in the course, as a matter of common experience, this spirit either dies out or becomes dormant. The idea of this film was born out of my desire to search for this spirit. Not knowing the final answers myself, I decided to give it a structure which is basically investigative in character." (36)

But this denial from the filmmaker cannot be taken for granted when we consider the grave political polemics let loose by the movie. As Iqbal Masood has aptly pointed out, "in *Mukhamukham* he [Adoor] presents the tragedy of our times-the failure of communism" (48). The alleged digression of the party from its revolutionary course is clinically addressed in this movie. Once Communist Party became part of the establishment it is alleged that they have abandoned their revolutionary ethos that eventually creates a situation that gives birth to the emergence of new political outsiders known as Naxalites. Sudhakaran in the movie represents those enraged youths who seek more rabid political activism. The disillusionment and the consequent determination of youths in the post-split political scenario of Kerala are epitomised in Sudhakaran's desperate outcry:

> Do you know? They have expelled me. The charges are many. Indiscipline and anti-party activities. Bad conduct too. They are acting in collusion. Let them not think they can defeat us! We will resist to the last. Today I am not alone. There are armies of determined young people getting ready to face anything that comes their way. The working class will single out the opportunists and traitors. We will tear the mask off the enemies of the people. (*Mukhamukham)*

The profile close-up shot where Sreedharan is seen slowly raising his head in pride in tandem with the intense articulations of Sudhakaran clearly indicates his political sympathy for the emerging political outsiders. But for himself, he is not fit for any more political actions. V. Vijayakumar argues that Adoor in *Mukhamukham* attempts metaphorically to capture the history of the degeneration of an age which is inseparably interlinked with the degeneration of the communist movement:

It is not that Adoor has represented the history of the degenerated age as such. Adoor talks through metaphors. Comrade Sreedharan in *Mukhamukham* is a metaphor for communist movement. Sreedaharan who stands with people, who struggles for workers, is the communist movement itself. Sreedharan, who hides away, represents the movement that moves away from the people. Sreedharan who always falls into sleep represents the movement that falls into slumber, without addressing the issues of the people. Sreedharan suffering from unbearable pain represents the deceased movement. The drunkard Sreedharan is a metaphor for the movement that pursues illusory pleasures. It can be easily targeted and spoiled by its enemies. (62-63)

The representation of the political outsider in transition is accurately carved out in *Mukhamukham* in the portrayal of both Sreedharan and Sudhakaran. The moment when Sudhakaran meets Sreedharan at the threshold of Sreedharan's house to express his dissatisfaction on the ideological distortion of the party, they are also at the threshold of a vital juncture where the organised Left gives way to the emergence of radical left.

At the beginning of the movie Sreedharan is found proactively political, making inspiring speeches to organize the working class. Being the representative of the Communist Party that topples the very edifice of the dominant ideology comprised of feudal value system and bourgeois capitalist relations of production, he remained as an outsider. But after being a part of the power structure Communist Party is said to be fallen into the pernicious pit of material glory that paved the way for the split in 1964. Here again Sreedharan remained as an outsider by being reluctant to join any of the splintered groups. A nascent form of political outsiders is gradually evolved out of this political cauldron as represented in the character of Sudhakaran. Sreedharan seems to be

sympathetic towards this political formation but is incapable of contributing anything. Adoor in 1984 succinctly maps out the complexities of the trajectory being trodden by the political outsiders during 1950s and 60s by resorting to every minute detail. He has recourse to the interiority of the protagonist to unveil the dynamics of power that facilitates the emergence of the idea of the political outsider. By depicting a character like Sreedharan who is never ready to yield to the temptations of the time Adoor underscores the predicament of the outsiders. It is in the character of young Sudhakaran that the cue to the next stage in the evolution of the outsider is dormantly present.

Election to the Kerala Legislative assembly in 1967 witnessed a seven party alliance known as Sapta Kakshi Munnani, including quasi-communal parties like Kerala Congress and Muslim League, led by the CPI and CPM. It registered a land slide victory over the Congress and came to power. But later it turned out to be a strategic fiasco as the ministry had been dissolved due to the discontent of its allies including CPI. The electoral alliance with the communal parties was already subjected to staunch criticism and such developments presented both Communist Parties in the public eye as opportunistic and power mongers. Both parties, even in the national level, it is argued, failed to address the ideological crisis they confronted in realistic terms. Tariq Ali in his introduction to K. Damodaran presents the position taken by him on the issue of 1964 split as follows:

> Damodaran argues that the eventual split in the CPI in the sixties, leading to the
> creation of the CPM, did not concern the basic question of whether the CPI
> should break with its parliamentary, class collaborationist strategy, but rather the
> tactical question of which bourgeois alleys were to be preferred in the pursuit of
> electoral advance. The CPI was prepared to give any political support to

Congress, hoping one day to achieve a governmental coalition with it. It has

continued to give the most servile support to Indira Gandhi, even after the

suppression of the 1974 railway worker's strike, and the qualitative shift to

dictatorship of June 1975. Following the split with the CPI, the CPM displayed

every readiness to ally itself the most reactionary bourgeois parties. . . .

Following the imposition of the State Emergency it moved incapable of mounting

any resistance to Indira Gandhi. (34)

Some of the discontent youths, including hard core party workers, rebelled against the

top level party functionaries and dreamt for an alternative that eventually lead to the

formation of extremist leftist outfit in Kerala. K. Sachidanandan, eminent poet and

political analyst of Kerala, mapped out the following reasons for the emergence of

Naxalite movement in Kerala:

The belief that Indian communist movement, including that of Kerala's, had

completely renounced social revolutionary programmes and the general

apprehension that in the post Telengana years they were subject to gradual

parliamentary desire-a desire that revolution can be achieved through

parliamentary means and the consequent disrespect towards mass struggles;

power consciousness and corruption; attraction towards the commitment and

innovativeness in the theories and praxis of revolutionary movements prevalent

in other parts of India ,especially in Bengal and Andhra; the approach that the

conditions in India is more akin to that of China and so the Maoist analysis and

praxis are more viable in Indian condition; the moral degeneration in Marxist

party and other leftist parties; the reactionary cultural policy of these parties; the

indifference of modernist writers and their young readers towards the narrowed

approach and model of the conventional progressive literature; the general sense

of resistance against established values came through modernist literature; the

critique of French mainstream communism by Existentialism, especially by its

Sartrian version and its support of Maoism, the fresh wave of confidence brought

about by the French student-working class riot of 1968; the emotional stimulation

caused by the thoughts of Latin American revolutionary movements and the

African, American protest literature; inspiration from militant social movements

like 'Dalit Panthers', propagation of foreign revolutionary literature through

paperbacks; sympathy towards the unorganised exploited classes like adivasis,

agriculture labourers and coolies; the intolerance of the traditional communist

parties towards critical questions; sincere anxiety for social justice.(19)

From the above observation it is clear that in Kerala Naxalite movement was a natural

manifestation of a conflation of political, economic and cultural factors prevalent during

the second half of the twentieth century. Naxalite movement in Kerala was largely

influenced by the Naxalbari riot of 1967. The failure of the Nehruvian economic policy

crippled the economy of the rural India. Disillusionment and dissatisfaction grew into

huge proportions. For the deprived classes both Communist parties failed to provide a

ready remedy for their predicament. Large sections of the working class people who felt

themselves cheated by all the established political parties at last resorted to alternate

ideological organisations for the proper expression of their discontent. Youngsters with

more radical outlooks severed from CPI (M) by alleging revisionism in the party. It was

in one of the remotest parts of West Bengal, a hilly area called Naxalbari, that the flag of

the newly formed revolutionary party, CPI (ML), was hoisted. Radical revolutionaries

like Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal and others vehemently resisted the Krushchevian

line and other revisionist tendencies apparent in the Communist Parties. They were

deeply influenced and inspired by the revolutionary paradigm brought to success by Mao

tse Tung in China which is later known as Cultural Revolution of 1963. They alleged

that the ministries came into power in 1967 both in Bengal and Kerala were mere

extension of the bourgeois ruling class and were indifferent to the predicaments of the

working class and peasants. The growing tension prevalent in the socio-economic

conditions of the post-independent India ultimately found its expression in the Naxalbari

revolution of the 1967. Daily agriculture labourers, peasants and working class people

belonging to Darjiling district, especially people around Naxalbari, Kharibari and

Fancideva, of West Bengal organised a bloody revolution against the oppressive regime

of the zamindars. It is reported that almost ninety percentages of the villagers took part

in that well organised struggle. The Chinese Communist Party extolled the incident as

the beginning of a complete revolution. *People's Daily* of China called the revolution as

a 'spring thunder in Indian horizon.' Mao's call for revolution through gun barrel had

immensely influenced not only the Indian rural population but also the educated urban

middle class who enthusiastically came into the forefront of the revolutionary movement.

Receiving impetus from the Naxalbari riot large number of labouring classes from

different pockets of rural India were organised for political struggle. Political discontent

was always in the air as people belonging to grass root level had a strong feeling that

their issues were not properly addressed by any of the governments came to power after

1957. In Kerala, the movement had strong base in Wayanad where labourers, especially

adivasis, were not paid properly and were subjected to exploitation and inhuman tortures

by the landlords. Most of the founding leaders of Kerala fraction of leftist extremism like

Kunnikkal Narayanan, Varghese, and K.Venu were members of the established

communist party, either CPI or CPI (M). Kunnikkal Narayanan had lost his faith in

Communist Russia after Stalin's death and strongly believed that China under Mao

would be the right model to fight against imperialism. Consequent upon his dissident

attitude Kunnikkal Narayanan was ousted from CPI (M). But he could not stop

challenging the degeneration of the organised Left. He became instrumental in

propagating a counter political narrative based on Mao's teachings pitted against the

established form of Left which was in power. Kunnikkal Narayanan tried to establish a

tie with Chinese embassy after knowing the situations in China through Peeking Radio.

He managed to collect communist literatures through various channels and translated

many of them into Malayalam. Apart from that he organised various struggles for the

trade unions of tile, and timber workers in Kozhikode. Kunnikkal and his friends

distributed revolutionary literature and books to the people. Their activities triggered the

rise of an alternate political thought shared by many of the discontent leftist

sympathisers. When the central committee meeting of the CPI (M) was conducted in

1967 at Kozhikode Kunnikkal Narayanan and other rebels organised protest march and

carried out counter propaganda activities. Comrades like K. P. Narayanan, Vellathooval

Stephen, and Varghese joined hands together to organise armed struggles against the

feudal landlords and anti-people policies of the state. This group unleashed armed

struggles in various parts of Northern Kerala, especially in Thalassery and Pulpally. The

rural poor had partly taken a supportive stand because they thought their grievances

would be addressed by such movements. The police station attacks carried out by the

group at Pulpally and Thalassery heralded the advent of another phase of left-wing

extremism in the state. But after the initial setback the state police force retaliated

quickly and successfully suppressed the uprisings. The revolutionaries were taken into

custody and were brutally tortured by the police. Even the sympathisers of the movement were witch-hunted. The charismatic leader Varghese was murdered with the full knowledge of the police officers. But they prepared a cooked up story of fake encounter which was later exposed to public knowledge by one of the police officials who happened to be the murderer. Both central government and state government cracked down against the Naxalite movement during 1967 to 1972. K. N. Ramachandran says that "almost ten thousand people assumed martyrdom. More than one lakh people were incarcerated. Even military were deployed. The situation had grown to the extent that anything can be done to suppress the Naxalites" (15).

Organised Leftist formations like CPI and CPI (M) were severely criticised for their renouncing the revolutionary path and for accepting parliamentary democracy. Established Communist Parties, just like the right wing Congress Party, could easily adapt to the new form of governance and came to power in every alternate term. But both Communist Parties found fault with the armed struggles practiced by the Naxalites and most of the party workers were expelled from both organisations. A renewed sense of the idea of the political outsider is evolved consequent to these socio-political re-orientations. Organised Leftist outfits like CPI and CPI (M), by virtue of their participation in the parliamentary democracy and their alleged relinquishment from revolutionary path, have now become well adapted to the mainstream social system. They lost their quality of being outsiders and started complying with the terms of the establishment. On the contrary the emergent extremist groups expressing affiliation with Mao's teachings started challenging both Communist Parties and the semi-feudal, semi-bourgeois system. Instead of participating in the mainstream political activities they believed in the underground operations. They were considered outsiders because of their

radical positions in politics and underground operations and were castigated as threats to the normalcy of the system. Ajita recollects the way her father Kunnikkal Narayanan was treated by the CPI (M) leadership: "Because of the single reason that they could not counter my father politically, by singling him out, they spread rumours within and outside the party. They stamped him either as a C I A agent or as a robber" (47). The exclusionary attitude of the Communist Party towards the radical revolutionaries is implicated here. An insider/outsider binary was formed between those who could accept the status quo and function within the accepted methodology of political activities and those who aspired for an immediate solution to the existing socio-economic disparities and strove for subverting the hierarchical structure of power. Those radical revolutionaries were represented in daily political discourses by the communists and other mainstream political parties in derogatory terms and the crimes unleashed by them were tacitly used to create terror psychosis. It is alleged that the left parties, who once were considered the outsiders, assumed the status of being insiders because of their readiness to accept pragmatic political methods and thereby became a part of the dominant ideology after grossly diluting their revolutionary programmes. In a context where either left-wing or right-wing political positions, because of their being subservient to the ideology of the dominant class, were considered politically inside, the Naxalite radicals were interpellated as political outsiders. Marxist ideologues like P. Govindapillai considered them as "pathological cases" (31). The state attributed a quality of monstrosity on them. The media took an ambivalent stand –sometimes they glorified them and at times they have replicated the popular representations. In both cases the issues raised by the outsiders were grossly neglected by the public sphere. Naxalism can

thus be perceived as the last phase in the continuous transformation and reinvention of the ideological left set out from the early thirties.

The aforesaid evolution in terms of individual perception of political reality and the experience of being politically conscious in every phase of its development is clinically absorbed into a filmic narrative by Adoor in his *Kathapurushan* (1995). The progressively evolved personality of the protagonist Kunjunni (Viswanathan) is set against the backdrop of different phases in the political history of Kerala. It begins with the childhood days of Kunjunni where he is in confrontation with the political realities of his time in the immediate aftermath of independence. Born into a feudal family, already abandoned by his father, Kunjunni is under the care of his ailing but affectionate mother (Urmila Unni) and agile grandmother (Aranmula Ponnamma). He grows under the lavish love and care of Janamma (Lalitha), the servant maid and Veluchar (Babu Namboodiri), the estate manager. The political realities of the time were mediated to the family through Veluchar who maintains a pro-feudal outlook as he was a dependent of that feudal family. There was a scene where Kunjunni came back from school in tears as he was called by his teacher as petit bourgeois. He felt his feudalist ancestry as something derogatory contrary to the feeling of pride and honour usually associated with it. This succinctly indicates the changed perception in political thinking emerged in Kerala during the first half of the 20th century as a combined result of Gandhi's charismatic presence in the nationalist movement and the intervention of communist ideas in the Kerala polity. There was another character Vasu (Narendra Prasad), Kunjunni's uncle, whose political trajectory from a devoted Gandhian to zealot communist maps out the evolutionary stages of communist movement in India/ Kerala during the fifties. Vasu was in the absconding due to his underground communist activities. The mystery associated

with Vasu is suggestive of the party's struggle to establish itself in a totally inhospitable political conditions. Kunjunni's political consciousness already shaped by the political perceptions mediated through Veluchar is disturbed by the arrival of Vasu who represents another aspect of political struggle. The counter political conviction articulated by Vasu that, "Just the British leaving India won't bring real freedom. For that actual revolution is needed" (*Kathapurushan*), is heard by Kunjunni with smiling reverence. The cameo entry of Vasu into the family, for Kunjunni, is his first encounter with the counter political debates. Political outsider as manifested in the character of Vasu epitomizes the turbulent political situation experienced by the communist movement during that time. The apprehension of his mother that "Do we need to kill people?" (*Kathapurushan*) suggests the public perception of the communist movement as the perpetrators of violence. Kunjunni's sobbing at the news of the death of Gandhi suggests how easily receptable he is in political issues. This political receptibility is manifested throughout his life as he shifted from one position to another as if he is constantly searching for a panacea for the sufferings of the people. For him communism offers the cure for all social maladies. Kunjunni joined the extremist Maoist group and was eventually arrested by the police for his alleged involvement in the extremist activities. Panning shot over the newspaper headlines tells the news of the Naxalite movement that marks the next phase in the development of the political outsider in the movie. While raiding his press the police have found out political pamphlets carrying Maoist exhortations. Later Kunhunni was released when court acquitted him. He got united with his childhood friend Meenakshi, sold his ancestral house and started another phase of his eventful life. He started writing about his experience, but it came about that Kunjunni the writer proved as ferocious as Kunjunni the extremist. His work,

Kharaksharangal, was banned by the state as it contained some disturbing facts which might cause sleepless nights to those in power. When he read the news of banning his book he became ecstatic and started laughing that eventually relieved him of his stammer. This last sequence elevates the narrative into a different plane where it loses its realistic predispositions and attributes an air of folk tale quality to it. The iron-fisted state oppression against the memoir is sardonically rejected by the protagonist and his family by reciting the Malayalam alphabet. This moment in the film can be perceived as one of the rare instances of resistance against the ruling class beautifully depicted in the history of Malayalam cinema. The folklorist atmosphere of the last scene further functioned as an effective link to the tale told by the storyteller who appears at the beginning and end of the film offering a structural coherence to the narrative. That is why Derek Malcom commented on *Kathapurushan*, "The film is brilliantly constructed as a parable about its time" (30). After reading the news of the ban, as if in a delirium, Kunjunni bursts out: "How ugly is the face of truth! So let's act without touching anybody, without disturbing anything, what do you say? Hiding, hedging, covering, fearing, shivering" (*Kathapurushan*). The story teller concludes his tale by asking the audience a grave question in a frontal close-up: "How can you be sure that you will win always?" (*Kathapurushan*) The final delirious outburst of the protagonist and the compelling question asked by the storyteller gives the narrative a thematic unity that politicises the filmic body. The spectators leave the theatre with this question within their mind.

The political theme of the movie is developed in tandem with the physical/ chronological development of two characters; one is Kunjunni and the other is Vasu. Both are political outsiders insofar as both represent political positions contrary to the ideology of the then dominant class. Interestingly enough the congress man turned

communist, Vasu, became an ascetic towards the conclusion of the movie. The ideological trajectory being navigated by Vasu has many real life counterparts in the political history of Kerala. But Adoor does not intent to make any such generalisations. That is why he keeps his protagonist well within his ideological convictions even if that hurts his material ambitions. When the family's old menial servant's son approached Kunjunni to sell the ancestral house, he readily agreed. The unnecessary weight of the family pride was totally absent in him. The character of the son, don by Mukesh, represents the emerging bourgeois class who gradually started redefining the economic relations based on feudal landlord power relations. Being a feudalist turned communist, Kunjunni had to confront the teasing comments of the political society. Kunjunni, unlike Vasu, has gone a step forward by abandoning his sympathies for the organised Left in favour of Maoist path. Kunjunni, being arrested and incarcerated, carries the memories of police torture in his body. The excess of police oppression enacted upon the revolutionaries' bodies exposes the gloomy side of the functioning of the democratic government. Veluchar has been a staunch supporter of feudalist system. He disappears to nowhere after the death of the grandmother as he could not bear her absence anymore. When the news of the enactment of the Kerala Agriculture Friendly Bill appears in the newspaper, he grumbles: "Voting the communists to power was ruinous, as was feared" (*Kathapurushan*). He represents the voice of the mainstream discourse evident in the socio-political scenario of Kerala during the time of the first communist ministry. But Kunjunni corrected him by articulating his political stance. Later, after the split in the communist party, when both communist parties followed parliamentary line by abandoning their revolutionary goal, Kunjunni sought a more radical political position. The explosive opening of the nascent extremist activities in Thalachery and Pulpally is

shown in the movie in a panning shot that covers various newspaper reports of the incidents. Later he was arrested by the police after recovering Maoist political pamphlets from his press. The close-up shot of the pamphlets clearly indicates the initial stages of the actual birth of the Naxalite movement in Kerala. Ajita recollects in her memoir that as their initial political activities they have translated and published Mao's texts in Malayalam. Once the identity of an outsider is established containment strategies of the dominant class follow. State intervenes as an act of ensuring the normalcy of the system by oppressing the deviants. Fear for the repressive regime of the state represented by the police was the marked feature of the tortured self of the post emergency Naxalite activists. When Kunjunni was visited by his step brother during the emergency period he mistook him for a police constable. The predicament of the political outsiders during the time of emergency as objects of police torture/surveillance is tacitly established here.

Adoor's *kathapurushan* moves along the narrow boundary that separates the personal from the political and most often it problematizes that distinction. The life of the political outsider, Kunjunni, is so intertwined with the political conditions of Kerala spanning from 1950s to 70s and it annuls the binary between the personal and the political. He never opted to remain as insider as he realizes that the idea of the insider is largely a construct of the dominant class. So he goes on reinventing and redefining his political positions in order not to be a part of the status quo. He prefers to be a perpetual outsider who wants to challenge the dominant ideology. Kunjunni considers the dilapidated structure of feudalism as "a huge ship rusted and leaky abandoned at the sea, waiting for its final immersion" (*Kathapurushan*). He has always been a critic of feudalism. Even though his allegiance with the communist movement is not clearly stated anywhere, his support for the government's decision to enact Agriculture Labour

Friendly Bill suggests his communist inclinations. Later he severed his association with the organised Communist Party and became an ideologue of the Maoist movement. Life for him has been a constant process of continuous ideological rejuvenation in political terms. The comments made by one of the police constables about Kunjunni as a man "brainwashed by ideology" (*Kathapurushan*) cannot be taken for granted. It can be argued that Adoor's *Kathapurushan* represents the navigation and consequent evolution of the idea of the political outsider across the turbulent political landscape of Kerala spanning for about three decades.

As observed by Kanchan Sarkar, "Movements and movies often interact and it is one important facet of the greater interaction between life and art" (24). The Naxalbari movement triggered the creative aspirations of many film makers in Bengal during 1970s. But Malayalam films made during 1960s and 70s were reluctant to follow polemical debates pertaining to politics which was rampant during that time. Whereas cinema turned its face against such fundamental issues, literature of the time tried to capture the complexities of the socio-political condition that was instrumental in the emergence of revolutionaries. Writers like K. G. Sankarapillai, K. Sachidanadan, M. Sukumaran, U. P. Jayaraj, P. K. Nanu and many others were enthusiastic to objectively analyse the situation. The formation of the Janakiya Samskarika Vedi (People's Cultural Forum) was a major step taken by the intellectuals of the time to propagate new trends in cultural and political thoughts. It was this platform that gave Naxalite movement a popular face. They organised street plays, street gatherings, and public recitations of poems that could attract the attention of the people. Magazines, especially little magazines and publications, were effectively utilised to propagate the political ideology

of the new movement. Civic Chandran, a former Naxalite, recollects the cultural aspects of the movement in his article entitled "Janakiya Samskarika Vediyude Bhakkipatram":

> In Kerala it (Naxal movement) started making its presence in the form of little magazines, new poetic, fictional and theatre forms. Magazines like Street, Prasakti, and Yanan, poems of K. G. S and Sachidanadan, plays of N. S Madhavan and Civic Chandran, stories of M. Sukumaran, U. P Jayarajan and P. K Nanu…'Inquilab' monthly edited by K. Venu, was also a part of this wave. (32)

Theatre underwent a new transformation under the influence of street plays like *Spartacus* (Madhu)*, Padayani* (Madhu)*, Amma* (Madhu), and *Nattugadhika* (K.J.Baby). Poets and story writers employed unconventional styles and methods that brought about aesthetic, thematic and formal experimentations. Our idea of the political, cultural, and aesthetic had been redefined and reconstructed every now and then to accommodate diverse approaches in the respective fields. The demarcation between these three became blurred. A new language is naturally evolved in all cultural activities to effectively represent the politico-cultural atmosphere of the time. But cinema maintained a strategic silence and remained aloof from such political engagements. The political repercussions experienced by the Kerala society during 1960s and 1970s did not seem to bother the filmmakers of the time. K. P. Jayakumar compares the difference in attitude evident in literature and cinema during these decades:

> The importance of 1970s is that it provided a novel outlook aimed to address the fragmented modernist sensibility. This novel sensibility rejected the aesthetic premises constructed by Individualism and Existentialism. That did not

aestheticise politics but politicised aesthetics- to a certain extend popularised it. The organised leftist movements in India and the splintered extreme leftist groups, who rejected the democratic slogans of the organised left, were all a part of those attempts to define the self-analysis of the educated middle class. The politico cultural activities, art, literature and cinema were the manifestations of the internal turmoil they experienced. It was less vocal in cinema than in literature. (x)

The movies released during 1960s and 70s were reluctant to engage burning issues of social injustice and predicament of the deprived classes like adivasis and coolies.

It was during the 1960s that mythological narratives overruled Malayalam cinema better than any other time in the history. Going back to mythologies for seeking rejuvenation was a modernist literary practice experimented by many European modernist writers like James Joyce, T S Eliot, Y. B. Yeats and others. Such escapist tendencies were politically meaningful because they devised this technique as a mode of resistance to negotiate the existential crisis perpetrated by bourgeois capitalism. Phalke resorted to Mythologies because he was optimistic about the role of the medium in carving out an imaginative consciousness of nationalism within the viewers that can be effectively directed against the colonial invasion. His later films like *Mohini Bhasmasura* (1913)*, Sathyavan Savitri* (1914), *Lanka Dahan* (1917), *Sreekrishna Janma,* (1918)and *Kaliya Mardhan* (1919) were all based on mythological narratives. He found it easier to deal with Indian mythology in order to articulate an identity to a seemingly disordered Indian population and thereby he could establish a genuine Indianness over a foreign product. Contrary to such politically relevant acts, in the particular context of Malayalam Cinema of 1960s, mythology and sagas were invoked as a part of reactionary politics to

sideline the threat of mass revolt imminent in the socio-political situation of Kerala. The first film ever made in India, *Raja Harischandra* in 1913 by Dada Phalke, was based on the myth of Harischandra. Many other language cinemas in India have inaugurated their cinema experience by filming mythological stories. But Malayalam cinema stood apart from this bandwagon. When other Indian language films followed more or less the same path, Malayalam cinema dared to visualise social theme in its debut attempt. Adherence to the literature of the time situated Malayalam cinema within the close affinity of Social Realism. The first film based on mythology appeared only in 1941, 13 years after *Vigathakumaran* was released. It was the 5th film produced in Malayalam. Mythological films were not quite frequent in Malayalam film industry till 1960s. But 60s witnessed a series of films based on Hindu mythology and sagas. K. P. Jayakumar observed: "(These films) conceived a transcendental spiritual age in place of contemporary social experiences and projected that transcendental value system as the immediate ethical value of society" (32). Films like *Harischandra* (1955), *Seetha* (1960), *Bhaktha Kuchela*, *Sree Rama Pattabhiseka* (both in 1962), *Sakunthala*, *Thacholi Othenan* (both in 1965) had served the interest of the dominant class in three ways: Politically such films could lull the audience and divert their attention from the most obscene version of authoritarian governance Kerala had witnessed during 1960s and 70s. Culturally they could disseminate upper caste Hindu sentiments across the cultural polity of Kerala. Psychologically they disallowed the spectators to memorize contemporaneity of social reality by bombarding series of colourful images from the unreal past. The representation of a constructed past as the real past confuses the spectator's experience with the present. Apolitical dialogue with the unreal past subverts the political undertones of contemporary reality. 1960s began with *Seetha Rama Kalyanam* and *Sabarimala*

Ayyappan (both in 1960) followed by *Bhaktha Kuchela* and *Krishna Kuchela* (both in 1961). In the same year Udaya produced *Unniyarcha*. P. K. Sathyapal came with another historical feature named *Umminithanga*. *Laila Majnu* directed by P. Bhaskaran was released in 1962. Subrahmanyam's *Sreerama Pattabhiskekam* was made under the banner of Neela in 1962. The first attempt to film a story from Bible was done in *Snapaka Yohannan* in 1963. *Thacholi Othenan* appeared in 1964. *Anarkkali* and *Kadamattathachan* in 1966, *Kodungallooramma* in 1968 and *Kumara Sambavam* in 1969 were all mythologies draped in unrealistic and extremely exaggerated visuals. Two major political melodramas released in the successive years, *Ningalenne Communistakki* (1967) and *Punnapra Vayalar* (1968), as those were released along with other mythological films, were actually attributing an aura of mythology to some of the goriest episodes of political uprising Kerala had witnessed. The communist government of Kerala had selected *Kumarasambhavam* for the first state award for the best Malayalam film in 1969 that irked many critics of the time. It was by setting aside many social realist films that a movie with mythological plot was considered for the prestigious award. It is interesting to note that a resurgence in the representation of mythological narratives occurred in a context when the turbulent political situation in Kerala was further aggravated by the emergence of extreme leftist politics/political outsiders inspired by the ideological doctrines of Mao.

A growing mistrust towards both factions of the party in the post-split period culminated in the formation of extreme leftist group under the leadership of Kunnikkal Narayanan. Drawing inspiration from the Naxalbari movement in Bengal they organised the working class people in Thalassery and peasants and Adivasis in Pulppally. They planned guerrilla warfare to challenge the apathy of the administration in redressing the

grievances of the masses. Police station attacks in Pulppally and Thalassery were carried out by these groups. Kerala witnessed mass peasant uprisings from various corners consequent to which a fresh wave of social awakening swept across the state. But as in the case of 1940s and 50s, cinema cast a blind eye towards such politically charged situation. Instead of reflecting the socio-political reality of the time, as in the case of other art forms like literature and theatre, cinema let phantasmagorical images parade through the silver screen. Glorification of the individual characters from Vadakkanpattu stories effectively eclipsed the strength of collective struggles. Ajita recalled in her memoir about the travail they had suffered after Pulppally Police Station attack. The leaders of the attack moved to Thrissilery to join the comrades from Thalassery. They had to wade through the most hostile environment of the forest day and night. They camped at various places in the thick forest for 8 days before being captured and brutally tortured by the most inhuman repressive regime of the state (Ajita 143-157). When real life heroes like Varghese, Kisan Thomman, Ajita, Varghese Thettamala Krishnan Kutty and other comrades were risking their lives, fighting for the cause of the downtrodden, the silver screen of the time was dominated by unreal heroes and heroines from the imaginary past. Thus the newly emerged political outsiders were also kept at a safer distance from the illusory world of cinema for almost a decade until 1975 when P. A. Baker, a talented young director dared to capture the predicament of such an activist in realistic terms in his movie *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. It was the first political statement articulated visually in Malayalam as a response to the Emergency of the 1975. This movie had to face many hurdles before getting released as the state machinery was anxious to intervene every now and then to ensure dilution of its political content. The

mutilated body of the film after several censor cuts appeared before the audience as a testament of the state's unilateral intervention

3.2. Outsiders as Outsiders: Representation as Resistance

The primary task of the political movies of the seventies was to shed of the burden of melodrama which had always been a necessary evil in Malayalam cinema. Some serious attempts to liberate cinema from the grip of excessive melodrama, songs and verbal obesity were done during the first half of the 1970s. The filmmakers had to invent a new language to express their unique sensibility. P. N. Menon's *Olavum Theeravum* (1970) and Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Swayamvaram* (1973) are the two major attempts in this direction. Those movies rejected conventions pertaining to filmmaking and tried to experiment with the genre peculiarities of the medium. They were able to bring cinema out of the four walls of the studio and give it a touch of stark realism which was later carried over by other filmmakers like John Abraham, K. R. Mohanan, K. P. Kumaran, Aravindan, and many others. Those two movies, especially *Swayamvaram* by Adoor, is said to have heralded the birth of modernity in Malayalam Cinema. Those movies dealt with the issue of individuals' desperate efforts to fit in with a particular socio- political context derived out of changing social relationships. Even then these movies cannot be considered political movies in the particular context of this thesis insofar as those movies do not deal with explicitly political themes. Politics is embedded in all cultural activities including cinema. But direct engagement with the idea of the political is very rare in Malayalam films. P. A. Backer's *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* is one among them. The distinctive feature of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* is that for the first time in the history of Malayalam films the political outsider finds a space for himself to interact with the spectators to remind them of the need for a political revolution to achieve the ultimate

goal of socialism and social justice. Unlike the political melodramas of the late sixties and the new wave films of the seventies, this movie tries to expose the tormenting experience of being a political outsider in a completely hostile environment. *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* achieved political significance by way of its readiness to dispense with formula driven commercial films of the time. Unlike pre-sixties movies a new trend was set in Malayalam cinema that opened up a sophisticated way of engaging reality. Instead of sticking on to flaccid and linear narratives of the political melodramas of the seventies, post-seventy films tried to explore reality in a more in-depth fashion. Narratives became less important than the development of the character or the ideas they wanted to communicate. The political hubble-bubble of the seventies found its expression in most of such films in an authentic way. In order to escape from the gravitational pull towards the romantically represented rural space, the so called *avant-garde* Malayalam filmmakers had to take a flight to the urban, semi-urban spaces. The 1960s political melodramas the representation of the rural themes galore which attributed a kind of sanctity to the rural life even though the organised oppression of the deprived classes was still a reality there. Semi-urban themes coupled with a cynical attitude marked the premises of the political movies of the 1970s. *Kabani Nadi Cuvannappol* also set its location in Bangalore, one of the fast growing metros in South India. K.P. Jayakumar made the following observation about the thematic peculiarities of the political movies, especially that of P. A. Backer's, of the 70s:

> [Kerala] society moved through a gloomy mental state during the 1970s. Because of that the pre-revolutionary conclusions made possible by films like *Ningalenne Communistakki* and *Mooladhanam* was not possible in 70s' films. Apprehensions about liberation, helplessness resulted from their inability to

influence the system and feeling of alienation was all experiences that determined

the social middle class consciousness. Films like Adoor's *Swayamvaram*, M. T.'s

Nirmalyam, Aravindan's *Uttarayanam*, K. P. Kumaran's *Adhithi*, John

Abraham's *Agraharathile Kazhuthai*, K. R. Mohana's *Aswathamavu*,

Raveendran's *Iniyum Marichittillatha Nammal* have deeply expressed this

psycho-social conditions. The representation of the 'intense' need not always be

the vision of the base structure. The issues and problems of the lower class are

entirely another discourse. P. A. Backer entered the realm of the middle class life

experiences which was hitherto alien to new wave films. Backer represented in

his films the world and life which is outside the perimeter of middle class life.

(27)

P. A. Backer was the producer of the movie *Olavum Theeravum* directed by P. N. Menon

which was released in 1970. It was the first Malayalam movie shot outside the

confinement of the studio. Scripting was done by M. T. Vasudevan Nair and

cinematography was done by Mankada Ravi Varma. As a producer Backer was very

particular about making a film that could challenge the conventional methodology of

filmmaking. He was a staunch critic of films made with the intention of making

commercial success. An intense awareness of the political turmoil of the 70s, especially

the tortures perpetrated by the state during the time of emergency, prompted him to

portray the uncertainties usually associated with anti-establishment positions. In *Kabani*

*Nadi Chuvannappo*l the audience encountered, for the first time in cinema, the

complexities in the life of a Naxalite. The movie came like a shot in the arm for the

experimental Malayalam cinema as it rejected the formula driven tendencies inherent in

it and purged it of the decorative excess, a precondition of dominant cinema, at least for a

short time. The lead role was performed by T. V. Chandran, who did not have the physical features and cinematic qualities of a conventional hero. The polemical debates on politics between couples in love in the movie never deviated into romantic and mellifluous verbosity. No performance of heroism is shown anywhere in the narrative. Through this movie P. A. Backer was trying to depict the grim picture of the political reality of our society to an audience who had hitherto been lulled by the voluptuous embrace of the dominant cinema. He was overwhelmingly embroiled in the burning political realities of the present rather than looking back in search of history or mythology. The shooting of the movie started on the second day of the declaration of the emergency in 1975. The creative aspirations of artists would normally be under the suspicious surveillance of the state during that time. A movie thematically ventured into an explicitly political theme especially that of leftist extremism would definitely fall prey to the vigilant eye of the authority. Only those artistic initiatives which either reproduced the ideology and interest of the ruling class or promoted mass entertainment were encouraged then.

The plot of the movie does not revolve around a well-knit story as it had been the custom. The filmmaker did not seem to be interested in narrating a story at all. His chief objective is to capture moments of gravity that communicates the dangers inherent in having a political outlook that may not resonate with the outlook of the state or the mainstream. The protagonist of the movie, Gopi (T. V. Chandran), is on the lookout for a hideout as he is being chased by the police due to his involvement in the radical political activism. The initial montage sequence suggests his involvement in a gruesome act of killing a despot. In order to escape from the police he seeks refuge in his former lady love Shari's flat in the city. Contrary to the viewer's expectations, instead of getting

indulged in nostalgic reminiscences the protagonist started discoursing politics. His

sloganeering mode of conversation keeps the political backdrop of the movie frequently

at the foreground. Through the conversations taken place between Gopi and Shari

(Salini) the filmmaker is able to generate deliberations on politics, the ideological role of

the state and the need for imminent social revolution. Gopi dreams of a society without

class and caste difference and he declares that his immediate task is to make such a world

possible. Basic human feelings like love and family are less important in his struggle for

social justice and equality. He feels himself as the liberator of the downtrodden which is

endorsed by his sloganeering verbosity. There are shots in the movie in which Gopi is

portrayed as having resemblances with Jesus Christ in his physical posture. Mankada

Ravivarma's camera captures the Christ like figure of the protagonist in subtle camera

shots. He used low angle mid shots and close-ups which had not been so usual during

that time to provide an air of strangeness to those shots. By drawing a parallel between

Jesus, who had been perceived as an outsider by the rulers of Roman Empire, and Gopi,

the position of Gopi as a political outsider is strongly established.

The film starts with an off- screen voice-over which has the narrative function of

communicating with the spectators what had happened before the filmic narrative started.

This strategy further obliterates the traditional narrative pattern which has a well-defined

beginning, development and a logical conclusion. The panning that followed the voice

over invites the active attention of the spectator who is eager to know the source of the

voice. The close-up of the questioning female protagonist is followed by the dispirited,

indifferent close-up shot of the male protagonist. The crucial question articulated by

Shari about the futility of the ideology of extermination put Gopi in a theoretically

unstable terrain. The same rhetorical question that has always been raised against leftist

extremism by the middle class in all ages is echoed here in the voice of Shari. The violence perpetrated by the radical left is juxtaposed with the violence of the state machinery either in the form of police officers in search of absconding Gopi or by subtle suggestions like the whistling of the pressure cooker or sudden knocking at the door. The encroachment of the disciplinary regime of the state within the domestic premises is thus tacitly delineated. The arrival of the investigating officer in the flat is meticulously conceived to imply the terror unleashed by the state machinery. There is something indefinable always felt in the gestures of the investigating officer. He is a combination of negotiation and dictation and behaves just in the same way how democracy functioned during the time of emergency. It demanded a fair amount of obedience from the part of the citizen the failure of which might invite inhuman treatment. The officer uses fair language but with well calculated strict mannerisms. He follows Shari wherever she goes and makes a second visit to her flat after smelling the presence of Gopi in the city. The long intercut sequence of the continuous tapping of the boot on the trunk and the perplexed face of Shari again throws light upon the police atrocities during emergency. The dream sequence that followed depicts the policemen masked in predatory animal faces- again suggestive of the collective fear society experienced during emergency.

The rural/urban divide is brought into the foreground only during the memory scenes where Shari is recollecting their college days. There again Gopi is portrayed as a political leader but was also capable of physical love. The rural is not represented as a centre of romantic idealism but as a space where people have to engage in political struggles to subvert the prevailing antagonistic system. It is depicted as a space where those who revolt against such dichotomous economic relations is witch hunted as dangerous outsiders. The locale of the plot is not particularly mentioned anywhere in the

movie. But it could be assumed that the action is located in Bangalore. The invocation of the urban theme is reiterated by the repeated shots of roads with heavy traffic, busy streets, posh buildings, and siren from the factory. As in the case of Adoor's *Swayamvaram*, the metropolitan realism of the *avant-garde* cinema is seen gradually displacing the melodramatic rural musicals. The cinema hoarding of the box office thriller *Sholay* (Dir. Ramesh Sippy 1975) captured by the camera conveys the cultural ambience of the time. Talking about the "incorrect and incomplete lyrics of the song (Chingari Koi Badke)" in the movie Ratheesh Radhakrishnan says that it "points to the fact that it is not used here as a framing device but as a marker of youth culture where the protagonist (and the film itself) can be located." (98) A mass culture gradually getting evolved as a result of pro-market policies of the ruling government is very succinctly suggested through this song. The contrast in attitude of the political outsiders and the managers of the emerging mass culture is implicated by the movie hoarding displayed. In actual life Gopi uses gun for the annihilation of an antagonistic system while the actors on the hoarding uses gun to attract capital inflow from the same system. In that sense the shot of the cinema hoarding poses a vital question regarding the function of art during the time of mass oppression and mass dissatisfaction.

There are two female characters in the movie- Shari and her friend Julie. The dress code and mannerisms of Julie, a full blown city dweller, again, locates the movie in an urban space. She is expressive, ostentatiously dressed, sexually daring and sociable. Shari on the other hand, with her repressed sexuality, swings between two mutually contradictory positions- one that of a traditional rural woman with her repressed sexuality and the other, an educated urban employee with sophisticated mannerisms. She tends to Gopi's wound and provides him with food and shelter. We find her sewing his

buttons to his shirt - a stock frame to suture female characters to the domestic

environment. Thus she fulfils her traditional female role as the harbinger of order out of

disorder. Contrary to that Gopi wants to destabilize the system. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan

maintains that it is Shari, not Gopi, who is the protagonist of the movie:

> Backer himself suggests that it is a film about Shari and not about Gopi, the
>
> revolutionary. The film successfully stages a pedagogic invention by making
>
> Shari a protagonist, right from the first sequence where Shari vocalizes a question
>
> on behalf of the spectator. In another sequence Gopi is seen looking at the mirror
>
> and saying that he hasn't seen himself for a long time. Shari enters the frame of
>
> the mirror to complete the circle of looking and ingrain the spectator into his field
>
> of vision, with Gopi now looking at Shari's reflection instead of his own. (98)

So he argues that it is erroneous to count *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* as a political

movie. Looking from the perspective of the spectators this argument seems to hold water

as the gaze of the spectators is centred upon Shari whose burning carnal desire is

suggested through the inviting gaze she casts upon Gopi many a time. Here Shari's

desire for sexual gratification can be equated with the spectators' desire for

pleasure/action. In that respect Shari is equally eligible for the position of the

protagonist. But Gopi's emphatic denials of Shari's desirous looks in effect dismiss the

spectators' desire for pleasure/action. So it is Gopi's presence with his inaction,

indifference and sloganeering verbosity in the movie that alienates the spectators from

the narrative. Insofar as the political outsider regulates the spectators' immersability in

the movie his subjective role can never so easily be overlooked. In addition to that the

filmmaker's claim, as pointed out by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, need not be taken for

granted as the authority of the auteur is not a legitimate precondition for evaluating the

contesting terrain of any work of art. By placing Shari in the position of the protagonist Ratheesh Radhakrishnan endeavours to dismiss the act of rebellious subversion informed in the post 1970s films. Shari with all her bent for tradition brings into the fore the romantic, idealist perspective associated with rural space. Her day dreams are marked with the bygone happy moments she spent with Gopi in the village. City provides her with anxiety and terror. The stream of consciousness sequences in the film are the manifestations of the psychological uncertainty she has to meet with in the city life. Shifting focus from the hero to the heroine may destabilize the effective politics of the film. By introducing a protagonist with unconventional physical and perspectival attributes the film gathers the spectator's gaze around Gopi. The Godardian kind of monologue that Gopi utters by facing the camera undoubtedly locates the movie in the propaganda genre. The answer to the first question she asked, "Do you think you can reform this land by killing a few people?" (*Kabani*), is answered in the last shot through a voice over sequence which says "I am sure that a time will come; when all men love each other… and others' words will be as music to their years" (*Kabani*). Here a question derived from the platform of middle class morality is answered from the premises of a romantic revolutionary ethos. As against the arguments made by Ratheesh Radhakrishnan in connection with the mirror scene in the movie, the idea conceived by Thomas Elsasser and Malte Hagener take a different trajectory. They distinguish three paradigms which belong to the semantic field of the mirror and its metaphoric connotations:

> First of all, there is the dominant notion- and a common trope in much of
>
> classical cinema- which regards the look into the mirror as a window on the
>
> unconscious, referring to a surplus or excess of Self which the mirror is capable

of disclosing. Second, the mirror metaphor in the cinema points to a reflexive doubling of what is being seen or shown: such moments tend to signify in film theory a distancing and an estranging effect rather than disclosing deeper meaning. It shows how modern cinema knows about its own history as a medium of appearance and deceptions and multiple reflections. The mirror as reflexive-reflexive doubling, stopping a narrative in its tracks, and –as in Bergman's PERSONA-referring us back to our situation as viewers of an artefact, is typical of the auteur cinema and the new waves of the 1960s. (71)

From none of the paradigms referred above one gets the idea that reflecting one's face in the mirror is an attempt in establishing one's identity over the other. Moreover the entry of Shari into the mirror has a definitive purpose. She wants to be more of what she actually is while Gopi wants to know how he is. Looking into the mirror, for Gopi, is an act of self-learning as he lost in touch with himself for a pretty long time. The period of political activity for him was a period of selfless action; an escape from ego or a self-exile. In that sense the mirror scene more or less endorses the political theme of the movie.

With the help of another comrade Gopalan (Raveendran), a mechanic in the city, Gopi finds another hideout in a deserted place. Shari makes occasional visits there and spends time with Gopi. In one of her dreams she finds herself dragging Gopi onto the top of a hill tying a rope around him which has a strong resemblance with the crucifixion of Christ. Here again a parallel is drawn between Gopi's desire for martyrdom and Christ's destiny-both resulting from their social function as the liberators of humankind. Gopi's death is announced by the sound of an off-screen gunshot followed by the medium shot of his dead body. The murder, for which Gopi is absconding, is also suggested by the

off-screen sound bites. Cinema began even before the spectator gets a vision on it and continues even after he left the theatre. In between, the spectator is subject to political indoctrination without being dragged into any form of fictional narrative.

Naxalites were Leftists without political power. They were outsiders by virtue of their anti-establishment views pertaining to the functioning of government. They tried to fill those lacunae left unaddressed by the successive governments. The antipathy of the administration to effectively address the issue of large sections of the population was the fundamental reason why Naxalite uprisings were erupted in impoverished areas of Kerala. The promise of liberation inextricably intertwined with the idea of the left was very soon proved hollow when the organised Left turned to parliamentary democracy by digressing from its path of immediate revolution. Sudhakaran in Adoor's *Mukhamukham* epitomizes the utter dissatisfaction experienced by the radical youths in this historical juncture. Gopi in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* is the logical continuation of everything that Sudhakaran stood for. Consequently he has to bear the brunt of physical oppression from the ruling class. Naxalites had to confront physical assault not only from the police but also from both fractions of the communist parties. Kunnel Krishnan, a former revolutionary and the prime accused in the sensational Madhathil Mathai murder case in his interview says: "Both communist parties bore strong dislike towards the Naxalites because of our growing popularity. They not only planned various strategies to tarnish our image but also organised mass attacks to exterminate us" (Shibu et al. iii). It was during the time of the administration of both CPI and CPI (M) that Naxalism has grown out of proportion. This is arguably due to the disillusionment of the people who lost faith in the established left. Two major incidents which still haunt the political consciousness Keralites were staged during the tenure of CPI leader C. Achutha Menon as Chief

Minister: the gruesome murder of Varghese, Naxalite leader from Wayanad and the

disappearance of Rajan, an Engineering college Student in R E C Kozhikode, who was

arrested by the police suspecting alleged involvement in radical activities. It was C H

Muhammed Koya who was handling the portfolio of the Home Minter when Varghese

was killed in the forest. When Rajan was arrested and brutally tortured under police

custody K Karunakaran was the Home Minister. In an interview with *Mathrubhoomi*

Weekly CPI state Secretary Kanam Rajendran alleges that "it was CPI (M), not CPI, who

unleashed brutal tortures against the left extremist in Kerala" (Rajendran and Abraham

Mathew 35). This shows that all parties, irrespective of their ideological positions,

including CPI, CPI (M), Muslim League and Congress had more or less taken the same

stand in cracking down the leftist extremism in Kerala. The party in power and the

ideology of the dominant class, however divergent they were, went hand in hand

whenever their authority was threatened by radical thinking. The ruling class always tries

to preserve the status quo which ensures the continuation and reproduction of their

power. Any ideology that questions this normal order will be dealt with an iron fist as it

was happened in the case of Naxalite movement in Kerala during the late sixties and

seventies. For them they were outsiders who deserved capital punishment for

dismantling the normalcy of the system.

In order to contain the threat posed by the leftist extremism and the not so meager

popularity it gained the state and its coterie-including bureaucrats, police, media and the

upper class segment of the society- embarked on a wide spread campaign against them.

There were reasons enough for the people to swallow the propaganda of the state as

reports of sporadic violence and killings were in the air during those times. The middle

class morality always constructed the idea of the Naxalite revolutionaries in derogatory

terms. The state and media representations of the Naxalite activists are almost resonant with the discourses generated by the middle class. Most of the time revolutionaries were portrayed as monstrous creatures sucking out blood from the policemen. The emblem of a palm carved in blood which was affixed on the walls of the Pulpally police station was a topic of hot debates in the media for a long time. Many fabricated stories were circulated among the people to create a sense of fear psychosis in the population about the revolutionaries. As a result of those contrived attempts state and its propaganda machinery could shift the point of attention of the people from the socio-economic disparities existing in society to the violence ingrained in the political activism practiced by the radical left. By generating discourses against such illegitimate political activism the ruling class succeeded in manufacturing public consent to undertake a crackdown on them. The extremists were hunted down and tortured by the police and goondas. A clear picture of the tortures suffered by the early Naxalite revolutionaries can be understood from the memoirs of people like Ajita, Thettamala Krishnan Kutty, Philip M. Prasad and the likes. K. P. Narayanan Master, one of the earliest revolutionaries, recounts his cell experience as follows:

> They started beating us by screaming "eat food" soon after they (the police) stormed into the room. They compelled us to get food and eat it by means of tortures. The torture was terrible. Most started eating. They beat me and put me onto the floor and dragged my bare body over the gravel. They shut me in a 'condemned cell' meant for the prisoners to be hung. There was no skin left on my back side. Head was beaten. Place around my eyes were bruised. They splashed two or three bucket full of water over my naked body after being put to cell. I felt utmost pain. Even then I refused food given to me…Consequent to the

severity of the tortures on the second day the pain in the wounds became

unbearable. When the jail doctor came to consult me I refused to accept treatment

from the jail. Thus as it became the eleventh day the pain became unbearable and

eye got swollen.[11] (Joseph 348)

Ajita in her memoir, *Ormakkurippukal*, describes the suffering she had to encounter from

the policemen after her arrest in 1969:

I was wearing a sari. An officer asked me to remove my sari. I didn't understand

why he ordered me to remain in trousers which I was wearing underneath. They

forcefully removed the woollen clothes over the blouse. I was asked to walk out

of the station with that most disgusting attire. Even while walking they were

hitting on my stomach and back. They mounted me on the raised platform of the

flag post of Mananthavady police station and exhibited me for the full view of

thousands of people gathered there. I was shivering with helplessness and shame.

The policemen shouted to the public that it was in that dress I worked with the

male comrades in the forest. Thus they showed utmost enthusiasm to portray me

as a whore. For the press they lost no time to take my photograph.[12] (169)

So the memory of each Naxalite is inevitably associated with tortures and sufferings they

had to undergo as part of their activism. His/ her body became a space where the state/

sovereign could inflict its vengeance. Foucault's clinical analysis of the way power

operates through various ways of torturing the criminal's body is very well recorded in

his monumental book *Discipline and Punish*. He says: "It [torture] made it possible to

reproduce the crime on the visible body of the criminal; in the same horror, the crime had

to be manifested and annulled. It also made the body of the condemned man the place

where the vengeance of the sovereign was applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces" (Foucault 55). Gopi's alert attention to every minute sound he heard explains this horror looming in the air especially during the emergency period. In *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol,* Gopi's body acts at multiple levels throughout the movie as a metaphor for the entire political episode that now we call Naxalite movement. Body that invites wrath of the authority, body that is devoid of desire and lust and at last, body that oozes out holy blood to liberate humanity. In that sense the movie resurfaces a political statement about the bruised and mutilated bodies with all its sense of immediacy as it is shot just after eight years of the murder of Varghese and the inhuman tortures inflicted upon the radical revolutionaries. The movie is also impregnated with a new wave of fear and apprehension about the oncoming assault on political activists that was looming around in the aftermath of the declaration of Emergency.

Gopi, the political outsider in the post-seventy Malayalam movies, is not like any of the political outsiders appeared in the pre-seventy films. Physiological as well as dispositional rupture from his predecessors renders his character unique. First of all, unlike his earlier counterparts, Gopi is not cinematic. He is not molded for satiating the voyeuristic pleasure of the audience. He is not a hero per se. By refusing to caste prominent stars of the time like Prem Nazir, Sathyan, or Madhu (insiders) Backer was sending out a strong message to the mainstream filmmaking practitioners. Stars have always been an essential part of the film industry's commodity output. But at the same time the presence of the stars in a movie like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* would have definitely rendered irrelevant the political deliberations he wanted to make. Since his aim was to conceive an instance to represent the life of a revolutionary - an outsider as far as

the dominant system is concerned - he wanted to caste somebody who is an outsider by all respect. In the movie, Gopi is consciously repulsive in terms of his physical attributes and also because of his sloganeering articulations. He does not sing; does not overpower his opponents by way of his muscle power. He loves and is loved but prioritises political over personal. Unlike his pre-seventies counterparts, Gopi does not involve in amorous escapades. With these unconventional physical and mental attributes he is not fit enough to be included in the commercial narrative unlike his previous avatars. In that sense the idea of the political outsider has taken a daring deviation in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, from the conventional methodology of dealing with such characters. Here the outsider proclaims emphatically his predicament as an outsider.

A movie that denies the commercial strategies involved in filmmaking should also have to find a non-conventional way of funding and distribution. Those who approach film as an industry naturally eschew from funding parallel attempts. But in the case of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* Backer found a suitable producer in Pavithran. The movie is produced by Pavithran and distributed by Janashakti film-a production and distribution company launched by CPM with money collected from people. Janashakthi rented parallel films, exhibited them in theatres and made them available for film societies in the region. Chathunni Master, then State Secretariat member in consultation with the then prominent CPM ideologue P. Govindapillai had taken the main initiative. The main objective behind the establishment of Janashakti Films was to educate the enthusiastic youth the new trends and perspectives in the field of cinema by making them familiar with international cinema. "Janasakthi purchased unreleased but award winning movies like *Ekakini, Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, and John Abraham's *Agraharatile Kazhuthai*, and exhibited those movies for the public"[14] (Mohandas 14). It had a

pedagogic intent of politicising the audience by teaching them the basics of counter

aesthetics. With this intent Janashakthi films distributed many epoch making cinematic

endeavours like *Bhuvan Shom, Ek Din Prati Din,* both by Mrinal Sen, *Subarna Rekha* by

Ritwik Ghatak, *Chomanadudi* by B. V. Karant, and *Pather Panchali* by Satyajit Rai, to

the Malayalee spectators. It was only because of the support extended by Janasakti Films

that Pavithran could materialize his project. The following comments made by Pavithran

elucidate the travails of a producer making offbeat films in a system dominated by the

ideology of the industry:

> It was just before the declaration of the Emergency that Backer and I started the
>
> shooting of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. The first schedule for the movie was
>
> already completed during the month of June 1975. It was an unusually changed
>
> situation. It was almost impossible for the production of a movie like *Kabani*.
>
> Hence I suffered huge losses. I had to suffer a lot for mobilising capital for the
>
> movie. I would not have dared to do this task had Emergency been declared before
>
> the work of the movie. (Jayakumar 36)

The state during the period of Emergency continuously intervened in the production

process of the movie to ensure that the political ideology of the radical left should never

disseminate among the public. The movie was completed after a long process of

sufferings and police atrocities. Censor board removed almost one thousand and eight

hundred foot films from the one submitted after editing. Most important moments in the

film were removed. It is under this background that the film is criticised as mechanical,

unnatural and mysterious. When it is shown in the theatre police directly intervened and

cut off as much as they wished from the movie. It affected the integrity and thematic

intensity of the movie. "*Kabani* still continues as a mutilated filmic body in the history of

Malayalam cinema"[15] (Jayakumar 36). The same fate that befell on the early political movie *Navalokam*, which had to remove most of its pro- labour dialogues, is repeated here. The systematic intervention from the part of the state and its machinery, the economic structure being controlled by the dominant class, the mainstream discourses generated around radical political activism and the reactionary aesthetic concepts dominating the cultural discourses jointly torn asunder the idea of the political outsider that is materialised in the movie *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* directed by a maverick institute graduate and produced by another anti-establishment cineaste. Makers of political movies had to meet with such oppositions from the dominant class as such movies were considered potential threats to the status quo. Maniswami, an unsuccessful Malayalam director, had to experience similar ordeals while making his political flick, *Rajan Paranja Katha*, during the time of emergency. The politically sensitive news of the mysterious disappearance of Rajan, an REC graduate, during Emergency for his alleged involvement in the Naxal movement was the theme of the movie. Maniswami's well-wishers had reminded him of the inevitable dangers immanent in such a risky project. Noted media critic P. K. Sreenivasan writes about the insensitive intervention from the authorities to ensure the de-politicisation of an otherwise politically sensitive movie:

> He had to overcome many hurdles to actualize that project. *Rajan Paranja Katha*
> had to suffer more setbacks compared to other political movies. It was a movie
> taken without much precaution. Because the story and events have direct political
> significance the Censor board referred the movie to Bombay (now Mumbai) for
> re-censoring. From there it was referred to Delhi. He had to wander here and

there for almost four months for getting the certificate. Censor board suggested

for forty cuts. (113)

This was the predicament of political movies during the time of emergency when even

the civil rights of ordinary citizen were in peril. It was in such an inhospitable condition

that Backer voluntarily ventured to politicise Malayalam cinema.

Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol can be considered the first Malayalam movie that

daringly portrayed the predicament of the political outsider without succumbing to the

pressures of the capital. In the third phase of the emergence of the political outsiders, a

new group of political outsiders emerged who were neither a part of the established

communist factions nor a part of the right-wing politics. They stood apart from the

corridors of power politics and dreamt of the liberation of the poor sections of the

society. Their political activism began during the late 1960s and continued till the first

half of the 80s. Within a span of around 15 years they could create some indelible marks

in the political history of Kerala. But the new political outsiders and their ideological

positions had never been represented in Malayalam movies produced during the time till

1975. It was *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* that invoked the predicament of the political

outsiders without subjecting them to cosmetic treatments, which was in vogue during the

pre-seventy political melodramas. The film is not realistic in the real sense of the word,

as the protagonist displays mannerisms quite unlike that of the real life people. Shots,

especially wherein Gopi is pictured as a Christ figure, communicate with the spectators'

interior. His dialogue renderings lack emotional undertones. These deliberate deviations

from realism in the portrayal of Gopi reiterate his predicament as an outsider. The usual

formula- ridden treatment with songs, choreography, suspense, stunts and intricate plots

were all ditched by the filmmaker to foreground the political theme without being diluted

or diffused by such pleasantries. Unlike the pre-seventy political melodramas, in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, political outsider is given a cinematic space by virtue of his/her being a political outsider.

End Notes

Translation of the following Malayalam texts appeared in this chapter is done by the researcher:

1. Ramachandran, K.N. "Thozhilalivarga Lokaviplavam Puthiya Thirichuvaravinte Ghattathil." Bhashaposhini, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1995, pp. 12–18.

2. Venu, K. "Apachayathinte Prasnangal." *Bhashaposhini*, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1995, pp. 7-9.

3. *Ormakalundayirikkanam.* Directed by T. V. Chandran, Performance by Mammootty et al., Navadhara Movie Makers, 1995.

4. *Mukhamukham.* Directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Performance by P. Gangadharan Nair et al., K. Raveendran Nair, 1984.

5. Sachidanandan, K. " Avasanikkatha Prathyasa". *Bhashaposhini*, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1995, pp.19-22.

6. Govindapilla, P. "Naxalism Enna Balarishtatha". *Bhashaposhini*, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1995, pp.30-31.

7. *Kathapurushan*. Directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Performance by Viswanathan et al., Adoor Gopalakrishnan Productions, 1996.

8. Chandran, Civic" Janakeeya Samskarika Vediyude Bhakkipatram". *Bhashaposhini*, vol. 19, no. 2, July 1995, pp.32-35.

9. Jayakumar, K.P. "Cinemayile Bhakthiprasthanam." *Jathivyavasthayum Malayala Cinemayum*. Olive Books, 2014, pp. 31-40.

10. *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol.* Directed by P. A. Backer, Performance by T. V.

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11. Joseph, Sebastian. *Vasanthathinte Idimuzhakkangal.* Poorna 2016.

12. Ajita.*Ormakkurippukal*. D C Books, 2011.

13.Sreenivasan,P.K. *Kodambakkam: Black & White*. Current Books, 2013.

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Chapter 4

HAUNTED BY ETERNAL MEMORIES: OUTSIDERS IN THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY GLOOM

The next phase in the evolution of the political outsider is characterised by a deep feeling of ideological vacuum experienced by the revolutionaries in the 1980s, particularly in the second half of the 80s. The 1975 Emergency exposed the extent to which a state can transform itself into a fascist regime that could dismantle the very idea of democracy and human rights. Organised resistances were brutally oppressed and the leaders of such mass resistance were arrested by the police and severely tortured. The remaining activists had to go underground to organize campaigns against the fascist state. The predictions made by the CPI (ML) fraction of the Naxalite movement about the feebleness of Indian democracy as an institution that carries the possibility of its becoming a fascist regime thus proved true. A mass outrage was fuming in the political atmosphere against the Congress party who declared emergency. But contrary to all expectations and against the national trend the popular electoral verdict in the ensuing election favoured the Congress party. This victory was considered a public political statement against the violence perpetrated by the Naxalites and that in a way paradoxically justified police tortures during the emergency. But the newly sworn in Chief Minister K. Karunakaran had to resign from his office on 25[th]of April consequent to serious remarks made by the Honourable High Court for his alleged involvement in producing fake evidence in the controversial Rajan case. The ideologues of the Naxalite movement like K. Venu and K. N. Ramachandran were freed from incarceration at the close of the decade. A plenary of the Naxalite movement was organised for the first time in Kozhikode on February 18, 1978. They have envisaged new action plans for their

future activities. There were differences of opinion about which line of action they had to adopt. Some argued for public political activities while others stood in favour of guerrilla warfare. The question whether fighting feudalism should be regarded as the main agenda of the revolution was yet another topic of debate. Some of the party workers like Madhu Master, Sulochana (then a 16 year old girl), Ilaykad Muralidharan, who were freed from jail, were actively involved in cultural activities. They constituted an organisation called *Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi* (Peoples Cultural Forum) in Wayanad that performed many street plays and public poetry recitations across Kerala. This continued as a strong and conducive platform for the propagation of revolutionary ideology. But it should be admitted that during 1980s two streams of thought were predominant among the Naxalites in Kerala. R. K Bijuraj points out:

> Even though Naxalite movement could overcome its initial constraints in the first phase, as it reached the conclusion of 1970s it was still confused about its future trajectory. Despite its strength in executing operations, the organisation was baffled with ideological contradictions. On the one hand there were new paradigms of investigations and methodologies in the Kerala fraction of the movement. On the other there were people in the organisation who more intensely cling on to the old line of extermination of the feudal landlordism by means of violence. The later enjoyed crucial position in the organisation during the 1980s. They implemented their professed old line by killing Kenichira Rajan (Wayanad) and Kanhiram Chirayil Somarajan (Alapuzha)."[1] (275)

Thus the decade began with violent political operations organised and executed by extremists in several parts of Kerala. The killings of Rajan and Mathai evoked criticism from the party workers. A fraction of the People's Cultural Forum raised dissent against

the Stalinist line of the party. Several members have quitted the party. An air of inertia was looming in the political atmosphere. As a result the state committee of the party has decided to redefine and reconceptualise its political standpoints in accordance with the changed situations. It was during the middle of the 1980s that a fundamental detachment occurred from the Maoist ideas. It was K. Venu who orchestrated such a move and exhorted the revolutionaries to perceive power and weapon as different entities. He has challenged the Maoist position of 'Political power through gun barrel.'

So the 1980s were a time for the movement to undertake a thorough introspection about what had been practiced as part of their political ideology. The romantic imaginations of the late 1960s and 70s were gradually diminished. The state terrorism unleashed during the emergency period inflicted enormous pain and sufferings upon the body and mind of the revolutionaries. Tortured and bruised bodies wandered along the streets of Kerala with a feeling of helplessness. The success of the Congress party after the Emergency further exacerbated the deep feeling of disappointment. A rethinking of the line of action they had been following started from many corners within the party members. Some of the fanatic zealots still adhered to the old doctrine of extermination of the enemy class. But for others, they turned more towards popularizing political power rather than giving priority to armed struggle. The entire scenario leads the party towards ideological dilemma from which they could not altogether come out satisfactorily. The public perceptions of the political situation of the 1980s acquired diametrically opposite positions. The growing middle class morality characterised by unbridled desire for material development voiced concerns about political extremism whereas the sympathisers of the revolution were brooding over the past with tormenting nostalgia. P. K. Rajasekharan calls them "the birds returned from Utopia." For him "they were fallen

from intense faith to the helpless open field of broken faith"[2] (53). He considers 80s as "a corridor from power alignments, coldwar, progressivism, class concept, political revolutionary dreams and modernism to the world of globalisation, the fall of communism, religious terrorism, gender consciousness, environmental prudence, end of history, postmodernism and information-communication revolution"(Rajasekharan 51). Those contradictory positions assumed by the public were manifested in different ways in terms of its cinematic expressions. Politically committed filmmaker John Abraham in his experimental movie *Amma Ariyan* (1986) ventures into capturing the tormenting experience of the political outsiders and tries to unfold the politically charged past of Kerala during the 1970s. *Piravi* (1989) by Shaji N. Karun captures the painful experience of a father whose son had been missing during the time of Emergency. The movie lays bare the ugly face of a state when it assumes absolute power over the civil society. On the other hand M. P. Sukumkaran Nair in his *Aparahnam* (1991) tries to unravel the complexities pertaining to the idea of political outsider in a context where revolution seems to have lost much of its initial vigour and enthusiasm. *Aparahnam* is vocal about the panoptical presence of the state with its constant surveillance mechanism tracking each moment in the life of the former revolutionary that continuously perils his existence. Rajeev Vijayaraghavan's *Margam* (2003) takes a different trajectory where the seeming serenity of the family life of a former revolutionary turns complicated by his ever haunting memories of the past that prompts him to embrace spiritualism. By bringing into the fore the miserable life of an ex-police constable, Madhupal's *Thalappavu* (2008) unpacks the element of incredulity always associated with official history. These movies unearth the fathomless depth of disillusionment suffered by the political outsiders in the post-Emergency period by representing their predicaments in

divergent ways that problematises the idea of the political outsider as a singular entity. *Amma ariyan, Margam,* and *Thalappavu* resort to memory to represent the complex interiors of the political outsiders. Remembering is an individual's act of exploring the past where he/she relives the past from the vantage point of the present as "... when we remember we simultaneously occupy both every day time and the temporality of remembering" (Chris Healy 225). These movies situate the remembering subject at close affinity/proximity with the past when the public memory conveniently ignores it.

4.1. Memory and Its Angst: *Amma Ariyan*

The violent episode of Naxalite activism had gradually waned from the collective memory of the Keralites. But before its retreat it left a deep and indelible mark in the political consciousness of a few. The painful silence that followed emergency was pregnant with deep sense of despair. The victory of Congress in the election immediately after the Emergency - that too against the national trend - was wrongly interpreted as a strong political statement against extremist violence. The growing middle class with pro-feudal value orientations and pro-bourgeois attitudes registered a thumping victory against all expectations. But the amber of revolutionary ideology was still glowing unnoticed, covered with ashes. It was not easy for artists with activist inclinations to dispense with the horrible memories of the terrible tortures. They set out to keep those memories alive in the political consciousness of our society. For them engaging memory has become a political activity. Emily Keightley says that, "remembering is a process that exceeds the psychology of the individual" (177). In an individual's memory the collective socio-political engagements of a society is invariably embedded. That is why she goes on to say that "memory is more than an expression of individual consciousness, and is both socially constructed" (177). When an artist sets out with the task of invoking

memory he problematizes the past by reminding a society something which it does not want to be reminded of. John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* (1986) is an attempt in digging out the past from where it is buried and by doing so forcing the spectators stay face to face with the wounds of the past. Such daring attempts challenge the privilege of the official narrative pertaining to the past and thereby deconstruct the accepted version of the authority. Those revolutionary expatriates who still bear the irredeemable weight of their revolutionary past remain as outsiders when society in general is showing the symptoms of political amnesia. Milan Kundera, renowned Czech novelist writes: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgeting" (4). Therefore the role of a real revolutionary is to remind the society of the sufferings and sacrifices of the revolutionaries in the past before being relegated into oblivion and to expose the lacunae in the functioning of the democratic state in the time of collective uprisings. A society susceptible to rapid forgetfulness tends to treat such revolutionaries as outsiders. Most people have already expurgated the memories of severe tortures unleashed by the state machinery. The emerging middle class was getting easily adapted to the changing socio-economic conditions and they have managed to sweep such unpleasant memories under the carpet. The Kerala economy during 1980s and 90s showed a growth rate of 6.7% which was unprecedented since 1957. Dr. Thomas Isaac, Finance minister of Kerala, who is also a renowned economist, points out that "in between 1987-1988 and 1996-1997 the gross economic growth of Kerala was 6.7%. It was just 1.6% for a time since 1973"[3] (143). He attributes the simmering growth rate to the flow of money from the Gulf countries. Since much of the growth was shown in the service sector, it was a clear indication of the growth in standard of living of the people. When the material comforts of the people were expanding, the grim experience of the

past became totally forgotten. It was in this time an iconoclastic filmmaker, John Abraham, who started a tirade against middle class sensibility, brought into the fore the predicaments of political outsiders.

John Abraham, the charismatic iconoclast whom critics called the epitome of the angry young men of the 1970s, was born in a middle class orthodox family. Resigning from his position in Life Insurance Corporation of India he joined Pune Film Institute in 1965. He passed out from the Institute in 1969 with an intense longing for making a movie of his own. He wanted to make a film that communicates with the illiterate section of his country. He wished to communicate straight away with the common man." If I do not understand him I am not at all a director myself; even not an artist. I want to reach out to him. I want touch his consciousness intensely"[4] (Abraham 23). In order to communicate with the marginalised section of society or outsiders he needs to have constructed a visual language hitherto unfamiliar to other filmmakers. He despised formalistic experimentations which is a part of European *avant- garde* movement. He considered cinema as a medium that he chose to communicate with people. But at the same time he equally despised the commercial, formula ridden mainstream movies. For him "Cinema is the language of camera. When that language is used aesthetically for self-expression it becomes art. Artistic creation means freedom. Basically it is an existential investigation into human values. Just like all other art form cinema too is related to human life. As a member of the society, my films also perform this same function." (30). His idea of film language is similar to the views of Latin American political filmmakers like Solanas and Getino who argued: "The placing of cinema within US models, even in the formal aspect, in language, leads to the adoption of the ideological forms that *gave rise to precisely that language and no other"* (Solanas and

Getino 51). They reminded that, "even the appropriation of models" is not welcome because they have been "*created and organised in order to generate certain ideologies*" (51).With the intention of digressing from the oft-trodden path of commercially viable filmmaking John invented a paradigm of filmmaking that absorbs and assimilates the socio-political condition of the time. He refused to follow filmmaking based on purely aesthetic considerations and formalist experimentations. Market was not at all a temptation for him. His intention was to make the act of filmmaking more and more democratic and people oriented. It is obvious that John was influenced by the theories of Latin American political filmmakers. With this intention, along with many like-minded people, he formed a collective in Kozhikode known as Odessa Movies. This collective screened many off-beat films to the ordinary people and enabled them to appreciate films intellectually. The movie *Amma Ariyan* was produced by Odessa movies with crowd funding. Since it was produced outside the dominant production system the film crew had to confront a series of economic constraints. He has not approached the film *Amma Ariyan* as a 'perfect movie' aiming to exchange pleasure for the money people spend. It was made out of his strong intention to make a film with people's participation. He collected funds from thousands of ordinary people. 10 rupee coupon collections and 100 rupees screening advance from the screening centres along with personal loans and bucket collections materialised the project. Ammad. C, one of the organisers of Odessa recollects the shooting experiences:

> The movie *Amma Ariyan* was made out of the fund completely collected from the
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> ordinary people. There were more than fifty people in the shooting crew from the
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> first day of its shooting at Fort Cochin. Shooting was completed with just fifty
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> thousand rupees as we were very particular about limiting expenses. Every crew

including John, except the camera men, slept in Eranakulam XL lodge without any discrimination. *Amma Ariyan* was not John's own film. Emotionally the film was everybody's.[5] (18)

Even before the first screening in Panorama after censoring in 1986, the movie was exhibited in Eranakulam Rajendra ground before a huge audience. Several public exhibitions followed. The cinema was never exhibited through mainstream theatre circuit. By refusing to comply with the dominant mode of production and exhibition John was introducing an alternate model for filmmaking. They believed that such attempts will weaken the clutches of capital gripping the mainstream films. He neither believed in the idea of art as a medium to exhibit the talent of the maker nor did he believe in the superficial entertainment projects. For him cinema is a medium that is to be practiced with a social intent. In order to attempt a new form of filmmaking John had to mobilise a heterogeneous group of people comprised of cineastes, intellectuals, musicians, ordinary people, technicians, and activists. The movie, *Amma Ariyan,* begins with a voice over that clearly states the political objective behind the formation of the film collective Odessa that produced the movie. It states:

> Odessa tries to communicate the reality of how a film cooperative can reach out
> to people. Odessa has reached out to many. It succeeded in producing good films.
> Most films portray reality by exploiting its economic, cultural and political
> aspect. Odessa's *Amma Ariyan* fulfils the ideal of film as a medium of art. It
> shows how the appreciation of art can be distilled through the production of good
> films. We must strengthen film cooperatives by making and screening more
> films.[6] (*Amma*)

This statement makes it clear that Odessa has a pedagogic purpose to sophisticate the visual culture of the people by providing them with a platform for visually interacting with alternate forms of film experiences.

At the start of the movie the protagonist, Purushan (Joy Mathew), is found taking leave from his mother for a long journey. The tracking camera captures his long walk till he reaches the bus station. He met his ladylove at the library who was waiting for him. The conversation between them gives us the idea that Purushan is worried about something. Next aerial long shot carries us to the serpentine hair- pin curves to Wayanad. There we find Purushan in the window seat of the bus absorbed in some thoughts. Again in the next shot he is found travelling in a jeep through the interiors of Wayanad. His jeep was stopped by cops as they wanted to carry the dead body of a youth, who has committed suicide, to the Medical College. Looking at the face of the dead man Purushan felt some sort of familiarity with him. With the aid of his friend at the Medical College he visited the mortuary and identified the deceased as their tabalist friend Hari (Harinarayanan). They brought their close associates Balettan (Nilamboor Balan) and Hamza, to the mortuary and confirmed their suspicion. Then they have decided to let Hari's mother know about the tragedy. Several other friends joined them on their way. At last they found Hari's mother and disclosed the tragedy happened to him. Hari's self-possessed mother calmly accepts the truth. During their journey to Fort Cochin where Hari's house is located they met several of their old friends and through the conversations and memories of those friends the tumultuous political past of Kerala stands exposed to the audience. As the title of the movie suggests it is the report of the death of a son to his mother by his friends. The interior monologue of the protagonist, Purushan, addressed to his mother broadens the meaning of the title. Then it means the

report of the death of Hari to Purushan's mother. There are a lot of mothers in the movie like the mother of Hamza and mother of Rajan to whom the tragic death of Hari is reported which further complicates the meaning of the title. Now the title means the report of the death of a youth to the entire crowd of mothers in our society. For the first time in the history of Malayalam cinema a stark political reality is communicated to a mother. Earlier, woman folks were kept outside the field of serious political discourses. The male, idealist political protagonist of the earlier films treated woman as politically ignorant and considered politics as a male prerogative. He silently suffered all the pangs and agonies of being a political activist. But in *Amma Ariyan* mothers are brought into the centre of political deliberations or at least they are informed about the calamities of radical activism. The journey undertaken by Purushan and his friends acquired allegorical implication as it is through this journey that the untold, never truly and officially recorded violence of the past is unfurled before them. The unbearable, tormenting weight of the past is always haunting all of them. Harinarayanan, who don the part of deceased Hari in *Amma Ariyan*, in an interview with *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, talks about the background of the movie:

> It was a regular practice even in Kerala that youth from middle class families either left their home or committed suicide during the immediate aftermath of Emergency. The ideological vacuum and the failure of both Naxalism and Janakeeya Samskarika Vedi had led the Kerala youth to great depression. People who had connection with drama, tabala, and literature were also associated with them. I too was engaged in classical music during that time. It was in such a Kerala situation that Hari and *Amma Ariyan* emerged. So the film should be approached in relation to the change of course with respect to Kerala's political

context. It was not a by-product of romantic revolutionary mind. It may be from

the rotten dead body that we come to learn the real knowledge of historical

reality.[7] (45)

So the dead body of Hari bears witness to the atrocities perpetrated by the repressive

machinery of the state during the time of emergency. Hari's suicide was not an

individual perversion but the result of the collective despair looming in the political

atmosphere of post emergency Kerala. Just like the protagonist in *Kabani Nadi*

Chuvannappol they dreamt of a dawn devoid of discrimination. In a sense *Amma Ariyan*

can be approached as a sequel to *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* which reminds the

spectators of the perilous outcome of such dreams. The past was replete with political

activism aimed to transform the society. They carried out many revolutionary activities.

They attacked police stations, organised fishing labourers, and captured forcefully the

ration merchants who had hoarded provisions, protested against the commercialisation of

medical education. But when the state and the dominant ideology crushed such uprisings

with an iron fist they became disillusioned and realised the failure of their dream and the

very ideology they cherished. A shot where a cow is found eating the poster with full of

political slogans suggests the indifference of the people towards the burning political

issues. Trade unions very soon became a ploy in the hands of the bourgeois capitalists.

They ignored the real issues of the working class. Radical left movement was cracked

down by the state. The socially committed educated middle class youths with political

inclination were at the crossroads. Just like Hari, they were all totally confused. Life

without an ideological position was unbearable to them. Committing suicide in such a

context would definitely have political connotation and relevance. Young revolutionaries

like Subrahmanya Das, T. Guhan and many others resorted to suicide out of that

excruciating ideological dilemma experienced by the radical minded youths. Finding an explanation for the tendency of committing suicide Emily Durkheim, a renowned French Sociologist, made the following observation:

> It is sometimes said that, by virtue of his psychological make-up, man cannot live unless he attaches himself to an object that is greater than himself and outlives him, and this necessity has been attributed to a supposedly common need not to perish entirely. Life, they say, is only tolerable if one can see some purpose in it, if it has a goal and one that is worth pursuing. But the individual in himself is not sufficient as an end for himself. He is too small a thing. Not only is he confined in space, he is also narrowly limited in time. So when we have no other objective than ourselves, we cannot escape from the feeling that our efforts are finally destined to vanish into nothing, since that is where we must return. In such a state, we should not have the strength to live, that is to say to act and struggle since nothing is to remain of all the trouble that we take. In a world, the state of egotism was in contradiction with human nature and hence too precarious to endure. (226)

The intense internal feelings of purposelessness coupled with loss of faith in all forms of ideological positions made the lives of middle class educated youth unendurable for them. Very soon they felt the mental and physical tortures they have suffered as a part of their political activism absolutely worthless. Just like the protagonist in the novel *Prakrit Niyamam* by P Parameswaran, one of the most influential writers during the post emergency period, the youths were haunted by the memories of the past. In *Prakriti Niyamam* the protagonist suffers from the intense pain of eternal memory. Memory was an ordeal for him yet he never wanted to evade it. He takes medicine to keep those

memories away from him. But at the same time he finds solace in those memories. This internal contradiction lying latent within the realm of memory, both as a cause of pain and also as a source of solace, marks the ideological crisis of the period. He saw the moral degeneration of the organised Left. Unwillingly he had to admit the failure of their revolutionary dreams. In *Amma Ariyan* Hari's suicide is also a logical and natural conclusion of the internal turmoil he suffered. As in the case of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* here again the figure of the Christ is often juxtaposed with the face of the protagonist in a sharp parallel shot. The role of the revolutionary as the liberator of mankind and the consequent tortures they suffered does have its parallel in the life of Jesus Christ too. The plight of the ex-revolutionaries is represented by the sighing asides of Hamza's and Rajan's mothers. They say: 'Sad, that young people commit suicide' *(Amma)*. Purushan's monologue at the beginning of the movie exactly recaptures the confused psyche of the youths: "Why must I go? I don't want to go. Night is creeping into my days. My spent dreams are scarred with silence. I throw them into nights empty of sleep. They fall into the desert of nightmares and miseries. In the eyes of the village, dry and scorched, I seem to find myself. But I must traverse the path of ill omen. I am accursed" *(Amma)*.While sitting on the rock under the tree where Hari committed suicide, Purushan recalls lines from "Nothing but Death" by the greatest Chilean poet of all time, Pablo Neruda. The poem glorifies death. The lines in the poem thematically suggest the youths' fascination for extinction and death. Among those foreign writers who influenced the radical thinkers of the time, Pablo Neruda's influence was the most significant. Neruda's lines here reverberate with the smell of death and the monologues of the protagonist painfully reiterate the complexities of that generation. In a sequence in the movie when the friends are aimlessly crisscrossing over the terrace of a building a

voice over is heard. A vulture appears in a long shot suggesting death. The loitering youths' close-up in the background of the voice over foregrounds the sense of loss they all suffer:

> How many violent deaths; this is how dreams break; how skulls split open; fighters shattered by guns; vultures flap and scream over the gallows tree. What do we get in return? The endless chain of violent deaths can give us no hope. Children are more fearless and far sighted. A whole people can be betrayed by misery and suffering. I do not know I do not know' (*Amma*).

Neruda's lines in this respect further emphasise the feeling of death and loss pervading over the political atmosphere of post-Emergency Kerala.

Direct political statements in the form of non-diegetic voice overs, prolonged reading of political texts, deliberate inclusion of political discourses, documentary narrations on actual political struggles were all meticulously incorporated in the movie to transact the political content of it. The movie is totally dispensed with the dictates of the fiction. Fiction is pushed into the fringe of the narrative for the documentary realism to storm in and dominate the ensuing polemical debates which has the function of reminding the audience of their ideological positions. The long sequence of the prolonged reading of Mao's text in the car functions as a pedagogic act deliberately bringing the spectators in direct confrontation with the dilapidated hopes and dreams they all carry in their mind:

> The poorest of the people will question the political intelligentsia. They will be asked why nothing was done when the country was dying like a tiny isolated flame. No one will be asked about their fine clothes or their long afternoon siesta; no one

care for their views on nothingness. No one value their financial positions. They

will not be asked about the Greek epics. When a coward amongst them hangs

himself no one question their contempt for him. One day the apolitical

intelligentsia of my country will be questioned by the poor. (Voice-over (*Amma*)

It is followed by direct reading of the text: "The poor have never found place in the

songs and tales of this apolitical intelligentsia. But the poor had given them food and

drink. They have washed their clothes for them, reared their dogs and driven their cars,

and tended their gardens. The poor will come and ask when our lives and dreams were

being scorched by suffering what were you doing?"*(Amma)*

Unlike the pre-sixties political melodramas, *Amma Ariyan* delves deep into the

complex interiors of individuals' mind disturbed by the memories of the past and the

indifference of the present towards everything political. Mind torn between two

extremes-one totally idealistic that dreamt of complete social transformation and the

other devoid of all hopes-is daringly and honestly followed by John's camera. The

inequalities existing in the society is delineated without giving it any sort of cosmetic

treatment. The documentary style of treatment given to such shots brings into the surface

the predicament of the working class people. The camera takes the spectators into the

real life of the suffering poor and investigates the politico-economic reason for their

misery. As observed by C. S Venkiteswaran, the noted Malayalam media critic, "the

surface level narrative of the movie is about the search for the identity of a dead body

and the journey for it. But this journey is through real spaces. Through the memories

awakened by the spaces covered and the people we confront during this journey the

inertia of the society we live in is exposed"[8] (65). At the conclusion of the movie the

friends of the deceased youth informed the news of his unfortunate death to his mother.

But contrary to their apprehensions the mother heard the news with a balanced mind. A mother capable of accepting such a tragedy is also new to Malayalam cinema. Here again a possible fall into melodrama is deliberately avoided by the filmmaker to break spectators anticipation for a climax. The filmmaker does not intend to make any such deviations into the conventional form of narrative cinema. He does not even expect individual immersion and contemplation from the viewers. Instead what the filmmaker wanted was to remind them of the traumatic experience of the past and to make remembrance an exercise in politics. The film was not made to entertain the pleasure seeking multitude who gathered around the cinema hall expecting unrealistic visual narratives. Instead, the movie presupposes a kind of spectators who are willing to stand face to face with reality, ready to engage with the political turmoil of the post-Emergency Kerala. Instead of revolving around a single protagonist, the movie progresses along with the addition of more and more characters joining the journey. An idea of the collective struggle as opposed to individual display of might is thus getting endorsed throughout the movie. The idea of the 'collective protagonist' developed by Bolivian filmmaker Jorge Sanjines is put into practice here. As in the case of *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*, in *Amma Ariyan* political outsiders are treated as outsiders in a system that was growing more and more pragmatic and egoistic.

The political outsiders in the movie *Amma Ariyan* are portrayed as eternal sufferers who had almost lost the political optimism shown by Gopi in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. Most of the characters appeared in the movie are former revolutionaries who suffered the terrible tortures of the state machinery. Now that they have returned home, joined their family and started adjusting themselves to the new social order does not mean that they are completely disconnected from the past. The rotten body of the

dead past suffocates them in each moment of their existence. They feel unstable and unsettled in the fast changing social order which was gradually getting under the tight grip of the market. They are still outsiders by way of their unwillingness to comply with a system that cast a spell upon individuals without immunity. When majority find it convenient to forget that past, these people keep remembering each and every nuance of their political past. So their journey over the geographical space is at the same time a journey through each others' interiors where they experience memory not merely as a psychological function. They memorise the past by means of their body. From each place they reach during their journey spring hot current of painful memories. Every individual joining the group carries within them bundles of memories.

4.2. Political Outsider as Refugee of Memories: *Margam*

The fragile optimism shown by the protagonist in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* is no longer visible in *Amma Ariyan* as they have really passed through the ordeals of political emergency. They became fully aware of the futility of armed mass struggle in the face of oppressive apparatus of the state. More than ten years of political activism had diffused much of their optimism for a better society through revolution. They became hopeless but could not disengage from the memories of the past. Political outsiders as represented in the movie *Amma Ariyan* were situated at a crossroads from where they could not move further. Engaging memory at a time of mass political dementia was the only political activity they could perform. But there was another phase in the life of the former rebels wherein some of them miserably tried to push such painful memories into the deep recess of their mind and managed to adapt with the changed situations. But while doing so they tried vehemently not to compromise with their political convictions. This mismatch between individual political convictions and

apolitical social conditions outside renders individual's mind a battleground for constant conflicts. There are instances where, in search of mental solace, such people resort to ahistorical and apolitical institutions like religion.

The 2003 film, *Margam*, delineates the internal conflicts of a revolutionary who later realised the absurdity of his extremist political activism. The protagonist of the movie Venukumara Menon (Nedumudi Venu) lives in a flat with his wife Elizabeth (Shobha Mohan), daughter Prakriti (Mera Krishna) and son Benny. He makes a living by taking classes in a private tuition centre. Benny is an engineering student and Prakriti is doing her graduation. She is very close to Venukumara Menon. The silence and breaks fall in between the usual chit chats among the family members very succinctly suggest the mental agony of the protagonist. He is an idealist by himself and takes firm positions on matters related to marriage, rites and capital. Consequent to the persistent pleading of his wife and daughter Venukumara Menon decided to visit his ancestral home. It has been long since he visited there. He was accompanied by his daughter. He met his old comrades there and was severely criticised for his political hibernation. After that Venukumara Menon and Prakriti went to Wayanad to meet his old comrades. He visited a convent to meet the mother of his old comrade Yohannan who had committed suicide out of depression in the post-Emergency political scenario. But she refused to talk to him. This further aggravated his mental agony. He was broken by the realisation that despite the sacrifice of many revolutionaries no considerable change has been taken place in the system. He developed a self- aversion for his ridiculous retreat into the comfort zone of family ignoring his political commitments. This overwhelming sense of despair was unbearable to him. He had fallen into clinical depression.

Venukumara Menon in *Margam* emblematises the third phase of the metamorphosis undergone by the political outsider. He reminds us of the glowing episode of Naxalite movement in the history of Kerala and the repercussions suffered at the individual level by a revolutionary who is split between two worlds: the foregone days of idealism and the present moments of pragmatism. Having fallen between two worlds, Menon fails to acknowledge the complexities of his own position. The burden of his political past haunts him at each moment. He married the sister of his old comrade, Joy, who was brutally murdered by the police. Now he is placed at a critical juncture where one has to either join the bandwagon of capitalist way of living or get perished. He stands perplexed at the complex interface between idealism and pragmatism. Gradually he succumbs himself to the temptation of the capital. At the crucial moment of that ideological/psychological crisis Menon, who was born in a wealthy feudal Nair family, has sought recourse to spiritualism. Thus a subterranean link is established between his early feudal days and the present, completely eclipsing the middle phase of his life-that of a political revolutionary. The ideological fascination felt during his youth was not strong enough to completely overshadow his early feudalist orientations. Menon's sojourn at his ancestral home helped resurface those hidden images already stored in his mind however strongly he denied his feudal legacy. His mental derangement was explicitly established for the first time in the movie in a shot where he obsessively opens his mother's old trunk and takes out his father's portrait and Gandhi cap. He rattled on the glories of his ancestry and quickly identifies himself with his father. The shot where he matches himself with the photograph of his father is suggestive of the kind of transformation he experiences. Menon becomes a proud inheritor of his feudal ancestry. Political ideology gives way to the pride for tradition:

'Even when fighting for social change they failed to annihilate religious and caste prejudices because of their inability to overcome their previous identity. But the 'public' mind unwilling to accept that failure attributes a philosophical colouring to such retreats. Through the act of embracing the remote past (ancestry/caste-religious), by superseding recent past (Leftist extremism), Venukumara Menon was falling into reactionary values.[9] (Jayakumar 81)

The plot mainly revolves around the relationship between father and daughter that subtly unveils the complex interior landscape of the former revolutionary. The filmmaker never resorted to surrealist techniques, which has been a usual practice while exploring the interiority of the characters, to depict such a mental state. Instead realist way of narration with simple dialogues unveils the complicated political unrest of the past. The secluded and isolated life of Menon is portrayed in several medium shots and long shots where he is captured either walking or lying alone. He is more often looked at by others. His gradual mental deterioration is suggested by the continuous looks cast upon him by others. On the contrary Menon does not observe anything. He is not interested in looking around. Instead he prefers staying alone and looks inward, broods over his past, sighs for the guilt he has committed. This testifies his inability to come into terms with the changed social order. He wants to bury his past in the deep recess of his wilful oblivion. He is found engaging class on the topic of time where he asks a crucial question to his students: "Is it possible to go back to our past?"*(Amma)* Going back in time, by means of memories, for him was a painful experience. "The move towards reparation and reconciliation rather than continuing conflict may leave gaps that cannot be filled, holes in the fabric of momoery that simply have to be stepped over or around" (Hodgekin and Susanna Radstone 237). He tried to blot out memories as much as

possible. Notwithstanding the consoling presence of his family his feeling of guilt is getting surfaced every now and then. A couple of decades ago he took arms against this very same hostile system. He was one of the conspirators in the Panavally murder case but was acquitted as police failed to prove conspiracy. He was the political ideologue of the revolutionaries who had masterminded many such gory episodes in the past. But those struggles did not bring about any significant changes in the system.

He found himself as an outsider in a system gradually tilting towards bourgeois capitalism. His recourse to family as a panacea for debilitating mental conditions proves more exacerbating as the idea of the family itself is an economic construct that demands certain patterned behaviour from the part of its members. When ninety percent of the population lives without insurance he was compelled to take insurance policy. He was advised by many to deposit some money for the future of his daughter. His family members insist on accepting his share of ancestral property in order to facilitate further dealings of it. His inability to negotiate with such materialist preoccupations makes him stand out as an outsider. He was criticised by his former comrades for his political ostricisation and by his family members for his failure to cope with the changing system. Just like Unni (Karamana Janardhanan) in Adoor's *Elippathayam* (1981) he clings on his lost dreams. His aunt once asks him when he obstinately rejects her plea to accept his share of the ancestral property: "What dream is still keeping you obstinate, dear?"[10] (*Margam*) He might have asked this very same question to himself many times already. This question may have been the recurrent question that disturbs him over the years. An ideology he fought for with utmost conviction has been now made obsolete in the emerging socio-economic condition. A sense of non-belongingness creeps into his mind. Neither the past nor the present is a source of solace for him. He was unable to willingly

accept the value system emerged consequent to neo-liberal policies came into effect during 1990s. His conscious mind resists such temptations. As a defence mechanism he gets dispensed with his conscious mind and falls into insanity that allows him to be pragmatic without being haunted by guilty consciousness. It is only when he is drawn into insanity that he decides to immerse his mother's ashes to the sea. Many other changes become visible in Menon's attitude. He makes remarks supporting globalisation. He decides to invest money for his family. Replacing an old photograph on the wall with that of his father's, is a ritualistic act from the part Menon to confirm his fixed tilt towards pragmatism or rather his complete sinking into the deep recess of insanity.

Margam was released in 2003 - almost thirteen years after India opened its market for the multinational companies to freely move their commodities. This move was made by the then Congress ministry at the centre headed by P. V. Narasimha Rao. It triggered hot political debates all over the country where the organised Left severely criticised the government by condemning that move as anti-people. But the same left was later criticised for implementing policies that facilitated capital investment from big players across the globe. Free flow of global capital across the political boundaries of nations made their economy more dynamic. Even countries with communist government in power like People's Republic of China joined that bandwagon. This perplexing political situation brought about by globalisation compelled the Left to undergo a thorough introspection. The imbroglio created by economic globalisation was never easy for the left to surmount with the conventional ideological positions it held. Organised Left was forced to accept some of such policy measures that facilitate the growth of private capital. Such policies were severely criticised by a group of intelligentsia as

ideological deviations from the part of the political left. A passing reference on the degeneration of party in this respect is subtly made in the movie when a newspaper headline reads as follows: "Capitalists too are invited to join the Communist party in china" (*Margam*). This news was really shocking to Menon. It was from China that extremist revolutionaries received their impetus once. Alleged ideological digression of the political left prompted Menon to withdraw from explicit political activism. He realised the emptiness of political movements and turn to himself for introspection. There is a scene in which he picks up his mother's old box and takes out his father's Gandhi cap and tries to identify himself with his father who was a Gandhian. Gandhi cap here assumes metonymical significance as a symbol of non-violence practiced by Gandhi. Wearing his Gandhi cap, then, becomes an act of repentance from the part of the protagonist who unleashed violence as part of his political activity. He was one of those accused in the Panavally murder case. The relief he feels by wearing it thus suggest this inner feeling of guilt he bears with him for the last few years. The epithet 'former Naxalite' carries complex socio-political undertones whereby a society perceives the existence of a former Naxalite. Various discourses perpetuated by politicians, intelligentsia, media and common folk together constructed an idea of the Naxalite that exerts unwanted burden in the lives of the former Naxalites. It is just like a heavy weight being placed on their shoulder which they cannot unload until their death. The existential crisis brought about by such preconceptions forced them to shy away from active social interactions. In *Margam* Venukumara Menon is entrapped in his self-begotten isolation with his daughter as his close companion. He has very few friends and companions. Kabeer, one of his earlier comrades he met during his visit to his ancestral home, turns critical and unleashed abusive outbursts against him. A large group of people were

encouraged to take up arms against the hostile system under the influence of Menon's political exhortations. The same zealot turned inactive and withdrawn after the failure of their mission. This was rigorously questioned by Kabeer who is a business entrepreneur now. Menon's indifference towards the plight of the former revolutionaries was exposed relentlessly. That night he wakes up abruptly from his sleep as if from a nightmare. Kabeer was asking the same questions which Menon has been asking to himself for years. The unbearable weight of being a former revolutionary pricks his conscience whenever he is reminded of his past. The only place where he finds peace and harmony was none other than his ancestral home. There he could organically connect himself with an indefinable something that thrills him emotionally. The intelligent camera of the award winning cinematographer Venu subtly captures the nuances of this feudal inclination lying latent within the interiors of Menon's psyche. Menon's enthusiastic description of his proud ancestry to his daughter, along with the flow of fresh current of energy emanated from his face after his visit to his ancestral home are all indicative of his deeply encrypted feudal mind set. His years of political activism and indoctrination were just a superficial covering.

Venukumara Menon is first seen in a medium high angle shot where he is idly sitting with a newspaper in his hand. It is his daughter Prakrit who draws him into action. Standing in front of the mirror while brushing his teeth he does not seem to be interested in looking into the mirror. He casts only an indifferent look into the mirror. Even while being a subject of others' gaze Menon does not look at his face. He even forgets to take his spectacle while going out. That suggests his disinterestedness in actively observing things and people around. Nowhere in the movie is he portrayed as actively engaging in any action. He has been treading on the narrow line that separates the world of idealism

and the world of pragmatism. He cannot so easily ditch his ideological steadfastness on the one hand and is incapable of freeing himself from his proclivity towards feudalist values on the other. His conscious mind is unwilling to accept the ensnaring world of pragmatism. But beneath the layer of idealism essential human inclination towards the comforts made possible by bourgeois capitalism resides. In order to be pragmatic he has to dispense with his conscious mind. That is why he sinks into momentary episode of insanity. When he regains his normal sense he decides to stop wavering from ideology to pragmatism. Close-up shots of the protagonist in the mental asylum with fixed expression, suggests his determination to remain idealistic. The tale of a sparrow being told by Prakriti to Venukumara Menon at the conclusion of the film also suggests the importance of being socially committed however meager one's contribution in his action may be.

Margam tries to delineate the socio-political changes and the resulting psychological transformations taken place at the individual level in Kerala during the aftermath of one of the goriest episodes in its history. It never attempts a serious political reading of the revolutionary activities of the 1970. It acknowledges the weight of the past upon the individuals in the present which they try to evade. Past is rendered irrelevant in the present. Critical absence of the flashback points to this fact. Instead the film tries to expose the wide hiatus lying in between selfless romantic idealism and selfish pragmatism of the present by bringing into the foreground the life of a former revolutionary who is totally disgruntled with the failure of his political position. The protagonist, Venukumara Menon, assumes two diametrically conflicting political positions in the movie. He spent major part of his first phase in Wayanad as a Naxalite involved in violent actions. He was one of the ideologues of the revolutionaries before

the diegetic world of the movie unveiled before the spectators. Contrasting picture of the protagonist as an active and energetic youth was emerged in the recounting of Elizabeth about their past to Prakriti. Filmmaker does not visualize any past events per se in the movie. Instead he uses newspaper cuttings to show the sufferings of the former Naxalites to the audience.   In the second phase or in the cinematic time we find Menon brooding over the past in his flat in Thiruvananthapuram. In this phase extremist position taken by the protagonist is subject to his own critical introspection. The mismatch between his dreams and reality always haunts him. He finds his organisation split into various groups. The ideological differences and factionalism in the Naxal movement bring pains to him. The death of two of his closest associates, Joy and Yohannan, and the abject rejection of Yohannan's mother throws the already sinking psychology of Menon into deep chaos. In a context where personal stands in direct conflict with the political Menon finds himself as a complete outsider. Thus Venukumara Menon in *Margam* represents another phase in the transformation of the idea of political outsider where the reluctance to ditch ideological standpoints on the one hand and the inability to locate oneself in a complicated socio-economic context on the other exert immense pressure upon the individual. Such conflicting situations may force individuals to seek solace in their roots as a means to make meaning out of chaos.

Margam is based on the story *Pithrutharpanam* by M Sukumaran one of the prominent leftist writers of the1960s and 70s. Most of his stories are seen as critiques of the degeneration of the Communist Party machinery in Kerala after it came to power. He was expelled from party after the publication of his novel *Seshakriya* consequent to which M Sukumaran remained in his flat in Thiruvananthapuram in complete isolation much like the life of Venukumara Menon in *Pithrutharpanam/Margam*. Even if

Sukumaran was not a member of Naxalite movement he was a sympathizer of it. He himself had admitted in one interview that after his expulsion from the party he was in a dilemma whether to embrace Naxalism or not. In the same interview he said: "In *Pithrutharpanam* I talk about those who lived for Naxalite movement. We cannot ignore their sacrifice. Even if it failed to make considerable changes in the society it has historical importance"[11] (Vanimel and Sukumaran 21). The values of the past were very soon replaced by the values of the new system driven by capitalist way of economic restructuring. Benny, son of Menon, represents the emerging new generation of technocrats who is suspicious about mass movements and collective struggles. They are no longer thrilled by the slogans of classical Marxism. They need more and more opportunities for employment. For that, they believe, a systemic restructuring of the existing order is a prerequisite. Prakriti and her college friends also represent the changing attitude evident in the youth. They celebrate one others' birthdays at the restaurants. They together go for movies. The youths live in the flat adjacent to that of Menon's are media persons who stand for emerging new possibilities in terms of employment in the post-globalised scenario. When the movie is contextualised within the last decade of the twentieth century, it exposes the inability of the ex-revolutionary to come into terms with the emerging capitalist world order. The movie does not try to accuse Venukumara Menon for his revolutionary pre-occupations nor does it point an accusing finger towards the new economic order. The movie simply brings into the fore the dilemma of many such revolutionaries in the aftermath of the failure of their political action. There is a scene in which Prakriti tries to shave Menon's beard which he tries to grow as it was the case with former leftist ideologues. Growing beard is an attempt from the part of Venukumara Menon to identify himself with the ideology he once stood for.

In an old photograph found in an old newspaper, Menon is appeared in his beard. By shaving his beard Prakriti tries to purge the last vestiges of revolutionary thoughts from his mind. The clean shaven Menon's visit to his ancestral home is like a going back to his own childhood. He seems to be more adaptable and excited in this new environment. Even Prakriti exclaims, "It is for the first time I have seen you laughing like this" (*Margam*).

The initial tracking shot locates the movie in an urban space that slowly leads to the interiors of a church. The montage cuts of the Christ figure again draw a parallel between the life of Christ and that of the revolutionaries as in the case of other Naxal movies. The crucified body of Jesus Christ is similar to the tortured body of the revolutionaries. Sustaining such a background throughout the movie caters to shore up the thematic element of self-sacrifice for the benefit of the entire society. Once, Menon revealed to Prakriti the cause of his mental agony. He says: "Majority of the people live in helpless misery" (*Margam*). For this, Prakriti remarks: "Father, your words sound as if they come straight out of mother's Bible" (*Margam*).Contextualising this remark of Prakriti in the post-revolutionary era engenders serious political implication. It suggests that there is nothing new in what Menon had been articulating in his political study classes during the time of revolution. In addition to that it points out the fact that unlike the revolutionaries Christ resorted to non-violence to achieve his goal. Christ's non-violence is privileged over the violence perpetrated by the revolutionaries. When Prakriti tries to destroy the ants clustered in the washbasin insane Menon stops her by saying that, "do not destroy a river valley civilisation" (*Margam*). Feeling of guilt for his involvement in the political violence in the past is exposed here. In another sequence where Menon is found missing we find Prakriti searching for him in places where he

visits frequently. Here again spectators see sayings from the Bible inscribed on the walls on the sides of the street. Parallels drawn between the life of Christ and the revolutionaries again served their purpose here.

Venukumara Menon in *Margam* is an outsider because of his inability to fix himself in any concrete ideological position. He lives in three worlds: first one is that of his family which he feel as the comfort zone for him. The second one is the world of his memories where he feels deep regret for his violent political activism and the third one is the world of his ancestry and pride with which he can identify himself very easily. Just like Freud's categorisation of an individual's mind into conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious these three different worlds have vital significance in determining his complex behaviour. An individual's awareness of reality is the result of the combined functioning of these three complex mental faculties. Conscious mind, for Freud, remains at the surface level and it consists of individual's immediate thought and perceptions. The preconscious consists of all that can be retrieved from memory. The third one, unconscious is the most complex repertoire of our primitive wishes and impulses and it is in this layer that an individual's repressed desires are locked away. For Venukumara Menon, he repressed his affinity with his ancestry into his unconscious which got resurfaced at the time of deep ideological crisis. It is even stronger than the memories of his political past which are overpowered by the powerful current of memories locked away in the unconscious. Gopi in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* was fully convinced of his mission and he strongly believed that the ideology that he pursued would one day liberate the entire humanity. He seemed to be unequivocal in the articulation of his political beliefs. The youths in *Amma Ariyan*, even at the time of their realisation of the failure of revolution, were not ready to discard their ideological steadfastness. For

Venukumara Menon, he is fully convinced of the failure of his earlier political position and seeks to purge his mind of all such memories. His attempts to visit his old comrades thus carry ritualistic implications since his ultimate aim was to purify his mind. As he was rejected by most of them he has no options left other than resorting to his own spiritual belief. His flight to spirituality is thus an escape from his own confused existence.

Margam bravely captures the psychological turmoil of a former revolutionary in fictional terms without being fallen into the trap of melodramatic vein that absorbs the spectators' attention throughout. The fictitious aspect of the narrative is broken every now and then to ensure the viewers' engagement with the reality outside cinema. The stock of old newspaper, real photographs, discussions on politics, and real place names situate the movie in real time and place. The jerking tracking shots predominantly used here provide the movie with a sort of documentary realism. The artists behave in front of the camera impeccably rescuing the narrative from falling into melodrama. The directorial flair shown by Rajeev Vijayaraghavan in *Margam* is really commendable. The story *Pithrutharpanam* is written by M. Sukumaran, a political exile who, just like Menon in the story, spends the rest of his life in isolation in a flat in Thiruvananthapuram. So it is an attempt from a living outsider to figure out the complexities of being an outsider, who is excluded both by the party and by the society in general.

4.3. Haunting Memories and Stark Reminders: *Thalappavu*

1998 witnessed resurgence in the public engagement with the memories of Naxalite movement and the brutalities of state oppression that followed it after the

confession made by a retired police constable who was unwillingly forced to perform a heinous crime during the revolution. The confession made by Ramachandran Nair before *Malayala Manorama* newspaper has actually awakened the public consciousness from its political slumber. The story of the coldblooded murder of the former Naxalite leader, Varghese, exposed to public eye the inhuman mechanism of oppression carried out by the state machinery during the time of Naxalite activism. Varghese was arrested by the police while he was hiding in another comrade, Sivaraman Nair's house. He was taken to the Thirunelli temple and was subjected to rigorous tortures by the police. As per the memoir of Ajita, they even "dipped his legs in the boiled water" (229). The fabricated story of encounter killing propagated by the police department and media thus proved false. The whole dynamics of constructing the idea of the political outsider as propagators of violence by the official history was subverted by counter narratives emanated from the public memories. The trial that followed in the court undermined the privileged position of the official narrative. Consequent to the confession, the then I G of police Lakshmana was sentenced for life imprisonment. Ramachandran Nair, the first accused died during the trial. He wrote his memoir, *Njan Jeevichirunnu Ennathinte Thelivu* published in 2005 in which he narrated this stark experience.

Thalappavu draws its material from the actual incident of confession made by Ramachandran Nair and tried to excavate the personal memories of the protagonist, Raveendran Pilla (Lal), to bring into light the untold history officially kept on the backburner by the state and its machinery. Unlike other Naxal movies, *Thalappavu* does not draw its material from the haunting memories of the political outsiders. Instead the idea of the political outsider is evolved out of the fragmented and painful memories of one of the police constables happened to be at the forefront of the Naxalite annihilation.

The filmmaker here ventured out to explore the socio-political conditions of the 1970s through the fragmented memories of the confessor that critically ruptures from the official versions. Here personal keeps the door open for the political. At the personal level we find Raveendran Nair fallen victim to the hierarchical system of the police force and at the political level Joseph was victimised by the suppressive regime of the state. Political outsider in the movie is represented as a perpetual presence, even after his death, which reminds the people of his role in the political process of revolution. An otherwise sentimental drama of the pathetic life of a septuagenarian police constable is converted into a turbulent space for serious political discussions when the glowing memory of a political outsider is resurrected from the trash can of history. The narrative is split into discordant temporality that subtly represents two subplots. The major subplot weaves around the life of Raveendran Pilla and the minor subplot narrates the travails of the revolutionaries. In the major subplot he is the dominant character but other characters are also organically developed. In the minor subplot the dominating figure is that of Joseph, the leader of the revolutionaries and other less important characters like Saiver, Saramma, and other police officers also perform their thematic function in the narrative. The intermittent intervention of the minor subplot into the sentimentally charged major subplot problematizes the binary between major and minor subplots and brings to the foreground the miseries suffered by the political outsiders.

In *Amma Ariyan*, the former revolutionaries, after identifying the dead body of their old comrade who had committed suicide, decided to inform his mother about the tragedy. The camera follows those comrades during their journey that turned out to be a virtual journey into the disconcerting political past of Kerala. More and more people joined them on their way -each person represents the helplessness of individual against

various forms of state oppression. *Amma Ariyan* engages past with all its brutalities without being deviated into melodramatic superficialities. Voice overs, commentaries and documentary shots are effectively employed to recapture the past with all its nuances. Whereas the overarching presence of the disturbing past in the present is realistically depicted in *Amma Ariyan,* the same is achieved in Madhupal's *Thalappavu* by way of broken memories and hallucinatory experience of the protagonist. Political outsiders in *Amma Ariyan* daringly accepts the ordeal of ruminating the past. In *Thalappavu*, the protagonist, Raveendran Nair (Lal) is haunted by the disturbing memories of the political outsider and he felt himself incapable of bearing the brunt of the onslaught of those memories. He failed to cast away the tortured body of Joseph (Pritviraj), who was killed by himself against his will, from his memories. Raveendran Nair was asked by an interviewer from the private television channel whether he could remember those final moments in the life of Joseph. His reply, "It is because that I cannot forget anything that happened there I lost thirty five years of my life" (*Thalappavu*) amply unveils the trials and tribulations he suffers consequent to the crime he had committed. The apparition of the dead Joseph has been following him all these years. The representation of the political outsider as an imaginary construct of the mentally fragile protagonist problematises the official narrative hitherto in vogue. The police report maintained that Varghese was killed during an encounter with the police in the forest of Thirunelli, in Wayanad. But the confession made by Ramachandran Nair after almost 30 years of the gruesome incident, revealed the fact that Varghese was actually a victim of the fake encounter cooked up by the police. He confessed that it was him, under the compulsion of his higher officers, who had killed Varghese. Much before that, traumatised by his involvement in the murder, he confessed his role in the incident

to Vasu, another revolutionary who was also an accused in the Thirunelli case. But Vasu did not reveal it in public for fear of dire consequences it might cause to Ramachandran Nair. K. Venu, the ideologue of Naxal organisation in Kerala, made some remarks on Varghese's death in his autobiography in *Malayalam Weekly*. Later *Madhyamam Weekly* published his letter and *Malayala Manorama Newspaper* interviewed him. This created a political furore in the state that prompted the authorities to initiate a re-interrogation in Varghese case. As a result then I. G. Lakshmana was sentenced to life imprisonment.

The movie *Thalappavu* attempts to recreate the whole incident in fictional terms trying to maintain fidelity to the past. The protagonist of the movie, a septuagenarian retired police constable Raveendran Nair, confesses the facts pertaining to the coldblooded murder of former Naxalite Joseph to a private T V channel. He revealed the fact that he was forced to execute the orders of his superior officer to kill Joseph against his will. He was ordered by his superiors not to reveal this to anybody failure of which may cause dire consequence to him. As a misfit in police force this incident wrecked him emotionally. He felt the presence of Varghese always around him with his body totally bruised and was clad in dhoti and shirt that he wore at the time his death. Raveendran Nair, shocked by this continuous apparition, turned to liquor for solace that eventually cut his family away from him. The entire narrative brings to the fore the tormenting mental conflicts of Ramachandran Nair that prompt him to make his confession. While doing so the story of the life and death of a former revolutionary is also gradually unfurled. Joseph, the leader of the revolutionary movement spent much of his time to organize adivasis against the atrocities of the landlord Krishna Deva Saiver. He was killed by the rebels in a midnight operation in which Joseph was the main accused. He was later arrested by the police with the help of an informer and was killed

in a fake encounter. But more tragedies were awaiting Raveendran Nair. His errant son tried to manhandle him when he denied his demand for money. His daughter turned to flesh trade for a living. He felt utterly broken. The apparition reappeared and asked him to reveal what had happened as an act of revenge to the whole system of the oppressive machinery of the state. In the next court scene Raveendran Pilla was seen at the dock revealing the entire episode before the magistrate.

The political backdrop of the narrative is very well established by the display of newspaper cuttings at the background of the credit titles. But as it is shown in the credit title that says, "The story and the characters of the movie are entirely imaginary. Any resemblance to any incident or personality is purely accidental or coincidental"[12] (*Thalappavu*), the filmmaker took an ambivalent position by blending facts with tinges of fiction. The newspaper reports clearly indicate this ambivalent position taken by the filmmaker about how he proceeds further. Here in the very beginning of the movie he mixes facts with fiction in a tacit way so as to make it impossible to distinguish one from the other. The name of the characters, place names, and even the name of the incidents bear close resemblances with the actual events taken place some three decades ago. We find the report of the fictional Joseph's (Varghese in reality) murder along with real news stories appeared in the 70s. The montage sequence ends with an artificial newspaper cutting in which the spectators find the report of Raveendran Pilla approaching court with the memories of Joseph. It is through this last paper cutting that the filmmaker invites us to the diegetic world of the cinema. Filmmaker never ventures out to represent facts as facts but at the same time problematizes fiction by situating his narrative in close agreement with facts. This ambivalent approach of the filmmaker can be compared with the Bengali filmmaker, Mrinal Sen who uses realistic footages at the beginning of his

movies like *Interview* and *Kolkotta Triology* as a threshold to his filmic narrative. Techniques like montage cuts of real space and images, news reel appearance of shots and hand held camera shots giving a colour of documentary realism situate the movie goers in the actual time and space so that they can engage with the socio-political conditions in realistic terms. But in *Thalappavu*, by blending facts and fiction, the filmmaker conveniently disengages himself with the serious task of articulating a political statement. Madhuapl, the director of the movie, already made his stance clear in one of his interviews that "the film is not an attempt to show my sympathy or political views. It is a reminder to a society that has forgotten how to respond to the problems faced by the human beings" (*The Hindu*). But the publicity posters of the movie carry captions that read History becomes film and Film made into History. *Thalappavu*'s engagement with history is rightly observed by Darsana Sreedhar in her following rmarks: "The notion of history evoked here becomes problematic as the counter pull to align with a past that is gone and at the same time the reluctance to categorically take a position to disavow it, pulls it in a strange situation" (213). The director's intention of not being known as a political sympathiser may be the reason why he elevates his narrative from pure documentary. Hence the methodologies of the dominant cinema are observed in the movie quite often. Those fictional elements attached to the filmic text other than the factual materials, remained little known until those were brought into the public attention by the confession, tend to stripe the movie off much of its political gravity. The pressure of the market might have its invisible presence in the filmic body. The adolescent love sequence of Raveendran Pilla and Saramma, the hilarious scenes featuring Jagathy Sreekumar as Govinda Pilla, the unexpected meeting of Raveendran Pilla and Saramma at Saiver's residence all contribute to the melodramatisation of the

narrative. But the filmmaker's unwillingness to rupture from the facts as stored in the memory of the protagonist recovers the film from its dangerous fall. The readiness of the filmmaker to navigate along the subtle complexities of the political past of Kerala situates the movie in the discursive space of political cinema.

Every event in the film is portrayed in the perspective of the protagonist Raveendran Nair. Even the past is evolved out of his fractured memories. The legitimacy of his memory is never ever verified either with the memories of any other characters or with any facts. Since the entire movie is narrated in stream of consciousness fashion in consonance with the turbid thought process of Raveendran Nair, the truth claim of the past/flashback is again under the stake. The conventional methods usually associated with the flashback technique are also discarded in this movie. The narrative is dispensed with flashback codes like fade or dissolve. Usually in flashback "the spectator is doubly positioned in relation to time" (Hayward134). But in this context as the past and present are intertwined with each other inextricably the idea of the past can only be perceived through the mental pictures surfaced in the remembering subject; here Raveendran Nair. Turin Has pointed out: "If flashback gives us images of memory, the personal archives of the past, they also give us images of history, the shared and recorded past" (8). Here Raveendran Nair's memory disavows the shared recorded past by exposing the official interventions in the process of historiography. His memories are in direct conflict with the official memory of the state that exercised prominence over any other counter narratives of the past. But with a brilliant close-up shot in the court scene where Raveendran Nair confesses that he is the murderer the filmmaker dismantles the official narratives and elevates the popular memory to privileged position. Being a witness to the confession of the protagonist the spectator tends to analyse the pathological condition of

his mental agony which is a logical outcome of the pathology of the system as a whole. Susan Hayward points out this tendency while talking about flashbacks and psyche:

> The flashback is a mimetic representation of thought process looking to the past, whether they are dreams, confessions or memories. They are then subjective truths, an explanation of the present through the past. Flashback shows how memories are stored and repressed. They also function on an associative level with memory… Because we are positioned as witness to the divulgences of the past we become the proto- analyst, and the protagonist our analysand. (136)

By juxtaposing past and present and thereby bringing the spectator's attention to the convoluted psychic condition of Raveendran Pilla the effective politics of the entire episode has been subtly foregrounded.

The surreal presence of Joseph, with the bruises all over his body consequent to police tortures just before his murder, as the personification of the haunting past of Raveendran Nair, is portrayed as Raveendran Nair's hallucination. But it is treated as more than mere hallucination in the end when Raveendran Nair's neighbour finds the candle fixed inside a coconut shell brought by Joseph's 'ghost' in the previous night. This last shot of the movie again problematises the fact/fiction binary evident in the narrative. Here the claim of the factual lost its grip on reality and the free and autonomous play of imagination elevates the experience of reality to a different plane. According to Luis Bunuel, the proponent of surrealist films, "in the hands of a free spirit the cinema is a magnificent and dangerous weapon. It is the superlative medium through which to express the world of thought feeling and instinct. The creative handling of film images is most reminiscent of the work of the mind during sleep. A film is like an

involuntary imitation of a dream" (Bunuel 139). He prefers a "cinema that will give me a total version of reality, enlarge my knowledge of things and of people, and open to me the marvellous world of the unknown, of everything that I do not find in any newspaper or on any street" (140). So surrealism is not an escape from reality but rather a comprehensive perception of it. Madhupal followed various techniques pertaining to surreal, such as shocking, irrational, and absurd imageries and juxtapositions. Here the surrealist techniques being employed reveal an alternate reality that transcends the bourgeois idea of reality based on instrumental logic. Free play of imagination is thus an attempt from the filmmaker to comprehensively approach reality. The recurring presence of the political outsider even in the present, irrespective of the temporal constraints, suggests the perpetual need for political interventions. The title that appears at the closing frame along with the lighting candle reiterates this notion: "The revelations of the revolutionary transcend time. They keep on revealing the marks of that truth even if it is destroyed constantly" (*Thalappavu*). This peculiar ending is already anticipated in the dialogue spoken by Joseph during one of the hallucinatory scenes where Raveendran Nair sees him on the pavement: "Everything is topsy turvied. Corrupt police; bribe demanding government officials; unscrupulous judiciary. Our country is moving towards anarchy. Now, aren't an apolitical individual like you thinking that a movement like that of ours is essential for our country?" (*Thalappavu*). This is one of the pivotal statements the filmmaker wants to communicate to the spectators however vehemently he disavows his political commitment.

The movie does not attempt to portray every nuance of the Naxalist activism. Only those incidents where Raveendran Pilla/Ramachandran Nair is involved brought in front of the camera. Joseph/Varghese is the central figure who appears in the memory

and therefore in front of the camera. There were other activists like Vellathooval Stephen, M. N. Ravunni, Balaraman, Kunhunni, and Vasu who were also arrested along with Varghese in the Thirunelli Case. But not even a passing reference is made in this movie about those revolutionaries. A crucial episode in the life of Ramachandra Nair, where he exposed the truth to Vasu, one of the accused in the same case, is also left untouched in the movie. Centrality is given to the character of Joseph in the narrative that heightens the political intensity of the subplot. The body language, the verbosity and even the dress he wears make him stand out from the other activists. In the film, during the time of his arrest he is seen wearing a shirt and a white dhoti. But as per Ramachandran Nair's memoir Varghese was in "khaki trousers and shirt"[13] (138) when he was arrested. This uniqueness attributed to the character of Joseph has political connotations rather than cinematic implications. The responsibility of communicating the political ideology to the spectators is thus vested on Joseph. This minor subplot would have followed the twists and turns of formula films where the evil deeds of an archetypal villain is challenged by the vigorous hero with all good qualities had the political conviction of the filmmaker is compromised for extraneous objectives. In addition to that the makers of *Thalappavu* did not venture out to follow the political furore following the death of Varghese. The public outrage in Mananthavadi following the murder of Varghese was so much so that the authorities had to declare curfew for two days. Ajita recalls:

> Manathavady and neighbouring places were appalled by the incident. People were shaken by the news of this gruesome killing. For the next several days people in Wayanad violated even the curfew declared by CRPF and they organised protest meetings and procession to avenge the killing. Even though the

dead body of Varghese was taken to his house for burial, the police did not dare

to show his dead body to his mother. They were afraid that the extruded pupil

would reveal the truth. The police dug the pit and buried his body, but that did

not satisfy the local people. Police had to stay days and nights near the grave for

almost one month when they heard people shouting that they would take the body

out of the pit. (230)

Here again the intention of the filmmaker is obvious. He resorts to one of the goriest

episodes of Kerala's political history by making careful choices. Those important

fragments still left behind in the trash can of history are thus kept open for the viewers to

explore. Beneath the veneer of an emotionally charged melodrama, Thalappavu hides a

serious political discourse implicated in the character of Joseph. The school scenes where

Raveendran Nair ruminates his amorous relationship with Saramma, accidental meeting

of Raveendran Nair and Saramma at Saiver's Bungalow, his daughter's flesh trade, first

meeting between Varghese and Raveendran Nair in the transport bus where all fictional

ingredients added to facts to convert a truly political history into an absorbing fiction.

The diegetic world of cinema invites the spectators into a well- knit narrative with its

own twists and turns, songs, combats, love sequence, and other emotionally intensive

episodes. But by keeping the political intention of the main character at the helm of

affairs the filmmaker cancels out the possibility of such fictional deviation. Joseph

appears in many close frontal shots where he makes explicit political exhortations like

Gopi in *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol*. Whatever he says to Raveendran Pilla is indirectly

meant for the public viewer. The larger than life figure of the political outsider reaches

out to the public with pedagogic intent to transact his ideology. Raveendran Pilla, while

he was still in the police force, was influenced by the charismatic Joseph. Once, when

the public perception of the Naxalites as 'robbers' was articulated by Nalinakshan, his neighbor, in their friendly talk, Raveendran Pilla corrected him: "They are not robbers. Their only aim is to liberate the exploited class. They are planning a big armed struggle for their struggle for social justice. In fact the peasants and adivasis in Wayanad are undergoing continuous exploitation" (*Thalappavu*). Here again the filmmaker uses close shot of Raveendran Pilla so as to make him address the public. In yet another sequence Joseph is found exhorting his political statement "only a responsible society can create a strong state" (*Thalappavu*) to the spectators. Such instances where actors directly address the audience are akin to Brecht's technique of *verfremdungseffekt* (distancing effect) which is effectively used by leftist filmmakers like Jean Godard to create a shocking effect to the audience.

The representation of the political outsider in the movie *Thalappavu* is instrumental in reinvigorating public memories of the Naxalite past in a context where aggressive rate of   commodity consumption had rendered us politically amnesiac. It reclaims history for those who are getting deeply ahistorisiced. *Thalappavu* was released in 2008, some 38 years after the murder of Varghese and ten years after the confession made by Ramachandran Nair. By then the bourgeois capitalists have already established themselves as the dominant class replacing the feudalists and communists. The value system usually associated with the feudal system gradually gave way to the logic of the market. Whereas in *Margam* the value system of feudalism is dormantly active in the protagonist, in *Thalappavu*, a frontal attack on feudalism is very much evident. We see Joseph in his close-ups, facing the audience in pedagogic vein, exhorting them the need to organize the peasants and adivasis and thereby destabilise the very edifice of feudalism. But the 'ghost' of Varghese is found critiquing the new system as well where

the bourgeois capitalist's excessive desire for profit is targeted. Here the moments of resistance from the past is meticulously used to address bleak scenario of the present. The renewed interests shown by the media and public towards otherwise forgotten history of Naxalite movement after the sensational incident of the confession is used for political objective. The star persona of Pritviraj, one of the stalwarts in the Malayalam commercial film industry, is rendered unattractive and disgusting by displaying his body with all the brutalities of police torture. He is clad in normal shirt and dhoti. It seems that while casting one of the stars of the time as the leader of the rebels and projecting him through a series of frontal close-ups and mediums special care was taken by the filmmaker not to fall into the trap of formula ridden commercial paradigm. The presence of the star in the minor subplot elevates the position of the political outsider well above the major subplot.

Thalappavu, by invoking one of the unique moments in the history of Kerala as its theme, once again resurfaces the political debates pushed into the dungeon of our collective memory. The moment of confession straight on gives way to the gradual unfurling of the turbulent past. Situations and dialogues are devised in such a way as to attribute legitimacy to the active political interventions of the Naxalites. The public perception of the political outsiders as murderous lots induced by media representations and state propaganda, are deconstructed by the subversion of the official narrative with the aid of personal memories. "No other popular Naxalite films have taken up the moments of violence. It is in this context that viewing *Thalappavu* acquires political dimension," argues K. P. Jayakumar (95). Albeit the unintentional digression to melodramatic vein very occasionally, the film could reinvigorate the public memories pertaining to the interventions of the political outsiders. But in *Thalappavu* even after

being arrested and tortured, political outsider Joseph is fully convinced of his action. In a brilliantly scripted narrative, unlike other mainstream movies, we find a police constable being mentally tormented by his deeds while he was a part of the oppressive regime of the state.

Whereas the political melodramas of the 1960s recreated the past in a way it was malleable within a narrative, *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* accommodated the present with all its subtle complexities, and thereby denied privilege to the fictional narrative. Later political movies like *Amma Ariyan*, *Aparahnam*, and *Margam*, on the other hand, have taken an altogether different strategy by resorting to individual memories of the past to bring to the fore the agonising political experience of the Naxalite revolutionaries. These movies engage individual memories to uncover the pangs and agonies of politically tensed past with all its intensity. In M. P. Sukumaran Nair's *Aparahnam* (1991) the former revolutionary Nandakumar (Babu Antony) is simultaneously haunted by the painful memories and the surveillance mechanism of the state. In *Thalappavu* it is the memory of the former police constable that brings to the fore the atrocities of the repressive state during the time of Naxalite uprising. At the same time some, like Venukumara Menon in *Margam,* resort to the act of forgetting to situate oneself in the transformed world. Such people willingly keep themselves aloof from active remembering as the act of remembering reminds them of the gory episodes of violence they became a part of. Most of the post - seventy Naxalite political movies explore the possibility of memories to expose the lacunae left behind by official representations. On the contrary, *Margam* deals with forgetting as a conscious act to evade possible retreat into the past. While *Amma Ariyan* foregrounds the unflagging quest of the revolutionaries to memorise the past, the protagonist in *Margam* disengages with such

memories to purge himself of the past. But in the case of *Thalappavu*, individual memory engenders polemic debates on official version of history fabricated to serve the interest of the privileged class. To sum up, it can be incontestably ascertain that the political movies discussed here represent the trials and tribulations of the political outsiders by realistically situating them in the different phases of the post- Emergency Kerala. The idea of the Naxalite political outsiders as a homogenous entity is thus subverted by the complex representations made possible by these movies.

End Notes

Translation of the Malayalam texts appeared in this chapter is done by the researcher:

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Chapter 5

IDEALISATION OF FAMILY AND POLITICAL OUTSIDERS AS ROMANTIC DAYDREAMERS

In the last phase of the evolution of the political outsiders, as reflected in the Malayalam dominant cinema, the disturbing presence of Naxalites are contested by situating them within the institutionalised space of family/home and reckon them as a threat to the smooth current of family life. *Margam* unveils the complex psychology of a helpless individual who was torn between two worlds-the world of idealism and the world of pragmatism. The movie situates the former Naxalite Venukumara Menon squarely within the well-defined realm of the family that always reproduces the values of the status quo. An internal mechanism of noramalisation is inherent within the domain of family. Venukumara Menon is always led by the intangible presence of family, one way or the other. He became a family man not out of his own choice. He married Saramma as a token of commitment to her brother who was killed in a police encounter. He is forced to bury memories of his political past deep inside the recess of oblivion in order to remain placid in the presence of his family. His unconscious is always replete with the proud memories of his ancestral family. The strong presence of family tries to shape his character in the post- revolutionary period that often contradicts his political convictions. When offbeat movies like *Amma Ariyan*, *Margam* and *Thalappavu* try to capture the internal conflicts of the political outsiders in an inglorious vein, Malayalam dominant cinema accommodated communist themes in their narrative, tacitly neutralises the political intensity of the movement by foregrounding less political themes like love and familial relationships. Family has always been depicted in mainstream Malayalam movies as a space that cannot be defiled by political discourses. Politics is seen critically

absent inside the cinematic space of family even in the political melodramas of the 60s.
In *Punnapravayalar* the communist leader Prabhakaran is forcefully dragged by his
father to his home while he was addressing a public gathering. This movement of the
protagonist from a politically active public space to a politically neutral private space, in
effect, suggests the entire trajectory of the political melodramas. For example in the
movie *Ningalenne Communistakki*, political debate between Mathew (K. P. Ummer) and
Gopalan (Prem Nazir) within the house is stopped by Gopalan's sister when their father
enters home. So the politically neutral family is visualised as an Eden of innocence and
bliss. The catastrophic turn-around befell on family consequent to the intrusion of
political discourses is once again found cinematic expressions in two popular movies
released in 1980s. *Aranyakam* (1989) scripted by M T Vasudevan Nair and directed by
Hariharan, both makers of box office hits, by creating an illusion of reality, disseminates
middle class perceptions on revolution and reflects the sentiments of a fraction of our
society and projects it as the opinion of the public. Here the political outsider is
portrayed as the disturber of the otherwise serene system of family. In *Ithirippoove
Chuvanna Poove* (1982) by Bharathan, the bourgeois concept of family is used as an
effective emotional shield to categorise the extremist ideology as deviant. These two
movies depict two mutually supplementary ways of looking at the idea of the political
outsider within the context of family. They converge at the site of their negation of the
ideology as the harbinger of suffering of the innocent mothers and lovers. At the same
time those movies never fail to exploit the market possibility of the political outsider.
Whereas *Amma Ariyan* and *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* reiterate the need for a complete
social change through political revolution, *Aranyakam* and *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove*
cancel squarely the idea of revolution as romantic, misdirected and therefore

meaningless. While *Amma Ariyan* and *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* posit certain crucial questions pertaining to the liberation of mankind from the clutches of dominant power structure, other movies reiterate the middle class apprehensions on revolution by bringing into the fore the repercussions it has created within the serenity of feudal family.

5.1. Contesting Ideology with Perpetual Guilt: *Aranyakam*

Hariharan's 1988 film *Aranyakam* scripted by M .T. Vasudevan Nair, one of the most prominent literary figures in Malayalam, deals with the idea of the political outsider in a different perspective. The romantic idealism of the revolutionaries was still in the air even after being repressed by the state. The violence always associated with the Naxal movement was kept alive by the active intervention of the state and media alike consequent upon which the revolutionary activism of the party was brought under social auditing. A growing middle class sensibility and morality emerged in Kerala as a result of changing socio-economic conditions. As it has been already observed, both the revolutionaries and the critics of the revolution had realised the futility of the extremist activism. Such a realisation was fatal for the revolutionaries. But for others it was the right time for consolidating public opinion against the political outsiders. A kind of ambivalent approach towards leftist ideological positions started dominating the political discourses across Kerala. While the sufferings and agonies experienced by the revolutionaries attributed an aura of heroism to them a growing discontent for the atrocities perpetrated by the revolutionaries was also shared by the social psyche. *Aranyakam* strikes a logical balance between this ambivalent attitudes lying latent within the political consciousness of Kerala. The commercial element of the movie is subtly trafficked under the garment of a serious political narrative.

The movie tells the story of a young girl of sixteen, Ammini, who visits her ancestral home in Wayanad to spend her holidays. Ammini's uncle, Madhavan Nair (Jagannatha Varma), who is the powerful patriarch in the family, is a feudal lord who exploits the local adivasi community around. He maintains an unholy clout with the government and police to facilitate this inhuman exploitation. Adivasis were brutally tortured with the help of the local sub- inspector Ravunni (Balan K. Nair) and their huts were set ablaze. Growing discontent against such brutalities were marshaled into an organised form of resistance under the leadership of Naxalite revolutionaries. Ammini during her aimless loitering through the nearby hills discovered a dilapidated temple inside the forest. She makes that place her usual haunt for reading and writing. One day she met a stranger (Devan) there who introduced himself as an apiarist. Initial sense of suspicion between them gradually gave way to cordial relationship and they became fast friends. Mohan (Vineeth), rich nephew of Madhavan Nair, visits the house with his parents. Aswathi (Parvathy), daughter of Madhavan Nair, wants to marry Mohan. But because of her quick-wittedness and brilliance Mohan is quickly attracted towards Ammini. He expressed his intention to marry Ammini after his academic engagements. But on the very next day a group of angry mob attacked the house with the intention of killing Madhavan Nair. Unfortunately it was Mohan who suffered the brunt of their attack and eventually succumbed to death. Later Ammini came to know that the stranger she occasionally met at the dilapidated temple was the leader of the revolutionaries who had attacked their house the other day. He is deeply wounded by a bullet shot and needs help from Ammini to survive. Ammini with all her misgivings and antipathy towards violent political actions extended her support to the stranger. Finally the police succeeded in finding out the hide out of the Naxal activist. Despite Ammini's timely

information he could not escape from police. To her dismay, Ammini witnessed the gruesome killing of the revolutionary by the police force. At this point we come to realize that the anonymous narrator at the beginning of the movie is Ammini herself.

In fact, there are two subplots in the movie that intersect at a certain point in the narrative: the triangular love relationship between Ammini, (Saleena), Aswathi (Parvathy) and Mohan (Vineeth) and the adventurous life of a revolutionary (Devan) engaged in underground political actions. The character Ammini oscillates between these two plots. The movie begins with a monologue by a female character whose identity is not revealed till the conclusion of the movie. The monologue performs significant narrative function by setting up the entire mood of the film. The spectators are thus made eager to know the reason for the painfully nostalgic remembrance of the past by the unknown speaker. After placing the viewer at the emotional level the movie goes on narrating a well-knit story packed with intrigues, suspense and songs. The visuals are well conceived and executed with a view to ensuring spectators' immersion in the story. The hegemony of the first plot –the triangular love story-over the second plot (political) is established in the very first sequence where the background music resonates with and thus anticipates the love sequence between and Mohan and Ammini. A political theme is here meticulously invoked for setting up a plot for a compelling love story. Talking about the Bengali Naxal movies Manoj Kumar observes: "The negative aspects of such films are noticeable when filmmakers and directors try to present it in distorted forms while mixing romanticism and other orientations for commercial purposes and not intending to highlight the naked reality of the Indian society that the Naxalite Movement focuses on" (Kumar 257). A close scrutiny of the narrative structure of the movie unveils the actual political intention operating beneath the veneer of a simple love story. Here a

love story is impeccably used to transact a well contrived political objective - of tarnishing the ideology of resistance. By doing so the movie accomplished its reactionary objective of representing the political outsider in a dubious way.

Feudal system is inherently hostile to social and economic equality. The structure of feudal society situates the overarching figure of a landlord at the centre and other depending classes at the margin. The upper caste feudal lord is always at the helm of affairs and he dictates terms for others. He is vested with immense social power that ranges from agriculture products to the toiling bodies of the labourers. Body of their men folk was made to toil from morning to evening without much incentive. Body of their womenfolk was sexually exploited by the landed gentry. The labourers, usually belong to the nadir of the social order, were ill-treated and exploited. The living conditions of the labourers were extremely pathetic whereas the landlord enjoys all sorts of material comforts. Feudalism as a socio-economic system in itself was highly reactionary in terms of fundamental democratic values. It was indeed historically inevitable to disrupt such an inhuman system. The major motto of the Naxal movement was the abolition of feudal system. But in *Aranyakam* the system of feudalism is never targeted either by the filmmakers or by the Naxalites. The revolutionaries wanted to kill Madhava Menon on the ground that he has unleashed violence against the adivasis. The character of Madhava Menon is not portrayed as the representative of the feudal system. Rather he is portrayed as an individual villain with violent temperament. In addition to that father of Madhava Menon (Nedumudi Venu) appears as a generous character who is sympathetic with the dalits and adivasis. Mohan and Ammini seem to be extremely sympathetic towards the predicament of the adivasis. By attributing mutually contradictory dispositions to the characters belonging to the same system, the filmmaker successfully exonerates the

system as such and put the blame upon the characters. It is in fact the system that made Madhava Menon more inhuman and megalomaniac not vice versa. MT-Hariharan duo had already filmed a Naxal story in their 1986 film *Panchagni* wherein instead of interrogating the hostile system the film tried to situate itself in a domestic milieu. This gross domestication of larger political issues ultimately reduces the political implication of the theme.

In *Aranyakam* the camera minutely follows the police brutality against the adivasis at the courtyard of the house. The caning of the adivasis is enough to arouse sympathy within the spectators. But that sequence is used to facilitate the flow of narrative rather than evoking political consciousness. This only helps portraying Madhavan Nair as the archetypal villain as seen in the traditional narratives. Not even a single scene or shot is used to visually explicate how the adivasi community was organised by the Naxalites. There is a mention of Parameswaran, son of the menial servant of the house, who speaks in public against the atrocities of the feudal landlord. He is not visibly depicted anywhere in the movie. Political resistance in the movie is thus represented as leaderless, incoherent and mysterious- as a result totally misguided and misdirected. The unexpected death of Mohan reiterates how misdirected the whole revolutionary activities were. The revolutionaries' aim was to kill Madhavan Nair in order to avenge the havoc he brought forth among the adivasis. But instead it was Mohan who was hit during their miscalculated ambush. Here the movie upholds its ideological function by placing leftist extremism at the dock. The occasion of the death of Mohan was used to pose some serious questions about the credibility of such political actions. Viewers of the movie identify themselves with the protagonist, Ammini, who develops disdain against extremism. The sufferings of the adivasis, the police brutalities

and the inhuman aspect of feudalist system were all pushed into the background giving way to a series of close-up shots of Ammini with tears gathering in her eyes. It can be contrasted with a short sequence where the procession of the local people with the dead body of a baby, died when their huts were caught fire (evidently set ablaze by Madhavan Nair), was taken in a detached long shot. The retaliatory operation carried out by the Naxalite activists was mainly shown from the perspectives of Ammini and the helpless old grandfather (Nedumudi Venu) to heighten the horror of the violence. By carefully conceiving and executing such sequences the film could successfully prepare an apolitical platform for targeting Naxalite extremism with viewers' support.

The spatio-temporal milieu of the plot in the movie is unidentifiable. It can be assumed that the action is set in the district of Wayanad which is considered the epicenter of Naxalite activities during the 1970s. A specific mention of the time of the action in the movie is not very well made anywhere. In one of the scenes Ammini is seen writing her diary where she indicates the date as 19/05/1975 - just before the declaration of Emergency. If it can be taken as the time of the action in the movie, then one can assume that filmmakers are trying to engage one of the most turbulent political periods Kerala had gone through. A passing reference to Rajan Case by the police officials yet again endorses this fact. We can see that the narrative of the movie *Aranyakam* derives its strength from spectators' awareness of the political past of Kerala. The film negotiates spectators' memory by tempting them to accept the visuals displayed before them as real without resistance. Susan Hayward distinguishes two types of realism in films as "seamless realism" and "aesthetically motivated realism" (Hayward 311). Narrative cinema, according to Hayward, resort to seamless realism to "disguise the illusion of realism" (311) so that the spectators get sutured to the flow of events. As a result they get

completely severed from the reality outside that ultimately transforms them as passive and inactive. Mixing up of facts with fiction ultimately cancels the truth claims of history and leads the narrative into a never- never world. The 1975 Wayanad serves as a space for the unfurling of a completely fictional story with shred of history smeared on it. While reconstructing the turbulent political past in fictional terms, the film never fails to reiterate the middle class understanding of Naxalite revolution as totally misdirected and unwanted. The incidents visualised in the story have never happened in 1975 Wayanad. But incidents with remote similarities occurred in Kenichira, Wayanad in 1981. An infamous Landlord Madhathil Mathai, who ill-treated his workers, was killed by Naxalites in 1981. Before executing their decision to kill him, Mathai was subjected to public trials three times by the revolutionaries. It has been said that despite such actions and warnings Mathai continued to illtreat and harass his workers. At last his murder was carried out as planned. But during the operation K. T. Rajan, a squad member, was also killed by the police firing. Madhathil Mathai murder was sensational news that frightened both the police force and the feudal landlords alike. Both parties tried to manufacture public opinion regarding violent forms of political activities through various means. The Naxalites, by means of pamphlets and posters, defended their activities while feudalist sympathisers with the help and support of the state unleashed extensive propaganda against such operations. Journals, newspapers and other media tried to capitalize on such a flux. Most of the media teamed up with the dominant ideology by ascertaining their pro-feudal positions. They were instrumental in spreading Naxalite fear among people. For example *Mathrubhoomi Newspaper* published Thalassery police station attack orchestrated by the Naxal group in 1969 in every minute detail that heighten the fear psychosis of the public. The news report goes as follows:

A group of around three hundred Marxist extremists attacked Thalassery town

police station with mortal weapons like acid bulbs, dynamite, wooden spears,

axe, etc. today at three in the early morning. It was the first attempt in Maoist

model Naxalbari revolution in Kerala.

The rebels circumvented the police station situated at the heart of the

Thalassery town and hurled acid bulb at the policeman in the sentry duty.

Fortunately that hit the notice board on the wall. Four people are taken to custody

for their alleged involvement in the attack.[1] (Naxalbari 1)

The news appeared in the first page with the photographs of the weapons seized from the

rebels. The role of the media in shaping the middle class perception of the Naxalites is

very much evident in such reporting of the rebellion. Media was instrumental in

constructing the negative stereotypes out of the revolutionaries and by doing so it could

silence the counter discourses articulated from revolutionary platforms. News stories

with a tinge of fictional elements appeared the front pages of leading Malayalam

newspapers. Discourse is defined as the "straight forward use of language, in exchanges

of information as well as forms that comment on, analyse, entertain, or criticise other

forms and other social contexts". . .(Thiesmeyer 2). The idea of the revolutionaries as the

perpetrators of violence is repeatedly endorsed by means of such media discourses.

Mathrubhoomi Newspaper goes further to fictionalise the facts based on the police

station attack: "It has been revealed by the investigation that the aim of the

revolutionaries was to seize the guns and weapons from the police station and to kill the

policeman on sentry duty and fix a mark on the station wall with his blood" (1). M.

Jayaraj observed that, "the Naxalite movement had subverted the erstwhile convention

pertaining to journalism. The guerrilla warfare for circulation started along with these

incidents. It was during this time that newspapers which haven't had any growth in Malabar got themselves established"[2] (97). The idea of the revolutionaries as the perpetrators of violence is reproduced through caricature representations in many films made during the 1980s. For example, in 1988 movie *Kudumbapuranam*, directed by Sathyan Anthikkad, Preman Vadakkemuri (Sreenivasan) tries to threaten his sister's lover Sivan (Sreenath) by saying that he is the active member of a Naxalite movement. In the film *Aranyakam*, subtle attempts to criticise revolutionary ideology are carried out throughout the narrative. Ammini, the protagonist of the movie, raised some serious questions that resonate with the middle class perspectives on revolution. After the unfortunate death of Mohan Ammini asked the leader of the operation: "Has it been said anywhere that killing is right? In any book?" (*Aranyakam*). For this he tried to justify his position by highlighting the atrocities perpetrated by Madhavan Nair. He thought that it was their target, Madhavan Nair, who was killed during the operation. He seemed to be unaware of the mistake his group has committed. When Ammini revealed the truth of what had happened the activist became stuck with remorse. In order to intensify his prick of conscience Ammini went on asking: "How has brother Mohan become your enemy?" (*Aranyakam*) The Close-up shot of the Naxal leader that follows shows the depth of mental agony he suffers. This unanswered question reminds the spectators of the futility and lack of direction pertaining to such uprisings. Thus the judgment made by Ammini - "Beasts are better; at least they show a bit of gratitude"[3] (*Aranyakam*) - about the anonymous rebel becomes the general verdict of the viewing public. This is further reiterated by the comment made by the activist. He says: "I don't know whether I am right or wrong; anyhow I have become like this" (*Aranyakam*). This foregrounds the presumption that even at the time of extremist activism the revolutionaries were not fully

convinced of their ideological positions. Whatever arguments he puts across to justify his actions the violence inherent in such action is brought under close public scrutiny here. The idea of Naxalites as the harbingers of violence is again established beyond doubts. The identity of the leader is not revealed anywhere in the movie. As per the police version he can be either Joseph or Murali. Whoever he may be, he is well educated and intelligent. A common perception on Naxalites is shared by the police officer when he says: "Are these youths mad?" (*Aranyakam*) This statement again echoes the values being perpetuated by the upper class feudal sensibility. It indirectly reminds the spectators that an educated and intelligent person is considered mad as long as he/she fails to satisfy the traditional role entrusted upon him by the social order or family. The bourgeois capitalism requires more labourers to expedite its capital reproduction that necessitates the absorption of all educated individuals to its work force. This, along with the traditional role bestowed upon the male members as bread winners, multiplies the familial responsibility of the educated male. Once someone digresses from this well defined social roles traditionally accorded to individual members, he/she will be stamped as deviant or mad. Once it is established that such political activists are mad, the authority can initiate a witch hunt to incarcerate or exterminate them. Just like the way the Enlightenment reason had excluded and punished the madman as the harbingers of unreason, as observed by Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation*, the dominant class conceived the idea of attributing madness as a way of legitimizing the forceful suppression of the revolutionaries. The lives and sufferings of the local people are never shown anywhere in the movie. They are always represented in long shots (funeral procession, cluster of complainants) where their individual identity is not properly established. But the life of the feudal landlord and his family members are shown in

minute details so that the spectators tend to establish familiarity with them. That will eventually create a notion of the revolutionaries as strangers who wreak havoc in the serenity of family/social life. Politics, in general, is depicted as something that destabilises the personal. The free flow of feudal life is obstructed; the love relationship between the protagonist and Mohan is broken; the serenity and loneliness of the female protagonist is disturbed-all due to the entry of a stranger in the family who practices politics of violence. By grossly neglecting the conditions by which such political formations were originated, the craftsman in M. T. Vasudevan Nair, through a well-knit story, arouses pity and sympathy towards Ammini and Mohan. The last gruesome killing of the activist leader may also arouse sympathy within the spectators for him. But much before that, spectators would develop an aversion towards the ideology he represents.

The movie used point-of- view shots quite frequently to keep the female protagonist at the vantage point. The initial voice over narration accompanied by the flashback cut situates the narrative squarely under her vicinity. Whatever she sees the audience see. Ammini's vision is always restricted either within the closed space of the house or outside in the large expanse of forest and fields. In both cases society is critically absent. But at times this privileged position of the protagonist is disturbed by the objective shots taken by the cinematographer. Thus the carefully crafted objective and subjective shots attribute a quality of realism to the movie. Unnecessary exaggerations and acts of supernatural heroism are carefully avoided in the movie that further endorses this cinematic realism. This aura of realism brings about huge damage to the political aspect of the movie. While talking about the Hollywood film *The Battle of Algiers* by Gillo Pontecorvo, Mike Wayne has made the following comments:

 Certainly, one element of my critique of *The Battle of Algiers* is that it had

overly   invested in getting the immediate appearance of the real in the raw with

its imitation of the 1960s reportage, and that not enough attention had been paid

to deeper, more fundamental dynamics. Lukacs idea that the social world is in

process and that the realist art must 'uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not

immediately perceptible, network of relationships that got to make up society'

(1988:38) anticipates Espinosa's call for Third Cinema 'to show the process

which generates the problems' (1997:81). (35)

Here Mike Wayne tries to suggest the fact that realism in cinema cannot be conceived as

the superficial movement of the cinematographic camera over the material objects.

Rather it should be derived from the filmmakers' in-depth awareness of the social reality

as a continuous process other than a fixed entity. Here Wayne goes to the extent of

taking up issue with neo-realist films like *The Bicycle Thieves* for its "naturalistic

limitations" (37). In *Aranyakam* the realist claim of the movie is at times disturbed by the

all-encompassing presence of the narrative with its unexpected twists and turns. The

absorbing story line with seamless current of visuals facilitated by continuity editing

does not provoke any political thinking in the spectators. Rather it disengages them from

the real world. Beneath the outward expression of the political the film carries seeds of

apolitical, reactionary ideology.

 The film is released in 1988, a time when the collective popular memory of the

consequences of the extremist political activism of the 1970s and early 80s was

somewhat gradually disappeared. A general trend of suspicion was aroused within the

mainstream against organised form of political action and violence. Globally the

communist ideology underwent a setback in many countries. Due to a rapid growth in the

field of information technology such news reached the remotest part of our country. Our society gradually reorganised into a middle class society swayed by pragmatic value system which believed in more democratic ways of political expressions. The ideological vacuum created by the incredulity towards political institutions in the aftermath of world war and the weakening of the communist nations compelled people to become more and more sceptical and self-centred. Revolutions of 1989 that signal the imminent fall of communism in Eastern blocs exacerbated this confusion. Power imbalances and shifts in geopolitical equations have been created in the world owing to the fall of Soviet Union on the one hand and the emergence of America as the economic super power on the other. Mainstream left gradually displaced Naxalism with more pragmatic paradigms. Owing to the unprecedented growth in the field of information technology the socio-economic and cultural environment of Kerala have already been transformed into a cluttered space with unprecedented global connect. The society started recognizing the importance of global encounter in terms of economic activities. More and more people have gone to Gulf countries in search of jobs that brought about conspicuous changes in the field of infrastructure. Kerala economy shows signs of rapid growth and a reorientation in terms of social relations became explicitly evident. The collective nostalgia for feudal values has been almost disappeared and replaced by cut throat competition in business and entrepreneurship. The process of urbanisation gained momentum and policies were adopted by the successive governments to expedite industrial and infrastructural growth. In such a context *Aranyakam* acts as an ideal visual text that thrives on society's mistrust towards extremism. The former revolutionaries have already lost their hope in ideological/political interventions and a new wave of thought process have emerged from the site of this vacuum that catered to the

propagation of pragmatic interventions in the field of politico-economic discourses. They were unbelievably optimistic about the prospects of development however anti-people and anti-nature those interventions were. This newly emerged perceptival shift ultimately resulted in the constitution of an ensemble of ideological positions- a strange mix of leftist, right wing politics along with other conservative positions. They started setting up agendas for mainstream social discourses in Kerala. By the time of the making of *Aranyakam*, M T–Hariharan duo had established themselves as the icons of box office success. They knew very well how to capitalize out of an existing socio-political situation. *Aranyakam* succinctly manipulates the ambivalent positions of the predominantly middle class Kerala society of the late 1980s who developed antipathy towards extremism and was getting ready to succumb to the temptation of the market.

There are two ways by which the political activist of the movie is represented as an outsider. First, he is attributed the quality of being a romantic outsider by way of his anonymity. The name of the protagonist is never mentioned anywhere. He revealed very few details about himself. He had a family where he enjoyed mental and material happiness. Despite having such a comfortable personal life he abandoned his family and worked for the welfare of the whole society. He is not at all satisfied with his own comforts. He dreams of all the members of the society enjoying equal rights and privileges. Such dreams are unrealistic and romantic. Depiction of such a character without giving adequate information to specifically position him in a tangible social milieu results in the mystification of the character that further enhances the romantic quality surrounding him. Just like a mythical figure he comes from nowhere. As a result the socio-political conditions that catered to the emergence of such leaders were grossly ignored. The mystery associated with the political activist is further ascertained by the

locale where he moves around. He is always found inside a dilapidated structure of a temple that sustained a fair amount of gothic atmosphere to the movie. What is he there for? He is there to liberate the deprived classes from oppression. A romantic nomad, cut off from familial relationships, ready to sacrifice his life for the wellbeing of humanity, is the archetypal hero frequenting ancient myths. The scriptwriter ventures into exploiting this subterranean awareness of the romantic hero embedded deep inside the recess of the spectators' unconscious. A society, ready to shed off the weight of history hanging upon its shoulders, can easily evade the threat posed by the revolutionaries by the strategy of romanticisation. By romanticising the practitioners of certain ideology, the filmmakers have succeeded in romanticising the ideology itself. Ideals such as social justice, equality and liberation of the downtrodden propagated by Naxalism are thus categorised as esoteric and unassailable. Secondly, with respect to the two locales where the action is centered upon, the activist is again considered an outsider. He is perceived as an intruder who disturbed the serenity of the sylvan retreat. Ammini, the protagonist of the movie, discovered the remains of a temple well inside the forest and found it suitable a place for the free expression of her eccentricities. The place is already reserved by Ammini by inscribing her name on the stone walls and arches. It was into such a quiet and serene landscape that the leader of the revolutionaries trespassed. The spectators, who move along with Ammini in her wanderings, identify themselves with her and thus took the revolutionary for an intruder. An intruder who does not talk too much about anything usually engenders a feeling of suspense. He introduced himself as a beekeeper, but an intangible something that surrounds him does leave behind enough room for suspicion for a mature audience. He appears all of a sudden and disappears the same way. Qualities usually associated with positive characters such as clarity of purpose and

clarity of vision are critically absent in the character enacted by Devan. Just like the intellectual confinement of his ideology his bodily mobility is also confined to this secluded terrain. After being shot by Madhava Menon during the operation, he tries to find asylum in his hide out. Ammini, at first, saw the blood drops on the ground which leads her way to the bleeding revolutionary. He now reminds us of the blood thirsty monster of the fairy tales who deserves capital punishment. The middle class public perception of the revolutionaries as blood thirsty monsters is resurfaced in this scene. This anonymous revolutionary is the mastermind behind the Naxal operation carried out at Madhava Menon's house. Until the entry of the revolutionary the life in the feudal family was extremely joyous. The rich landlord had all the powers vested upon him so that he could control any sign of dissent from the part of his dependents. The girls of the family enjoyed comforts and privileges usually experienced by feudal families. The entry of Mohan, son of another wealthy landlord, creates twists and turns to the plot that eventually ended up in a tragedy. Here again the political activist is portrayed as an outsider who has upset the happiness and joy hitherto prevalent in the family. By pitting the joyous family prior to the calamitous entry of the anonymous Naxalite against the tragedy befell upon them after his entry the film could generate aversion against radical activism. The delicate bond established between Ammini and Mohan was also broken with the unfortunate death of the later. Here again the revolutionary enacts his role as a perpetual nuisance who wreaks havoc to a system which is otherwise thought to be perfectly serene, calm and quiet. To sum up, the ideological function of narrative film-as the preserver and propagator of the dominant power structure- is meticulously materialised in *Aranyakam*.

5.2. Politics as Peevish and Frivolous: *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove*

Aranyakam portrays the political outsider as a vicious presence who troubles the otherwise smooth current of the family life. The ideological function of the movie is uncovered when the planned and predefined pattern of family life is contrasted with the elusive, socially disconnected life of the anonymous revolutionary. The spectators' antipathy towards the Naxalite is aroused by portraying him as a destructor of the prospective family of the female protagonist. Whereas the Naxalite destabilised the family life of a feudal landlord in *Aranyakam*, the revolutionary youth in 1984 movie, *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove* directed by Bharathan and scripted by John Paul, tears asunder the pleasures of his own feudal family. The movie invokes into the narrative the idea of the political outsider in such a way as to proscribe the ideological position being upheld by them. As in the case of *Margam*, here again the plot is developed within the idealised space of family wherein the melodramaticised relationships among the members of the family are squarely placed against the individual choice of the revolutionary. As a result the idea of the revolution is presented as an aberration that is inherently inhospitable to delicate familial emotionalities. In *Margam* the former revolutionary is found disturbed by the incessant flow of images from his political past. For him family metaphorically acts as a protective womb where he can feel solace from his internal commotions. The constant presence of his indefatigable daughter remains as a source of inspiration to him throughout his life. But in *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove*, the political outsider remains as a perpetual source of agony to the family members including his mother, father, sister, and brother. The overemphasisation accorded to the idea of the family strategically attributes the quality of being an outsider to the revolutionary youth that eventually turns him as an object of spectators' fury.

The story revolves around the emotional intricacies experienced by the members of the family after the death of Unnikrishnan (Rahman), the youngest son in the family. Unni, a Naxalite activist, was accidently killed when a bomb he was carrying got exploded. His father (Madhu) became a heart patient after that unfortunate incident and his mother Meenakshi (K. R. Vijaya) became mentally wreck. His elder brother Balan (Mammootty) was a police officer who was in charge of getting the Naxalite activists arrested. His only sister Subhadra (Sobhana) had to terminate her education in order to take care of her insane mother. The arrival of a stranger, Ravi, (Nahas), in the family brings Meenakshi back into life as she mistook him for Unni. The stranger turned out to be an absconding Naxalite, one of Unni's associates, who was seeking for a hide out. The arrival of Ravi worked wonders in Meenakshi who seemed to be quickly relieved of her psychological derangement. This strange coincidence, which leads to a strange relationship between Ravi and Meenakshi, remained as the fulcrum of the narrative. It is around this thread that the entire narrative is meticulously stitched. Ravi was compelled by Subhadra and her father to stay in the house for a few more days in order to keep Meenakshi out of her mental agony. Balan wanted to arrest Ravi but was wary of its dire consequences. He was sure that that would push his mother into perennial inasnity. As a responsible police officer he had no option other than getting Ravi arrested. But Ravi, with the aid of his fellow Naxalites, turned against the police for which the police retaliated with firing guns. Meenakshi, who came out of the house to see what was going around, was accidently shot dead during the exchange of fire.

The first shot of the movie functions as an emblematic shot that sums up the whole narrative. The close-up that shows a barking dog thus suggests the intrigues awaiting the spectators who are very quickly invited to the diegetic world of cinema with

the chasing sequence that followed. In addition to that the first shot sounds an ominous alarm in the face of an imminent danger that awaits the spectators. The chasing sequence cuts to the close-up shot of Meenakshi looking through the window. Those shots gradually build up the suspense characteristic of narrative cinema. The arrival of an anonymous character into a heretofore solemn family environment is a stock theme in Hollywood Westerns. This powerful leitmotif wrapped in emotional extravaganza situates the spectacors in a parallel world wherein they are totally engrossed in the nondisruptive fictional narrative. The strong presence of such an overarching diegetic environment envisages the idea of spectators as mere passive subjects bereft of their agency. Once the total subjugation of the spectators is ensured the ideology of the movie can be disseminated without resistance. Here the political outsiders, represented by Unnikrishnan and Ravi, are depicted as immature daydreamers whose calamitous presence udermines the serenity of an otherwise smooth flowing system. By projecting the institutional structure of family as a sacrosanct entity the movie embarks on a relentless critique of political extremism that unequivocally castigate revolutionary movements.

The idea of the family as a social institution functions as a necessary component of any social order. Family, like all other institutions, presupposes a pattern of behaviour from the part of the members that guarantees order. "For social relationships to be "orderly" actors must be (1) able to form expectations about the actions of others that has some probability of being correct, (2) have some way of the learning of the accuracy of their expectations, and (3) some guidance as to how to correct them if they are mistaken" (Horwitz 24). Individual members in a family are expected to perform certain roles in accordance with the larger interest of the society. "… Many of the things that families do

are a consequence of the existing in the broader context of the Great Society" (Horwitz 34). So members in a family act in accordance with the dynamism of the internal environment and also within the constraints maintained by the society outside. Any instance of non-conforminty with these impositions would be reckoned with as deviations and such behaviour is brought under the strict monitoring of the family/society. The families of the revolutionaries had to bear the brunt of their political activities in various ways. Along with them prolonged absence of the major actor (mostly the bread winning male) in the family, police raids and atrocities and the consequent mental depressions, the responsibility to manage the family alone, and the public perception of the such families as antisocials were some of the challenges the other members of the family had to confront. Many revolutionaries were emotionally attacked by the police by using family as bait to compel them to reveal vital information. Some of them later recollected how painful it was to leave their families behind while undergoing police tortures. Sulochana, who was arrested at the age of fourteen and kept in police custody for 27 days, recollected that "the police tried to emotionally blackmail me by reminding me of my duties as a responsible daughter in the family. According to them I was ruining the goodwill of my family"[4] (Shibu et al. iv).). The typically coded behaviour entrusted upon the members of a family thus acts as a means of control during the time of rebellious uprisings. Family as a romantic idea has been propagated by the state/dominant ideology to target individuals digressing from such coded behaviour.

There are plenty of examples in Malayalam cinema, especially in commercials, where family acts as a centripetal force that exerts a gravitational pull on every individual who tends to move away from it. In the movie *Punnapravayalar*, the protagonist Prabhakaran is presented as an obedient son who is always under the control

of his father, even in his political activities. He was dragged out of the crowd by his father while he was addressing public meeting and was forcefully taken home. The inability of the political outsider to ignore the patriarchal authority of the family indirectly suggests the ineptitude of the revolution to subvert the dominant power structure. Whereas in *Ningalenne Communistakki* Gopalan is portrayed as a timid and obedient son who does not even discuss politics in the presence of his feudal father. An idea of the family as pure and sacrosanct is constructed in these movies wherein political discussions are conceived as acts of desecration. In the box-office hit 1988 movie, *Chithram* by Priyadarsan, the protagonist Vishnu (Mohanlal) killed his brother-in-law suspecting that he was his wife's paramour. But, actually he was an absconding Naxalite, who used to visit his sister only during nights. The presence of a Naxalite in the family was, thus, pictured as a secret, not to be revealed even to one's own husband. Those movies categorically underscored the public perception that, as observed by K. P. Jayakumar, "family is the end point of all political debates and the home/family binary has to be preserved within the moral constraints of the society" (68). Traditionally maintained patriarchal hierarchy is unquestionably sustained even by the revolutionaries in those films ultimately disseminate the idea that politics is weak and ineffective. In *Aranyakam* spectators' sympathy for the revolutionary is aroused in the scene where he emotionally recaptures the memories of his family. The centrality of the family is tacitly juxtaposed with the 'irresponsible' social activism of the political outsiders in those movies to denigrate them as deviants.

In the movie *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove* the same strategy is followed to depict the revolutionaries as miscreants who destabilise the sanctity of the family. The members of Unnikrishnan's family have been leading a joyous life with all the comforts

and paraphernalia a feudal family can offer. The extreme close-ups of flaming traditional lamps and countenances with devotional marks on their foreheads, poojas and other observations set the narrative within a strictly feudal framework. The dominant value system of the movie is thus established wherein the members seem to be in conformity with the dictates of the values in question. The adolescent Unni, with all his childish mannerisms, was a source of happiness in the family. Things were getting upside down when Unni started showing interest in serious political literature. His sister Subhadra recollects Unni's changes: "He was always reading from his room closed. His views and behaviour have been thoroughly changed. Unni was changing" (*Ithirippove*). Even from the mood of her narration it is clear that the change happened to Unni was perceived as unwelcome by other members of the family. He became an ardent follower of Mao and joined extremist groups to organize armed struggles against the ruling class. His political fervour is set diametrically opposite to the serenity of the family. The predefined, set-patterns in respect of the family are dismantled by Unni in this stage. He violated the temporal constrains observed in the family by being late to reach home. He could no longer dine together with other members of the family which has been the usual practice. He started questioning the authority of his elder brother who was also a police officer. Hence the political outsider is represented as a peevish youngster subverting the sacrosanct hierarchy of the family. The character of Unni is depicted as naïve and childish when he was resorting to a fast unto death for compelling his father to get him a new motor bike. This episode acts as the forerunner of Unni's future political indoctrination which is thus perceived as frivolous. This can be viewed as an indirect statement that denigrates anything political as trivial. Such reductionism and trivialisation are the hallmark of dominant cinema while dealing with political outsiders.

The camera traverses through the interiors of the ancestral house most times. It was the family temple that dominates the sequences after the tharavadu house. Only very occasionally does the camera move beyond these two geographical entities. A close reading would reveal the fact that these places are more geopolitical in nature than geographical as these places succinctly consolidate the dominance of the upper class Hindu sensibility. The family thus acquired a sort of metaphorical quality that stands for the entire feudal system being torn apart by the radical political outsider. This aspect of the movie is further reiterated in another scene where Unni's bereaved father making scathing remarks to Ravi when Ravi calls Unni a martyr. He asks Ravi about the meaning of the word martyr. Then out of desperation he attributes the quality of martyrhood to all the members of the family. By facing the audience in a frontal close-up he asks Ravi/spectators: "Don't you feel that his mother, who has been out of sense after his accidental death, a martyr? Subhadra, who had to terminate her education to take care of her mother, a martyr? His brother Balaraman, who could not visit this house after his death, a martyr"?[5] (*Ithirippove*). Here Unni's political activism/Naxalism, in the broader context, is considered calamitous to the entire family/society. As these statements are delivered by the patriarch of the family directly to the audience with an unequivocal clarity the reactionary politics of the movie becomes conspicuous.

Talking about the preindustrial family Steven Horwitz observes that in such families - even if the love among the members of the family remains same as it is today - it was not expressed in the same magnitude because expression of love was more expensive during those days. But in the post industrial modern society "when the wealth produced by the advent of capitalism and industrialisation raised living standards and reduced family sizes, it lowered the cost of expressing those parental sentiments poured

forth both between parents and children and in the marital dyad itself" (Horwitz 66).

Even if this observation is made within the European environment it has its relevance in

Kerala also. "India's family system is not (therefore) being transformed from a

monolithic pre-industrial extended system to a similarly monolithic 'modern' nuclear

one," (283) observes Susan C. Seymour. In the context of Kerala society of 1970s and

80s the gradual transformation from a feudal society to a bourgeois capitalist system

became conspicuously evident and this had its repercussions in the family relations as

well. It was not a complete rupture from the traditional values that had taken place.

Instead an economic reorientation within the backdrop of the traditional values was

slowly evolving. When the households cease to become centres of economic activities,

as it was the case during the time of feudalism, the role of women more or less confined

within the household ranging from rearing of children to that of preparing food for the

whole family. As women in the upper caste Hindu families used to have menial servants

to manage such activites, they usually got meaningful time to spend with their children.

So the mother–child relationship became more and more emotional compared to that of

other family members. Earlier in the joint family system, apart from mother "there are

many other care takers assisting the mother and vying for the child's attention" (Seymour

279). But the emrgence of the nuclear family, child rearing has become the sole

responsibility of the mother. In *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove* the value system of the

feudal family is ostensibly foregrounded by techniques specific to cinema. Exaggerated

versions of this relationship are blended with shots of images that reflect feudal pride.

The close relationship between Unni and his mother aggravates the spectators' contempt

for Unni's politics as it is his political activism that came between them. Politics has

been introduced as a destructive force that separates an otherwise innocent youth from his affectionate mother.

The idea of the home as an Eden of innocence is developed along with the growth of capitalism as it is totally cut off from the complexities of economic and political activities unlike in the feudal economy. As women started offering her permanent presence in the home, those qualities usually attributed to women became permeated to home. The duality between home and mother became disappeared and one metaphorically resembles the other. To be at home means to be in the safe haven:

> The middle and upper classes during the nineteenth century provided the blue print for the nostalgic version of home that continues to serve as a cultural ideal even to our own time. The home was the physical representation of the refuge from the competitive amoral, if not immoral, world of the public sphere, whether that be the market or politics. Being the sphere controlled by women, it became the symbol of purity that women are supposed to represent. (Horwitz 92)

People who are away from home thus acquire the quality of being outsiders, who are reluctant to abide by the regulations imposed by the conditions at home. It implies that those outsiders are hurting the sentiments of the parents, especially that of the mother. That is why Subhadra reminds Unni of the consequences it may bring about when he talks at length about his political activism: "Our parents know only to love. Don't bring pain to their mind" (*Ithirippove*). Politics is conceived as the harbinger of pain and fear. When Unni was too much vocal about his political position, Subhadra became nervous and she says: "I am afraid when I hear all these" (*Ithirippove*). There is one scene where Unni is found looking into the mirror colouring the eyes of his mirror image in red. It

suggests his blind adoration for the radical politics he has become a part of. His political conviction prevents him from looking into things with objective understanding. His political indoctrination is thus portrayed as a cataract that completely eclipsed objective reality around. Looking into the mirror is an act of looking into one's own self. By reddening the eyes of his image in the mirror he agrees to accept the reddened version of reality. Indirectly this scene indicates his inability to assimilate political doctrines without discretion.

The entire political activism of the revolutionaries is shown in the movie mainly in two sequences. One a street play and the other, an ambush they have successfully executed to liberate one of their comrades who was arrested. At the same time activities like organizing the working class and the peasants and public trials undertaken by the revolutionaries were all ignored. Since the major part of the narrative is centred on the mental trepidations of Meenakshi and thereby on the emotional crisis of the feudal family, the pangs and agonies of the underprivileged were pushed into the background without being represented in the filmic text. The character of Balaraman, Unni's brother, the representative of the repressive machinery of the state, is pitted squarely against that of Unni to reduce the tension into the domestic level. The placidity of Balan is juxtaposed to the frivolity of Unni that eventually creates an elder/ younger binary where the elder, as in the case of feudal family, is placed in the privileged position. In a sense this move approves Balan's arguments against Naxalism and thereby legitimises the state oppression. The excess of police atrocities perpetrated during the time of Naxalite uprising and Emergency were thus trivialised in the fictional world of this movie. Such reductionisms functionally redeem the state oppression to a great extend.

The movie, by way of its seamless narrative, situautes the spectators in the fictional world ideologically constructed to create an antipathy towards radical politics. The view that ". . . all human expression, indeed culture itself, is stripped of any responsibility to thought and transformed in to the neutralised element of the all-embracing rationality of an economic system long since grown irrational," (Adorno et al. 72) points out the passivity of the consumption of cultural products like films in the capitalist system. Adorno's views of the spectators as consumers passively consuming the cultural products without any political reflection deny them their agency. As a result, through capitalist mode of production, the ideology could maintain its dominance unchallenged forever. By narrating an emotionally loaded story with sufficient slots for adrenalin pumping experiences, the film constructs a totally ominous picture of the revolution. The political predicaments of the outsiders Unni and Ravi are entangled in the romantically intensified family relationship especially that of mother/son relationship, consequent to which an antipathy towards Naxal politics is carefully crafted. In *Ithirippoove Chuvanna Poove* family is always set at the foreground in order to judge every other incidents based on the impact those incidents bring about in the family. When family holds centrality in the whole narrative individual's behavioural incompatibility in relation to the family is perceived as deviation. Unni becomes an outsider insofar as he fails to comply with the pattern of behaviour assigned to him by the family/society. To recapitulate, Unni's political radicalism is conceived as a flagrant violation of the traditional role usually associated with the male member of the family as the prospective breadwinner of the family and the major player in the economic activities it demands.

Govind Nihalani's 1998 Hindi film, *Hazaar Chourasi Ki Maa,* based on

Mahaswetha Debi's novel with the same title, narrates the angst of a mother whose son

had been killed during an encounter. The film, despite its thematic resemblances with

Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove, frees itself from being fallen into the trap of melodrama by

analyzing the diegetic situation more politically. Here mother Sujata (Jaya Bachan), after

her initial shock at the news of her son Brati Chatterji's (Joy Segupta) unfortunate death,

quickly recovers and tries to probe into the death of her son. The film never attempts to

foreground the emotional condition of the mother; instead it undertakes a serious

investigation into the socio-political conditions that made possible such deaths. Being an

affectionate mother her understanding of her son has been heretofore defined in terms of

familial relationship replete with mutual love and care. But she failed to understand Brati

comprehensively as a social being capable of diagnosing social malaise with ideological

parameters. Brati's death comes like an eye opener to Sujata who later realizes the social

injustice rampant in a bourgeois capitalist system. She met many people during her

investigation including Brati's friends, lover and one of his friends' mothers. Such

confrontations have allegorical significance in the life of Sujata as she becomes more and

more political. She comes closer to her son and thereby more closer to the political

ideology he once stood for. Whereas in *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove* mother of the dead

son turned insane, in *Hazaaro Charasi Ki Ma* she became politically conscious. In the

former the 'madness has some method in it'; it ideologically functioned as a tool to

denigrate Naxalism as a source of social disturbance. But in the later film mother proudly

upholds the political conviction of her dead son as an inevitable part of resisting social

injustice. Unlike the camera in *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove* that swings from feudal

family to temple every now and then, the camera in *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Ma* follows the

journey of the mother and thus exposes the sleazy lacunae inherent in the hostile system. When the Malayalam movie tries to conceive the idea of the political in derogatory terms the Hindi counterpart regards this film as an occasion to politicise the spectators. The activism of the political outsider in Malayalam film is disparaged as aberration whereas in *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Ma* it is conceived as the need of the hour.

To sum up, Malayalam dominant films during the 1980s dealt with Naxalites as outsiders who defile the sanctity of the sacrosanct institution of family and thereby reinforce the public perception of Naxalites as threat to the status quo. Political activism by ignoring the social role entrusted upon the individual by the society is portrayed as unhealthy deviation. Naxalism is projected as a source of social disturbance that would be tamed by active intervention from the repressive machinery of the state or dominant ideology. In *Aranyakam*, the Naxalite leader is portrayed as an irresponsible member of a family who ignored his potential role of a bread winner while engaging in politics. Moreover he has torn asunder the seemingly blissful environment of a feudal family and the hopes and expectations of the female protagonist for a family life in her future. In *Chithram* it was the unwanted entry of the Naxalite that destroyed the blissful family life of the protagonist. On the other hand in *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove* the feudal family is imploded due to the calamitous presence of a young Naxalite in the family. In both instances family is projected as the transcendental value system the preservation of which is made more urgent than the fight for equality and social justice.

End Notes

The translation of the following Malayalam texts appeared in this chapter is done by the

    researcher:

1. "Naxalbarikal Police Station Akramichu."*Mathrubhoomi Newspaper*, 1968,

    November 23, pp.

2. Jayaraj, M. "Charitrapadam". *Mathrubhoomi Weekly* Vol.92, no.13, June 2014, pp.96-

    97.

3. *Aranyakam.* Directed by Hariharan, Performance by Devan et al., Mudra, 1986

4. *Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove.* Directed by Bharathan, Performance by Mammootty

    et al., Grihalakhsmi, 1984.

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Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa. directed by Govind Nihalani, Performance by Jaya Bachan et al, Manmohan Shetty and Govind Nihalani,1998.

Ithirippove Chuvanna Poove. Directed by Bharathan, Performance by Mammootty et al., Grihalakhsmi, 1984.

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CONCLUSION

The idea of the outsider is constructed by the dominant class through various strategies to marginalize individuals or groups who challenge the smooth functioning of any given system. Outsiders always pose threat to the conventional edifice of the system by disturbing the status quo and by exposing the dichotomy in the distribution of power in a system. Those who are always in direct confrontation with the system and those who take part in the revolutionary activities to set the system right are labelled as political outsiders in direct contrast with the dominant class who always assumes the centrality in social discourses. In Kerala, the communist movement of the 1930s and 40s emerged as the first instance of organised resistance against the status quo dominated by the upper caste Hindu feudal landlords. Since they posed threat to the existing system they were treated like outsiders. The revolutionaries had to confront brutalities unleashed by the state and feudal landlords alike for decades. The Communist Party, with its pro-people attitude and because of its close proximity with the poor, came to power in the 1957 election to the Kerala legislative assembly. It was a unique political incident in the history of the communist party as it was for the first time that a Communist Party formed a government through parliamentary process. But some radical activists in the party found issue with the alleged 'parliamentary digression' and accused the organised Communist Party of discarding its revolutionary agenda. When the organised Left became a part of the ruling establishment they were criticised for their failure to deliver what had been expected from them by the deprived classes. This eventually paved the way for the formation of Naxalite movement in Kerala. Failure of the political left to address the concerns of the working class compelled them to redefine the idea of the leftist politics. The Naxalite movement in Bengal orchestrated in line with the Maoist

model of peasant revolt, inspired the disgruntled youths in Kerala to pursue the line of armed struggle against the solidified inhuman structures of feudalism and the emerging bourgeois class alike. The movement was active in the political history of Kerala for two decades and made its own repercussions before being relegated into the political oblivion. By this time the organised Left became political insiders because of their alleged digression from their proclaimed revolutionary path. Since then, Keralites' awareness of the political has been sharply divided into either organised left-wing politics of the Left Democratic Front or right wing politics of the United Democratic Front. These two fronts invariably assume power almost in an alternate fashion leaving no room for other political discourses to flourish. Anything beyond this binary would quite often be considered aberrations. It was in such a context that Naxalism emerged as an alternate political value system that sought to find out an immediate remedy for the socio-economic chasm dividing the haves and have-nots. But these 'aberrations' were strategically regulated by the society as it caused heavy damages to the middle class morality people were used to. As a result Naxalites became the newly emerged political outsiders in this phase. The different phases of the evolution of the Left have ite reflections in the literature and cinema of produced in each phase. As a site of reference, it can be seen that, cinema succinctly follows the trajectory of these evolutions explicit in the socio-political scenario of Kerala. Down from its formative years, the Left has been dealt with as a political outsider by the Malayalam dominant cinema because dominant cinema always preserves and perpetuates the ideology of the dominant class. But the post-1970 political cinema undermined this ideological function of cinema by proactively re-considering the whole process of filmmaking and articulated unique identity to the political outsiders. At the same time, this newly emerged counter aesthetic

platform is again subverted by the overarching influence of the dominant cinema. It is apparent that the dominant ideology employed various strategies to tackle the challenging presence of the political outsiders in cinema. The strategy of 'conscious ignorance', the strategy of 'neutralised accommodation', and the strategy of rejection through apolitical criticism are the major acts of containment strategies identified in this thesis. A close analysis of the cinematic representation of the idea of the political outsiders spanning from 1950s to the first decades of the 21st century, giving special references to select Malayalam films, exposes the forces of power actively working behind the construction, accommodation, and finally the neutralisation of leftist political positions.

In order to analyse the mechanism of power operating within a given system that produced the binary between outsider and insider, this thesis drew theoretical materials from Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Edward Said. Frankfurt School critics like Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse have made stunning inquiry in to the ideological function of mass culture that could uncover the unholy nexus between capitalism and culture industry. Counter Aesthetic initiatives of Latin American Film makers like Fernando Solanas, Octavio Getino, and Glauber Rocha shed more light on the theoretical aspects of political cinema. In the particular context of Malayalam cinema, indepth studies made by Vijayakrishnan, C.S. Venkiteswaran, N. P. Sajeesh, and many other media critics were useful for formulating concepts in this thesis. Since the real is very much reflected in the 'reel', cinema offers a site of reference to learn more about the political past of Kerala. Autobiography and memoirs of K. Damodaran, A.K. Gopalan, E. M. S. Namboodirippadu, and Ajita expose the plights of being a political outsider in a predominantly feudalist environment.

It is conspicuous that Malayalam cinema produced during the first half of the 20th century up to 1950 consciously ignored the rebellious presence of leftist political positions as that would considerably dent the values maintained by the dominant ideology. Cinema as an industry, which requires the support of capital, needs to ensure necessary visual ingredients to satiate popular taste. It was believed that any attempt that destabilises the existing system would fail to attract popular imagination as the idea of popular imagination itself is a hegemonic construct. Therefore anything that would promote the ethos of Communism should have to risk public antipathy. That means, dominant cinema never allowed dominant ideology to be challenged by any other alternative system of thought. History of Malayalam cinema begins with the dismal release of *Vigathakumaran* in 1928. The rebellious inclusion of a caste woman to enact the role of an upper caste 'gentle woman' irked the feudal sensibility. They vandalised the theatre during its first projection. J. C. Daniel could not exhibit his film anywhere. So until 1950, nobody dared to challenge the feudal hierarchy in visual terms. Because of that the diegetic world of mainstream cinema maintained a logical distance from communist themes during the first half of the 20th century. This strategy can be better called 'strategy of conscious ignorance'. But later it came like that the immense popularity gained by the communist movement could no longer be easily overlooked by the filmmakers. In addition to that, the emergence of the bourgeois class as a considerable force in the socio-economic environment of Kerala redefines the traditional feudalist value system. The bourgeois sensibility in the field of filmmaking was realised in the recapturing of earlier social reformist interventions.

Films made during that period had to assimilate two mutually contradictory positions; one was that of the overarching presence of feudal value system and the other

was that of the emerging bourgeois liberalism. The culturally hegemonic system of feudalism could not have been dispensed with by the film industry as it facilitates the mass appeal of the medium. So even after the disintegration of the feudal structure, the value system being preserved by the society remained the same for decades to come. But the bourgeois economic system promotes more flexible social relations to facilitate economic dynamism. In the context of Malayalam cinema, this ambivalence was reconciled by the evolution of new genres which can be better called as 'family socials' of the 1950s and 'political melodramas' of the late 1960s. Since "as a genre, melodrama also developed alongside nineteenth century capitalism" (Hayward 214), it tacitly performs its ideological function to serve the cause of the capitalists. The convoluted socio- political scenario evolved out of the complexities of post- feudal (structurally), leftist (politically) and bourgeois (economically) social reorganisation found its expression in the family socials and political melodramas of the 1950s and 60s. In order to capitalise out of that popularity enjoyed by the communist movement the family socials, the precursors of political melodramas, were forced to incorporate political themes in their cinematic narratives. Movies like *Jeevitha Nouka* and *Navalokam* tacitly assimilated political debates by neutralising the political content. This is how the dominant cinema executed the strategy of 'neutralised accommodation'. This process continued in the late 1960 political melodramas like *Mooladhanam, Ningalenne Communistakki,* and *Punnapravayalar* where the serious political issues are accommodated in the cinematic space after neutralisation. To accommodate leftist political positions in a predominantly capitalist art form in itself seemed insurmountable. One of the ways by which Malayalam dominant cinema effectively cornered the communist presence was to resort to narratives that foregrounded pleasure rather than

politics. Putting politics into a compelling narrative with twists and turns and intricacies is an anti-political act frequently performed by the makers of the mainstream movies. The concept of narrative cinema is developed within the capitalist culture industry that aims at maximising profit at the expense of aesthetics and politics by integrating film production into capitalist industrial production and consumption. This dominant form of narrative cinema promotes the unrealistic experience of spatio-temporal continuity. Such films employ unity of characters, gradual and linear unfolding of the story line and continuity editing to situate the viewers in a completely fictional world. The spectators' blissful immersion into the narrative of a cinema is often exploited by the film industry to further its capital. In the context of Malayalam commercial narratives, they always ensure the presence of stars of the time to further enthral popular imagination. But when stars are featured as the protagonists in political melodramas the ordinary working class spectators naturally fail to identify themselves with those fictional counterparts. The colourless, secular body of the revolutionary protagonist was, thus, replaced by the body politics of the dominant Hindus. Stars, more or less, function as vehicles of the dominant value system. In addition to that narrative cinema's over-dependence on music, songs, choreography and action situate the spectators in an illusory world devoid of political function. Along with that, a slew of mythological films appeared in Malayalam cinema during the last years of the 1960 like *Seetha Rama Kalyanam* and *Sabarimala Ayyappan* (both in 1960), *Bhaktha Kuchela* and *Krishna Kuchela* (both in 1961), *Laila Majnu* (1962), *Sreerama Pattabhiskekam* (1962), *Snapaka Yohannan* (1963), *Thacholi Othenan* appeared in 1964, and *Anarkkali* and *Kadamattathachan* (both in 1966), that ideologically eclipsed the burning social issues that paved the way for the emergence of Naxalite movement in Kerala.

Malayalam dominant cinema effectively employed the strategy of rejection through apolitical criticism in the last phase of the evolution of the political outsider when the Naxalites emerged as the new political outsiders. The social conditions that necessitated the emergence of leftist politics in Kerala and its rapid growth thereafter is followed by the sudden discontent experienced by major sections of Kerala society towards the leftist governments of the 1957 and 1967 as they failed to deliver on the expectation of the peasants and the working classes. The emergence of Naxalite movement was actually the manifestation of that disillusionment pervading the political atmosphere of Kerala. In order to understand the cinematic representations of the Naxalite heroes as political outsiders the socio-political conditions of the period should have be assessed. The political movies employed thematic, stylistic and structural experimentations to redefine the dominant paradigm of filmmaking practices of the time and rediscovered a counter aesthetics for the parallel filmmaking. Post-seventy political movies, in this way, politicise filmmaking practices by carefully rupturing from the invisible grip of the capital. In the post-seventy scenario a new genre of political films emerged that has revolutionised the entire process of filmmaking. Films like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (1975), *Amma Ariyan* (1986), and *Aparahnam* (1993) rejected all conventionalities pertaining to mainstream cinema. A new method of filmmaking gradually gained momentum that could challenge the aesthetic premises dominated by feudal/bourgeois ideology. Taking advantage of the aesthetic insight provided by the Italian Neo-realist movement on the one hand, and French New Wave on the other, filmmakers like P. A. Backer, John Abraham, Raveendran and other political filmmakers have started experimenting with the medium. In addition to that, the counter aesthetic premises developed by the Latin American filmmakers had great bindings on their

approach to this medium. They took the camera out to the street and set out their journey to identify the dynamics of the institutionalised power structure that preserves the status quo. It is not accidental that most of those filmmakers were political activists too. The cinema provided a space for them to carry out their political intentions, to express their hope for a better world, and to cast away their despair. Cinema, by and large, was used as an effective medium to propagate their ideological positions. In these movies political outsiders are represented as true outsiders without subjecting them to cinematic extravaganza. Most of the Naxalite movies resort to memories to unearth the painful moments of torments and agonies associated with political activism of the past. The revolutionaries in *Amma Ariyan* resort to memories as for them remembering is the only political act they can perform. In M. P. Sukumaran Nair's *Aparahnam* (1991), the former revolutionary Nandakumar (Babu Antony) is simultaneously haunted by the painful memories of the past and the surveillance mechanism of the state. In *Margam* the former revolutionary embarks on willed oblivion to absolve himself from the violence of the past. When the revolutionaries in *Amma Ariyan* consider remembering as the only political act they can perform, Venukumara Menon in *Margam* desperately try to free himself from the clutches of those tormenting memories. In *Thalappav,* directed by Madhupal, it is the memory of the former police constable that brings to the fore the atrocities of the repressive state during the time of the Naxalite uprising. By exploring the memory, the film indirectly foregrounds the relevance of a radical political outsider in all ages. Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Mukhamukham* and *Kathapurushan* are relevant in the context of this thesis because these two movies subtly follow the evolution of the political outsiders without being fallen into the trap of emotional identification.

Political filmmakers adopt various ways to disrupt the seeming spatio-temporal continuity and try to alienate the viewers from the hegemony of the narrative. For example, French New Wave filmmakers like Jean Godard undertook extensive experimentation to subvert the very notion of storytelling in his films. Russian formalists like Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov were also relatively unconcerned with the narrative side. As indicated by Andrew Dix "They (the Russian Formalists) were preoccupied with uncovering the formal or structural principles of aesthetic production, including the workings of narrative" (103). Political filmmakers from Latin America like Fernando Solanas and Getino mainly depend upon documentary footages instead of fiction to propagate their political convictions. To sum up, it can be said that experimental filmmakers and political filmmakers often extend less of their attention to the narrative aspect of their creation than to the political and experimental possibilities. A political filmmaker should be able to untangle the peripheral appearance of reality and thereby to unveil the actual determinants that decide the dichotomous distribution of power and economy. Movies like *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol, Margam, Amma Ariyan, Thalappavu* and many other post-seventy political movies ventured to expose the underlying complexities of ideological domination. Narratives in those movies were not an end in itself, but a means to transact their political convictions. Mere storytelling usually reproduces the existing power relationships rather than subvert it.   Fictional treatment of political themes, as in the case of Malayalam political melodramas of the 1970s and 80s, therefore functions to sustain the dominant ideology wherein critical evaluation of the social structure had never been carried out. To put this into perspective it becomes quite clear that mainstream Malayalam movies, in the guise of debating politics with all its pretensions of narrating a political theme, disseminate reactionary

ideas on politics. They never attempt to awaken politicised consciousness within the spectators. Any claim that such films are sympathetic towards political outsiders tend to neglect the fact that the low-key commitment they show in fact ignores the prominent questions posed by the revolutionaries. Apart from the genre specific factors like stars, music, song, narrative and others, macro-economic factors like production, distribution and exhibition impose restraints upon cinema in the genuine representation of political outsiders. That is the treason why film *Amma Ariyan* denied all conventionalities pertaining to film production, distribution and exhibition in order to reach out to the public. Out-of- the-theatre exhibition of the movie provided the former revolutionaries with a political space for ruminating on their traumatic memories. The state intervened with censorship that further regulated the political deliberations in these movies. *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* had to confront such hurdles before its release in 1975 after being subjected to censor cuts extensively. So was the case with another political movie, *Rajan Paranja Katha.*

However, the mainstream films made during this phase depicted the idea of the political outsider in a different way. They have rejected politics altogether by means of apolitical criticism. Films like *Aranyakam*, *Ithiripoove Chuvanna Poove*, and *Panchagni* diffused the revolutionary spirit of the movement by placing it within the well-knit fictional narrative. The revolutionaries were either romanticised or exoticised and those political outsiders were represented as romantic outsiders and exotic subjects. Here the politics of exclusion was meticulously carried out by the mainstream cinema that underscored the general understanding of revolutionaries as romantic daydreamers. A sense of guilt for the 'crime' the revolutionaries have committed was also attributed to them by some of the offbeat movies like *Aparahnam* and *Margam* that made them self-

defensive. The concept of the revolution was stripped off its larger social connotations and was confined within the domestic, personal realm in films like *Piravi* and *Aparahnam*. But Malayalam dominant cinema circumscribes the idea of the political outsider by juxtaposing the violence perpetrated by Naxalism with the serenity of family life. Family is brought to the vortex of the narrative and spectators' sympathy is drawn towards the members of the family who are destined to be remained as eternal sufferers due to the intrusion of radical political ideology into the privacy of the family. The pain, uncertainties, fears and apprehensions of each member of the family thus trivialise the sufferings of the revolutionary outsiders. Another strategy was to portray the working class as an impediment to development and a consensus over this issue was carefully manufactured. The impossibility of an 'effective outside' to the system was, thus, discursively established. Language of generalisation was the predominant aspect of the post-1980 films. The degeneration of the political left has become the stock theme in most of the visual narratives. Urban political melodramas by I. V. Sasi teamed up with T. Damodaran as scriptwriter, for example, revolve around the binary of 'good comrade' and 'bad comrade' to wilfully reach a reactionary conclusion that a relentless bourgeois capitalist is better than 'bad comrades'. Films like *Adimakal Udamakal* (1987), *Angadi* (1980), *Ee Nadu* (1982) and similar others have taken this trajectory. N. P. Sajeesh observes: "The interventions (from the culture industry) to contain the rejuvenated consciousness of the working class were explicit during the second half of the 20th century. Its propaganda machinery implicitly or explicitly discharged that ideological function. Movies by I. V. Sasi and T. Damodaran undertook that role in the context of Malayalam cinema"[1] (32). But such usual practices in commercial films that represented leftist positions as sleazy and incorrigible were contested by Madhupal in 2008 who

came up with a political movie, *Thalappavu*, that exposed the totalitarian excess of state during the time of Naxalite upheaval. The victimised in this film are a police constable and a Naxalite leader, one already dead and the other always on the verge of collapse. Here again, Malayalam cinema recovers from the trash can of historical oblivion memories of the turbulent past. So it becomes clear that cinematic rendition of the Naxalite movement takes mutually contradictory standpoints whereas on the one hand it exploits the commercial possibility inherent in it while on the other keeps the memories of the past unmitigated. Each phase in the whole trajectory of representation of the communist movement is marked by mutually contesting interests at play- ranging from total neglect to total absorption. While they were a part of the mass movement cinema ignored them; when they became a part of the ruling class they were assimilated into narrative cinema as liberal outsiders and when they became explosive radicals they were represented as romantic outsiders as threats to the system. At the same time political cinema realistically tried to acknowledge the traumatic experience of the political outsiders and tried to represent, as much as possible, their alienation and existential crisis. Such representations are in consonance with the changing socio-political conditions of Kerala.

Mike Wane's catchy statement, "Marxism and film share at least one thing in common: they are both interested in the masses" (1) exposes the inextricable and inevitable relationships between cinema, Marxism and masses. Cinema still remains the most popular art form with its ability to reach out to the masses with the support of technology that produced it. Marxism, on the other hand, is concerned with the collective political initiatives as a prerequisite to social changes. Film's ability to influence the masses may be the reason why Marxism is so much involved in theoretical deliberations

pertaining to cinema. Vladimir Lenin may be the first known Marxist who realised this potential of cinema. For him of all the arts the cinema was the most important. At the same time, the overarching presence of capital with its mammoth production, distribution and exhibition system along with art-of the-state marketing strategies undermines the political possibilities of cinema and renders it as politically desiccate. Thus dominant cinema, as a component of the repressive and mendacious culture industry, by means of the negative stereotyping of the revolutionaries, is still maintaining the interest of the dominant class. As a result the idea of the Left has undergone various ramifications in line with the shifting economic relationships in the context of Kerala- from feudalism to the age of late capitalism. It can be undoubtedly asserted that the idea of the Left has always been a staple item in the cultural market of Kerala-from the early political melodramas of the 1950s and 60s to the urban political commercials of I. V. Sasi and recently released political nostalgia films. Commodification of Marxism is a part of tacit market strategy being employed by the dominant class with a view to neutralise the political content of this ideology. Leftist political positions in cinema are being adulterated by blending it with superficial entertainment strategies that ultimately serves to ideologically neutralise the politics in cinema in the post-globalised political context. Malayalam movies like *Independence* (1999), *Shikkar* (2010), *Gulmohar* (2008) and many others have resorted to grotesque representations of the idea of the political outsider. Recently released movies like *Oru Mexical Aparatha* (2017*)*, *Comrade in America* (2017), and *Sakhavu* (2017) exploit Keralites' collective nostalgia for an ideal left. The visual excess in these flicks never fails to stimulate the middle class desire for spectacle, but at the same time it fails to interact with them politically.

According to Fredric Jameson,

… anxiety and hope are two faces of the same collective consciousness, so that

the work of mass culture, even if their function lies in the legitimation of the

existing order – or some worse one-cannot do their job without deflecting in the

latter's service the deepest and the most fundamental hopes and fantasies of the

collectivity, to which they can therefore, no matter how distorted a fashion, be

found to be given voice." (144)

He calls for "the need of a method capable of doing justice to both the ideological and

the Utopian or transcendent functions of mass culture simultaneously" (144). It implies

that within the filmic text there is a plethora of counter texts subverting the domination

of a privileged narrative. Even within the mass produced films possibilities of political

readings can be foregrounde. But this thesis does not seek to unearth polyphonic

polemics ingrained within the cinematic narrative. It embarks on more essentialist way of

identifying the binary between political and apolitical to sort out how communist

movement was mis/represented in both dominant and political forms of Malayalam

cinema by situating it within the socio-political conditions of Kerala. Even then, this

thesis does not try to conceive any sort of periodic generalisations because quite often

within the same period movies with mutually contradicting ideologies are produced.

Over and above this, this thesis ignores the reason why women, as political activists, are

denied centrality in those movies even when Ajita remained as one the dominant figures

in the Naxalite movement. In a context where the overarching presence of digital

technology and the unorthodox economic arrangements like satellite rates, DVD rights,

internet release, etc., have already dismissed spectators as the pre-condition for capital

reproduction, and even in the absence of spectators movies can harvest many multiples

of its actual budget, political cinema has to reinvent and redefine itself to compete with

dominant cinema to assert itself as a strong alternative. It calls for the need of serious academic investigation to redefine the features and function of political cinema in this rapidly changing world. The scope of this thesis was to identify strategies of containment carefully employed by the Malayalam dominant cinema to circumscribe the challenge posed by the Left at the site of cultural discourses from 1950s to the first decade of the 21st century. Along with that it shows how those strategies have been contested by the Malayalam political films over the years. As we inhabit a cultural context where the distinction between the political, economic and cultural and where the distinction between outsiders and insiders, is dwindled fast, innovative methodological tools and theoretical perspectives are required to decipher the complexities pertaining to political filmmaking. Given the fact that the idea of the political has undergone epistemological, semantic and sociological transmutations on a drastic scale, this thesis leaves behind possibilities for further inquiry into the different manifestations of the idea of the political outsider in the post-globalised, post-capitalist, and post-digital environment.

End Notes

Translation of the following Malayalam text appeared in conclusion is done by the researcher:

1.Sajeesh, N P. "Anungal Alarithakartha Malayala Cinema." *Mathrubhoomi Weekly*, no. 95, ser. 7, 2017, pp. 30–45. *7.*

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APPENDIX

Interview with Mr. Kunnel Krishnan and Mrs. Sulochana.   Both are former Naxalites in Wayanad and were imprisoned after Emergency in 1975. Mr. Kunnel Krishnan is the State Committee Member of CPI (ML) Redflag and Mrs. Sulochana is a full time social activist.

Interview conducted on 3, May 2017.

Shibu : How were you attracted to Naxalite movement? Was it because of a romantic inclination towards an immediate revolution?

Kunnel Krishnan: Not really so. Even when I was a high school student I was attracted to politics. I was the secretary of the Leftist students' organisation, and Varghese was its chairman. We worked together for many years and later I went to Gujarat for a living. Even then, I would closely observe the political developments not only in Kerala but also worldwide. I came back to Kerala after receiving a letter from Varghese who asked me to join Naxalite movement. But before I reached here he was brutally murdered by the police.

Shibu : You were not a part of the first Naxalite uprising in Kerala in 1969. You joined the party two or three years later. What you think of the socio-political backdrop of the first Naxalite movement?

Kunnel Krishnan: The split in Communist Party in1964 was ideological. A group of Party leaders under the leadership of S. A. Dange argued that since Nehru was adopting socialist policies he should be supported by the Party. Five year planning, nationalisation of private sectors were all measures, they believed, that

could bring about socialism in India. But the rival group under the leadership of
A. K.Gopalan, who was also the opposition leader then, strongly argued that the
ruling Congress party actually represented Indian bourgeoisie. So an alliance with
the Congress Party could never be ideologically justifiable. Other Party
ideologues like E. M. S. and Bhoopesh Gupta assumed a centralist position. The
ideological rivalry between the Khrushchevian policy of class reconciliation and
Marxist theory of class war worsened which ended up in the split in 1964. Those
who rejected Khrushchevian line formed a new party known as CPI (M). But
later it came like that the very same break away party CPI (M) was also pursuing
pro-bourgeois policy measures to appease the class enemies. The radicals within
the Party raised their voice against it and most of them left the party to pursue
revolutionary activism.

Shibu : You were a student when the police arrested you in the aftermath of emergency.
Were you a part of the revolutionary outfit?

Sulochana: Actually I was not a part of Naxalite movement as such and I was not mature
enough to understand the ideology of the movement as well. I was just sixteen
then, studying in Meenangadi High School. It was in 1975, immediately after
emergency. They arrested me, violating all the fundamental rights under M I S A
(Maintenance of Internal Security Act) and I spend a year and a half in jail.
Thereafter I became a part of a new cultural movement known as
JanakiyaSamskarikaVedi. Madhu Master, one of the founders of the movement
was also my teacher. We used to perform street plays to propagate our political
views. There was a stand-off between the Party and the Vedi. Even then we were
arrested on charges of anti-national activities.

Shibu : How did both Communist Parties deal with the emerging Naxalite

revolutionaries and their growing popular base?

Kunnel Krishnan: A growing discontent was in the air that both Communist Parties could

not become revolutionary parties because of their pro- bourgeois inclinations.

They might have taken progressive measures, but those were not revolutionary

programmes at all. People realised the need of an organic, revolutionary party to

replace both Communist Parties with conservative policies. In Mananthavady, I

can tell you, even the office bearers of CPI and CPI (M) quitted their party and

joined Naxalite movement. Both communist parties bore strong dislike towards

the Naxalites because of our growing popularity. They not only planned various

strategies to tarnish our image but also organised mass attacks to exterminate us.

They even unleashed negative propaganda campaign among the working class

people to keep us away in a fair distance. We were represented both as anti-

people and anti- working class. Since we adopted guerrilla warfare to "liberate

the villages and surround the cities," we didn't have a popular base to counter

that propaganda. By then both Communist Parties turned out to be middle class

parties so that they could propagate middle class sensibility as the legitimate one.

See what they have done in Telengana? After about 6 years of struggles and

sufferings the party asked the revolutionaries to surrender! Otherwise Party

would have been in power even before it happened in Kerala. This shows that

even during 1950s they have abandoned their revolutionary policies.

Sulochana: After my term in jail the Communist Party arranged reception to some of us.

I did not feel at ease with them. May be they might have thought I would join

their party. I was told by many comrades that Communist party was against our movement. But anyhow, they were friendly with me.

Shibu : How did the police treat you after your arrest?

Sulochana: Because I was not directly involved in any insurgence and may be because of my age, they did not torture me too much physically. Instead they have adopted a psychological tactics to weaken our strength. The police tried to emotionally blackmail me by reminding me of my duties as a responsible daughter in the family. According to them I was ruining the goodwill of my family. Along with me there was a nine year old boy, Muhammad Ali, who was also constantly threatened by the police. That means, any voice of dissent was strictly monitored and controlled by the police during that time.

Shibu : What was the public perception about the movement? How did mainstream media represent Naxalite activities in Kerala?

Kunnel Krishnan: Initially we were adopting guerrilla war fare that kept us away from the public. A general perception was created by both the state and the media that we were the perpetrators of violence. Not even a single media came forward to support us. They acted as ventriloquists for the middle- class who treated us like outsiders basking in romantic daydreams. All the mainstream newspapers represented us in negative stereotypes. We were perceived as problem makers and represented as enemies to the state. That's why we published *Inquilab*, a propaganda paper for us.

Shibu : Most of the former Naxalites, including ideologues like K. Venu and Philip M. Prasad, later left the party and retracted most of the exhortations they have made

during the time of their activities. Personally when you look back what do you feel about your revolutionary activities?

Kunnel Krishnan: Lenin in his "Colonial Theory" observed that in the context of colonial countries a feudal- bourgeois nexus would be formed that would ultimately cancel the possibility of a democratic revolution. It was in this context that Mao in China successfully put into practice the idea of 'New Democratic Revolution' by integrating working class people and peasants alike. The same model repeated in Bengal under Charu Majumdar. That's why during the formative years of our activities we didn't even form class organisations. I was involved in various underground operations organised by the party and many times I was arrested. I still believe that those were badly needed by the poor people during that time. Now we realise the fact that class organisations are prerequisite for a total revolution. That's why we form cooperatives of the peasants and working class people. As an organic party CPI(ML) Red flag is trying to reinvent its line of action time and again. I have never regretted in my life for what have been done as part of my political activities. I am still working as the state committee member of CPI (ML) Redflag.

Sulochana: I too do not feel much regret on whatever we have done. As I told you, I was not directly involved in any violent activities. I still believe that it is because of that movement the state started addressing the issues of the *adivasis* and underprivileged classes. Naxalite movement was a much needed intervention when you look it from the angle of marginalised people in India.