

## Chapter 2

### **State as a Norm: A Study of *Elepathayam*, *Mukhamukam* and *Kathapurushan***

The transition of Kerala into the phase of modernity serves as the primary plot in the analysis of the films. The films of the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century reflect social realism. There was a noted transition in the themes and plots of Malayalam cinema as it transfigured the trajectory of events in the social and political domain of Kerala. The films taken for discussion in this chapter trace the political history of Kerala. Specifically, the films deal with the social structure of Travancore and how the caste, class, and politics of a particular generation build power structures.

The narration of history is abstract. Adoor's delineation of history in the films is not a factual account of political and cultural events in Kerala over a span of time. Rather, he represents how the events of the time affected the lives of the generation in which he also lived. Because Adoor comes from a nair matrilineal family, the ideologies of the caste and class to which he belongs are visible in the films. The contestations and insecurities of the individual life are frequently addressed in art films. These entrapped individuals are a part of a turbulent society that constructs the former. Adoor problematises the power structures in society. The select films in this chapter are inspired by true events that occurred in Kerala, as well as in India as a whole.

The study of the films in this chapter contributes to the understanding of sovereign power and its perception in society. The state has an authority over society, and the study explores and details the power operations in various aspects. The film's narrative incorporates the implication of sovereign power through

allusions and references to policies and political implementations in the state of Kerala. Michael Foucault in *Power/Knowledge* says that “the state is superstructural in relation to a whole series of power networks that invest the body, sexuality, the family, kinship, knowledge, technology, and so forth (123). The power of family, religion, gender, caste, etc. is brought under the control of the state. Foucault says that “it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no; it also traverses and produces things; it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, and discourse” (120). There are transformations in the hierarchies, which also prove that power travels not only from top to bottom but also vice versa.

The protagonists of *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan* represent characters who are defiant and refuse to be fixed in the flux of history. They were landowners of feudal families. The political entanglements of Kerala as a state form the backdrop for these films. The reading of power structures in these stories is analysed to understand how they condition discourse, society, and government. The study of class in the films *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan* functions as subversive forces to attain hegemony, as the dominant will to power. Nietzsche in *The Will to Power* says, “The dominant will to power needs the will to resistance in order to be manageable and exist” (438). “If the dominant will to power fails to contain the will to resistance” he writes, “it results in the establishment of a new centre of power organization” (439). The abolition of matrilineal systems and the new developments in the political sphere in Kerala dismantle hierarchical systems. The constant struggle in the political sphere leads to the decentralisation of power. The dominant elements cannot manage the resistance of the ruled class or the suppressed. This paved the way for the new establishment of hierarchical

segmentation. This emphasises the post structuralistic reading on the instability of the position of the centre. So, power is not fixed. It moves from the centre to the periphery and vice versa.

The stories of *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan* unfold the state of powerlessness in the hands of the protagonists. The term protagonist is used here to describe something other than an individual. Though Adoor refers to families in particular, it tells the realistic story of a generation of a state. This study intends to find out how power is dispersed. Foucault says that power runs through the entire social system. It is a productive network. It shifts from one system to another. Cultural institutions and political organisations function in a specific manner. It is developed through the takeover of materialistic signifiers, which hold power. It can be materialised both through legal and illegal means. For Foucault, power is not repressive; rather, it is productive. But when the films of Adoor are analysed, it becomes clear that power manifestations are both repressive and productive at the same time.

The implications of Kerala's matrilineal system, the formation of the first elected communist government in Kerala, the Land Reform Bill of 1969, and the Gulf migration of the 1980s are discussed, and this chapter intends to look at the impact of the same on society from the perspective of power dislocations. The discourse of the age, to be specific in the film, is the period between 1940 and the 1980s, which is studied to understand how hierarchies have turned into structures of power in the state of Kerala. Foucault in *Power/ Knowledge* underlines the statement that knowledge endorses the position of power and vice versa. The selected films give the social background of Adoor's age. The narrative

representations of the matrilineal system, the land reform bill, and the political engagements enhance the plot.

Kerala was not formed as a state before 1956. Under princely rule, the British units Malabar, Cochin, and Travancore were formed. These are brought together in accordance with linguistic reorganisation, which means that people speaking the same language are created during the presidency. V. Aiya Nagam in *Travancore State Manual* speaks about one of the legends associated with the origin of Kerala. The myth about Kerala's origins reflects the plurality of hierarchies in the forms of class. Parasurama threw his axe from Cape Comorin to Gokarnam, the sea receded, and Kerala was formed. To populate the new area, Parasurama introduced a special race of Brahmins, the Nambuthiris, and gave them ownership of all the land and its unique customs, which facilitated their return to India on the other side of the Western Ghats. Next, he brought the sudras, the nairs, to act as the servants and bodyguards of the nambuthiris (210-212). Sudras belongs to the one of the lower classes and Nambuthiri belongs to the upper class of Hindu caste.

The legend about the origin of Kerala justifies the upper caste's hierarchical privileges, to a certain extent. Power is a chain that is observed in all social relations, whether they operate at the levels of caste, class, family, etc. The dominance and subservience between Nairs and Nambuthiris are obvious in the hierarchical order of social relations between them. Because resistance is required for power structures to exist, the study also investigates acts of defiance by the powerless or oppressed in the late twentieth century. Power operates not only

from top to bottom but also vice versa. The films of Adoor actually portray the act of resistance from the bottom and the decline of upper-caste dominance.

According to Robin Jeffrey in *The Decline of Nair Dominance*, the Travancore began to show upper caste Hindu dominance fifty years before Travancore fell under British suzerainty. The extent of their dominance is believed to be in northern and central Travancore. The biggest land owners were Syrian Christians, but Nairs occupied most of Travancore. They considered themselves the clean Hindu caste, ignored Syrian Christians, and expected submission and subservience in the most ingenious way from their caste inferiors. This is obviously captured in the attitudes of the characters in *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan*. The position of Nairs as one of the dominant castes is justified by the definition of the modern anthropologist Dumont Louis on dominant caste:

A dominant caste has relatively eminent right over the land; power to grant land and to employ other castes. . [and thereby] to build up a large clientele, not [to] say an armed force; power of justice..., generally speaking monopoly of authority...,... the dominant caste is often a royal caste, [or] a caste allied to royal castes (Dumont 207).

It is important to understand the factors that have led to the merging of three regions: Travancore, Malabar, and Cochin. The resolutions and committees were formed to bring the three regions together. As a result of the discussions, Travancore and Cochin were merged on July 1, 1949. The States Reorganisation Act of 1956 separated the four southern states of Tovala, Agastiswaram,

Kalkulam, and Vilavancode and a part of Shencottah Taluk from Travancore and Cochin, and they are in Madras state. Later, the districts of Kasargode taluk and South Cannore were added to Travancore Cochin. These three united regions constitute Kerala as a state, which came into existence on November 1, 1956 (Jeffery 239).

G. Arunima's *There comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliney in Kerala Malabar c. 1850-1940*, Robin Jeffrey's *The Decline of Nair Dominance* and K. Saradamoni's *Matriliney Transformed: Family, Law and Ideology in Twentieth Century Travancore* give a detailed account of the studies based on the matrilineal kinship system held in Kerala. Arunima says that the abolition of matriliney in Kerala was practiced and made possible through a series of legislative interventions in the early twentieth century. The multiple factors, such as the influence of colonial administration, western education, and the role of missionaries, made the people in Kerala think that these practices are inferior. The English adopted and practiced a patriarchal system, and they considered the system of sambandam<sup>1</sup> absurd. The men from the Nair community began to work outside the home, and they got married and formed nuclear families. They urged the necessity of dividing the family property and needing the individual share. The Travancore Will Act of 1899 states the right of the wives and children to acquire half of the self-acquired property from the father. It is the first time that children's rights have been recognised. In November 1912, a bill appeared before the legislative assembly demanding the partition of *Taravad* (ancestral home or property). However, because the three Nair community members were conservative, the demand for partition was dropped.

The Nairs followed the matrilineal *Marumakathayam* system of inheritance based on the matrilineal joint family called *taravadu* (ancestral residence). There is a common female ancestor, and all the members of the family descend from her. The management of the financial and domestic affairs of the home is entrusted to the eldest male member of the family, *Karanavar*. The individuals have no right to claim or own the property; rather, it was held or shared in common. G. Saradamoni describes about *taravadu* in her book *Matriliney Transformed*:

A *taravadu* in its simplest form would consist of a mother and her children with their maternal uncle. In its complex form it would include a mother her children both sons and daughters, the latter's children and their descendants however distant. Menon emphasised the presence of a *karanavan*, the oldest woman's uncle, brother or son...Right to the property were traced through women and not through men. Each of the mothers and her children and descendants in the female line formed a *tavazhi*, literally meaning a mother's line (62).

The *taravadu* comprises three or four generations and likewise contains different branches from a common ancestor. There is no legal marriage or woman is not getting married off and stay in other home. She can live in her own home with the children. Each woman has a room of her own and she can have relationship with male partners from the class of Nambuthiris, Kshatriyas, Nairs or non malayali Brahmins. The male partner who wants to have relationship with the woman has

to negotiate and obtain the consent from the *karanavar*. She details about *Sambandam*:

Nayar women entered into conjugal relationship- sambandham, which literally means alliance-with men of their caste or caste above theirs. By and large it was also between families of equal economic status. Children born to the women belonged to their tharavadu, where they had the right of maintenance (65).

It is called *sambandam*. A woman can have *sambandam* with number of men. The men could hold little right over the children. The woman holds more power. G.

Arunima in *There Comes Papa* says:

Matrilineal marriage did not alter the property and other rights that women had within their natal tharavadu... Matrilineal women differed from their patrilineal counterparts in two important ways: marriage did not sever their ties-affective and economic-with their natal homes, and children, irrespective of their sex belonged to their mother's *tharavadu* (13).

The study here does not attempt to provide historiography but rather to demonstrate how the shifts in family structure, from matriarchal to patriarchal, have influenced power relations. The Nair families possess a major share of the land. The community living habits of these families help them to hold property and wealth without partition. Power is located in a single centre.

Robin Jeffrey in the article "Legacy of Matriliney: The Place of Women and the Kerala Model" writes that the Nairs themselves took the initiative to convert matrilineal law to patrilineal and establish the right to individual shares of



the family's collective wealth (Jeffrey 651). Between 1896 and 1976, at least 20 pieces of legislation were passed to modify and ultimately abolish matrilineal practices relating to ownership and inheritance of property and legal guardianship of children (43–44).

The close examination of the films reveals the distribution of power in Kerala society. The rewriting of lived history or one's own culture is dependent on the perceptions of the reader and writer. Adoor was born into a nair (one of the groups of Hindu caste in Kerala) matrilineal joint family. *Marumakathayam* means a form of inheritance by sisters' children as opposed to sons and daughters. This is a form of matrilineal inheritance and the lineage is traced through female line. The Kerala Joint Hindu Family System (Abolition) Act, 1975 (Act No. 30 of 1976) abolished *Marumakathayam* or joint family system prevalent among the Nairs of Hindu caste. But there are families who still confine to the practices of matrilineal inheritance. The system has its own experiences, stories, and perplexing questions. The culture of Kerala is reflected as a dominant trope in the films of Adoor.

Even after the legislation in the first half of the twentieth century, the families confined themselves to the joint family system and held the property without partition. Power has shifted from women's hands to men's hands. As ancestral property has been divided, power has shifted to the family in general. So, the power is dislocated or dispersed. The power confined to an individual *karanavar* (eldest male member of a family) and *karanavathi* (eldest female member of the family) is also ruled out, and it is shifted to individual members.

One of the resources that bestowed power was land. The possession of land gives power over economy. The reformations in the ownership of land during the rule of the leftist party of Kerala appear as a context in the reading of the films *Elepathayam*, *Mukhamukam*, and *Kathapurushan*. Adoor meticulously delineates the dilemmas and struggles encountered in the lives of the protagonists. The land reform bill of 1969 has had a wide impact among all castes in Kerala. Though the legislature passed land reform bills in 1960, 1963 and 1964 it became an amendment in the year 1969. The chief minister C. Achutha Menon ensured the rights of tenants and the bill came into force in the year 1970. As a member of the Nair caste, Adoor has witnessed and understands the impact on Nair families. He has narrated that in his films, *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan*. Both of the protagonist families in the films suffer from financial distress. The agricultural profit of landlords, known as 'janmis' decreased as the government imposed limits on land ownership. Gradually, that led to the financial crisis. But general studies and surveys found that it ended the caste and class inequality that prevailed in Kerala. And also, it offered ownership of land to the tenants, so they gained power gradually.

The Land Reform Bill took land of the land lords and restored the same to peasants. This is one of the steps that led to the shift in the power structures of Kerala, and it is well brought out in the film. In his study, Asish Rajadyaksha observes it as: "regressive authoritarian feudal states into ones ruled by communist agendas" (Rajadyaksha 20). The agitation known as *Vimochana Samaram*, or Liberation Struggle, by the non-communist parties took a serious turn. The Governor of India reported to the president that the constitutional

administration has dissolved and issued a proclamation taking over the administration of the state under Section 356 of the Constitution of India.

It is equally important to understand the constitutional developments, as they play an important role in the reading of Adoor's films. The general elections are one of the most important things to note here, and they serve as the plot for Adoor's films. The Agrarian System was implemented in Kerala during the communist regime in India. The bill was passed by the revenue minister, K. R. Gouri Amma, during that time. This bill shattered the feudal nature of landlords during those decades, causing a schism in power structures. The slogan 'land to the tiller' literally gave power to the peasants. The land monopoly was one of the power holders, which gave them authority. They were financially strong. This bill states that cultivable waste land would be given to the tillers.

The communist party split in 1964 into the CPI and the CPI (M). There were internal tensions and power politics, which led to the breakup of the party into two. Various scholars have researched and studied the cause of the Sino-Soviet split. In 1964, in conjunction with the widening rift between China and the Soviet Union, a large leftist faction of the CPI leadership, based predominantly in Kerala and West Bengal, split from the party to form the Communist Party of India (Marxist), or CPI (M). Kerala's state legislature was held in February and March 1957. The Communist Party of India and a few independents supported by it secured 65 of the 126 seats in the legislature. This brought an end to the president's rule on April 5, 1957. The communist party, under the leadership of EMS Namboothiripadu, came into power. The policies of the Communist government evoked opposition and led to its agitation.

To be specific, Adoor's films *Elepathayam*, *Kathapurushan*, and *Mukhamukam* trace the power displacements in the history of modern Kerala. The viewers can read the historical and political background of the age, which forms the core of the stories of the films. Though these three films vary in structure and narration, there is a common thread that binds them together. Adoor, as a young boy, became a part of the events, and that apparently comes as a theme for the films.

*Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan* are two films that explore how power distribution affects people emotionally and physically. *Mukhamukam* also analyses the power dispersions in the political context of Kerala and deals with 'political'. Unni and his sister, Rajamma, represent the old order. Unni, who holds the position of *karanavar* in the matrilineal system, has also lost his status. The study unfolds how the displacement in the position of the protagonist changes the power dynamics in the familial structure. Unni's attempt to reclaim his authoritarian status was futile. The film *Kathapurushan* also points to the loss of power at the hands of the central authoritarian character, *Karanavathi*. It represents the old matrilineal system in which women held power and the decline of that power as a result of the system's abolition.

The reading of the films provides a poststructuralist interpretation. The poststructuralists reject the idea that structures are self-sufficient. It is an interrogation of binary oppositions. Instability is one of the major themes of poststructuralism. This instability emerges from the complexity of human beings and the impossibility of escaping structures. The protagonists of the films chosen for this study are described as complex. It counts on weaknesses, pretensions, and

fears. The study of the characterisation critically questions the problematic legacy of power implications in the state of Kerala. The poststructuralist study involves an erudite examination of signs, which are produced by aesthetics and politics. Post-structuralism cannot be described as a theory but as a set of theoretical possessions. The very core is the self-reflexive discourse, which is aware of the tentativeness, slipperiness, ambiguity, and complex interrelationships of the text and its meanings. The concept of language also has to be studied scientifically to understand its various undertones.

Post structuralism emerged in France in the 1960s as a critique of structuralism. There are many perceptions that the poststructuralists accept from structuralism, and there are things that they resist. Roland Barthe's *The Death of the Author* marked a significant metaphorical turn, which contributed to the production of multiple meanings from a text. Not only is the author's intended meaning reflected here, it is impossible to form a concrete deduction. So, the text is deconstructed to study it. Deconstruction can be termed "applied post-structuralism". It can also be called "reading against the text". Deconstructive readings uncover the unconscious rather than the conscious dimensions of the text. The ordinary things that usually fade or go unrecognized are brought to the forefront through the practice of deconstruction. In such a reading, inconsistencies and complexities are highlighted, and new meanings of the text are explored. This practice of reading is called "oppositional reading" to unmask the incongruities. The discord reflected in the selected films is typical of post structuralism.

The films are non-linear, and the meanings of each shot in relation to the props and the dialogue give wider contextual meanings. The deconstruction

reveals a text's or film's disunity. It can be interpreted as the nature of language itself. Deconstructive criticism posits the undecidability of meaning for all texts. The texts reveal contradictory discourses and gaps within themselves. Deconstruction demonstrates not only that hierarchies can be inverted or reversed but also that the whole opposition can be undermined or collapsed.

The post structuralist reader must be able to use a variety of perspectives to create a multifaceted interpretation of the text. These interpretations may be contradictory. It makes the assumption that there is no singular, universal, unified truth. The frameworks must untie, and the structures become unstable or decentered, according to them. Post structuralism is also concerned with power structures, or hegemony, and how these elements contribute to and maintain structures to enforce a semblance of hierarchy. The study points to a new historicist assumption in the sense that it postulates the plurality and hybridity of human nature.

The reading of these films provides a new historicist reading of Kerala. The new critics disagree that the texts' intrinsic relationship with the historical and biographical background. The realistic representation of signifiers in the films of Adoor can be understood only through social and historical context. The study is examined and handled according to new historicism, where both the literary text and the non-literary context are given equal weight. Old historicism views history as the 'background' of facts to foreground the literature. The Derridean belief that there is nothing outside the text or that everything is available to us in 'textual' or narrative form causes old historicism to break down such hierarchies and follow a parallel reading of literature and history. It also examines history as it is

represented and recorded in literary texts. By constructing a historical framework and situating the literary text within it, old historicism takes a hierarchical approach. In essence, new historicism focuses on the 'word' of the past, whereas old historicism is focused on the 'world' of the past (Barry, *Beginning Theory* 167).

Old historians, according to Foucault, attempted to reconstruct the past by using historical documents as a source. They also appropriated facts and details to hide any illogical components and produce a narrative of history that appeared to be cohesive and according to the language of the day and age. New historicists, on the other hand, examine source documents from within to comprehend the inherent cracks. Instead of a continuous chronology of reason, this new strategy works to multiply discontinuities in the history of ideas. As a corollary to Foucault's view of knowledge as a manifestation of power, new historicists emphasise and take delight in discontinuities in a post structuralist manner (Barry168).

This chapter's research attempts to unearth selected films as products of contextualizing cultural and intellectual history. There are films that are the products of the particular social conditions of Kerala and share the same prejudices and ideologies. These films as texts are considered political, economic, historical, and cultural readings of the particular era. This method is known as the 'new historicist reading'. These films can be read in the context of other films and literary texts in Malayalam in order to foreground the social conditions of their production.

The realistic approach of Adoor in the selected films is studied as a new historicist approach that focuses on the text of the films as an arena of power relations. According to Hayden White in *Metahistory*, history is written according to the historian's current context and needs (White 4). Adoor wrote about Kerala in the latter half of the twentieth century, especially the Nair families in *Elepathayam* and *Mukhamukam*, from a nair perspective, taking into consideration his background and ideologies. His education has influenced the formation of these ideologies.

The new historicism does not intend to read history through the lens of grand narratives but rather to investigate conflicts and oppositions. Adoor's films focus on subversive movements, in the light of the new historicist reading of the texts. The conflicting and anarchic perspectives on the political and cultural entanglements are also brought into the narrative of the films.

The research in these films acknowledges the textuality of history, specifically the complexities of institutional and social power relations. The historicity of these texts is determined by power relations. The new historicism acknowledges the constructedness of history. The dynamics of power determine the shape of these narratives.

The new historicist reading explores the assumptions of Marxism in the narrative of the films. Images of cultural forms and practices are frequently associated with material conditions. As it serves the dominant culture of the time, Adoor adopts the caste system and political formulations of the decade. A new historicist reading of the films of Adoor shows how the genre supported the



dominant class. It reinforced the class structure of Kerala. It constructed specific notions of identity: the typical parasitic nature of Unni as a landlord, Kunjunni as the pampered son of the Nair family, and Sreedharan as an upholder of Marxist ideologies. It preserved and normalised gender roles. It can be seen in the portrayal of female characters in certain films. They confine themselves to the traditional roles of women. But Adoor also gives space for the representation of characters who want to resist the existing notion. Here, new historicism examines how the film as a cultural form supports, questions, or subverts established beliefs. It is inextricably linked, either positively or negatively, to the dominant classes' beliefs. It is associated with the Nair caste, or communist ideologies in society, in the reading of the films.

The new historicism emphasises the intertextual nature of all texts and looks for echoes of law, religion, politics, medicine, and other discourses in the literary texts of an age. This is clearly evident in the Malayalam cinema of that age. The art cinemas and the films of select directors reflect the age. And to be specific, the *mise en scène*, dialogue, props, illustrations, etc. reflect this.

The methodology of new historicist study recreates culture into the filmic text and thus examines both literary and non-literary texts. It is inspired by Clifford Geertz. 'Improvisation' is a term used by Stephen Greenblatt in *Renaissance: Self fashioning*. It means the way in which an individual seeks to enter into power relations. This term highlights or underlines the perception that all identity is fictional. The characters in these films behave in such a way that they alter or tune their identities according to changing power relations. It is not an abstract phenomenon. Adoor uses his aesthetic sense to represent these ideas

on the screen. Identity is generated through repeated performance and narratives. These performances of the characters are modes of reading in socio-historical contexts. It enables an individual, or, to be specific, a caste, class, or political movement, to enter the system of power. New historicism says that the attempt to adapt, accommodate and resist reinforce the power structures. But the study does not agree with this viewpoint partially, as in the films of Adoor, the resistance sometimes overpowers the dominant. It underlines the Foucauldian presumption that power does not reside in the center itself.

The new historicist term 'circulation' refers to the way in which power circulates through different texts in the form of discourse, such as how the images of Queen Elizabeth are circulated in pastoral poetry. Malayalam literature and film depict the image of Nair men and women. In this aspect, O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* is a representation of the period. The costumes and names of the upper caste men and women obviously reflect the circulation of power. The names and the roles attributed to lower castes make a sharp contrast to this.

Greenbalt uses the term 'Cultural Poetics' instead of new historicism' near the end of the 1980s. Cultural materialists believe that the new historicist readings are apolitical. There is no question of agency on the part of the marginalised. According to them, the dominant power structures absorb resistance. But at that point, Adoor, as the cultural materialists argue, focuses on the possibilities of subversion and resistance.

The films display the power struggles of a certain period and generation as encoded in the history of Kerala. It cannot be traced as the true history; rather, it

problematizes the history, which is here studied in the context of the Nair matrilineal system, the Land Reform Bill, Gulf migration, subversion of gender roles, and caste hierarchies. The films can also be seen as how history is conceptualised. This study aims to contextualise the plot of films in the form of power entanglements, especially how sovereign or state power acts upon the people.

At its most basic, the film depicts the collapse of feudalism in modern Kerala. Adoor tells the story of a Nair *taravadu*, who once held a position of power in society. Adoor reads the lives of Nair families in Kerala at a specific point in time through this family. The transition from *marumakatayam* to *makatayam* (lineage through children) has caused a rupture in the property, which was once concentrated in the centre as the common. The shift in power relations is evident, and the cause of that is clear to a viewer who knows the political history of Kerala during that time.

The production of meaning in a film occurs through the inter relationships of various codes. The moving and still images, sounds, recorded noise, musical sound, etc. contribute to the signification process. Though the film speaks about the repercussions of the matrilineal system and the ravages of feudalism, it is never stated in the film that the story is about such things. The images, costumes of the characters, plot of the story, props, noises, background sounds, etc. are taken as signs. These signs produce meanings at different levels.

The very title 'Rat Trap' or *Elepathayam* signifies the condition of the residents of a *Taravadu* in Travancore. Adoor uses it as a metaphor. The old

house, surrounded by a large plot, itself holds power, though it is in a dilapidated condition. The home as a trope is used in the film to display their economic stability in the past. The dilapidated condition of the home is a representation of power dislocations. The socio-economic changes in Kerala during that time point caused the descent of power from the hands of those who once held it. Suranjan Ganguly comments that the “brittle, eroded foundations” of the home make it synonymous with homelessness. He observes:

The subject of these films is their liminal existence as outsiders caught between the past and the present. This unreal in-between space becomes the site of their physical dislocation, which takes the form of a neurotic obsession with power that they exercise on their immediate family members or the community at large. And yet, officially, the men have no real access to power. This strange contradiction—power within powerlessness—only confirms their perverse otherness (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 31).

The props establish the plot and character of the film. There are different types of props, namely instrumental props, metaphorical props, cultural props, and contextual props. Instrumental props are common in film because they are used for their intended purpose. Metaphorical props are symbolic of a particular meaning. Cultural props convey meaning within a particular class or society. Contextual props acquire meaning according to their place in the narrative. The cultural props, such as the easy chair, traditional lock on the door, easy chair, courtyard, heap of coconuts, etc., carry significant meaning. The traditional

wooden easy chair installed in the long verandah on which Unni sits exemplifies the power he once wielded in the previous social order. The scene in which Unni sits on the chair and summons Rajamma to shoo the cow away demonstrates Unni's parasitic and chauvinistic nature.

The opening establishing shots of the house include the lamp stand, the oil lamp, the chinese jar, the heavy ancient door, the iron keys, key holes, the abandoned cot, the aesthetic design of the wooden ceiling, and a non-functional wall clock (Baruah 86). Also, there is a musical instrument called a harmonium in their house, which shows the financial soundness of their family in the past few days. These can also be seen as the props, which clearly indicate the system of power. Though the film discusses the disintegration of the feudal past, props point out the luxurious past that they once enjoyed. These props are part of the set design that establishes the film's narrative. This serves as one of the narrative techniques that enables and generates the narrative contexts of the Nair caste in Kerala, which has a rich feudal past. It was also influenced by the actions of characters, motion, and silence.

The torch used by Unni is an example of a metaphorical prop. During the *tharavadu's* heritage, the torch can be seen as a watchguard. It has the power to show its surveillance and authority against others. It is used as a symbol of power, which gives Unni a sort of security. The character Unni always holds the torch. The torch as a signifier is reinvested with the appropriation of Unni's attempt to make him believe in or recapture the power of the landlord. The torch is used as a sign in two different shots. Unni points the torch light at a passerby, and he shouts

and expresses his anger to Unni. He also lights the torch against Meenakshi on the village road.

Unni still tries to keep the power he has. The director also tries to give the character Unni to obtain voyeuristic pleasure. And at the same time, the fear of society and his awareness of his identity made him nervous, so he switched off the torch. The breaking of the torch glasses by his nephew represents the loss of power in an indirect metaphorical sense. But the light of the torch is used even in the last shots when Unni is intruded on and at the sound of breaking the door of the granary is heard. And in this shot, the village people who chase Unni light the torch against him.

Unni is presented as a character who represents the community of the past feudal order and who declines to become a part of the new social system. The character of Unni challenges the hierarchical structures of power that exist within the domains of class and caste. Adoor frequently employs the dialogues as a satirical weapon to highlight power structures.

Unni acts as an exponent of the patriarchal system. Unni is portrayed as a weak, timid member of the family. Though these are read as signs, the reading attempts to unearth the roots of this system. Unni's inability to adapt himself serves to reveal the background in the form of power structures.

Unni plays a central role of authority among his two sisters, Rajamma and Sridevi. Unni's attitude towards them obviously reflects his selfishness and egocentricity. Though he has a patriarchal nature, he is physically and mentally weak. He is not strong enough to express his basic emotions. Through this

character, Adoor explores the dichotomies and ambivalences in the matrilineal system. The background of the plot can be read from the images and dialogues. As explained earlier, the film reflects the nature of those who remained inactive during reforms in the class and caste systems.

Unni maintained financial stability and caste superiority in the past. The clues that Adoor has used as props in his film enhance the aesthetic charm, and even the noises add to the meaning. The study intends to bring out the power relations within the changing family structure. The film displays the dilapidated conditions of those cultural props, which were once indicators of class and economic dominance. The decay of these assets indicates financial instability. The reading of the cause of this gives an idea about the decline of matrilineal systems among Nair families and the land reform bill. The character Unni is considered the beholder of wealth, status, power, and privilege. Being the *karanavar*, Unni was granted authority over the land and property. The structure of the film can be read as an offshoot of the reaction to the abolition of the joint family system in 1976. Unni is a character who is not ready to part ways with his sisters.

The plot of the film frames Unni as a parasitic character who depends upon his spinster sister Rajamma for his daily rituals. Unni wants the privileges, so she acts as a dutiful slave. Unni denies the attempt to get her married off, as he thinks that a share of the property has to be given. Here, gender is a problematic factor in the matrilineal and patriarchal systems. The character Rajamma does not have the voice to express her desire to get married. The subversive role of the gender hierarchy is evident in the characterisation of Rajamma, and Unni exploits her to enjoy his privileges. He never takes any initiative to get the younger sister

married. He refuses to give the share when his elder sister Janamma and son Ravikuttan request it. Unni's escapism is cautiously reflected in two different shots. Unni is not ready to speak with or tries to avoid his elder sister and his son.

Unni is the one who is threatened in the film's opening scenes. The very image of Unni and the rat trap are often related. The rat trap even becomes a synonym for power when there is enough food in it. The rat takes no effort to escape. The rat is not aware of the consequences. The rat becomes powerless and understands that it is a trap when the feed is over. There is a constructed association between Unni and the rats. Unni's *taravadu* is also powerful as long as it has wealth. When the wealth is dispersed and the granary is empty, they are unable to maintain the home. The policies of the state act as an exertor of power, and they disrupt the carefree and idle attitude of Unni.

Unni screams at night because he believes a rat has bitten him. He cries out for the help of his younger sisters. The weakness and fearful nature of Unni stand in contrast to his sisters' attempts to chase it and trap it in the rat trap. He is a man who is interested only in himself. There are other scenes in the film that show the fragility of Unni. He is a defiant who is not strong enough to chase away the cow who intrudes on their courtyard. He abandons a journey because he must cross a mud pool.

The idle nature of Unni is vividly understood when he remains apathetic to the sisters' hint that some thieves have intruded on their plot to take the coconuts. He is not ready to disturb his sleep. Unni's obsession with his own body made him stick to certain demands, such as a hot water bath. His extreme attention to his



nails and moustache reveals his self-absorption. This can be seen as a form of narcissistic pleasure that he has obtained from it. Unni's lament in the last scene shows his complete defeat at trying to live as a man according to codes structured for a society. Literally, the film also clearly turns upside down the courage and power associated with males through him. It is a satire on men who live in leisure and idleness. Adoor shifts the position of the central male figure in the cinema. It breaks the conventions of focusing the heroic attributes on the male character.

The character Unni represents a community, or he is one of the representatives of the male characters. Adoor tries to tell a story of a community who lived in his time. When the axiom of hierarchy is shifted, there are those who tend to change and those who cannot accept the change. Some resist and challenge the change with their power.

Adoor describes Unni's apathy toward the changes outside throughout the story. Through Unni, he introduces the characters in his family and the village. Unni's confrontation with others, which she opens to the spectators, can be read in parallel with the connotations and denotations of her age. The study does not intend to focus on the historical context of the era, but rather on how the film deconstructs power structures. Class, caste, and gender are obvious seats of power. It is unavoidable to represent an age without these constructs. When Adoor tells the history, to be specific, through the narration of the filmic text, there is a deconstruction of the history. Family and society are relevant signifiers that produce and mould power systems.

Unni becomes a character of satirical nature when he is placed in a context of power relations. The very narcissistic nature of Unni makes him think that he holds some power. But his weakness is revealed when placed in contrast with his sisters. He always needs the help of his sister. Though he possesses external power (the status of being a male), his will power is insufficient to express his sexual desire. Unni became sexually attracted to Meenakshi, and his nervousness is an after effect of his powerlessness and repressed sexual desire. He considers it a forbidden passion. Being the *karanavar* of a reputed and aristocratic Nair family, he thinks that he has to adhere to and practice structural code. While reading a letter from Sreedevi's book, Unni's facial expressions are highlighted.

When his sister Rajamma becomes ill, his chauvinistic attitude is revealed. He has taken no initiative to give her medication or even attempt to inquire about the illness. His attitude becomes chauvinistic when he insists on hot water and tea. He is not concerned about others. His elder sister Janamma spoke about their sister's illness and Unni is totally apathetic towards it. He asks about other women in the home to serve his needs. The film raises concerns about the role of women being reduced to mere slaves who must serve the needs of men. Here, Unni is a man who never does any physical labor or gets involved in any activity. His insistence on getting food on time and the discomfort that results when there is a delay shows the gender disparity.

Unni considers women subservient to men. But he does not play an aggressive role. Through him, Adoor paints the idleness of a generation, a resultant of feudalism. He always plays a passive role in the fulfillment of his responsibilities. Adoor questions or dismantles the structural unity of the family.

He does not have heroic attributes. He is physically weak and a nervous and fearful man. But at the same time, being the male member and the head of the family, he insists on the privileges.

The character named Vareed Mappila, an old tenant of their family, also speaks about the irresponsible attitude of the character. When there is no yield from the coconut trees, he complains that the trees are not properly manured. Though this hints at the irresponsible and carefree nature of Unni Adoor, it implicitly speaks about the economic instability of Nair families. Unni is the product of a generation that lived with leisure and idleness. Since the property was held in common, they could hold land titles. This raises worries, hardships, and challenges. The land reform bill of 1969 posed a serious threat to these families. Adoor presents the crisis of that generation through the dialogues. Also, he shows the servile nature of the characters like Vareed Mappilai. He does not even ask for the wages for his work, and he talks about their dependence on Unni's family. So, through these hints, Adoor depicts the old picture of Unni's ancestors and *taravadu*. At the same time, this makes a compromise with the present scenario.

Unni's nature of escapism from his elder sister Janamma and his son Ravi shows his unwillingness to share. They are aware of the laws and rights. They question them and ask about their rights. In the family property, male and female family members have equal rights. Unni's authority in the family and the attempt to dismantle the authority are presented through them. The sister, Janamma, brings her elder son to claim their share. Unni does not respond to anything when she asserts her rights over the property. She tries to establish her rights in the home through his son. The nephew does not show any respect to the uncle. He considers

and tries to claim ownership over every property in the mother's home. Though Unni dislikes this and considers this a violation of his private space, Unni does not have the courage to ask him back.

There are two reasons for the apathy in this case. It was discussed earlier that they have the right to assert the claim according to their share in the matrilineal property. As a result, Unni is powerless to intervene. And also, the other thing is that, by nature, Unni does not question anything. He remains silent in the face of any intrusion into the home. When Unni is placed in a specific context, he occupies or contains power. Unni still holds the power of the old feudal order. The old feudalism does not have power in the plot discussed in the film. Unni's hold over the powers can be associated with the concept of erasure. The concept of erasure was developed by Martin Heidegger in the book *Being and Time* (1962). It is also influenced by poststructuralism. 'Erasure' means the traces of a sign exist, not the sign as an entity. In the case of Unni, power as a repressive apparatus plays no role. Physically, he is also a powerless character. However, his dominance over characters such as Keshu *Ammavan* (uncle), Mathaikutty, and, of course, his sister Rajamma is an example of this. They did not react solely because of the hegemonic characteristics of his caste and class' ideological assonance. Unni insults and shows resentment towards Mathaikutty and Keshu *Ammavan* in the guise of his dominant status in the caste.

Unni's evasion of the people who came with a notice and receipt reflects his poor economic situation. Unni never wants to hurt his ego by being powerless. Adoor employs this shot to help the audience understand his past and present situation. They are programmed to read the sign indicating that they have arrived

to collect funds. Unni's ego never allows him to speak about his poor economic condition. Unni also wishes to flee the person who delivered the legal notice.

The last shots show Unni's lament and inefficacy. The infirmity and helplessness are rooted in his unconsciousness, and the realisation that he has no role to play in history reveals more than Unni's identity crisis. Rather, it speaks about the crisis of a community in history. The speculative introspection transforms into aversion to the new power systems, and the impotency is complete. The last scenes can be seen as a nightmare. Unni becomes neurotic not due to the psychological imbalance but because he cannot accept the status of being powerless. Unni's running in the last shot shows his attempt to escape from the new social order. A door frames it through a metaphorical representation.

In the final scene, Unni is shown from a high angle. The high-angle shot is used to diminish the power of its subject, and the low-angle shot is used to enhance it. High-angle shots represent vulnerability or powerlessness, while low-angle shots represent dominance or hegemony. However, claims about such fixity are not always consistent, as it is sometimes used as a defamiliarisation technique. Unni's drowning and ascent to the steps do not provide an answer or climax in the last scene.

The film attempts to locate power dynamics in the portrayal of female characters. Here, the submission and dominance of the women are in contrast with the role of the character Unni. Unni represents the old order and ideologies. Being a signifier in the power system has various levels of significance.

The characterisation alludes to women's roles in the matrilineal system. Matriarchy provides freedom and grants rights to women. The three women characters who break the conventions are Janamma, Sridevi, and Meenakshi, the worker women. The conversation between Janamma and her brother Unni traces the legislation for the abolition of the joint family system. She is bold enough to express her right to inherit. She questions the unwillingness of her brother to give her share. First, she sends her son to ask about her share. Later, she comes and asks for her share of the property. She discusses the irresponsibility of her brother with the estate manager, Vareed Mappilai. She openly discusses with him the disinterestedness of Unni in giving the share to his own lineage. She also asks for her share of the crop. She threatens Unni that her husband will come and ask for the same. Janamma, the character, tells the story of a matriarchal society that once existed. This explores how women are changed with reference to social change. When she insists that the system of joint families has existed and that its abolition has swayed its power, Adoor points out the existence of matrilineal and patrilineal systems.

Though new critics disagree with biographical criticism, the plot of the films points to the matrilineal system that prevailed in Kerala. Adoor himself admits that he has witnessed things, and the things that he has known intimately became the plot for the stories. The study does not intend to delve into the nature of matrilineality through the character of Janamma. Rather, it studies how power relations in the system and gender dichotomies were constructed. G. Saradamoni, in the book *Matrilineality Transformed*, speaks about how matrilineality originated in Kerala. The historians studied the fact that patrilineality existed in the past and

matriliny came into being later. The origins of matriliny are debated by Padmanba Menon and P. T. Sreenivasa Iyengar. The myth says that Pasurama, the mythological founder of Kerala, introduced the matrilineal system. He ordered sudra women to satisfy the desires of Brahman men, and they had to put off their chastity (Menon 198). It is also said that this was concocted by the Nambuthiris to establish their superiority. The other reason cited is that they did not have conjugal relations with many castes, including lower sub-divisions of Nairs. Another reason is that Nair men had to join the military, and army women were supposed to take care of the house and properties.

Saradamoni opines that these have not offered any identity or security to women. Actually, it prevailed among both the landed upper caste and the landless lower caste. Matriliny offered better status for women than patriliney. She holds the opinion that Matriliny has offered identity, security, and autonomy to women. However, theorists and anthropologists have attempted to persuade us that women in matrilineal families were controlled, if not oppressed, by matrilineal kin.

Adoor speaks about the age that shows the disintegration of this system and at the same time contains the traces of it. The study attempts to provide a parallel reading of both the literary studies and Adoor's films. Both the authors of books and the auteur have witnessed and become a part of this system. However, they have strategic differences in their interpretation of the age.

Rajamma is a character who possesses internal strength. But to a certain extent, she carries the traces of the old matrilineal system. She is submissive to her brother, who is rooted in the authority of *Karanavar*. She is the victim of all kinds

of oppression. Rajamma does not have an opinion of her own. Even though she has a desire to marry, she does not express it. When a marriage proposal is brought to her, she does not express an opinion. She curiously comes to hear about the proposal. But it is also understood that it is a vague attempt. Her brother has no intention of marrying her off because he believes he has to give her the share or the dowry,

The sound of aeroplane is used as a contextual metaphor. It is intentionally employed as a metaphor for flight. She could never see it, and her vision became pale at the sight. It can be read as impossibility of escape for Rajamma. Because of the sunlight, she could not see the plane. The overwhelming power of Unni over Rajamma prevents her flight from the home. The spectators also can not see it, and only her sister Sreedevi saw it. Sreedevi's ability to see shows her impending escape.

Domestic responsibilities are an example of servitude. In the spatial structure, she never comes to front space of the home. She always stands behind the door to express her opinion. She comes outside only to perform household duties. She cleans with a broom to chase the cow out, and in another scene, it is shown that she is taking pepper from the tree. She is a woman who has internal power. She is more courageous than her brother. Unni looks through window from the home, while Rajamma stands on top. Unni's attempt to move into an interior space again shows his inertness. Rajamma atleast makes an attempt to break the bondage in the film.



Sreedevi is the offspring of a new order. She breaks the conventions of domesticity attributed to women. She is presented as a character in contrast to Rajamma. She is the one who went out to study. She is preoccupied with herself and bold enough to give voice to her passions and desires. She always cares about herself. Adoor, most of the time, takes the viewer to read Unni through the eyes of Sreedevi. She mocks at the fear and nervousness of Unni in her mind.

Adoor poignantly uses the significance of the title 'The Rat Trap' through this character. He uses the long shots of Sreedevi taking the trap and drowning it in the pond. This literally symbolises the killing of a rat. But it also shows the death of the old systems. And Sreedevi, as a representative of the new generation, takes the initiative to kill the rat. She, as a woman, does not confine herself to silent servitude.



Fig: 1 Sreedevi in the film *Elipathayam*

Adoor tracks the long shot, which takes almost one minute of her walking through a plot full of trees. This implies that she is attempting to take a new shift by drowning the previous ones. Her color of dress is poignant, as red denotes the color of revolution and spirit. Sreedevi can also be seen as the representation of resistance. She is ready to embrace the spirit of a new life. She makes her own life decisions. She is not as submissive as Rajamma, who never takes a decision for herself and leaves it to the men of the family. Sreedevi believes that her life must be run by her choices. She knows it is obvious and understands the attitude of her brother, who wants to break with tradition and the old aristocracy.

J. Devika's study in the work *Kulasthreeyum Chandapennum* is significant in the reading of this character. She says that there are two binary oppositions in the addressing of women: *Tharavattil Pirannaval* (a woman who belongs to aristocratic lineage and high class order) and *Chandapennu* (a woman who belongs to lower class strata). A woman who adheres to the values and traditions of *Taravadu* and belongs to a class of high order is an aristocratic woman, and a woman who works out in paddy fields and belongs to the lower caste is a *Chandapennu*. *Taravadu* is considered the epitome of class and economic power. The power structures of class and caste are reflected in these dichotomies. These systems, however, have become questioned and problematic by the late twentieth century. There was a rupture in the structure of these systems. According to Devika, western education has influenced the generation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which rejected some systems and encouraged the new reforms. This generation brought about reformatory changes in the Cochin and Travancore regions. They are forming the new public sphere. With their efforts, they openly discussed the

measures for reform in news articles, magazines, and discussion forums. They thought about how to reform their own caste and class. Devika adds that these were carried out by Syrian Christians and Nairs. According to her, the people who got privileges from the socio political changes were these Renaissance thinkers.

The value system of these neopagans includes an inclination towards the property laws of the capitalist system, the upliftment of society through the economic growth of individuals, the conditions for a competitive economic function, etc. Actually, this was influenced by western countries. However, the basic principles of equality, fraternity, and brotherhood have a western influence as well. But these neo-uplifters have practiced them without compromising their ideologies. They did not give women equality with men in the gender structure.

The last decades of the 19th century were a time of intense criticism of the caste system in general. The missionaries and companions argued that this system, which in God's eyes was equal, created by God, and separated mankind, was contrary to nature, man, and God alike. There were some who wrote outside of missionary influence, borrowing egalitarianism from Western political thought. The two groups had one thing in common: the claim that the difference between men and women could be explained by their physical characteristics. The missionaries and other reformers alike argued that nature itself had endowed them with the physical qualities and attitudes of men and women, through which the social status of men and women should be determined.

Accordingly, the woman's proper place was said to be the home. It came down to the responsibilities of housework, childbirth, raising children, and the

responsibility to influence family members through emotions in general and lead them in the right direction. New writers and missionaries argued that the home, as opposed to the outside world, was a place where peace and love could prevail, and that nature instilled in every woman the qualities that she deserved. Love, kindness, forgiveness, affection, the power to influence other human beings through words, tears, and requests—all these are innate in a woman. However, they lamented that traditional family practices did not nurture such qualities at all and that the real "femininity" of women in traditional families was simply wasted. Educate women in a way that nurtures their "special qualities," change family habits, and reform marriage practices—these are suggestions put forward by many authors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to reclaim the "true femininity" of women. The gender differences existed within a society though the caste system was eradicated. Inherent in this was the notion that differences between men and women would not interfere with their equality. In societies where the home and the outside world have the same power and recognition, there is a growing optimism that gender equality will come naturally (Devika 74-77).

Adoor problematises the character of Rajamma. She performs the role of submissiveness. Through her characterisation, he also gives voice to the power structures embedded in the reform movements of this particular age. Actually, through each of the female characters, he analyses and, at the same time, leaves the spectators to reflect on the ideological power operations embedded in the gender dichotomies. Janamma and Sreedevi, the characters, spoke out against the idealised role of women. When Unni is not ready to compromise his personal comforts, these two satirise him and do not pay much attention to him. Sreedevi

gives preference to her personal interests. Rajamma also does the same, and both of them give importance to their personal space. Rajamma also at one point ridicules the sisters' lack of interest in the need for property.

Though Rajamma plays the submissive role, she is also aware of the hegemonic characteristics of class dominance. When the worker woman Meenakshi requests permission to bathe in their home's pond, she expresses her displeasure. Here, Adoor problematises the grudges prevalent against the lower caste. Through its characters, the film raises questions about the caste and class systems of Kerala. The lower caste starts asking questions about their rights. And there was also the influence of the reform of the caste system through missionaries and western education.

Adoor's attitude toward the lower caste is expressed through three characters. The treatment of Unni towards the character called Keshu Ammavan shows the false pride and self-esteem of Unni. When Keshu Ammavan speaks about a marriage proposal for Unni's sister Rajamma, Unni rejects it. When he insists on the proposal, to justify his deed, Unni taunts the character Keshu Ammavan (uncle) as the person who came to their house as *sambandam*. Even though *sambandam* was considered a normal and accepted relationship during that time, Unni attempts to insult the character called Kesuammavan for being related to their family through *sambandam*.

The dominance and subservience in the matriarchal structure of the family are represented here, as well as how power structures influence submission. Keshu Ammavan admits that he is related to Unni's family through the *sambandam*. As a

result, there is no authority in matriarchal power relations to intervene in the decisions of the woman's partner. The eldest male member, or *karanavar*, of the family has power to take decisions. This questions the rupture and instability of power structures contained in family relationships of family. At the same time, his response includes an insulting remark about the decline of economic power. And he subtly attempts to undermine norms and power structures that were once thought to be natural and neutral during the matriarchy.

The representation of the character Mathaikutty foregrounds the Gulf Migration of the particular age. Mathai Kutty is the son of Vareed Mappilai. The attitude of Unni towards Mathai Kutty shows his egoistical nature and caste dominance. There is a scene in which t Mathaikutty, visits Unni's home. Unni shows his dominance and aversion toward him. He had a high financial status at the time, despite the fact that his father and forefathers were the only dependants of Unni's family. Through this character, Adoor also speaks about the changed financial conditions in the lives of the people. People from the lower castes began to migrate to Gulf countries in search of work. The mass migration of people from Kerala to the Gulf from 1972 to 1983 is called the Gulf Boom.

Gulf migrants, many of whom were from the working and the lower-middle classes, gradually gained social status. A myth was in the making: that of the 'Gulf man'. Gulf migrants were highly sought after as bridegrooms. Their attractive earnings, irrespective of their shortcomings, enabled them to marry into wealthy and respected families when they returned home. The Gulf Dream has

also found its expression in Malayalam cinema and literature (Malayalam Manorama Year 1990).

The Gulf migrants gradually gained social status. But the representatives of the old generation were never ready to embrace the changed social scenario. Mathaikutty brings perfume for them. His and his sisters' attitudes highlight false pride and the gradual acceptance of equality. Rajamma brings him tea and extends hospitality. But Unni intentionally hurts the pride of Mathaikutty by mentioning the tedious work conditions of the Gulf immigrants. Saradmoni in her work *Matriliny Transformed* says:

The economic changes of the late nineteenth century and the strictness of the new legal system had ruined many tharavads. From Nairs to Christians and even Avarna Hindus, there was mounting evidence of wealth. Such a transfer, coupled with the spread of egalitarian ideas among the same groups, posed a threat to the social position and the local political dominance of Nairs, which few could ignore (243).

The other, which depicts the condition of class power relations, is Meenakshi, the worker woman. The very characterisation of this lower-caste woman as vulnerable questions the power relations embedded within the text and outside the text. The depiction of a lower-caste woman is presented as the other. The power politics are embedded even in the physical representation of the dalit woman, Meenakshi, in contrast with the nair women, the sisters of Unni.

The use of popular characters as upper caste women emphasizes the binary representations of civilized/uncivilized, beautiful/ugly, and so on. Christina Romeo, in her paper titled "The Decathected Dalit Body in Malayalam Cinema," says that the dark skin and unattractiveness associated with dalit characters are often repeated and the condition of the same is imprinted in the social mind, and the spectators fail to overcome such stereotyped presentations. The dark-skinned characters are presented as the other, or the film makers intentionally made them dark on the screen to represent the Dalit. She says that when the lower caste is represented on screen, they are created as the "other" of the dominant upper caste women. So, such a woman will be devoid of identity, and the spectators will identify only the laboring body. In contrast, non-dalits establish their intellectual and social superiority.

Meenakshi is portrayed as sexually vulnerable as a lower caste woman. Adoor typifies the subjectivity of a lower-caste woman as a product of sexual objectivity. As a member of the lower caste, she considers herself and her body as an object to be devoured by patriarchal constraints. Her submissiveness shows the servitude of the caste and gender hierarchies.

In her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", Laura Mulvey discusses how films are consumed to satisfy the masculine appetite for scopophilia. Here she says how the male gaze, as the representation of power, controls the passive woman on screen. She defines the woman as "a signifier for male others bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions" in a patriarchal culture. Here, the character Unni tries to suppress his fantasies, while the character Meenakshi tries to instill pleasure in him. She



has been rendered passive, and her efforts to make Unni gravitate towards her are another form of passive submission. She also tries to incite pleasure through sexual overtones and gestures. One way Adoor problematises the age is through the representation of marginalised people, and the film's marginalised characters are identified by an identity imposed on them by the ideological and hierarchical operations of the caste system. The self of these individuals resists the given identity and desires or admires an identity that elevates their status to that of the privileged or upper class.

The film *Kathapurushan* narrates the political history of Kerala through the parallel changes in the lives of a Nair family. The study attempts to look at these changes as changes in the power operations of Kerala. It seeks to examine how the sovereign and disciplinary modes of power act. The intended analysis uses Foucauldian perceptions of sovereign power as legislative, prohibitive, and censoring in *The History of Sexuality: An introduction* (Foucault 83-85). The film is not a factual account of political events. But Adoor narrates the political happenings from his perspective, and he is a product of power discourses. Adoor says that the film is partially the story of his own life. He draws the characters from his life. Every political system or ideology is a representation of power. When it is part of history and narrated, the author's perspective also holds some power.

Gautaman Bhaskaran in *Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Life in Cinema* says that every system must adapt and change. There are characters in his films like Unni in *Elepathayam* and Sreedharan in *Mukhamukam* who do not adapt themselves to this system. They are unable to adapt to the neo power systems.

This film unfolds the political turmoil between the 1940s and 1970s. The shifts in the power systems, such as political and caste systems are narrated through the story of Kunjunni.

The film unfolds the growth of the protagonist, Kunjunni. Adoor, as an auteur, reads the age of the same period through his perspective. Adoor's ideologies, beliefs, and attitudes intervene in the depiction of the age. The props serve to speak in the film like *Elepathayam* to speak about the old aristocracy of the nair *taravadu*, to which the protagonist Kunjunni belongs. Adoor frames the shots in such a way that they sketch much more than the surface reality. The big house, wooden frames and windows, furniture etc. are used as metaphors that create a narrative space for the plot.

The representation of class is significant. When Adoor speaks and represents the family of Kunjunni, the dependent individuals or characters in their family, called the other, always serve them as subordinates. The family of Janamma, the female maid, and Veluchar, the manager, serve the family as servants. They address the character Kunjunni as Kunjunni *yajamanan* (master). This makes him aware of the disparities that make up the social and economic aspects of the relationships. Ganguly studies: "Despite living under the same roof, these others clearly do not share his sense of home and class. Their presence underlines an unequal feudal structure of wealth and privilege" (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 144).

Ganguly, in his study, observes that Kunjunni has entitled himself to be superior in relation to the family of Janamma, including his friend Meenakshi.

“He registers the difference but does not reject it as perverse” (145). The difference in the class of hierarchical division is exemplified in spatial structure as well. The servant Janamma and her family live in a part of the house that is for servants. They do not have a space of their own. The manager of the house, Veluchar, also has a reserved space in the home. Both of them are devoid of spatial identity.

Domestic space is divided along lines of class and labour. Kunjunni can grasp this intuitively because he moves between his space and their space. The fluid movement between separate realms enables him to stay within and yet stand outside the hierarchy that governs the divisions within the household (145). Kunjunni is portrayed as a weak character in his childhood. He is dependent on others for his needs. Though the old generation consists of Veluchar and Janamma, the position of the *vaidyan* (physician who deals the treatment with ayurvedic medicine) and the astrologer is also significant. They are aware of the social and economic marginalisation created by the ideological structures of caste.

The dependant servants’ servitude to their families is due to ideological affiliations with the class and creed. Actually, Adoor creates ‘spaces of the other, (144) through the representation of the marginalised main characters Veluchar, Janamma, Meenakshi, Pachu Pillai, and the younger children. Though the fluidity of movement takes place between the two spaces, the positions of being in the privileged class and the underprivileged class function as the sites of power disparities.

There is a scene in which Kunjunni comes back from school crying, and the reason he gives is that the teacher there calls him 'petty bourgeois'. Actually, this becomes an insult for Kunjunni. This raises questions about the hierarchical disruptions in the seats of power. The decline in the economy has caused dislocations in their status. The caste reform movements, the influence of Gandhian values, and western education made the lower class aware of their rights. The term 'bourgeois' obviously applies to Kunjunni which pertains to the economic security and class hierarchy of him in the ancient days. The Encyclopedia defines the term 'petty bourgeois' as "a transitional class in which the interests of the major classes of capitalist society meet and become blurred; the petty bourgeois is located between these two classes in terms of its interests as well as its social situation". It represents a distinctive form of social organisation in which petty productivity is mixed with, and owned by, family labor. This was replaced by Nicos Poulantzas, who defines the term on the basis of ideological, political, and economic criteria. According to him, they are unproductive wage earners and the carriers of ideological dominance.

The social class structure is very predominant in Kerala. The *Nambuthiris* (one of the classes of Hindu caste) belong to the top of the class hierarchy, and Nairs come below them. As explained earlier, they are land owners. They controlled a major portion of the land. The lower castes were the tillers of the land. They have undergone numerous tribulations. The film points out the changes in Kerala, which can also be read in parallel with social reform and democratic movements in Kerala. The study attempts to look at how these changes have taken

place and how they caused the shift in the power structure from the centre to the periphery.

The caste system prevalent in Kerala is the root cause of the tribulations suffered by people of lower caste people. The law was not egalitarian. There were untouchability and unapproachability. There were restrictions on intercaste marriage and social mobility. Manual labor was considered as a degraded occupation by the upper caste and the land lords. The influence of missionaries and western education resulted in changes to the rigid caste structure. The subversive forces questioned the social practices of discrimination in Kerala. The nationalist and reform movements paved the way for changes, such as the abolition of caste and class as sources of power.

The movements led by Sree Narayana Guru campaigned for equality. He questioned the Brahmin hegemony and fought against social disabilities. The changes witnessed in the last phase of the 19<sup>th</sup> and earlier phases of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries could be taken as a cultural and ideological struggle against the hegemonical constraints of caste hierarchy. Adoor witnessed the result of these in his life. The erasure of these tribulations and their aftereffects were contested. The problematic relationship between the upper caste, especially the Nair class, and the political and non-political movements is narrated in the text of the film through the family of Kunjunni.

There is a scene in which Kunjunni returns from the school in tears, and the reason for his grief was the comment made by the master in the school. The master insulted him as a petty bourgeois. Veluchar's reflection on this remark was

significant. The master belongs to a class lower than the family of his master's (Kunjunni), and Veluchar criticises the master as he has once passed in front of their home with chappals. Though the caste reformation has swept away such customs those were insisted on the basis of class divisions, Veluchar represents a generation that neglects to comprehend the changes. He criticises Gandhi's principle that everyone should be treated equally. Though it creates a light sense of humor about the innocence of Veluchar, it reflects the undeniable dominance of power. Veluchar's perspective on his master's family's class hegemony underpins his egoistical pride as well as his opposition to reform movements that shackle their dominance. Veluchar's extreme servitude towards the master and, through that, the upper caste, is significant here. Though this is a short scene, it again points out the age and influence of the Gandhian movement in Kerala. It reinforces his class superiority along with the portrayal of his age. When history is represented, a powerful figure is mentioned, and Adoor speaks about the consequences of that. The assassination of Gandhiji and the reverberations it caused in Kerala are depicted in a long shot of a procession of white-clad congress leaders. Though Veluchar criticises Gandhi's principles, he and the mother of the family could not understand the reason to murder such a person as Gandhi, whose principles are based on 'ahimsa'.

The arrival of Vasu, the maternal uncle of Kunjunni, points to the parallel struggles of the era. Actually, Adoor gives importance to mini-narratives through the filmic text. Vasu was an adherent of Gandhian principles. Later, it is understood that he left the Gandhian movement and told his friends that real freedom could be obtained only through revolution. Adoor emphasises the

importance of individual activists for change once more. But at the same time, he fears the forces of the state—the police. Every system holds power, and that power is not absolutely pervasive. It is also productive. It has resistance. Ganguly says:

For Gopalakrishnan, history is a set of variations on a theme—a series of interactions, conflicts, transformations, and refinements through which society and humanity evolve. It is an ongoing process with no pause and no promise of utopia. The individual, by virtue of his or her actions, is an integral part of this process and, in turn, is shaped by the forces he or she sets in motion. There is thus a continuous struggle to define oneself in relation to the state and ideology. According to Gopalakrishnan, it is one's moral duty to oppose all systems once they become inevitably good and oppressive. As he observes, "Any system . . . soon begins to develop its own mechanisms of defense. . . It tries to annihilate individual dissent. Human progress has been mainly possible because individuals have kept fighting that kind of encrustation" (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 142).

The post modernist reading is relevant here because Adoor interprets the movements as mini-stories. The importance of each decade is portrayed through the representation of a landmark movement. But it is not portrayed as a major theme. Adoor reinvests it with the critical perspective of the auteur, and the artistic vision is also significant. The communist electoral revolution of 1957 has a

great impact on the lives of the people in that decade. Adoor presents the victory of the communist party through a shot that shows the heading of news articles. As a mini-narrative, Adoor tries to present the parallel condition in the lives of the people. The land reform bill of 1969 is a landmark event in the rule of the communist party. It represents the decadence of power inherent in the hands of a class. As in *Elepathayam* Adoor, the author recaptures the aftereffects of the event. Because the land economy was a signifier of power for the upper classes of society, restrictions on the possession of land led to a loss of power. Adoor has experienced and witnessed the crisis and captured the same in the films.

It is not narrated as a major event, but the reading of that event is possible through the actions. The financial condition of Kunjunni's family is weak. They are unable to hold Janamma's family. Adoor brings a tragic note to the scene in which Janamma and family bid farewell to their master's home. The spatial relations implied in the scene are also important. The women occupy the major space of the frame in this shot. Janamma, the maid, is more powerful than her husband. Pachu Pillai, her husband, is physically weaker than his wife. The maternal grand mother 'Karanavathi' plays a dominant role in decision-making, in the home of Kunjunni. Adoor tries to provide a gentleness that binds the boundaries of the master-servant class division. Despite the fact that the lower class is a beneficiary of the land reform bill, they prefer to remain subservient in the scene.

When Veluchar criticises the bill here, it is Kunjunni who supports it. He says that they too have rights on the land. The land actually belongs to the tiller. The ideology of the party to which he belongs is reflected in his thought. The



scene depicting Veluchar's plea to the police to release Kunjunni, as well as the police's attitude toward him, is an example of extreme servitude to power. The police's inhumane attitude demonstrates the pervasiveness of power.

The state becomes synonymous with power, and the subjects are compelled to submit to its will. The land reform bill has created tensions. Here, the devastated condition of Kunjunni's family becomes more complicated. They had already spent an amount on sending his maternal uncle Vasu to England for higher studies. They have spent money on Kunjunni's education, for example. As a result, they are helpless and unable to support Janamma's family.

Adoor narrates the turmoils in Kerala's political sphere with Kunjunni's life. Through Kunjunni, he represents a generation that is trapped in hidden power structures. The unseen power that acts as a decisive factor in the lives of the people is narrated through him. The plot of the film incorporates Jeremy Bentham's concept of panoptic surveillance and Foucauldian notions of power. The ideology of Marxism has influenced him. His perspectives are left-biased. He dislikes the label 'bourgeois'. He is addressed as a 'bourgeois' by his friend in the college.

His involvement in Naxalism is represented through how the police subdue the movement. He becomes actively involved with the Naxalite ideology. It represents the voice of an age in which the youth are influenced by the Naxalite movement. The naxalite uprising of the 1960s arose as a reaction to feudalism and bourgeoisie, as well as the degeneration of Kerala's communist party. The educated, radical youth fought for their rights.

Adoor brought this experience only in this film, *Kathapurushan*, and narrated how the state intervened and repressed the movement's trajectories. There are films such as *Amma Ariyan* by John Abraham and *Aaranayakam* by Hariharan that have narrated about the naxalite movement in Kerala. In the film, *Kathapurushan* Adoor does not trace his experiences as a naxalite but rather as a signifier of the power structure. He intertwines it with the trajectory of events in the political history of modern Kerala.

Kunjunni is a character who develops his reflections and perspectives in response to the needs of society. His youth inclination toward leftist ideology, as well as influence from his uncle, led him to join the party. The repressive apparatus of the state tries to resist the movement. Being a member of the feudal family itself, he fought for the rights of the downtrodden. The film also captures the repression of the police to subdue the activism, in the case of his uncle and himself.

Adoor picturises the period of black emergency through the representation of visuals. It traces the efforts to block the printing of inflammatory literature. It again questions the freedom of press and Kunjunni's attempt to resist it shows the co existence of resistance together with sovereign power. Adoor traces the origins of naxalism and its evolution through a collection of printed materials. The power of the printed literature in a state is also reflected. The power is in the form of the brutality of the police to destroy the printed literature that supports the Naxal movement. In a single shot, the color red is used, which indicates the suppression and attack of the police. There are no shots that clearly show the police attack. But

it is conveyed through a single shot that is full of red canvas. In a consecutive shot, the sound of beats and boots is heard. It reflects the repression of the police.

Adoor traces each epoch in an artistic and intelligible way, as it does not deviate from the plot. But power structures in each epoch are chosen with subtlety. The power of the state during the emergency period is also pointed out here. The paradigm shift in power (plurality of power relations) in the hands of the political party suspended people's rights. The national emergency declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi between June 25, 1975, and March 21, 1977, imposed restrictions on fundamental rights. The prime minister has the authority to rule by decree, suspend the elections, and curb civil liberties. The police hold the power, and Adoor associates it with the police activism and the resistance of the naxalites to overthrow it.

The attempt by Kunjunni to publish the book *The Hard Consonants* reflects the resistance of the power structures to stop its publication. It again shows the imposition on the individual to get his work published. He has to check whether the political climate is right enough for its publication. He seeks the help of a journalist friend, and when it is published, the government bans its publication. As a realist, Adoor, through Kunjunni, recreates himself. This is a direct reference to attacks on the freedom of a writer. It limits his or her artistic freedom. The power incites opposition. This book is described as 'explosive' by his friend. The process of making the book has taken place during the emergency period. The brutal suppression of the Naxal movement in Kerala made him write about the plight of the people under an authoritarian regime. It is obvious that he has copied the facts of the political sphere that he has known intimately.

The props used in this film play an important role in contextualizing the power representations. The wooden frames used in the house, like in *Elepathayam*, signify the dilapidated condition of the home. However, the shots of these props reveal additional meanings. The window is a prominent prop in Adoor's films. The spatial representation also signifies power entanglements. The wooden frame of the door, through which Kunjunni's mother is shot and which always remains in the way of the door, represents the repressed self of women. The shots taken as she is positioned inside the frame of the window reflect subjectivity.

The *kindi* which is made of bronze (a type of pitcher found in old Kerala houses), is shown in the opening scenes. There are such copper vessels of different shapes in different parts of the home. Adoor takes one medium shot, in which there are only vessels. It shows the past financial heritage of the family. Adoor visually depicts the decline of power by changing the props. Kunjunni enters his adolescence, and the financial situation deteriorates once more. So, there is a shift in the use of the props. The *kindi*, which is made of copper, is changed to a vessel made of steel. That visual is brought in together with the arrival of his uncle Vasu as an ascetic.

The grandmother's golden chain is highlighted in the shots that focus on her costume. It shows her past aristocracy and richness. Again, the degradation of their economic condition is stated through the scene, which shows the servant Janamma and her family being sent away from the home. So as a token of help, the grandmother handed over the golden chain to Meenakshi. She is the only one to remind her that she has property. Being the *Karanavathi*, she is portrayed as

powerful and is also a member of the matrilineal system. She holds power and authority in the home, though she has a gentle nature toward everyone. There is a scene that shows both the long shot of the grandmother and the pointed arch roof of the home together. It speaks about her dominance and authority.

There are big bedsteads with wooden carvings in the home which also shows their ancient glory. Every cot in the home is built with heavy wooden frames. The wooden cot acquires significance as Kunjunni sleeps on this and the picture of that cot is taken from outside together with the open wooden frame of window. This cot is symbolic of the family's power. Later the significance becomes more understood when a person approaches Kunjunni asking whether he has plans to sell the home. He brings the suggestion that when they put the cost for the home they should add the specific wooden cot kept in the first floor. It was the cot of the forefather of Kunjunni. The person wants that for his father who was once servant of their home. He considers that as a symbol of proud and power.



Fig: 2 The wooden cot in the film *Kathapurushan*

When the economic condition of Kunjunni's family becomes weak he has no hesitation to sell off the property. At the same time the servant becomes rich enough to own the property. The shifts in the power structures are indicated through the intelligent representation of props intertwined with the plot of the story.

The ancient structure of the house as a prop becomes devoid of power. The ancient house stands for the ancient heritage and glory of the Nair *taravadu*. But it acquires meaning only in the light of economic power. The decline in economic status has reduced the structure of the home to the status of an object. Meenakshi, the wife of Kunjunni, makes a metaphorical comment about their plight in that house. They are like trapped rats. For them, the house is the only reminder of power. Their decision to sell the house is an attempt to shed the outer manifestation of hierarchy. Kunjunni is ready to make a deal about the house, including the wooden bedstead, with the son of their old servant.

The character Kunjunni is more practical than Unni in *Elepathayam*. When Unni wants to live as a trapped rat in the old house, Kunjunni makes an escape from the trap. They sold the property and bought a new plot. Kunjunni does manual labor, and the jump from the plot of the old, big *taravadu* to the small house shows the power shift. Again, the old house, symbolic of power, belongs to their servant. Thus, cultural props take on significance in *Elepathayam* and *Kathapurushan* in order to reflect power structures.

The stammering of Kunjunni can also be taken as a defense against the power system in the school. The school's rigid system imposes principles on everything. The school serves as a metaphor for the construction of structures for

everything in this case. Kunjunni strives as a child to master the Malayalam consonants with verbal clarity. When he looks and enjoys the sight of a lamb eating the leaves, the master becomes impatient and furious, and he tries to impart the learning. The master's anger against him is also a rage against the class superiority of Kunjunni. Stammering can be seen as a sort of resistance against the rigidities of the power system.

The very title of his literary output, *The Hard Consonants* is resistance against the authorities. The title literally refers to the allusion made to his hardships in mastering the consonants. When he becomes an activist and writer, he recognises the forces against artistic freedom. Power relations act as an underlying factor in the acceptance and publication of literary output. The press itself is denied freedom of expression. The ruling parties hold power and impose restrictions on artistic freedom. Kunjunni's style of realism is evident in his act of resistance against his disagreements with the authorities. He refuses to open the letters from the editors together with the returned books.

Kunjunni makes an attempt with a journalist friend to publish the book. The government bans the sale of the book. Though it is an imposition on the freedom of speech, Kunjunni's reaction becomes a metaphorical allusion. He laughs at the news, and he starts speaking without stammering. Ganguly claims that the government's decision demonstrates how much the authority "fears the unsavoury truth of his work" (152).

With his pen, he can defy or combat the power. Ganguly says: As Kunjunni speaks with passion, empowered by his sense of purpose,

his stutter is cured for good. In this respect, it is really his triumph, and it frees him through his laughter from precisely the forces that seek to oppress him. (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 152).

Here the operations of power do not come to an end, and it is a play between the oppressor and the oppressed. The positions of the oppressor and the oppressed vary and are often abstract. It is not necessary that the power play by the oppressor is always pervasive. It is productive at times. Kunjunni shows his defiance towards society through his words, and the government fears the power of the same.

There is a jump cut from the shot in which he applies bear fat in the second phase of life. He becomes a young man. His shift in ideologies, with a preference for the ideology of the class system, demonstrates his defiance of dominance within him. But he is a character who tries to erase the hierarchical boundaries. Adoor represents that through the scenes in his childhood. Meenakshi acts as a more powerful child than Kunjunni in their relationship, and she provides support for him. Like that, when Kunjunni sleeps with Veluchar, he takes into account the racism. Kunjunni's being addressed as *Yajamanan* is the only hierarchy that existed between them.

Kunjunni's attitude towards Marxism and Naxalism later shows his apathy towards the ideologies of his own class. He agrees to the dictum that the land belongs to the tiller when Veluchar shows his dissent towards the land reform bill. The marriage of Kunjunni with Meenakshi is also another spark that ignores the



class system. Even Kunjuni's uncle Vasu says that was a good decision. Kunjuni never tries to hold the ancestral property, *tharavadu*, as a symbol of power. He shows happiness when someone comes forward and is ready to take the property. He has no hesitation or reluctance when he comes to know that he is the servant. He is hostile in his treatment towards him, unlike the character Unni in his attitude towards Mathaikutty.

The printed literature and processions represent a specific position in the film to convey a variety of messages. Adoor uses a long shot of a procession of Congress party workers in white to convey the news of Gandhi's assassination as well as the period of the story. Adoor attempts to speak about the influence of Gandhian idealism in Kerala through this and a previous shot in the conversation between Vasu and his mother. Political turmoil and displacement are also discussed in printed literature, particularly in news articles.

The shot that covers the first half of a *Deshabimani* news paper shows the news about the passing of the land reform bill and also how the parallel reading of non-literary text reflects the party's ideology. The newspaper occupies the most prominent space on the screen. The *Deshabimani* news paper often supports the ideology of the leftist party. It is also shown how partiality is implied in the process of writing.

Adoor again uses moving images of the front pages of different Malayalam news papers in a single shot, such as *Malayalam Manorama*, *Mathrubumi*, *Janayugam*, *Kerala Kaumudi*, and *Deshabimani*. The study attempts to consider these images of news articles as non-literary texts. It represents the

power structures in the political sphere of Kerala. It depicts the inner and outer conflicts in modern Kerala, and he tries to depict the rise and fall of power structures between the 1960s. It gives a glimpse of the Naxal activism of the 1960s. The headlines of the news point to the naxal attacks against the police stations in Pullalli and Wayanad and to the murder of the policeman. The particular shot ends with the conspiracy to overthrow the left-front government in Kerala. This particular shot shows the political undercurrents of a decade in which naxal activism was at its peak. It also tells about the naxal activities in the colleges. It is often linked to Kunjunni's naxal underpinnings.

The brutal attacks of the Naxals against the feudal land lords and their revolt for the rights of peasants are implied in the glimpse of news papers. The consecutive jump to the shot in the printing press shows a glimpse of the booklets and articles that favor naxalism. The police conducted a search of the printing press and found clandestine literature. The medium shots of the focus on Mao Zedong's "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains," "Revolution through the Barrel of a Gun," "Naxalbari Peasant Revolt," "Learn from Telangana Strike", etc. are the articles that promoted the naxal spirit and urge among activists. These are considered clandestine, and the printing and distribution of them are considered illegal. The power of the police as a repressive force acts against activism. The Naxalites are regarded as a threat to the country and the state. The news about the overthrow of the United Front (left) government in the *Deshabimani* news paper, with which the shot concludes, demonstrates power struggles within the party between the CPI and the CPI(M), as well as opposition party moves against the United Front. The sound in the shot is powerful. The

sound of the printing machine and the force that makes it silent show the dominance of Juridico's discursive system of power. To clarify the time period, Adoor employs the contextual prop "Calendar" by the Kerala Government, which states the year 1968.

The women characters in the film are powerful. The grandmother, Janamma, the servant, and Meenakshi make bold decisions. To a certain extent, the male characters in the film are ineffectual. Kunjunni's father, Vasu, and Janamma's servant's husband, Pachu Pillai, are unreliable to their family. They have not succumbed to the responsibilities and duties of gender definitions. They are non-normative in the gender roles defined by society in familial relationships. This attains meaning when these characters are placed in a matrilineal context.

The plot that surrounds these characters takes place at a time before the abolition of matrilineal systems (1975). The women have to take care of themselves and their children. Kunjunni's father has deserted his wife and child, and he appears only once in the film, during her funeral. Pachu Pillai, also being irresponsible, was away from the family without taking care of them. Vasu, the educated uncle of Kunjunni, was sent to England for higher studies. However, he abandoned his studies and briefly joined the Gandhian movement. He quit and became ascetic in the last part of the film. He himself admitted guiltily that he had not fulfilled his obligations to his mother. The three men's apathy is evident in their treatment. "The failure of all three men as husbands and fathers is placed within the self-indulgent, enervating culture of feudalism. It is women who always pay the price, as Kunjunni discovers, watching his mother pine away and die prematurely" (Ganguly 149).

The fluidity of power relations or the shift in the structures of power is evident. When Kunjunni comes to call Meenakshi his life partner, her father refuses. He says that he is not ready to send his daughter off with a stuttering criminal. Despite his class in the hierarchy, Pachu Pillai's attitude shows the reversal of power. Here again, power becomes more of a strategy than a possession. Here, Adoor overthrows the opposition between the subject and object. Again, Kunjunni is ready to give him ten thousand rupees for Meenakshi. Here, Kunjunni overthrows the practice of dowry, in which the male partner is privileged.

Kunjunni grew up in a matrilineal culture with an authoritative male figure in her family. The authorial figure in Kunjunni's home is the grandmother, and her exercise of power is gentle and firm. Kunjunni has imbibed the nature of her grandmother. But at the same time, the film problematises the void of the father figure. The family often faced questions from the others (the astrologer and physician), and the attempts made by them urge the necessity of the father figure, and at times they construct the notion of otherness. Despite the inquiries made by Kunjunni's family, he has not responded. This is an offshoot of and a rebellion against the matrilineal system. The father figure has excluded himself from the responsibilities and duties. Kunjunni also wants to know about his father from Veluchar. He, despite the otherness imposed on him, needs the father figure in his childhood. Kunjunni's grief over Gandhi's death is a contextual metaphor that emphasises the need. Ganguly says:

The tears may seem strange until we place them in the context of his own father's absence, which he keenly feels because of the

social attached to it (when the ayurvedic physician inquires about the man there is a cut to Kunjuni lowering his eyes) and that translates into his sense of rejection. Although brought up among women in a matrilineal society, the boy is fully aware of the power and status of men. Even divinity, he discovers, is predominantly male in terms of gender (when he spends the night in Veluchar's room, the servant sings a hymn to god Rama). And in the larger world outside, men, like Gandhi, embody paternity and make things happen. Denied his father's stabilising presence, which would have helped him achieve both self definition and respectability, Kunjuni has identified with the country's pre-eminent symbol of fatherhood and now orphaned like the rest of the nation. It is his first encounter with the symbolic-in political terms-and anticipates his subsequent immersion in public life as an activist. As for now, Kunjuni struggles to overcome his sense of loss by rubbing fat above his lip. The hope is that it will sprout a moustache and thus accelerate his growth toward the confronting security of manhood (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 148).

The breach delivery, stutter, limp etc. are the markers of otherness. The one who is abandoned by the father adds to the social stigma constructed by the society. The decline of the feudalism and the economic depravity of the family add severity to these signifiers.

The film *Mukhamukam* discusses the life of a character who is a strong adherent of communist ideologies. His life is discussed in parallel with the rise

and fall of the Communist Party and its split into two. The film does not adopt a linear narrative to tell the story. There are discrepancies in the character of Sreedharan. Adoor has adopted a complex narrative pattern to tell the story. Through the character Sreedharan, the film posits the central discussion on communist ideologies. The film never draws a caricature of a powerful man who has heroic attributes to lead the movement. He is a powerful figure who possesses strong principles of the party's ideology. But the very portrayal raises questions about the aspect of power in the plot of the story and the characterization. Power is implicit in the plot of the story. The study attempts to look at the power encapsulated in different layers.

The story uses the technique of documentary to place the character. As in the film *Kathapurushan*, Adoor introduces the character through images of printed literature. The very uncertainty and ambiguity implied in the headlines add to the dimension of power. The film centres on the question “Who is Sreedharan?” and the answer to the question is told through a series of answers to this question.

The beginning of the film itself provides an obvious write-up about the period of the two parts of the story. The hint about the age is crucial to understanding the power structures of the age. The film is more than just an examination of party politics and its split. Rather, it discusses the conflict between the systems, which can be cited as power structures at a point in time.

The film's main point of contention is the conflict between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. These terms acquire significance in the context of the rule of the political parties in parallel with the context of the age. Adoor denies reading the film as a criticism of the political party.

Sreedharan, the main character, is a trade union leader. Actually, through him, Adoor traces the power of organisations. Their act of power can also be read as an act of resistance. The industrialisation of Kerala led to the loss of manual labour. Adoor portrays the parallel growth of trade unions in Kerala. The formation of trade unions is a power tactic against the oppressor or the owners. Here, employers are seen as oppressors. Trade unions are formed to protect workers' rights as well as to protect employers from tyranny. It is a signifier that provides access to power.

The first shot depicts the after effects of industrialisation in Kerala. By far, the transition from manual labour to machine systems has caused unemployment. This is a realistic depiction of Kerala, where many people lost their jobs. As a protest against this, a trade union is formed to take over the lost jobs. Karl Marx writes about the trade unions as the instruments of the working class against capitalist oppression (Lozovsky 1). It can be considered resistance or power formation. In the first part of the film, power is not conceived, as it comes only from a central source, but it reverses and the voice of the oppressed is heard. Though Adoor denies the reading of the film as Marxist, the film obviously involves a tacit reading of the political power structure in Kerala.

A long shot that incorporates images of men and machines depicts the process of manufacture of tiles and its transition from manual labour to industrialisation. Sreedharan, an enigmatic character, holds certain power over the people. He has the power to influence the comrades through his thoughts on Marxism ideology. The study here attempts to read the operations of power in prominent power structures over time. The trade union as a system of power and resistance is exemplified through the character Sreedharan. The portrayal of the

character Sreedharan represents how a particular person or movement holds power and challenges the dictum for a certain period of time. The study comprehensively discusses the period and how trade unions wielded influence. The trade union movement originated in a coir factory industry in Alapuzha, Travancore, in 1922. It stood for the rights of working-class people to speak for them against capitalist society or the bourgeoisie. Mahatma Gandhi speaks about the trade union as something that entails all aspects of a worker's life, both at home and at work. It also intends to extend the moral and intellectual power of labor, and it raises the position of the labourer from mere slave to master. Pramod Varma and Suriya Mookerjee, speak about the functions of trade unions in "Trade Unions in India":

The activities of the association include collection of funds for the welfare of the labourers, medical assistance to the labourers, to establish a library and reading room ,to fight for compulsory primary education for all , and to fight against untouchability and other unjust practices (Varma 80).

Adoor has incorporated the functions of a trade union through the strike conducted by Sreedharan. The images of the process of manufacture make it clear that it is the production unit for tile manufacture. As the advent of machinery reduced the need for man power, the labourers lost their jobs abruptly. The labourers are the product of oppression. As every organisation is a form of power artifact, here the trade union organisation speaks for the labourers.

Adoor delineates the condition of poverty-stricken homes due to the loss of jobs. The costumes and mise en scène are expertly woven to fit the plot of the depraved condition. The labourers demanded that the dismissed employees be taken back. The power of their trade union movement makes the employees not



want to withdraw from any of the compensations. The power of the union or the strike by the labourers is not portrayed through processions. Rather like other films, the images in the words are powerful. It has a greater impact on the audience than the dialogues. The demands of the workers are conveyed through the written words on the placards. The central position of the protagonist, Sreedharan, who gives his extended support to the workers, makes their strike strong.

As strong as the workers resistance is, the management's power is also strong. Adoor has incorporated the functions of a trade union through the strike conducted by Sreedharan. The images of the process of manufacture make it clear that it is the production unit for tile manufacture. As the advent of machinery reduced the need for manpower, the labourers lost their jobs abruptly. The labourers are the product of oppression. As every organisation is a form of power artifact, here the trade union organisation speaks for the labourers. The management is unwilling to agree to the workers' demands. The power of the oppressor coincides with the power of the oppressed. Here, when the power representations of the age are delineated in a way that also takes care to integrate the minor struggles of the period. Even the leader, Sreedharan, never holds the designation of leader of a political party. But he has influence over the people. He does not impose a juridico-discursive mode of power, and it is not pervasive. They obey him here as the power is productive for them to obtain their rights. The image of Sreedharan in the temporary shed in front of the factory, who is on hunger strike, and his followers with placards that reveal the reason for the strike is a powerful image.

The strike gets significance in the light of the Marxist reading of the film. The study attempts to read the turbulent events of political history here. The trade union organisations stand for workers and Adoor places their thematic significance in the plot through the Marxist interpretation of events and images. The representation and development in the characterisation parallel the inflections on Kerala's ruling political party. As the ruling political party acquires certain power over the subjects, it can be productive, pervasive, or both. Here it can be interpreted as the rise and fall of a party worker at the primary level of reading. Adoor depicts the state and the political power structures involved in it to represent the same. However, he does not limit himself to the rise and fall of a single political party; rather, he represents minor political movements and how they work together to build and play power in the state. This is also important in the representation of an age, as the film does not intend to represent powerful personalities or leaders. Rather, Adoor tells about age through the lives of ordinary people and their struggle with the politics of the time.

Through the representation of the strike in the initial shots of the film, Adoor intends to present the dilemma of the Marxist part of Kerala. The electoral victory of the communist party in Kerala in 1957 and the split in the party into two in 1964 parallel the two parts of the film and also the two images of Sreedharan. Though Adoor repeatedly denies the political film label and instead intends to depict his character's psychological trauma. The factors associated with the trauma are studied in relation to age.

Harold Crouch, in his paper "AITUC and Split in the Communist Party," says that the close link between AITUC and Marxism is stated in the writings of Karl Marx himself. The trade unions always support improving the conditions of

the workers. That would never take place under capitalism. The working class' consciousness is used to wipe out the effects of capitalism. Marx stated: "That the militant state of the working class, its economic movement, and its political action are indissolubly united". He says that the close connection between the CPI and AITUC can be seen in the organisations, which are influenced by the writings of Karl Marx.

The power and authority that the party and union have over the people are narrated through Sreedharan in the first part of the film. He is a character who never submits himself to anyone and who is bold enough to resist any kind of temptation. He is not ready to withdraw himself from the strike when the factory owner comes to mediation talks.

The meetings and classes represent the party's power. Every association is a form of power. The techniques of montage and "the image reality dichotomy" (Ganguly, *The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 28) of the film dismantle the conventions of the circular narrative. Adoor is studied as a realist. The appearance of Sreedharan in the second part is ambiguous, in that it raises the question of whether it is realistic or if Adoor deliberately uses these scenes to undermine the effect of realism. The posture and the setting of the scene in which Savithri knows about the arrival of Sreedharan and the death of Sreedharan are the same. In his study, Ganguly raises the question of whether there is any passage of time. He says that Sreedharan's arrival is an answer to the intense desire of his followers to concretise their ideologies.

Adoor questions the authority and power of Sreedharan in the second part of the film. Silence itself becomes a major trope in the characterisation of

Sreedharan. He says nothing in response to his wife's or friends' questions about his absence in the past. The image of Sreedharan as an alcoholic with a total disregard for the responsibilities of home and party fades. He takes or requests money from people in order to drink alcohol. He steals money from Savithri's purse. But he does not say anything when his son is being accused of it by Savithri. The characterisation of him as a person is flawed. The complete exclusion of the person from what he was in the first part shows the abstractness of power operations.

Sreedharan's contempt for the party and disinterest in the party's decisions demonstrate that he has evolved significantly from his previous self. The party's deviation from its ideologies and beliefs might have resulted in a shock in his mind. The uncertainty about his whereabouts over the ten years also deviates from the realistic portrayal. The changes in party ideologies in the state in particular and the country in general have affected the policies.

Antonio Gramsci, in *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, speaks that “social democracy has tended to see the relationship between workers and intellectuals in the socialist movement in formal and mechanistic terms, with the intellectuals—refugees from the bourgeois class—providing theory and ideology (and often leadership) for a mass base of non-intellectuals, i. e., workers” (132). Sreedharan in the film serves as an intellectual who belongs to the first category according to the above terms. Sreedharan's personification as an ‘organic intellectual’ in the first half clearly defines Gramsci's conceptualisation of the same about their role in production and work organisation, and on the other hand by their ‘directive’ political role, focused on the party.

Sreedharan belongs to the dominant group of individuals, and in the second part, too, it is evident that a spontaneous consent has been given to him by the supporters of the party. Gramsci says that such consent is the result of the prestige and confidence that the general group enjoyed. The party members who are anxiously waiting outside his house to listen to him is an example of the power exerted by him on the group.

Sreedharan belongs to the rural intellectual class and holds a certain power over the people. His command of the party's ideologies gave him power. The members of the party have respect and admiration for him, even in the second phase. The dislocation of power from the centre, that is, the party, held certain strength when it was known as the Communist Party. The split of the party into two causes a schism in the party's ideologies. It has shattered Sreedharan's faith in the party. When the leaders of the two split parties approached him, he was indifferent in his attitude.

Sreedharan imbibes a certain kind of power from the ideologies of the leftist party. In the second phase, no one in the party or the family knows about the reality of Sreedharan's disappearance during the rivalry in the leftist party. But for them, he is a powerful leader. Even though he seems disappointed and weak, the villagers, especially the people of the party, hold a sort of hope in him. He was the person who led them. But disdainful of his political affiliations, he is a powerless person. He bears some of the blame for his inactivity in the activity.

The split of the party into two in the film represents a fall in the party's ideologies. His friend Damodaran tells him the reason for the breakup of the party.

He indirectly accuses Sreedharan for his disappearance during the split in the party during the Calcutta conference in 1964. He has not come forward to clarify his position. Sreedharan's expressions in this shot reveal more of his opposition to the decision and party split. His lowering of his head in front of Damodharan shows his resentment and resistance towards them.

Damodaran quotes Lenin's statement that those who take a stand against the basic interests and revolutionary spirit of the working class are labelled as reactionaries. They weaken the proletariat and thereby motivate the interests of the bourgeoisie. Damodaran tells this to justify his appearance at the party. The film makes use of photos as props, and in this particular shot, the framed photographs of Lenin and Marx add authenticity to his statements. When he speaks, the image of the party hammer and sickle in a red frame appears, along with the party name Communist Party of India (Marxist). It speaks more forcefully about the party's ideological regimes. The dictum of the party founders holds the power to create discipline, and those who deviate from it are called reactionaries. Sreedharan lost his position in the party, but his framed photo underlines his previous position in the party.

There is a scene in which Mathukutty comes in front of him and offers him the post of a cashier in the factory. Sreedharan feels a sort of contempt toward him, and it is vividly reflected in his expression. Mathukutty is seen as an opportunist in this shot, and Sreedharan is unable to stand with them. In the middle of this, a shot shows the character Sreedharan in severe stomach pain. He finds liquor to be his medication. It suggests that he is an alcoholic who is unable

to resist it. His addiction and irresponsible attitude toward his family cause him to deviate from the norm.

Damodharan pays a visit to Sreedharan to justify the expulsion of Sreedharan from the party. He again cites Lenin to say that the “proletarian movement passes through various stages of growth. At every stage, a set of people stagger, stop, and drop out of the movement’s march forward”. The camera frame is important in this case because it focuses Sreedharan in a single frame in a long shot. Sreedharan’s subjection is very much evident in the shot.

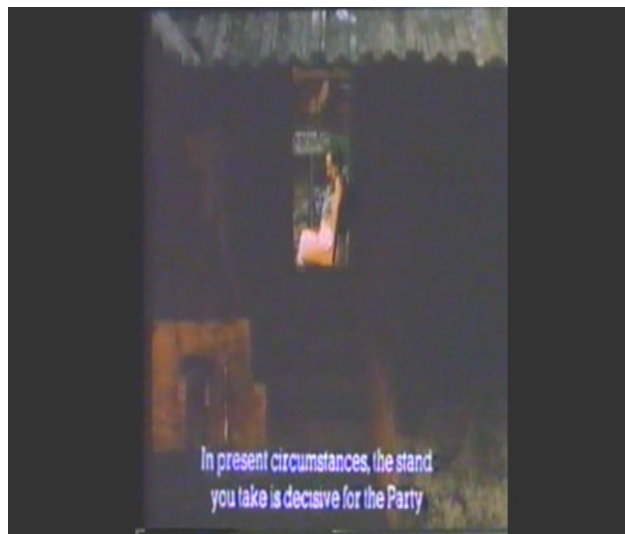


Fig:3 Sreedharan in the film *Mukhamukam*

He underlines the name of Lenin to emphasise the power implied in the statement.

The silence of Sreedharan is shown to imply his dissatisfaction and resentment.

Suranjan Ganguly says:

The portraits of Lenin and Sreedharan on the wall confirm this further, since both are now images without substance for a community that once worshipped them as heroes. Ironically, it is

only in this form that they are kept alive. For Sreedharan, who has returned from the dead, the only context for living in such a world of shattered ideals is memory and trace, which his portrait exemplifies. This is evident in the way the camera frames the silent, withdrawn Sreedharan in relation to his image (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 23).

The theories of Marx and Lenin are used as a weapon by the leaders of the party to justify their deeds. The first phase of the film reflects power as an act of instrumentation for the benefits of proletarians. It gives emphasis to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Sreedharan is the representative of the working class, and he takes classes to educate them on how the working class holds power. He is influenced by Lenin's idea of a revolution to defeat capitalism. Sreedharan, a staunch Leninist, used the theory and tactics of proletarian power. But in the second phase, Adoor poignantly criticises how the statements act as mechanisms of power for the selfish motives of opportunists. The term 'opportunist' refers to someone who is ready to adapt or change their principles according to the situation. Even the red colour in the background reinstates the leftist ideology.

The very structure of the film does not follow a circular motion. The ambiguities and anomalies in the structure itself speak about the relations of power in the plot of the film. Chidananda Das Gupta, in "Adoor Gopalakrishnan, The Kerala Coconut" says:

There is intense pressure in *Mukhamukham* for the revolutionary returning from exile to break into a torrent of words about his life in the absence, the changes in his ideas, his relationship with his



party, and his future plans—about all of which he maintains a stony silence, creating a powerful tension. The lack of explanation infuses ambiguity; the audience is induced to speculate and decipher meanings on its own. Its presumptions, set ideas, and knee-jerk reactions are all shaken off one by one, until the audience has to face the last alternative, the true one, however unacceptable: that the man has had enough; he just wants to be left alone with his drink (Gupta 2).

Harris in a comparative study based on two films John Abraham's *Amma Ariyan* and Adoor's *Mukhamukam* makes significant observations about the character Sreedharan. He says that the reality or the truth is questioned when Sreedharan takes a turn from a political hero to a normal man with limitations.

Though the film at the primary reading conveys the power transitions and tensions in the communist party, it also analyses the gender structures. Sreedharan is a powerful and charismatic leader. But he is timid and shy in his attitude towards the women. The female characters seem more powerful in the film, like *Elepathayam*. The party comrade Vilasini and his wife Savithri are the two female characters in the film. Vilasini is a party worker, and she serves well for the purpose of the party. Sreedharan is an introvert in his relationship with women. But Vilasini is confident in expressing her desires and thoughts. There is a scene in which Sreedharan comes to visit Damodharan, the brother of Vilasini. Sreedharan is not bold enough to speak to her in the absence of her brother. When she understands that it is a matter regarding party matters, she says that men alone do not form unions. She is a woman who speaks about the need for the

involvement of women in the party. Sreedharan's passive nature, on the one hand, shows his commitment to the party. He emphasises that a communist should sacrifice pleasure, gain, and personal relationships. It can be analysed as an intentional desertion for the principles of party. On the other hand, it shows the timidness and inert nature of his attitude towards women. He avoids listening to Vilasini when she comes forward to speak. Suranjan Ganguly says:

Vilasini's account transforms Sreedharan into a dissembler who represses his natural inclinations to maintain a clear separation between his private and public selves. The flashback ends with her admonition that women should be part of male-dominated trade unions. He points out that she is the one who has been asked to organise them. "Once again, we detect ambiguity: Sreedharan remains aloof, but his desire to bond with Vilasini is expressed in his sidelong glance with her (*The Films of Adoor Gopalakrishnan: A Cinema of Emancipation* 20).

Adoor meticulously uses the space, actions, and dialogue in the shots when Vilasini and Sreedharan come together in the frame. He does not have the intensity of the charismatic speaker in his dialogues with Vilasini. In terms of gender and familial relationships, Sreedharan's relationship with Savithri is problematic. Sreedharan never criticises his role as a devoted husband in his relationship with her. He feels physical attraction towards her, and the male gaze in him works just to satisfy his sexual urge. He exploits Savithri and her father for his personal benefits. He never listens to Savithri. But she performs the role of a subordinate wife. Her subjectivity becomes more evident in the second part. He

holds a chauvinistic attitude in his deliberations, and she is supposed to provide financial help for his deeds. Even though he is not legally married to her, he considers male privileges to be taken for granted.

The three films explore the investigation of power in terms of sovereign control. The study also explores and foregrounds the disciplinary and bio power, modes of power regimes. The plurality of power operations, both direct and indirect, contribute to the reading of the select films in this chapter. Resistance must be muted at times, but it is clear that resistance occurs as a struggle against, bourgeoisie, state and society. The resistance of Sreedharan is even strong in the second phase of the film also. He adopts silence as a strong weapon to express the resentment towards the split in the party.