

**Cast as the Female Lead: Counter- Discourses in Imaging Women in  
Kerala Films**

**Thesis submitted to the University of Calicut  
for the award of the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
English Language and Literature**

**by  
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Thrissur  
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**January 2018**

*To*  
*My Parents*  
©  
*My Soul mate...*

## **DECLARATION**

I, Jumana P, hereby declare that the thesis entitled Cast as the Female Lead: Counter- Discourses in Imaging Women in Kerala 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 .K.P. Sudha, my Research Supervisor and Dr. Preetha M.M ,my Co-Research Supervisor and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma or similar titles.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the thesis entitled *Cast as the Female Lead: Counter-Discourses in Imaging Women in Kerala Films* submitted by Jumana P. 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 her 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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This is to certify that the contents of the CD and the thesis submitted to the University of Calicut are one and the same.

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## A Note on Documentation

For the purpose of documentation, the seventh edition of MLA Handbook is used.

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## **Introduction**

### **Imaging Women in Malayalam Cinema**

Creating a discourse on the images of women in Malayalam cinema is a deeply problematical task beset by multiple perspectives, histories and lineages. The visual culture and photography significantly alter the image of woman and the function of the visuals of woman. The dissemination of imaging in visual media allows the visual field to expand and bridge the fissures of gender and community in films. As a vehicle for transmitting meaning and imaginative power, the visual culture acts as a metaphor for social development in its shifting consumption patterns and socio-economic concerns. One of the ways in which the contemporary era has been negotiated in visual culture is imaging. The meanings are given for images in excess of those assigned by the culture and context from which they arise. The uniqueness of images is often analyzed on how images are conveyed to the viewers and as a result of that one has to rethink how images are read in the contemporary moment. Women images complicate the otherness of gendered sexuality by taking it beyond the narrow historicity of female sexuality. Women images have devised materials mean to transfigure the sanctioned notions of identity by a theoretical rendering of gender. Feminist consciousness in women images reduplicates the experience of social loss in order to gain a contrary mandate for a promise of survival incarnating in the form of the witness, the pain and desire, the abjection and refusal of otherness.

The contemporary visual culture simultaneously over-presents and erases the female in its social register. In the case of the film industries spread over the world, the visibility of the female as body and her absence as a creative or narrative agent in film-making defines this problem. There is a systematic exclusion of the female

voice: this, on the one hand, legitimizes the objectification of the female on screen, and on the other, reinforces the patriarchal melodramatic apparatus that is responsible for the moral centers around which film cultures revolve. Critics like Kaja Silverman (*The Acoustic Mirror*) and Teresa De Lauretis (*Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*) argue that the look of the cinema or camera has become of utmost importance to the postmodern day semiotics. As a matter of principle, Silverman in fact even proceeded to locate the female voice within the system of international cinematic visuality.

The current thesis tries to locate the visual logics of contemporary Malayalam cinema with reference to its gross gender bias. The thesis maps the larger discourse of feminism in which such a project needs to be read, and uses sources from both western and post-colonial to accomplish this. It is also necessary that the thesis identifies the evolutionary landmarks in the native history of visuality with reference to female body. It is imperative to think through the histories of both international cinema and feminism in its western and native versions, to arrive at larger conclusions regarding the imaging of women in Malayalam cinema. The thesis explores how women are portrayed in Malayalam films with reference to social change in Kerala and also explores how women body images are described in Malayalam films. The common charge against films is that the films tend to reinforce and perhaps even worsen sex role stereotypes of women and men. There is an idea that women are supposed to look very pretty, be domestic, have children and then look after them while the man goes out to work and does many activities. When a woman character is powerful, strong and unfeminine, she will often fail or flounder and either change to become more sensitive and caring, or be condemned to a life of misery and loneliness. The current study analyzes the counter imaging of women in

Kerala cinema. One of the objectives of this thesis is to study the characterization of the actors especially that of the lead female and to analyze the type of behavioural pattern the female characters exhibit.

Feminism as an academic discipline grew out of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave held that we cannot separate knowledge from political practice and that feminist knowledge should help to improve the lives of women. It is in this period that gender came to be defined as different from sex i.e., gender is a set of socially constructed characteristics where as sex is a biological reality. Gender, according to the theory of feminism since 1960s, is a system of social hierarchy in which masculine characteristics are more valued than feminine ones. It is a structure that signifies unequal power relationships between women and men. A gender sensitive lens enables people to see how the world is shaped by gendered concepts, practices and institutions. Later feminists incorporated feminism into theories such as liberalism, critical theory, constructivism, post modernism and post colonialism and they went beyond the binary of man/woman by introducing gender as a category of analysis.

Liberal feminists believe that women's equality can be achieved by removing legal obstacles that deny women the same opportunities as men. Post feminists disagree with liberal feminists and they claim that people must look more deeply at unequal gendered structures in order to understand women's subordination. Feminist constructivists show us the various ways in which ideas about gender shaping takes place. Postmodern feminists are concerned with the link between knowledge and power. They suggest that men have been seen as 'knower' and as subjects of knowledge. Postcolonial feminists criticize western feminists for basing feminist knowledge on western women's lives and for portraying third world women as

lacking in agency. They suggest the difference in subordination of women must be understood in the terms of race, class and geographical location and that all women should be seen as the agents rather than the victims.

In comparison with traditional life and culture, modern life and culture are highly centered on visual media. The life experiences of people have become more visual and visualized than before, it can be perceived from satellite pictures and images. Most of the people have an online life/netizens in the present century. In this condition, there arises the need for visual culture as a field of study. Critics in various disciplines describe this emerging field as visual culture. In the book, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (1999), Mirzoeff describes visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure are sought by the consumers in an interface with visual technology (2). Visual technology is any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision from oil painting to television and the internet. In the present century visual culture has cast more influence upon the society than print culture. According to Nicholas Mirzoeff:

Visual culture is used in a far more active sense, concentrating on the determining role of visual culture in the wider culture to which it belongs. Such a history of visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class gender, sexual and racialized identities. (2)

One of the most important features of the visual culture is the developing tendency to visualize things that are not visuals in themselves. The German Philosopher Martin Heidegger was one among the first scholars who commented that this development is the rise of the world picture. In his work, *The Age of the World Picture* (1977) Martin Heidegger argues that a world picture does not mean a

picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped as a picture. The world picture does not change from earlier medieval into modern, but rather the fact that the world becomes picture at all is what distinguishes the essence of the modern age (130). The focus of the visual culture is on the visual as a space where meanings are created. Visual representation is an intellectual form of illustration of ideas and social reality. With the emergence of visual culture, there develops a 'picture theory'. In W.J T Mitchell's view:

picture theory stems from the realization that spectatorship (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation surveillance and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of reading (decipherment, decoding, interpretation , etc) and that 'visual literacy' might not be fully explicable in the model of textuality .(16)

There arises a paradigm shift from world as a text to world as picture, and through visual images the real condition and attitude towards world is visible. Most of the postmodern theorists opine that one of the specific features of visual culture is the dominance of image. The critics of visual culture start from Plato himself, Plato believed that the objects encountered in everyday life are simply a copy of those objects. According to him the image is inevitably distorted from the original appearance. It means everything seen in the real world is already a copy. For an artist to make a representation of what is seen would be to make a copy out of a copy. So there is no space for the visual arts in his *Republic*. Thus image replaces reality with its representation. Aristotle gave much space to arts even though it is a copy of copy according to Plato. The modern world defines world in terms of pastiche, a pastiche is a work of a visual art, literature, theatre or music that imitates the style or character of the work of one or more other artists. It is also a kind of

copying where originality or reality has been lost. The post modern world defines everything in terms of simulacra. According to Baudrillard what has happened in post modern culture is that our society has become so reliant on models and maps which have lost all contact with the real world. In his work *The Precession of Simulacra* (1984) he argues that “when it comes to post modern simulation and simulacra, it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2). To clarify his point, he argues that there are three orders of simulacra. In the first order of simulacra which he associates with the pre-modern period, the image is a clear counterfeit of the real; the image is recognized as just an illusion, a place marker for the real. In the second order of simulacra which Baudrillard associates with the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the distinctions between the image and the representation begin to break down because of mass production and the proliferation of copies. Such production misrepresents and masks an underlying reality by initiating it well. In the third order of simulacra which is associated with the post modern age, people are confronted with a precession of simulacra, that is, the representation precedes and determines the real. Even though everything is a copy of reality, the world completely depends on visual culture whereas post modern people believe in the on screen reality. Every visual image represents the real world and people can receive what is going on around them. The visibility of visual culture is fragmented into disciplinary units such as film, television, art and video. The constituent parts of visual culture are the visual events that are the interaction between viewers and viewed, in other words, the interaction between signs and signified. Semiotics (science of signs) is a system devised by linguists to analyze the spoken and written word. It divides the signs into two parts- the signifier that which is seen and the



signified that which is meant. A picture of a tree is taken to signify a tree not because it really is in some way tree like but because the viewing audience accepts it as representing a tree. Thus seeing is not believing but interpreting.

In the visual field, the constructed nature of the image was central to the radical technique of montage in film and photography in the 1920's and 1930s. It was introduced into cinema by Sergei Eisenstein in his articles and book particularly *Film Form* (1949) and *Film Sense* (1947). Montage is a technique in film editing in which a series of short shots are edited into a sequence to condense space, time and information. Montage was the artificial juncture of two points of view to create a new idea, through the use of cross-cutting in film and the blending of two or more images into a new idea in photography. Visual image is more democratic medium than the written text. According to Frederic Jameson those who have the temerity to enjoy visual pleasure are pornographers at best most like animals. It is the idea derived from the film theory of Christian Metz and other film theorists of the 1970s. These film theorists consider cinema as an apparatus for the dissemination of ideology in which the spectator was reduced to a passive consumer. Jameson presents cinema audience as lowlier beings more comparable to animals than serious intellectuals. But the viewers have the freedom to interpret the images that have been seen on the screen. After the construction of an image, the maker loses the power upon the image. It is the viewer or spectator who creates meaning upon what is shown on the screen.

As a visual sign, cinema plays an important role to reflect the socio-economic and political condition of a particular society. Cinema can serve its best purpose of creating a better society. As far as Kerala is concerned, cinema plays an important medium for women empowerment as it articulates the voice of women. The very idea of feminism is articulated through the medium of cinema as a cultural artifact. A

genre called women –centric cinema has evolved with the extreme interaction of women with cinema. As a result of this interaction, a new dimension in film theory has evolved as feminist film theory. Theories like psychoanalysis, Marxism, structuralism, post structuralism and deconstruction and so on provide new methods of decoding and demystifying the meanings of cinema as an art form. Feminist film theory provides a space to interpret and generate the signs of cinema from a woman's perspective. Women have been discontented with their banishment from mainstream representation. This is one of the reasons for the evolution of feminist film criticism. This feminist film criticism provides the sense of a female perspective on narrative, character, genres, parody etc and also provides an impact on women's reception of a film. As its inception in the 1970s, feminist film theory has provided the impetus for some of the most interesting developments in film studies like feminism, there has been a cultural backlash against feminist film theory also. Within the feminist film theory and criticism, there are ground breaking ideas of some major feminist film theorists like Laura Mulvey, John Clairston, Marry Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis and Barbara Creed whose works are informed by a passionate commitment to both film and feminism. All these major feminist film theorists have made remarkable contributions to feminist film theory, showing why film is a feminist issue and why feminist issues are important in film.

Feminism is a method of vocal and emotional protest against the power structures within the patriarchal society where men rule and their values are privileged. Feminists raise their voices against exploitations and oppressions towards women. Feminism is not just about women and not simply against men. It is for the socio-economic and political empowerment of women and society. Women's movement can be classified as first wave feminism, second wave feminism, third

wave feminism and fourth wave feminism based on historical time. The Suffragette Movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is known as first wave feminism. The second wave feminism draws attention to women's experience in the home and family, reproduction, language use, fashion and appearance. The slogan of second wave feminism was 'the personal is the political'. The dominant figure in the second wave feminism was Simone de Beauvoir and her influential work *The Second Sex* (1949). She herself declared that she is not a feminist but a socialist believing that socialism would bring an end to oppression of women. Many of the second wave campaigns centered on women's bodies and issues of feminine appearance. They give priority to the representation of women. Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) Shula Smith Fire Stone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) are some of the key feminist works published at that time. Feminist film theory is the product of second wave feminism which began in the 1960s. In Britain, Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston joined the London women's films which started in 1971 and was devoted to screening films by women. The influential texts in women's film studies are Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973), Joan Mellen's *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film* (1974) and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (1974). Feminist film theorists drew attention on thinkers such as psycho analyst Jacques Lacan, Marxist Philosopher Louis Althusser, the anthropologist Claude Levi Strauss, the film theorist Christian Metz and the semioticians like Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes to understand how films produced their meanings and how they addressed their spectators. The key concepts of feminist film theory are the male gaze, the female voice, technologies of gender, queering desire etc. Feminist film theorists demand for 'positive' or 'true' images of women. Making direct link between images of women and society was the

trend that originated in U.S and they demand for the images of women as they 'really' are or how they would wish women to be.

Dissatisfied with this approach British film theorists formed a number of discourses to analyze the representation of women in film. A figure in this movement was Claire Johnston and her auteur theory. She argues the feminist analysis of woman as a 'sign' signifying the myth of patriarchal discourse. She makes a diagnosis that woman as woman remains the unspoken absence of patriarchal culture. Laura Mulvey's influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in the year 1975 is treated as pioneering essay and many of its insights are still applied in the films. According to her, the representation of woman as a spectacle to be looked at exists in every part of visual culture. In such representations, women are defined in terms of sexuality and an object of desire. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema is constructed for a male gaze, male fantasies and pleasures. It was the first attempt to consider the interaction between the spectator and the screen in feminist terms.

Laura Mulvey is a British film theorist and her pioneering essay was published in the British journal 'Screen' which became an important forum of intellectual exchange between British and French film theory. She intends to use psychoanalysis to discover femininity within the film. She feels that psychoanalytic theory is a strong political weapon to demonstrate the unconscious of patriarchal society within the film. Mulvey talks about three looks associated with classical Hollywood cinema. They are the 'look' produced by the camera, the 'look' produced by the characters within the film and the 'look' of the spectators. She mentions about the spectator's privilege of 'invisibility' looking without being looked at from

the male protagonist's point of view, the 'look' of the camera and the 'look' of the spectator seem subordinate to that of the characters. Laura Mulvey argues:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled according. In these traditional exhibitionists role women are simultaneously looked and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to - be-looked-at-ness. (19)

Laura Mulvey in her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) highlights the issues of female spectatorship and male gaze. This essay is heavily influenced by the theories of Jacques Lacan, who famously stated that the unconscious is structured like a language. Mulvey tries to uncover the ways in which how the structure of a film is formed by the unconsciousness of patriarchal society. This thought provoking use of psychoanalytic theory enables her to turn her focus from the description of woman as spectacle to the male psyche. Mulvey concentrates only on Hollywood cinema and its spectatorship. She is highly influenced by the term 'looking'. Mulvey argues that cinema also develops 'scopophilia' and she also takes Lacan's concept of mirror stage. But this identification is based on imaginary misrecognition as mirror stage and present ideal ego. Mulvey finds that it is not difficult to connect this to cinema. In his essay "The Imaginary Signifier" (1975) the French film theorist Christian Metz finds the cinema screen similar to a mirror. Laura Mulvey argues that there are two forms of 'looking' involved in the spectator's relationship with the screen they are active scopophilia, which uses another person as an erotic object and in which the subject's identity is

different from and distanced from the objects on the screen. The other look arises from narcissism where the spectator identifies with their on – screen likeness. According to Mulvey, woman plays a traditional exhibitionist role in narrative cinema wherein woman's body is imaged as a passive erotic object for the gaze of male spectators and woman in the cinema connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness" (89). The men on the screen are the agents of the 'look' with whom the spectator identifies to enjoy the possession of woman. Mulvey locates these looks involved in cinema. They are the camera's look, audiences' look and the characters look at one another. In the narrative cinema, women have a passive role which is linked to her status as spectacle. Mulvey uses psychoanalytic approach towards woman's role in the narrative cinema. Woman raises a problem for the man who looks at her. Owing to her 'lack' of penis, woman evokes the unpleasurable threat of castration. This castration anxiety is related to the child's original trauma of discovering that the mother does not have a penis. As per Freudian theory the child assumes that she is castrated. In films this castration anxiety is presented in two ways; one is by re-enacting the trauma through voyeurism and the other is by disavowing castration through fetishism. Mulvey stresses the need for women to understand the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism that underlie the patriarchal unconscious of narrative film. In the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Mulvey ignored the space of the female spectator as Mulvey argues that narrative cinema positions its spectators as male, catering only for male fantasies and pleasures. The debates on the absence of female spectator became the hot topic of feminist film theory during 1980's. The critics object Laura Mulvey's view by arguing that during 1930s and 1940s there existed a notion that women's cinema and melodramas specifically try to address female spectators. As a result, in her essay "After Thoughts on Visual

Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (1981), Mulvey reconsiders the role of the female spectator. In the earlier essay she had argued that narrative cinema does not offer a place for female spectators. In the second essay she argues that the female spectator might enjoy the fantasy of control and freedom over the narrative world that identifies with what the hero affords and that she can cross the lines of gender in her identification with the male hero because her gender is itself divided. Mulvey suggests that the female spectator can identify with the active, masculine position, but this is a form of ‘transvestite’ identification (*Visual and Other Pleasures* 33) that sits uneasily on her.

The American feminist film theorist Mary Ann Doane has led the debates on genres where the implied spectator is female and also she has expanded Mulvey’s paradigm concept. Mary Ann Doane in her influential essay “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator” (1982) defines the structures of the gaze in terms of proximity and distance in relation to the image rather than a distinction between ‘male/active’ and ‘female/passive’ and the female spectator’s ‘transvestite’ oscillation between these two forms of identification. She tries to discover the problem posed by the female spectator that woman functions as the image. According to Ann Doane, female spectator has two options; the first option is to over identify with the woman on the screen. The second option is for the female spectator to take the heroine as her own narcissistic object of desire. In both options, the spectator loses herself in the image. The solution for this problem of spectatorship is that the female spectator has to read the on-screen image of her likeness as a Masquerade. Mary Ann Doane appropriates the motion of masquerade to theorize the possibility of creating a distance between the female spectator and women as image, making woman image available for viewers to critique. But as she recognizes with in

films, female characters who masquerade are often punished as that of femmes' fatales. D.N. Rodowick, another critic of Laura Mulvey highlights the fault with the binary logic of Mulvey's argument. Binary oppositions like male/female, active/passive, scopophilia/narcissism are often attributed to Mulvey's dependence on psychoanalysis. He points out that Freud himself problematizes any strict binary division between 'maleness/femaleness and activity/passivity' etc. The changing conditions under which audience view films make Laura Mulvey to call for new theories of spectatorship and reflections on the future of cinema in her newest book *Death 24 x a second* (2005). In this book Mulvey reconsiders her ground breaking essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in the light of new technologies where she identifies two types of spectatorship including 'pensive' and 'possessive' spectators (Shohini Chaudhuri 124). Pensive spectators are those who are engaged in deep or serious thought after viewing the film. Possessive spectators are those who are possessed by cinema. According to Laura Mulvey the possessive spectator commits an act of violence against the cohesion of a story, the aesthetic integrity that holds it together and the vision of its creator.

Kaja Silverman highlights the concept of 'female voice' in her influential book *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988). She argues that the feminist critique of cinema has largely been confined to the image track in which a woman is constructed as an object of the male gaze. She extends her analyses to sound track and argues that classic cinema is obsessed with the sounds produced by the female voice. According to her, women's voices in the course of any film have no authoritative voice in the narrative. Kaja Silverman makes an analysis of how sexual difference is constructed through film sound tracks. She makes use of psychoanalysis, semiotics, film theory and feminist theory to illuminate her concept of 'female voice'. She is also influenced by



Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Silverman argues that the female subject is made to bear the burden of lack that properly belongs to both male and female subjects. In the opinion of Silverman, none has solidified the connections between the female voices and the body more than Irigaray. In *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977), Irigaray tries to describe the different economy of female desire in terms of the female form. In her book *Feminist Film Theorists* Shohini Chaudhuri quotes from Kaja Silverman that:

Unlike, the male organ, the female sex is not 'one' but several – with vulval lips that are always touching each other. Her vision of feminine language hangs on this model of multiplicity, contiguity and simultaneity, valorizing the sense of touch over sight. Irigaray claims a woman speaks by wandering off in numerous directions, 'touching upon' rather than focusing, appearing mad or incoherent from the stand point of reason (cited in Silverman 1988:144). Many Irigaray's formulations of feminine are completely consonant with traditional derogations of woman, such as the claim that she is irrational, speaks incoherently, can't concentrate on one thing at a time, lacks visual authority, is closer to her body, or is more oriented towards pleasure than man (Silverman 1988: 148). She acknowledges that there is indeed a culturally repressed dimension of femininity but refuses to locate it in such criteria or in the female body. The thrust of her critique is not to jettison the body from the feminist project – she recognizes that rewriting the body is vital, but believes that it should be undertaken in order to change the ways in which women discursively relate to their bodies. (57)

According to Kaja Silverman, in terms of cinematic authorship, the female voice is hampered by a number of other factors including unequal opportunities in the film industry. The majority of the film industry excludes female voice. Silverman quotes Roland Barthes's *The Death of the Author*. According to her, Barthes announces the death of a specifically male-defined idea of the author. She argues that film theory has since put an emphasis on film as discourse, banishing the author from textual analysis. So the question of 'who or what is speaking' has generally been translated as 'who or what is looking' – identifying the camera, more than any other part of the cinematic apparatus as the enunciator. Silverman herself strives to locate the female voice within the symbolic order. She puts forward an alternative model of female subjectivity in her theory of the 'homosexual – maternal fantasmatic' (Chaudhuri 56) and outlines strategies for a theory of female authorship.

Teresa De Lauretis in her influential essay "The Technology of Gender" (1987), radically re-thinks the concept of sexual difference. She makes use of semiotics and psychoanalysis and also the idea popularized by cultural historian Michel Foucault. Teresa De Lauretis tries to address the paradoxical relationship between women as historically specific individuals and woman as an imaginary cultural representation. Women are simultaneously absent and present in dominant culture as opined by Adrienne Rich. De Lauretis points out that this paradox is in fact grounded in a real contradiction. Women as real social beings – are not the same as 'the woman', yet they are 'caught' experientially and conceptually between the two. The same happens to women on an everyday level as they are with cultural fantasies of the 'woman' in media and advertising and expected to live up to those images. According to De Lauretis, the image of woman casts none other than Man's shadow. She argues that it is imperative for film analysis to address the non-coincidence

between women as historically specific individuals and ‘the woman’ produced by dominant discourses. She means woman as a fictional construct, an essence ascribed to all women distilled from numerous dominant western cultural discourses. Lauretis argues that the idea of ‘woman’ is an attempt to contain women within ideas of femininity, enigma, proper womanhood, nature or evil. By contrast, the term ‘women’ designates that:

The real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain. She argues that psychoanalysis always defines woman in relation to man, usually conceiving her within the same terms of reference and that is why psychoanalysis does not address the complex and contradictory relation of women to woman, which it instead defines as a simple equation women = woman = Mother.(20)

Lauretis criticizes Foucault’s notion of ‘technology of sex’. In Foucault’s terminology, technologies are discourse of power and technologies of sex construct sexuality through discourses that support state interests. He has been criticized for not distinguishing between the positive and the oppressive effects of power. Highlighting his silence on gendered subjectivity, De Lauretis calls the social technologies involved in the construction of gender i.e., technology of gender. De Lauretis prefers the term ‘gender’ to ‘sexual difference’ as it better conveys the ongoing process of social construction. According to De Lauretis gender represents “a relation of belonging, assigning individuals positions within particular ‘classes’ or social groups and relative to other classes or groups. She claims that it is gender, not sexual difference that brings to the fore the heterogeneity in men and women’s experience of material conditions constituted as they are distinguished by multiple different

relations to culture, race and class” (Chaudhuri 66). De Lauretis makes use of Althusserian concept of ‘ideological state apparatuses’ – the media, schools, and family and law courts. All these institutions produce discourses that have the power to produce and promote representations of gender which are then accepted internalized by subjects. De Lauretis rephrases Althusser by creating a new notion of gender as an ideologico-technological production whose function is to constitute concrete individuals as men and women (De Lauretis 21). De Lauretis reformulates her earlier work *Alice Doesn't* that the constant slippage between woman as representation and women as historical beings is driven by the contradictory logic of our culture in which women occupy a position that is both inside and outside of the ideology of gender. She describes how women move in and out of gender as an ideological representation. De Lauretis uses a filmic analogy of ‘the space off’ (Chaudhuri 67), a term that designates space which cannot be seen within the frame yet which can be inferred from it. In main stream cinema, space off is usually concealed by editing techniques such as shot/reverse – shot where as avant garde cinema gestures to space off either by commenting on its absence or by alluding to the camera or spectator both of whom occupy the field of the space off. In De Lauretis analogy, the male centered representation of woman inhibits the space of the frame, while women remain outside. De Lauretis rethinks women’s cinema and she does not believe in the idea that the gaze is male, the camera eye is masculine and film does not carry the look of woman. She gives a number of definitions for women’s cinema that the films made by women, made for women or dealing with women or all of these combined. In her essay “Rethinking Women’s Cinema”, De Lauretis reconceptualizes women’s cinema as cinema made by and for women. In her view, women’s cinema defines all points of identification with character, image

camera as female, feminine or feminist and this structure of address is far more important than considerations about whether women are being portrayed positively or not. According to her, women's cinema shows women as social subjects. She offers a new conception of women's cinema that it is across the boundaries of independent and main stream, vanguard and narrative cinema – one that does not always privilege avant-garde and independent productions. Teresa De Lauretis argues that the sexual differentiations within spectators challenge Mulvey's and other film theorists' definition of cinematic identification as masculine. According to her, the analogy that links identification with the look to masculinity and identification with the image to femininity breaks down precisely when the spectators alternate between the masculinity and feminine images. She proposes an either/or model of cinematic identification in which the female spectator benefits from a double desiring position. According to De Lauretis, two sets of identifications are recognized by film theory. They are the masculine active identification with the gaze (the looks of the camera and of the male) and the passive feminine identification with the image. De Lauretis invents another form of identification which involves the 'double identification' with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject and with the figure of narrative closure, the narrative image (144). This identification allows the female spectator to occupy both active and passive positions of desire at once – she is a doubly desiring spectator whose desire is simultaneously 'desire for the other, and desire to be desired by the other' (143). De Lauretis argues that patriarchal ideology cannot permit women to sustain their double desire whenever that double desire is unwittingly registered in mainstream film, it must be presented as impossible or duplicitous leading to a conflict that is resolved by the woman's destruction or re-territorialization -at the end of the film, she either dies or gets married (Chaudhuri

74). In her work *Alice Doesn't* De Lauretis claims that it is the task of feminist cinema to foreground the doubly desiring woman rather than resolving the duplicity. She asserts the specificity of lesbian desire through films and feminist discourse. De Lauretis submits an account of lesbian desire and argues that lesbian desire is formed against the threat of castration and compensated by fetish objects that represent the lost and denied female body. She offers the different ways of conceiving how sexuality is 'implanted' in the subject.

Barbara Creed makes a psychoanalytic study on horror film and the role of women in her book *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993). She focuses on the representation of woman as monster by taking Kristeva's notion of the abject. According to Barbara Creed, the abject both fascinates and horrifies. It thrives on ambiguity and the transgression of taboos and boundaries. The gay male critic Robin Wood in his essay "The Return of the Repressed" (1978) argues that what is repressed into the unconscious always returns – re-surfacing in disguised or symbolic form. According to him in the horror film, the return of the repressed is enacted in the form of the monster that not only turns society's dominant norms upside down but also embodies what is repressed in us, the monster is our own society's 'other'. Barbara Creed extends her arguments on abject that it is part of ourselves, we reject it, expelling it and locating it outside the self, designating it as 'not –me', in order to protect our boundaries. Barbara Creed states that bodily wastes such as 'shift, blood, crime and pus as well as dead bodies are the ultimate in abjection' (Chaudhuri 93). Creed's attempt is to uncover the many different aspects of woman as monster, the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, vampire, witch, possessed body, castrating mother and deadly femme castratrice (Chaudhuri 100). According to Barbara Creed, the archaic mother is another aspect of the maternal figure whose existence has been

repressed in patriarchal ideology. In Barbara's view the notion of woman-as-monster or monstrous feminine in the horror film is often tied to the reproductive functions of the female body which is constructed as abject in patriarchal culture. The presence of active female monsters in horror films challenges patriarchal views that women are basically passive victims. Creed takes Freud's idea that woman only horrifies because she is assumed to be castrated. In her view, fears of castrating mother play a crucial cultural role. The role of woman as active monster questions the theory of the male gaze and generates forms of identification for the female spectator.

Kaja Silverman makes an analysis of the ideology of masculinity as it stresses the implications for the female subject. Silverman argues that the typical male subject deposits his castration or lack at the site of female subjectivity while he refuses to recognize his own 'lack'. She claims that in films, it is not just men who fetishize masculinity. The gaze also plays an important role in films, the look comes from a subject or subjects and like the subject, and it is marked by lack. Kaja Silverman has focused the feminist intervention into the area of masculinity crisis. She reveals the notion of traditional masculinity as an ideological construction based on an imaginary equation between the penis and the phallic. According to Silverman this ideology of masculinity is a key support for the dominant fiction. She argues that dominant fiction is the images and stories through which a society configures consensus, images which films draw upon and help to shape and cements the male subject's identification with power and privilege. Silverman claims that loss of belief in the notion of traditional masculinity can shake faith in the entire dominant fiction. She finds a fascination with marginal male subjectivity and challenges the cultural equation that places men on the side of mastery, voyeurism and sadism and women on the side of passivity, exhibitionism and masochism.

Indian film theory is developed and sharpened by the theories from the West and the non Western people use this theory to tell their story. There is a need for Indian film theory as far as Indian film industries are concerned with presenting Indian films in an Indian way. India being the largest cinema producing nation of the world with her diversities of language, culture and religion, it is a bit difficult to analyze Indian films with the help of western theory. It is indeed a challenge to define an Indian Cinema. All the films belonging to the mainstream of the south and the east should rightfully fall under the 'Indian National Cinema' along with Bollywood. There is a huge volume of the Hindi commercial films different from that of the Tamil and Bengali art house cinema. The Indian common diction poses a problem in the cultural experience of the viewer. Most of the theories in cultural studies have been dominated and dictated by the aesthetic standards of the west. Both film critics and film industry are enlightened by the western theories. Even though the enlightened art films can be read as texts of conventional theory, the main stream films make the theories numb. The primordial focus of classical film theory revolves around the concepts of 'gaze' and 'spectatorship'. This gets contextualized with respect to gender, voyeurism etc. The concept of 'gaze' in Indian context is different from western world where public exposure of the female body occurs in a different way than that in rural India. According to the renowned film scholar Madhava Prasad, the Indian cinema is a product of a heterogeneous form of manufacture where as Hollywood cinema is that of a serial form of manufacture. The centre of Hollywood cinema is that of the story and the concept of audience identification happens. As far as Indian cinemas are concerned the success of the film depends on multiple visual pleasures. Amit Sarwal opines in his essay "Is there an Indian Film Theory" (2005) that Indian film theories emerge essentially as an already colonized discourse as



opposed to the autonomous entity that is Indian popular cinema born in the clutches of colonialism; it was still very much a decolonized space of expression (473). There are people like Ravi.S. Vasudevan, Vijay Mishra, Aruna Vasudev, Firoze Rangoonwalla, Bhavana Somaya, Bunny Reuben, Someswara, Bhumika, Shoma Chattergy, Sangeetha Dutta, Sudhir Kakar, Rashmi Doraiswami, Gautam Kaul etc who must be credited for pioneering a certain critical discourse on India which are derived from western cinematic models. It was in the 1980's that film studies in India gained prominence. Indian film theories are totally indianized to preserve Indian culture and tradition. According to Madhava Prasad Indian popular cinema is a 'cinema of dominance'. He finds that the ideology served by Indian Cinema is the dominant capitalist ideology. Thus cinema becomes the site of ideological struggle between the state and the directors. Ravi Vasudevan critically analyses Madhava Prasad's excessive dependence on Marxism and his reading of art house and parallel cinema as Indian popular cinema. Ashish Nandy uses the metaphor 'slum' for Bollywood because of its similar impassioned negotiation with the matters of everyday survival, its mix of the comic and the tragic, its stress on lower middle class etc. Rachel Dwyer and Divia Patel make an attempt to study the visual culture of Hindi films. The rise of consumerism, glamour and cosmopolitan culture in the west have highly influenced the Indian Popular Cinema.

The feminist film theories try to explore the subjectivity of femaleness and create a space of women. Many of the cinemas are women centered when they are analyzed from a female perspective. The female voice can be heard even though the patriarchal culture makes it silent. One of the greatest challenges with these feminist film theories is that they are evolved in the western context and its applicability in the non-western films. Yet gaze, voice, representation, imaging etc come in non-western

films also. The representation and women images in non-western films like Malayalam films also produce the image of woman which is the exact counter to earlier image of passive woman. In Malayalam film industry, the reflection of Kerala culture can be seen and it highlights the social taboos prevailing in Kerala society. There have been several memorable and powerful female characters in Malayalam cinema since its conception – those who stand with their male counterparts and those who stand alone. Those women characters in Malayalam cinema have shown us different facets of women-their extra ordinary courage, their selfless love, their all consuming anger, their amazing endurance, their unparalleled beauty etc. There has been a shift in trend in the male dominated Malayalam film industry of late, with more women – centric films hitting the screens. In the earlier Malayalam cinema, women are not allowed to be outspoken.

There are many women centric films in Malayalam since 1960s.

*Kallichellamma* (1969) is one of the earliest woman centric cinemas produced in the industry. This film is directed by P.Bhaskaran and written by G.Vivekanandan. The leading figure is Sheela who played the role of the titular Chellamma. Chellamma is beautiful, independent, impulsive and foul mouthed. She is also wittily sarcastic, but all cunning ways she employs to ward off the hawk-eyes of the world around her fails when an entire village goes crazy on her and ostracizes her as ‘Kalli’ chellamma. She is portrayed as the real reflection of one of the women who lives in Kerala society.

Another strong woman is Raji in *Avalude Ravukal* (1978), played by Seema in her acting debut in I.V Sasi’s sensational blockbuster. Raji is a teenage prostitute who is forced to take up this line of work to make a living and at the same time to look after the well being of her younger brother. This film highlights the condition of prostitute women in Kerala. *Aadaminte Variyellu* (1983), written and directed by K.G George,

articulates the story of the oppressed lives of three women in a male dominated world and their distinctive approach towards their individual crisis followed by the shockingly different method they end it for themselves.

*Panchagni* is one of the powerful movies ever produced in Malayalam film industry in the year 1986. This film is directed by Hariharan and written by M.T Vasudevan Nair. The woman in *Panchagni* is the byproduct of a merciless world that victimizes women based on patriarchal rule. But she is not ready to take it in a stride or to give in. Instead she fights back with so much anger that the repercussions victimize her as an exclusive target. *Deshadanakili Karayarilla* (1986), directed and written by Padmarajan, is a film that highlights female friendship and tells the story of two girls Sally and Nirmala. They signify every woman who yearns to be free from societal norms. Their endearing bond with strong romantic undertones is also one of the best ever friendships portrayed in Malayalam cinema. The woman in *Aaranyakam* (1988) is an eccentric and spontaneous teenager who is not too keen to find a place in the conventional line up to fit in the normal world. It is written by M.T Vasudevan Nair and directed by Hariharan. The two women in Fazil's *Ente Sooryaputhrikku* (1991) portray an endearing mother daughter bond through their unconventional arrangement.

Another unforgettable movie in Malayalam industry is *Akashadoothu* (1993) written by Dennis Joseph and directed by Sibi Malayil. The woman in *Akashadoothu* is a dying mother desperately seeking safe haven for her four kids before surrendering to leukemia. She sets out in search of four households as nobody agrees to take in all four of them together. *Parinayam* (1994) is another movie produced on the basis of caste system in Kerala. This film is written by M.T Vasudevan Nair and directed by Hariharan. It is the principles and determination of woman that is highlighted through

the struggles of a young widow who is shunned first by family and later by society for bearing child outside of wedlock.

*Kannezhuthi Pottum Thottu* is one of the powerful films in the revenge genre of Malayalam cinema in the year 1999, which is directed and written by T.K Rajeev Kumar. With fire in her eyes and ache in her heart, the woman in this film is an unforgiving daughter who is out to avenge the murder of her parents and uses her charms to reduce debauched landlord responsible for it.

Sreenivasan's directorial venture *Chinthavishtayaya Shyamala* (1998) follows the growth of a dependent house wife to a self reliant bread earner of the family with two daughters when her escapist husband bails on them in the pretext of his eccentric passions. The movie *Susanna* (2000), which is directed and written by T.V Chandran, articulates the story of Susanna, who is a concubine to five men. But she gracefully does multiple roles of mother, daughter, sister and wife to these men. She becomes the limb around which their different lives revolve. Another unforgettable movie in Malayalam is *Kannaki* (2001) directed by Jayaraj and written by Sajeed Kilikulam. In *Kannaki*, woman appears in her vixen avatar. The femme fatale here is a version of the notorious Cleopatra who is as tender and seductive in luring her prey into her web of deceit, witchcraft and tantric love. Another woman centric movie in Malayalam is with the directorial venture of T.V Chandran *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* (2003). The underaged wife of a man, already married with child, innocently yearns to finish high school but emerges pregnant from her intoxicated trysts with her devious husband who then abandons her in the name of outstanding dowry.

The two girls in *Sancharam* (2004) directed and written by Ligy J Pullapally, are childhood friends who increasingly grow close to each other to eventually fall in love, but not without the world around them frowning at the unconventional liaison

vehemently trying to divide them with social standards. Adoor Gopala Krishnan's adaptation combining four short stories by Thakazhi *Naalu Pennungal* (2007) portrays the lives of four different types of women the virgin, the eternal virgin, the house wife and the prostitute each chronologically fallings in different time periods illustrating the status of women in society over the years. Another path breaking movie is *Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathirakolapathakathinte Kadha* (2009) directed by Ranjith. The woman in the film is a very bold and beautiful female who cheats on her husband and also supports his murder. The movie revolves around the rape of her daughter – in – law and how she remains silent about it and the woman character in the film is very challenging.

The film *Artist* is directed by Shyamaprasad and is released in the year 2013. It is the adaptation of *Dreams in Prussian Blue*, a novel written by Paritosh Uttam. The movie talks about the journey of two arts students, who take a decision of living together. The movie shows how, after her husband loses his eye sight, she goes through various struggles to fulfill their dreams. The woman in the film plays an ambitious, bold and independent character. The film *How Old Are You?* (2014), directed by Roshan Andrews, focuses on a woman who discovers her identity and importance of 'self' after a certain point of time. The film shows that there is no barrier for a certain age for a woman to fulfill her dreams and she can achieve it whenever she looks upto it. The movie *22 Female Kottayam* (2012) directed by Ashiq Abu definitely broke the stereotypes. The movie gives the glimpse of life of Tessa, a nurse in the city of Bangalore. This movie realistically portrays the mental agonies of a raped woman. The film *Thira* (2013), directed by Vineeth Sreenivasan, explores the theme of human trafficking. The leading woman in the film is a strong human activist

and a cardiologist. She finds children who are victims of human trafficking and successfully saves them.

Another controversial film *Kalimannu* (2013), which is directed by Blessy, is one of the rare kind movies in the history of Malayalam cinema. It tells the story of a bar dancer who aspires to become a film-star and eventually becomes one. After her husband becomes brain dead due to a fatal accident, she fights for the birth of a child by artificial insemination. She successfully gives birth to her husband's baby by this process. The film imaged actual child birth footage. There are only a few films which cast female as the lead. There are films which show the counter images of passive women. Such a trend takes place in Malayalam film industry from 2000 onwards. The present study focuses on the counter analysis of a few films which cast as the female lead. There comes about an obvious shift from passive woman to active woman, male gaze to female gaze, and male spectatorship to female spectatorship, from objectivity to subjectivity and so on.

## **Literature Review**

Literature review attempts to give an introduction to the representation of women in Malayalam cinema. Several researchers have focused their efforts on studying women in Malayalam cinema. Within a given hegemonic gender ideology roles that a woman is given to articulate or perform have been discussed by many research scholars. The study of representations of women is getting importance because of the realization of today that the problems confronted by women in real life are somehow entangled and tied up with those of the images of women. Many studies have concentrated on imaging of women in Malayalam cinema that engenders the

creation of a female subjectivity created in accordance with various ideological imperatives existing in Kerala society. These studies aim to look at imaging of women in Malayalam cinema both as a political and epistemological problem and as understanding the political significance of its gender representations. All over the world the cinematic tradition has given cause for concern among feminists and film critics owing to the skill with which they can manipulate visual pleasure in order to provide gratification to the viewers. The critic like Laura Mulvey (1975) has created awareness about the pervasive power of patriarchal desires with the notions of pleasure, spectatorship and gender identity. Cinema has become extremely important in any serious study of the woman's question today because it is an art and a medium that the woman on screen comes to represent a category.

Most of the Malayalam cinema reveals a high level of gender role stereotype. In the essay "Becoming Women" (2010) Meena T. Pillai states that most of the women in movies are women who have consented to their subordination, who have not only internalized patriarchal ideology but have become so steeped in it as to happily indoctrinate their children with the very values that have perpetuated their subordination. In this essay she makes a symptomatic reading of the language of Malayalam cinema and to problematise the easy or natural identification that women often develop with the images churned out by this industry. Meena T. Pillai opines that though Malayalam cinema is never outrightly mythical in its representation of women, it does often seek to transform 'history' into 'nature' freezing women's oppression, both social and linguistic, into something 'natural' and propelling the audience to real what is only a semi logical system for a factual system (13). Mainstream Malayalam cinemas replicate the anxieties and obsessions of Malayali men and seek to subvert and sabotage the immense artistic and productive potential of

modern Malayali women (24). Women were not allowed to step beyond the parameters of the traditional codes. Women on the Indian celluloid screen have sung, danced loved and reveled but only within the confines of the lakshmana rekha (12).

Malayalam cinema from the time of its inception was strongly rooted in contemporary social reality. Social realism at the level of characterization, especially those of women characters, is in a peculiar form for a cinema to adopt. Early Malayalam cinema, rejecting the devotional bend of cinema in other parts of India and displaying a propensity for socially realistic film that depicted agrarian revolts, feudal tensions and the evils of class and caste, paradoxically enough remains mute over the women question in a fast changing social milieu. While it proves modernistic in discarding the re-telling of devotional stories from epics, puranas and mythologies, it is curiously conformist in its portrayal of women as mere stereotypes, acting out roles positive or negative as already drawn out in traditional myths and symbols. Women thus subjected to the new rigorous gaze of the camera are forced to classify themselves under one of the two signs of the new discourse- the spiritual essence of femininity or its crass materialistic embodiment (14).

In 1928, JC Daniel, the director of the first Malayalam movie had to search far and wide for nearly six months before he could get a woman to play the lead role in *Vigathakumaran*. He finally had to make do with an Anglo-Indian lady playing the role of a Malayali woman. But the Malayali audience could not accept a woman 'acting'. Love scenes were rejected with cut calls and there was much agitation among the audience. Stones were pelted, leading to the screen being torn (Vijaya Krishnan 2004:23). This speaks volume about the gender bias, sex role expectations and definitions prevalent in Kerala's society at that time (16). Malayalam film has created the image of woman who 'loves' to cook and clean, wash and scrub, shine



and polish for her man. One sees how the gendered ‘coding’ of the act of ‘cooking’ naturalizes it as a function associated with the woman, linking it up with her natural domain – ‘the family’ – one sees how femininity is constructed within the sign system of film languages is given and obvious. The woman who is portrayed as obviously taking pleasure in offering her servitude to the person she loves has already been interpellated into a subject position which is masculine. Such images demand the female spectator to survey herself and check whether the surveyed in her carries these marks of femininity, the marks of culture (8-9). According to Pillai, in the early years of Malayalam cinema, women were portrayed either as paragons of virtue or vice incarnate, with female chastity being created as the natural correlative of male valour. According to Meena T Pillai the fifties of early films such as *Nallathanka* – all names of the heroine in the respective story – vouchsafe for the predominance of the image of woman on screen. The heroine of the period is a romantic ideal, with fluttering eyelids and limit gait treated with loving reverence by the camera in soft focus and gentle backlighting. But it is her essential submissiveness and coy charm which she offers at the altar of her male ego ideal that earns her this halo of romantic severance. In retrospect we can see in these films the first effort, however unconscious, to give shape to the ‘myth of Malayali woman’, where the myth is as much a public dream as an oral culture trying to find new fables in order to represent itself in a visual medium in tune to hegemonic, social structures. Right from the first talkies- *Balan* (1938) and *Jnanambika* (1940). Malayalam cinema shows a remarkable propensity to stereotype women characters. Serving a hegemonic function, these stereotypes striven to naturalize and legitimize the gender hierarchies existing in society even in those times (11).

Today, Malayalam cinema attempts to create a pan-Malayali identity which revolves around the image of an increasing ‘machoistic’ and tradition-brand ‘modern hero’ (as played by Mohanlal in *Devasuram*, *Aaram Thampuran*, *Ravana Prabhu*, *Narasimham*, by Mammooty in *Rakshasa Rajavu*, *Valyettan*, Dileep in *Lion*, *Meesamadhavan*) and an increasingly ‘feminized’ and ‘conforming’ heroine and one can see here a fear of the feminine. As more and more women in Kerala become better educated and step out in to the public domain as technocrats, bureaucrats and career women, cinema has started echoing a typically male fear of being suppressed / dominated by the woman. So it is almost as though the more women become aware of their rights, the more cloistered they become in screen representation in Malayalam cinema (23). Cinema has been used by a paranoid Malayali male psyche to serve as false mirrors, to borrow Virginia Woolf’s analogy, which have the ‘magic’ and delicious capacity to reflect the figure of the Malayali man twice or thrice its natural size hide cutting down the figure of woman to the tiniest possible proportions (24).

Malayalam cinema has had its distant uniqueness in terms of selection of stories, tackling of issues and narration, right from the start to the present day. But when it comes to projection of woman in cinema, we have not shown any obvious difference compared to other language movies, despite the fact that Kerala has traditionally been a matriarchal society (27). According to P.K Nair stereotyping is an easy recourse. “Stereotyping of characters, basically as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ is a common feature we come across in our stories written either for the screen or the print media. And women characters are no exception. But we know from life experience that it is too naive to categorize people as all white and all black” (28). There is a space for a lot of grey also. But to make it easy for the readers and viewers to identify, one opts for stereotyping and so the hero, heroine, villain, vamp and comedian characters had

to conform to certain fixed norms of behavior and actions, follow certain do's and don'ts, which became the hallmark of their type. Characters, be they men, women or children, depicted in our early cinema suffered heavily from the stereotyping syndrome. This is true of all language cinemas including Malayalam. The venomous step mother is treating the children of the first wife to the point of driving them out to the streets so that she can become the sole her apparent to the gullible husband's vast property, the disgruntled mother-in-law pouring out her frustrations on the newly arrived bride and their ongoing conflict, with the son tossed in between and invariably taking the side of the mother and the young wife taking all the beatings and meekly suffering without an iota of protest as if self sacrifice is the only path for redemption are some of the stock images of the 'bad and good woman' projected in the early films. It is ironical that one of the strong and arresting images of woman in early Malayalam cinema has been in terms of bad characters. The character played by Pankjavalli, Janoo, who ill treat her husband's brother (Tikkurissi) and wife (B.S Saroja) in the Koshi-Kunchakko production, *Jeevitha Nauka* (1951), is a good example of this strong 'bad' woman (28-29).

P.K Nair in his essay "Gender Equations in Malayalam Cinema" (2010) argues that women are imaged as silent sufferers and self flagellators. Karuthamma of Thakazhi's *Chemmeen*, which Ramu Kariat filmed in 1965, had intrinsically a much bigger role to play than the two men in her life. In the beginning she (Sheela) lets her romantic attachment to the local Muslim youth (Madhu) be exploited by her greedy parents for their personal ends and later subjects herself to a spate of emotional blackmail from a jealous husband. Heart broken by the guilt, conscious of ruining the man she loved so passionately and her values of love, chastity and family ties being completely shattered, she lets the wrath of the sea and woman cinematically, with

only a stray dialogue pertaining to this Karuthamma. Inflicting pain and suffering to oneself and exhibition as the only means of redemption is something which has found favor with our audiences and film makers have exploited it to the maximum (30).

P.K Nair opines that a strong woman's film ultimately turns out to be one on 'macho friendship'. This is the way a woman is imaged. Out of all the women characters seen in Malayalam cinema recently, the one created by Lohithadas and portrayed by Manju Warriar in *Kanmadham* is quite dynamic. She is the younger sister who at a tender age acquires enough maturity and understanding to virtually run the household, keeping a watchful eye on her two sisters (one older and other younger) and a doting old granny. She is naturally suspicious of the dubious intentions of strangers walking into the all women's household after the bitter experience of what the previous man they sheltered had left behind, pointing to her elder sister illegitimate child in the cradle. She even warns her school going young sister to be wary of the advances of her boy friend. Whatever dynamics and maturity Manju brought to the character comes to naught once she starts crumbling like a thottavadi (touch me not) plant at man's embrace. The character is reduced to the routine run of the mill woman with nothing to rave about. And so what should have been a strong woman's film ultimately turns out to be one macho friendship (32).

In Malayalam movies, even though the individuality of women is asserted, it is again up to a point. A woman sets out to find the right man to be her life partner and after a series of bitter experiences in life ends up with a negative response to the biblical sermon *Anweshichu Kandethiyilla* (1967) and continues her providential search. It was an apparently strong character from the pen of Parappurathu, translated into an award winning film by P.Bhaskaran. But K.R Vijaya's interpretation of the role lacked vitality and strength. Comparatively the working class woman in

Sethumadhavan's *Anubhavgal Palichakal* (1971) played by Sheela stands out as one who can decide for herself. Left alone when her rebel husband (Sathyan) gets involved in a murder and is sent to jail, and with no hope of his return, she decides to lead life her own way with her own moral values. She boldly asks her husband's best friend (Prem Nazir) to share her bed. He hesitates in the beginning but succumbs to her wishes. When the husband returns on parole he accepts the wife as she is, with no heart burns, though their happiness turns out to be short lived (32-33).

Many directors have made an attempt to handle the plight of women in our contemporary society. T.V Chandran is one such film maker who has consistently handled the plight of women in several of his films. At a time when films are bought and sold on the strength of their male stars, he has stuck to the strength and individuality of his female characters, even casting has male actors in roles subservient to the woman. *Susanna* is one of his much- talked about films in this respect. The female protagonist –the literate and cultured prostitute- takes stock of the four men in her life and in the process exposes the hypocritical society, which denigrates and humiliates her character which emerges from the subdued and intelligent performance of Vani Viswanath, a talented artist whose potential is not fully utilized by Malayalam film makers. Executed rather crudely, the film does take up the cause of the fallen woman in society and her rehabilitation in her own terms. Revathi gives a certain identity and inner strength to T.V Chandran's *Mankamma*, the life saga of a poverty stricken lone Tamil woman who faces heavy odds and asserts her individuality in a highly male dominated society for a decent and dignified existence. In *Padam Onu: Oru Vilapam*, T.V Chandran shows his rebel heroine fighting for her independence and selfhood but again she has to succumb to social forces beyond her. By making his school going heroine run away from a forced

marriage and hiding in the dark corners of a classroom, the film maker hints education is perhaps the only hope for girls like her. The film unfortunately ends on a defeatist note with no signs of hope (32-33).

Most of the directors have attempted to depict the notion of women liberation under a sweet male deception. Sreenivasan's *Chinthavishtayaya Shyamala* is another deceptive film. The title gives one the impression that it is a woman's film. But it is not so. In fact it is more a man centred film than of the woman. During most of the scenes we see shyamala (Sangeetha) from the point of view of the man, her husband, convincingly played by the director himself (Sreenivasan). We never get to see how the courageous Shyamala managed the household and two kids during the long absence of her irresponsible husband, but it is conveyed to us just through words while the camera never leaves the husband in his eternal search. The legitimate visual space accorded to Shyamala, even with the entitlement (*Chinthavishtayaya Shymala*) of the film seems to be marginalized. . Under these circumstances, to categorize Shyamala as a women's liberation film, would be a misnomer.

The age old mother – in – law and daughter – in – law conflict is almost done to death (apart from the burning of the bride) by screen writers in all Indian languages, and Malayalam is no exception. In T.V Chandran's *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* (2003), ironically the first wife hesitatingly gives a helping hand to her brute husband to subdue his young second wife, who has been asserting her individuality from the day she stepped into the house, a cruel joke on a young girl by a mature woman and that too a mother. She knows she is wrong but she had no other choice, would be the film maker's justification. Wrongs done to one is passed on to the other. The victim becomes the victimizer with the passage of time, and as the cycle continues, the film maker just watches as a passive observer with no form of protest

(35). Thus woman- woman conflict is an obvious scene in Malayalam film industry. In the words of P.K Nair, one of the classic woman-woman conflicts in recent times is in Kamal's *Perumazhakkalam*. Continuous rain almost became a metaphorical backdrop to the tearful tale of two victimized young mothers, a Brahmin and a Muslim, the widowed and the other faced with the threat of becoming one, respectively. The two husbands are good friends working in a far away land – As fate would have it; death comes to one at the hands of the other, not by intention but by sheer accident, and the latter is to be hanged according to the law of the land. The only hope for the Muslim woman is to get a written pardon from the Hindu widow. Will she or will she not that is the conflict. Braving stiff opposition from her orthodox folks and the community, she signs the pardon, asserting her independence as a woman with a mind and heart. It is a welcome change that a woman who acts independently and strongly becomes the symbol of love and tolerance in a movie (36).

Malayalam cinema quite often portrays the visuals of middle class married couples. The worried husband with a problem in his head walks impatiently to and fro in his bedroom. The wife, eager to help, wants to know what is bothering him, and with all sincerity enquires, “What’s the problem? He curtly replies ‘You won’t understand’. It’s beyond your comprehension. Go to sleep”. So here woman is underestimated as a mere body without any understanding capabilities (37). In the words of P.K Nair these are unassumingly simple run-of the mill conversations that one may come across in real-life situations. But when repeated in film after film, day in and day out, it is bound to create problems. Inadvertently we are reinforcing in-built biases about gender relations, namely that the woman is inferior to man, and thus a certain mindset is rooted. The film maker takes refuge under the fact that “he is

only reproducing what is happening in society” (37). P.K Nair opines that the gender equations would become much clearer if we accept the age old truth that there is a man in every woman and a woman in every man. The concept of Ardha Nari evolves out of this principle.

Some of the haunting and striking images of women in Malayalam cinema in the words of P.K Nair are that of the widowed mother’s helpless look at the knocking door, whether to open it or not, and in the process looking at us, the audience. The questioning look seems to ask us, ‘where do I go from here?’ Saradas’s beseeching look in Adoor’s *Swayamvaram* (1972) impinges us to ponder over her fate as well as several women like her. In the film *Adaminte Varyellu* the working – class woman who leads the attack by an irate group of women, appeasing their anger by pouncing on the film maker and his camera to put an end to their exploitation both within and outside the screen in the name of ‘women’s liberation’. In the film *Elippathayam*, directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, several days after her teenage college-going sister eloped with her boy friend, an infuriated Rajamma, his spinster sister who has been submissive all along, explodes into a scathing attack on her egocentric elder brother for neither taking any steps to search for his missing sister or being least bothered about it. Rajamma blames him for taking it easy because it will now suit him to give vent to his incestual desires on her. This links up with the earlier scene of his voyeuristic look through the little widow at her plucking the fruits from the backyard tree and his deliberate denial of the several marriage proposals brought for her. The film *Susanna* directed by T.V, Chandran portrays the woman of the house (house wife played by Urmila Unni) and the woman of the world (prostitute played by Vani Vishwanath) in an exclusive private conversation take stock of their lives and the men over a drink and go through the graceful steps of a *Mohiniyattam* dance in a moment



of ecstasy. It is one of the finest scenes in Malayalam cinema in recent times, where a male film maker has sensitively tried to probe into the psyche of two mature women in our society (39-40). In the essay, “Film, Female and the New Wave in Kerala” (2010) C.S Venkiteswaran analyzed that it was during that period when ‘art’ films were being made in regular frequency that commercial cinema too underwent radical change, especially with regard to the representation of women. The ‘art’ films were trying to define themselves as ‘high’ art and create a distinct style and treatment of their own, which were defined by their ascetic style – lengthy shots, sparse dialogues, long silences, absence of songs, dance, stunts, sidekicks and humor. In effect it was the absence of the body and its pleasure that characterized such films. But mainstream cinema, on the contrary was slowly breaking free from its earlier dependence on literature (something that bordered on slavery) and the austere narrative styles it adhered to till then. It had moved more to daring and promiscuous themes and experimental styles (46).

The watershed film that turned the tide was I.V Sasi’s *Avalude Ravukal* (1978) virtually opened the flood gates of a soft porn genre that went on to capture a national market for a brief period of time. Sexual display (which in these narratives meant exhibition of the body of the vamp or rape attempt on the heroine) was a ‘number’ or part of the formula in the films till 1970s and was marginal to the central narrative. They were either a digression, a fall or a brief turning point in the life of the hero or heroine, which called either for a ‘return to morality’ or heroic ways, or in the latter case, yet another occasion for the hero to exhibit masculinity and rescue the heroine and her body from the clutches of the villain. In the case of heroines, it was also an affirmation of their feminine vulnerability. With the entry of scenarists like Padmarajan, and directors like I.V Sasi and Bharathan, there were changes in visual

culture. They made a number of films in which infidelity and adultery, campus love and sexual awakening of the adolescents etc. were the central themes. These narratives provided great scope for sexual display of female bodies. In earlier films the visual depiction of heroines like Sheela, Sarada and Jayabharati were also sexually charged, but that was a voyeurism in which the gaze of the hero and the viewer did not coincide (or was not meant to coincide). Both the hero and the heroine were out there on the screen for the viewer to gaze at with the camera's seemingly 'innocent' voyeuristic intentions and angles. Its addressee was more for the film viewer than the hero within it. In the earlier decades, following the tradition of the theatre, the female characters were not mere individuals but they were representatives of a class or community, which also made it difficult for the film's narrative logic and morality to position them as purely sexual subjects (they were sexual objects and preys only to the villain). Most of the films of the period based themselves on successful literary works and so had to function and 'behave' within its moral and aesthetic economy. But with the arrival of the women as individuals, and the shift of the diegeses to their interiorities and their emotional conflicts the women were 'cut loose' from the anchors of the all-too-literary narratives and were 'free' to flaunt their body – a freedom only the vamps enjoyed earlier. Now they could self consciously (and self-confidently) entice and offer scopophilic pleasures both to the hero/villain within the diegetic space and to the viewer outside (47-48). According to Venkiteswaran one aspect of female representation that of the prostitute, the lascivious one, free and roaming, were invariably placed outside the world of the male hero. She 'roams outside', threatening morality and is below middle – class decency / honour. On the contrary, the woman inside (the home/class) is totally a sexual in nature and is more of an ideal (51).

Seena J and D Niveditha quote in their article “Women Empowerment through Women Centric Movies in Malayalam: A Critical Study 2004 – 2014”, subsequent to the long lasting reign of old time heroines (Sheela, Sarada and Jayabharathi), Malayalam Cinema has picked up a lot of female actors, only the male actors stayed and the females turned into an ephemeral category. Even the strongest woman character has nothing much to do in the male world of action movies. Women in Malayalam cinema continue willingly to surrender her individuality and metaphorically subjugated by the world. They are not eager to envisage intelligent independent women, keen on pursuing the ambitions of her life, as a popular heroine (Harris 62). Malayalam cinema hits upon a successful formula with the first half focusing on an encounter between a self willed heroine and macho hero, while the second half witness a systematic and extremely popular process of breaking her down into either a neurotic, or an orphan or any other kind of weakling. This sort of narrative transmutation of female characters begets another kind of violence which cinema inflicts women not on her body but on her identity (Muraleedharan 19). It is said that every society gets the film it deserves. If Malayalam cinema is lacking strong women themes we should blame only ourselves, our film makers and audience. The heroes of earlier days were more accommodating compared to their present counterparts. Stars like Sathyan, Prem Nazir, Madhu and others had carved out their individual images, which left out enough space for the heroines to make their presence felt. Now we live in times of the superheroes where market forces decide the stuff. Invariably the male hero gets the maximum importance and film space with the result heroines are reduced to a pretty doll to play second fiddle to the hero and to fill up whatever is left of the romantic space. When the bulk of the

production is geared around just two or three male images, how one can expect a woman oriented subjects to be produced sincerely (255).

In the words of Janaky Sreedharan while the male stardom is born out of violent revenge and action, any sign of initiative for vengeance in a woman is censured, cancelled and disciplined. This trend becomes more pronounced in the 1990s when there is a powerful intervention of feminist consciousness in the cultural forms like literature, television, cinema and other performing arts. Cinema becomes a very important site of male back lash against women who have in their social and political lives outside become vociferous about their rights and self-respect. Unfortunately the male superstar becomes the mouthpiece for the patriarchal vitriol on this female self, emerging out of the shadows (83).

In the essay “Women of a Different Republic” (2010), K.Gopinath observes that Malayalam cinema was the abundance of the weepies idealizing the ‘powerful’ woman with their softless love and sacrifice was one of the notable features of the first two decades of post-independence. Mary Ann Doane’s observation on the Hollywood films of the 1940s which, while focusing on a female main character, confirmed stereotypes about female ‘psyche’ is relevant in this context. Her position can be summarized like this: The emotional investment of the viewer leads to over identification, destroying the distance to the object of desire and turning the active desire of both the female character and female spectator into the passive desire to be the desired object. Retrieval of the ‘errant’ back into the family order through punishment/repentance or an outright elimination from the narrative to preserve the sedate peace of the familial paradise were some of the oft-repeated themes of the films during this period. Beyond the ‘protected zone’ of the family, the vast public space in the narratives where history unfolded and mighty political battles were

fought, remained a space exclusive to male initiatives, a situation typical of a 'peripheral, modernizing state like India' (92-93).

Seena J and D Nivedhitha in the essay "Women Empowerment through Women Centric Movies in Malayalam: A Critical Study 2004-2014" comment that cinema as an institution that has a vital role to play in the formation of a modern state and civil society. Ambitions and successful working women become a number to be reckoned with in the Kerala society and the conflicts between their professional and domestic lives begin to be tentatively explored in movies. This work place outside the home is knit into the texture of her personality very subtly and is often subsumed within the larger demands of the nuclear family. The Indian film industry has relied on the male lead actors from the 'Black and White' days. There was a belief that actresses can't shoulder a movie of their own and so it was rather hard for movies to come up with female centric subjects. But still, there were a few movies that made an impact by coming up with subjects that had strong female characters as their lead and they garnered awesome reviews and stupendous collections. According to Somaaya and Madangarli the present century brought in many changes and it was basically Bollywood that stood up and started making commercial movies with female leads. Later on, it spreads into other language films; directors and producers have started to think differently and the faith on actresses was affirmed. Cinema as a medium of communication has been serving on the both fronts, first through the shifting roles of female and secondly, it has enthused and motivated the entire society in the field of women empowerment by making a lot of women centric movies. Women have marked a substantial change in her image in the society; they have no longer been self sacrificing doormats. They have emerged as a powerful, independent and confident self who is bold enough in her expression of every emotion, be it love, anger, passion,

resentment, pleasure, elation or anything that she was known to be silent about (Gopinathan 2003). To a great extent women are represented as the one who lives in fancy world and rather than being delineated as normal human beings, they are always lionized to a privileged position capable of committing no mistakes. Today in movies, it is unusual to see a bold and tough female action character what Angelina Jolie (in *Salt*, 2010) and Charlie's Angels (2000) have played women's aspirations, desires, grievances, feelings and perspectives are entirely gone astray from the silver screen (257).

In the essay "The Shaping of New Wave Femininities in Mollywood films", Saji.K agrees with Simon De Bouviour argument that "one is not born, but becomes a woman" (*The Second Sex* 1949) and opines that her argument is applicable in films as well. Woman has been defined only in terms of her relationship with the male characters and also in relation to the male dominant audience. However, the aspect of femininity that has been structured in films has witnessed changes over the years and various directors and film theorists tried to define the 'feminine' in different ways. Saji K. observes the changes in the depiction of femininity in Malayalam films and how the woman as an 'object of gaze'. Women characters presented underwent changes in the patriarchal mindset of the audience in the backdrop of new wave feminism and cinema. According to him, there have always been stereotypes or role models for how a woman should 'perform' the act of being a woman, backed up by the established notions of culture and civilization. Men were in control of sexual relationship, while females were endowed with concepts of chastity which is not applicable to men. Woman doesn't have an identity other than being the binary opposite of man. Saji K. quotes that this idea of women as sites of relation between men was considered by Levi-Strauss in his study of structural Anthropology, which

was in turn criticized by the queer theoretician, Judith Butler in her seminal work *Gender Trouble*. Sex has been one of the chief weapons by which the male reaffirmed his superiority. Saji K. quotes what John Berger says in his *Ways of Seeing* (1972), “Men act, women appear. Men look at women; women watch themselves being looked at” (Berger 47) Behind this also is the male centered belief of finding identity through the juxta position with the un-manly figure of the woman. Saji K. quotes Hegel’s concept of Reciprocity that can be traced in relation to man and woman. Like a master who needs a slave; a man needs a woman to contrast himself to, so that in their relation, he can acquire a better position. Thus women are portrayed only in relation to men as their wives, their lovers or their mothers. According to Saji K. cinema being the most effective medium represented this phallogocentrism in the society can be seen in celluloid also. Saji K. observes that female body, a ‘property’ of which the ownership had been possessed by male for quite a long time and had been enjoyed the pleasure of its gaze (44). The cinema has made such a wonderful opportunity for the males to experience over and again quite comfortably in the darkness of the cinema hall, getting adequate privacy, to explore his eyes on her body. Saji K. quotes Laura Mulvey that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood inevitably put the spectator in a masculine subject position with the figure of the women on screen as the object of desire and the male gaze. This is a common phenomenon throughout the world cinema and molly wood is not an exception. Woman body was an object of gaze, not the beauty of the body but the nakedness of the body. This woman used to be objectified for mere pleasure of looking at her body. Saji K. analyzed that the domineering ‘looks’ disappeared by the male characters in the film or men in the hall and it is not the nakedness of the body but the beauty of the body that is being displayed(hard earned by tiresome dieting and continuous

workouts). Saji K. analyzed Mulvey's insights that in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. Here, the female is not at all passive but active to the passive male who becomes a slave for her kindness. Saji.K cited an example from Trivandrum Lodge, the sex starved Shibu Vellayini (Saiju Kurup) makes this passive look and makes a begging request (no rape here) to Dhvani Nambiar (Honey Rose) which is clearly denied. Thus, in the opinion of Saji.K, there is no dominance and the associated narcissism of the heroines in showing and the pride in one's own body also should be taken into account. The new wave films portray the personality of the woman quite differently from the traditional caricature form (mild, calm, coy and chaste). There is a paradigm shift in the presentation of female debonair (44).

Bindu Nair, in her essay 'Female Bodies and the Male Gaze: Laura Mulvey and Hindi Cinema' (2002) quotes from Laura Mulvey that "What counts is what the heroine provokes or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" – Mulvey (837). According to Bindu Nair, the stories played out on the screen are the men's – their conflicts, their dreams, their aspirations their tragedies, their revenge, their wives and especially their lovers. It is hard to find even one story revolving around a single unattached woman and of course there is the worship of youth and beauty. We rarely ever see a woman act independently, make her own decisions, question authority or even be a working woman unless her mother is on her death bed or the father crippled and definitely never once she gets married. Traditionally, women have been reduced to being a mere spectacle in the movies, pretty faces commodified for



their beauty, with hardly any dividing line between beauty contests and acting in films (52-53).

In the article “Loud Silence of Morality: A Study through Recent Malayalam Cinemas” (2013), Nithin Kalorth, identifies the absence (silence) of perceived stereotypical morality in new age Malayalam cinemas which is widely written by journalist and press men. The concept of morality differs from subject to subject and place to place. The absence is felt in new age Malayalam cinemas in the form of dialogue scenes, online promotion and branding. In this paper, Nithin Kalorth tries to analyze such cinema forms and its deliberate silence on so called Kerala morality. Nithin Kalorth quotes the observations of M.G Radhakrishnan regarding the new swathe of Malayalam film industry. According to him, art house movies at one end of the spectrum and semi-porn fare on the other, Malayalam cinema is now experiencing a brave new wave that is challenging established social mores and it is being lapped up by the people – especially the youth-even as superstars sink without a trace one after the other. The new Malayalam cinema, like its Bollywood counterpart, is characterized by fresh and unusual themes, plots which are urban-centric and middle-class oriented; they are modestly budgeted shun superstars and some entirely shoot with DSLR still cameras; and they heavily use social networking sites for online marketing. The heroes are no more Mister Perfects and Superman. Nor do they carry even the signs of conventional masculinity. If the protagonist of the film *Beautiful* is a quadriplegic, the one in *Ee Adutha Kalath* is impotent, in *Akam* his face is charged with acid burns, in *Nidra* he is a paranoid. If *Salt N Pepper* the hesitant hero’s only obsession is food, the one in *Dha Thadiyaa* is bumbling fat so and those in *Chappa Kurish* and *Cocktail* are hopelessly unfaithful lovers. The heroine, too, has changed beyond recognition. She is no more the long suffering Bharatiya Nari who finds her

Moksha in their husband's embrace. She flirts openly, drinks in public, and passes lewd comments.

Nithin Kalorth quotes from 'The Joshi Committee Reports' which observed in 1984 that Doordarshan is dominated by feature films and films based programs that exploit the female form to titillate and/or through their socially insensitive approach, simply trivialize and debase the image of womanhood (Keval J Kumar). The joys and sorrows of being a woman in a male dominated society are related to one's identity. This identity seems to oscillate when women are considered a combination of polarities "unwelcome at birth, yet referred to as Lakshmi of the house neglected childhood, yet worshipped as the virgin incarnation of Devi, given away in marriage in order to gain merit in the next world, yet valued for the material wealth" (94). The Indian society has certain dominant motifs of the women in its mental panorama that of the *Pativrata* – devoted, virtuous wife, and faithful uncomplaining wifedom. It is *Soubhagya* for her to have a husband and *Streedharma* is to serve her conjugal family. The *Pativrata* image led to the strict management of sexual and restricted woman's social interaction and mobility, but has also ensured that woman remain in an inferior, subordinate and distinctly dependent position in the marital equation. Nithin Kalorth, quotes another dominant motif of a woman is that of the motherhood even to the extent of divinizing it. This again is another, subtler way of denying her true sexuality. All such motifs find their assertion in modern media as well (Holsti 601).

Nithin Kalorth quotes Prakash Elavarthi's observation that there have been several studies of print media with regard to women which have found the print media, guilty of sexism, distortion of image of women and propagation of sex stereotype; mothers, housewives dependent, passive etc. The other side of such

misinterpretation is that in most popular print media, women are seldom shown as working women, capable as professionals, laborers and farmers etc. Rather, the predominant image is that of the self sacrificing house wife. Nithin Kalorth observes that in the advertising world, the Sari clad, large bindi, Mangalsutra and Sindhoor sporting women have become the Indian symbol of marriage. Women are often portrayed as stereotypical images. She could be a mother, sister, and wife, mother –in – law or daughter-in-law. A common sight of women in advertisement for decades is in the kitchen, cooking food, washing buckets of clothes, bandaging wounds or feeding her husband and children. Nithin Kalorth quotes from Haripriya's essay 'Women in Advertisements on Television' those films are criticized for not showing women as 'women' or as 'fully human'. The image is criticized as inadequate, partial and one sided in relation to a possible definition of women elsewhere.

The purpose of the literature review is to help the reader to understand different aspects posed by the research on the imaging of women in Malayalam cinema. This is significant because many scholars have approached differently towards the imaging of women in Malayalam cinema industry. There has been much research and discussion conducted on the opinion of women images in Malayalam cinema. It is important to conduct more studies on the gender aspects of Malayalam film industry. Most of the studies have not considered how female roles are constructed according to the culture of Kerala.

Many studies have to be conducted in gender in relation with Malayalam cinema and how 'women' are projected as per the expectations of society. The counter discourses on imaging women should also be analyzed. As far as Kerala is concerned there are three parameters which define a woman, they are culture, religion and tradition. Even though Kerala is known for its matrilineal culture, there exists the

patriarchal culture which is dominant. Patriarchal society decides how a woman should act and behave. Women should not move against the so called behavioral criteria which are labeled upon her. So the space of women in Kerala culture is as same as the space given to her everywhere in the world. Film industry is also highlighting women in such a way. Malayalam film projects woman as they are constructed by culture, religion and tradition. The concept of *Pativrata* is one of the main images labeled to women in Kerala tradition. This concept is not at all applicable to any man in the whole world. Malayalam cinema is not giving much attention to the issues which women face, rather it projects or image women as how she is expected by patriarchal society. In every film, the sufferings and problems of women are projected, but it is marginalized and most of the directors have tried to focus on her body. When a film is read from a female perspective, all those issues can be seen and it influences the entire women and some of them realize how to resist and solve their own issues. To some extent women can be empowered. Unfortunately most of the Malayalam cinema is viewed from male perspective and more importance is given to male gaze. Film provides a visual pleasure through scopophilia and identification with the on screen male actor. In each and every film woman is imaged as the bearer of meaning rather than the maker of the meaning. In the 'visual pleasure and narrative cinema', Mulvey argues that the male spectators take the female on screen as their own sex object.

Malayalam cinema creates a space for the male spectators where one can take the female on screen as his own sex object. Mulvey argues that women can take two roles in relation to film. The first one is the masochistic identification with female object of desire that is ultimately self defeating and the second one is transsexuals' identification with men as the active viewer of the text or film. This research tries to

analyze Malayalam films in such a perspective. It intends to use feminism and psychoanalysis to explore how imaging of woman is done in Malayalam cinemas. It takes as starting point; the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual differences which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle.

This study offers multiple perspectives regarding the imaging of women in Malayalam cinemas. It focuses on women on screen-their characterization, description of their issues, their identity crises, and their problem of to be looked- at- ness in the dominant culture of Kerala. The role of cinema in depicting the image of women and their multiple perspectives is the key issue in this study. The present study deals with five key areas of focus:

- An analysis of how Malayalam films consciously and unconsciously image women to both male and female spectators- a shift from male spectatorship to female spectatorship
- How a woman is constructed as per the dominant patriarchal culture
- How women describe themselves and how they perceive their portrayal by the films- a shift from male gaze to female gaze.
- How woman's 'body' is constructed for the pleasure of male spectators and for the celebration of womanhood- body as a medium for women empowerment.
- Cast as the female lead.

It is important to note that for becoming a master, a man needs a slave and without a slave he cannot be a master. In this way a male hero can lead a film only with the presence of a heroine. This study also explores a female perspective reading for Malayalam films and also analyses the attitude of society towards women. This

qualitative study tries to give an answer to the question whether women are ‘victimized’ or ‘empowered’ in Malayalam film industry. This study will help the readers to analyze the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of woman, her sense of self and her ways of understanding and her relation with the world. It is high time to reject patriarchal concept of meaning and the ways in which they have defined women. There should be an attempt to redefine ‘femaleness’ by subverting accepted language and conventional rationality. It is necessary to produce a new meaning and ‘subject’ position to women and encourage women to create a new identity. The thesis chapters will help the readers to know how the woman is imaged in Malayalam cinema.

The chapter titled “Body Visuals and Female Spectatorship” tries to highlight the imaging of female body on the screen and through such imaging how women perceive themselves in the context of Kerala culture. As far as Kerala is concerned it is the culture, tradition and religion that determine one’s identity. The first chapter focuses on the films *Four women*, *22 Female Kottayam*, *Trivandrum Lodge*, *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam and How Old Are You?*. Female spectators can identify the tortured body of women on the screen. The spectators perceive a kind of voyeuristic pleasure in imaging the tortured body. In the film *22 Female Kottayam* a raped female body and its pain are imaged. The film also presents the solution for such atrocities done in the patriarchal society. The raped woman in the film boldly takes revenge upon the man by whom she is raped. *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* highlights society’s attitude towards woman’s body and its treatment of female body as a commodity to be sold in the institution of marriage. The ostracization of aged female body is depicted in the film *How Old Are You?*

The chapter titled “Malayalam Cinema and The Question of Representation” focuses on the life of female prostitutes and their treatment in a male dominated society through the film *Naalu Pennungal*. *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* focuses on the issues of Muslim women in Kerala context. Education plays an important role in the empowerment of women. But in a patriarchal society, Muslim women are not allowed to access proper education. This is highlighted in the film *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*. Muslim community promotes early marriage to girl children and polygamy. The chapter tries to locate the individuality and female voice of prostitute women.

The chapter titled “The Feminine Spaces and Malayalam Cinema” explores the space of women in Malayalam cinema. Women have occupied their own spaces through resistance. The chapter focuses on the films like *Artist*, *Munnariyippu* and *How Old Are You?* Women characters create their own space by leading the entire plot of the film. It is the women characters who give space for men and these three films try to image a new woman who is different from the stereotypical passive woman on the screen. All these women characters explore their own ‘self’ instead of surrendering their ‘selves’ to male dominating culture.

## Chapter One

### Body Visuals and Female Spectatorship

Imaging woman is certainly one of the most complex processes in the human social field especially in art and culture due to the cross fertilization in history of its meanings . The theoretical background of imaging women emphasizes on common and discursive nature of all identities especially the social construction of gender. The term ‘body’ and ‘sex’ have more feminine qualities rather than masculinity and there is an undercurrent of domination, submission and oppression. Like other discourses, feminism also has structural feminism, post structural feminism, and modern feminism and post modern feminism. All the branches of feminism have their own areas of interest. These are in large part a tool for literary analysis, but all these branches deal with psychoanalysis and socio-cultural critique and seek to explore the relationship between subjectivity and power relations, especially gender relations. Feminism is the advocacy of women’s right on the grounds of equality of the sexes. It is a kind of political, ideological and social movements that share a common goal of achieving and obtaining political, economic, personal and social rights for women, which are equal to those of men. The term feminine is more related with gender identity for women and it may vary from one geographic region to another. Femininity is a socially imposed system of rules and regulations on how a woman should act, look, feel and even think within a particular society.

Female body has been a matter of hot discussion for a long period of time. Body has got different connotations in different cultural localities. Body is a space where the dominant power can play whatever it wishes. In the early history of time, female body is regarded as a powerless space and it is a source of pleasure. The



images of female body in popular culture produce different meanings to different spectators. The only common factor that unifies these spectators is that objectification of female body. The philosophical attempt to read 'body' as a text started with Rene Descartes, a French philosopher, who dislocated the mind from the body. It has tended to treat the body with mistrust as the site of uncontrollable impulses and instincts. According to Ian Buchanan, this only began to change in the early twentieth century with the advent of phenomenology, especially the works of Maurice Merleau – Pontey, who was probably the first philosopher to attempt a genuine philosophy of body. But in the latter half of twentieth century, feminism in all its forms has given the greatest attention to the body. Simone De Beauvoir argues that body is the site of an almost essential form of sexual difference which has in turn led to the formation of a sex/gender binary. In the words of Judith Butler, it is fallacious to think that there is a natural body that is distinct from a cultural body, so to correlate sex with biology and gender with culture is mistaken. At theoretical level body has got a wide meaning. The present study focuses on the imagining of female body in popular culture especially in Malayalam films. A female body has been represented as mother, seductive woman and sexual object of pleasure. The male dominated society attributes particular values to the women's body and the women are imposed to assimilate these values. Such stereotypic images can be seen in films. Stephen Heath in his *Questions of Cinema* (1981) argues that:

The body in films is also moments, intensities outside a simple constant unity of the body as a whole, the property of someone, films are full of fragments, bits of bodies, gestures, desirable traces, fetish points – if we take fetishism here as investment in a bit a fragment for its own sake, as the end of the accomplishment of a desire. This

resence of the body is evident in pornographic films, with the penis as the determining investment, the close –up of the vision (for Freud, the normal prototype of fetishes is a man’s penis), but is equally insistent in mainstream Hollywood cinema, from the stressed attraction of a star in this or that part of the body (legs or breast or hair or eyes) to more random elements that exist of me, that I catch as a trace of my history (the curve of an eyebrow, the full of a neck, the momentary sweep an arm...) and including to –fetishes exactly the attributers“ of bodies the colour of a dress, the knot of scarf, a hat...).(183)

As far as a film is concerned it has its own socio –political ideology by which the characters are imaged. A character in the film gets a particular meaning only in accordance with spectator’s gender, class, culture and religion. Nivedita Menon argues that the rigid division of bodies into ‘male only’ and ‘female only’ occurred at the particular moment in human society, that is, at the inception of the constellation of features called modernity. Gradually the status of body has been increased in social and cultural theory. It is one of the most salient aspects of the development of post modern forms of cultural analysis. Rosa Maria Peres in her influential essay ‘Body and Culture: Field work Experiences in India’ (2009) quotes Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ –considered as a set of dispositions acquired through the process of socialization, to demonstrate that the values, attitude and ideologies of a society are literally embodied, and that they all consciously or unconsciously, reveal the social structures embedded in the body. Thus the ‘socially informed body’, to use Bourdieu’s expression, acts as both the product and producer of this process of appropriation. Rosa Maria Peres in her essay “Body and Culture: Fieldwork Experiences in India” quotes from Foucault that:

Foucault introduced a significant shift of paradigm in the conception of the body in the social sciences by focusing on the body as a site of regulation of power. The body thus emerges as the point where social regulation and practices of the self meet, and where discipline is inscribed on the self. In short, according to Foucault the control of population was combined with the disciplining of individual bodies to produce bio-politics. In other words the body is the site where political power is exercised there for leading to the death of the subjects. From the Foucauldian perspective the making of the gendered self or gender identity is the product of disciplinary practices of the body that ensure the reproduction of heterosexuality as the norm. (32)

As gender is a socially constructed reality, the politics of power structure has an important role in the construction of gender. In the essay “Gender Body and Everyday Life” (1995) Meenakshi Thapan argues that the gender subject is not a biological or even psychological but primarily a social being that experiences her femininity in inter-subjective relationships with several others in a complex interplay of class, caste, regional and socio-economic factors. The complicity of the gendered subject in her own construction is acknowledged, as are also her frequent attempts at resistance and this is in fact central to the process of social construction.

As far as the Kerala society is concerned, cinema influences them to a great extent. People want to watch films according to their whims and fancies. In the twentieth century, Malayalam cinema industry has produced many cinemas which satisfy the desires of male spectators. In such cinemas, female body is just a matter of pleasure, it is also an object to be played and acted according to the dominant male ideology. A female body is viewed as being sensuous, mysterious, exotic and always

desirable. The male gaze towards women in cinema is always speculating how the next woman will dress her body. Stephan Heath in his essay “Body, Voice” opines that:

It must not be forgotten that a body in cinema, in a film is present in its absence, in the traces of an image (very different to the body in theatre). The position of the spectator of a film is often described as ‘Voyeuristic’ but voyeurs watch people not films, though no doubt many elements of voyeurism obtain in the pleasure- in seeing cinema engages. (189)

Thus the above quote suggests that the majority of male spectators never want to watch film as a textual message, instead they want to watch people especially the female body. As women are imposed to assimilate the patriarchal values, such trends are seen in the twentieth century Malayalam films also. Women are depicted as passive, voiceless, resistless, and submissive and an oppressed item to be looked on gazed upon and lusted after, where women’s body is also abused and violated. In the words of Meenakshi Thapan, this ‘objectification of the female body’ is clearly linked to sexuality to the extent that it is the women’s body as a sex subject as well as her presentation of embodied self as an expression of her sexuality that take precedence over everything else. Feminist theorists like Adrienne Rich and Shula smith Firestone argue that the identification of the women with their bodies is the root cause of their oppression in a patriarchal culture and society. Women are mainly identified with her bodily functions especially reproduction and child bearing. In the words of Meenakshi Thapan the female body is undoubtedly the place to begin for any in-depth understanding of femininity as it is the surface on which are inscribed the culturally coded and socially sanctioned contexts of the perfect or desirable woman.

The socialization of the girl child is a complex process through which the main purpose is to inculcate in girls the appropriate codes of conduct including self-effacement and self – denial and to train her to see her life primarily in terms of service to others. The rules for presentation of bodily self in everyday life are clearly defined and we are socialized into conformity from very early. The body is perceived essentially as the vehicle of procreation and the girl is prepared mainly for a life of compulsory heterosexuality and inevitable motherhood. Such a view might however suggest a simplistic understanding of femininity as an outcome of patriarchal oppression where in woman, as gendered subject, is the passive products of socialization. If, however, we view femininity in the social world of everyday life then femininity is a social organization of relations among women and between women and men which is mediated by texts that is, by the materially fixed forms of printed writing and images. It is therefore not the case that women are presented as images, both visual and return, about their bodies and forms of self- adornment, for example, but that they also participate, actively and creatively, in the presentation and the perpetuation of these images.

In each and every culture, body has hidden texts and gender and there is power relation. There are ‘social body’, ‘political body’ and ‘biological body’ in every culture. Social body ascribes socially conventional and man made values upon a natural male or female body. Political body ascribes hierarchical power structure upon a natural male body either of a man or of a woman. Biological body is that of a natural body either of man or of woman. All these three social, political and biological bodies are seen in the visual culture also. Masculinity culture tries to keep their political vocabulary upon each body. Feminist culture tries to establish power resistance upon each body. The so called ‘bodies’ have existed in our culture ever

since the life of man started. Bourdieu and Foucault have underlined that power operates from within our culture. In the essay “Gender, Body and Everyday Life” Meenakshi Thapan states that:

Power operates from within us and has taken root in many webbed ways in our way of thinking, knowing and seeing so that we perceive as we are meant to and thus know our embodied selves as we are expected to. The female body, as Foucault would have us believe, is then the ‘docile body’ to the extent that it may be subjected, used transformed and improved (136) and is ruled completely by its dominant other which however, it has internalized as its own. (39)

It is the man made society which imposes values to each body. It gives more space to men and less space to women. Feminist discourse argues for equal space in social political and economic power structure. But patriarchal society tries to keep up their head over female body. Henrietta L Moor, in her work *A Passion for Difference* (1994) argues that it is essential to understand the point about multiple subjectivities, that all the major axes of difference, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality and region interest with gender in ways which proffer a multiplicity of subject positions where women often feel like a different person. As quoted by Meenakshi Thapan, ‘As women, we therefore respond to different subject positions by either accepting them whole heartedly or denying them altogether or by manipulating the situation through an apparent acceptance but in fact offering resistance’(42). Thus women’s reaction to every action depends on the situation or context in which she lives under dominant ideologies. Through social practice, dominant ideologies are available and gendered body forms a new shape by these dominant patriarchal ideologies.

One of the important aspects of gender consciousness is body image. The real body in the culture and body image in visual culture have differences. The real body is subjective and it has subjectivity. But in visual culture body is imaged in different ways. Meenakshi Thapan quotes Morleau – Ponty that is ‘finally a way of stating that my body is in the world’ (45). The limits and shape of the body image are largely determined by the space surrounding the subject’s body. According to Thapan, in everyday life a woman’s physical spatiality is shaped by both offensive and pleasurable experience in the family, home and work place and in the wider public arenas which she frequents. Woman’s bodily space is a restricted space in almost any culture. Women function from confined enclosed spaces while men have access to wider, more open public spaces. Thus heterogeneous body constructs a culture that can be interpreted differently and it is subjective in sense. Each body articulates a particular ideology - either a dominant ideology or an oppressive ideology. The representations of male body and female body have got different perceptions to the heterogeneous spectatorship. In the visual culture, there is representation of both celebrated body and tortured body. Most of the time the celebrated body is that of a male and tortured body is that of a female and this kind of body actually addresses the social reality. Body is a space that provides a chance of observation. It reveals the social structures –Pierre Bourdieu calls it as ‘habitus’ – i.e. a set of dispositions acquired through the process of socialization which demonstrates the values, attitudes and ideologies of society. As far as imaging of body is concerned, dress becomes an important sign to interpret that particular given body. In the cinematic presentation of body, there are covered body and uncovered body, shaved body and unshaved body, naked and half naked etc. Most of the women images are disturbing because of their apparently quite traditional equation of women with their sexual organs. The

cinematic representation of women and their body are purely meant for men and such images are created under patriarchal ideology. Some of the cinema articulates the realistic images of women in society. Some of them are meant to feel the voyeuristic pleasure. In the visual culture, there is the materialization of female body and it projects the sexual organs of female body. Men want to feel pleasure and are thrilled in viewing women's suppressed body. They could not find out the real issues of women in cinematic apparatus. Body has got different meanings to heterogeneous spectators. Male spectators interpret female body in its socio-political and cultural undercurrents while female spectators try to find out their own self in their bodies on screen. The present study attempts to make an insight into the cultural hierarchy of gender in the visual field. The objectification of body and the body as an erotic field are taken for consideration. Each female body is a voiced text in the visual culture and each part of female body has a symbolic form. The positive and negative images are distinguished on the basis of social culture in which one belongs and the dominant ideology under which one lives.

Women play an important role in Malayalam film industry and each woman on screen represents 'the living women' in the society. Women speak to women through their silence, body gestures and voiceless voice. Each woman on screen is perceived as an image - either as a subject or as an object. This perception is dependent on the spectatorship. The woman is celebrated for her 'body' and the same 'body' is tortured on screen. In the last century, Malayalam film industry articulated the 'tortured body' both physically and mentally. But in the present century, there happens a paradigm shift. Those tortured bodies begin to recover their injuries and come up with more resistance. The image of women on screen begins to rewrite their stories with a new theoretical perspective. The women on screen make an attempt to



redefine their gender in cultural sense. Such images try to occupy more powerful spaces in both economic and political sphere. These images have started to vanguard their issues through screen. In this woman to woman conversation, the men on screen become marginalized and their atrocity towards women is highlighted. In this way Malayalam film industry becomes a tool for empowering and recognizing the marginalized women and their 'selfhood'. The present study makes a comparative analysis of imaging women in the twentieth century Malayalam cinema and imaging women in the twenty first century Malayalam cinema. In the last century, majority of women on Malayalam film screen articulate the passive and voiceless conditions of women under male dominated society where as the present century women on Malayalam screen have an active leading role and their muted voice is released. The stereotypic images of women are deconstructed and new meaning is given by redefining the womanhood. In the past, Malayalam cinema produces a voyeuristic meaning to women's body where as in the present century Malayalam cinema, women celebrate their body as a space to build up their own selves. Instead of objectification, there comes off this subjectivity; the body of a woman is imaged as a voiced text. The present thesis takes some of the earlier films to analyze what female body image on screen as an object does and to where camera's eye focuses -is it on female sexual organs or elsewhere. This study also takes some of the later films for analysis. The differences in imaging female body on screen and what meaning it produces are the focus of consideration.

Gender performance is measured by the performance of gender bodies. As Judith Butler argues there is a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed gender. Sexed bodies are those biological bodies that differentiate men from women and gender bodies are those bodies which are

constructed on the basis of prevailing culture. The bodies in the visual culture articulate both sex and gender. Nivedita Menon in her work *Seeing like a Feminist* (2012) argues that:

The making of a distinction between sex and gender is intrinsic to feminism. The initial move was to use the term 'Sex' to refer to the biological differences between men women, while 'gender' indicated the vast range of cultural meanings attached to that basic difference. This distinction is important for feminism to make because the subordination of women has been fundamentally justified on the grounds of the biological differences between men and women. This kind of philosophical reasoning which legitimizes various forms of subordination as natural and inescapable, because it is based on supposedly natural and, therefore, unchangeable factors – is called biological determinism. (61)

This kind of biological and gender differences can be seen in Malayalam visual industry. In Malayalam cinema 'body' is the centre of attraction. Generally film industry demands the slimmest and shapely bodies of women and six pack muscular body of men. The matured female body has no demand in the industry in the assumption that such bodies have no sexual appeal to male viewers and those bodies have different connotation. Such connotative gestures and body languages are analyzed in this chapter especially in movies like *Naalu Pennungal* directed by Adoor Gopala Krishnan, *22 Female Kottayam* directed by Ashiq Abu *Trivandrum Lodge* directed by Anoop Menon, *How Old Are You?* directed by Roshan Andrews, *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* directed by T.V. Chandran. The common thread of all these movies is the use of body as sign of resistance as well as surrender, sign of

powerfulness as well as powerlessness, acceptance as well as rejection and exclusion as well as inclusion. Throughout these films, female body can be read as a cultural text that articulates the dominant culture which dictates how a woman should act and react to a particular incident. All these selected films raise the dominant issues of woman in society through the voice in the cinema. In the essay "The Articulation of Body and Space" Mary Ann Doane argues that the notion of political erotic of the voice is particularly problematic from a feminist perspective. Over and against the theorization of the look as phallic, as the support of voyeurism and fetishism (a drive and a defense which in Freud, are linked explicitly with the male), the voice appears to lend itself readily as an alternative to the image, as a potentially viable means whereby the woman can "make herself heard"(49). Luce Irigaray, for instance, claims that patriarchal culture has a heavier investment in seeing than in hearing. Bonitzer, in the context of defining a political erotica, speaks of "returning the voice to women" as a major component. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that, while psychoanalysis delineates a pre oedipal scenario in which the voice of the mother dominates. The voice in psychoanalysis is also the instrument of interdiction of the patriarchal order and to mark the voice as an isolated haven within patriarchy, or as having an essential relation to the woman, is to invoke the spectator of feminine specificity, always recuperable as another form of 'othernesses'. A political erotica which posits a new fantasmatic which relies on images of an 'extended' sensory body, is inevitably caught in the double bind which feminism always seems to confront: on the one hand, there is a danger in grounding a politics on a conceptualization of the body because the body has always been the site of woman's oppression, posited as the final and undeniable guarantee of a difference and a lack; but, on the other hand, there is a potential gain as well – it is precisely because the

body has been a major site of oppression and perhaps that must be the site of the battle to be waged. The supreme achievement of patriarchal ideology is that it has nothing outside the body and through her body woman's status in society is highlighted.

One of the finest film makers in the Malayalam Cinema industry Adoor Gopalakrishnan has directed a woman centered movie, *Naalu Pennungal* in the year 2008. This film articulates the four different stories of women who belong to different cultural backgrounds. Female bodies are expounded and the stories are told by their 'voiced and lived bodies'. While analyzing the female body, the traditional and cultural concept of beauty should be noted and how such beautiful bodies give sexual pleasure to the spectators. It is through the eyes of film makers, a spectator visualizes the body. The politics of both the film maker and the spectator mixes and interprets body as a source of pleasure. But in the film *Naalu Pennungal*, the female body is a cultural text where the issues of women are re-presented in different ways. The first story in the film is about a prostitute named Kunjippennu. Her way of dressing gives a glimpse of particular culture prevalent in that period. Kunjippennu does not cover her body fully. She wears blouse and mundu and her long hair is tied back. She wears a single chain around her neck and a big bindhi on her forehead. Her belly and naval is highly projected. Her body is symbolically presented to show the particular culture where she lives as a prostitute. When Kunjippennu and Pappikutty decide to live together they never owe any privacy and beds down on verandah. Jasmine flowers on Kunjippennu's hair become symbolic. Pappikutty lovingly calls Kunjippennu and tells her that he likes the smell of jasmine flowers as she too smells jasmine. When she says that she takes bath everyday and wears jasmine flowers on her hair, Pappikutty keeps quiet. That flower symbolizes her sexuality and her appeals to

males. She had been usually selling her body to others for her livelihood. But the moment she decides to live with Pappukutty, she stops selling her 'body' and gives a sexual invitation to her chosen partner. Her 'body' articulates the issues of prostitutes and their culture. But 'body' is a viewing platform to be gazed up on, lusted after and protected. The 'body' of Kunjippennu reflects the oppression and sufferings of prostitute woman who has subjectivity. Society never treats any women in a respectful manner and people never search the reason behind why women decide to sell their body. Even after they stop prostitution, they never get any respectful social status. Her 'body' also articulates the issues of marriage that is solemnized orally not legally. As a text, her body has the voice which sounds the identity crisis of such women in male dominated society. While she is doing road construction work, the camera focuses on the style of her walking and also towards her buttocks. It is focused purely for sexual pleasure both for spectators and for film maker. Here 'body' needs a space and the urgency of having space for women is highlighted through the symbolic presentation of having a home, even though she has a man. In the presence of Pappukutty, Kunjippennu feels security and she boldly declares to those who want sex with her that she has a man.



Fig.1. A woman to woman conversation that releases the muted female voice and creates a narcissistic identification among female spectators in a patriarchal society - a scene from *Naalu Pennungal*,



Fig. 2. Image of a spaceless woman even after her marriage



Fig.3. The trial scene soon after the marriage (without legal sanction) of a prostitute

In the second story 'Kanyaka', the female body articulates the traditional cultural concept of virginity. It is the story of Kumari, who works in the paddy fields and shoulders the responsibility of her family. The story revolves around the marriage of Kumari and her life after marriage with a glutton who has an important social standing. Here the body stands for an independent woman who is dissatisfied with the institution of marriage. On the wedding night of Kumari and Nandu, all her expectations come crashing down. Nandu's impotency is concealed and all blame falls upon Kumari. Through her body gestures she invites Nandu for sex but he denies that invitation. Before marriage and after marriage, she keeps the so-called virginity. The term virginity is related with sexual purity. But society marked her as an adulterous

woman and it is because of her adultery that her husband leaves her at her home. This is how her marriage ends. In this story also 'body' takes the role of a cultural text. It articulates the concept of virginity and its dominant role in the patriarchal society. Kumari fights against the injustice of society towards women. She boldly rejects the institution of marriage which gives license for sex. She powerfully declares that she can live without the presence of man as she has her own room and financial independency. The costume style generates a sense of time and space.



Fig. 4. Image of an earning woman who proudly rejects the institution of marriage- a shot from *Naalu Pennungal*



Fig. 5. The glutton who tries to hide his impotency and he satisfies his sexual urge through food.

The third story 'House Wife' (*Chinnu Amma*) is about a childless woman where 'female body' is treated only as a platform to bear children. This body tells the culture of patriarchy with regard to Kerala. Through this story, the film maker tries to articulate the condition of a childless house wife and society's attitude towards her.

Body in this story never wants to come out of the institution of marriage to bear a child. It is against the culture of Kerala. When Narapillai, her childhood friend, offers her a long living child, she wavers for a moment but suddenly regains control over her senses. She never surrenders her body to him. Body as a cultural text, it relates the tag of 'motherhood' with a legally married woman, that is, the three terms – women, marriage and motherhood – should be only with her legal husband. This is the patriarchal politics in Kerala. The same costume is used in this story also.



Fig.6. Image of a childless woman who resists the sexual attack from her childhood boyfriend – A shot from *Naalu Pennungal*

The fourth story 'Nithya Kanyaka' articulates the story of a spinster, Kamakshi. The female body in this story boldly faces all the trials and tribulation raised by the society towards a woman who lives without a man. The text of the story realistically presents the pathetic conditions of unmarried woman in a male dominated society. The ostracism of matured female body can be seen in this particular society. The man who proposes Kamakshi later marries her younger sister.



The story raises questions like is it because of her lack of sexual appeal, that the man, who proposed her, marries her younger sister? Through her body Kamakshi raises voice against subsiding of lonely woman. The symbolic knocking on the door and the voice inside the room epitomizes her strong resistance towards male gaze and treatment.



Fig.7. Image of a thoughtful woman who boldly proves her own existence with out a man

The female body is a sexual object which is meant to satisfy man. Throughout this film, female body is shown as a reflection of a particular culture and in that sense body is a cultural text. The mise en-scene of the film such as performers, settings and costumes become an exact match for reading female body as a cultural text. It is a film in which women speak to women through her body and bodily resistance. Here female body performs not for any sexual pleasure but for resistance against the social and cultural values imposed upon a woman's body by treating it as an object rather than a subject.

22 *Female Kottayam* is one of the more powerful movies produced in the Malayalam film industry which is directed by Ashiq Abu, who upholds the feministic thoughts and values and has tried to present such thoughts through this film. The film realistically depicts a tortured body. In visual culture woman is presented either through her 'sexually celebrated body' or through her 'sexually tortured body'. This

film articulates the story of a twenty two year old girl who wishes to migrate to Canada to be a professional nurse. In this film, the female body becomes a social object of torture and a pawn in power relations. The film maker successfully visualizes the mental agony and physical pain of a raped body through the performers, settings, language, lighting, colour composition and iconographic aspects of the cinematic image. The body owned by Tessa K Abraham, female protagonist, is a symbol of everyday resistance in relation to power politics. Here the body becomes a critiquing discourse that analyses the cultural and social conditions that replicate the dominant power and agency. Where there is power, there should be resistance. The text of the film revolves around a nurse who wants to take revenge on her former lover. Tessa K Abraham falls in love with Cyril, a visa agent and scenes move on well. But these initial conditions are upset when the female protagonist (Tessa) is raped by her lover's boss. But the raped girl never files a case against her assailant, who is easily identifiable. Instead she decides to take revenge upon her assailants. Here Tessa transforms herself from a sexual and judicial victim to an avenging woman. Her tortured body rises as a powerful resistant woman. Through her body, she addresses the entire female spectators who are victimized because of dominant patriarchal power. It is through her tortured body, she takes revenge by poisoning Hedge, the Boss with Cobra. Tessa also executes her revenge plan and sedates Cyril and sadistically penectomises him. When he regains consciousness she tells him that she has removed his penis through a medical surgery. While Cyril finds himself in intense pain and bound to his bed, she taunts to make him realize his faults and the wrongs he committed to her and rationalizes her crime.



Fig. 8. A shift from male gaze to female gaze, a scene from *22 Female Kottayam*



Fig. 9.



Fig. 9 and 10 .Theatrical postures of the film *22 Female Kottayam*, proclaiming that the film totally deconstructs the image of woman

Thus the tortured body articulates the ‘everyday resistance’. In the article, “Everyday Resistance: Exploration of a Concept and its Theories” (2013), Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson argue that everyday resistance is about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power. Everyday resistance is not easily recognized like public and collective resistance, such as rebellions or demonstrations – but it is typically hidden or disguised, individual and not politically articulated (2). The term ‘everyday resistance’ is a theoretical concept introduced by James Scott in 1985. Tessa K Abraham disguises as a femme fatale to take revenge upon Cyril and also seeks the help of her friends to take revenge upon Hedge. Vinthagen and Anna Johansson argue that the key characteristic of everyday resistance is the ‘pervasive use of disguise’, through either the concealment of anonymity of the resister, in which the personal (not the class) identity of the protesters are kept secret or concealment of the act itself. Instead of a clear message delivered by a disguised messenger, an ambiguous message is delivered by identified messengers. A practical act of resistance is thus often accompanied by a public discursive affirmation of the very arrangements being resisted. And within folk culture we typically find trickster figures, spirituals, metaphors or euphemisms that have a double meaning, so that they cannot be treated as a direct, open challenge (7). Thus tortured body symbolizes power relation and resistance towards those politics of power. The feelings of a raped body are felt and such male atrocity is highlighted with the use of settings and dialogues.

In the film *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* female body plays the role of a cultural text that articulates the problems of child marriage and the story revolves around a teenage Muslim girl studying in the tenth standard. The film is a strong critique of treating female body as a commodity that is to be transacted for sexual

pleasure. Through her body Shahina articulates the mental agony suffered by the young Muslim women. The community chief and elders made fifteen year old Shahina, the wife of Rasaq who is already married and a father. Shahina knows nothing about married life and her interest still lies in attending school. Rasaq exploits Shahina sexually in the beginning by drugging her and later divorces her saying that she is not fit for the family. Shahina is happy that she can return to school but soon realizes that she is pregnant. The atrocity done towards her 'body' as a sexual object is highlighted. Rasaq decides to marry again to get dowry, to fund his gulf trip in search of a job.



Fig.11.The male atrocity towards a female body- a shot from *Paadam Onnu Oru Vilapam*



Fig.12.These two girls epitomize the victimization of patriarchal notion of female body as a commodity



Fig.13. Being a Muslim girl, she undergoes double oppression in seeking knowledge



Fig.14. Black magic upon a female body for not being surrendered to sexual gratification

The film focuses on the form in which the veiled female body is shaped within the cultural space of Kerala. In the work, *Bodies that Matter* (2011), Judith Butler argues that the materiality of the body, the flesh or corporeality is associated with reproduction. In the article “Controlling Women’s Bodies: The Black and Veiled Female Body in Western Visual Culture-A Comparative View”, Elena Larisa Stanciu and Bjorn – Christensen argue that Muslim women are turned into victims through an

unsubstantiated process of naturalization of gender oppression on their bodies. The veiled body is de-subjectified; women's agency is, in Al-Saji's words, mutilated female bodies are appropriated into a re-signification of their very corporeality: they are symbols of victimhood, noiselessness, and coercion. As a pre-requisite of racialization of the veiled body, the act of veiling is made hyper-visible, over-determined and as a symbol of gender oppression. They also argue that female veiled body is a cultural artifact and a product of sediment habits of social seeing. Thus the same way, the female body in the film *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* is a cultural artifact in the sense that Islam never denies education to women and never supports male domination and secondary status to women. It is our tradition and culture that gives a secondary status to women and it is the man made social law that Muslim girl should get married in very early teens. Even though Islam supports polygamy, there are conditions. In this film the Hindu teenage girl is allowed to continue her education and the Muslim teenage girl comes to get married. The man who got married never loves her instead he tries his best to satisfy his sexual desires with her even in the presence of his first wife and five year old daughter. Here also the imagery of tortured female body and lot of physical torturing are done upon Shahina's body with black magic. It is done solely to surrender her body to Rasaan. Here the body is important factor as it is conditioned through cultural and social values. Religion also becomes a part of culture or culture becomes the part of religion. Both religion and culture play an important role in a society. In this film young female bodies are highlighted. Shahina's body is beaten by the elders and she tries her best to resist the dominant power structure. But she fails and somehow she escapes from the institution of marriage by divorce at a very early age but Rasaan leaves her with a baby. Thus, here the body becomes a sexual object and a space to get sexual pleasure. Rasaan could

have satisfied his sexual greed with his first wife. Why he got married again is a question? It is obvious that he might have got married again for money. Here dowry plays the role of a villain. In the culture of Kerala, dowry is the value given to a female body. Dowry is a part of social ritual, the rich pays more on female body and the poor becomes poorer by adding value. As female body is a cultural artifact, dowry is the product of reification. Here female body goes through social atrocity and reaches a state of 'thingification' – seeing body as a thing. A thing meant to nurture the babies and satisfy the needs of a man. Patriarchal society forgets the very fact that woman is also a human being with all subjective feelings and emotions.

The film *How Old Are You?* indirectly raises the issue of ostracism of a matured female body. Here the leading figure, Nirupama Rajeev is a thirty six year old woman working in the revenue department of Kerala state government. Her husband Rajeev Narayan, who works at Akashvani, dreams of migrating to Ireland. Nirupama is a typical Kerala woman whose day begins with preparing breakfast and ends with preparing dinner for her family. Her job application is turned down because of her age. Her aged body (thirty six year old) becomes a burden for her husband. She tries to dress attractively for her husband and even colours her hair to hide her grey hairs. But whatever she does, she never gets any support and appreciation from her husband. He is a typical example of a male chauvinist. But this film throws light on the capabilities of a woman's body. The camera tries to focus on the health problems of women after thirty five in an ironical and teasing manner. Rajeev leaves for Ireland with their daughter. Nirupama had lost her sense of self within her married life; her small mistakes are mocked as blunders. Rajeev is actually escaping because he finds Nirupama awkward and inefficient to live with. Battered and bruised Nirupama struggles for inspiration. It is her old classmate and friend Susan David who



motivates her to make a life changing decision. Through her motivation and inspiration, Nirupama rediscovers herself. She becomes 'a woman' who understands her strength and her self esteem now makes her a shining star among others. She becomes an inspiration for a whole state – she changed herself through her body. In the beginning scenes of the film her body is shown as weak, passive and sexually unattractive. She has various health problems like blood pressure, aches, fainting etc and her 'aged body' is shown through her grey hairs. Grey hairs become a symbol of her inactivity. She artificially makes those grey hairs black. This dying is a sign of her attempt to rediscover herself. She becomes health conscious and body conscious and starts doing routine exercises to make her body healthier and fitter. The setting, lighting, camera and performers try to ostracize matured female body and here body becomes a symbol of power. In the politics of power relation the muscular body becomes the dominating icon and female body becomes an object in the sexual power relation. But in this film, the female body is a symbol of repossession or attaining what she has lost. It destroys the earlier notions of female body as weak and passive. As the film is a product of patriarchal culture, it tries to suppress the power of female body and makes 'it' an awkward object. But in the same time, the film shows how a mentally tortured body rising like a phoenix bird. Even though she achieves her goal and regains her lost sense of self through her mind and body, she goes back to her familial duties after getting the recognition of her worthiness by her daughter and husband. It is the attitude of the film maker that makes Nirupama centered on her family and camera focuses herself with her husband and daughter. The film maker never wants her to fly higher than her husband even though she possesses much more inner power, enthusiasm, and confidence.



Fig.15.Theatrical poster of the film *How Old Are You?* directly gives the identity of Nirupama to women in Kerala and opens the door for narcissistic identification with the woman on screen



Fig.16. Image of self confident women who proves their inner stability.

The presentation of female body as an object has become common in the visual culture. But the present century Malayalam cinema offers a paradigm shift from ‘sexual’ object to ‘sexual’ subject. Female body can be viewed from different points of view – female body as a cultural text, cultural artifact and as a sign of power. Female body is a subjective text that highlights the inner capabilities and

power. Women possess an active body. It is the visual culture under patriarchy that has made the female body a mere object and also gives a negative value. The body imagery communicates to the women about the inner values in female selves. The same body imagery communicates sexually to the man. It is spectator's perceptions that give particular meanings to female body imagery. Body is a sign in the sense that signs are arbitrary as Ferdinand De Saussure points out and these signs do not have any inherent meaning. All given meanings are decorated by viewers. Another concept of Saussure is that sign has two different components- a signifier and a signified. A signifier is the acoustic image of the spoken word and signified is the meaning called forth in the mind of the viewer from the signifier. Thus body as a sign, it is both the signifier and the signified. The body that present in visual imagery is the signifier and the result that is stimulated from the body on screen is the signified. Each body on screen has both connotative and denotative meaning. Female body signifies cultural value and it has cultural implications. In the work, *Semiotics for Beginners: Paradigms and Syntagms*, (2002) Chandler Daniel states that it is important to note the meaning Saussure assigned to the two types of differences occurring between the signifiers. The first difference is syntagmatic, which refers intratextually to other signifiers co-present within the text. The second difference is paradigmatic, which refers inter-textuality to signifiers absent from the text. Because the meaning and value of a sign is determined by both types of relation – inter textual and intra textual. Sometimes the film makers deliberately present some signs which reveal the passiveness of women and activeness of men. The body image on the screen should have sexual appeal - this is the basic criteria for the production of cinema in the patriarchal culture. The most commonly featured female body parts are arms, and shoulder, abdomen, shaped breast, thin and fair body, legs and thighs etc. By showing

female body parts, both the film makers and the male spectators enjoy a kind of voyeuristic pleasure. Even though issues of women are presented on screen, the male spectators never address those issues instead they satisfy the thrill of being sexually aroused. Women on screen appear mostly in fair, flawless skin and revealing body parts, featuring half covered bodies. But even in 'covered' body, the camera focuses on the most sexually appealing parts of the body. For example in the film *Naalu Pennungal* Kunjippennu's (Padmapriya) walking is focused and also light is focused on her buttocks. Her navel is highlighted and camera is focused on it. Actually camera devalues women's body.

In the article "What's Wrong with Images of Women?" Griselda Pollock argues that the term images of women implies a juxtaposition of two separable elements – women as a gender or social group versus representations of women or a real entity, women, opposed to falsified, distorted or male views of women (133). The body image signifies both the real female body and also gendered body. A space has to be created between these two extreme entities. As a cultural entity body can provide texts on the issues of women in a patriarchal culture and also create awareness among the women community about the real status of women. The notion of woman as a body has different perspectives- especially the female body imagery in visual culture. Here the female body is objectified by adding some socially conventional values upon the body. The density of meanings signified by the female body in visual culture can be shown by projecting different parts of a female body. As a cultural artifact cinema provides a ground for voyeuristic pleasure to the male spectators when the body of a woman is changed from a real, normal and natural thing to just an object or a thing, the meaning is dematerialized and a gap is created between the signifier and signified, highlighting the concept of the female as both

subject to bodily processes and also a space of action for various cultural products. The film makers perceive a kind of pleasure in imaging ‘tortured body’. In the film *22 Female Kottayam* the ‘raped body’ is highlighted. The man who once raped the body of Tessa K Abraham is so smitten by her physical body that he again wants to do the same. He never considers the pain that the body and the mind undergo; instead he wants to get pleasure through sadistic processes. Griselda Pollock argues that the appropriation of woman as body in all forms of representation has spawned within the women’s movement a consistent attempt to decolonize the female body, a tendency which walks a tight rope between subversion and reappropriation, and often serves rather to consolidate the potency of the signification rather than actually to rupture it. The raped woman takes revenge upon her tormentors in a very successful manner. The raped body is the product of patriarchal bourgeois. In the film *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* the woman’s body is signified as a saleable commodity. It is for financial benefit that Rasaan marries fifteen year old Shahina. Her body has the value of just twenty five thousand rupees. Here Shahina gets the significance of woman only as a body and a source of sexual pleasure and not as a human being. In that film T.V. Chandran successfully portrays the working of ideology and the codes of representation.

The individuals construct their social identity through the commoditized texts produced by media especially films and films represent social realities. In the essay “Women Making Meaning: New Feminist Directions in Communication” (2015) Byars and Dell quotes culture as a process through which people circulate and struggle over the meanings of our social experiences, social relations and therefore our ‘selves’. It is the generally accepted idea that sex differences are rooted in culture. Sometimes the film makers give negative values to woman’s body and at the same

time those negative values can be a sign for positive change in society. T.V Chandran's *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* is such a film text by which many of the Muslim women identify themselves through the image of Shahina and it makes a remarkable change in the attitude of Muslim community towards education. In Kerala society, the raped woman always has a negative image and she is marginalized. No one is bothered about it is from the male category, such a disaster comes only on the woman's body. The whole gaze towards a raped body creates a kind of inferiority. But the film *22 Female Kottayam* shows how a raped body can rise up and takes revenge upon her tormentors. In this way female spectators can negotiate the meaning of the female body – whether it is tortured or sexualized. In the early Malayalam cinema, the body imagery went through the process of objectification of the subject. But the cinema produced in the present century the spectators perceive body as a living subject and all understands that the power circulation upon 'body' is reified as part of dominant culture. Viewers are watching their own cultural product. While doing so, viewers are reconditioning their conditioned identity. This is the way stereotypic image discourses become controversial. Clothing and fashion are the two basic criteria for identifying oneself as man or woman. They play an important role in conditioning and re-conditioning the social and gender identity of an individual. Body is symbolic once it is covered with clothes. The covered body symbolizes voicelessness of a subject. It does not mean that uncovered body symbolizes voiced text. The covered body is a sign of submissiveness and clothing is an effective way to communicate one's emotional and psychological values. It is the symbolic communication of an individual's social identity. But in the visual culture such identities are misinterpreted and the voice of the body is restricted. There is a politics behind covering female body in a sexual manner. It is meant to attract and stimulate

the viewer's sexual pleasure. The film makers visualize the female body in the most appealing way. The perspectives of female spectatorship help to find out the optimistic qualities in the negative portrayal of women and discuss the common issues of women presented on screen. Through the female body a woman identifies herself and the inscriptions on body articulate to the consciousness of women. Women on screen directly speak to women off the screen. Thus body becomes a medium of emotive and psychological language. Body itself is a subjective language. Through this language women demand the right to define their own social role.

In the film *Trivandrum Lodge*, director V.K. Prakash tries to portray female body as a mystic text which wants to show the powerfulness and inner voice of women by deconstructing the existing notion of female body as a space for voyeuristic pleasure. The text of the film revolves around a lodge named Trivandrum Lodge which is built at the cost of a female body. In the beginning part of the film, it indirectly hints the wealth of a woman who sells her body for money and pleasure. The film narrates the different faces of men towards the female body. All the men on the screen have only one aim – sexual gratification. All those men live in different rooms in the Trivandrum Lodge for a cheap rent. In that lodge, there are eight men with different attitudes. The only common thread that runs through them is their hunger for sex. The eldest among them proudly says that he lies with 999 women and still wants to lie with a woman to reach the goal of 1000. Shibu Vellayani, a film magazine writer, always seduces women with the promise that he will make them superstars.



Fig.17. The dialogue between a woman and a man about the body to satisfy their sexual pleasure. Here female body is treated as a commodity which is available in the market under installment.



Fig.18. Sign of an intellectual woman with a sex starving man – A shot from the movie *Trivandrum Lodge*





Fig.19.A reversing dimension of female sexuality- celebration of womanhood through her sexualized body

According to the director, the film is a tale of love, lust and longing which is set in a lodge. It articulates the changing sexual morals. It pictures the map of developed Kochi. The leading plot is sex obsession and sex starvation. The picture of the film completely changes with the entrance of Dhvani (Honey Rose). She is divorced, wants to be free, eat good and tasty food and wants to fornicate with abandon. She comes to stay at Trivandrum Lodge aiming to write a novel with Kochi as the background. Dhvani finds a man of her taste – Abdu (Jayasurya) one of the inmates of Trivandrum Lodge. He is sex starved and obsessed with porn journals to satisfy his sexual pleasures. The fabula of the film also focuses on the intense love affairs between Ravi Sankar, the owner of Trivandrum Lodge and his dead wife Malavika (Bhavana). It also portrays the unconditional adolescent love between Arjun, Ravi Sankar's son and his girl friend. The film also throws light on the mystic relation between Arthur Relton (Janardhanan), piano teacher and Peggy aunt (Sukumari), runner of canteen for Trivandrum lodge inmates. The mise-en-scene of

the film focuses on the sexually – repressed souls of both men and women. The film moves with bold and explicit sexual talk.

*Trivandrum Lodge* is the symbolic representation of the female body and its doors and windows are the entrances to the body. Abdu, a sexual maniac, comes on the screen by throwing a shoe. Shoe is a sexual symbol in Freudian terms. In the work, *Historicism, Psychoanalysis and Early Modern Culture* (2000), Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor comment that:

Freud added a footnote in 1910: The shoe or slipper is a corresponding symbol of the female genitals. So, reading back from the 1910 footnote, we can be assured us that feet and shoes are the symbols that mark the difference between male and female genitals, he adds a further footnote in 1910 that tells us that smell is often crucial for the fetish and that smell is about “a coprophillic pleasure” organized around the ... rather than the genital. (23)

Before the entrance of Abdu, mis-en-scene is highlighted with a pair of shoes and Abdu throws away one shoe and by doing so, the other becomes useless. Abdu is feeling jealous towards his fellow inmates for not being able to have women yet. He keeps under garments of women and is addicted to pornographic books. He always complains to elder inmates about his unfulfilled sexual desires and he tries to have a woman for 750 rupees. But he is afraid of her ill husband and he drops his plan. Abdu is an eccentric man doing odd jobs. He works as a trainee massager in a beauty spa and he always sneaks a peek at the shaved legs of women. He is dismissed for his misbehaviour and then takes up the job of a driver for Arjun. In between he is

attracted by Dhvani's half naked body and Dhvani is sexually attracted by his tooth clip. Abdu gets a chance to massage Dhvani's neck. That was his first experience of touching a real woman. In order to free herself from her marriage Dhvani makes Abdu as her lover and creates a love making scene with Abdu to convince her ex-husband. Abdu never wants to give a clear picture about him. Sometimes he is childish and the problem is that he cannot satisfy his sexual needs. He is an orphan and by birth he is a Muslim, but hasn't been to a mosque yet. Since he is an inexperienced in the matter of women, he does not know how to invite women sexually. When Trivandrum Lodge is confiscated Abdu becomes abnormal because that lodge is his sexual space and when the documents are re-discovered, Abdu becomes the happiest. In between he finds out the thrown shoe and gives it back to Satheeshan. But the single shoe becomes useless. Abdu and shoe become one of the symbols for sexual desire of men.

*Trivandrum Lodge's* explicit female body is Dhvani- who owns her body and never wants to surrender her body as a flesh to be played on. She never believes in the institution of marriage. When she had been with her husband she never gets the freedom to take food. Her husband is a man with a definite beauty concept of female body – the thin ideal body. When she comes out of the marriage circle, she prefers to fornicate with abandon and uncultured people. She prefers freedom in all its sense. She comes to Kochi aiming to write a visual novel. Dhvani meets her friend and she arranges Trivandrum Lodge for Dhvani. The film maker uses sexually abusive words to make the spectators sexually thrilled and Dhvani never hesitates to show her body. Male gaze is prevalent and at the same time Dhvani leaves sexual gazes towards the inmates of Lodge. She openly discusses her sexual desires with men and in that sense she even approaches Ravi Sankar. Dhvani appears like a seductress. Most of the

films in this genre focus only the sexual desire of men but this film is an exceptional one. It projects the sexual desire of women, their brilliancy in sex works, and women's attitude towards body. The film justifies the whore mother of Ravi Sankar. The film indirectly hints why women do leave their husband and go after other men and the text of the film gives the answer. Women have sexual desires too and want to enjoy it and in this film prostitution is presented in an affirmative manner. Through that profession, the mother earns a lot of property with proper documents. It is not only with her body she earns but also with her brilliancy. The film explores the sexual expectations of women. It openly criticizes the social institution of marriage and the notions of male sexuality. Women want to get married to the wealthiest silly guys and men who can show excellent performance in bed. Dhvani can arouse scopophilic pleasure among the spectators. The film gives a definition for divorce – it is like closing of a profitable company. It hints the economic independency for women. Even though the film is a product of patriarchal culture, it produces an esteemed presence of women. Ravi Sankar, an iconic representation of men, never wants to fall in love with another woman after the death his wife Malavika. He is in deep love, with his dead wife. All his richness is the contribution of his mother through her prostitution. Ravi Sankar is proud of being the son of his whore mother. He finds an affirmative note in selling one's body and earning money. But his father Narayanan (P.Jayachandran) has moved away from the family years ago. He runs a small hotel, away from his son's world. Thesni Khan is the living representation of a prostitute. Her name Kanyaka itself is symbolic and ironic. Through the name Kanyaka the patriarchal concept of virginity is emphasized. She demands money from all her partners and her gaze towards other men is highlighted. She also earns money by selling her body. Narayan stresses the sin in all the property earned by his wife as a

concubine. Ravi Sankar humorously states all the sins will be cleaned by applying dettol. The film maker has shown the intimate scenes without any hesitation.

Through the film *Trivandrum Lodge* the film maker tries to map the present condition of a metropolitan city like Cochin and its possibility and scope of prostitution. It is through the character of Babu Namboothiri as Thangal (cameo) map the possibility and scope of prostitution. He is a professional pimp and he reprises the same role from *Thoovanathumpikal*. He makes his appearance at a five star hotel where he meets Kanyaka and promises to make her rich through her profession. He shifts from Thrissur to Kochi. In *Thoovanathumpikal* also Thangal played the role of a professional pimp. The film is set in a patriarchal social background where man is the centre and a woman revolves around the man. The film *Thoovanathumpikal* is directed by Padmarajan and it critically analyses how a woman is being sexualized by man as part of social conditioning and how a woman sexualizes herself as a tool for self empowerment and resistance. The text of the film focuses on a patriarchal society in which how the other (women) is imaged as mere bodies. The film revolves around the 'sexualized body' of Clara (Sumalatha), who hails from coastal fisherman community and is leading a difficult life with her step mother's harassment towards her. When the film moves on, Clara is trying to get out Beatrice's (step mother) clutches. As an easy way for this, Clara agrees to become a sex worker and meets Jaya Krishnan (Mohanlal). Jaya Krishnan is a man of multiple personalities who keeps typical patriarchal ideologies. It is Jaya Krishnan who pretends to be the mother superior and writes a letter to Clara to be the bride of Jesus Christ. He gets acquainted with Clara and makes love with her.



Fig.20. Female visuality- a shot from the movie *Thoovanathumpikal*



Fig.21. A sexualized female body – celebration of womanhood



Fig.22. Celebration of female sexuality through her sexualized body by having a great sense of happiness and freedom

Her very first appearance makes her a mere sexually desirable body. Her lips her eyes, her nose, everything is imaged as an item to be sexualized for the male spectators. Clara embodies a set of images of female desirability, a sexualized female image which emphasizes physical strength and stature. Clara, being figured as a romantic interest, performs a key narrative function. She offers both a point of differentiation from the hero and deflects attention from the homoeroticism surrounding male buddy relationships. Clara provides a space onto which a variety of desires and anxieties are placed. The narrative and cinematography insistently sexualize and commodify her body. The love scenes in the film provoke sexual desire among the spectators also. Clara functions as a figure where the displaced story of sexual desire is voiced. The hero controls the action as he offers the audience a sexual spectacle. Whenever the hero thinks of Clara, she is visualized on the background of rain which symbolizes sexual fertility. Clara appears on the screen only three times. When she appears first, her 'body' is imaged as an object that provokes desire, leading to sex. At the same time she also wants to be free from all the clutches of suffocation and for that she prefers to be a sex worker. When she appears the second time, she is fed up of all the closed rooms, walls and windows and unknowingly she wishes to be chained to a single man. The second time, she is imaged in 'body' revealing clothes that creates sexual desire. The third time she appears with a baby that makes the hero less attracted towards her. After having a baby, Clara is no longer a subject of sexual desire.

Simone De Beauvoir gives positive attributes of having a female body in her most famous work *The Second Sex*. She argues that there are situations in which young women can be comfortable in their bodies – indeed, not only comfortable, but joyous and proud. She has a great sense of happiness and freedom in her body which

she does not feel in a social environment. The experience of pregnancy is more positive, yet stills an ambiguous one for women – it can be an unfair invasion of her body and at the same time a wonderful enrichment. As a woman's pregnancy develops, society tends to consider her less sexually attractive and as no longer sexually available. This means that she temporally escapes from man's sexual gaze. Thus body becomes an icon for eroticism as well as empowerment.

It is very common in visual culture that there is a man who controls prostitutes, finds customers for them and makes a profit from them. Thangal is such a character in Trivandrum Lodge. In the film *Avalude Raavukal* directed by I.V Sasi, also there is a pimp character Damuvettan (Pappu). It is such characters who become the sellers of female body. One common theme that threads *Avalude Raavukal* and *Thooavanathumbikal* is that the circumstances of both Clara and Raaji (Seema) that turn them into sex workers. They become the victims of male sexuality. The text of the film revolves around Raji and three young men in her life, two college- going youngsters Babu (Ravi Kumar), Jayan (Sukumaran) and a school teacher Chandran (Soman). Raji loses her parents early in her life leaving the responsibility of bringing up her younger brother Sudhakaran on her shoulders. Circumstances and her unskilled status force her into a life of prostitution. She begins living in a slum with a lady and a cycle rickshaw driver Damu working as her 'agent' (pimp).





Fig.23. Visuals from the movie *Avalude Raavukal* which arouse sexual desire among the male spectators. Here female body performs as the space for voyeuristic pleasure.



Fig.24. Image of an avenging woman who takes revenge upon men through her sexualized body.

In the film *22 Female Kottayam*, there is also a pimp Cyril (Fahad Fazil) and what the pimp does is not treated as bad and immoral. They treat female body as an item to be sold and a source of monetary gain. Everything done is for financial gain. The big question is how can a woman be a prostitute without the presence of a man?

But nowhere the man is treated as an object or an item to be sold. It is the politics behind patriarchal ideology. Man is always a man with every right to enjoy, to exploit and to control woman's body. Why do women have to be an object always? It is the culture; tradition and religion that make woman and her body an object. In

*Trivandrum Lodge*, the eldest inmate mentions the four types of women categorized in Kamasuthra Shankini (conch woman), Chitrini (art woman), Padmini (lotus woman) and Hastini (elephant woman). The eldest man describes one of the girls, who shares bed with ShibuVellayani, as Shankini. Shankini or conch woman is tall, large and with dark yellow-brown skin. Her breasts are small, limbs are long and thin. She looks out of the corners of her eyes. Such types of women have harsh voice and way of walking decisive. She eats moderately and is fond of new clothes, flowers and ornaments. She is a great lover and engages too much in love. She is hard-hearted, insolent and good at finding faults in others. It becomes cultural history. According to appearance and physical features women are classified under different names.

Padmini or Lotus woman has face like full moon. She dresses well and flesh is soft and skin as tender and as beautiful as yellow lotus. She is not dark coloured. She is brimming with youthfulness. Her eyes are bright and beautiful like the big eyes of a fawn. Her neck is delicate, straight and lovely. Wrinkles at the middle of her belly are horizontal and appears as three folds of fine skin. With a walk like the swan and voice like cuckoo, she delights in decorative clothing and fine jewels. She is religious, intelligent, and courteous and enjoys conversation with learned people. Chitrini, Art woman is of medium size – neither tall nor short. Thick, black hair, thin well rounded and shell like neck, tender body, sculptured hard, good-shaped thighs and wide lips are peculiarities of art women. Hergait is like an elephant sound like that of a peacock. She likes variety. She is good at singing and excels at all art forms. Hastini

or elephant woman is stout with coarse body. Lips are large, voice is harsh and neck is bent. Gait is slow and walk is slouching. She is never easily satisfied in sex and she prefers prolonged sex. She is gluttonous and shameless. She enjoys sex during all seasons of the year. In Indian literary tradition, there is a book on love, erotic, sensual and sexual desire and it is called Kamasutra. In the eighth century BC, Shvetaketu son of Uddalaka, produced a world which is too vast to access. A scholar Babhravya together with a group of his disciples produced a summary of Shvetaketu. The oldest text available on this subject is Kama sutra described to Vatsayana. This work assesses the women category on the basis of their physical appearance. This work is the cultural constitution of gender, biological sex, desire and the performance of those desires in the form of sexuality. This work is treated as discourses on sexuality.

Theories like psychoanalysis and semiotics are used as a methodology to understand how women are represented in cinema. These critical analyses help feminists to explore the ideology as well as the aesthetics of a particular film. Psychoanalysis provides a platform for certain states of mind among the viewers. Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Pam Cook and many other writers have been influenced by psychoanalysis in their exploration of feminist film criticism. Laura Mulvey gives a sharp feminist twist to psychoanalytic theory in her seminal article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" which was written in 1975. In this article Mulvey takes Freud's account of sexuality and the unconscious as basically accurate description of the place of women in a phallogentric order. Mulvey asks how the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured the forms of films. According to Mulvey male visual pleasure is the controlling pleasure in cinema. She suggests its two central forms; scopophilic pleasure that is linked to sexual attraction (voyeurism in extremes) and scopophilic pleasure that is linked to narcissistic identification (the

introjections of ideal egos). Mulvey considers the consequences of the erotic attraction of male viewers for female characters. She argues that the attraction is ambivalent. Since the feminine is seen not only as a lure but as threat, the threat of sinking into the half – light of the imaginary, the threat of castration conveyed by the real absence of a penis from the body of the woman. Mulvey states that male ambivalence toward the image of woman leaves no place for the female viewer. As an alternative, Mulvey proposes the refusal of visual pleasure as structured by a patriarchal order.

Malayalam film industry has been highly influenced by the politics of patriarchy. Most of the film forms are structured in ways which demonstrate the unconscious of patriarchal society. Each male viewer identifies himself with the male heroes and satisfies his sexual desires through the heroine on the screen. Most of the Malayalam movies have failed to demonstrate the subconscious of women through screen. But there are some film directors who have made alternative patriarchal assumptions of the main stream Malayalam cinema. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, T.V Chandran, Shyamaprasad, Ashiq Abu are some of such directors who have tried to bring out the real viewers and feminine subconscious through their films. Most of Malayalam cinema present woman as an image for pleasure and man would be the bearer of the look. In a patriarchal world ordered by sexual imbalance, the pleasure in looking has been split between active male and passive female. Laura Mulvey states that, the determining male gaze projects its phantasm onto the female figure; in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at ness (309).

Mulvey explains:

Traditionally, the woman displayed has functions on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. For instance, the device of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own time and space. (309)

Most of the male characters in Malayalam cinema never bear the burden of sexual objectification. Men have the role of active male who make things happen. These types of images are created inside the story. According to Mulvey the man controls the film phantasm and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extra- diegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. Mulvey argues that:

A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror. The character in the story can make things happen and control events better than the subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor co-ordination. In contrast to women as icon the active male figure (the ego ideal of

the identification process) demands a three –dimensional space corresponding to that of the mirror recognition, in which the alienated subject internalized his own representation of this imaginary existence. He is a figure in a landscape. Here the function of film is to reproduce as accurately as possible the so-called natural conditions of human perception. Camera technology (as exemplified by deep focus in particular) and camera movements (determined by the action of the protagonist) combined with invisible editing (demanded by realism), all tend to blur the limits of screen space. The male protagonist is free to command the stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action. (310)

Laura Mulvey's arguments are exactly applicable in Malayalam cinema also. Most of the films depict woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male characters inside the film. She opines that the heroine in the film would be glamorous and sexualized. But as the narrative progresses she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalized sexuality, her show girl connotations and her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. Such kinds of objectification have labeled to the women characters in the film. She just becomes an object of gaze and pleasure. It is part of patriarchal ideology. Mulvey identifies that there are three different looks associated with cinema- that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. Laura Mulvey points out the fetishistic and sadistic aspect in imaging women.

Psychoanalysis raises an hundred million dollar question on what kind of a reader does the film text construct? .That is the positioning of the subject in relation to patriarchal ideology which determines the question of voyeuristic pleasure in relation to the female figure in the cinema. B.Ruby Rich in her article “In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism” (1980) speaks of the two important approaches in feminist film criticism. In her words:

Two of the most important products of this approach are pieces by Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston. Johnston has critiqued the image of woman in male cinema and finds her to be a signifier, not of woman, but of the absent phallus, a signifier of an absence rather than any presence. Similarly Mulvey has analyzed the nature of the cinematic spectator and finds evidence – in cinematic voyeurism and in the nature of the camera look –of the exclusively male spectator as a production assumption. (349)

Thus the image of women in Malayalam cinema is presented as a signifier of absent phallus in the film *22 Female Kottayam*, Tessa K Abraham, the female protagonist is imaged as symbol of absent phallus. In that film she tries to castrate the sexual organ of Cyril .Tessa feels relaxed and happy and it signifies the powerlessness of particular structure without penis. The castration procedure creates the feeling that the power culture of patriarchy has begun to fall. *22 Female Kottayam* also depicts the rape scene that gives a voyeuristic pleasure to the male spectators. The film realistically portrays the pain and stress of a girl who is being raped brutally by Cyril’s boss. Through the sexual satisfaction of the male characters, the spectators themselves satisfy their sexual desire. This has been termed as the ‘cinematic voyeurism’, by Laura Mulvey. Such scenes provoke emotional responses in its

viewers who are completely unconscious. In this way filmic experience offers an imaginary pleasure. Todd McGowan in his article “Looking for the Gaze: Lacanian Film Theory and Its Vicissitudes” (2003) argues that:

Traditional Lacanian film theory understands the gaze as it appears in the mirror stage and as it functions in the process of ideological interpellation. That is, the gaze represents a point of identification an ideological operation in which the spectator invests her/himself in the filmic image. As Christian Metz puts it, “the spectator is absent from the screen as perceived, but also (the two things inevitably go together) present there and even all present as perceiver”. At every moment I am in the film by my look’s caress. Being absent as perceived and present as perceiver affords the spectator an almost unqualified sense of mastery over the filmic experience. In this sense, the filmic experience provides a wholly imaginary pleasure, repeating the experience that Lacan sees occurring in the mirror stage. Jean Louis Baudry makes this connection explicit, pointing out that the arrangement of the different elements – projector, darkened hall screen – in addition to reproducing in a striking way the mise-en-scene of Plato’s cave... Reconstructs the situation necessary to the release of the ‘mirror stage’ discovered by Lacan. The gaze in ‘the mirror stage’ according to Lacan, provides an illusory mastery for the child, a mastery over her/his own body that the child does not yet have in reality. (28)

In his essay on “The Mirror Stage” (1966) Lacan takes the gaze as a mastering gaze. Later this gaze becomes something that the subject encounters in the object; it



becomes an objective rather than a subjective gaze. Thus the gaze involves the spectator in the image disrupting his /her ability to remain all perceiving and unperceived in the cinema. Jean Loans Baudry in his influential work the *Ideological Effects of the Cinematographic Apparatus* indicated an approach which conceives the projection screen in terms of Althusser's ideological state of apparatus, Lacan's mirror stage and Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The ideological effect of film has focused film as a finished product. But it depends on the mise-en-scene of that film. In the process of the production of a film, the film transforms from decoupage (language) to montage. The decoupage is transformed through the apparatus of camera into image and then finally becomes a commodity, film owns the exchange value and it is transformed through the apparatus of screen and it is consumed by the spectators. The finished film restores the objective reality that the camera has filmed- which creates an illusion of movement through static images. But the instruments that enact are completely hidden from the viewer. The projection creates an illusion of movement from a sequence of static images and through these images meanings can be constituted. The theatre and its settings in which the films are exhibited (dark room), reproduce the mirror stage in which secondary identification occurs and the subject constitutes the meanings according to their perception. Baudry explains how spectator identifies with the films. The spectators identify themselves more with the character on screen and less with what is represented on screen (absent character). The role of the films is to reproduce an ideology and an objective reality. The entire function of the filmic apparatus is to make the viewer forget the filmic apparatus. The viewers are only made aware of the apparatus when it breaks. There is a relation between the viewer and the film text in the assumption that viewers are inactive victims who are subjected to the ideology and cannot differentiate between illusion

and reality. Thus film imposes an ideology rather than producing critical awareness in the spectator. All ideologies are mentally constructed and thus immaterial. Through the projection of a film, a relationship is established between the unconscious of the subject and what is being presented on screen. Baudry moves on to state how he believes the subject is able to become consciously enmeshed in the film. According to him, there is both fantasmaticization of an objective reality which seems equally to augment the possibilities of the subject. It is the belief in the omnipotence of thought and viewpoint. The subject sees the visual image of the world. But the ego of the subject believes that what is shown is shown for a reason and whatever the subject sees has a purpose and meaning. Baudry treats the screen as a mirror. But it does not reflect an objective reality instead it reflect images. Baudry argues that just as a mirror assembles the fragmented body in a sort of imaginary integration of the self, the transcendental self unites the discontinuous fragments of phenomena, of lived experiences into unifying meaning by integrating into an organic unit. According to Baudry the camera needs to seize the subject in a mode of specular reflection. The film is a method of experience in which the spectators gain power over the sexual object and tries to dominate the sexual object especially the female through gaze. This gaze motivates the spectator's desire to encounter the object. Todd Mc Gowan argues that "instead of lamenting the fantasmatic dimension of the cinema, we should view it is an opportunity for an encounter with the gaze- an encounter with the Real- that otherwise would be impossible" (40). As Žižek points out, in the opposition between fantasy and reality, the real is on the side of fantasy. It is in the very turn to fantasy that it becomes possible to experience a traumatic encounter with the gaze-to experience the Real. Whereas desire always keeps the gaze at a distance, fantasy can act as the vehicle to lead the subject to an encounter with the gaze. Fantasy, unlike the

sense of ‘reality’ is always incomplete; it breaks down and loses its consistency at its edges. Even though it screens the gaze because of the constitutive incompleteness to fantasy, it also allows for an experience of the gaze that would otherwise be impossible to come by. When film employs fantasy but at the same time reveals the limit that fantasy comes up against, it takes us to an encounter with the traumatic real. Thus films employ both desire and fantasy in order to enact an encounter with the real gaze. The act of looking has a political agenda as it is an exercise of power.

Female visibility is an upcoming area in the field of visual culture. The gendered notion of gaze has two aspects- male gaze and female gaze. Power structure of a society gives space for gaze. Visual pleasure has socially constructed nature of the visual which Laura Mulvey describes as psychical. Theories like Psychoanalysis, Marxism, Structuralism, Post Structuralism and Deconstruction etc provide new methods of decoding and demystifying the meanings of cinema as an art form. In the process of male gaze, woman becomes the object for gaze and visual pleasure. The present study illuminates the paradigm shift from male gaze to female gaze, from men’s desire to women’s desire. The term visual pleasure means the masculine pleasure and there is no trace of the female spectator. But women have been discontent with their banishment from mainstream representation; the feminist film critics have tried to occupy their own space in spectatorship. Diane Shoos in her review essay on “The Female Subject of Popular Culture” quotes Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment’s notes on introduction to the collection “The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture” that:

we feel that we cannot afford to dismiss the popular by always positioning ourselves outside it....For it is here, from popular culture-soaps, sitcoms, the tabloid press women magazines, mass produced

fiction, pop music etc-that most people in our society get their entertainment and their information. It is here that women (and men) are offered the cultures' dominant definitions of themselves. It would therefore see as crucial to explore the possibilities and pitfalls of intervention in popular forms in order to find ways of making feminist meanings a part of our pleasures. (Gamman and Marshment 2)

Thus multiple methods in which female points of view are articulated in visual text are treated as female visuality. The term female gaze is not only related with sight but also how the sense of a female perspective on narrative, character, genres, parody, round etc have an impact on women's reception of a film. Through such gaze the female constructs her own identity. In the article "Visual 'Drive' and Cinematic Narrative: Reading Gaze theory in Lacan, Hitchcock and Mulvey", Clifford T Manlove justifies Mulvey's observation. He states that:

Mulvey correctly notes the libidinal power inherent in the eye and its ability to look, the point at which Lacan creates a broader theory of drives. However, her schematic of how the power travels and the effects of the gaze upon the subject deserve a second look. Although Freud distinguishes between active and passive behaviors and motives, Freud does not align these with gender. One effect of this reading of Freud is for Mulvey to make the claim that all narrative cinemas develop (s) scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. (88)

Women's discourse in popular culture like Malayalam cinema has become slightly problematic and often marginalized. The problem that arises in the women's discourse is on how women see themselves both as readers and as targets of cultural

product. Malayalam film industry is the cultural product of Kerala and to speak about a female or woman discourse within popular culture refers not only to textual product but also the films try to raise key questions about ways of looking and producing meaning in popular cinematic images and the way women are represented on screen. Within a patriarchal cultural mode, it is the women audience who produce meaning for a film text with feminist explorations of the possibility of making female sense. From the year 2000 onwards, a number of films in Malayalam were released which featured strong central female characters. These films were categorized as women centric movies which did not depend on the traditional active-male/passive-female axis of representation. Films like *Naalu Pennungal* (2007) *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* (2003) *Female Kottayam* (2012) *How Old Are You?* (2014) *Artist* (2013) are come under this category. However, despite these enthusiastic responses to the new representations, women's desire is seen as a major threat to the male world with the nation that it must be eliminated. Feminist critiques have attempted to come to terms with the key notion of female gaze in popular culture, especially in films. Many of the issues arise from a pioneering critique of women's discourse within patriarchal power structure. Mulvey argued that visual pleasure in mainstream cinema reproduces a male textual structure where the woman becomes the object of the male gaze produced through the gaze of camera. Mulvey concludes that such pleasure must be destroyed to develop a cinema whose textual strategies would ensure that the representation of women and the interpretation of the woman's perspectives are not marginalized but central to the narrative.

A recent Malayalam movie *Trivandrum Lodge* (2014) appears to activate a female gaze and offers space for considering shifts in the representation of gender. Dhvani, the central female character makes a platform for female audience. All the

male characters try to look at her as object and as a response she tries to stimulate all men in the lodge and also provides a female viewpoint towards the inmates of the lodge. Thus camera produces a visual pleasure in female gaze. The male bodies and images in the films offer great visual pleasure and feast for the female audience/spectators especially the image of Ravi Sankar played by Anoop Menon. All the inmates in Trivandrum lodge are the prime objects of desire and erotic spectacle. In the film *Thoovanathumpikal*, Jayakrishnan's (Mohanlal) half naked body circulates and is on display, and offers sexualized imaginative anatomy. In the film *22 Female Kottayam*, the male body owned by Cyril also provides a voyeuristic visual treat. These images of male bodies can offer the female spectators contradictory variable and ambivalent possibilities. On one aspect, these male images endorse masculinity. Men maintain a 'stiff upper lip' at times of emotional stress according to the theories of masculinity. But on another angle, male bodies question other dominant assumptions about masculinity. Through the film *Trivandrum Lodge* it is clear that widowhood poses a serious challenge to emotional control. This film illustrates how widowers negotiate the conflicting emotional experience of widowhood and hegemonic masculinity with its emphasis on emotional suppression. The context of such emotions is necessary to know how masculinity is maintained; emotional expression may be permitted in private but not in public. The masculine image of six-pack body of one of the inmates of *Trivandrum Lodge* is a visual delight to women's gaze. The object of desire is not so much the female but the male. In the film *Thoovanathumpikal*, the erotic body of Jayakrishnan becomes centre of female gaze. His body symbolizes an outside figure, which operates as a free body and moral bounds of society offering pleasure to all. The visual pleasure of female gaze provides a space for paradigm shift from male spectatorship to female spectatorship

along with the shift from male gaze to female gaze. Griselda Pollock, in her article, “Modernity and the Space of Femininity” (1988) argues that the female gaze can often be visually negated. Pollock claims Robert Doisneau’s photo side long Glance supports this argument. In the photo middle-aged bourgeois couple are looking around an art gallery. The spectator views the picture from inside the shop but the couple is looking in different places other than that of the spectator. The woman is commenting on an image to her husband, while the husband is distracted by a nude female painting. The nude female painting is hung within the view of the spectator. The woman is looking at another image, but it is out of view of the spectator. The male gaze has found something more interesting and he has chosen to ignore the woman’s comment. The women are also in contrast to the nude female in the painting, and instead of passively accepting the male gaze, she presents herself as actively returning and confirming the gaze of the masculine spectator. Lorraine Gamman has suggested that the role of the female gaze is not to appropriate the traditional male form of voyeurism but its purpose is to disrupt the phallogocentric power of the male gaze by providing other modes of view. Thus the female gaze is gaze trope about the way a work is presented from a female perspective or reflects female attitudes either because of the creators of gender or because it is deliberately aimed at a female audience. It represents the gaze of the female viewer. The female gaze looks at three viewpoints. They are the individuals in the film, the characters within the film and the spectators. These three viewpoints also concern Mulvey’s male gaze but focuses on females. It can be noted in women centric cinema. Women centric films as a genre focus on female leads, showing the female as diegetic –story teller rather than that of a spectacle. Movies such as *Naalu Pennungal* and *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* are examples of such films in which the traditional narrative is

told through the female protagonist. The films are meant to represent the desires of female protagonists and therefore, represent the desire of female spectators. The female gaze can be analyzed both at the points of production and reception



## Chapter Two

### Malayalam Cinema and the Question of Representing Women

Malayalam film industry has produced many films that render a visual appeal to the social realities of women in Kerala. It has influenced the way in which people perceive various aspects of their own lives. Malayalam cinema has shaped and expressed the changing scenarios of Kerala to an extent that no art form could ever achieve because cinema has its own specific ideology. The present study analyses the feministic ideology of how a woman image produces meaning to the spectators and how her representation on the screen appeals to the female spectators. The visual appeal of woman gives a voyeuristic pleasure to the spectators and most of the images about women portray the realities which are stereotypical depiction of their social existence. But there are counter images that challenge the traditional images. These counter images address the female spectators and are meant to empower the subdued gender in the society. There are film directors who uphold the feminist values and highlight the issues of women belonging to different social strata. The imaging of women in films like *Naalu Pennugal*, *22 Female Kottayam*, *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam and Akashadoothu* and so on reflect the trials and tribulations faced by women. The roles of women in a patriarchal power structure are strongly portrayed in Malayalam cinema. Many women centered cinemas in Malayalam speak about the lives of ordinary women. It represents the social realities and each of the woman character epitomizes the essence of womanhood.

Feminism is a social movement that has a great influence on film theory and criticism. Issues of representation and spectatorship are central to feminist film theory and criticism. The hardships of women in a patriarchal society are effectively

designed. Feminist film theory tries to highlight the real life issues of women in a patriarchal society. It is concerned with the way women have been presented in all art forms and draw the attention to the roles that women can play. Film, as a mass medium of entertainment, holds a mirror to social and cultural aspects of the society. Film reflects the cultural content. It is clear that people have been influenced by filmic images of women. In the article “The Feminist Perspective in Film Studies”, Ann Kaplan states that:

The relationship between film and reality varies from period to period and depends on the style any director is working in. The presentation of women in expressionist or surrealist films has little direct relationship to social reality. In these films, male myths and fantasies about women emerge clearly. In the Hollywood genres films, myths and fantasies predominant, only now they are shrouded in a surface realism that makes them harder to decipher. These films also draw upon literary and theoretical convention, especially the early films, and thus perpetuate stereotypes that had existed before the development of film. (18)

Thus feminist film theory analyses prevalent gender roles as they are represented in cinema and also focuses on how such representations of women reflect and are connected to actual life and social conditions. According to Pramod K Nayar, feminist literary and cultural theory draws a link between the representation of women in art and real material conditions in which they live. He states that:

Feminist theory argues that the representation of women as weak, double innocent seductive or irrational sentimental is rooted in and influence actual social conditions, where she does not have power, is

treated as a sex object or a procreating machine, has fewer political and financial rights and is abused. Feminism therefore, is a world view that refuses to delink art from existing social conditions and practices. Feminism explores the cultural dimension of the woman's material life. Feminist literary cultural critics assume that cultural texts such as cinema, soap opera, music, painting parallel and duplicate real life power struggles between genders. Cultural texts naturalize the oppression of women through their stereotypical representation of women as weak/vulnerable, seductress, obstacle sexual object or a procreating device. The task of criticism, therefore, is to reveal the underlying ideologies within these texts because these ideologies are instrumental in continuing women's oppression. (83)

Simone De Beauvoir argues in her influential work *The Second Sex* (1949) that men are able to mystify women and women in turn have accepted this mystified and stereotypical role that Bauvoir talks about. In the process of 'othering', women are seen as dependent or as a flawed version of the male. So in the opinion of Beauvoir men and women constantly engaged in this subject other relation where the man is the subject and women the other. This othering of women is reflected in Malayalam cinema too. Its underlying patriarchal power structure makes the role of women as other and as marginalized. In most of the main stream Malayalam cinema heroes are worshipped and valued and the heroines are merely a support. It is purely meant to get a social acceptance as society is structured so. As Simone De Bauvoir argues, there is no essence of a woman and 'she' is constructed by men and society, as she puts "one is not born a woman but becomes one" (267). According to her, patriarchy makes use of sexual difference to maintain an inequality between men and

women. She proposed the idea that women must take charge of their own choices.

Women should become subjects in their own right instead of being weak, inferior and other. Beauvoir puts forward the idea that women need not be restricted to the roles and identities fostered or imposed on them by patriarchy. Pramod K Nayar summarizes her view on feminism in these words:

De Beauvoir thus offers feminism in two key ideas (i) the social construction of gender where women accept their men-ordained roles as women and (ii) the necessity for women to take responsibility and choose for themselves. When women choose for themselves they choose for the entire society. Thus, the woman's choice is about social transformation. Her influence on the American feminists like Betty Frieden helped to launch second wave feminism. De Beauvoir's major contribution was to shift the focus from biological substrata to the man/woman debate to a social one. She located gender as a social category rather than a merely biological one arguing that women are socially conditioned, trained and prescribed so as to assume the role of women. (88-89)

Feminism is reflected in Malayalam cinema also and it is meant to represent women not only as weak and inferior to men but also as a strong and leading- a counter imaging of women. Malayalam cinema industry has produced many avenging women characters such as in films like *22 Female Kottayam*. There are many women centered cinema in Malayalam. Adoor Gopala Krishnan's *Naalu Pennungal*, TV Chandran's *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* and Sibi Malayil's *Akaashadootu* etc are women centred in which the women characters are portayed as leading, bold and avenging protagonists slightly different from the negative imaging of women, that is

the woman is made to accept the idea that she is made or born to be a mother, device for procreation and nurture. These films raise the tension between viewing pleasure and resisting pleasure. It tries to demystify the stereotypical roles allotted to women character and highlight the politics of feminism. The selected films for present study focus on the condition of women from a woman's perspective. Film depicts the linear and glorified account of a woman's position in the society. In their work "Women in Indian society" (2001), Neera Desai and Usha Thakkur argue that:

The history of women is not linear, nor does it have a well organized structure. It is in fact, an integral though mostly invisible part of the saga of civilization. Its threads are closely interwoven with those of culture society, states and above all, with the lives of the people.

Untangling the threads through multiple layers of traditions is a fascinating enterprise. Women's duties as good daughters , good wives and good mothers are well defined in the Indian patriarchal society wife hood and motherhood are accepted as pivotal roles for women by implication .These roles are complete in themselves and women need not pursue any specialized discipline of knowledge, art or profession. The good woman is sweet, gentle, loving, caring and ever sacrificing. The mainstream concept of the role of a woman seems to be best described in the anonymous Sanskrit couplet: She (in relation to her husband) is like a mother while he is working, servant at his feet courtesan in his bed and earth like in forbearance. (2001)

There are lots of Malayalam films in which women are imaged as sweet, gentle, loving, caring and ever sacrificing. Most of the Malayalam cinema portrays

women in accordance to the social and cultural fabric of society in Kerala. In the essay “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation”, Stuart Hall argues that:

There are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity. The first position defines cultural identity in terms of the idea of one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one true self’, hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed ‘selves’ which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (387)

According to Stuart Hall, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute what we really are or rather what we have become. He states that:

...Cultural identity in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. (388)

As far as the culture of Kerala is concerned it has matrilineal cultural roots. The matriarchal culture of Kerala gives a little space for women. But by the passing of time patriarchy became powerful and women became underestimated and inferior to men. The status of women was lowered from reverence to rape and they lost their

sense of self or identity which is also reflected. Thus use of media to portray women and giving suggestion about their preferred roles are not the new phenomenon. Films try to idealize woman according to the dominant patriarchal culture of Kerala. The representation of women and its counter imaging are taken for consideration in the present study to locate the areas where women have shown their strength, the spaces where they have carved out for their assertions and the empowerment they have been exhibited. The present study tries to analyze how the women in- spite of male dominance have expressed their identity in different ways and also the facts about women's lives being discovered and being realized, that patriarchy does not operate in a monolithic manner, its manifestations are varied. In the essay "Women in Indian Cinema: Fictional Constructs" (2009) Vrinda Mathur states that:

The present portrayal of women on screen merely perpetrates the Indian cultural devaluation theory. "I am a girl, therefore bad and therefore destined to suffer" is the message that is sent forth in movie after movie. This space between a strong woman in real life and her portrayal on celluloid needs to be negotiated and the positive ambience for grounded. Indian cinema has double role to play in shaping the mindset of its people. It must also set the stage for social change. Can a woman be redefined and recategorized into "I am a woman, therefore strong, therefore invincible". Only then can the women characters come alive on screen. Until then they shall continue to be what they are - mere fictional constructs and one dimensional figure who are distant from the ordinary real life woman. (70)

The women characters, in the film *Naalu Pennungal* directed by Adoor Gopala Krishnan, can say boldly that "I am a woman therefore strong, therefore

Invincible”. In this film women speak to women and their voice is released and they do not want to be the victim of patriarchal politics.

Adoor Gopala Krishnan is an Indian film director, script writer and producer who had a major role in revolutionizing Malayalam cinema during the 1970’s and is regarded as one of the finest film makers of India. He pioneered the new wave cinema movement in Kerala. Most of his films have gone to film festivals around the world. He has been known as a director who completely dictates evens fine detail in his films. On the performance of actors in his movies he stated that it is not the artist’s job to do the detailing and he does not want to give different interpretations of roles that may clash with each other as it has to be absolutely unified. He has scripted and directed eleven feature films and about thirty short films and documentaries. All his films have won national and international awards. He gains the ideas for his film from the real life situations. His creativity has led to the depiction of characters that are the life like images. His films dealt with the dynamics of power especially patriarchal ideology and his films try to historicize the power structure. His characters hail from the lower social class and he realistically depicts the exploitation of dominant class in the society. Lalit Mohan Joshi quotes Adoor Gopala Krishnan’s words in his article “Nizhalkkuthu: The Epic Conflict”:

In the narration of the story I wanted to use all the five elements of nature in its raw and untamed manifestations- the EARTH in the shape of the primeval mountains and virginal valleys with tall trees and lush vegetation; the AIR in the form of the insistent wind that blows through the plains and fields and lending the Palmyra trees a personality and expression that which also turns a piece of reed into an instrument of music and is the very life breath of beings; the WATER



that cleanses and sustains life and lashes down in torrents swelling streams and soaking the farms; the FIRE that lights up the dark and enlightens the mind and soul and that also burns and reduces everything into ashes; and the SKY the over expanse of which makes all the human drama and trials look trivial and inconsequential. (114)

Most of his films leave something intensely personal behind their depiction. His films stimulate and inspire the viewers and leave them either shattered or elevated in spirit. Adoor Gopala Krishnan is highly influenced by Sathyajith Ray.

*Naalu Pennungal* (Four Women) is a 2007 Malayalam movie produced and directed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan based on four short stories written by Thakazhi Siva Sankara Pillai, the Njanapith award winning Malayalam writer. The movie chronicles a journey of womanhood. The movie has four distinct parts. Each of the parts narrates the stories of women from different strata of the society. It is the story of four women from Kuttanad in Alappuzha district in Kerala. The stories are set in the years between the 1940 to the 1960. The thin line between promiscuity and mortality, fidelity and infidelity and also the clash between wishes and deprivation is what the auteur par excellence tries to explore in *Naalu Pennungal*. The film is a series of four stories depicting the lives of four females without any direct link to each other. Each of these women comes from different strata of the society and covers different time spans and changing social milieu. The film begins from the anarchy of powers stamping on the rights of nomadic individuals' choice to lead a life of their own and ends with a lonely individual left in a social structure in the form of younger siblings. These four stories are adapted from Njanapith award winner, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai and all these short stories are set in Kuttanadu in an era when social upheaval and turmoil seemed to be setting down. This film is an

exploratory journey through the lives of four archetypal women, the prostitute, the virgin, the house wife and the spinster. The four stories are titled as *Oru Niyama Langhanathinte Katha, Kanyaka; Chinnu Amma and Nithya Kanyaka*. These stories revolve around women who start their Journey from passive acceptance to willed choices.

The film begins with the sound of running water. The first story is titled as *Oru Niyama Lamghanathinte Katha [Prostitute]*. In this story the protagonist is a street prostitute. In the opening scene Kunjippennu, the street girl scolds Pappukutty for pursuing her to have a life with him. Pappukutty (Sreejith Ravi) is an independent man who earns for his daily life and wants to marry Kunjipennu even if she is a street prostitute. He declares that he will take care of Kunjipennu and she becomes a partner for lonely Pappukutty. That night itself Kunjippennu lies with pappukkutty in the verandah of a shop. Both Kunjippennu and Pappukutty do not have a roof of their own. So they lie in the verandah. Pappukkutty lovingly calls Kunjipennu and tells that he likes the smell of jasmine flower as she too smells the jasmine flowers. When she says that every day she takes bath and wears jasmine flowers on her hair, Pappukutty keeps silence. It shows that the moment kunjipennu decides to live with Pappukutty she stops selling of her body. After declaring themselves as husband and wife, Kunjippennu sexually invites Pappukutty. From her conversation with Pappukutty, it is clear that she has been longing for love and care which is denied for her .she was an orphan. After she comes out of prostitution, Kunjippennu starts to earn money by doing road work. Her husband also earns money for their livelihood. Their unauthorized married life runs smoothly. Both Kunjipennu and pappukutty are uneducated and the elder men who work along with her appreciated her for readiness to work for earning money. The supervisor of road construction work makes lewd

comments upon her and offers money for her body. But she declares that she is a woman of her man. She shares her happiness with her street sister about her work and her lover. Her sister suggests of having a house even if she has a man. She respects her man. Ouseppachan has an eye on her, makes lewd comment upon her and his man and teases her by calling *pathivratha*. She boldly resists his approach under the label of her man Pappukutty. He challenges her man and Pappukutty accepts his challenges and he hits Ouseppachan badly. Ouseppachan wants to take revenge upon Pappukutty and Kunjippennu. The police men come in search and catch Pappukutty and Kunjippennu for adultery. Kunjippennu is already labeled as a prostitute. Both Kunjippennu and Pappukutty are taken by police into the court where they have to answer to many questions. Both of them cannot answer the questions about their family background since both of them are orphans. Pappukutty declares that since he does not own a home, he lies in the verandah and also state that they are husband and wife. But there is no proof for being married and they do not have a legally sanctioned marriage certificate. The judge teases them that they have no home, no parents and there is no proof for their claiming to be husband and wife. They are treated as offenders and the crime imposed upon them is that of adultery and they are remanded for fourteen days. Again the prosecution finds that they are wrong and committed illegal sexual acts publicly only on the basis of their past deeds. Authority will not accept anything without proof. Ouseppachan stands strongly and gives more proof against them. Pappukutty declares many times that they are husband and wife. But they do not have any real and legally authorized documents about the culmination of their marriage. At last they are punished for violating laws. This is the story of Kunjippennu.

Adoor Goplala Krishnan depicts the pathetic condition of prostitutes.

Kunjippennu represents the woman who happens to sell her body for bread. Society never treats any prostitutes as good and never seeks why they decide to sell bodies.

The two women in the story *Oru Niyama Langhanathinte Katha* represent those women who do not have a roof of their own. The love that they get from men is momentary. They never get a social status even after they stop selling their bodies.

Once they are labeled as prostitutes, till their death that label is with them.

Kunjippennu stands for women who hail from the lower strata of society. Once

Pappukkutty offers a life with love and care, she comes out of prostitution and decides to live with Pappukkutty as his wife. Their marriage is not sanctioned legally.

So it does not have any validity before law as it needs proof. Adoor Gopala Krishnan

focuses on the identity crisis of women in a patriarchal society by imaging

Kunjippennu as a prostitute. Adoor Gopala Krishnan opens an eye on the issues of women who happens to sell their body. Society never recognizes a prostitute even if

that male dominated society spends much money for her body and satisfies his

desires. Ouseppachan takes revenge upon Kunjippennu for denying his sexual urge

for her. In the shadow of Pappukkutty, Kunjippennu feels secure and she boldly

declares that he is a man and resists approaches from both Ouseppachan and road

construction supervisor. Even if Kunjippennu sold her body for many men, she longs

for the love and care of one man since she needs a comfort zone. Adoor

Gopalakrishnan highlights the identity crises of a prostitute. Prostitutes need social

space and they should be recognized and should not be mistreated. The director

highlights on the issue of women who are not married legally but living with a man.

He directly and indirectly criticizes the institution of marriage, which becomes the

essential part of Kerala culture. In the story of Kunjippennu, Adoor Gopala Krishnan

explores the problems faced by women who do not solemnize a legal affair with a man and also the issues of prostitution. Marriage is a license for a woman to have sex with a man. It is only applicable for women. But outside marriage, a man can have sex with any woman, whomsoever he desires. Thus a woman's identity is socially constructed by men in accordance with patriarchy. If Kunjippennu had accepted the look of Ouseppachan, she would not have been sent to jail. Kunjippennu wants to be a sincere wife to Pappukutty. Once she is promised by a married life with him, she stops lending her body for the fantasies and pleasure of men. The same man who enjoyed pleasure with Kunippennu sends her to jail in the name of adultery only because of her denial of his sexual favours. There are only two main female characters in the story of prostitute-Kunjippennu and the sister (Sona Nair). Both earn the money from prostitution and the sister is happy when Kunjippennu lives happily with her man. Sister reminds Kunjippennu about having a home even though she has a man.

The second story is titled as *Kanyaka (Virgin)*. It tells the story of Kumari, who is working in the paddy field and takes the responsibility of her family. Her father Gopa kumar is proud of his daughter who earns and saves money. The story opens with the talk of a marriage proposal for Kumari and her father promises that her presence in any home brings prosperity to others. A man with marriage proposal came to Kumari's home and the women around her ask whether she likes him or not. Kumari looks into the ground in the assumption that, she is ready to accept that man and their marriage is solemnized with the blessing of her relatives. When she sits beside her husband, he never looks at his wife. Soon after reaching his home, Nandu leaves for his business. Kumari keeps waiting for him till late night. His mother tells that he never wastes any money on smoking and drinking. He spends money only for

watching movies. Kumari keeps waiting and sleeps. The expectations about her married life was lost in the first night itself as Nandu comes back late night and he does not make much conversation with his wife. Nandu wants to hide his impotency. He is interested only in eating because he is a glutton. He denies her sexual bliss and makes lame excuses. He leaves Kumari at her home and he never comes to take her back. She starts working in field and resumes shouldering the responsibilities of her family. People begin to talk against Kumari and mark her as 'bad' and as a result Nandu now demands divorce. In the end of the story she declares that since marriage is not solemnized between Kumari and Nandu, there is no need of divorce. The story ends based on this note.

Through the characterization of Kumari, Adoor Gopalakrishnan tries to portray an independent woman who is not satisfied with the institution of marriage as it destroys all her expectations. Kumari is portrayed as a financially independent woman who is ready to take responsibility of her family. Adoor Gopala Krishnan realistically presents the situation of those women who are abandoned by their husbands. Society blames only women not the men. Even if her husband is an impotent, Kumari is blamed. Before marriage and after marriage, she keeps her virginity. But she is treated as an adulterous woman. Society assumes and believes that it is because of her adultery, her husband leaves her at her home and this is how society ill treats her. Here in this story also marriage becomes a license for having sex. That is why Kumari makes a sexual invitation towards her husband after their marriage. In that sense she declares that her marriage is not solemnized with him. Adoor Gopala Krishnan ridiculously presents the character of Nandu. His way of having food and his way of spending and saving money are taken for consideration. But such a characterization misguides the spectator and it is done to hide his

impotency. Nandu goes out to open his shop on his marriage day itself and he deliberately comes late and does not interact with Kumari. He just marries her for the sake of marriage itself. Because of that Kumari gets irritated with Nandu. Her feeling of alienation in his home is shown through her loneliness at night. Her characterization gives inspiration to those women who are marginalized in the name of marriage and divorce. Kumari longs for a better partner who is ready to share duties and rights equally. Kumari is never shaken before the label given by society for her. Instead she courageously faces the criticism towards her. Kumari is a virgin both mentally and physically and it is her self confidence that helps her to live independently. Her readiness to earn money gives her financial autonomy. Here in this story Nandu fails to provide any happiness to Kumari. So she never makes an attempt to search or follow him. The undercurrent of sex becomes the theme of this story too. Her sexual gaze towards Nandu leads to leave her at her own home. Nandu becomes an incompetent person in front of Kumari because of his impotency. The patriarchal society believes that their power over women lies in their penis. The imaging of Kumari is bold, voiced and independent woman which becomes a counter imaging of usual stereotypical imaging of woman, who is weak, subservient and dependent. Kumari is fighting against the injustice of society towards women. She boldly rejects the institution of marriage which gives license for sex. She powerfully declares that she can live without the presence of man. She has a room of her own. She has financial independency. As Virginia Woolf proposes the idea of having a room of one's own in her celebrated work *A Room of One's Own* (1929) Kumari possesses her space in the male dominated society that makes her unique among the cliché image of traditional woman.

The third story titled as *Chinnu Amma* is about a childless mother. The story opens with the coming of Narapilla, with whom Chinnu Amma had a lovely friendship. Narapillai comes to her house and they are having nostalgic memories of her school days. He reminds her about their romantic relationship that leads to physical relationship also. But at that time Chinnu Amma controls herself and did not have such physical relationship with Narapillai. But when Narapillai asks about Chinnu Amma's off springs, she becomes sad and desperate. Narapillai tries to ask questions like how many times she conceived and tells her that it is not her fault but that of her husband. She talks about the treatment she had along with her husband. But everything ends in vain. Narapillai tells the story of a man, who has a lot of assets except children, to stimulate Chinnu Amma. Chinnu Amma talks about Narapillai to her husband Rama Pillai. Narapillai again visits Chinnu Amma in the absence of Rama Pillai with stimulating talks with Chinnu Amma. Rama Pillai has regret because of Chinnu Amma's blaming that it is because of Rama Pillai's fault that they are not having a child. Narapillai again visits her with sexual appeal. But Chinnu Amma denies his sexual approach and desire. She consoles herself that God will give her a baby and asks him to give up his sexual desire for Chinnu Amma. To Chinnu Amma, having such relationship with another man other than her husband is a sin and she never wants to do it. She wants to keep her marriage relation so pure and sincere. Narapillai pretends to appear as good and loving as possible. He wants to satisfy his sexual desire which he has been keeping in mind for years. But she never surrenders her body to him and always resists his approach. At the end of the story she asks Narapillai to leave her and asks him to go back to paandi. Narapillai leaves the place without satisfying his desire.



Through the characterization of Chinnu Amma, Adoor Gopalakrishnan tries to portray the condition of a childless house wife and the attitude of society towards the childless married women. The theme of marriage can also be seen in this story. A woman in this story never wants to come out of the institution of marriage even if she is childless. When Narapillai offers her a healthy child, she wavers for a moment, but suddenly regains control of her senses. Narapillai has only a sexual desire for her. He does not want to keep a real relation with her – he wants to satisfy his desire. But Chinnu Amma boldly resists his desire. Through this story Adoor Gopalakrishnan tries to relate the tag of motherhood with a married woman. The three terms- woman, marriage and motherhood- should be with only her husband. This is the culture of the Kerala society. A child out of illegal relation is a sin. Woman should be loyal to her man. No one will question a man even if the man breaks his loyalty to his woman. Narapillai is a typical representation for those men. A woman is never allowed to carry a baby out of the institution of her marriage. Women should live with the code and conduct of the society. Motherhood is a sacred position for a woman. A woman who cannot be a mother is worthless in the society. But here in this story, Chinnu Amma has a loving and supporting husband. But Raman Pillai, her husband never takes the responsibility of not having a child for them because of his ego. But Chinnu Amma boldly faces all her trials and tribulations. She holds up a positive image even if she is portrayed as a childless woman. Narapillai happens to hold a negative image as he fails to win Chinnu Amma. Being childless is not a sin for Chinnu Amma, but to surrender her body for becoming a mother is against herself and her ethics. Thus through the story of 'House wife' in four women Adoor Gopalakrishnan tries to represent childless women's mental tribulations and resistance. Chinnu Amma reminds Narapillai about his wife and children and asks him to be loyal with them by

giving up his desire for her. The story ends with her soliloquy that sometimes she might have children, if she surrendered herself to Narapillai in her old age. But she is not sure of it and is not able to predict it. She consoles herself that now she has a room for herself as she never surrenders herself to any illegal relationships.

The fourth story *Nithya Kanyaka* tells about the story of a spinster Kamakshi. The story opens with the knocking at door of Kamakshi's room by a man who comes to satisfy his desire. But Kamakshi never opens the door for him and asks him to go back. Then the text opens to tell the story of Kamakshi, how she becomes an ever green spinster. Kamakshi (Nandini) is the eldest daughter of her mother (KPAC Lalitha) and she has two young sisters and a brother. Kamakshi is going through her marriage period and has got a proposal. Ravi vallathol is the man who comes to propose to Kamakshi. But unfortunately he falls in love with her younger sister. He wants to marry only Subadra (Kavya Madhavan) Kamakshi informs her willingness to arrange Subadra's marriage with her even though she is five years younger than Kamakshi. Kamakshi feels alienated and insulted. Subadra's marriage is solemnized with him. Mother is eagerly cooking food for the newly married couple. Meanwhile mother gets irritated with Kamakshi as she is always in deep thoughts. She becomes sleepless as she feels alienated and marginalized by everybody at her home and society. She cries a lot and she blames Subadra's husband as *Pazhuppan*. Kamakshi's life revolves around her home and kitchen. She never loses her control over sensual pleasures even though marriage is denied to her. The marriage broker again comes to her home but he comes with a proposal for her brother, not for Kamakshi. But mother is much worried about Kamakshi's life. Her youngest sister *podimol* (Remya Nambeesan) also gets married. Kamakshi is a fatherless girl and her mother becomes too old. Her sisters and brother are settled with their own families. Her mother is on

death bed now. Her mother dies and Kamakshi became lonely and Kamakshi shifts to Subadra's home after the death of her mother to look after Subadra's children and also to help Subadra as she is carrying her third child by Parameswaran Pillai (Ravi Vallathol). Subadra gets irritated with Kamakshi's presence at her Husband's home. She blames Kamakshi for everything and treats her as their servant. Kamakshi over hears Subadra's talking with her husband about sending Kamakshi back to her home as people begin to say about Kamakshi's staying with Subadra's husband. Kamakshi leaves Subadra's home and comes back to her home. Her youngest sister Sarojam and her brother Kuttan invite Kamakshi to their home as they never want to make Kamakshi lonely. But Kamakshi is not ready to go with any of her siblings. She wants to live alone at her home. The story is about to reach at climax where we can again hear knocking at door. Kamakshi is never ready to open her door to Keshavan; a man who comes to satisfy his desire with Kamakshi. She asks him to go back and declares she is not a woman as he thinks. She accepts her mistake of inviting him to her home. She asks him to forgive her. She openly says that her heart had wavered in a moment and now she regains her control over sense and she strongly says that it will never happen anymore. She asks a priceless question to herself that without a man, a woman can live, can't she? Her answer is "yes"; a woman can live without a man. A woman can become self sufficient and self reliant. What she needs is only a room of her own. This is how the story of spinster ends.

In the story 'The Spinster' Kamakshi is portrayed as a strong woman who can boldly face all the trails and the tribulations raised by the society in which she lives. Through the story Adoor Gopalakrishnan depicts the pathetic condition of unmarried women and shows the spectators that a woman can live without a man. In one of the weak moments, Kamakshi too loses her control over herself. But she never surrenders

herself to anybody. Adoor Gopalakrishnan fully agrees with Virginia Woolf that a woman needs a room of her own that will provide economic and social independence to her and thus she can live without the presence of a man. At the beginning of the story she could not tolerate her alienation. But gradually she regains mental strength to overcome alienation. Gouthaman Bhaskaran in his work “The Authorized

Biography: Adoor Goapalkrishnan- A Life in Cinema” (2010) states that the story is bracketed between two door knocks - one seen from outside the door and other heard inside the room. After several agonizing moments when Kamakshi stands facing the door, hearing the knocks and debating whether to let in the man she had invited earlier, she asks him to go away. Does she find peace which she stops herself from yielding to sexual temptation? Possibly... what is more pertinent is that she resolves to face the world without a man. These stories amply illuminate society’s indifference towards women. The community is inconsiderate, even hostile, when women make unconventional choice. The judge cannot understand how a street walker can live with a poor man and make a home. When Narayan sends Kumari back to her parents home, she is blamed for the break –up and scandals spread. But the man is absolved. Her parents are foxed when she tells them that there had been no marriage at all in the first place. Raman Pillai (Murali), Chinnu’s gentle and caring husband is unwilling to accept that he could be responsible for the premature death of her babies. Nara Pillai is hurt and annoyed when a woman craving for children could turn down a stud like him. It is neither Kamakshi’s fault nor choice that she has to lead the life of a spinster. It is the unfair social system which treats woman as an adjunct of man that is responsible for her humiliating predicament. As an unmarried woman, Kamakshi finds her status in her own house taking a beating. Despite their adversities, these women are no weepy creatures. They have a certain inherent

strength that probably enjoyed greater privileges and a higher status than that elsewhere in the country (198-199).

Through the film *Naalu Pennungal* Adoor Gopala krishnan makes an attempt to analyse the defending attitude of women in contemporary Malayalam cinema. The four women in this movie try to defend male chauvinism. The pathetic state of prostitutes is convincingly presented. Even though prostitutes want to stop selling their body, the authority of power structures never want to rise up her social position. The common thread in these four women is the power of resistance and rising up for their voices against male atrocity and domination. All these images of women have an independent personality. This film highlights society's attitude towards prostitutes, the institution of marriage, suffering of a childless mother and the feelings of an over aged spinster. Their resistance is a counter imaging for their earlier suppressive imaging. The representation of sexuality is commendable. Women and sexuality are the core concepts in feminist film theory, and it also highlights the female body. As Molly Haskell points in her influential work *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies*, three types of women characters appear in this movie i.e., the extra ordinary, ordinary and the ordinary who becomes extra ordinary (160). The extra ordinary women project themselves as strong and powerful. The ordinary who becomes extra ordinary woman portrays herself as strong and powerful. The ordinary woman portrays herself as common, passive and often a victim. The ordinary that becomes extra ordinary woman character in this movie can be categorized into the extra ordinary character like Kumari (Geethu Mohandas); ordinary women like Kunjippennu (Padma Priya) and ordinary who becomes extra ordinary like Kamakshi (NanditaDas). This film begins and ends with knocking at the door by a man who wants to satisfy his desire with Kamakshi. But it is through her powerful voice that

she resists his approach. She resolves to face the world without a man's presence.

Thus Adoor Gopalakrishnan gives a colourful characterisation to the four women in this film even though they belong to different social class of the society.

*22 Female Kottayam* is a 2012 Malayalam film produced by Ashiq Abu. He is a director who upholds the feminist thoughts and values and has tried to present such thoughts through his film *22 Female Kottayam*. This film enlightens many female spectators in Kerala. The film highlights the pathetic condition of a raped woman and the attitude of society towards such women. The text of the film opens with the thanks giving of Tessa to a man for his help to achieve her goal. She meets Cyril (Fahad Fazil) from the travel consultant agency working toward setting up of her visa. Cyril offers her the help to get visa for Canada. Meanwhile she had an encounter with Cyril's boss accidentally. He got his nose broken while Tessa pulled the door without knowing that Boss is about to open the same door. Tessa says sorry to him and takes care of him.

The next scene discloses Tessa's life with her friends. They are also the nurses who have been waiting for visa. One of Tessa's friends gets visa. Actually these friends exploit a man called DK by pretending love and care towards him for meeting all their expenses through DK. The film is about the realistic portrayal of the life of Malayali nurse. All the leading male characters have an eye on Tessa. Cyril makes all arrangement for Tessa's visa. But gradually they fall in love with each other. She discloses her part and she openly dares to say that she is not a virgin. Cyril and Tessa had lovely moments together and soon decide to live together. They have started life together at Cyril's flat. One day at pub, a gay misbehaves with Tessa and Cyril beats him up badly. The guy tries to take revenge upon Cyril and searches for him. Cyril goes to hide with the help of his boss Hedge. Hedge arrives at Cyril's to inform Tessa

about the situation. Then he asks her plainly “can I have sex with you?” A shocked Tessa is then brutally attacked and raped. When Cyril finds out what happened, he becomes violent and wants to kill Hedge. Tessa calms him down saying that she does not want to make incident worse than it is, instead she wants to go to Canada at the earliest. She prefers a life with Cyril instead of committing suicide. When Tess is getting better from her injuries by brutal rape, Hedge visits her again in the absence of Cyril to ask forgiveness. Hedge lies that he is a chronic insomniac and after having sex with her, he got sound sleep. Meanwhile Tessa panics and cries loudly by calling Cyril. Hedge again asks her openly “can I have sex with you one more time. Just one more time?” and Hedge rapes her for second time. Tessa is brutally attacked and raped by Hedge twice. Actually Cyril was cheating Tessa as he is committed to Hedge. So the first rape was intentional with the knowledge of Cyril and second rape was Hedge’s madness. Meanwhile Tessa decides not to go Canada and wants to take revenge on Hedge. She swears no girl should go through the circumstance that she has undergone. Cyril discloses her decision to Hedge and informs that Hedge is in trouble. Hedge asks him to kill Tessa for him and Hedge is ready to pay for it. Cyril plans an operation to trap her. In a coffee shop Cyril puts cocaine drugs in her bag without her knowledge and she is caught by police and as a result Tessa is imprisoned for the acquisition of drugs. Being a nurse she is imprisoned along with a pregnant Zubeida, a known rowdy. Even though Zubeida is a rowdy, she consoles Tessa and mentally gives strength to Tessa. Each prisoner has their own tragic story. Zubeida is imprisoned for a murder case. Zubeida knows Cyril Mathew and his criminal background and she discloses his entire criminal attitude towards her. Zubeida tells her all about the big Land owner Hedge, who is accused in the rape case of an eight year old. Both Cyril and Hedge have a chain of sex rackets. Meanwhile she gets a

letter from one of the patients of the hospital where she has been working for two years before her imprisonment. That old man is very funny and has loving attitude towards Tessa and informs her that he has left half of his property to her in his will just because of her kindness. Zubeida delivers a baby and Ravi uncle dies. Tessa regains her lost sense of self and wants to take revenge on both Hedge and Cyril. She wants to kill them and seeks the help of Zubeida. She is ready to give any kind of help. Zubeida reminds Tessa that women are born with power to kill and can face every bad situation. Zubeida arranges Dineshan (DK), her friend to help Tessa for killing Hedge. When the court sets Tessa free, and with the help of DK (Sathar) she kills Hedge by poisoning him with cobra. Next she arrives in Cochin as a femme fatale in search of Cyril while pretending to be a model. Later one night Tessa hooks up with Cyril in his studio. Cyril who had recognized her career reveals his anger and berates her. He beats her and abuses her by calling her a “slut who does any adjustment to flourish her career” for stopping her further being a menace to him. But his frustration dissolves slowly as he wants to enjoy her company. She reminds him she is a mere woman. But at night Tessa executes her revenge plan and sedates Cyril and sadistically penectomises him. When he regains consciousness, she tells him that she has removed his penis through a medical surgery. While Cyril finds himself in intense pain and bound to his bed, she taunts him to realize his faults and the gross wrongs he committed to her and rationalizes her crime. But he doesn't yield to her taunts and reveals a back story concerning his mother and that his life as a pimp is not entirely his fault. Tessa informs Cyril about his love and she is still somewhere in his heart. She reminds him that she has only lost someone who cheated her whereas he lost someone who genuinely loved him. Now Cyril is stunned that he is not even able to face Tessa. Cyril recollects that her love was true and his love was over shadowed



by his male supremacy concept and greed for wealth. Over the days he admits his actions that caused her pain. Then Tessa leaves him but not before inviting him to settle the score with her. Cyril accepts the challenge of a true criminal as he is and taunts her that he will confront her when he gets ready, probably knowing that he has to settle the score with her in terms of true love with roots in violence. Tessa leaves for Canada, dismantles her cell phone and stops further contact with DK. This is how the plot of *22 Female Kottayam* ends.

The character of Tessa K Abraham is one of the inspiring and motivating characters in Malayalam cinema. In reality, this film has sounded the death knell for hero –worshipping scripts. It has innovative story line and was unanimously accepted at the box office. This film revolves around a nurse who wants to take revenge on her tormentors. She is a normal girl with a younger sister whose parents are dead. It is about the adversities she has to face in life. Tessa K Abraham represents those girls who move out of Kerala to Hyderabad, Orissa and Bangalore in search of nursing jobs and to eventually go abroad. She is portrayed as an avenging woman who wants to question the male supremacy. The film goes through the mental depression of a raped girl. *22 Female Kottayam* is one of the films which boldly portray women as avenging. It comes under revenge genre. The film opens with happy and normal life but with a difference. There is a marked absence of dominant paternal figures. The female protagonist is always a working woman (nurse) with a strong presence on screen. Tessa falls in love with Cyril and scenes move on well. But these initial conditions are upset when the female protagonist is raped. But the raped woman never files a case against her assailant, who is easily identifiable. Instead she decides to take revenge upon her assailant. Here Tessa transforms herself from a sexual and judicial victim to an avenging woman. Rape scenes are not unusual in Malayalam

cinema. But the avenging women in films like *22 Female Kottayam* is new. The traumatic events that the victim experience is realistically presented. In this film there are no heroes only villains. Cyril and Hedge – their dominating power is reduced to the lowest level. Tessa is ready to even penectomise the hero and leads the entire story. She is acting for those women who are being victimized. She speaks and acts for such women. Her revenge upon Hedge is commendable and she makes Hedge to experience the pain and fear that Tessa herself has undergone. She kills him by poisoning with cobra. She makes Cyril penectomised in order to realize that without penis, he is nothing. It is the penis that makes him feel he is superior. That is why she decides to take revenge upon him by penectomising. The film revolves around a kind of sadomasochist pleasure, the rape revenge narrative. Lalitha Gopalan in her essay “Avenging Women in Indian cinema” she claims that:

It appears that the rape –revenge scenes in the avenging women genre similarly rely on the generation of sadomasochistic pleasure, a pleasure that unwillingly challenges, however provisionally the straight forward sadistic impulses of rape in Indian cinema. Because rape scenes are inextricably meshed with the revenge plot in their genre, the masochistic dimensions of the rape scene far outweigh their conventional sadistic associations; while at the same time the unfolding revenge plot lean on provoking the spectators’ sadistic investment in revenge and punishment. Interweaving sadism and masochism through different filmic moments, this genre upsets the normalizing fetishistic economy with the fragmented woman’s body as the central objects, but complicating these generic pleasures is the continuing tussle between every Indian film –maker and the state over

censorship. As a result, it is precisely through over submission to  
 censorship regulations that the commercial film industry parodies the  
 authority of the state a relationship that is not unlike the masochists  
 relationship to patriarchal law; therefore, we may have to consider the  
 possibility of the rape revenge device as yet another ruse to circumvent  
 censorship, resorting once again to the woman's body. (51)

In the essay "Carnivalising new Generation Kerala from Sylvan Innocence to  
 Urban Experience" Dr.N. Sajan makes comments on the film *22 Female Kottayam*  
 and the character of Tessa.K.Abraham that the female subjects in *22 Female  
 Kottayam* is constituted by the cinematic narrator in manner that attempts to  
 reconfigure the relationship among gender powers and social conventions. It appears  
 to make a radical departure from the stereotypical rape –revenge narrative of  
 yesteryears. The first half of the movie traces the descendent career motives of Tessa  
 who is deftly set to said smoothly into a prospective profession in spite of the travails  
 of male gaze that she encounters in the physical space of a hi-tech hospital she has  
 only sick male bodies to nurse and the sexual gaze of the bystanders seeking a space  
 for herself, she gets into an intimate relationship with Cyril when she finds to be  
 mentor and confidante though not a prospective life partner who would ultimately  
 bring in happy conventional resolution. She occupies a busy demanding world where  
 even the pubs and bars become testing grounds of her resilience and inner strength.  
 The visuals are coded with frames that reiterate in Laura Mulvey words a sort of "to  
 be looked –at ness" (56) this could be discerned in the night scene where she drinks  
 with masculine pace and goes back in the morning for work unfazed without any  
 hangover. The mise –en seine retroactively carrier forward the film narrative by  
 investing the conventional paradigm of the "active/male and passive / female" but

this inversion of paradigm cannot be tolerated by the implied film maker or the male viewer, so Tessa has to be put in her place by Cyril at of direct ( 42).

The film *22 Female Kottayam* creates the castration anxiety – the presence of the female figure frightens the male since he realizes that he too could be without a penis. Tessa does not want to kill Cyril for his deceitfulness towards her instead of it, she wants to penectomise him. The act of penectomisation has two implications. It is because of Tessa's possessiveness that Cyril should never approach any girl with sexual desire other than her. Or it is also a warning and punishment for Cyril for cheating her in a planned way. This film is a warning for malevolent male chauvinistic society. Tessa presents herself as feminine fatale in order to charm and ensure Cyril. She pretends as a model and makes use of her ex-lover Benny to get a chance to be the model in Cyril Advertisement Company. The film also gives hints on how the females have been cheated by males in different ways. Benny, the salesman in a medical shop, makes Tessa fall in love with him by hiding the truth of his married life. Benny exploits Tessa both mentally and physically in her teenage life. But on the other hand she trusts Benny blindly without knowing his true colour. Later Tessa threatens Benny to avenge upon Cyril. The character of Tessa K. Abraham is portrayed as avenging and aggressive woman. She makes use of all womanizers to achieve her goal in an excellent way. The film focuses on the sexual gazes on female and female gaze on male also. In the coffee shop scene Tessa's younger sister makes comments on Cyril's buttocks by giving such a look at him. The film really creates a paradigm shift in the Malayalam film industry. Usually it is the man who controls the film fantasy as the representative of power. But in *22 Female Kottayam* it is upturned and the female controls the film fantasy and female (Tessa K. Abraham) emerges as the centre of power to avenge. Even though she offers herself to DK for his help, it is

symbolically presented by dismantling her cell phone in the end of fabula and leaves for better prospects abroad. The concluding scene of the film is entirely against the traditional way of Malayalam cinema climax. Here happens an erotic catharsis. The *Sjuzet* of the film is highly influenced by the American author Sydney Sheldon's crime fiction novel *If Tomorrow Comes* (1985) in which an ordinary woman who is framed by the Mafia takes her subsequent quest for vengeance towards them. Tessa's character resembles the woman (Tracy) in that novel. Tessa decides to revenge herself on all the men who have ruined her life like Tracy. Tessa's attempts to regain her lost sense of self are an inspiration for the spectators. In our society raped women are marginalized and those women never get a chance to empower themselves. But *22 Female Kottayam* is an inspiration for such women. Rape scene is realistically presented and the spectators can feel the mental and physical pain of Tessa while she has been raped by malevolent Hedge. The second half of the film assumes the imaging of horror film where Tessa makes herself as an avenging woman and as a castrator. Tessa K. Abraham is imaged as a bold, a vengeful and aggressive woman. All women characters in *22 Female Kottayam* are imaged as self-reliant and self-sufficient. They know well how to tackle the situation. They never want to surrender themselves to any man. Instead they utilize all womanizers to establish their identity. The prison scene shows many women who have done vengeance to those men who ruined their life. All women in jail have their own stories of both mental and physical torturings by men. But those women can make themselves ready even to kill. Zubeida is imaged as a 'rowdy' in front of other prisoners in the film. The criminal background of Zubeida has helped Tessa to take revenge on Hedge. All these women images are counter images to earlier women images of passivity. These women are not submissive or silent in nature against the male action. They are much

empowered with their own feminine qualities. *22 Female Kottayam* portrays the space of women in the globalized world. It creates a 'social link' where women get enough freedom beyond their restriction. In the globalised context, gender roles are redefined and redesigned. Tessa, a twenty two year old, professionally oriented nursing student from Kottayam is the female subject who is set out to shed her feminine and social constraints and carves out a career and life for herself in the emerging global job market. T.V. Chandran, one of the veteran directors in the Malayalam film industry, has produced powerful social movie *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* (Lesson One: A Wail). The film has focused on a teenage Muslim girl, set in Malappuram with a strong message about the Muslim culture in Kerala. The film is based on the story by Aryadan Shoukath and the script is done by the director himself. The film throws light on the problems of child marriage prevailing in the Muslim community of Kerala. The imaging of Shahina becomes one of the powerful representations of Muslim women in India. Shahina is a teenage Muslim girl studying in the tenth standard. Her relatives and the community chief decide to get married her to a man named Razak who is already married and having a child. Shahina aspires to attend school and even she shows her ignorance about the married life. He exploits Shahina sexually in the very first day of their wedding by drugging her and later divorces her by saying that she is not fit for the family. Shahina is happy with the divorce that she can return to school but soon realizes her pregnancy. This is the *fabula* of the film text.

When the text of the film opens Razia, a teenage girl, holding a baby is sent back to home by her husband because her parents have failed to give the promised dowry. Razia's father is a sick man who cannot afford the dowry for her. Mother is also tensed and sad as her daughter has come back to home. As Razia's family

belongs to an economically backward class, they opt for a marriage by which Razia had to accept an unknown man from the neighbouring province of Mysore. At the age of fourteen, Razia gives birth to a baby. Now she is about to be divorced on dowry issue. When she is back to her home from her husband's home, it becomes a talk among the neighbors. Razia dropped her studies from ninth standard when she is forced to get married. The arrival of Razia makes Shahina happy. Even though Shahina wants to visit Razia in the morning itself, her mother denied it and asked her to visit Razia in the evening after her class. Shahina's mother Saphia is a young widow and makes a living by making rice dumplings and selling them at a nearby teashop. Shahina has a young brother who is also a school boy and he carries rice dumplings to teashop by his bicycle. Tea shop is a place where elder people gather and engaged in public talk. The next scene focuses on Shahina's school and class rooms. She goes to school with her friend Janakikutty, her Hindu neighbour. Her Malayalam teacher is so worried of the drop out of Muslim girl students in the name of marriage. When the teacher makes a comment on the pathetic condition of Muslim girl students, the Muslim teacher stands totally against it and justifies that early marriage of Muslim girls helps them not to walk in a wrong path and they do not come to do something immoral. This is the attitude of Muslim male teacher even if he is educated. After the class, Shahina, Janakikutty and a young girl visit Razia and her baby. Razia is so sad and is not able to be happy with her baby. When Shahina asks Razia how she gives birth to a baby, Razia breaks silence with tears and Shahina tries to cheer her up by talking about the baby and their days at school. Shahina visits Razia every day along with her tenth standard text books. Shahina is a studious girl and her ambition is to attend college after tenth along with Janakikutty. Her mother Saphia supports her well. But Saphia's brother has started to compel her for the

marriage of Shahina. Saphia also wants Shahina to continue her studies.

Unfortunately Shahina is a fatherless girl and her mother has not much voice to speak for the rights. Hassan Moyeen (Mamukoya) is a busy match maker. It is he who matches all marriages in that particular area. He supports even second marriage and Mysore marriage. Hassan Moyeen happens to see Shahina while she comes from school. He thinks of matching Shahina with Razak. Razak is a thirty year old young married man with five year old daughter. But Razak is in need of money as he wants to go abroad. So Razak decides to marry again to get dowry to fund his trip in search of a job. Hassan Moyeen visits Shahina's home along with Saphia's brother. Saphia becomes so sad about the marriage proposal to Shahina. The 'girl seeing' ceremony happens during the class time. Shahina rejects Hassan Moyeen and Razak. But her uncle, Hassan Moyeen, Mulla chief and old man visit Shahina to arrange her marriage, but she tries and runs away from home. Her uncle and Hassan Moyeen follow her, but they get tired and they could not find Shahina. At last Shahina seeks shelter in her own class room. She is taken away from school and her 'Nikah' has been solemnized at the age of fifteen with 'married Razak'.

After marriage, Shahina leaves her own home and is sent away to Razak's home. At his home, Wahida, his first wife and his daughter are staying. The situation is so ironic and tragic. The feelings of Wahida and his daughter are not taken for consideration by Razak. Shahina is in his bedroom and her wedding night with Razak is so pathetic. When Razak tries to make a physical relation, Shahina is frightened and she runs away from him. Shahina attacks Razak when he approaches her. Razak's mother is helpless and she tries to console Shahina. Razak meets with repeated failures in his attempt to consummate his marriage with Shahina. The injuries of Razak made by Shahina are healed by his first wife Wahida. Whenever she meets



Razak, she becomes panic. Meanwhile Shahina becomes more attached with his daughter, Mumthaz and the two become inseparable. Wahida has become silent and she still loves her daughter's father. Wahida feels sorry for Shahina as the very sight of Razak provokes revulsion in her. Sex is something that Shahina cannot make sense of. Before his second marriage Razak informs Wahida that he is marrying for the benefit of Wahida and their daughter. But it so sad that, with Wahida's presence, Razak wants to have sexual satisfaction with fifteen year old Shahina and Razak forces Wahida to give sedatives to Shahina. When she sleeps Razak fulfills his sexual desire over Shahina. When Shahina wakes up she turns hysterical in anger. When she becomes hysterical, they have treated it with superstitious beliefs. Razak uses her hysteric behaviour as a pretext to divorce her. Though divorce comes as a relief to her, Razak quickly resumes his journey to life and she returns home. Shahina resumes her studies. But on the first day of exams, she slumps on her desk. The medical examination reveals that she is pregnant. The whole world collapses before her when she realizes that she is pregnant. Her mother dies of heart attack after hearing the news. She is accused of adultery as her husband claims that he has never touched her. Thus began a series of dark nights for her and her unborn baby. She is ostracized; a poor innocent young girl has to undergo social punishment throughout her life just because of male chauvinism.

As far as the character of Shahina is concerned she fails to resist the discussion of the religious priest and accepts destiny at the age of fifteen. She also becomes the victim for dowry, one of the evil customs in Muslim community. Shahina epitomizes the entire Muslim girls who happen to be helpless because of male chauvinism. The film opens the eyes of society. It focuses on the issues of Muslim women and also throws light on social evils and identity crisis that a woman

undergoes. Even though film focuses upon the life of Muslim women belonging to Malappuram district in Kerala state, the conditions of Muslim women in other districts in Kerala is not much better. The major problems highlighted in the film include the inability of Muslim women to complete their basic education, social evils like dowry, polygamy, marriage and divorce. The pathetic condition of divorced women and widows are highlighted. Another problem faced is adultery and the text of the film revolves around the women characters and their issues. It is a realistic presentation of Muslim community in India, especially in Kerala. Even though Islam religion claims to respect women and protect their rights, in reality it is not so. In Muslim culture males become dominant and they restrict the freedom of speech, freedom to obtain education, freedom to choose their men, freedom to travel of women are restricted. Only men can and should enjoy such kinds of freedom. In this film at the age of fifteen Shahina becomes the second wife of Razak and happens to be divorced after being pregnant at a very young age. Razia is also seen to be at the edge of divorce because; her parents fail to give dowry even though she has a young baby. But their friend Janakikutty almost the same age gets proper education and freedom. But the only difference is that Janakikutty belongs to Hindu community and those people value education and respect the choice of women compared with Muslim community. Polygamy is not so prevalent in Hindu community and it is clearly presented in the film *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*. The lives of Mullahs are presented in the film and the mullah in the film insisted that they were following the Quran in safeguarding the women, who would go astray if they were educated. This is the attitude of Mullahs even in the real society also. One of the high class Muslim men in the film has more than three wives. All of them have covered their face and body in the belief that nothing in the body of women should be exposed and all those

women are in Burquas. The covering of the whole body of women symbolizes the restriction and prevention of freedom of women and their choice. The wives of Muslim men (polygamy) are always in good terms and they are never seen as jealous or possessive. The wives of mullah and the wives of Razak are good examples. It shows that Muslim women have to accept the double oppression that is of being a woman as well as being a wife. Wahida still loves her husband even though he marries fifteen year old Shahina. The pain of Wahida and her five year old daughter Mumthaz can be understood clearly. The marriage institution becomes a market where buying and selling of women can be seen. Here the dowry plays the role of money. Razak marries Shahina not to give her a life but to build up a life for himself by buying Shahina. She costs twenty five thousand rupees only. After Razak gets money, he throws away 'that item'. Shahina is a play doll for him. But he wants to satisfy his sexual desire with her. For this, he is even ready to sedate Shahina with the help of Wahida, his first wife. The emotional feelings of women are completely ignored by men in the society. Women have no power to take decision. The pathetic condition of a young widow is presented through the character of Saphia, Shahina's mother. She tries hard to make both ends meet. She gives much value for Shahina's education. Being a widow Saphia is forced to accept the decision of her elder brother and Mullahs. So she accepts the marriage of her young daughter even though she wishes to give proper education for her girl. When Saphia comes to know about the divorce and pregnancy of Shahina, she dies of heart attack. In this film Saphia is a voiceless woman who is forced to accept the orders from the elders in society silently. In the case of Wahida, she has to accept the second marriage of her husband. she never speaks against the wishes of Razak. In front of Wahida, Razak approaches fifteen year old Shahina for sex. When Shahina makes injuries on Razak; Wahida tries

to heal those injuries without speaking anything negatively. Somehow Wahida lives in his home and she never tries to leave his home even when another woman comes in her place. She never wants to be a divorcee for her five year old daughter. In the case of Razia, she becomes the victims of dowry and Mysore marriage. Because of her poor financial background, she happens to accept an unknown Mysore marriage at the age of fourteen and has become a mother at that very young age. When her parents fail to give the assured dowry amount, Razia is sent back to her home with her baby. The Mysore man comes after sending her back to get the remaining dowry amount. In the case of Jankikutty she has much more freedom than Shahina and Razia. She is free to have proper education. It shows that non – Muslim girls have more freedom of choice and lesser societal restrictions although in real life not all non Muslim girls/women are as freed from the shackles of society as portrayed in the film *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*. The attitude of Mullahs is much worse in the film *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*. They have learned the holy Quran and they try to misinterpret. One of the teachers in the school appears like a mullah and supports child marriage and is bothered about giving proper education to Muslim girl children and never worried to the drop outs of Muslim girls in the school. According to that Mullah, girls should be married in the early age so that they never mislead to the wrong path. The real condition of Muslim life is portrayed in this film with a strong social theme. Even though Indian constitution guarantees free and compulsory education to children up to the age of fourteen without any discrimination on the basis of caste, religion, creed, sex and race, many of the Muslim girls in India are not able to enjoy this right to education and right to the freedom of speech. It is an eye opening movie. In one of the interviews director TV Chandran says that the intellectuals, who sympathize with women in Iran and Iraq, ignore the plight of

women in their own state. The Muslim culture is realistically depicted by script writer Aryadan Shoukath. This film could open the eyes of thousands of Muslim parents. To an extent this film has succeeded into empower Muslim women in Kerala.

The imaging of women plays an important role for social empowerment. Films act as mediator. There are a lot of archetypal female images and stereotypic images. But the imaging of women in films varies from time to time. Oxford dictionary of critical theory defines archetype as this:

Archetypes are ways of thinking and acting that derive from the most primitive aspects of our psyche, which for Jung means that dimension of the psyche we have in common with our most distant ancestors.

There is a large variety of archetypes, each one pointing to a different mode of action such as caring for another or defending oneself from attack. Taken together they form a dynamic preconscious system which is actively seeking actualization in the form of an association, complex idea or at the negative extreme a symptom. The most well-known example is the binary pair animus /anima – the former is the archetypal image woman has of man and the latter the archetypal image man has of woman. Archetype can usefully be compared with the structure referred to in ethnology as innate releasing mechanisms. They are powerful force compelling action which is why the conscious has to engage them and bring them under control. (26)

The term “archetype” has its origins in ancient Greek word *archein*, which means “original or old”, and *typos*, which means “pattern, model or type”. The combined meaning is “original pattern” from which all other similar persons, objects or concept are derived, copied modelled or emulated. Chelsey Latimer in her essay

“Female Archetypes” summarizes the twelve main archetypes that Carl Jung defined. Jung identified twelve types that reveal human motives, values, meanings and personality traits. Jung divided these types into three sets of four umbrellas determining their intent and purpose; ego, soul and self. Following is outline of the twelve common female archetypes and character that match their description.

According to Chelsey Latimer, the innocent archetype is often the naive, wide eyed traditionalist. Eternally optimistic, faith based, saint –like and yearning to do the right thing. This could also be the girl – next door archetype, the ingénue. The hero is a common archetype in action TV/film, the lady rising from the ashes to prove her strength through courage and courageous acts. The rescuer, the dragon slayer and the crusader and hero believes in mastery and competence. They are tenacious and carry an air of confidence. The orphan or the “regular girl”, is often the working class very eager to belong and to feel, to be seen and loved. They are down to earth with solid morals, empathy and non- judgment. Their main desire is to fit in. The care giver /the nurturer archetype is the common ‘mother figure’ archetype. If there is someone in your life who has a tendency to save food or put everyone’s needs before their own she is termed the nurturer archetype. They believe in compassion and generosity though in the image of the martyr. They are altruistic, protective and supportive; they are the personification of selfishness. The rebel archetype is fairly easy to see and define. They believe in shock value, rule breaking, shaking up the system and absolute freedom. They would prefer to dance to their own dream and actively destroy the norm. The explorer archetype believes in seeing the world and taking in as much as the world has to offer. They are fiercely independent, ambitious and value individuality, transformation through change and new experiences. Similar to the rebels they do not believe in conforming and would rather be in the world than of the

world. The lover's main desire is intimacy, passion partnership and commitment. A lover puts relationships and physical/emotional intimacy above all things. They use their power of charm and desirability to attain and satiate all of their needs. This is likely the most common female archetype in current pop culture, TV/Film. The creator is the artist, the imaginative thinker and innovator. They believe in cultivating talent, skill and visualization. The core desire of their lives is to feel. They are the believers in day dreaming and following their inner voice. The writer, painter, dancer, sculptor are all creator archetypes. The jester is the one cracking the joker, finding levity and laughter in heavy situations and often has a self-deprecating sense of humour, cheerful loyal and likable. Their life's strategy is to find playfulness in all things. The sage is the one who seeks truth, knowledge and self-reflection above all things. They need to have an understanding of the world. They are academics, religious figures, philosophers or teachers who value the intellectual world, over the physical world. Their motto is, "The truth will set you free". As far as the ruler/the boss is concerned, Power is the goal with the ruler archetype. They are competitive and dynamic, having a position of authority and leadership as ideal for their archetype. They desire to control prosperity and command attention /admiration. The Magician /the Free Spirit archetype are called, "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl", which have been referred to lately with indie films and popular Zooey Deschanel character types. The magician believes in the fanciful, in making things happen, frivolity and impulsiveness. They can also be healers, shamans and fantastic story tellers. They do believe that dreams come true.

In films, all these feminine archetypal images can be seen such as the innocent, the Hero, the Orphan, the Care Giver, the Rebel and the Lover are commonly seen in films especially in Malayalam films. In the film, *22 Female*

*Kottayam* directed by Ashiq Abu, the role played by Tessa K Abraham is the archetypal feminine image of the Hero and is successful in proving strength through courage and bold actions. Tessa K. Abraham decides to take revenge upon those who spoilt her life and also plays as the rebel. Adoor Gopala Krishnan's *Naalu Pennungal* gives an apt example for feminine archetypal images like Innocent, the Hero, the Orphan, the Lover, the Care Giver etc. – the imaging of Kunjipennu in *Naalu Pennungal* is like 'The orphan' who is often the working class having a desire to belong and feel to be seen and loved. The imaging of Kumari by Adoor Gopalakrishnan is that of the care giver or the nurturer – a mother figure, who has a tendency to save, feed or a put everyone else's needs before their own. The imaging of Chinnu Amma also is a care giver or the nurturer. Kamakshi, one of the characters in the film *Naalu Pennungal* is the archetypal imaging of the innocent. She is often imaged as the naïve, wide eyed traditionalist. She is portrayed as an optimist, faith based, saint like and yearns to do the right things. She never surrenders herself before any men even though her life ends to be as a spinster. The imaging of Nirupama Menon in the film *How Old are You?*, directed by Roshan Andrews, is like an explorer. She believes in seeing the world and taking in as much as the world has to offer. She becomes an independent woman with the help of her friend Susan David. Nirupama values individuality, transformation through change and new experiences. She is successful in finding out her own self. In the film *Artist*, directed by Shyama Prasad, the character called Gayathri (Ann Augustine) plays the role of Rebel. She believes in shock value, role breaking, shaking up the system and absolute freedom. She would prefer to dance to her own drum and to actively destroy the norm. She prefers the life style of 'living together' even though she belongs to an upper caste Brahmin family. She breaks up the conventional rules and starts life with Michael



(Fahad fazil) without the conventional marriage ceremony. The character of Anjali Arakkal in the film *Munnariyippu* is a suitable example for the archetypal image 'The Creator'. The creator is the artist, the imaginative finger and innovator. She believes in cultivating talent, skill and visualization. Anjali wants to write the life history of C.K Raghavan, an imprisoned man that would bring a turning point in the history of her career as a professional journalist. The imaging of Shahina, a Muslim girl in the film *Padam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* is a Muslim girl who values the intellectual world.

Women play an important role in the understanding of the social reality i.e., the condition of women in society. Film is a social media in which women and their potentials have been perceived by the viewers. Women are perceived as different images. The image of women in the Indian tradition can be seen in the traditional literature and epic like Ramayana and Mahabharata. In the essay "The Image of Women in the Indian Tradition Some Reflections" (1996), G.C Pande opines that:

An image is generally considered to be the likeness or representation of an object real or unreal. It is something which may be apprehended sensuously or mentally as a distinct form which refers to something other than the presentation itself by virtue of some intrinsic feature such as resemblance rather than more convention. There is view which is impossible to disprove that we never perceive external objects but only images or representations, and there is also the view that ideas as cognitive mental states or acts are also images in the sense that they are also constructs formations which claim to be representations of society and have the logical character of being true of false. Without pronouncing on the nature of objects in themselves, it may be said that

ideas represent them formally and that ideas themselves are represented by symbols conventionally. (40)

## Chapter Three

### The Feminine Spaces in Malayalam Cinema

Society is made up of heterosexual human beings wherein the space of sex is measured on the basis of tradition, culture and religion. In India, the concept of woman is constructed according to the cultural heritage. Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory defines culture as “it is a set of beliefs, practices, rituals and traditions shared by a group of people with at least one point of common identity such as their ethnicity, race or nationality and it is a product conscious choice and not the instincts” (105). Space is the physical environment inhabited by a group of people. So the cultural space is the space which is given to a group of people in a particular society. As far as Malayalam cinema is concerned it reflects the social realities and the atrocity prevalent in Kerala society. The space of women in the society is measured according to the so called cultural heritage since the gender is a cultural construct. The present study analyses the space of women in Malayalam cinema that how women create their own space on screen.

The social condition of Kerala is mainly determined by the male dominated power structure. In such a social structure women are marginalized and ostracized by men and majority of space is occupied by men. It is the men who measure the space of women and the same is reflected in films too. Malayalam film industry is mainly dominated by heroes not the heroines. As Laura Mulvey opined, film is the product of patriarchal unconsciousness, each of the Malayalam films tries to project the male outlook and the female perspective is abated. Even though Malayalam films try to project the issues of women, in the climax it is the hero who wins. A slight change can be seen after the globalization where the sphere of women in Malayalam cinema

has also got a cultural traditional and religious heritage. The patriarchal culture of Kerala plays an important role in marginalization of women characters in Malayalam film industry. Most of the films cast as the male lead. There are a few films which cast the female lead. Malayalam films directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, T.V Chandran, Shyama Prasad and Padmarajan and so on try to make women centered films and focus on the representation of women issues in the public space. Films like *Naalu Pennungal* (Four Women), *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*, *Artist*, *22 Female Kottayam* have focused on the issues of women and women's attitude towards those issues. This makes the female spectators more enlightened and it shows how to tackle the problems in a vivid manner.

Identity is the key factor that helps to attain independence. A person is independent only when she or he has her or his own identity. There are three factors that decide a person's identity which are culture, tradition and religion. Basically human beings are classified into men, women, gays, lesbians and transgender. Among these classifications it is only the men who gain the complete identity as 'Man'. They are free to do everything, they please and all the decisions are taken by them. The other remaining categories are identified mainly by their sex, caste, religion, race and ethnicity. A woman's identity is created according to the sex she possesses, the culture she owes, the religion she believes and the traditions, she supposed to follow. Thus identity is something related with the image one has, or the image of one who is. It is either self created or imposed by some external factors. These two identities are not always in harmony with one another. So there arises a clash between the self-created identity and imposed identity. It is the men who possess power structure and it is the women who possess the imposed identity and they are excluded from the

power structure. In films it is assumed that heroes possess the self created identity and the heroines have dependent identity and space.

In the essay “Understanding Cinema” written by K.G George, he states that cinema is an art of time and space. The spatial properties of cinema refer, first of all, the arrangements of objects within the frame. The term ‘frame’ refers to the dimensions of the projected area on screen objects can be arranged within this area in terms of height, width and apparent depth. The arrangement of objects within these dimensions is the art of composition. As cinema is an art of time and space, it also deals with the social spaces and social timings. The present study tries to analyze the impact of socio cultural and political changes in the Malayalam film industry and how women occupy a space of their own after the social reformation and renaissance in Kerala. Thus there is a need for a historical analysis of the Kerala modernity and its impact on Malayalam cinema. As a result of modernity in Kerala, women are able to find their own ‘space’ in public irrespective of their caste, religion and sex and women possess what they need. The present study focuses on the feministic movement in Kerala and its impact on the socio cultural conditions of Kerala. As cinema is the mirror of society, it reflects the socio-political, economic and cultural condition of Kerala society.

Kerala is labeled as God’s own country for its well-known cultural heritage, tradition and hospitality. Kerala state was formed in 1956 and by the end of 1990’s, it has gained international attention because of its outstanding literacy, low infant and maternal mortality, falling birth rates and of its health system. As a result of modernization, there happens a new cultural and social phenomenon which has given new ways of thinking that changed the attitude of the people in Kerala. J.Devika, in her essay “Being in-translation in a Post-Colony: Translating Feminism in Kerala

State, India” argues that the shaping of Malayalee modernity, however, began in the early to mid-nineteenth century, with the establishment of British dominance over Malayalam – speaking areas. The princely states of Travancore and Cochin acknowledged British dominance and the Malayalam – speaking areas to the north were absorbed into the British presidency of Madras as the province of Malabar. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, a whole array of agents – missionaries, colonial officials, the newly educated local elite began to voice their criticism of the existing socio-cultural order and propose means to change it in “modern ways”. J. Devika states that, this was a debate that would continue right up to the mid twentieth century. The same period also has witnessed the emergence of ‘community movements’ in Malayalee society, which made intense efforts to reform the customary practices and hierarchies of particular castes and give shape to “modern communities” (Jeffrey 2003). According to J. Devika, this idea of modern community is to be realized through reformist efforts in the future inevitably pivoted on the ideal of the individual as naturally endowed with gendered qualities which, however, needed to be developed further through suitable education in order to produce “men” and “women” (Devika 2007). These processes of gendering continued quite unabated through the twentieth century, and the communist movement was itself an important vehicle of the process.

J. Devika has attempted to translate western feminist ideas into local language. Before independence, the women throughout India were not concerned about their oppression and exploitation and they did not feel a need to struggle for equal rights. The western first wave feminism had fought for women’s rights of equality with men which have continued for almost two decades in the west. Such a struggle is not happened in India because after Independence, the Indian women had

become really conscious of their social, legal, economic and political rights which are guaranteed by Indian constitution. What ‘she’ needs is the all round liberation/freedom i.e., emancipation – emotional intellectual and moral liberation of women. As far as Kerala is concerned, the concept of emancipation of women arrived only in the late 1980’s. Most of the feminists in Kerala have attempted to liberate women’s emotional, intellectual and moral potentials. They have tried to make aware of their intellectual capabilities. They have been trying to inject the Western feminist concepts among the Kerala women. In the words of J. Devika:

...this arose from the larger recognition that we needed to bridge the “communication chasm” a gap which, we felt, was seriously affecting our ability to intervene not only in everyday language and micro politics, but even in public debate – where we seemed to have become a presence, but often an ineffective one. We all agreed that a key political goal of any feminist project would be to infiltrate public discourse, not just by bringing into view new issues now recognized as public and political, but also by providing new concepts ideas – through which reality is constructed afresh. Thus, over the years unwanted male attention has come to be recognized as a form of violence against women, referred to in public not as “eve – teasing” but as “sexual harassment”. This act of re – naming is in fact one of the most powerful ways in which feminism may become an enduring force in public life. (2)

According to J. Devika, in a post colonial society like Kerala, the feminist effort to intervene in public discourse by illuminating the workings of patriarchal power cannot but involve an effort to translate feminist concepts into the local culture

and idiom. It is since the mid 1990's; the term 'gender' becomes popular to address the issue of male domination.

As an impact of globalization and liberalization, there happens a change in the role of women in society. Colonization resulted in the rise of educated middle class and that leads to the process of social class formation. In Kerala, caste plays an important role. It signified varied roles for women. As MeeraVelayudhan opines, in her article "Changing Roles and Women's Narratives" (1994):

The gender tensions are thus conditioned by combination of contests for control within the household, over property, unequal rights (even for males) for inheritance, the process of change in property relations, the authority of the land lord – priests (Namboodiris) and other factors linked with the emergence of state and class formations, i.e., conflicts set in motion by colonialism, social reform and nationalist struggles, the cultural impact of English Education and the proselytizing activities of Christian missionaries. (65)

MeeraVelayudhan has commented that caste struggles provide the background for the development of class consciousness and the emergence of a distinctly forward looking feminist discourse, leading to the formation of women's organizations and committee. Their sphere of activity extends from the household and workplace to the domain of politics. The struggles against caste oppression were the precursor to social reforms within the caste. Women's organizations emerged during the course of these conflicts (66).

As a result of the arrival of feminist concepts in Kerala, women have become more alert on their own selfhood and have got an intense power to raise voice against the male atrocity towards women. A lot of Namboodiri women came forward and



were active in social reform movement and stressed the need for women to change their silent and surrendering attitude towards men. Meera Velayudhan states that “Women must take a lead in smashing the old structures and building a new one. Women were not the weaker sex. They had to find a way out to liberate themselves. They needed to develop a wider outlook, greater tolerance, power of thinking, reading habit, courage etc” (76). Meera Velayudhan quotes one of the arguments made by Ambadi Ekavamma in her powerful article “Our Ideals” that:

...there was a historical basis for women’s subordination and sexual division of labour. Even in so – called civilized countries, women are tied down by rules for chastity and sexual morality while men faced no such constraints, she argued. Critical of the men who stated that women need to be ‘given’ freedom, she maintained that with the growth of the idea of the equality, however superficial, the attitude that women must be sheltered by men will gradually disappear.

Unfortunately, an atmosphere of competition was developing as men feared that women were challenging them. This was evident from their attitude toward women’s employment and representation in elected bodies. Motherhood was a service women performed for men and society at large. Given an option to be free from these functions, it was quite possible for women to compete with men. (77)

All these social changes make women more conscious about the emancipation at all fields – moral, emotional and intellectual women have got a little more space than they have earlier. Women have expressed their emotions and intellectual thoughts through their writings and their public speeches. This social change of Kerala was also reflected in the popular literature and cinema. Before the arrival of

feminism into Kerala, Malayalam cinemas were purely male – centered and the female characters were always depicted as subordinate to male characters. Women were considered only as an emblem of sexual gratification for men. Woman is always portrayed as an ideal one – obedient daughter, loving and faithful wife, caring mother etc. Though the dominant trends are involved in a process of image building, they are not iconoclastic; rather they wish to give a new meaning to old images or seek out images of strong, capable, knowledgeable women in the ancient myths and texts. They attempt to reinterpret the images of Sati, Savitri, Sita, Draupadi images as that of strong women, not the models of women subjugated by men. They constantly seek out illustrious women from the past unravel the existence of wise strong talented courageous women from mythology and the epics. They find talented women in history, in different lands and under differing faiths. These narratives suggest women’s attempts to create a different self – image. In that sense, they are participants in the construction of gendered identity (78).

It is very clear in the Malayalam film industry too that women characters have tried to occupy more spaces by creating their own self images. Globalization also becomes one of the reasons of the total change of the socio – economic and political conditions of women in Kerala. *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines globalization as “A complex process involving the world wide diffusion of cultural products, the stream lining of international manufacturing and trade, the standardization of global financial markets, and the prevalence of new media technology capable of simultaneous real time transmission of content everywhere in the world” (202). Globalization has marked a paradigm shift in media and is also reflected in the films. The importance of media and of films and the imaging of women with new identity are taken for granted. The space of each man and woman

has widened because of the democratization of public sphere. Sangeetha Datta in her article “Globalization and Representation of Women in Indian Cinema” (2000) opines that:

An imaginary national identity and sense of belonging emerges with modernity and with the capitalism that made possible increasing dissemination of newspaper and the novel form in a common language linked to national identity. This is a question of how daily routine practices—homogenizing cultural elements – so called, Americanization as in shopping malls, food chains like MacDonalD’s and entertainment such as American movies and television comfort the deeper sense of belonging to a culture in which social and religious practices and family relations are centre signs of specific kinds of cultural belonging. (72)

Even though globalization came in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, Indians had a tendency to imitate the first world countries which is actually the result of colonization. British people had their maximum to believe ourselves that our culture and tradition are much inferior to them. They made a psychological impact on Indians and forced ourselves to learn and imitate the culture of the West. In sum, western culture has a mass influence on Indian market – clothing, media and food, particularly Indian cinema. The history of Indian cinema shows a continuous influence of world cinema, especially European World Cinema. C.S Venkiteswaran gives a historical over view of the arrival of cinema in Kerala. Cinema came to Kerala a decade after the Lumiere brothers put up their historic show at the Grand Cafe in Paris, arriving on the shores of Kozhikode in 1906 when itinerant Showman Paul Vincent screened some films with his Edison Bioscope. Film production, however, came much later.

The first Malayalam film, the silent *Vigathakumaran* by J.C Daniel, was made in 1928. It was another ten years after first Malayalam Talkies; *Balan* (S. Nottani, 1938) was released. There were only a handful of films in Malayalam until the 1950's. It was in the following three decades that film production gathered momentum after independence i.e., the making of new nation and after the formation of Kerala state. Malayalam film industry has tried to project Kerala culture to the world market through international film festivals that leads to the iconization and identification of Kerala culture and the position of women. First it is the Hollywood Cinema, which brought women from the margins to the centre of their text. A female perspective and female gaze brought a focus on female subjectivity. As a result of the women's movement gained strength in India, women's oppression and a struggle for an egalitarian society are highlighted. But at that time in Kerala, Malayalam film industry mainly revolves around the male centered films by highlighting their power, valour and domination over female. Before the globalization phenomena, women are imaged as passive bearer of meaning. Sangeetha Datta opines:

Fundamentally consumerism is set to objectify masculine ideals post modern strategies of parody and pastiche simply serve to maintain the male domination of representation. In Indian mainstream cinema we continue to see a patriarchal version of female sexuality. Masculinity is defined as the muscular body and physical aggression. The visual spectacle and collage have taken over as mandatory song and dance sequences through confusing international locales which disrupt the viewer's sense of time and space. (73-74)

In the article "History of an Emergence: 'woman' and 'man' in Modern Kerala" (2007), Sharmila Sukumar and Ratheesh Radhakrishnan have attempted to

make a review on ‘engendering individuals’ – an idea put forwarded by J. Devika, in which Devika argues that:

Gender difference as it obtains in present day Kerala has a history of not more than a century. Notions of individual and society so crucial to what is understood as “modern” emerged alongside the public sphere in early twentieth century. This emergent public sphere implicated individuals as gendered subjects: thus, the moment of becoming individual was also simultaneously the moment of becoming gender. In other words, gender was constituted of the modern individuals fashioned in Kerala. The term “engendering” is deployed here to signify both the “coming into being” and the “production of gender”. Devika takes up the confluence of “ideas”, “culture” and “materialities” as constituting the discursive regime within which modern man and woman were imagined. (2411)

Malayalam cinema has tried its best to visualize modern man and woman. But the problem is that the subjective representation is given only to the male characters and woman is objectified. The fetishisation and commodification of female body is an ever seen image in the Malayalam cinema. In *70 Years of Indian Cinema* P.R.S Pillai (1985) opined that Malayalam cinema hit the headlines for the first time when Ramu Kariat’s *Chemmeen*, produced in 1965, won the Indian president’s Gold Medal – the highest National Award for films. Kariat’s achievement was repeated by AdoorGopalakrishnan’s *Swayamvaram* in 1972 and M.T Vasudevan Nair’s *Nirmalyam* in 1973. This, in addition to a host of other awards, raised Malayalam cinema to the higher degrees of appreciation at national and international levels. Variety, freshness and social relevance which occur at regular intervals are the

primary qualities that sustain the Malayalam cinema. Political unrest, economic ills, social discontent and the revolt of the younger generation against the old conventions of the established family, all these had found expression in varying degrees in Malayalam films right through the years (397-398)

Cinema reflects the emotions, feelings, issues and bitter realities of society. It is the product of a specific culture. Cinema has two types of representation; political representation and aesthetic representation. The political representation highlights who speak for whom and for whom it is concerned, it speaks the politics of patriarchy which is dominant in society and is marked by class, race and gender. Aesthetic representation highlights the images, genres and strategies that are used to please the spectators especially the male spectators. Cinema is an apparatus through which any ideology can be communicated. The present study focuses on the cinema and feminist ideologies by considering the screen as an apparatus for social change. In the view of Baudry:

Apparatus theory aims at disclosing the processes that transform 'objective reality' into the finished product of a film. When the transformational process eludes the viewer, the apparatus seems to have performed a kind of magic, or, in the terminology of Louis Althusser (1971), it generates an ideological effect. Ideological effects merely project the illusion of transparency – permitting insight and an effect of knowledge – by manipulating our relation to the represented object. For instance, by inviting us to identify with the perspective implied in representation, the represented world appears as the seamless continuation or extension of our 'real world' experience. In this sense, cinema's power of illusion results not so much from the

imitation of an authentic reality (what we see) as from the simulation of a realistic perception or point of view ('how we see'). (15)

Even if the film highlights the patriarchal ideology, it is the right of the spectator to choose the perspective by which a film can be viewed. There are different perspectives by which a film can be viewed – patriarchal, feminist, ideological, Marxist, psychoanalytical and so on. It is through the feminist perspective; the space of women can be seen and analyzed. Representation and re-presentation of women in Malayalam cinema is focused in the present study. In the essay 'Representation' by Henry Bacon, he makes the statement that 'Representation' is the depiction of things, classes, relationships, experiences and other phenomena by means such as signs, images, models, formulas and narratives. In an important sense the notion of representation – something standing for something else – implies that the real world is not simply out there for us to perfectly copy or experience without meditation (402). Cinematic representation of women has both positive and negative perspectives. Woman is represented as 'object' rather than 'subject' in the earlier Malayalam films. Carrol Noel in his influential work "Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory" (1988) categorizes three types of representation i.e physical portrayal, depiction and nominal portrayal. In the physical portrayal of representation every shot portrays a definitive object, person, place or event that can be designated by a singular term. In depiction, a class or collection of objects are designated by a general term. In the nominal portrayal of representation, a character within the story world is given a certain fictional name and identity establishing that the things shown in the image stand for particular things other than the ones that caused the image (404 – 405). The physical portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema mainly focus on her appearance and cosmetics, the presentation of her 'body' for the voyeuristic pleasure

for male spectators. The depictions of women in Malayalam cinema represent women as a category – their issues and position in a given category. The nominal portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema represents a character in a film where her identity and space are taken for granted. The representation of women is conditioned by the context of production and reception of images and sounds by spectators. As far as Malayalam cinema is concerned, it is produced in the cultural context of Kerala and the Malayalee spectators expect a desirable outcome according to their choice and wish. The interpretation of cinema is purely based on the socio-political ideology one possesses. But most of the spectators interpret cinema through the lens provided by producers and the socio-political context in which one lives.

The core concepts of the feminist film theory are the representation of women, space of women, women body, and women psyche and women spectatorship. The present study focuses on these core areas of feminist film theory and Malayalam cinema. One of the first questions that are raised by a feminist is that how a woman is represented in the cinema? Diana Pozo, in her essay “Feminist Film Theory, Core Concepts”, claims that:

There are clear connections between the identification and evaluation of images of women and the process of consciousness – rising, whereby women identify and discuss personal issues of gender inequality in their lives. The impetus for studying representation was the belief that if women could begin to understand how patriarchal society was being reproduced through media images, perhaps they would be less hesitant to identify as feminists. However, the representational approach, which often bracketed issues of production



and spectatorship, risked reproducing existing cultural inequalities.

There is a politics in representation and imaging of women as an object and passive rather than subjective and active. It is nothing but the politics of patriarchy. According to Judith Butler, “Representation serves as operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects, on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women” (1).

As Laura Mulvey opined cinema as the product of patriarchal unconscious, the feminist film theorists ask the question about the role of a woman in a film and the space she occupies inside a film narrative and also the nature of representation of women in the film industry. Diano Pozo raises many questions in her article, “Feminist Film theory, History of”:

Feminist film theorists must not only ask ‘what is a woman?’ and question whether the concept of ‘women’ is an effective organizing principle for the study of film, they must also question the nature of representation (does gender exist before representation or is it created through representation?), and determine the aspects of film most important for feminist analysis. Should feminists canonize women in the film industry? Or should they focus on producing a feminist theory for all film, regardless of the gender of its producers? What about women as spectators of film? What are the differences between and among women (race, class, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender

expression, physical ability etc) and how are these central to feminist engagements with film?. (195)

The present study picks up the question, did gender exist before representation or was it created through representation? Ian Buchanan, in his *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory* defines:

Gender is the set of behavioral, cultural, psychological and social characteristics and practices associated with masculinity and femininity. The notion of gender was used in second wave feminism to separate individual attitudes and actions from physiology in order to undermine the biological determinist theses which holds that cultural attitudes are simply a reflection of the specific nature of the body. (198)

In the words of Judith Butler from her work *Gender Trouble*:

Although the unproblematic unity of “women” is often invoked to construct solidarity of identity, a split is introduced in the feminist subject by the distinction between sex and gender. Originally intended to dispute the biology – is – destiny for formulation, the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex. The unity of the subject is thus already potential contested by the distinction that permits of gender as a multiple interpretation of sex. (6)

In Kerala the term ‘Gender’ is defined and constructed by its culture and social tradition. Cinema is a cultural product and women are imaged according to the

terms and conditions of Kerala culture and tradition. Malayalam cinema industry moves according to the expected outcome provided for the male dominated spectators. Thus the representation comes after the arrival of gender categorization. Gender is not created through the process of representation but it is created through the process of cultural formation. J. Devika and Mini Sukumar, in their collaborative article “Making Space for Feminist Social Critique in Contemporary Kerala” quotes:

...Malayalee feminists to give names to gender oppression and voice to their emergent, for instance, Anna Chandy’s polemical term, “adukkalavadam” (Kitchenism) [Chandy (1929) 2005:123]. This however is an aspect that did not figure significantly on the political agenda of Malayalee feminism in the 1980s: a recent anthropological study on how Malayalee feminists perceive the ‘west’ has remarked on how they still feel it difficult to describe patriarchy here, as if it were somehow in the ‘air’ [Bygnes 2005]. While some such questioning of everyday language in Kerala did happen, more needs to be done. Indeed the work of naming has been taken over by the mass media with ambiguous results – for instance, the concept ‘sthreepadnam’ seems to mean everything from sexist comments and gang rape. We are thus faced with the double task of being watchful of both new and existent devices of language in order to probe their political implications, and creating new terms to express adequately the whole range of presently nameless female experience in Kerala. (4473)

It is necessary to look back into the history of gender struggle in Kerala. The feminist movement in Kerala started around the 1990s. There were only a few women scholars who contributed their valuable intellectual thoughts to awaken the Malayalee

women. In 1990s, a lot of research based feminist studies began to appear. Women scholars have found more space in the intellectual field. J. Devika and Mini Sukumar opined that:

The first generation of feminist in Kerala, it seems, choose to retreat from debate into narrow and negative positions, which ultimately proved fatal to the articulation of gender politics. We need to learn from their failures. The new spaces of political education that we need to promote now as feminists must be spaces of self – clarification that help us to change the terms of collective living . (4473)

The socio – cultural change in Kerala has influenced Malayalam film industry and this led to the opening up of more space for women in Malayalam cinema. Earlier women have been confined to domestic sphere but now there is a paradigm shift from domestic sphere to public sphere. When women occupy their own spaces in Malayalam films, men began to feel a kind of anxiety regarding their own existence in film industry. In the words of J. Devika and Mini Sukumar:

...modern educated women in Malayalee society; many of them were employed in modern institutions that continued to expand in these times. They did not question the solidity of the ‘natural’ divide between men and women that allegedly assigned to them specific sets of qualities, dispositions and preferences, which in turn made them suitable for the public and domestic domains, respectively. Indeed, their strategy was to blur the boundaries between the public and the domestic, to point out that there were emergent institutions in the public, such as schools, hospitals, reformatories – even the police – and so on, where “womanly qualities” seemed absolutely at home. But

they did make significant effort to alter the pedagogic mode of addressing women dominant in the Malayalee public sphere. (4470)

New wave cinema gives more space to women not as a category, but as an individual. To an extent, women are able to show their capabilities and intellectual talents when it is compared with their earlier visualization on screen. Many criticisms are raised by the male film critics that whatever be the roles female actors play in the Malayalam film they are ultimately treated as a mere woman. It is the perspective that makes women as a mere passive category. It shows the pure male dominating thought and perspective that is prevalent in the patriarchal society. In the essay 'Engendering Popular Cinema in Malayalam' (2010) V.C Harris argues that:

...the spectacular success of Bharathachandran IPS (written and directed by RenjiPanicker) – a sequel to an early – 1990's film, commissioner starring Suresh Gopi – reminds me of the continuing purchase of the macho guy in the popular imagination. Needless to say, women play not even the second fiddle in these movies; what is important to note is that they are often shown their place, as in *The King* (1995; another blockbuster Renji Panickar movie directed by Shaji Kailas) where Mammooty as the all powerful district collector shows with utter contempt what the woman superintendent of police is really worth. Such examples could be easily multiplied. Even where you acknowledge the unmistakable social presence of senior woman police officer, administrator, lawyer or journalist, they have to be exposed for what they ultimately are – mere women! (62)

It is the male chauvinism that makes a woman, a 'mere woman'. A woman can also make a man 'mere man'. So it is the attitude and the ego complex that measures the space of women in Malayalam cinema. It is the man who injects the feelings that how a woman should be. In each man, there is a woman and in each woman, there is a man. Both man and woman can possess the same capabilities and intellectual talents except the biological difference. But now a days it is also possible that transgender – a new category is blooming all over the world. MeeraVelayudhan states in her article "Changing Roles and Women's Narratives" (1994):

...However, if women were to give up their feminine attribute only to compete with men, it would be disastrous. Neither men nor women were meant to replace each other or perform conflicting roles. If men ask 'can women fight or labour hard like us?' women could retort, 'can men love or nurture like us?'. She suggests a kind of half-male, half-female godliness, a moral ardhanareshwara situation. (77)

It is meaningless to say that a woman is always a 'mere woman'. It is the man who closes the door of opportunities to women because of his fear – psychological feeling that makes man more conscious about the power of woman, her capabilities, her talents, both biological and intellectual. There is an assumption that women are emotionally very weak and she always needs an emotional back up from man. Does man need such an emotional back up from woman? Are men emotionally self sufficient? It is very clear that without woman, man cannot own an 'identity' of his own. MeeraVelayudhan opines that "Once women became fully aware of their strength, there will be no alternative for men but to surrender their 'masculinity'. If women had a say in the affairs of the world, much of immorality and injustice would appear (78).

As far as Malayalam films are concerned majority of the films are written and directed by men. It is through the lens of men a film is viewed and commented. Susan Kirkpatrick, in her article “Cinema, Modernity and the Women of ‘27” (2010) quotes from the British journal “Close Up” (1927-1933):

Richardson, in the film commentary she wrote for the journal, called attention to the double protagonism of women in relation to movies as both audience and represented subject. She regarded women’s representation in film as liberatory. Through out her column Richardson celebrates the cinema as women’s sphere. Each and every film can be viewed as a female perspective and by doing so woman realizes her own self image and become powerful to react against oppression she really faces in her own socio-cultural background.(67)

The present study illuminates the aspects of western feminism and its influence on Indian cinema especially Malayalam cinema. The focus is given to the representation of women and space of women in Malayalam cinema. As far as Indian culture is concerned there is certain code of conduct that makes a woman an ideal one. The qualities like smartness, courage and intellect are attributed to men or labeled as masculine. Once a woman comes out of the restricted area, she is labeled as bad. K.Moti Gokulsing and Wimal Dissanayak claims in *Routledge Handbook of Indian Cinemas* that:

In traditional Indian society, the lives of women were severely circumscribed strict rules and regulations had to be followed.

Women’s roles were essentially as daughter (Beti), wife (Patni) and mother (Ma). According to the Manusmriti, which had a profound effect on shaping the morals of Indian society, a female should be

subject in childhood to her father, in youth to her husband and when her husband is dead, to her children. Women were given no kind of independence. Manusmriti is emphatic that a woman must not strive to separate herself from her father, her husband, and her sons. She is told to be always cheerful, efficient in the management of household affairs, fastidious in cleaning utensils, careful with expenses. She is expected to be unwaveringly obedient to her husband and after he is dead, she must make every effort to honour his memory. (76)

It is the code of conduct allotted to women throughout India and is articulated in popular films also. Indian cinema is the product of Indian culture and the portrayal of women is done according to the cultural modernity and this reflection can also be seen in Malayalam films. After the arrival of feminist concept in Kerala, some of the film directors have tried their best to examine the issues, experiences, and hardships encountered by women in Kerala society. Adoor Gopalakrishnan, T.V Chandran, Ashiq Abu, Padmarajan, etc are some of the major film directors who have tried their best to make film from the view point of women. Almost all film directors have made films purely for the vested interest of patriarchal power structure prevalent in Kerala. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, all the patriarchal arguments are deconstructed by the women spectators. Most of the films were viewed from female perspective. Films like *Naalu Pennungal*, *Vilapangalkkappuram*, *22Female Kottayam*, *Artist*, *Chamaram* etc portray women characters as strong, stubborn and self sufficient than ever. Women have grabbed all the extreme opportunities like Journalist, Advocate, Doctor, Lecturer, Police Commissioner, Minister etc and all these roles are played by women in Malayalam films. Films like *Trivandrum Lodge*, women have the voice to open up all her physical desires in public. Women create their own space and voice



among the male heroes. It is the female who leads the entire films. The present study analyses how women create their own space in Malayalam film industry.

In the film *Munnariyippu* (Warning) the director Venu.R gives a space to Anjali Arakkal [Aparna] as a freelance journalist. The women characters in the film are presented as smart, highly ambitious and hardly exposed to difficult situations in life. All of them were trying to establish themselves as individuals. Unfortunately individual freedom is denied to them. Women in this film seek out for freedom – they don't want any external restrictions and they want freedom to do what they want. They long for self satisfaction in their life. The three women Ramani, Pooja Patel and Anjali Arakkal revolve around C.K Raghavan (Mammootty). He is a man who wants simple lonely life free from all kinds of nagging and pressures. So he failed to give a life to his own wife Ramani who might ask him to work to have a good life. She pesters her husband always and became an obstacle on the way of C.K Raghavan's philosophical life. So C.K Raghavan (CKR) eliminated this obstacle simply without any guilt. Pooja Patel, the Marvadi girl who was in his career life and always nagged him in one form or other becomes another obstacle for C.K Raghavan. Like Ramani's removal, C.K.Raghavan also removed this obstacle too. As far as Anjali is concerned, a young vibrant ambitious freelance journalist who is desperately trying to get a major breaks in her career with C.K Raghavan's life story. Thus she also became an obstacle for C.K.Raghavan. So without any guilty consciousness C.K.Raghavan removed Anjali too. The women in the film are imaged as pester makers and those women who have raised their voice against C.K Raghavan reached the tombstone. Those who have tried to establish their freedom to reveal their potentialities become a hindrance for C.K.Raghavan. The film is a journey of Anjali Arakkal to achieve her goal as a dedicated journalist who happens to fall down before reaching the

destination. It is her article based on CK Raghavan– “Brain behind the bar” – The untold story that made her popular in the media. After the publication of this article, she got an offer to write for well reputed literary magazine about the secrets and untold history of CK Raghavan with a deadline. She made all arrangements for CK Raghavan to get out from the world of prison after twenty years and also set up a room for him with, blank papers and pens and she wants to make him write. CK Raghavan does not know English and is hardly educated. It is only through his diary, some of the information about him is revealed. Those lines in his personal diary reflect his life and philosophical thoughts and such thoughts are far more brilliant than what the world expects from a person like him. He is an intelligent philosopher, comments a senior journalist. The diary is what launches him to stardom. But what the world fails to notice are the secrets he has hidden between those lines –the secrets which reveals what a person he really is. Anjali’s assigned job is to translate C.K Raghavan’s ideas into English with a sequential order. The entire world is eagerly waiting for the story. Unfortunately CK Raghavan is not able to pen a word. He does not know where to start and what to write that made him in a dilemma. It is this procrastination to pen his story which made Anjali tensed. She has signed the contract and received the advance amount. This made Anjali more committed to the cause. Every day she paid visit to CK Raghavan to check whether he wrote something or not. Whenever she visits CK Raghavan, she becomes more and more tensed and disappointed and then she started to raise her voice against him. But he is not at all upset and he keeps on the white papers blank. She takes a trip to her home to get relaxed but where also she is haunted by job as it does not provide any pleasure and peace of mind. For her mother, it is her job that made her daughter restless and peace less. But when her daughter is appreciated by everybody after the blockbuster success

of her publication, mother also takes it positively and was happy in her success. Mother wants to see her daughter to get married and is in search of a guy suitable for her. As a result Anjali meets Prithviraj. Meanwhile she is fighting with CK Raghavan to pen something, but her attempts are end in vain. At last she decided to quit all her dream and to make CK Raghavan free. The reminder of the dead line by company is also her death bell. When she came to make CK Raghavan free from her hands, he had kept ready with written papers. When she asked him to pack up all his belonging, he gave his written papers. When Anjali is going through the papers, she became frightened and her eyes are filled with fearful tears. A minute before she completes her reading, she is killed by CK Raghavan. From this it is clear that what happened to Ramani and Pooja Patel too.

There are two reasons for killing Anjali. One is that CK Raghavan is a homeless person and has to find out a space for himself. The space that suits him is none other than the jail. So by becoming a murderer, it is easy to go back to jail. The other reason is that CK Raghavan does not want to share his process of elimination of the obstacles. For his self freedom he denied the right of others to live. But here another question is raised- Why does he eliminate the women only? He might have felt that women become an obstacle for his free and independent life. He is a misogynist and does not know how to handle women. So he just eliminated them from his life. But he never mentions anywhere that he hates women for some reason or any other. His psyche does not want to share that feeling in front of the public. He is a man with an underlined patriarchal ideology. That is why he doesn't allow Anjali to put a green mark in her professional career. It is the hero's fear of losing his space that made him to procrastinate his writings. If he had finished his writing in the stipulated time, she could have achieved his career goal. But CK Raghavan never and

ever allowed her to be a highly reputed journalist even if he himself too gets fame and reward. He never wants to make herself a free bird. So he simply kills her. The patriarchal corporate company offers an excellent turning point in her career. Actually it is a kind of exploitation as such corporate companies have their own ethics and rules and those who violate will be punished. From the view point of Anjali Arakkal, she tries her best to create a space of her own through her intellectual talents. But her space is controlled by the power structure.

The film *Munnariyippu* [Warning] gives a warning for the spectators. It opens with a top angle shots, as the credits scroll on the screen, in the background an army of ants shift a dead gecko from the screen's left to the right. It is not clear whether the ants have killed the gecko. But they are sure about where they are heading and they move slowly to that tination. The swarm of ants in the opening credits had shown death. It is the warning for those who invaded the personal space of a person. But what happened in the film? Even though the director and script writer give much importance to the individual freedom that freedom is limited by a section of the society. Anjali Arakkal nags C.K Raghavan continuously for her selfishness and tries to invade his personal space. So he kills Anjali as she becomes an obstacle for his individual freedom. This is the way the film shows the value of individual freedom. It is a mystery that why the male protagonist kills women only. Here Anjali depicts the entire female class whose freedom is curtailed by the dominating patriarchy. In the climax scene C.K. Raghavan, he takes revenge upon her by ending her life itself. The text of the film indirectly gives the warning to all women who try to invade the space of man, that is, she will be destined to death. It is Anjali's selfish motive that gives a life to the character of C.K Raghavan (Mamooty) who conquers freedom in his own way and his own ideology. For C.K Raghavan, life itself is an anxious or irritable

moment before death. According to him life without freedom is an utter boredom. He wants to enjoy freedom by removing all the obstacles. As a result of his action, he reached the prison world and enjoys his life without any complaint. To him, outer world is the barrier for his free life. That is why he could enjoy freedom inside the iron bars. He keeps repeating the sentence 'I have not killed anyone', but still chooses the freedom provided by the prison cell even after his sentence period. When the legal authorities give justification for the punishment with proof, he asks the very question "Do we have any proof to believe in God?"

When the text of the film opens we see that C.K Raghavan is an exconvict who is redeeming his life after his release from prison. He stumbles upon Anjali, a journalist who decides to write an autobiography of his life for her fame. The police department gives the explanation for his imprisonment that he has committed double homicide. The very opening appearance of C.K Raghavan makes clear that he does not have any guilty conscience and he is fully satisfied inside the four walls. He is a man with his own ideology and according to him, whatever comes as obstacles on the way to 'freedom', should be removed. He killed two women- Ramani, his wife and Pooja Patel, a Marvadi girl. These two women always pestered him and they became an obstacle but it is not shown that how had they pestered him. The film never gives clear picture of family life or family background. But it is clear that he does not want to have a familial life in the restricted and pressurizing social circle. This is the reason behind committing homicide. But in the eyes of C.K Raghavan he has not killed anyone. He just removed the obstacles in his life to have a free life. So he is happy inside the prison as he is away from social pressures. When the legal authority attacks him with proof, he simply denied all those proofs and accepts the punishment happily as he is not able to prove his own innocence. It is until the arrival of Anjali Arakkal, a

freelance journalist who sees in him a career making story and a potential book deal. As she free to do some ghost writing for the jail superintendent Rama Moorthy (Nedumudivenu) she meets one of his inmates (C.K Raghavan). If she had not met him, C.K Raghavan might not have got a life. It is the character of Anjali, who leads the movie as thrilling and most of the mysteries are revealed through her character.

Having served twenty years for committing double homicide, CK Raghvan furtively whispers to Anjali that he has murdered none. When Anjali publishes his philosophical jotting, it becomes an overnight sensation. That makes Anjali more ambitious, fame seeking vibrant journalist. Anjali continuously tries to make C K Raghavan to pen his life story. In the interview scene between Anjali and C.K Raghavan he asks her, “Can it record the thoughts of a man?” From this question itself; it is clear that he is a man with a lot of secrets. In her first visit itself Anjali has understood that CK Raghavan is a man with an intellectual potential. His philosophy of life, God, punishment and society are taken for consideration. He shares his justification about truth that when we switched on a bulb, it can spread light in the darkness. So truth and light are similar ideas according to him as the word truth channels his illustration of light and what it signifies. In the interview scene, he raised a question with regard to punishment- why do we imprison a criminal? Is it to make him good by giving time to repent or to protect society by taking him away? Such questions are highly thought provoking. The mark of civilized society is its capacity to define the right of its citizens; to protect them from other individuals, to allow them full political expression and to guarantee freedom of speech and movement. As far as he is concerned his imprisonment can never be an evil for himself. It is a blessing that he is having a life away from restricted social circle. Even if Anjali gives him time and space, he has postponed his writing. His procrastination in writing his own past

gives us the picture of his nature. When she happens to pester him as he delays writing his life story, Anjali becomes an obstacle. In this way her photo is also pasted along with Ramani and pooja.

The character of Raghavan seeks the positive freedom to achieve the state of personal autonomy and self mastery. His character wants to liberate himself from cultural and social pressures that would otherwise impede progress towards self realization. His character never wants to make him treated as a murderer and he believes that he has never killed anybody. That kind of 'murder' treatment is so painful and irritating. The character of Anjali actually supports him to prove his innocence before the public. It is her character that leads the entire story as it is her requirement to make him write and bring fame for herself. This film is the journey of two protagonists who seek freedom to establish themselves as their own. In this film *Munnariyippu* the woman protagonist leads the story and gives life to the male hero. If Anjali had no selfish motive to become a famous journalist, the film would not have got a complete plot. In this film the female protagonist has got enough 'space' to lead the male protagonist and his life. Without the character of Anjali Arakkal the film has no plot of its own. The character of Anjali plays an important role in conveying the message of the film - everyone has their own individual freedom and existence. No individual has the right to interfere in others individual freedom. The director R Venu and the script writer Unni make use of the character of Anjali Arakkal in the development of the plot of the film by giving her character the leading role. The film clearly portrays the dominating attitude of patriarchy towards women. Even though Anjali wants to create a space for her along with the hero, she is surrendered to death only because of her attempt to be a bold and an intellectual woman.

In the film *Artist*, director Shyamaprasad makes the character of Gayathri (Ann Augustin) an ever memorable in Malayalam film industry. The film *Artist* is written and directed by Shyama Prasad, a leading Indian film maker. It is an adaptation of the English paperback novel *Dreams in Prussian Blue* by a techie-turned writer ParitoshUttam. The film is about a bold and vibrant stroke of the emotional and physical upheavals in the life of two aspiring artists. The slice of life visualized here is that of Michael (Fahadh Fazil) and Gayathri (Ann Augustine). They are fine arts students in the same college, both driven by individual ambitions, who decide to live together. The film traces the course of their relationship and their progression as artists. Michael Angelo is the son of a Goan businessman and Gayathri hails from a conservative Brahmin family. Gayathri shocks her parents by choosing to study in Fine Arts College. They decide to drop out of college and start living together with Michael, an eccentric genius with a promising career. Their new life together does not eradicate her isolation as Michael wraps further layers of self-centeredness around the cocoon that he has built for him. Gayathri looks around for ways to keep her passion for him intact. Gayathri is barely out of her partner even though she does not get even emotional support from him. Her woes increase when Michael loses his eyesight in a road accident. The challenges of the ungrateful Michael who struggles to transform his artistry on the canvas and how the youngsters tackle egoism, selfishness and their artistic demands creates the plot of the story.

The theme of the film revolves around love, betrayal, revenge, loneliness, estrangement etc. The film is a bildungsroman which focuses on the personal development of the protagonist. It portrays the development of Michael as an artist with the help of his partner Gayathri. It is Gayathri who makes him a famous artist. The character of Gayathri leads the entire plot of the story. The narrative text of the



film begins with the present and passes through flash back and ends in present. The flashback shows events that have taken place before the present time established in the film. It is through the flashback scene, the spectators get an idea of the background of the film. The opening scene focuses on the tensed and impatient female protagonist. In the opening scene, when Gayathri is waiting for Michael in the cafeteria for the meeting that she had arranged for him with the curator of the Arts Museum, her impatience and nervousness can be seen on the screen. Gayathri arranges a meeting for Michael as her last attempt to make him a better artist. While she is waiting for Michael at cafeteria, Michael is fully engaged in his own painting even by forgetting such a meeting with the curator of the Arts museum. Gayathri makes phone calls and asks him to come within five minutes. It is her dialogue that opens the rest of the film...

Gayathri. Listen, Michael. This is serious. This is your best chance to help me..... Us. If you waste this, it's all over.

Michael. What all over?

Gayathri. Everything between us.

Michael. Gayoo...? Five minutes, that's all you have. Kid you not. Gayathri begs at the feet of the curator to wait him for five more minutes. She tries to convince the curator that Michael has all the problems of a real artist. At home, Michael is simply painting his new ideas without considering the efforts taken by Gayathri for him. She reveals her emotional frustration as she gives up everything for Michael her family, her education, her creative abilities everything for him when she is barely out of her teens. She never gets an emotional support from him. In the cafeteria, she recollects her life and struggling for him. Then scenes change to fine Arts College,

Trivandrum, and her beginning college days. From that scene itself it is clear that Michael is fully indulged in art and painting. He talks about the painting, its value and its judgment based on different standards. The first meeting of Gayathri and Michael is portrayed with their intellectual thoughts about painting. Gayathri has her own vision about a good painting. According to her, it is the mind of the painter that can make a painting more valuable. Michael is fully impressed with her views that lead them to a deep relationship. Through the musical background their relationship becomes more and more intense. Gayathri is indulged in love and respect with the eccentricities of Michael. But Michael never reveals his love for her as his mind is filled with paintings alone. When Gayathri misses Michael's presence in the college, she dares to go to his flat alone and she finds his flat walls are full of paintings. Very interestingly, Michael shows her all his painting and requested her not to explain his painting when she keeps silence. Michael expresses his feelings and respect to her by giving her a pure kiss. That might have made Gayathri think that he loves her with full passion. Then the scene again goes back to cafeteria-she has been waiting for Michael since the morning and tries to call him over phone and it says that he is out of coverage area. The scene again shifts to the college campus, after the kissing scene, Gayathri pretends that she is avoiding him and in the tea shop she asks "why did you kiss me at the flat"? Michael first teases her and says that it is her silence before his paintings made him to kiss. Her college friends arrange a visit to historical art gallery and takes photos. At that time she asks 'why do you like me?'. At that time also Michael mocks her by saying that "who told I like you?"... Then he reveals that it is her philosophical thought on painting makes him like her. It is Michael's unconventional life style and his presence which makes her courageous to bunk the class and to be disobey to her parents and teachers. It is here the villain friend Abby

warns about Michael's relationship with Gayathri. Abby warns Gayathri that Michael is an eccentric odd man and some girls were hurt by him and Michael is not matching for a girl like Gayathri. She denies it and tells him that nothing to worry about their relationship. She frequently makes visit to his flat where he lives alone and spend time together. In one of her visits Michael tells a mad idea about living together by supporting each other and he will paint and she will write. Michael simply says the time they spend at college to learn should find time to forget it. Michael does not want to propose Gayathri for marriage. First she can't even think of living together without marrying each other. Michael plans to make Gayathri earn money and he will paint at home. But she is in utter confusion that they are not same religion, they have no job to earn money for their life. Then again the scene goes back to cafeteria, where she still waits Michael. It is too late and she comes out of cafeteria and again tries to contact Michael. Then again scene goes back to Michael and Gayathri. Michael declares her that he always thinks of colour and painting alone. His dream is a big canvas. According to him once a man understands his painting, its form, colour and theme then his painting becomes successful. He talks enthusiastically about painting where Gayathri doesn't have any space. He is highly philosophical about painting. Gayathri makes him remind about a job to make his masterpiece and tells that Michael is so intelligent and it is easy to get a job for him. At that time Michael desperately says that 'compromise' is the fate of an artist or to die out of starvation. At last she decides to leave her home and live with Michael as her choice. She chooses the day her father is out of station to leave the house. She packs up her dress and belongings and goes to Michael's flat. There is a scene in which Michael covers his eyes with a cloth and tries to portray the abstract of Gayathri. Actually this scene gives a sign for the heralding fate that is about to

happen in his life. The scene again goes back to present where she goes on trying to contact Michael. She asks her friend Ruchi, Abby's wife whether she can meet her and talk her personally about her and Michael. It really shows that Gayathri is totally fed up with life and her hardship to earn money for their life and for painting, canvasses and brush. She is really trying hard to make her both ends meet. In between Michael discloses to his father about his dropping out of college for painting and his disinterestedness to join in business with his father. He never reveals that he and Gayathri live together, however support from his father stops at that moment itself. When his father's financial support stops, Michael fully depends on Gayathri and he is not at all interested to find any part-time job and he wants to spend his time for painting alone. As the luxury flat is not affordable, they shifted to an ordinary congested rented home. Gayathri started to earn money for Michael and his painting. She is doing her domestic work and she doesn't have any quality time to spend for herself. When she talks with Michael's father over phone, she is completely insulted. Micheal shouts at her for talking with his father. Then the scene moves to the present where she hears that Michael has met with a road accident. As far as Michael is concerned he should not be disturbed while painting and he shouts at Gayathri that she can't understand his feelings and she has only her own feelings. She suffers and struggles inside home and outside home working for Michael's painting. In a scene Michael reveals his wish to help Gayathri by earning extra income for painting. But he doesn't want to do any job other than painting and he reminds Gayathri that they have decided to live together for living happily by doing painting and not worrying about painting. She says..... "I really remember what you told. When we decide to live together for spending quality time for each other Michael spends time for painting and she spends time for writing.... But now what happens. I am worried

about everything.... You are a true artist and what I am... a person who spends full time at a BPO office”.

After that Michael keeps silence and she informs her arrangement of a meeting with an art Gallery curator for Michael’s better art life and she begs at Michael to do little sacrifices for her. Finally he agrees with her. This is where the text of the film opens with a waiting scene at a cafeteria. On the way to cafeteria, he meets with an accident and losses his eye-sight. This is the turning point in the life of both Gayathri and Michael. After realizing Gayathri’s lovely attitude, he regrets for not appreciating her with a single word. In between he worries whether Gayathri and Abby have any affair. Michael confesses before Gayathri and asks her to go for a job rather than spending time with him inside the small room. But she does not agree with him because she is not confident about Michael handling things alone. At that time the dialogue between Gayathri and Michael goes like this

Michael.	You are young and beautiful. Your life is not meant to spoil with a blind man who is not having any income. We are not really married. You just walk with your life, if you want.
Gayathri	Because I love you. Michael. I can’t leave you in this situation.

Gayathri feels that if she had not arranged such a meeting with that art gallery curator, Michael would not have lost his eye sight. Gayathri thinks Michael is taking revenge upon her for losing his eyesight. Abby consoles Gayathri and tells that she need not be guilty. It is Michael’s inability to paint has haunted him a lot. Gayathri really wants to see him to be painting even if he loses his eye sight and she is ready to

sacrifice everything again even though she has a choice to leave him. She again starts working to earn and Michael starts painting with his own mind and imagination. When she struggles a lot Abbey extends a helping hand with his own painting and brushes which is no more useful to him. Gayathri feels so happy. But the only thing is that Abby owns the same Prussian blue color painting. Abbey argues that Michael cannot feel any difference in colour. From this point onwards Gayathri cheats Michael but Abby fixes his eyes on her body by giving his paintings. The Prussian blue colour is the secret that is known only to Gayathri and Abby. When Gayathri denies Abbey's sexual approach, Abby starts blackmailing in the name of Prussian blue colour. Somehow Michael wants to exhibit his own painting. But he does not know he uses the same Prussian blue colour in all his painting. Michael thinks he is using all colours. He dedicates all his painting to Gayathri alone and labeled it as 'Dreams in Prussian blue'. The exhibition is arranged with the same curator Roy and he reads all his paintings in an artistic way. But still Gayathri feels a kind of guiltiness about the Prussian blue colour and she is worried whether Michael can face the entire public. Michael requests Gayathri to ask the public to judge him purely on his paintings and not on his blindness. The exhibition of his master piece 'Magnum opus' dreams in Prussian blue becomes a great success and all his paintings are sold for four lakhs. In the exhibition scene Abby comes to threaten Gayathri but she requests him not to spoil the day. When she goes to take Michael in front of the public there is Ruchi, Abbey's wife. Michael comes to know about Gayathri's cheating about Prussian blue. Ruche misunderstands Gayathri and Abby's relation even if Gayathri confesses that Abby is fully responsible for such relationship. Michael is really shocked that all his paintings are in Prussian blue. He really feels he is teased by everybody as he is blind and all his paintings are in blue. In the last scene Michael

tells Gayathri that “he trusted her as his own eyes and it is better to be blind than to be cheated” and asks her to go back to her own home. Michael hesitates to go with Gayathri for press meeting and he goes with the curator Roy and he addresses the public and answering to one of the questions raised among the public that “why did he use the Prussian blue? Is it better to use black colour to picture blank?” Michael says blue is the colour of cheating and falsehood as it is the world round us. In the climactic scene Gayathri tells herself that in everyone, at a point, has to accept the reality and comes back to what we were. So she says good bye to Michael forever and she reminds Michael that it is painful to her to break a relation. When the time comes, each one accepts the pain and moves on with the realities of life and Gayathri comes back from the life of Michael to her own world where she can create her own identity. This is how the film ends.

The film begins and ends with Gayathri. It is the character of Gayathri who leads the entire movie. Gayathri makes Michael a real artist by sacrificing herself. The film revolves around the theme of love, betrayal, revenge and alienation. From a female point of view, the character of Gayathri has all the potentials as that of Michael. She is having all the inherent talents for developing into a successful artist as Michael. In fact, her critical mind, sense of justice, readiness to change, absence of hypocrisy and narrow mindedness in relation to what is called tradition and such other positive qualities that makes the entire plot of the film *Artist*. The director Shyamaprasad created the character of Gayathri in such a way and is presented as a bold, independent and more over a practical teenage girl, who takes up all the responsibilities of a family by sacrificing her quality time meant to spend for her own creative thinking and writing. The character of Gayathri plays an important role in conveying the message of the film- the need of every individual, whether man or

woman to find out the person he or she really is and striving to become that person. She is not presented as dreamy teenage girl living in a fantasy world. At the very beginning of their relationship, she thinks so practically about the cultural background that they live and the religious background that they hail from. As she experiences financial crisis, she happens to cheat the blind Michael with the color of Prussian blues due to her deep wish to make Michael a famous artist. The film is about the disillusionment of a woman, and about how she has been dominated and how her basic right- her right to be someone – has been ruthlessly destroyed in the name of love and dedication to her partner. She is totally careful about his tastes, his likes and dislikes in art and painting. She shows up her own sacrifices-her family, her education, her tastes and likeness everything she gives up for Michael. The character of Gayathri is very compromising and she is truly adaptable without any sense of self egotism. She tries her best to face the problems by herself even though out of some frustrated moments she opens up her bag of emotions in front of Abbey, the villainous friend. As the story progresses she becomes stronger, from being a teenager smitten by the charms of a free- thinking artist to an independent person. The character of Gayathri enjoys all the basic freedom even though she hails from a conservative Brahmin family. She is bold enough to choose her area of interest against her parent's advice and wish. In one of the scenes at her home, her mother asks about her new college and new friends. When they came to know from her that Michael is her best friend, her father discourages her from such close relationship with a Christian boy even if he speaks publicly about secularism. The director Shyamaprasad presents the character of Gayathri as a very advanced modern girl who dares to go for cohabitation and living together which is far away from the conventional concept of marriage. She never gets a chance of creating her own



identity as an artist or writer because of the heavy responsibility upon her shoulder. She could have gone back away from Michael. But her woes increase when Michael loses his eye sight in a road accident. It is quite an unexpected shock to Gayathri as she understands the negative approach made by her friend Abby. But she boldly resists it even if she expresses her readiness as she does not want to spoil the exhibition scene. That day is very important in the life of both Michael and Gayathri. In the climax scene Michael never forgives Gayathri for cheating him with the Prussian blue colour and never understands the circumstances under which she happens to cheat Michael. At last she realizes the true nature of Michael and goes away from him by accepting the reality even if it is much hurting for Gayathri. Her character contributes a lot in the development of the plot and the conveyance of message. It is her character that leads the entire movie.

Shyamaprasad tries his best to represent the man-woman relationship, their artistic aspirations and imagination. Michael's character as a true artist is depicted in the movie. He possesses all the qualities of a real artist and it is accepted by Gayathri and she tries her best to make him a true artist. Michael has all the qualities of a true artist like an eye for design and knows what makes for a good work of art. He has creativity and always has new ideas for canvas. He really knows that not everyone will have the same feelings about their work. He is very passionate about his work and practices his art because he loves the works and feels a need to create. He has a keen knowledge of materials and is very much familiar with a variety of materials like paintings, brushes canvases and knows how to use them to bolster a piece most effectively. Like great artists he has a strong sense of vision and can easily picture the desired end result at the outset of a piece of work. As far as the character of Michael is concerned it is the art that is the core reason for which he loses life. He has a strong

work ethics even after he loses his eyesight, he works and practice. He learns from experiences and experiments to improve on. He decides to live with Gayathri only because of her full support to his art career. Michael is never bothered of Gayathri's hardship and struggles and he always thinks of painting. He wishes to be known as Michael Angelou and he believes in the inner imaginative quality in an artist. Even though Gayathri and Michael decide to live together with a contract that both of them can spend quality time after earning income for themselves, in reality only Michael gets the quality time for painting. Gayathri never gets such a time. She spends all her time to earn money for Michael. Michael can never have an artistic life in the absence of Gayathri. Out of his passion for paintings, he never and ever wants to join in business with his father. He is an eccentric man leading an unconventional life. According to Michael, each painting has its own story to tell and only a person with such an aesthetic value can read those stories. His mind is filled with colours and ideas. There is no value for human relationships. On the way to cafeteria, where Gayathri arranges a meeting with art Gallery curator for Michael, he meets with an accident and loses his eye sight. Even though there is no light in life, he never loses his passion for art and he practices the idea that comes in his mind. He loses his temper when Gayathri makes delay to bring him brush, canvasses and paintings. He wants to use only the professional and branded painting alone. He does not bother about the money it costs. He never gives any emotional support to Gayathri before losing his eye sight. It is only after he becomes blind, he understands her and gives support and dedicates all his paintings for her. It is the villainous friend Abby who puts forward the idea of bringing Prussian blue colour. In the beginning Gayathri thinks it is cheating but out of her financial difficulties she agrees to accept the box of Prussian blue colour paintings from Abby. Gayathri keeps it as secret from Michael

and tells him that all those painting tubes are different colours. Michael is not much possessive of Gayathri and never doubts about her relationship with Abbey. He asks Gayathri to go away from a blind man who is not having any financial security and have a life with another one as she is young and beautiful. But Gayathri never backs off from Michael and she becomes more dedicated because of her guilty feeling that she is the reason for losing his eye sight. If she had not arranged such a meeting with the curator, Michael would never have lost his eye sight. She feels that Michael is taking revenge upon her. But Abby betrays Gayathri as she rejects him and discloses the truth about Prussian blue colour. Michael creates his own masterpiece in Prussian blue color and exhibited all his painting under the label of *Dreams in Prussian Blue*. After becoming a famous artist he simply avoids Gayathri without understanding her circumstances under which she happens to do so. If Gayathri had not helped him with all sacrifices, how could he express his artistic qualities before the public? So, it is no doubt that it is Gayathri who leads the entire story.

As the film *Artist* revolves around the theme of revenge, the character of Gayathri is presented as ‘a cheater’. Her cheating is actually the reward for Michael but he breaks the bond between them. But nothing is preplanned and everything happens accidentally – Michael’s road accident, his loss of eye sight, Prussian blue colour painting series, his fame as a real artist etc. But the character of Michael is not at all presented as ‘cheater’. It is Gayathri’s emotional and physical support that makes Michael a true artist. His character is presented and imaged as the most sympathizing especially after the loss of his eyesight. The film sketches many shades of relationships, delves into the world of art with artist. Saraswathy Nagarajan quotes the words of Shyamaprasad:

It is about the challenges and the inner journey of an artist who struggles to transform his artistry on the canvas. It is also the love story of two youngsters and their passage through life as they tackle egoism, selfishness and their artistic demands. Gayathri's deep admiration for the big-talking Micheal blossoms into a live – in relationship and they drop out of college, says Shyamaprasad, who fills his canvas with a palette of emotions drawn from life itself.

(The Hindu: Artistic Blue)

Deccan Chronicle reviews the movie *Artist* as the most satisfying film as far as the director is concerned because the story evolves in a room and the challenge lay in trying to capture different emotions through lighting and frames. He reveals the love between the characters is shown through the camera lens and the distance between them is also portrayed through the distance between the lenses and the lighting changes, according to the mood of the characters. *Artist* is about two painters and colouring and lighting is very important when you frame the characters. Speaking about the technical side, director explains that mainly three kinds of lights were used a hanging tungsten bulb, a defective tube light that flickers on and off and a 0 walt red bulb. The flickering light is used when Fahadh turns blind, the problems of the couple are taken in the red light and the sequences after Fahadh turns blind are shown in dark lighting to reflect his mental frame. He opines that more than the remuneration, it is to do films like *Artist* that he entered the industry and he doesn't need any further rewards.

The film *Artist* makes a signature in Malayalam film industry with the excellent performances of Ann Augustine and Fahadh Fazil and the character of Gayathri leaves an evergreen mark in the history of Malayalam cinema. Malayalam

film industry directly and indirectly raises the question of space of women. Through the film *How Old Are You?* (2014) the director Roshan Andrews does not hesitate to reveal the potential of women. The film raises the question ‘who decides the expiry date of a woman’s dream? The film revolves around this question and the plot itself is an answer to this question. The film deals with a woman’s quest to unearth her long buried identity. Even though the film is basically treated as a social desire, it inspires the entire women to an extensive level. It tells the story of an ordinary woman with all capabilities and also reveals the man-woman relationship in a male dominated society. The film sheds the light on the real condition of women who forget to dream because of the heavy burden of family and domestic work. It is realistically portrayed through the actor Manju Warriar.

The plot of the film is centered on a thirty six year old character named Nirupama Rajeev (Manju Warriar) who works as a UD clerk in the Revenue Department. Her husband is Rajeev Narayanan (Kunchako Boban) who works at Akashavani and dreams of migrating to Ireland, but Nirupama cannot accompany him as the most Irish companies turn down her job applications. The character of Nirupama is presented as an ordinary woman with constructed womanly qualities like teasing, gossips and snobbery. She is much worried of her age and looks. She thinks only about how to please her husband and her teenage daughter by preparing food for them. Her day begins with preparing breakfast and ends with preparing dinner. In between she spends time at her office where she actually takes ‘rest’ than doing her official works. Her husband is bored with the mundane life of her as she can think only about the price of vegetables and groceries. Her husband and daughter always blame her for not dreaming of anything in her life. The character of Nirupama Rajeev acts as a typical product of Kerala culture in the first part of the film. When her

husband is charged against an accident case Nirupama is ready to take charge herself with her own driving license without knowing that its expiry date is over. Since her husband wants to go for Ireland she is ready to sacrifice everything for her family like a typical Kerala woman. On a bright morning being summoned to the IG's office, Nirupama learns that the president of India would like to have a conversation with her over breakfast. She gets such an invitation because her daughter was a participant of a questionnaire session with the president of India. The president of India is highly impressed by that question and Lakshmi reveals that, the question is prepared by her mother. So the President of India wishes to see the woman and makes arrangements for it. Thus Nirupama Rajeev leading an ordinary life becomes the special guest. Actually she does not remember that question. Nirupama does not want to meet the honourable President of India. Under compulsion she decides to receive the invitation. Unfortunately, Nirupama faints in front of the President of India and the meeting turns out to be a disaster. She becomes a laughing stock on social media. Nirupama is then faced with an issue of being criticized by her family also. Her husband and daughter are ashamed of being her husband and being her daughter. They want to escape from this situation. She has to watch her husband and daughter fly to Ireland promising to have chit chat sessions over Skype. Nirupama really feels alienated after their departure. She had a habit of nurturing a vegetable garden on her roof, without the usage of chemicals and pesticides. One day Nirupama visits an old woman whom she meets every day in bus. Both of them don't even know their names and when she gets to know that the woman is sick, Nirupama turns up at her house with her own vegetables. The old woman thanks her for the time she spent for her and for reminding that she is not alone in this world. One fine morning she is asked to meet the district collector. It becomes the real chance for digging herself. Her old

classmate Susan David (Kaniha) is having a chatting session with the District collector and it is her friend Susan who talks about Nirupama's appreciating talents in their college days. They visit their college and in the relics of old memories where she is known as Nirupama Krishnan who challenges everything and is ready to face every problem with courage. In their college days she is the leader of each genuine strikes and the present computer lab in their college is the result of her hard struggle. It is her valuable signature in college days. When her father dies, she takes up the job and responsibilities of family and she got married and lives for her husband and daughter. Susan David, a successful business woman, reminds her of the woman she used to be and inspires her to rediscover her younger self. It is the joke on social media that makes Susan to meet Nirupama. After the meeting with Susan, Nirupama Rajeev decides to give an answer for social media where she became a laughing stock. Nirupama then explains her situation when she happens to meet the honorable President of India to the social media and clarifies her part. Now she is getting back the old confidence and courage. After her explanation through media, she is appreciated by everybody especially by her daughter, as she is totally disappointed with her mother when she missed the golden opportunity to meet the president of India. Sitaram Iyyer comes to know about Nirupama's organic vegetables through the old woman and her vegetables are asked for the wedding of Ayyar's daughter. Ayyar needs her pure vegetables without the usage of chemicals and pesticides and he seeks her readiness and availability of vegetables for two thousand people. When Nirupama's daughter invites her to Ireland, but she withdraws from her daughter's invitation as she has lots of work left to be done and she is ready to take up Ayyar's order for pure vegetables. To make this happen Nirupama encourages all her neighbours to cultivate vegetables on their rooftops. Through Susan David, Nirupama

gets an opportunity to present a seminar on bio farming in an important function with important officials as audience. Her seminar on biofarming influences all the officials and she gets great applause from the audience. The Minister himself makes a request to Nirupama about bio farming in each home and requests her to lead the activity. Nirupama is ready to take up the task entrusted by The Minister. At that moment her husband Rajeev comes back to India to take Nirupama to Ireland as he cannot afford the salary of a servant. Nirupama hesitates to go with him as she is committed with many jobs. But the cunning Rajeev emotionally exploits her through the words of Lakshmi and she gives consent to go to Ireland for her husband and daughter. Through her bio farming, she again gets the golden opportunity to meet the honourable President of India with her family. Now Rajeev and Laxmi are proud of Nirupama. At the end of the story, the spectators get the answer to the question. "Who decides the expiry date of a woman's dream?" The plot clearly goes through the answer of that question.

It is the character of Nirupama who leads the entire story. The film reflects the real story of a Kerala woman who forgets to dream in the midst of her family life. Nirupama has always struggled to fulfill the expectations of her husband and daughter. Her ignorance makes her the subject of ridicule among her friends, family and colleagues. Existence is as mundane for Nirupama who is locked in a rather unhappy marriage with Rajeev, her husband. She has a daughter who is unsatisfied with her. She is considered almost as good for nothing by her spouse and off spring. There are a number of hilarious scenes which look so natural that they appear gleaned out of life. Nirupama's small mistakes are mocked as blunders. She fails to grab many opportunities that come her way because of her incapacibilities. Rajeev and Lakshmi leave for Ireland to pursue their dreams as Nirupama fails to join them due to



technical problems. In fact it is a sort of escape for the husband and daughter, who find Nirupama awkward and inefficient to live with. Battered and bruised Nirupama struggles for inspiration. But she never gets any support from her husband and daughter. To make herself younger, she applies to dye her grey hair. But nothing makes her to compete with her husband and daughter. Her inability to rise up to her daughter's expectations and the discomfort of her husband who is mistaken for her younger brother further troubles her. It is her old classmate and friend Susan David who motivates her to a life changing decision. Out of her motivation and inspiration, Nirupama rediscovers herself and she becomes a woman who understands her strength and her self esteem now makes her a shining star among others. She becomes an inspiration for a whole state and ultimately her husband and daughter recognize her worth.

Is there anything or any criteria which decides the expiry date of a woman's dream? Yes: there is. It is the culture, tradition and religion decide the expiry date of a woman's dream. It is wonderfully portrayed in the film *How old are you?*. The film proves that age is not a barrier for conquering the dreams. It is the attitude of the person which helps to achieve the goals and dreams of a person. As far as the film is concerned, it is the male dominated society and the culture of Kerala which decide the expiry date of Nirupama's dream to conquer the world. The character of Nirupama represents not an individual but a type. She represents the silent pains of millions of hopeless mothers and wives who get conveniently ignored in their household. The film is imbued with lots of messages and inspirations for that hapless woman. The film revolves around the character of Nirupama Rajeev- her life before marriage and after marriage. Before her marriage she is known as Nirupama Krishnan and after her marriage she is known as Nirupama Rajeev. She does not get an identity

of her own self. It is the patriarchal culture who decides even the identity of a woman. The film tries to teach how a woman can be independent through the portrayal of the character of Nirupama. The film tries to convey the feministic ideology and the importance of biofarming. In the essay “On Screen, In Frame: Film and Ideology”, Stephen Heath argues that:

In ideology, it is said, is represented the imaginary relation of individuals to the real relations under which they live. It has also to be stressed, however that this imaginary relation to ideology is itself real, which means not simply that the individuals live it as such (the mode of illusion, the inverted image) but that it is effectively, practically, the reality of their concrete existence, the term of their subject positions, the basis of their activity, in a given social order. The imaginary is not just in ideology (it is in relations) and ideology is not just reducible to the imaginary (it is the real instance in which the imaginary is realized). What is held in ideology, what it forms, is the unity of the real relations and the imaginary relations between men and women and the real conditions of their existence. All of which is not to forget the economic instance nor to ideologize reality into the status of an impossible myth, rather it is to bring out ideology in its reality and to indicate that society – as against ideology, as its truth – is posed only in process in the specific contradictions of a particular socio-historical moment. (5)

The film *How Old Are You?* tells about the issues born out of man – woman relationship and reflects on both the male and female ideologies. The character of Rajeev typically stands for the dominating husband who dreams of migrating to

Ireland to lead a better life as he fed up with his present family life with a battered and bruised wife Nirupama, who works as a UD clerk in the revenue department. He never wants to appreciate her wife who always struggles to satisfy him with all dedication and sacrifice. In fact the character of Rajeev never allows her wife to cross the so called Laxman Line. It is illustrated colourfully by the director Roshan Andrews. There are many scenes in which he ties her down to stereotypical role and make her feel guilty for chasing her dreams. As far as Nirupama is concerned, she feels it is her duty to accompany her husband and daughter to Ireland. She needs a job in Ireland. But most of the Irish companies turned down her job application as there is nothing interesting about her life and of her age – thirty six year old. So her daughter Laxmi, always blames her for failing in interviews. Laxmi is a teenage girl with high ambitions. She wants to migrate and always blames her mother for being old. Another scene is regarding with Nirupama's question which breaks the monotony of her life. When she is invited by the president of India, Rajeev has a kind of complex. His ego never allows him to appreciate her for being the chief guest of the president of India. He too makes a question for Laxmi to ask the President, but the school rejects it. His question is the importance of radio in the development of India. Rajeev has had all these conversation in the absence of Nirupama. But she over hears his conversation and Rajeev becomes insulted. What it clearly shows is his hidden inferiority complex. But he never expresses his inferiority complex in front of Nirupama instead he tries to underestimate her with various silly reasons. Even though he leaves to Ireland he never stops his domination over his wife. When Nirupama accepted Ayyar's order for pure vegetable, he insists her to cancel it. Rajeev never wants his wife to be appreciated by others. He underestimates her that she cannot cultivate vegetables for two thousand people and also reminds her that she should not insult him and his

daughter again by accepting such an impossible order. But Nirupama never wants to cancel the order and she encourages all her neighbours to cultivate vegetables on their roof tops as well, which turns out to be a huge success. Actually it is Rajeev's jealousy that makes him to control Nirupama even when he is in Ireland. By presenting a seminar on bio farming, she is able to open up the eyes of Govt. officials and the minister himself request her presence to lead the bio-farming programme. At that time Rajeev arrives to take Nirupama to Ireland and asks her to stop the social activities and serve him and his daughter as he can't afford the salary of a servant. But she hesitates from his invitation as she has lots of work left to be done. But Rajeev emotionally hurts her bringing in sentiments of their daughter and at last she becomes ready to go Ireland for some days and decides to continue her own activities after her visits to Ireland. She never wants to surrender her abilities before her husband. Nirupama reminds her husband to expect only what is given to her. What happens to Nirupama is also happening in several lives – not just to a woman. People forget to the kind of persons that they had been long back and start believing that they have always been the paler, weaker, scorched beings that they have evolved into over the years.

Through the film *How Old Are You?* the director covers almost every situation that an average Malayalee woman of her age goes through – especially the working woman. This film conveys the importance of being a self reliant. The character of Nirupama is an inspiration to millions of women who want to walk in and out of their lives with strong determinations and desires. She is a woman with concrete perceptions. Even though she is presented as a simple woman leading simple life without any dream, she knows well that somebody or something act as a hindrance to attain the goals of women and she successfully removes all the hindrances with her

own inner capabilities. Her character tries to convey the message that women should not be tied up inside the lives of men. She should come forward and do something for the entire humanity and create her own space and leaves a signature by her. This film clearly makes the viewers to understand how men see women because women have internalized their ways of seeing. It presents the typical Kerala model woman image in its the most obvious form which provides a platform for each woman for the changes she must make in her ways of seeing herself and what work must be done to change men's ideas about a woman. Men likewise can learn much from film like *How Old Are You?* Each man has to accept the capabilities of women and the need of appreciation. Most of the viewers reviewed this film positively. The film proves that age does not matter and you are never too old to chase your dreams. Some of the viewers reviewed it is a fairy tale journey and it is just a social desire not a reality which is not going to be realized. The film deals with the question of identity and self definition. The face of Malayalam film industry has undergone a changing scenario in which women are able to occupy both intellectual and creative space. The present chapter makes a study on three contemporary Malayalam film- *Munnariyippu* (2014) *Artist* (2013) and *How Old Are You* (2014) and analyses the space of women in Malayalam cinema industry. The women characters occupy more creative and intellectual space in these three movies. They are presented as bold, ambitious and inspiring characters than presenting them as a weak, subordinate and an object. In these three films female characters have a leading role along with male characters. As far as the film *Munnariyippu* is concerned, it is Anjali's ambitious nature and her strong desire to be famous journalist leads the plot. In the film *Artist*, it is Gayathri's positive attitude and adjusting nature that leads the story. As far as the film *How Old Are You?* is concerned, it is Nirupama's questions – that leads the plot of the film.

The present study analyses the ability of female characters in conveying the message of the cinema and their ability to lead the entire plot. It is only after the arrival of globalization, such a face of women has begun to appear. Globalization has changed the face of the world, making us all into global consumers and giving us access to instant information. It has deeply influenced the lives of women – the status of women- social, economic, political and general. It makes women to enjoy many more rights – social and legal and have greater freedom and voice and participate more freely in public affairs. All these facts can be seen in the select three contemporary Malayalam cinemas. Anjali's ambitious attitude to give due weight to her career graphs, Gayathri's courageous attitude towards a new phenomenon – living together – by breaking all traditional social rules and Nirupama's attempt to leave her own signature in the world are the best example of changing status of women in Kerala. These women have begun to take responsibility and decision for their life rather than just playing wife's and mother's roles. Their aptitude and skills are slowly breaking down all characteristic barriers. They demand and enjoy their rights and are not afraid to stand alone. They make their own decisions and are not a door mat. They do not take any kind of injustice meted out to her. They can think for themselves and they make a life of their own. They are not afraid to be tough, aggressive and assertive. At the same time, they are not afraid to be feminine, sensational, gentle, caring and considerate. They can be a professional women as well as a home maker. They are full of aspirations, expectations and desires, but if they fail, they do not act like a weak woman. This is how the women in *Munnariyippu*, *Artist*, and *How old are you?* are depicted. The women characters in these three films occupy their own spaces.

## Conclusion

Cinema becomes one of the important means of communication between society and social beings and as a medium of communication; it conveys the social reality to its viewers. Recently, films have focused on the social issues and have been successful in representing the issues of women. These studies focus on the issues of women and on how such issues are perceived by women themselves. It also analyses how women are represented on the screen. Through this study, an attempt is made to prove that women are imaged as leading characters and their passive stereotypical roles have changed to active and resisting roles. Malayalam cinema industry has produced many women centered cinemas in which the female casts as the leading role. There was an assumption that women can play only the role of an obedient wife and daughter, loving and caring mother and grandmother. In the earlier Malayalam cinemas, women were treated as an object and an item to be looked at. From 1980 onwards, there is a shift from male lead to female lead, from male gaze to female gaze and from male spectatorship to female spectatorship and all these shifts have been taken for consideration in this study. Even though feminism is the product of western culture, it has influenced the eastern parts also. In western countries, it is women who lead and contribute for the improvement of socio- economic and political condition of women. Women had fought against the social evils like inequality, subordination and the treatment of women as object rather than subject. Even though feminist theories claim to give 'multicultural perspective' on women issues, it is dominated by western debates and western issues. In eastern countries like India, feminism is aimed at defining, establishing and defending equal political, social and economic opportunities for Indian women. Such movements are also reflected in

Malayalam cinema and the Malayalam cinema industry has produced many bold and defending women characters. With the influence of feminism and its theories, there emerged feminist film theory which focuses on women on the screen and their representation. Laura Mulvey in her ground breaking essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” focuses the issues of female spectatorship and male gaze with the help of psychoanalytic theory. In her views, cinema is the product of patriarchal culture and women are represented as a spectacle to be looked at and in such representations women are defined in terms of sexuality and an object of desire. Such representation can be seen in earlier Malayalam cinema. But with the evolution of time, women have achieved the status of subjectivity through female voice on the screen.

Malayalam cinema industry has been the consortium of male stardom for a long period where woman is only a flesh to be attacked or a tool to realize the sexual pleasures. The present study focuses on the leading role of women in Malayalam cinema and the films which are the byproduct of feminism and which have cast an influence on the people of Kerala are also selected for the detailed analysis. As a result of casting female as the leading role, there comes off many paradigm shifts. Feminists have tried to empower women from all social class and this empowerment is reflected in Malayalam cinema also. In the film *Naalu Pennungal*, the director Adoor Gopalakrishnan highlights the status of women in a male dominated society. The director has the idea of an independent woman that woman needs to have a room of her own as Virginia Woolf argues. All the women characters in this film have strong voice against the male fantasies. The film articulates the condition of a prostitute woman, a married virgin, a childless wife and an eternal spinster. Each woman in each story raises strong voice against male dominated atrocity. The



character Kunjippennu represents female prostitutes; society never treats any prostitute as good and never seeks why they decide to share their body in accordance with the fantasies of men. The film ridicules the institution of marriage. The attitude of patriarchal society towards marriage is that it is the license for sexual gratification. Such social attitudes are strongly criticized in the film. Through the characterization of Kumari, the director tries to portray an independent woman who is not satisfied with the institution of marriage because it destroys all her expectations. The film focuses on the situation of those women who are deserted by their husbands. The patriarchal society has a temptation to blame adultery on women. The same is realistically presented in the film. Kumari's husband refuses to have sex with her only because of his impotency. To hide this weakness, he denies sex to his wife and leaves her by blaming adultery upon her. The film indirectly hints the impotency of her husband. Through the characterization of Chinnu Amma, the treatment of society towards a childless mother is presented. The patriarchal society blames only women when she fails to give birth to a child. Chinnu Amma never surrenders her body to her friend for a baby even though he tempts her. Kamakshi is imaged as a strong woman who boldly faces all the trials and tribulations raised by the society in which she lives. She boldly says a woman can live without a man. These four women are imaged as a counter image for earlier passive and submissive women characters.<sup>22</sup> *Female Kottayam* presents an avenging woman who takes revenge upon her tormentors. The film realistically portrays the mental agonies of a raped girl. Instead of living as a raped and ostracized girl, Tessa K Abraham decides to take revenge through penectomising Cyril and poisoning his boss Hedge. It is an innovative characterization that Malayalam film industry has ever produced. The transformation of the character of Nirupama Rajeev in the film *How Old Are You?* from submissive

and passive role to active and defending one is appreciable. Such transformations are portrayed mainly in the films produced from 2000 onwards. Shyama Prasad in his film *Artist* presents a bold, independent and practical teenage girl who takes up all the responsibility of a family by sacrificing her quality time. The character of Gayathri breaks the conventional institution of marriage by preferring co-habitation with her lover. The film is about the disillusionment of a woman and how she has been dominated and how her basic right to be someone is denied by patriarchal society. But the character of Gayathri faces all the trials and tribulations with her bold and defending attitude. One of the major changes is that of the absence of a dominant father figure in the women centered cinema especially in the film *22 Female Kottayam*. It is a great shift as far as Malayalam cinema is concerned.

In a series of analysis of popular films, especially the films produced in the present century, it is clear that there is a shift from male gaze to female gaze and women spectators identify themselves with the characters on the screen. Usually mainstream films are constructed for male gaze, male pleasures and fantasies. Male spectators' unanimously accepted and responded to the voyeuristic and fetishistic images of women. But there are films which produce female gaze, *Trivandrum Lodge* offers a much more provocative and challenging form of female gaze. As far as the male gaze is concerned, spectators are encouraged to identify with the look of male hero and make the heroine a passive object of erotic spectacle. Laura Mulvey identifies three sets of looks involved in the cinema. They are the camera's look at the profilmic reality, the audience's look at the final film product and the characters look at each other. Women centered cinemas try to address female spectators. Mulvey suggests that the female spectators can identify with the active masculine position, but she calls this identification as a form of 'transvestite'. The leading character of the

film *Trivandrum Lodge*, Dhwani produces a voyeuristic look towards the men who are longing for sexual gratification. She openly discusses her sexual desire with men and in that desire she even approaches men. The film projects the desire of men, their brilliancy in sex works and women's attitude towards body. The film justifies the whore mother who builds up a better future for her son. The film explicitly highlights the sexual desire of women and the way women want to enjoy it. Dhwani is even attracted by the tooth clip of Abdu. It is a kind of transvestite identification that she identifies herself with the active and masculine position. Mary Ann Doane claims that the female spectators have two options: they are over identification with the women on the screen and to identify with the heroine as her own narcissist object of desire. Through this identification women enjoy gaze towards men and also identify the social issues women face in a patriarchal society. Along with the identification with the look to masculinity and identification with the image to femininity, Terese De Laurates argues that there is a third set of identification with the figure of narrative movement, the mythical subject and with the figure of narrative closure and the narrative image. In this way woman is a doubly desiring spectator whose desire is simultaneously a desire for the other and the desire to be desired by the other. In the film *How Old Are You?*, the character of Nirupama Rajeev desires to be desired by her 'self' rather than her husband. Through the film *Thoovanathumpikal* Clara celebrates her womanhood through her body. She embodies a set of images of female desirability and sexualized female images which emphasize physical strength and stature. Even though she provokes sexual desire, she desires to be free from her sexual gazes, thus the film offers a double identification.

The thesis begins with the attempt to analyze women centered cinema in Malayalam film industry. There are films which focus on the issues of women and

how such issues are represented on the screen. One of the main aspects dealt in the present study is how do women perceive the imaging of themselves on the screen. The first chapter tries to highlight the representation of female body on the screen and through such imaging how women perceive themselves in the context of Kerala culture. As far as Kerala is concerned it is the culture, tradition and religion that determine one's identity. The first chapter focuses on the films *Naalu Pennungal*, *22 Female Kottayam*, *Trivandrum Lodge*, *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* and *How Old Are You?* Female spectators can identify the tortured body of women on the screen. The spectators perceive a kind of voyeuristic pleasure in imaging tortured body. In the film *22 Female Kottayam* a raped female body and its pain are imaged. The film also presents the solution for such atrocity done in the patriarchal society. The raped woman in the film boldly takes revenge upon the man by whom she is raped. *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* highlights society's attitude towards woman's body and its treatment of female body as a commodity to be sold in the institution of marriage. The ostracization of aged female body is depicted in the film *How Old Are You?* The second chapter focuses on the life of female prostitutes and their treatment in a male dominated society through the film *Naalu Pennungal*. *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* focuses on the issues of Muslim women in Kerala context. Education plays an important role in the empowerment of women but in a patriarchal society, Muslim women are not allowed to access proper education. This is highlighted in the film *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam*. Muslim community promotes early marriage to girls and polygamy. The third chapter explores the feminine space in Malayalam cinema wherein women have occupied their own spaces through resistance. The chapter focuses on the films like *Artist*, *Munnariyippu* and *How Old Are You*. Women characters create their own space by leading the entire plot of the film. These three

films try to image a new woman who is different from the stereotypical passive woman on the screen. All these women characters explore their own 'selves' instead of surrendering their 'selves' to male dominating culture.

Malayalam film studies have shown a tendency to see cinema as a part of cultural representation. The current study focuses mainly on the films produced after 1980's in Malayalam film industry especially films in the present century. The cited films in this study are analyzed from female perspective with the help of feminist film theories. Even though most of the feminist film theories are a product of Western culture, its application in the non western films especially Malayalam films, is a little bit tough. The thesis focuses on those directors in Malayalam genre who uphold feministic values. Malayalam visual culture has a tradition to influence its viewers as a medium for women empowerment. Directors like Adoor Gopala Krishnan , T.V. Chandran , Roshan Andrews, Shyama Prasad, I.V.Shashi, Padmarajan etc are a few of the Malayalam directors who uphold the value of women in a patriarchal society. These film directors explore the new woman image that is more active and more resisting. When the earlier Malayalam cinema is compared with latter Malayalam cinema, the perception attitude has changed variably. As a counter discourse to male gaze, there emerged the female gaze phenomena in Malayalam cinema also wherein the camera exposes the hidden patriarchal ideology. Throughout the film, a relationship is established between what is in the subconscious of the women subject and what is being presented on screen. In this way in Malayalam film industry made a chance for a great shift from male spectatorship to female spectatorship. From the year 2000 onwards the female characters occupy the position of the subject rather than the object. In the select films, the objectification of women cannot be seen. Another important aspect is that most of the leading female characters produced after

2000 are economically independent characters. The male chauvinism of heroes are reduced with the bold approach of female characters. The constructed social values of patriarchal power structure are broken. In *22 Female Kottayam*, the character of Tessa K. Abraham is the archetypal feminine image of 'the hero'. She is successful in proving strength through her bold action. Tessa K Abraham decides to take revenge upon those who spoilt her life. The imaging of Kunjippennu in *Naalu Pennungal* is the archetypal feminine image of 'the orphan' who is often to be working class and desires to be seen and loved. The imaging of Kumari in *Naalu Pennungal* is that of the feminine archetypal image of 'the care giver' or 'the nurturer' - a mother figure, who has a tendency to save, feed or put everyone else's needs before their own. Chinnu Amma is similar to the feminine archetype of a care giver and Kamakshi is the archetypal imaging of the innocent. She is often imaged as the naive, wide eyed traditionalist. She is portrayed as an optimistic faith based saint and yearns to do the right things. The character of Gayathri in the film *Artist* is an archetypal feminine image of 'the rebel'. She believes in shock values, rule breaking, shaking up the system and absolute freedom. The imaging of Nirupama Rajeev in the film *How Old Are You?* is like the explorer. She believes in seeing the world and taking in as much as the world has to offer. The imaging of Shahina in *Paadam Onnu: Oru Vilapam* is of a Muslim girl who values the intellectual world. The character of Anjali Arakkal in *Munnariyippu* is a suitable example of the archetypal image of 'the creator'. She believes in cultivating talent, skill and visualization. Malayalam cinema industry wants to celebrate hegemonic masculinity by making woman the weaker sex and man the powerful. Thus the current study analyses the counter imaging of women in Malayalam cinema which casts the female as its lead. Even though cinema becomes a

medium of empowerment; society should also come up to the level of accepting individuality of woman.

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