AITHIHYAMALA AND THE POLITICS OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION: A STUDY OF SELECT NARRATIVES

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "***Aithihyamala* and the Politics of Visual Representation: A Study of Select Narratives**" is a bona fide record of studies and research carried out by Nila Rajeev under my guidance and submitted for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English. To the best of my knowledge, this research work has not been previously formed the basis of award for any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar titles. Its critical evaluation represents the independent work on the part of the candidate.

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DECLARATION

I, hereby, declare that the thesis entitled "***Aithihyamala* and the Politics of Visual Representation: A Study of Select Narratives**" is an authentic record of my studies and research carried out under the guidance of Dr. Syam Sudhakar, Assistant Professor & Research Guide, Research Centre, Department of English, St. Thomas College (Autonomous), Thrissur. I hereby certify that no part of this work has been submitted or published for the award of any other degree, diploma, title, fellowship or recognition.

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ABSTRACT

Aithihyamala (The Garland of Legends) written by Kottarathil Sankunni is a collection of 126 stories compiled in eight volumes between the years 1909 and 1934. The text has played a pivotal role in the formation of Kerala modernity. A problem arises when we think about why the project/critiques of Kerala modernity embraced a text such as *Aithihyamala*, which was replete with the myths and legends scattered across the state, while the major aspects of Kerala modernity focused on the renaissance spirit and technological advancements. It was assumed in the beginning of the research that a common thread unifying the legends in *Aithihyamala* was the projection of masculinity in the depiction of the heroes, in the text as well as in films and television serials. To limit the scope of the study, the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* were selected along with their film and television adaptations.

The thesis is divided into six chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter traces the dissemination of a text such as *Aithihyamala* in the popular culture of Kerala from the oral tradition to the digital age. The second chapter is theoretical, it contextualises *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity and analyses the masculinity formulation, its transition from a matrilineal system to a patrilineal one and eventually to a modern salaried system. The third chapter is analytical and it re-reads the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadmattathu Kathanar* on the canvas of cinema and examines the celebration of the masculinities within these films and how it differs from the representation of the legends within *Aithihyamala*. The fourth chapter is also analytical and it examines the television adaptations of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and traces modernity shaping gendered desires and anxieties of the Kerala audience. The fifth chapter focuses on the re-representation of these legends for the consumption of a new generation of audience and it concludes with the fact that even though the popularity of a text such as *Aithihyamala* wanes, these legends will remain intact in the popular culture through new forms. The sixth chapter is recommendations and it discusses the advanced scope of the study in spatial, literary, and academic fields. The various shades of masculinity appropriated into the popular culture through the legends from *Aithihyamala,* and their visual (both film and television) adaptations have created a collective Malayali psyche inextricably linked to the discourses of modernity.

Keywords: Kerala Modernity, Masculinity, Popular Culture, *Aithihyamala*, Malayali psyche

പ്രബന്ധ സംഗ്രഹം

കൊട്ടാരത്തിൽ ശങ്കുണ്ണി രചിച്ച *ഐതിഹ്യമാല* (1909-1934) എട്ട് വാല്യങ്ങളിലായി ശേഖരിച്ച വാമൊഴിക്കഥകളുടെ സമാഹാരമാണ്. കേരള ആധുനികതയുടെ രൂപീകരണത്തിൽ ഈ ഗ്രന്ഥം നിർണായക പങ്കുവഹിച്ചു. ആധുനികതയുടെ പ്രധാനവശങ്ങൾ നവോത്ഥാന ചൈതന്യത്തിലും സാങ്കേതിക മുന്നേറ്റത്തിലും ഊന്നുമ്പോൾ, കേരളത്തിലുടനീളം ചിതറിക്കിടക്കുന്ന മിത്തുകളും ഐതിഹ്യങ്ങളും നിറഞ്ഞ ഈ ഗ്രന്ഥം ആധുനികതയുടെ പദ്ധതി വിമർശനങ്ങൾ സ്വീകരിച്ചത് എന്തുകൊണ്ടാണെന്നു ചിന്തിക്കുമ്പോൾ ഒരു പ്രശ്നം ഉയർന്നുവരുന്നു. ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ തുടക്കത്തിൽത്തന്നെ അനുമാനിക്കപ്പെട്ടത് *ഐതിഹ്യമാല*യിലെ ഐതിഹ്യങ്ങളെ ഏകീകരിക്കുന്ന ഒരു പൊതുഘടകം അതിൽ നിറഞ്ഞുനിൽക്കുന്ന ആണത്തങ്ങളുടെ ചിത്രീകരണമാണ് എന്നതാണ്. പിന്നീട് ഐതിഹ്യങ്ങൾ ജനകീയസംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി സിനിമകളിലേക്കും സീരിയലുകളിലേക്കും വന്നപ്പോഴും അവയിൽ നിറഞ്ഞുനിന്നത് നായകന്മാർ പ്രദർശിപ്പിച്ച ആണത്തംതന്നെ ആയിരുന്നു. പഠനത്തിന്റെ വ്യാപ്തി പരിമിതപ്പെടുത്താൻ, കായംകുളം കൊച്ചുണ്ണിയുടെയും കടമറ്റത്ത് കത്തനാരുടെയും ഐതിഹ്യങ്ങളും ഒപ്പം അവയുടെ സിനിമ-ടെലിവിഷൻ അനുരൂപീകരണങ്ങളുമാണ് (adaptation) തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്തത്.

ആമുഖവും ഉപസംഹാരവും സഹിതം ആറ് അധ്യായങ്ങളായി പ്രബന്ധം തിരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു. ആദ്യ അധ്യായത്തിൽ വാമൊഴി പാരമ്പര്യം മുതൽ ഡിജിറ്റൽ യുഗംവരെ കേരളത്തിലെ ജനകീയ സംസ്കാരത്തിൽ *ഐതിഹ്യമാല* എന്ന ഗ്രന്ഥത്തിന്റെ പ്രചാരം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നതാണ്. രണ്ടാം അധ്യായം സൈദ്ധാന്തികമാണ്; ഇത് കേരള ആധുനികതയുടെ വ്യവഹാരത്തിലുള്ള *ഐതിഹ്യമാല*യുടെ പ്രസക്തിയും ആണത്തങ്ങളുടെ രൂപീകരണവും ചർച്ചചെയ്യുകയും മരുമക്കത്തായത്തിൽനിന്ന് പിതൃദായക വ്യവസ്ഥയിലേക്കും ഒടുവിൽ ആധുനിക ശമ്പള വ്യവസ്ഥയിലേക്കുമുള്ള മാറ്റങ്ങൾ പരിശോധിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

മൂന്നും നാലും അധ്യായങ്ങൾ വിശകലനപരമാണ്. മൂന്നാം അധ്യായത്തിൽ കായംകുളം കൊച്ചുണ്ണിയുടെയും കടമറ്റത്തു കത്തനാരുടെയും ഇതിഹാസങ്ങളെ സിനിമയുടെ ക്യാൻവാസിൽ പുനർവായന നടത്തുകയും ഈ സിനിമകളിലെ ആണത്തങ്ങളുടെ ആഘോഷം ഐതിഹ്യമാലയിലെ ഇതിഹാസങ്ങളുടെ പ്രതിനിധാനത്തിൽനിന്ന് എങ്ങനെ വ്യത്യാസപ്പെട്ടിരിക്കുന്നുവെന്നു പരിശോധിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. നാലാം അധ്യായത്തിൽ കത്തനാരുടെയും കൊച്ചുണ്ണിയുടെയും ടിവി സീരിയൽ രൂപാന്തരങ്ങൾ പഠിക്കുകയും മലയാളി പ്രേക്ഷകരുടെ ലിംഗപരമായ ഉത്കണ്ഠകളും രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്ന ആധുനികതയുടെ പ്രവർത്തനം വിശകലനത്തിനു വിധേയമാക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. അഞ്ചാം അധ്യായം ഈ ഐതിഹ്യങ്ങളുടെ പുനരാവിഷ്കരണം പുതുതലമുറയിലെ പ്രേക്ഷകർ എങ്ങനെ സ്വീകരിക്കുന്നു എന്നതിന്റെ അന്വേഷണമാണ്. ഒപ്പം ഐതിഹ്യമാല എങ്ങനെ ജനകീയസംസ്കാരത്തിന്റെ അവിഭാജ്യഘടകമായി തുടരുന്നു എന്നു പരിശോധിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. ആറാമത്തെ അധ്യായം ശുപാർശകളാണ്. അത് ഈ പഠനത്തിന്റെ സാഹിത്യം, അക്കാദമിക് തുടങ്ങിയ മേഖലകളിലെ വ്യാപ്തികളിലേക്കു വിരൽചൂണ്ടുന്നു. ഐതിഹ്യമാലയുടെ ജനകീയ സംസ്കാരത്തിലേക്കുള്ള കടന്നുവരവും ദൃശ്യമാധ്യമങ്ങളിലൂടെയുള്ള അനുവർത്തനങ്ങളും ആണത്തങ്ങളും ആധുനികതയുടെ വ്യവഹാരങ്ങളുമായി കൂടിച്ചേർന്നുകിടക്കുന്ന ഒരു മലയാളി മനസ്സിനെ സൃഷ്ടിക്കുന്നു എന്നതാണു കണ്ടെത്തൽ.

സൂചികകൾ: കേരള ആധുനികത, ആണത്തം, ജനകീയ സംസ്കാരം, ഐതിഹ്യമാല, മലയാളിയുടെ സ്വത്വബോധം

A NOTE ON DOCUMENTATION

I, hereby, would like to acknowledge that the documentation in the thesis is prepared in accordance with the style format suggested by *MLA Handbook* (9th Edition).

CONTENTS

Introduction

Aithihyamala by Kottarathil Sankunni is a compilation of the myths and legends of Kerala, which adds up to 126 tales in eight volumes. The first volume was published in 1909 and the last volume was published in 1934. The text gave an insight into the cultural past of Kerala through the history of temples; of the ruling dynasties and eminent personalities of Kerala's mythical past. Sankunni had compiled legends that were scattered across different parts of the region, namely Travancore, Cochin and the British Malabar.

Aithihyamala is inextricably linked to the project of constructing Malayali masculinity. The study aims to locate the role of *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity. The text can be considered as an instance of how the discourse of modernity propels masculinity within a discursive web of power relations, caste hierarchies, and gender equations. The period of the study focuses on the evolution of masculinity in Kerala through the transformation of the matrilineal system and the feudal system in the late nineteenth century until the formation of a unified Kerala.

The text *Aithihyamala* was able to foster a 'Malayali consciousness'. Its projection of masculinity was celebrated as soon as the legends from *Aithihyamala* entered popular culture. The narratives that were previously popular in the oral tradition entered the domain of the print. The text was peppered with numerous Sanskrit verses appealing to an elite section of society. But, as the reading public evolved in the aftermath of the Kerala reformation movement, the text grew all the more popular and became a treasure trove for posterity. Popular legends such as Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar found themselves adapted into theatre, film and television productions. In the wake of the COVID -19 pandemic, these legends further increased their audience base through OTT

streaming. Therefore, the study also tries to analyse the celebration of masculinity in these legends and its influence on fashioning a collective psyche among Malayali audience.

Aithihyamala is hailed as a text which plays a pivotal role in the formation of Kerala modernity. A problem arises when we think about why the project/critiques of Kerala modernity embraced a text such as *Aithihyamala*, which was replete with the myths and legends scattered across the state, while the major aspects of Kerala modernity focused on the renaissance spirit and technological advancements. It was assumed at the beginning of the research that a common thread unifying the legends in *Aithihyamala* was the projection of masculinity in the depiction of the heroes, in the text as well as in films and television serials. This shows that a text like *Aithihyamala* can be adapted into new forms and formats for a contemporary audience. The research entitled "*Aithihyamala* and the Politics of Visual Representation: A Study of Select Narratives" argues that masculinity is not monolithic; it is plural. Nevertheless, the concept of hegemonic masculinity operated all along in the construction of the heroes and it was celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala. To limit the scope of the study, the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* were selected along with their film and television adaptations. These adaptations happened over different periods of time starting from the nineteenth century way until the twenty-first century.

The major objectives behind studying the text were to identify *Aithihyamala*'s place in the discourse of Kerala modernity and the politics of revived interest in the text aided by various visual-media adaptations up to the present era. Further, it aimed to analyse the language and politics of the text both in visual and print cultures. The study examines the role of the text in heralding a unified Kerala movement which culminated in the creation of the modern state of Kerala. Further, it also focuses on different aspects of masculinity and the changing politics of representation from one medium to the other. The

thesis tries to problematise how legends in *Aithihyamala* respond to the collective desires and fantasies of the Malayali audience and shape the 'Malayali psyche'.

The primary works selected include *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Sankunni and films such as *Kadamattathachan* directed by N.P. Suresh (1984), *Kayamkulam Kochunni* directed by P.A. Thomas (1966) and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* directed by Rosshan Andrrews (2018). Also, the study covers a selection of episodes from television serials, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* on Surya TV from 2004 to 2007, and *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* on the same channel from 2016 to 2017, and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* telecasted on Asianet from 2004 to 2005. The multi-generic adaptations of Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar depicted the different aspects of masculinity played out in different periods in conjunction with Kerala modernity.

The first chapter of the thesis "*Aithihyamala*, Popular Culture, and Masculinity: An Introduction" introduces the instrumental role of *Aithihyamala* in popular culture and its contribution to modelling a 'collective consciousness' for Malayalis. The chapter opens by tracing the relevance of a text such as *Aithihyamala* in academia through the text being a part of the syllabi and undergoing numerous translations. This study also focuses on the representation of masculinity in popular children's literature, as found in comic strips like Balarama *Amar Chithra Kathas* which primarily focused on the lives of elite and the upper-caste characters from *Aithihyamala*. Further, the chapter problematises the pervasive nature of hegemonic masculinity aided by the dissemination of the text in popular media and digital streaming technologies. It also looks at the role of the discourses of modernity in provoking gendered desires and anxieties even as it restructured the private sphere of the family and aided in perfecting a patriarchal system.

The second chapter "*Aithihyamala* and the Discourse of Kerala Modernity: Masculinity in Context" contextualises a text such as *Aithihyamala* as a site where the

formation of masculinities within the region takes place as a result of modernity's gendering project. The matrilineal system, where a *karanavan* headed the family, was dismantled by colonial laws and the mantle of the power was handed down to the father figure. This discourse was instrumental in normalising male authority in society. The men were seen to be a part of the public sphere, but women who were also simultaneously getting empowered by colonial education were relegated to the private sphere of the family. This transition has strong ties with the land laws which led to the weakening of the feudal system, eventually getting replaced by a modern salaried system. Renaissance-infused efforts tried to eliminate caste from society. Even upper-caste members of society felt compelled to secure jobs. This led to a transition from the hegemonic masculinity fashioned by feudal ruling classes to that of colonial masculinity, and later to that of a new form of masculinity with salaried jobs. This chapter situates the different types of masculinities embedded in *Aithihyamala* within the cultural history of Kerala ranging from hegemonic masculinity, nationalist masculinity, communist masculinity, counter-hegemonic masculinity, Muslim masculinity and salaried masculinity. Towards the end, the chapter discusses the problematic representation of gender in *Aithihyamala*, where the women characters are made to fit into the binaries of 'divine' or 'diabolic'.

The third chapter titled "Visualising the Legends: Cinema and the Masculine World" analyses the representation of masculinity in films like *Kadamattathu Kathanar* (1984) and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966 and 2018). This chapter looks at the popularity of the legends of Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni and the celebration of these heroes in popular culture. The first part of the chapter analyses the problematic representation of masculinity in the film, *Kadamattathachan* (1984) and the second part of the chapter analyses the problematic representation of masculinity in the film, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966 and 2018). The chapter analyses the elements of

masculinity projected by the hero and other men within these films—especially through their bodies, mannerisms and hypermasculine performances. The study analyses the moral masculinity embodied by Prem Nazir as Kathanar within a Christian setting; the working-class masculinity enacted by Sathyan and other masculinities such as the masculinity of the comedians or fools constructed in opposition to the hero's masculinity. Further, it deals with the star cast and the marketing strategies owing to the commercial success of these films. These chapters also analyse the treatment of women in the popular media and how the heroines are constructed to exalt the position of the hero. Further, it reflects on how a tussle between hegemonic masculinities employs women as objects in their power struggle and how the commercial formulas of the popular film want women as vamp figures to be punished. Towards the end, the chapter studies the difference between Kottarathil Sankunni's depiction of these heroes in *Aithihyamala* as opposed to their representation in the films to fulfill the collective desires and fantasies of the Malayali audience.

The fourth chapter titled "Visualising the Legends: Television, Modernity and the Masculine World" analyses the celebration of masculinity in the television serials, *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni*; further, it examines the failure of the sequel, *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* as well. The first part of the chapter aims to explore the moral superiority of the hegemonic masculine figure of Kadamattathu Kathanar as an indigenous hero in a Christian setting. Further, it analyses the good versus evil binary that operates throughout the serial and the glorification of Kathanar's use of violence in his consistent victories over the *Yakshis* or the 'abject.' The chapter moves on to discuss how the elements of camera, lighting, editing, music, casting, sets, make-up, action and dialogue contribute to the representation of different aspects of masculinities in the serial. The second part of the chapter engages in a dialogue with the birth of a

rebellious masculinity, like Kayamkulam Kochunni who protested against the ruthless feudal system, and the exploitation of the poor. The chapter explores the relegation of female characters into stereotypes in television serials and examines the failure of its sequel through the lens of the identification process with the audience. Towards the end, the chapter contemplates how nostalgia is activated through audience response in contemporary times within these serials.

The fifth chapter, "Legends Beyond the Screens: Kerala Modernity, Masculinity, and Popular Culture" deals with the relevance of legends in contemporary Kerala. This chapter also examines the transformation of indigenous heroes into universal heroes by examining what version of masculinity appeals to an OTT-driven global audience. This is done by analysing the teaser of *Kadamattathu Kathanar: The Wild Sorcerer Part* 1. The chapter also focuses on the discourse of modernity activated through the medium of film and television and how they differ from each other. It analyses the proliferation of these legends and their various reproductions available for the consumption of a mass audience and their numerous contemporary avatars. Towards the end, the chapter concludes that even if the popularity of the source text such as *Aithihyamala* wanes, these narratives will be celebrated in popular culture through new forms and new mediums.

The sixth chapter "Recommendations" discusses the scope of further studies of *Aithihyamala* from the prism of spatial, linguistic and memory studies. An extended study on different translations of *Aithihyamala* can also be undertaken. Potential studies could probe masculinity in contemporary Kerala against the backdrop of caste and class, while critically approaching gender equations in the state.

The study ends with a conclusion summarising all the research findings in the previous chapters. When tracing the formation of masculinity in Kerala, it was assumed that the discourse of modernity had a significant role in configuring identities and its

plural nature even as the hegemony of a patriarchal society operated all along. *Aithihyamala* documented the trajectory of masculinity from pre-colonial times till the unification of Kerala. The text also resisted colonial masculinity by prominently featuring the tales of indigenous heroes. Its popularisation of the myths and legends from native culture aligns it with the project of nationalism. By being a first-of-its-kind text first published through newspapers and popular magazines, it is a contender heralding literary modernity. Further, the text is celebrated in popular culture even today, which underscores its continued relevance. *Aithihyamala* has carved a niche in the popular culture of Kerala by fostering the collective consciousness of the Malayali audience and has also attempted to cast a unified and secular image of Kerala.

Chapter 1

Aithihyamala, Popular Culture, and Masculinity: An Introduction

Aithihyamala (The Garland of Legends) written by Kottarathil Sankunni is a collection of 126 stories compiled in eight volumes between the years 1909 and 1934. A riveting bag of myths and legends interconnected like the beads of a beautiful garland, the text has inextricably woven the present with that of the past. The chapter focuses on how a text such as *Aithihyamala* is irreplaceable in the evolution of Kerala's culture industry and examines its contemporary relevance in popular culture. It looks at the dissemination of the myths and legends in *Aithihyamala* and the representational changes that these tales have undergone from the oral culture to print culture, and finally, how they were incorporated into the aesthetics of the visual through iterations in films, television serials, and digital platforms. The chapter focuses on the celebration of hegemonic masculinity in Kerala's popular culture and the politics behind its representations. It also looks at the role of the discourses of modernity in provoking gendered desires and anxieties even as it restructured the private sphere of the family and aided in perfecting a patriarchal system.

The temple histories in *Aithihyamala* were first published under the title 'Kshethramahatmyam' in 1929. The myths and legends compiled in the text can broadly be classified into epic stories, local histories, origin stories, supernatural tales, temple legends, and elephant stories. It is through this text that much of what is loosely understood as history, historiography, popular beliefs, and traditions of a space like Kerala became available to public consumption. It embodies an archival gallery in Kerala representing people from different sections of society.

Kottarathil Sankunni had a profound knowledge of the legends and historical anecdotes of the region which informed the creation of *Aithihyamala.* He was a versatile

writer and left a mark in different genres. His literary oeuvre is replete with songs written for performative traditions like *Kaikottikali, Kilipattu, Thullalpattukal*, and *Vanchipattu* as well as thirteen *Manipravalakritis*, translation of three Sanskrit plays and mythological stories. Even though Sankunni's body of work is not limited to *Aithihyamala*, it is widely regarded as his magnum opus.

Kottarathil Sankunni was adept in English, therefore, he was ample enough to tutor many European missionaries in the Malayalam language. Eventually, he was employed as a Malayalam *munshi* (teacher) at the M.D. Seminary School at Kottayam. This was where he met Kandathil Varghese Mappila, the manager of the school, who later founded and edited the influential Malayalam newspaper, *Malayala Manorama*. Sankunni was hired as a Poetry Editor at Malayala Manorama Office, Kottayam. During his time as a poetry editor, he used to entertain his friends with storytelling. Kandathil Varghese Mappila, who, upon sensing the enormous impact that such tales could have on the Manorama readers insisted that Sankunni compile the legends from across the length and breadth of Kerala. These were published as columns by the daily, *Malayala Manorama* and this column became immensely popular. At the time, it was a novel endeavour since no such attempt had been made till then to systematically document the myths and legends of Kerala. *Aithihyamala* became popular and a part of the 'public sphere' of Kerala, especially since it was disseminated by a widely-read newspaper like *Malayala Manorama* and its magazine arm, *Bhashaposhini*.

Aithihyamala is often hailed as the *Kathasaritsagara* of Kerala. This enormous compilation captured much of the region's mythical past, local histories, and colourful historical figures. The mammoth task of researching and compiling the popular legends of Kerala was highly demanding in Sankunni's time. "It is left to us," says Ambalapuzha Ramavarma, "to sift and sieve the legends to locate the truth through logic and research. It

is commendable that *Aithihyamala* has been able to provide an account of history although shrouded in untruth and vagueness" (15). Sankunni was passionate about collecting stories from his visits to different places. If he was fascinated by the history of a place, he made sure that he collected as much information about the region, including its religious traditions and cultural practices, information on colourful figures such as magicians, astrologers, martial artists, local heroes, royal families, etc.

The logical reasoning informing the stories of *Aithihyamala* is supplemented by ardent humour and deft use of language. All the stories are dexterously crafted with utmost simplicity, brevity, and clarity. He was an adept storyteller and a master craftsman. He wrote about quarreling Gods, voluptuous *Yakshis* and the charms of *Gandharvas*, mischievous goblins, intelligent elephants, and their caring mahouts, etc. The readers encounter multiple instances of the author proposing antithesis with great enigmatic charm, yet appealing to the masses through stories like that of an illiterate transforming into a formidable scholar or an ordinary man attaining supernatural powers or a brigand with a great ethical quotient.

The text breathed life into a colourful bygone era in all its glory. It encapsulated the 'collective consciousness' of the Malayali society. The compiled tales are a perfect blend of memory, style, and language. The work carries great significance for contemporary times as it documents the wealth of cultural legacy from the region's distant past.

Theories of Popular Culture

Popular culture can be defined as a site of contestation where different meanings of cultural production evolve. The term popular culture can only be defined based on a proper understanding of the term 'culture'. Raymond Williams calls culture "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (87). He associates three

broad definitions of culture. Firstly, culture can be used to define "a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development" (90). This definition often reminds us that the cultural development of society is contingent on intellectuals and several others. Secondly, the word 'culture' might be used to suggest "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period or a group" (90). The ability to conceptualise culture as a way of life helps to explain different aspects of community life such as holidays, festivals, sports, etc. Finally, he suggests that culture can be used to refer to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (90). Based on this definition offered by Raymond Williams, culture influences the production of meaning.

Earlier, the term popular culture was always defined as opposed to other categories of culture, as John Storey observes "popular culture is always defined, implicitly or explicitly, in contrast to other conceptual categories: folk culture, mass culture, high culture, dominant culture, working-class culture" (1). The term 'Popular Culture' is problematic since it involves various methods and praxis. It views 'culture' as "a particular way of life" as well as "a signifying practice" (2). Additionally, Popular Culture draws attention to a historical context where its aesthetic pleasures will offer "powerful conduits for expressions of social desire that would otherwise be considered illegitimate" (Ross 5). Hence, it needs to be grounded in various theoretical foundations and requires different methods of inquiry.

Raymond Williams in his book, *Keywords*, attributes four types of meaning to the word 'popular': "'well liked by many people'; 'inferior kinds of work'; 'work deliberately setting out to win favour with the people'; 'culture actually made by the people for themselves'" (237). In the first definition, popular culture is synonymous with people's approval. This category comprises popular films, books, music, festivals, concerts, etc. The quantitative index of sales, market value, and profitability are vital elements

considered in this regard. In the second definition, popular culture belongs to an inferior or residual category. In this definition, there is a clear distinction between “popular culture” and “high culture” (Storey 6). It compares popular culture to a “mass-produced commercial culture” on the contrary, “high culture is pedestalled as an act of individual creation” (6). The third definition equates popular culture with ‘mass culture’, where it is imagined as a commercial product line packaged for mass consumption. According to this definition, mass culture is manipulative with passive consumers who willfully offer up to its commercial designs. Some critics believe that the process of treating popular culture as mass culture can be traced back to the process of Americanisation. According to Andrew Ross, “popular culture has been socially and institutionally central in America for longer and in a more significant way than in Europe” (7). John Storey believes that British culture has lost its “homogenising influence over American culture” (8). Thus, the emergence of popular culture is inextricably linked with the process of Americanisation.

Theodor Adorno envisions popular culture, especially “popular music, as a type of ‘social cement’” where it acts as a bridge between reality and fantasy (72). Popular Culture evokes a “public fantasy” sublimating a “collective dream world” through its texts and praxis (Storey 9). According to Richard Maltby, popular culture offers, “an escapism that is not an escape from or to anywhere, but an escape of our utopian selves” (14). The collective fantasies provide an outlet for repressed dreams and desires. The fourth definition of popular culture, states that it is the culture that “originates from ‘the people’” (Storey 9). Here, the dominant ideologies are not imposed upon people. This definition implies that popular culture acts as an “authentic culture” of “the people,” therefore, it becomes “folk culture,” “a culture of the people for the people” (9). John Storey is quick to point out the ambivalence in who all figures under the category of ‘the people’ and the commercial designs of popular culture (9). Therefore, Popular Culture appropriates

various connotations of the term ‘culture’ and becomes an intricated terrain with diverse meanings.

As a text, *Aithihyamala* is home to several myths and legends that were popular in the oral culture and they underwent many transformations from the oral to the print spaces, and to the visual realm of film and television. Popular culture, Stuart Hall says is, “a site where ‘collective social understandings are created’: a terrain on which ‘the politics of signification’ are played out in attempts to win people to particular ways of seeing the world” (122-23). It shapes collective consciousness and, therefore, all the texts in popular culture are ultimately political. The myths and legends compiled in *Aithihyamala* are part of the popular culture of Kerala and it was instrumental in moulding the Malayali psyche in a particular way. This process continues unabated through mass media and popular culture.

Aithihyamala as a popular text

Aithihyamala was the first attempt at the compilation of myths and legends scattered across different regions of Kerala *Aithihyamala* was “the first text that ‘conceptualised’ and ‘categorised’ the genre called *aithihyam*/legend in the Malayalam literary canon” (Thomas and Arulmozhi 56). Kottarathil Sankunni sourced these legends from the oral literature of Kerala. When he brought these into the print space, many of the oral tales were altered to fit the mould of the print culture. When produced in print, this incredible mix of narratives, with their regional flavours and variations, acquired some uniformity.

Before the establishment of the printing press, many of the original texts existed in the form of manuscripts. They were often inscribed on *thaliyola* or palm leaves. This system lacked uniformity since there was an arbitrariness associated with the nature of the alphabets, under different writers. The advent of printing aided in the standardisation of

the alphabet in Malayalam. In his article, "Malayalam: 'The Day-to-Day Social Life of the People'," Robin Jeffrey notes that printing "took place along with a steady increase in literacy rates, elementary schooling and in the volume of printed material which, by the second quarter of the twentieth century, became easily procurable for a couple of *annas* or one-sixteenth of a rupee" (18). The consumers of the print culture increased proportionally with a rise in the readership due to the growth of the literacy rate and the spread of education. Thus, a bulk of the printed material became accessible to the reading population.

It was in the wake of colonial modernity, with the advent of Christian missionary ventures, that Kerala once again became a fertile ground for 'renaissance' movements. The Christian missionaries started different educational institutions in Kerala and taught the Malayalam alphabet and grammar. However, the overindulgence of missionaries who were keen to mould the Malayalam language for ideological purposes proved a hindrance to the growth of the language. The mantle fell into the hands of the Travancore dynasty for taking over public education. Due to the dearth of the printing press in Travancore, they resorted to the distribution of textbooks in the form of manuscripts. This gradually helped in the evolution of a standardised regional language variety. But, in 1894 all educational institutions came under the control of the British government. The educational system that existed prior to the British intervention was a mix of different models and largely community-based:

> *Namboothiris* had special schools for teaching Sanskrit, Vedas, and Sastras. Caste Hindu girls were taught music and poetry at home. Muslims had their *madrasas*. The Christians had their own church schools. The traditional *patasalas* were run by individual initiative with no aid from the state. (Bahauddin 134)

The colonial government's takeover of education established a centralised system of education and a formal variant of the Malayalam language was used in the textbooks. On the contrary, in regions such as Malabar, there was a dearth of opportunities to access basic education, so a dialect different from the one that evolved in Thiru-Kochi came into existence. Organisations such as *Kavi Samajam* further attempted to curb regional and linguistic differences by pushing for a standardised language. The dearth of grammar texts proved to be a hindrance to linguistic unity. To resolve this, a committee was formed to identify an official text. Thus, *Kerala Panineeyam* by A.R. Rajaraja Varma was selected for academic purposes.

Aithihyamala is critically studied in academic spaces even today. Several legends in *Aithihyamala* were part of the curriculum even before the unification of the three princely states— Cochin, Travancore and Malabar—took place. Of the textbooks published by the Travancore government, the textbook called *Kerala Charithra Kathakal and Civics* to first forum written by K.E. Job and published in the year 1952, contains passages on legendary figures from the royal dynasties of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, namely figures such as Marthanda Varma, Swathi Thirunal, Shakthan Thampuran, Kolathiri, Samoothiri, et al. *Keralathile Veerapurushanmar* (1954) for Forum Three by A.Shankarapilla M.A commissioned by the government of Travancore-Cochin contains the legends of Iravikkutti Pillai (Valiyapadathalavan), Shakthan Thampuran, Velu Thampi, et al. After the unification of Kerala in 1956, the *Kerala Padavali* for standard three comprised legends about Swathi Thirunal (archive.org/kerala-text-books). These legends about the rulers of Kerala are presented as historical facts and shrouded in myths and legends. It is interesting to note that even after the unification of Kerala, the textbook committee included the same nominees of the Travancore and Cochin governments. The Malabar province was the last to join the United Kerala movement and a majority of the

Malayalam-speaking population in Malabar was lagging in education and financial prospects (Muraleedharan 90). Yet another aspect of these legends is that they talked about the elite histories of powerful men in Kerala's history.

Aithihyamala has also found its way to the undergraduate programme for Malayalam under Mahatma Gandhi University from 2017 onwards. The University offers a complementary course called Folkloristics or *Folklore Vijnjaanam* (Course Code: ML2CMT04) for second-semester BA Malayalam students. The syllabus prescribes a detailed study of the legend of "Kadamattathu Kathanar" from *Aithihyamala,* its aesthetic considerations and politics of representation ("Syllabus for Folkloristics"). In the syllabus for BA English Semester 4 (Course Code: EN 1411.1), General English textbook, *Global Voices and Cultures* the legend "The Power of Faith" from *Aithihyamala* is incorporated ("Syllabus for General English"). The legend encapsulates the lesson that absolute faith in something can bring you success. Thus, *Aithihyamala* remains significant, offering fresh insights when viewed through the prism of contemporary society and culture.

Aithihyamala was published by the Mangoladayam Company while Kottrathil Sankunni was alive. In 1973, the publishing rights were handed over to Kottarathil Sankunni Smaraka Samithi (K.S. Memorial Society) at Kottayam. Later, *Aithihyamala* was published by several leading publishing companies such as Current Books, DC Books, Mathrubhoomi Books, etc. Thus, from October 1978 to December 1990, the number of copies sold were more than 48,000. Around 1,58,000 copies of the text were sold between July 1991 to July 2005. This indicates that *Aithihyamala* is well on course to becoming one of the bestselling non-fiction titles in Kerala.

Over the years, there have been different translations of *Aithihyamala* which has enlarged the scope of the text to a global audience. Some well-known translations include *Lores and Legends of Aithihyamala* by T.C. Narayanan (2009) and *Tales once Told* (2006)

by Abraham Eraly. Translators such as Rukmini Shekhar, Sreekumari Ramachandran, Leela James, et al., have also published their translations between 2010 and 2015. Folklore studies based on, *Aithihyamala* by Raghavan Payyanad and A.B. Raghunathan Nair aided the text to regain momentum in academic circles. Thus, the textualisation of *Aithihyamala* brought more popularity to the text over time.

A text such as *Aithihyamala* was instrumental in cultivating a Pan-Indian identity. In her article, "Animal as Hero: Narrative Dynamics of Alterity and Answerability in the Elephant Stories of *Aithihyamala*," Bini B.S observes that "The connections of *Aithihyamala* stories with the regional and pan-Indian socio-ethical conventions, literary and linguistic tropes and narrative genres are intricate and multidirectional" (123). It is intertextual and has references from other myths and legends of Indian mythology. For example, the legend "Mahabhasyam" from *Aithihyamala* describes the nuances of the *Chathurvarnya* system (caste system) in India, where the members of the society are divided into mainly four castes such as Brahmins, *Kshathriyas* or the warrior caste, *Vaishyas* (merchants or landowners), *Shudras* or the lower-caste members of the society engaged in menial occupations. The legend goes on to dwell on why an upper-caste Brahmin could marry a *shudra* girl who saved his life only after marrying three women from the respective *varna* system. Similarly, a son born from a *shudra* wife could not learn *Veda* directly from his father. The father would sit behind a veil and teach the sacred text 'Mahabhashyam' to his son (Sankunni 39). It also talks about historical figures such as Vararuchi and Vikramadityan, the King of Ujjain, a figure from a different historical context altogether, thus blurring the boundaries between the nation and the region.

When Sankunni compiled *Aithihyamala*, he restructured the legends in an elaborate style, and filled them with Sanskrit slokas, to adapt them to an elite discourse. Sankunni was adept in both Sanskrit and English. *Aithihyamala* is laden with Sanskrit words, which

shows the affinities of Malayalam and Sanskrit. Sanskrit was the language of caste elites or *devabhasha* of the upper castes. Sankunni reverted to the tradition of Sanskrit words in describing upper-castes, rulers, and kings. For example, in the legend of Swati Thirunnal, he addresses King Swathi Thirunnal as *Sangeetha Sahithya Sagaraparagan* which means the King was proficient in literature, music, and arts (Sankunni 409). In the legend of Alathur Nambi, he borrows the expression *ashatavaidya* or an expert practitioner in Ayurveda; when a bird asks him about "who can be deemed healthy," he replies; *Kale hithamit bhoji kruth chamkraman kramen vamasaya; moothr preesh; sthreeshu yathatma cha yo nara; sorukke* (Sankunni 269), which translates to "one who consumes a balanced diet on time, one who walks a few yards after consuming a meal, one who sleeps on the left side, one who answers nature's call on time, one who indulges in normal sex is deemed 'healthy'" (Vinay 3). Several legends such as *Mahabhashyam*, *Bharthrihari*, *Parayi petta Panthirukulam*, etc., are splattered with Sanskrit slokas to validate the hegemonic upper-caste discourse in Kerala.

Aithihyamala gained authenticity when it was published in the print media. The legends were transformed into an authentic and final version through drastic changes in their form, language, narrative style, and content. Its print serialisation resulted in the appropriation of oral culture to the classical tradition. The process of textualisation brought edits and convenient omissions to different aspects of orally transmitted myths and legends (56). For example, there is a temple for Kayamkulam Kochunni at Kozhenchery in the Pathanamthitta district called Edappara Maladevar Nada. The temple has an idol of Kayamkulam Kochunni. The local narrative is about the installation of a Muslim man's idol on the premises of a Hindu temple. The tale relates to an *oorali* (oracle) who encountered Kochunni's spirit on his way to Kayamkulam. Kochunni sought his help with finding a place to reside. The oracle asked him to guard the temple and

consecrated him within the temple premises (I. Thomas). Several such local variations of the legends are omitted in *Aithihyamala*. Similarly, *Aithihyamala* features a young Kadamattathu Kathanar, who is kidnapped and held hostage for a period of twelve years by the members of a tribal community called *Malayarayans*. However, the oral versions refer to the captors as *pishachu* or evil spirits. A conscious attempt to replace evil spirits with an existing tribe may be part of a project of "legitimising" and "rationalising" legends in "the wake of colonial modernity" (Thomas and Arulmozhi 61).

Kottarathil Sankunni, in his preface to the first volume of *Aithihyamala* published by Manorama Books in 2014 recounts that when the legend *Parayi petta Panthirikulam* was initially published in *Bhashaposhini,* the text received severe criticism from a reader who condemned the editor for publishing frivolous articles (Sankunni). He added that Sankunni should cover the cost of wasted paper and return the author's fee. He also suggested that the magazine should endorse writers such as Sheshagiri Prabhu who wrote about a noble text such as *Kerala Paneneeyam* to maintain literary standards (Sankunni). According to Ancy Bay, "Literature which is only meant for *kevala anandam* [ordinary pleasure] or *vayana sukham* [pleasured reading] was accused to be status quoist, futile or anti ideal" (97). This shows that the term 'popular' was a site of contestation at that point in time; high culture was regarded as a product of an individual's creation while popular culture a trivial or inferior art form. However, *Aithihyamala* became one of the seminal texts studying the myths and legends of Kerala. It is celebrated even today since it has been appropriated into popular culture by film, television, and modern digital platforms.

The text could be seen as a harbinger of the *Aikya Kerala* project or the unified Kerala project which was gathering momentum. The region was treated as a distinct linguistic community, consuming the same language and culture, as Shiju Sam Varughese points out:

> In the context of Kerala, the formation of modern Malayalam as a standard language, according to this perspective, was coeval with the subjectivisation of the *Malayali*. Kerala modernity hence was 'Malayali modernity', where in the term Malayali simultaneously denoted the subject and the language. (4796)

The discourse of modernity was instrumental in creating a collective regional consciousness among Malayalis. Malayalam emerged as a "standard," language through a process of "vernacularisation," where the formation of a regional language coexisted with the formation of a regional subject (4797). Therefore, there was a constant flux between the constructs of "language," "subject," "community" and "region" (4797).

The *Aikya* Kerala movement aimed at the integration of the three provinces: Travancore, Malabar, and Kochi. The affinity for a 'common' language was a unique trait of this movement. There was a demand for a common culture and a common language. Sankunni who worked as a poetry editor in *Malayala Manorama*, during his free time, used to narrate local legends to Kandathil Varughese Mappila and his friends. He started compiling the legends from the region as per the instructions by Kandathil Varughese Mappila, the managing editor of the daily, *Malayala Manorama*. In her article, "Animal as Hero: Narrative Dynamics of Alterity and Answerability in the Elephant Stories of *Aithihyamala*" Bini B.S. notes, "Kandathil Varghese Mappila, the managing editor of *Malayala Manorama* publications and a friend of Sankunni, requested him to write the rare stories he had the habit of narrating to his colleagues and contemporaries" (124). He felt that these legends should be published in his newspaper and magazines since "these narratives also contain great philosophical principles and timeless wisdom that all of us should internalise" (qtd. in Bini 125). Unlike the spontaneity associated with the oral tradition, these legends were published as part of a conscious design to enlighten people. Hence, *Aithihyamala* was serialised in the renowned newspaper, *Malayala Manorama*,

and its allied magazine, *Bhashaposhini* to nurture a collective 'Malayali' identity at the time of the united Kerala movement. There was a motive behind the inclusion of several legends in this compilation. For example, the legend of *Parayi petta Panthirukulam* in *Aithihyamala* was included to emphasise plurality and 'unity in diversity' among Malayalis entrapped in caste and class hierarchies.

In the preface to the one-fiftieth birth anniversary edition of Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* published by Current Books in 2005, he observes that the text was compiled into the form of a book by Vellaikkal Narayana Menon, the manager of *Lakshimibhai* magazine (19). He states that he had sent twenty-one essays, which had previously been published in *Manorama* and *Bhashaposhini,* to be included in the book entitled *Lakshmibhai Granthavali.* Sankunni mentions that these essays were published by Vellaikkal Narayana Menon as an attempt to nurture the Malayalam language or *bhashaposhanartham* (19). This was precisely the aim of the unified Kerala movement. It was an attempt to devise a common and standardised form of language as well as to nurture it. Thus, the reason for publishing *Aithihyamala* in the most popular newspaper and magazines of the time was to reach a large audience. This shows that the dissemination of the myths and legends included in the text compromised much of its regional flavour as it became a part of the popular culture of Kerala via the print medium.

Myths are a form of popular culture, often more than that. Claude Lévi-Strauss was concerned with the study of the underlying structure of myths and their relevance in popular culture. He believed that they were "homogeneous" structures that dominated the specific and historically variable cultures and myths. He points out that "individual myths are examples of *parole*, articulations of an underlying structure or *langue*" (120). It is only by understanding this structure that one can comprehend, the "operational value" of particular myths (209). The similarity of the underlying structures of the myth will enable

it to "have a similar sociocultural function within the society" (120). According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, "the purpose of myth is to make the world explicable, to magically resolve its problems and contradictions" (qtd. in Strinati 120). Myth confers a religious and sacred explanation of a story from the past. It is essentially a narrative that can at once be regional, yet universal, which can recur in different epochs and manifest in contemporary life and culture. Levi Strauss argues, "mythical thought always progresses from the awareness of oppositions toward their resolution . . . . The purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (229). They are narratives that proliferate across different cultures and help societies to resolve contradictions. They attempt to create a better world in order to put us at peace with ourselves and our existence (Strinati 120).

The process of legend-making/mythmaking with a shared culture and past keep a region intact. Further, this process ensures the continuity of human existence and aids in the transmission of knowledge across different cultures and generations. They highlight intellectual frameworks that have influenced various interpretations of history (Zacharias 4). The prominent newspapers and magazines of the nineteenth century had dedicated columns for myths and legends. In one such column in the daily, *Malayala Manorama*, a contributor adds to the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar and his teacher, Mar Abo, arguing that their sorcery was used for the welfare of the people. He concludes the column with a request to the readers to publish more legends in the newspapers about the life of Kadamattathu Kathanar ("Kadamattathu Mar Abo"). Such open calls for the readers to actively participate in the mythmaking process is an attempt to create a cultural memory of the region by shared consumption of the myths and legends integral to the local culture.

Roland Barthes offers a semiological analysis of popular culture in his study of myths. In *Mythologies*, Barthes notes that ". . . myth is a system of communication, that it

is a message," (108) where it acts as "a mode of signification…a type of speech…conveyed by a discourse. Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message" (107). According to Roland Barthes, myth is "a second-order semiological system" (113). He suggests that in the second-order system of myth, a signifier replaces a sign in the first-order system. Therefore, "now the myth-consumer takes the signification for a system of facts: myth is read as a factual system, whereas it is but a semiological system" (130). Thus, the nature of myth does not remain as an unconscious process. Instead, myth is produced for consumption and its meaning serves similar functions in a society and is comparable to how ideology operates. Therefore, the myths in the modern world are predominated by the capitalist ideologies at its core. These ideologies need to be unveiled by analysing the denotations and connotations of these myths in popular culture.

Myths occupy a significant position in society, they act as a unifying point that contributes to the collective memory of a region. In a text such as *Aithihihyamala*, the narrator employs a unique narrative strategy, where he presents the myths and legends as believable. He does that through a direct appeal to the logic of the readers who have gained education through the project of modernity. Thus, he tries to make it convincing to the reading public by interspersing the narratives with spatiotemporal references drawn from the everyday life of a region such as Kerala.

In the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala, the popularity of the text contributes to a collective consciousness that can essentially be attributed to spatial and temporal specificity observed by the author to validate the authenticity of these legends by placing them within the historical context of Kerala, where these myths and legends of *Aithihyamala* can often be read as a subtext to history. For example, the legend about Marthandavarma sticks to the historical timeline of his rule as the king who died in the

Malayalam year 1036 CE (Sankunni 227). The legend even mentions the timeline of prominent elephants like Vaikkathu Thiruneelakandan (950-61 CE). Sankunni offers a vast spatial study of the territorialised/der-territorialised region of Kerala with specific references to the provinces, villages, and various places where the legend takes place. In the legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni, he notes that Kochunni was born in the year 993 CE, in the month of *Karkkidaka* (a Malayalam month) at the village of Keerikkadu in Karthikappali Taluk, near Kottukulangara (189). Similarly, specific details about the customs and rituals of several temples such as Aranmula, Kumaranalloor, Chengannoor, etc. are elucidated in the text, owing to their popularity to date. The reason for *Aithihyamala*'s appeal to Keralites lies in the text's familiarity with the terrain on which it is situated. This is an important reason still driving its popular reception.

Aithihyamala provides the region with a sense of shared cultural past by stringing together multiple stories to create a regional wealth of narratives that resist colonial discourses. According to Nivea Thomas and S. Arulmozhi, ". . . a significant role in constructing the nation-state and its regional" (54). The cultural significance of the text has contributed to the making of collective consciousness. For example, several legends, such *Ashtavaidyans* in *Aithyhamala,* give glimpses of the indigenous ayurvedic tradition in Kerala. According to Maya Vinay, "the privileging of the *Ashtavaidya* tradition over any other form of medicine was a part of the larger scheme of promoting loyalty towards traditional treatment over colonial treatment and preference for this meant pledging loyalty towards nation and the native ruler" (7). The colonisers tried to exert their hegemony in the field of medicine, but in the wake of anti-colonial nationalism, a region such as Kerala resisted colonial intervention with the help of its indigenous system of medicine. *Ashtavaidyas* were ayurvedic practitioners who preserved the indigenous system of Aurvedic tradition in Kerala. The popular practice of medicine under the *Ashtavaidyas*

was monopolised by Western medicine under the colonial administration. Several such legends in *Aithihyamala* uphold the indigenous traditions of Kerala. For example, the legend of Pandalam Neelakandan and several other elephants captures the festival traditions of Kerala; the legend of Thalakulathur Bhattathiri and Pazhoor Padippura deals with astrology; the legend of Thevalassery Nambi deals with the indigenous tradition of magic and sorcery; the legend of Kunchikuttipilla Sarvadhikarykar deals with *kalarippayattu*, a martial arts performance of Kerala. Thus, these legends uphold the indigenous traditions that are unique in the cultural history of Kerala.

Thus, *Aithihyamala* as a cultural product falls within Raymond William's definition of popular culture discussed in the introduction to this chapter—it is well-liked as it has successfully withstood the test of time. Even though many people looked down upon it in the early years, branding it to be of inferior literary quality, it became a part of the popular culture of Kerala through its serialisation in print dailies and magazines, translations, as children's literature, grandma stories, and storytelling sessions, etc. Sensing its market potential and continued appeal, the text was soon adapted by television serials, films, and online streaming platforms for a mass audience.

Aithihyamala for Young Readers

Children's Literature is a popular genre focused on young readers and their diverse interests. The history of the genre in Kerala spans over two hundred years. It was necessary to document this treasure trove of folktales and legends in the oral tradition for posterity. According to Robin D' Crusz "in Kerala, this historical moment can be traced back to the first half of the 19th century with the emergence of print culture and modernity ushered in under the aegis of missionaries and modern education" ("Children's Literature in Kerala"). Following the establishment of printing presses in different parts of Kerala

through missionary initiatives, several translations, abridged versions, and adaptations from the English language shaped the genre of Children's Literature in Malayalam.

Popular texts such as Vaikath Paachu Moothath's *Balabhooshanam* (1868), T.C Kalyani Amma's *Aesop Stories* in 1897, Kottarathil Shankunni's *Aithihyamala* in 1909, Kumaran Asan's adaptation of Ramayana for children, *Balaramayana* were published in 1916. Mahakavi Ulloor S. Parameswara Iyer published a seven-volume series of poems under the title *Padyamanjari* (1915–31). Several other writers such as Nanthanar, Mali Madhavan Nair, Sumangala, Kunjunni Mash, Vailoppilli Sreedharamenon, Akkitham, et al., are other prominent writers who contributed to the genre of Children's Literature in Malayalam. In the contemporary scenario, leading publishing houses in Malayalam have respectable catalogues of Children's Literature.

Aithihyamala is an emblematic text that popularised myths and legends among children in Kerala. According to Radhika Menon, "this basic narrative desire in children is hugely exploited by a crude culture industry which churns out toys and games, films and advertisements, computer games and cartoons, magazines and comic strips through the all-pervasive media - print, television and the world wide web" ("An Overview"). Children have essentially become consumers of the text, where the culture industry produces variations of original myths and legends into changing mass media forms.

Initially, the myths and legends in *Aithihyamala* became popular among children via comic strips or *Amar Chithra Kathas*. According to Rupleena Bose, "tales of brave warrior gods, conniving demons, benevolent Hindu kings and clever ministers have gripped the child growing up in post-colonial India" (33). In post-colonial countries like India, popular cultural forms such as cinema, comics, television serials, etc. become inevitable tools for the creation of the nation-state, by upholding the hegemonic idea of "Indianness," where Hindu myths and history align together. The *Amar Chithra Kathas*

are popular among immigrants from India as well. *Amar Chithra Katha* is "housed in images from childhood and stories of a perfect past, nostalgia translates into popular cultural symbols remodelling itself as the classic" (Bose 33). As for the diaspora, it functions as a companion for their children to relive the cultural memory of their Indian tradition with nostalgia and innocence of childhood.

The *Amar Chithra Katha* adapted several stories from *Aithihyamala*, with visually appealing illustrations. The India Book House of *Amar Chithra Kathas* published adaptations of Kayamkulam Kochunni (no.794, 1978), Marthanda Varma, Velu Thampi Dalwa (no. 749, 1980), Sree Narayana Guru (no.792, 1988), etc. Children's magazines such as *Poompatta*, *Balarama*, *Balabhoomi*, *Balamangalam*, etc. were also instrumental in the dissemination of *Aithihyamala* stories into the popular culture of Kerala. *Poompatta*, initially owned by P. A. Warrier and from 1978 by Pai and Pai Company, it was the first children's magazine in Malayalam to publish comics produced by India Book House. In 1983, *Balarama Amar Chithra Katha*, a popular publication by the renowned daily *Malayala Manorama* under M.M Publications, Kottayam, acquired copyrights from the India Book House Private Ltd. for publishing the comic strips in Malayalam.

Balarama Amar Chithra Katha has published several titles such as Kayamkulam Kochunni, Kadamattathu Kathanar, Marthanda Varma, et al., from *Aithihyamala*. This played a pivotal role in fashioning a refined and normative form of hegemonic masculinity in Kerala through Children's Literature. The series ". . . it creates a fable like heroism, where conflict is only between the Hindu hero/ good and the deviant other/evil creates a fable-like heroism, where conflict is only between the Hindu hero/good and the deviant other/evil" (Bose 33). This oppositional framework formulates the analysis of text and spectacles in the form of symbols in popular culture. Rupleena Bose claims that, "the symbolic world of illustrations leads the young readers to associate fair, Roman, upper

caste Hindu features as naturally good and the bearded sharp-jawed signifying the evil and lecherous Muslim" (34). The binary of good vs evil is portrayed through these comics where the hegemony of the elite upper-caste Hindu Brahmin men were pictured with the notions of purity, fairness, and heroic virtues, whereas Muslim men were pictured as invaders, conspiratorial and violent.

The series produced several titles from *Aithihyamala* intending to influence the collective Malayali psyche, and further serve the national interest of preserving Indianness among children as well as adults. In her book, *The Classic Popular*, Nandini Chandra notes, "hero worship, an integral part of children's literature is then put into the service of the life-narrative designed to foster national feeling. The premise of identification between hero and child is then magically affected through a common religious bonding" (5). The creation of heroes is an essential part of children's literature. In this case, the *Balarama Amar Chithra Kathas* selected and included certain tales from *Aithihyamala* to ensure that the heroic formulations that are evoked through these cultural commodities rekindle the spirit of a unified Malayali community bound by the myths and legends of a dominant Hindu tradition at its core.

As per the list obtained from the Balarama Amarchithrakatha Office, Kottayam, the heroes in the titles adapted by Balarama *Amar Chithra Kathas* from *Aithihyamala* include the legends about noble and valiant kings like *Chembakasseri Raja* (vol.20, no.9, March 2010), *Kathunna Kolathiri, Kuthunna Samoothiri* (vol.24, no.7, April 2014), *Marthanda Varma* (vol. 17, no.6, Jan. 2007), *Shakthan Thampuran* (no.82, Jan. 1974; no.287, Dec. 2007) ("Sales Trends Report"). Further, it comprises of experts in the field of ayurveda, magic, arts, literature, and administration. The legends of *ashtavidyas*, the likes of Alathoor Nambi who was an exemplary Ayurveda practitioner (vol.20, no.16, Nov. 2010), the legends of sorcerers and magicians like *Thevalassery Nambi* (vol.21, no.3, Dec.

2010), *Kadamattathu Kathanar* (no.329, Jan. 2004), *Kaippuzha Thamban* (vol.20, no.6, Jan. 2010), *Chembra Ezhuthachan* (vol.20, no.19, Jan 2010), martial arts expert *Kallanthattil Gurukkal* (vol.21, no.2, Nov. 2010), and the legend of the astrologer, *Thalakulathur Bhattathiri* (vo.21, no.5, Jan. 2010) were adapted from *Aithihyamala*. The legends of well-known names from the field of literature like *Kalidasa* (vol.18, no.4, Dec. 2007), *Poonthanam Namboothiri* (vol.18, no.11, Dec. 2008), *Kunjan Nambiar* (vol.22, no.19, Aug. 2012), *Prabhakaran* (vol.20, no.17, July 2010), who wrote *Sreekrishnakarnamritham* (recited to show the devotion towards one's teacher), etc., was also adapted from *Aithihyamala*. The tales of goddesses such as *Kumaranelloramma* (vol 21, no.1, Aug. 2010), *Kodungalloramma* (vol.19, no.20, Aug. 2004), and diabolic feminine forms such as *Yakshi* were illustrated in the series Kalliyanakattu Neeli (vol.20, no.10, March 2010). The legend of *Kodan Bharaniyile Uppumanga* (vol.24, no.12, June 2014) explores the culinary interests of Keralites. The legend of the brigand, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (no.27, Dec. 1991; no.280, Jan. 2002; no.3, Feb. 2013) was extremely popular, hence it was reprinted in three editions from 1991 to 2013. The legends of *Naranathu Bhranthan* (vol.23, no.5, March 2013) and *Parayi petta Panthirukulam* (vol.19, no.8, Feb. 2009) show the heterogeneous nature of the Keralites, despite the caste and class hierarchies that existed in the society ("Sales Trends Report").

Aithihyamala acts as an indigenous project to create a collective fantasy about our rich and varied past. In the aftermath of the *Aikya Kerala* project, a narrative of a unified and secular Kerala was disseminated. But, the modern subject that evolved out of this process was essentially 'man'. There were attempts made to glorify feudal nostalgia and the history of the elite sections of society through a celebration of masculinity in the public sphere. This percolated into the popular culture as well. According to Antonio Gramsci, the term "hegemony" refers to, "the way in which dominant groups in society, seek to win

the consent of subordinate groups in society, through a process of 'intellectual and moral leadership'" (75). In modern capitalist societies, consensual acceptance of subordinate groups are visible. Here, the majority of the population consumed *Amar Chithra Kathas* and took pride in their heroic and masculine past. In the guise of fostering an indigenous culture, there was an attempt to inject and celebrate hegemonic masculinity in popular culture by valorising terms such as 'wisdom', 'bravery', 'chivalry', 'power', etc., as exclusive traits of men.

The variety of legends that were circulated through *Amar Chithra Kathas* redefined the notion of masculinity by plotting these narratives onto young minds. The motto of *Amar Chithra Kathas* was to reconnect the youth to their roots. It also inculcated didactic values and aimed at extolling virtues such as respecting elders, and devotion to teachers which were fundamental virtues to fashion the Malayali psyche. Deepa Sreenivas, in the introduction of her book, *Sculpting a Middle Class: History, Masculinity and the Amar Chithra Katha in India,* writes,

> . . . it articulates the hegemonic ambitions of a modern Hindu nationalism; a refined, brahminised, yet modern, masculinity emerges as normative within the discourse of ACK (*Amar Chithra Kathas*). It seeks to train future citizens of the nation through narratives that centre and foreground an indomitable and persevering masculinity. (4)

The *Amar Chithra Kathas* helped to disseminate Hindu nationalist aspirations as they revived interest in the myths and legends pertinent to Hindu epics such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharatha*, *Panchathanthra*, *Kathasaritsagara*, *Aithihyamala*, etc. These legends, with a strong undercurrent of hegemonic masculinity, typically celebrated alpha males of a religion or a community exerting control over the subordinate groups. The emergence of a

modern, yet brahminised masculinity, was hence celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala.

The *Amar Chithra Kathas* seeped into popular culture and contemporary life through the mass media. According to Frances W. Pritchett "*Amar Chitra Katha* is thus part of a loosely integrated entertainment and self-improvement empire that has come to span a number of media: comics, children's books, audio cassettes, magazines, correspondence courses, and recently even a videotape" (79). Comics continue to be celebrated through children's books, audio cassettes are replaced by mobile devices and online streaming platforms. As observed by Deepa Sreenivas, the *Amar Chithra Kathas* series has a life even today, through its virtually accessible format of four-hundred plus stories available on online platforms and mobile phones (3). The myths and legends of *Aithihyamala* are produced in the audiobook format by *Storytel*, a prominent audiobook subscription service. *Storytel* has compiled the entire volume of *Aithihyamala* stories that both children and adults can listen to. Similarly, according to a *The Hindu* report dated 5 September 2018, a book store called 'The Reading Room' at Trivandrum, holds an event called 'Tales at Sunset' where they narrate popular legends like *Parayi petta Panthrukulam* from *Aithihyamala* to children (Harikumar). In a technology-driven world, it is necessary to keep the circulation of these myths and legends alive in a society where new meanings are produced even as received meanings are either contested or met with constant negotiation.

Aithihyamala and Popular Media

Popular culture confers a multiplicity of meanings in the text. *Aithihyamala* can be deemed as a popular text and intertextuality is one of the characteristic features of a popular text. For example, the literary versions and film versions of *Aithihyamala* are juxtaposed with the myths and legends circulating in the oral tradition. There is a sense of

fluidity associated with it. As John Fiske points out, "popular texts have leaky boundaries; they flow into each other and they flow into everyday life" (126). A popular text is never complete in itself; its boundaries overlap with each other; at times, they complement each other as well. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, "one of the main distinctive features of popular culture against high culture is its resolute difference between the aesthetic and the everyday" (qtd. in Fiske 127). In popular culture, text as objects are mere commodities, sometimes their meanings can be read only when they are assimilated into the everyday lives of the people. Thus, the intertextuality of popular culture permeates its boundaries to ease into everyday life.

A text like *Aithihyamala* marks "repetition" and "seriality" as a cultural commodity. The meanings of the text are produced within its constant circulation depending upon its social contexts. Fiske states that popular culture is built on "repetition" and "seriality"; since no text is complete within itself (126). *Aithihyamala* as a cultural commodity circulates within the popular culture of Kerala. It has been transferred to popular culture mainly through print, especially newspapers, magazines, comic strips, etc. The print culture has played an instrumental role in appropriating the legends from the oral tradition. Later, the features of repetition and seriality were adapted into the visual medium through the canvas of film and television serials. These are some of the ways in which a cultural text such as *Aithihyamala* produces meanings and pleasures for consumption.

Popular culture embraces our day-to-day lives. In his book, *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske notes, "Popular culture is made by the people, not produced by the culture industry. All the culture industries can do is produce a repertoire of texts/cultural resources for the various formations of the people to use/reject in the ongoing process of producing their popular culture" (24). A popular text will be successful

only when it is appealing to people fulfilling their tastes, as well as helping them to tackle the meanings produced within the context of their social relations and identities. Relevance is a key term central to the study of popular culture because it "acts as the intersection between the textual and the social" (14). A popular text will thrive only if there is a common factor that satisfies the consumption patterns of diverse social groups. Otherwise, a text will be commercially unviable and may not withstand the test of time.

A text such as *Aithihyamala* has witnessed rapid growth in its consumption and an increase in its profitability. The circulation of meanings has been intact since it got altered and reinvented to appease the new marketplace. The text remains ephemeral but the relevance of the text may be determined by its presence in popular culture where it takes on new forms. The popular media genres to which the text has been appropriated include film, television, the internet, etc. The adaptation of the myths and legends in *Aithihyamala* to popular culture, especially in the visual spaces has also shaped the notions of masculinity in Kerala.

The spread of popular culture in Kerala can be attributed to the rise of the print culture which was produced at cheaper rates and led to consumption by a large number of readers. The invention of the printing press was instrumental in heralding literary modernity across the world. Before the invention of the printing press, text-making was rather a strenuous process (Danesi 107). The invention of the printing press resulted in the circulation of messages through popular culture and the texts were consumed by a vast number of people. The novels were born as an aftermath of the mass production of printed materials. In Kerala, there were numerous novels and other print magazines published as a result of the project of modernity. Raghavan Puthupally claims that the 1930s witnessed a rapid growth of periodicals as well as serial publications, variously known as 'weeklies', 'fortnightlies', and 'monthlies' which were intended for the consumption of an ordinary

readership (93). There was an attempt to link the term 'popular' due to its encounter with the local culture industry matrix to be conceived as *janapriyam* or liked by the people (Bay 98). The term *janapriyam* spread to other domains such as literature, film, art, drama, etc. But the problem associated with the term 'janapriyam', notes Ancy Bay:

> It was often being cited as qualitatively inferior to the high-sounding and politically impregnated *janakeeyam* or 'linked to the people' cultural type. While *janakeeyam* was conceived as an organic engraft on the ways people live and react, janapriyam was argued to be an artificial creation, often accused of being a commoditised artefact in the local culture-industry and as living upon a set of manufactured tastes. (98)

The term *janapriyam* was often regarded as problematic since it was associated with the works of superfluous literary tastes and artefacts, whereas the term *janakeeyam* [popular] was construed to be culturally rich and politically sound literary productions. The works that were popular or branded under the term *janakeeyam* engaged with the everyday life of the people. It was a site of negotiation where dominant ideologies were resisted by certain constituencies of the popular culture.

The theatre tradition of Kerala was *janakeeyam* or popular with the masses but it was only after the eighties that the local theatre emerged in Malayalam. The popularity of the theatrical tradition further gained momentum with yet another professional theatre group called *Kalanilayam*. It was the first professional theatre group in Kerala and it was founded by Kalanilayam Krishnan Nair in 1963. Kalanilayam adapted the legends of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* in 1979. A notice by Kalanilayam in 1979 about the drama fest at Kayamkulam High School ground says that the play 'Kadamattathu Kathanar' would be staged on 2nd and 3rd March 1979 and that the ticket prices ranged from 3 to 15 rupees. The advertisement said that the play was about a

famous magician, Kadamattathu Kathanar, who defeated another illustrious magician Kunchamon Potti (“Kalanilayam Stage). Not only did he tame a fearsome *Yakshi* in Panayannarkavu, he also made her do household chores. The Kalanaliyam stage employed advanced technology such as a sound system prior to that of the modern digital theatre systems or DTS systems, where the sound of the *Yakshi’s* laugh will be echoed from all sides of the stage. Similarly, the sound of the thunder was brought to the audience as if it was directly falling from the sky. They used technologies such as heated valves on amplifiers (“Kalanilayam Stage”). Further, the notice states that the production featured evil spirits and ghosts and used stage techniques to create floating clouds, sea, hell, waterfalls, fire, flood, etc. The Kalanilayam dramas brought yet another innovative technology such as the introduction of dramascope in their plays to create a spectacular experience for the audience, where the imaginary world appears real to them (“Kalanilayam Dramascope”).

The performance of the drama, Kayamkulam Kochunni was scheduled for March 4, 1979, at Kayamkulam from 9 am to 11 am and from 1 pm to 5 pm. An interesting side note on its notice mentions that there would be bus services to all the main routes after the drama (“Notice for Kalanilyam Drama”). The structure and the technical nuances of Kalanilayam stagecraft were detailed in a *Facebook* post uploaded by Kalanilayam Dramas in April 2020. As the audience entered the huge entrance, they were able to see the two-storeyed stage of Kalanilayam with a balcony balanced on a pillar along with two doors on either side of the stage complete with two windows. Until the play started the audience was perplexed about the production; they debated whether the *Yakshi* such as Kaliyankattu Neeli or the blood-sucking vampire *Rakhsassu* would enter through which door and this remained as suspense till the beginning of the play. Usually, the construction of the stage will begin two months prior to the production (“Kalanilayam Stage”). As

Nivea Thomas observes, “The construction of the stage using plaited coconut leaves, strong areca nut poles, and braided coir cut into the precise sizes as needed since it used to take nearly two months to develop into a properly functional setting” (130). The auditorium where Kalanaliyam dramas are staged was replete with luxurious items such as ceiling fans and comfortable sofas for the audience. Also, it could accommodate more than a thousand people and the visual spectacle of the Kalanilyam stage was made possible with the ardent labour of more than one hundred and fifty technicians (“Kalanilayam Stage”).

Theatre as a popular art form appealed to the masses by facilitating a sense of camaraderie. The liberating potential of the theatre was visible as it moved away from the upper echelons of society to common people and became an important site of popular culture. However, with the rise of mass media forms such as film and television in the late nineties, Kerala began seeing the decline of theatre as a popular art form.

Legends on Silver Screen

Film and television are an integral part of popular culture in Kerala. A text such as *Aithihyamala* has documented the myths and legends of Kerala which are vied to hegemonic power structures. They also fulfil the function of addressing the anxieties and aspirations of the people belonging to a region by aiding in the formation of a ‘collective consciousness.’ The popular media has also shaped the notions of masculinity in Kerala and structured how society views women.

The popularity of the film industry in Kerala was catered through the print culture. In her article, “Coming into Cinema: Critical Cosmopolitanisms of Malayalam Cinema,” Bindu Menon observes, “Often, this engagement was in the form of short news stories on film screenings or incidents around screenings or short notes published alongside other news, crossword puzzles, and political essays” (413). The newspaper, *Malayala*

Manorama had a special column on feature films since 1939. There were several such film magazines, song books, film criticisms etc, that heralded the discourse of cinema through the print medium. These changes coincided with the Indian freedom struggle, the United or *Aikya* Kerala movement, the peasant revolts and the agitations against the caste system (413).

As an ongoing project of modernity in Kerala, Malayalam cinema has played a vital role in shaping a collective Malayali identity. In her essay "Matriliny to Masculinity," Meena T. Pillai observes:

> As national/subnational narratives, they have functioned as organs of the ideological state apparatus in forging a sense of belonging which shape the contours of a linguistic or cultural community, constructing common identities and acculturating men and women to function within symbolic boundaries. Thus regional cinemas have been instrumental in the crystallization of social formations with clearly demarcated structures and meticulously codified social relations. (102)

Cinemas have interpolated people in particular regions with a sense of belonging to their linguistic or cultural communities. Regional cinema has embodied the formation of social and cultural identities by providing a common medium of entertainment. The transition to new and liberating spaces offered by modernity was made accessible to people of the nation/region through the visual medium.

The project of nationalism was responsible for the creation of the idea of 'Indianness.' In her article "Bearing Witness: Malayalam Cinema and the Making of Kerala," Meena T. Pillai notes that, "cinema as a discourse of modernity starts spreading its roots in India at a time when the project of nationalism and the crystallisation of its ideology and its agendas had been fairly standardised and had become firmly entrenched in the Indian psyche" (278). The cinema of the post-independence era was marked by an

affinity for the nation-building project but this was absent in the Malayalam films of that era (Venkiteswaran 4). These films depicted a "desire to see one-self projected and what was 'projected' was also the idea of the nation of Kerala, which films created, showed and invited the audience to share in" (4). The canvas of the Malayalam cinema was brimming with themes that envisioned a secular and egalitarian space and a unified Malayali identity.

The cinema halls were envisioned as a new 'modernised' space that created a collective consciousness among Malayalis. In her article, "Romancing history and historicizing romance," Bindu Menon points out, "in the 1940s the princely state of Thiruvithamkoor was marked by the presence of a large number of touring film companies, the establishment of new permanent cinema halls across most small towns and a profusion of discourses around cinema in the public sphere" (30). Later, all three provinces of Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar had permanent cinema halls, along with an increasing urbanity and a proliferation of film writings (B. Menon 421). This further solidified a region based on linguistic unity. The sentiment in favour of political and administrative cooperation among the three provinces resulted in a United Kerala. This political demand was thought to be important for fostering a "common culture" and a "common language" that were already present (Devika 11).

The discourse of modernity channelled by Malayalam cinema had an important place even in its nascent stage. It was expected to "function as a unifying factor that could accomplish the integration of the three princely states by obliterating social, cultural and even linguistic differences" (Muraleedharan 90). This attempt to forge a Malayalam-speaking region was mobilised through the discourse of cinema. As C. Madhavan Pillai, in his article, "Keralathile Cinema Yugam" points out:

> Even though the Malayalam region consists of three constitutive components namely Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, they presently remain divided in many ways and function with greater distance among themselves than England, Scotland and Ireland…We hardly have any industrial/social links that could hold us together. Let a Malayalam film industry take root in this region. For that very reason, we might come together and become inseparable. At the moment, the northerners have nothing but contempt for the Malayalam of the Southerners and the Southerners loath the Malayalam of the northerners. Malayalam films could be instrumental in effectively solving such problems. And that would be a commendable achievement for *Kairali* or goddess of Malayalam. (qtd. in Muraleedharan 90)

The three distinct provinces were following their own laws and regulations before unification. The provinces of Travancore and Cochin were ruled by Kings with the British Residents controlling the mantle, whereas the province of Malabar was directly under the control of the British. The discourse of modernity on the silver screen was able to foster collective consciousness among the members of the Malayalam-speaking regions. The economic, cultural, and social disparities that existed among the three provinces took a back seat with the rapid growth of cinema theatres. The projection of one's cultural identity interspersed with singular aspects of Malayaliness was achieved through the popularisation of cinema halls. Therefore, cinema was and remains one of the significant forces behind the creation of a 'collective psyche' in Malayalis.

The uniqueness of Malayalam cinema was visible in early films of the fifties such as *Jeevitha Nouka*, *Neelakkuyil*, *Rarichan Enna Pouran*, etc. They took on themes rooted in Malayali culture. These films, rather than focusing on the idea of the nation, imagined "an 'elsewhere', an imaginary nation of a classless secular society" (Venkiteswaran 13). In

her article, “Bearing Witness: Malayalam Cinema and the Making of Kerala,” Meena T. Pillai notes, “The arrival of modernity resulted in the transformation of traditional societies and the fabric of its social life, where the screen became, emblematically enough, another fabric that would weave images of new subjectivities and offer a new register for writing the nation/region” (276). The idea of region differed from the tropes of mainstream nationalism. There was a constant disavowal as well as a yearning for a nation, but at the same time, the region was eager to create a progressive and secular modern state with a unique linguistic identity.

The progressive and secular space of the new ‘Malayalam-speaking region’ was essentially masculine. In his article, “Malayalam Cinema of the 1950’s: Mapping the Nation” C.S. Venkiteswaran observes “significantly, this outside space—secular, modern—is solely occupied by the male characters. It is a male kingdom that is out of bounds for females, whose space is the tragic inside” (13). The cinematic representations often attempt to ‘reiterate’ and ‘reinstate’ hegemonic values and norms in popular culture. The representation of men in Malayalam cinema can be approached through the prism of Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumim, where they look at how masculinity is represented and enacted by the cinematic medium through the arenas of the body, action, the internal world and the external world (65). In many popular films, the body of the hero is presented as the site of power and strength and celebrated as the subject of the male spectacle (65). Secondly, in epic, adventure, or superhero movies, there is a “sexualisation of violence” (65). The hero is moved to righteous action as he stamps his power and authority over his adversaries. The dominant values in the society restore patriarchal notions as well as cultivate adoration for heroes who are valiant and brave, but at the same time denigrate women and the members of the lower castes to life without dignity.

Aithihyamala as a cultural text documents the myths, traditions and practices of a masculine world. The text as a cultural artefact preserves the hegemonic values that were prevalent in erstwhile Kerala. Later, when it was adapted to film, television and other popular mediums, there was a tendency to project "heroes" who struck a chord with the consumers of the popular culture of Kerala. A text such as *Aithihyamala* has been the source for several films in Kerala. The films such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (Dir. P.A. Thomas, 1966), *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (Dir. Rosshan Andrrews, 2018), *Kadamattathu Kathanar* (Dir. Suresh, 1984) and *Perunthachan* (Dir. Ajayan, 1991) depict the heroes based on the legends from *Aithihyamala*. As Michael S. Kimmel observes, there is a tendency to equate "manhood with being strong, successful, capable, reliable, in control" (125). These films celebrate the elevation of the individual to heroic proportions and thereby attempt to legitimise hegemonic masculinity in the public sphere of Kerala.

The migration of labour to Gulf countries and the diaspora resulted in evoking nostalgia for a feudal past and a reiteration of tradition. The semiotic codes of the hegemonic order were shown in the cinemas of the post-1990s with an affinity for spectacles of Brahmanic rituals and traditions. This resulted in the remasculinisation of the public sphere. Post-1990s, there were feminist movements to assert the rights of women and the century also witnessed women starting to go outside the domestic sphere for education and employment. These movements destabilised traditional notions of masculinity. According to Meena T. Pillai, "one of the functions of hegemonic masculinity in Malayalam cinema has been the maintenance of gender fixities, boundaries and hierarchies at a time when there are so many academic and intellectual debates to dismantle such binaries" (110). Malayalam cinema invigorated hegemonic masculinity and a culture of female subjugation, where the heroine was a mere subject of fulfilling either a romantic fantasy, marriage, the functions of a mother figure or as a vamp figure.

The popular culture of Kerala is replete with different manifestations of the myth of *Yakshi* that abound in folklore, literature, and film. The subconscious 'fears' and 'desires' of a community come to light in the figure of the *Yakshi*. In films and television serials, *Yakshi* is portrayed as a white-sari-clad seductress who roams the streets at night. She is portrayed as the deviant 'other', who is the binary opposite of the ideal woman of Kerala (Pillai 103). The cinema, as a discourse of modernity tried "to erase the cultural memories of the irritant figure of the polyandrous mother" (103) represented in the form of *Yakshi* in Malayalam cinema. Therefore, it was possible to witness the taming of the *Yakshi* by the alpha male of a religious community, where the dominant patriarchal ideology always emerges victorious in the end. Modernity in Kerala has attempted to control the agency and sexuality of women with "reform bills in marriage, inheritance and succession practices that would contain the transgressive' potential of women in matrilineal systems of kinship" (104). Therefore, *Yakshi* became a binary of the ideal Malayali woman, who couldn't be fettered within the rigid norms of the patriarchal system.

The problematic discourse of modernity was double-edged: it tries to evade and move away from the past but at the same time it is tied to deep-rooted cultural continuities of the native tradition and its oppressive ideologies that violated the cultural body of the woman. According to Meena T. Pillai, "the Janus-faced representational problematics of modernity as both a metamorphosis of identity, shedding the remains of a dark past, while simultaneously asserting continuation with the cultural roots of a native tradition and its ideological compromises were effected on the bodies of Malayalee women" (104). The cultural body of a *Yakshi*, who falls outside the realm of the patriarchal system was violated in the visual medium through the act of exorcism or by driving an iron nail into

the head of the woman. This was an indication of how the patriarchal society controlled pre-modern excesses of women who could not be contained within the system.

The burden of preserving native traditions and individual autonomy as well as controlling the agency of women was thrust upon the male members of the society via the medium of film and television. As Meena T. Pillai, in her article, "Matriliny to Masculinity" observes, "It also sought to instill a paternal, male familialism in contrast to Western individualism, molding a patriarchy geared towards protection of its women and children." (105). The family headed by the male member of the society or the presence of a father figure was considered essential to safeguard the subjects of the family, especially women and children. Thus, cinema as a discourse of modernity familiarised the role of a heroic, masculine figure bearing the onus of the family and the society; this narrative was immediately celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala.

The patriarchal norm of excluding women from the public spaces of Kerala was incorporated into cinema. For example, public spaces such as *chayyakkada* or tea shops and *kallushaps* or toddy shops, represented as nostalgic spaces in the film, completely excluded women from them (110). However, it is represented as a place where men display their powers and these spaces were devoid of women. Thus, there was an evident display of masculinity in the visual spaces of Malayalam cinema, where men thrived in the public spaces by a deliberate attempt to marginalise women through a display of the female bodies through 'item dances' or by relegating them to the domestic sphere by attributing the roles of a 'mother', 'wife', or 'lover'.

The hegemonic masculinity in Malayalam cinema posed impending threats of violence to women, not only onscreen but by cautioning real women that they have to be confined within patriarchal norms. If they disobey, they will be threatened with violence. This made critical debates with the other an impossible option (Pillai 111). Therefore, the

female characters in the canvas of the Malayalam silver screen "represented a form of 'emphasized femininity,' which is defined as compliance with an accepted 'universal' notion of subordination of women to men, 'and is oriented to accommodating the interests and desires of men'" (qtd. in Pillai 112). Thus, till the end of the nineties, the visual politics of Malayalam cinema treated women as mere subjects of a power structure controlled by men.

The developmental modernity of Kerala resulted in transforming it into a progressive state with a rich cultural heritage and tradition. The project of modernity brought progress into the cultural space of Kerala. Nevertheless, cinema grew into a medium that faithfully reflected the socio-political realities of Kerala. Therefore, the gender disparities that existed in Kerala society were reflected in the films as well.

Television and Domestic Spaces

Television occupies a significant role in the popular culture of Kerala. Benita Acca Benjamin observes that when television was introduced to Kerala in 1985, it immediately became the harbinger of a new political and personal space and facilitated rapid transitions in the cultural, economic, social and political spheres (5485). In his book, *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske says that television produces two kinds of "parallel," and "semi-autonomous" economies as part of the culture industry; they are "financial" and "cultural" (27). The financial economy circulates wealth in the subsystems of "production and distribution" (27). The cultural economy circulates meanings and pleasures. The production of a television programme as a commodity involves it being sold to the audience in its moments of consumption; where the audience becomes producers and they are in turn sold to advertisers. In the cultural function of the economy, there is the circulation of "meanings and pleasures" (27).

In his book, *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*, Dominic Strinati argues, "for Gramsci, popular culture and the mass media are places where hegemony is produced, reproduced and transformed; they are institutions of civil society which involve cultural production and consumption" (156). Hegemony operates in a 'civil society' through institutions such as popular culture and mass media, education, etc (157). Gramsci views civil society as a place where culture and ideology remain intact with the aid of hegemony. He believes that hegemony is produced in a civil society through intellectuals. He introduces the term 'intellectuals' in a broader sense to describe all those who 'work with the ideas' to sustain hegemony in a civil society.

The audience transforms themselves from being a commodity to the producer of meanings and pleasures. Since the production of meanings can neither be consumed nor commodified, the circulation of meanings becomes an important function in the cultural economy. Eileen R. Meehan suggests, "Rather, television is a complex combination of industry and artistry" (448). These two functions enable us to view television as an artefact and commodity, where both the ideology and culture are manufactured and produced for the consumption and interpretation of the audience.

The trajectory of television discourse is intermingled with the history of the region. The modernity that television tried to mediate was "Indianized" so as to achieve a consensus between national interests and modernity (Mankekar 37). Robin Jeffrey's observations about printing which quickly transformed from being a rare and scarce medium to a mass medium in Kerala is true of television as well (259). The modernity perpetuated through television witnessed an intermingling of the 'public' and the 'private' spheres since the whole neighbourhood was huddled together in front of it when television was still considered a luxury (Chandran 9). Even though it was a new medium that

embraced modernity, it was not able to break free of the myths of a masculine public sphere.

Television serials gradually became an indispensable part of the popular culture of Kerala. Television serials disseminate the icons, symbols and representations of the dominant culture/religion. Television serials propagate hegemonic values through their semiotic codes. When the legends in *Aithihyamala* such as the narratives of *Kadmattathu Kathanar, Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Parayi petta Panthirukulam* were telecasted by prominent channels such as Asianet, Surya and Doordarshan respectively. There was an operation of the semiotic codes of the dominant religion and the values of the cultural elite being presented to the audience.

Television discourses present selected worldviews, truths, myths, values, and visions. Eileen R. Meehan observes, "This representation of social life, especially with its seeming immediacy and intimacy, has great potential as a disseminator of dominant ideology and as a cultivator of hegemony" (449). Television serials were immensely popular in the domestic sphere of Kerala. It aimed to mould "collective desires" in tune with the structure of the society and the family (Rajagopal 90). It could neither defer hegemonic patriarchal values nor cultural markers of the dominant religion. Television serials generated adoration for masculine heroes as well as mythical characters. Further, they consolidated heteronormative subjectivities.

When television was first introduced in India in the year 1959, its stated objective was to ensure "community development and formal education" (Kumar 296). Later, Doordarshan was launched and it served as "an infotainment platform that aimed to connect the heterogeneous population of the country" (Mathai 258). The nationalistic spirit of the country was propagated through state-run machinery such as Doordarshan. Through the programmes that were initially telecast, Doordarshan tried to "re-affirm

Kerala's identity as a sub-national entity" (Benjamin 5487). Thus, television as a new medium was critically launched as a tool for national integration, both at the national and regional levels.

Doordarshan was able to produce a national image of masculinity, with television's enormous potential in facilitating the "hypodermic injections of modernity" (Vilanilam 70). According to Benitta Acca Benjamin, "almost all the programmes telecasted in Doordarshan tried to fashion a civil society that is unequivocally dedicated to national development and modernity" (5487). The heterogeneous population of the country was made to consume the televised images that sought to build a collective identity of a 'nation'. Despite its diverse population, "India did emerge as a 'nation,' not without its contradiction and struggles, but as an unified entity that is still struggling to find a dominant national image" (Mitra 39). Doordarshan tried to create a unified and homogeneous image of India as a 'nation', amidst the plurality of Indian culture.

The project of modernity dispelled through television was directed to capture "the private life of the nation-state" (Ellis 5). Therefore, broadcasting channels such as Doordarshan tried to serve the most intimate space of nation-building, the family (Benjamin 5487). When serials such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharatha* were telecasted in Doordarshan, the diverse regions of the nation-state were connected by the televised versions of these epics. As Ananda Mitra observes, "the image of India that is produced and reproduced by Doordarshan, and circulated as the dominant and preferred one is a Hindu image" (40). The dominant rituals and traditions of the Hindu culture were circulated through these serials. The seriality and repetition of these images might lead to a monolithic framework of modernity, as Ananda Mitra observes, "Even though the religious ritual is not the central concern in some of these serials, the use of repetitive

signifiers only reproduces a specific religious image of the nation," leading to the erasure of diverse practices that affirm the plurality of India (40).

The characters in the epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*, were instrumental in evoking the memory of a cultural past. According to Ananda Mitra "by bringing these characters, and their related practices, back within the popular culture, and representing them as the preferred ones within the popular culture, Doordarshan was able to establish the necessary links between the production of a national image and the Hindu religion" (41). When a broadcasting network such as Doordarshan depicts the representations of a dominant religion and circulates these images within the popular culture, the Indian households assimilate the hegemonic order of dominant sections of the society. The popular culture of India now resonates with the dominant image of a nation that associates itself with a particular religion.

In Kerala, the discourses of modernity perpetuated by television spurred gendered desires and anxieties. When the channel DD Malayalam was first introduced to Kerala in 1985, the state encountered renewed dynamics of modernity and consequently, familial spaces were re-fashioned. The disintegration of the matrilineal family and the burgeoning of small families entailed the rise of new anxieties towards the end of the twentieth century (Devika 17). The disintegration of *tharavad*s or ancestral properties led to the formation of nuclear families with the father as its head. The family was a site where the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched (Chatterjee 147). This has led to the hegemony of patriarchal nationalism with women as the subjects of patriarchal control. Therefore, the ideal Malayali woman was expected to exhibit "natural disposition" and "socially acquired ability" to care for the family (Devika 81).

The images and representations circulated through the medium of television were able to evoke "collective desires" that were prevalent in society and institutions such as

family (Rajagopal 90). The collective consciousness of the people of Kerala began to imagine the region as a unified entity. The region was bound by a common language. The popular culture of Kerala witnessed a "re-traditionalisation" or a regressive return to the myths and legends that validate the hegemony of the upper castes (Giddens 91). After the 1990s, Doordarshan lost its monopoly and several other private channels telecasted their own serials drawing on Hindu myths and legends. When the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni, Kadamattathu Kathanar, Parayi petta Panthirikulam,* etc. from *Aithihyamala* were made into popular serials by private channels, they were extremely conscious about incorporating the semiotic codes from the pantheon of Hinduism. The rituals and traditions adopted from the religion were used in every possible way to remind the audiences of our cultural past.

The notions of masculinity that prevailed through the depiction of these serials were that of an 'ideal hero' who fought against evil. The mythical opposition of good versus evil was a debilitating theme of these serials. The heroes were often alpha males of their community or religion, who fought against injustice. There were different types of heroes. Some of them were martial heroes who had enormous physical power and other heroes were characterised by idealised conceptions of morality and forced the rest of the society to follow a specific moral code. These televised images represented and circulated in the popular culture of Kerala typically attributed the heroes with qualities such as courage, adventurous spirit, and chivalry.

From the mid-nineteen seventies onwards, there was a large-scale migration of youth from Kerala to the Gulf countries. This migration was not only a result of the rise in unemployment but it was also a solution to the economic crises that loomed large in Kerala (Sreekumar and Parayil 245). The Gulf migration resulted in a flow of capital to Kerala, which was responsible for transforming the region into a consumerist society. The

women in the household were left to take care of the family and young brides were often left without company. On the other hand, the traditional role of men being the sole breadwinners of the family was re-defined when women started earning in nuclear households. The onset of television modernity transformed a family into a "viewing family" (Mankekar 32). Television as a cultural artefact became popular in every household through its mass production and became affordable at a lower price (Usha 25). Therefore, the family became a site for harbouring the desires of national and regional identities.

Initially, the advent of television in the popular culture of Kerala was marked by suspicion. The primary concern associated with television was whether it will affect the state's 'progressive' attitudes and 'literacy' (Chandran 26). The discourse of modernity brought by television introduced new "ethnoscapes," "mediascapes," "technoscapes," "financescapes" and "ideoscapes" (Appadurai 33). The Gulf migration resulted in redefining the social, cultural and political boundaries of a region such as Kerala. Along with the spread of modern technology including television and other new media platforms, the inflow of capital from the Gulf countries turned our economy into a consumerist one. The images and representations transmitted through the mass media have given rise to active discussions and intellectual debates, thereby restructuring the public as well as the private spheres. The volatile flux of the heterogeneous population of Kerala was frozen to the point of universal consumption of televised images.

New Platforms and Popular Culture

Postmodernism has blurred the boundaries between 'high culture' and 'low culture'. Angela McRobbie notes that "the recent debates on post-modernism possess both a positive attraction and a usefulness to the analyst of popular culture" (15). Postmodernism considers popular culture and mass media as the most powerful

institutions in structuring the social relations in contemporary society. In a postmodern world, popular culture determines the role of the economy by taking the reins of consumption. Our choices of what to consume or buy are influenced by popular culture. The modern world is overwhelmed by the consumption of popular culture and multi-media screens that appear in every nook and corner of the world. The images are propagated through film, television, streaming platforms, video games, advertisements, etc.

In contemporary society, there is a multitude of audiences with different tastes and aptitudes. Marcel Danesi observes that there is an increasing growth of the media from radio to the internet, influencing different kinds of people with different ideologies (108). There is no uniform audience consuming the mass-produced, uniform content as claimed by the culture industry. Another drastic change is that there is a transformation of the audience from passive 'consumers' to active 'producers' of the content (109). Due to the plethora of media forms including modern-day digital platforms like YouTube, the audience can produce content on their own. Marcel Danesi observes,

> With YouTube, the social mediasphere has greatly extended many of the functions of Print Age entertainment texts and knowledge-engaging enterprises. It allows users to comment on and rate videos. Users can also start a discussion about a video, transforming YouTube into a powerful social networking site. (108)

The viral potential embedded in YouTube culture has reinvented the celebrity standards of popular culture. Since YouTube has blurred the boundaries between producers and consumers, anyone could be branded as a 'celebrity.' And it is possible for anyone to produce and put out their own content despite being amateurish. They can engage in discussions about a movie, create vlogs, rap songs, upload videos, etc.

Modern streaming platforms such as *Amazon Prime*, *Disney Hotstar* and *YouTube* are streaming several films and television serials adapted from the myths and legends of *Aithihyamala* to a new generation of global audience. With the advent of satellite television, mobile applications, and the internet revolution, it became possible to transport local culture to a global audience. The OTT platforms have also made it easy for a transnational audience to access film, television, and video content beyond national/linguistic boundaries. Thus, the relevance of the text is intact even today. When the film, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966) directed by P. A. Thomas was uploaded to YouTube in 2014, it received one million hits within hours. Similarly, the OTT platforms such as Disney Hotstar, Netflix along with the Sun NXT App etc., have telecasted films and television serials based on the legends from *Aithihyamala*. This indicates that the element of nostalgia for myths and legends is intact for a new generation of audiences, it offered a window for revisiting the past by forging a continuum with the present.

Conclusion

A text such as *Aithihyamala* is inextricably linked to the popular culture of Kerala. The text can be located in specific moments of Kerala's history. The spatial and temporal references made by Kottarathil Sankunni have been exemplary sources for validating his claims and rendering authenticity to his compilation. The text circulated in the popular culture of Kerala in different forms as it moved from oral traditions to print culture and finally to the aesthetics of the film. The text remains relevant even today despite changing socio-cultural dynamics.

Aithihyamala in the print mode brought authenticity and fixity to the text. The digressions as well as regional flavours that existed in the oral tradition were erased. It should be noted that the discourses of modernity associated with print culture were instrumental in the popularity of the text since it was initially published by a popular

newspaper and a respectable literary magazine. When seen as a corollary to the *Aikya Kerala* project to unite Travancore, Cochin and Malabar by a common language, *Aithihyamala* succeeded in binding the cultural fabric of the region together and it nurtured the Malayalam language. The text entered into the canon of Children's Literature and became a part of the academia through syllabus and numerous translations were made.

The visual adaptations of a text such as *Aithihyamala* were an instant hit in the popular culture of Kerala. The films and television serials have celebrated the success of hegemonic aspects of masculinity through the medium. The mass media disseminated the concept of what it means to be an ideal 'woman' and an ideal 'man' into popular culture. Thus, the discourse of modernity transmitted through mass media has also resulted in new gendered anxieties and desires.

Chapter 2

Aithihyamala and the Discourse of Kerala Modernity: Masculinity in Context

Aithihyamala by all means can be considered as an opulent cultural text which disseminated the ideals of modernity through its narrative discourse. The text emphasises the fact that Kerala Modernity is not a monolithic framework, rather it refers to an approximation of multiple identities, castes, classes and genders vied against the colonial encounter, yet unified by a collective 'Malayali' consciousness. The first part of the study contextualises *Aithihyamala* in the light of the discourses of Kerala Modernity. It also traces the relevance of the text towards the *Aikya* Kerala formation. The second part of the study focuses on the changing definition of masculinities in Kerala from the pre-colonial time to the present. According to R.W. Connell, "everyday life is an arena of gender politics not an escape from it" (20). Gender relations in Kerala were caught between the trappings of caste and class hierarchies entrenched in the society. The study intends to trace the re-fashioning of masculinity from pre-colonial Kerala to the contemporary era, with a special focus on the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century periods.

This study gains relevance as understanding the discourse of masculinity is inextricably linked with the trajectory of Kerala modernity. This enquiry is expected to give an insight into the past and how the past forges a continuum with the present. In *Men and Masculinities: A Social, Cultural, and Historical Encyclopedia*, Michael Kimmel points out:

> Masculinities refers to the social roles, behaviours, and meanings prescribed for men in any given society at any one time. As such it emphasizes gender, not biological sex, and the diversity of identities among different groups of men. Although we experience gender to be an internal facet of identity, the concept of

> masculinity is produced within the institutions of society and through our daily interactions. (503)

Masculinity can be defined as the characteristics and patterns of behaviour attributed to men by the society. It is legitimised through institutions such as family, religion, school, etc. The public sphere of Kerala is built around different notions of masculinities. According to Ratheesh Radhakrishnan, "it is important to expose the various axes of articulation and performance of masculinity that produce what could be called 'masculinities in Kerala' as opposed to 'Malayali men' or even 'Malayali masculinity" (89). Therefore, the idea of masculinities in Kerala is embedded into a historical and cultural framework within which these notions of masculinity operate.

Foucault's concept of the "deployment of sexuality" was gaining circulation and persuasive power in modern societies by replacing his notion of "deployment of alliance" in the kinship systems (106). Even though the idea of deployment of sexuality was gaining popularity, J. Devika observes, in Kerala "the management of sexuality was still conceived within the ambit of caste and kin alliance" (49). This was achieved by re-organisation of family structures through legislative reforms, which also resulted in the formation of new alliances, property relations, and kinship networks. Rosemary Hennessy argues that in heterosexuality and in its accompanying hierarchy of gender, "the earlier systems of alliances and the newer discourse of sex are interdependent" (88). Indeed, it has been argued that both in the colonial context and in the west, the 'deployment of sexuality' did not wipe out kinship and alliances.

The notions of masculinities in pre-colonial Kerala were intertwined with the private domains of family, marriage, and kinship structures. In his book, *Social and Cultural History of Kerala*, A. Shreedhara Menon writes, at the beginning of the century:

> Caste and feudalism encircled Keralam. . . . Institutions like untouchability, polygamy, polyandry and matriliny flourished under the patronage of feudalism. The larger section of society did not have the freedom or the opportunity to grow or develop according to their own ambitions. (181)

Kerala society was home to an oppressive caste regime, which alienated several sections of the community to the margins. The eldest member of the family (*karanavan*) governed the lives of all the members of a family. The conjugal system was not based on monogamy. The marital practices at the time favoured polygamy. The laws defining the property rights of the individual were left ambiguous. The socio-cultural milieu was transformed by the arrival of the 'renaissance', and radical reforms and social movements uprooted many archaic practices. Kerala Modernity's encounter with colonialism contributed to the weakening of distorted cultural codes that governed kinship structures, marriage, and property rights. The end of the nineteenth century marked a clear transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal order. Thus, the private sphere imploded and redefined itself to incorporate different kinds of masculinities.

The growth of nationalism and the spread of communism changed the course of masculinity to a large extent. The marginalised communities, emboldened by education, proposed a counter hegemonic discourse through various protests and movements for the assertion of their rights and for access to the "public sphere" (Habermas 105). The modern notions of masculinity marked a clear demarcation between the public and the private sphere. Also, it imagined compulsory heterosexuality as a norm. The status of women was relegated to that of the 'other' and the patriarchal structure was fearful of her sexuality. Therefore, an ideal notion of 'emancipated femininity' manifested only in words. She was confined within the role of mother figure or as a chaste wife till the end of the twentieth century.

Even though women were educated, the benefits of their education were utilised for the welfare of the family rather than being put to use in the public sphere. In the contemporary scenario, gender identities are in flux. This has redefined the essentialised insistence on heterosexuality. In the last decade, sexual minorities also found a place in the socio-political milieu of Kerala. The voices from the queer community were heard for the first time in the gendered spaces of Kerala. This has further dismantled male monopolies and heteronormative hierarchy that held primacy in the gender debates of Kerala.

The latter part of the study focuses on different concepts of masculinities that are embedded into the historical and cultural context of a text such as *Aithihyamala*. It also analyses how the text problematises the construction of gender by allying with patriarchal discourse in confining women into two categories: the divine and the diabolic female. It also unmasks the scheming ingrained in the project of patriarchy to violate the cultural body of women by perpetuating the imaginary of a monstrous and vile seductress (*Yakshi*), thereby, inspiring fear and suspicion of a woman's sexuality. A text such as *Aithihyamala* intertwines various articulations of masculinity from different historical junctures in Kerala modernity.

Aithihyamala and Masculinity: A Project of Kerala Modernity

Modernity involves a critical engagement with 'the present'. It envisions the present based on its characteristic differences from preceding epochs and in its potentiality to produce change. The terms 'modern' and 'modernity' have their origin in the Latin words *modernus* and *modernitas,* respectively. Hans Robert Jauss noted that the concept of 'modern', "was used for the first time in the late 5th century in order to distinguish the present, which had become officially Christian, from the Roman and pagan past" (qtd. in Habermas 39).

The term ‘modern’ highlighted the contemporary as something novel and qualitatively different from the previous epochs. The Oxford English Dictionary offers two related definitions for Modernity. It can be defined as “‘the quality or condition of being modern; modernness of character or style,’ and ‘an intellectual tendency or social perspective characterized by departure from or repudiation of traditional ideas, doctrines, and cultural values in favor of contemporary or radical values and beliefs (chiefly those of scientific rationalism and liberalism).” (qtd. in Hunt 47). Modernity as a philosophy invokes the idea of independence and self-reliance and it is characterised by the quest for reason, liberty, freedom, resistance, and desire for political power and agency. Thus, modernity demarcates the present state of existence from the vagaries of the past; it locates the present as a getaway site where the individual can breathe easily after breaking away from the rigidities of the past. From this perspective, it will be interesting to discuss how a text like *Aithihyamala* became instrumental in the project of Kerala modernity.

The border that exists between ‘modern’ and ‘traditional’ gets blurred. Jurgen Habermas strongly believes that a “modern work becomes a classic because it has once been authentically modern” (4). According to him, the meaning of modern differs, “with varying content, the term ‘modern’ again and again expresses the consciousness of an epoch that relates itself to the past of antiquity, in order to view itself as the result of a transition from old to new” (1). The relationship between ‘modern’ and ‘classical’ has lost a fixed historical reference. A work now hailed as classic was innovative and new at the point of reception. Thus, there is a hidden connection between the ‘classical’ and the ‘modern.’ It helps us to retain the contemporaneity of a text such as *Aithihyamala*, which as a cultural product transcends the spatial and temporal boundaries and informs the modernisation project of Kerala. Modernity has not made a clear break from the past. A permanent break from the past is not possible, thus, scholars find the conduit of modernity

to be an incomplete project. A culturally charged literary artifice such as the *Aithihyamala* is in constant dialogue with Kerala's past.

Aithihyamala offered different ways of native subversive resistance against colonial encounters by breathing local flavour and territorial imagination into the myths and legends of the southern state of Kerala. As Nivea Thomas observes, "the nationalist consciousness that emerged in India as part of a counterbalance to colonialism created a need for reclaiming the past through reinventing tradition" (66). In India, the study of its mythical past and legends commenced with the publication of *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* by the British. Similarly, journals like *Mythic Society* and *The Indian Antiquary* published studies on several legends spread across the country. In 1969, P.C Roy Chaudhari compiled several such legends from more than twenty states and started a series based on them. Delhi-based Sterling Publishers published the series in twenty volumes. His contribution was pivotal in infusing new vigour into the study of myths and legends.

Kerala houses thousands of legends scattered across different regions of the state. It was the visiting Christian missionaries who first started any documentation in this regard. If it had not been the case, due to the dearth of proper documentation, they might have gone into oblivion. In 1843, Herman Gundert's *Keralolpathi*, a pioneering work in this genre, was published. The relevance of Kottarathil Sankunni's magnum opus, *Aithihyamala*, should be understood in this context. It was a unique and worthy attempt that forayed into a relatively unknown domain. The large collection of stories compiled included religious, supernatural, creation, and historical legends that were inextricably linked to the region's cultural past.

Kottarathil Sankunni and Varughese Mappila belonged to the middle-class intelligentsia that reaped the benefits of English education. In his article, "Literature and

Social Mobilisation: Reading Kerala Renaissance," Aneesh K. observes, "This class wanted to recover the space of the indigenous language and culture in a new form coloured with national modernity" (750). This newly emerged class comprised of cultural activists and writers who harboured the skill of using 'the new public language' brought by 'colonial modernity' and they incited the readers with a spirit of collectiveness to rebel against 'colonialism' (750). The ideals that percolated from colonial modernity such as an affinity to logic and didactism thus became an essential characteristic of *Aithihyamala*. Being a didactic text, *Aithihyamala* reflects on the importance of religiosity, piety, benevolence, and empathy by drawing on stories from indigenous cultures. Also, authorship was attributed to legends that otherwise might have gotten lost in the oral tradition. This brought uniformity to the text. Kottarathil Sankunni was influenced by colonial education but he used it as a tool to resist the colonial hold on the indigenous knowledge systems within the region. It is within the interstices of modernity and tradition that he tried to project indigenous heroes as emblematic of valour, bravery and courage, and also thrust hegemonic masculinity and hypermasculine traits as the ideal of masculinity in mainstream Malayalam literature.

The nineteenth-century cultural milieu of Kerala, steeped in the strictures of the caste system, was in many ways at odds with Western egalitarian ideals promoted by British education. As Jurgen Habermas points out, "modernity revolts against the normalizing functions of tradition; modernity lives on the experience of rebelling against all that is normative" (5). The project of modernity has contributed to shaping the pronounced facets of the Kerala model of development. It created a rupture in the existing caste and class hierarchies in Kerala with powerful social reform movements. Print culture had already been gaining traction with proselytising missions and educational arms of the European missionary movement, which gradually contributed to the rise of a reading

public. The formation of an educated middle class and the socio-political awakening of the lower caste groups evolved into a crescendo, where the pushback against regressive social values led to the political mobilisation of oppressed groups, universal education, anti-caste agitations, literary and cultural endeavours, and so on, came to be retrospectively referred to as the Kerala Renaissance; modernity preceded this and laid the ground for the modern moment to unravel.

It is significant to note that the region is treated as "a rhizomatic assemblage of diverse space-times," which is essential in understanding the complex process of Kerala modernity (Bose and Varughese 10). The concept of 'region' was once thought to be static, fixed, and permanent. But, with modernity, the region came to be conceived as fluid and evasive in its formation and existence. K.N. Panikkar, in his observations about the region, notes:

> No region has completely evolved in the mind of the people. Its formation might not have been completed at any particular period of history as well. The political formation of Kerala as a state happened in 1956. But, this process has not yet been completed and it is an ongoing project in the minds of the people. In the same way, the formation of a region will be a continuing project and this is an everchanging process that happens every day or the other. (33)

The political unification of Kerala took place in 1956. The unique feature of Kerala modernity is that it is still an ongoing project, where the region remains as a fluid entity rather than a static, unchanging unit. Thus, the very concept of the region gets re-imagined every day. In his essay, *History and Historiography in Constituting a Region: The Case of Kerala*, Keshavan Veluthat notes that although the term 'Keralam' was in vogue from the early centuries of the Christian era, it is from the eighth century onwards that the term began to be used in a territorial sense (15). In Veluthat's reading, the notion of Keralam as

a political/geographical entity, distinct from the rest of Tamilakam, takes root in the ninth century (16). Rajan Gurukkal locates the rise of a temple-centred agrarian economy led by landed Brahmin households between the eighth and twelfth centuries (310). Even though Kerala emerged as a homogeneous political state of the Indian Union on 1 November 1956, the social formation of the state had crystallised through centuries of transformation.

Meera C. argues that the trope of 'Malayala rajyam' operated at two levels. Firstly, it foregrounds an emerging geographical/territorial identity grounded in the language in the place of the religious cartography of God's kingdom. Remarkably so because it makes an appearance for the first time in a discourse by a missionary enterprise. Secondly, the Malayala rajyam narratives engage with the existing "regional-territorial imagination embodied in narratives like *Keralolpatti* in curious ways" (40). It attributed new ideations to an existing regional-territorial conception, and repeatedly as well as performatively assigned the name for an emerging public sphere. This was the result of 'modernity's engagement with colonialism. Even after attaining independence in 1947, Kerala remained as three distinct administrative units such as the British Malabar (attached to Madras Presidency), which was under the direct control of the British, and the princely states of Travancore and Cochin which were semi-autonomous but dependent states of British power.

In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni collects tales from the erstwhile regions of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar. He observes that the spatial boundaries of these regions were constantly in flux from the numerous invasions and power struggles between the three provinces. In *Aithihyamala,* Kottarathil Sankunni gives a detailed account of Travancore King Marthandavarma's quest to capture the region called Kayamkulam and merge it with the kingdom of Travancore to expand his territory (444). Also, in the legend Kunchikuttippilla Sarvadhikaryakkar, there was a tussle between the kingdom of

Travancore and Cochin over an elephant that was entrapped on the provincial borders. The Cochin government took the elephant on but Kunchikuttippilla made the elephant follow him to the kingdom of Travancore (614). Thus, these legends reveal that state boundaries remained elusive and that the formation of the region was an ongoing project of modernity

Aithihyamala can be envisioned as a harbinger of the *Aikya* Kerala Movement or a United Kerala Movement. The *Aikya* Kerala Movement resulted in the formation of a 'linguistically unified state' by combining the provinces of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar on 1st November 1956. Folklorist Raghavan Payyanad categorises *Aithihyamala* legends into three based on their spatial and cultural moorings: "Sixty-four stories from Travancore; twenty-one stories from Cochin and twenty-six stories from British Malabar" (qtd. in Thomas 38). By compiling the myths and legends from the three regions of Kerala such as Cochin, Travancore, and Malabar in one place, the text contributed to the formation of a 'unified' Malayali identity. For example, referring to the legend of Kadangottu Makkam Bhagavathi in *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni notes that the particular legend which was extremely popular in the northern part of Kerala was not familiar to many in the southern regions (615). He believed that the attempt to document the legend would make it popular throughout Kerala.

Yet another myth that was popular during the unified Kerala movement was that of the legend of Cheraman Perumal. The legend of Cheraman Perumal notes that the last of the Perumal who had ruled over the entire stretch of Kerala under a single umbrella divided his kingdom among his relatives and left for Mecca (Logan 157). In the legend, *Pallibana Perumalum Kiliroor Deshavum*, Sankunni points out that Cheraman Perumal converted to Buddhism, and that he later embraced Islam (611). E.M.S Namboothiripad in *Keralam: Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi* observes that the reign of Perumals was a golden age in the history of Kerala. They controlled a large area of land and acted as

progenitors of the united Kerala model during their reign. It was only after the Perumal embraced Islam and went to Mecca that the kingdom was divided into small *rajyams* and it was distributed between their nephews and servants (84). As Kottarathil Sankunni incorporated these legends in *Aithihyamala*, it simultaneously anticipated a united Kerala movement as the myths expounded the glory of a land that existed before its dismantling into several regions. Also, the myths ensured that harmonious relations existed between different religious communities in Kerala.

The regional modernities of Malayalis can be imagined as a wider form of national modernity, where the region is envisioned as a kind of "imagined political community" (Anderson 12). Benedict Anderson believed in the primacy of capitalism perpetuated through the print media. It was through the development of the mass vernacular newspapers that the collective sharing of news happened within the imagined communities. Kerala Modernity and the growth of the reading public can be treated as an extension of regional modernity in creating national consciousness. Thus, the regional modernity of Kerala was characterised by members consuming the same printed newspapers, shared historical experiences, beliefs, and attitudes that might have led to the popular reception of a text like *Aithihyamala*, and contributed to the creation of a unified Malayali identity.

Jurgen Habermas defines "the public sphere" as a commonplace where private citizens came together as public to debate matters of public concern or common interest and to critically engage with the state (27). Feminist scholars like Nancy Fraser, while affirming the significance of the Habermasian concept as it provides space for "institutionalised discursive interactions," also criticise the "exclusivity that this space presupposes" (57). This exclusivity lies in the potential to shape a polarised public sphere along the lines of class, gender, and caste stratification. The Christian missionary

interventions, in addition to furthering the religious cause, also led to the establishment of printing presses and seeded the spread of print culture in Kerala. With the advent of print culture, the public spaces of Kerala, which were hitherto reserved for the elite classes, had to open their doors to marginalised communities.

Another important aspect of the growth of the 'public sphere' in Kerala was the creation of a reading public. The literary domain of Kerala was replete with revived classics, imported genres, and bourgeoning newspapers. The printed books catered to self-learning and political consciousness among the masses. This resulted in the dissemination of Western precepts of humanism, democracy, and socialism. Thus, print technology catalysed the evolution of literary modernity in Kerala, thereby ushering in a major transitional period in the history of Kerala.

In 1821, Benjamin Bailey, a CMS missionary, established a Malayalam printing press called CMS Press in Kottayam. He also published the first Malayalam-English Dictionary in 1846 and English-Malayalam Dictionary in 1849. By the second half of the nineteenth century, there were numerous printing presses established under the aegis of the government of Travancore. Numerous newspapers such as *Rajya Samacharam* and *Paschimodayam* were published from Thalassery by Herman Gundert. These advancements saw a rapid growth of the vernacular press by the end of the nineteenth century which broadened the horizons of an evolving 'Malayali consciousness'. Newspapers such as *Nasrani Deepika* (1887), *Malayala Manorama* (1890), *Mitavadi* (1907), *Mathrubhumi* (1923), etc., played their part in this process of creating a unified Kerala by actively contributing to the dissemination of knowledge and cultivated an interest for reading among the literate sections of the society.

Aithihyamala swiftly became popular and eased into the 'public sphere' of Kerala, especially since it was disseminated through the widely read newspaper, *Malayala*

Manorama. Varughese Mappila started his career as the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, *Keralamitram*. N.P. Rajendran notes that "even before people had started conceptualising Kerala, Varghese Mappillai had envisioned the idea of 'united Kerala' and it was very evident right from the naming of the newspaper as *Keralamitram*" (69). Kandathil Varghese Mappila envisioned the *Aikya* Kerala movement much before the concept gained momentum in the public imagination. He transcended the role of a journalist and dedicated a daily solely to '*bhashaposhanartham'*, meaning nurturing the Malayalam language and literature through Malayala Manorama (N. Panicker 10). This made the newspaper a playground for emerging poets in Malayalam and it also paved the way for *Malayala Manorama* to achieve a superior status among other newspapers (13). *Bhashaposhini Sabha,* which emerged out of a *Kavisamajam* (gathering of poets) organised by Malayala Manorama at Kottayam in 1892, was the first all-Kerala Association that aided the cultural unification of Kerala. Kottarathil Sankunni was a prominent member of the *Kavisamajam* and he was a patron to several young poets as well. Thus, in the aftermath of print modernity, there was a rapid growth in the reading public, one that was instrumental in fostering 'collective consciousness' among Malayalis.

Masculinity: Text in Context

The rigid division of gender into male and female happened with the onset of modernity in Europe that started from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries (N. Menon 60). Kerala Modernity which resulted in the evolution of a new 'region' was instrumental in redefining the notions of gender in the public and private domains of the state. Modern iterations of 'masculinity' and 'female sexuality' in Kerala were shaped by legal reforms and marriage laws that took place in the latter nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. *Aithihyamala* being a cultural product of its own time, was indeed a reflection of the gender hierarchies that existed in the society. The text depicted a

masculine world, where the different types of masculinities that resulted in the formation of Kerala, as a region could be identified.

The literary landscape of *Aithihyamala* is a masculine world dominated by quarrelling Gods, valiant kings, warriors, martial arts experts, men of great physical prowess and upper-caste Namboothiris. The legends present an overt depiction of masculine power and agency. Vrinda Varma, in her article "*Aithihyamala*: Translating Text in Context" observes,

> The protagonists (other than gods and goddesses) of most stories are all mainly men, mostly from the Kerala Hindu upper caste, rarely common people, even rarely, women, which is telling on the caste and gender of the author, himself a Hindu male of the privileged upper caste. The protagonists of the stories are mostly rulers, or ministers in the royal court; Brahmins exemplars in medicine, sorcery, astrology, and other men of considerable historical or mythological repute. There are also many stories of elephants—an animal that is culturally significant to Kerala and its many temple festivals. One cannot however disregard the manner in which the stories revere the elite upper-caste male, while consciously relegate the female as well as the lower-caste male. (56)

Among the 126 tales in *Aithihyamala*, excluding the legends of gods and goddesses, as well as elephant tales, the major chunk of the text is filled with the myths and legends of the Hindu upper-caste man who wields power either through their religion or through their caste and class. The author's choices might have preceeded from his own cultural background as well. The legends of the upper-caste Brahmins who were experts in the fields of art, literature, medicine, astrology and sorcery is elaborated to a great extent whereas there is a meagre representation of women and the members of the lower-caste. Even the eight narratives about elephants are documented in such a way to depict the pride

and honour associated with their possession among the upper-caste members of the community. The hegemonic masculinities wield their power through institutions and structures such as religion, caste, and class. The dominant ideologies are often interpolated into the society through the dissemination of cultural (and religious) myths and legends. They are also effective tools for the oppression of 'women' and serve the designs of patriarchy to the hilt.

It is difficult to reimagine the idea of gender in Kerala away from the matrix of caste and class identities. The masculinities in Kerala are shaped by the social reform movements, encounters with the colonial administration, national liberation struggles and the growth of the Communist Party. The study addresses masculinity as a plural entity rather than a singular one since the formation of masculinity in pre-colonial Kerala underwent a paradigmatic change over the centuries giving rise to new avenues of plural masculinities.

In pre-colonial Kerala, the dominant strain of masculinity that defined gender relations, caste, and class system was overtly hegemonic masculinity. The sociologist, R.W. Connell introduced the concept of "hegemonic masculinity" into the public domain. She defines it as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). The presence of this hegemonic masculinity was used to legitimise the family structures, marriages, and hierarchical system of caste in the society. In his essay, "Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," Michael Kaufman problematises the issues of hegemonic masculinities by pointing out that "the acquisition of hegemonic (and most subordinate) masculinities is a process through which men come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities, such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and

compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood" (148). Hegemonic Masculinity was considered as the norm of 'being a man'. It resulted in suppressing an array of emotions such as empathy, compassion and caring by branding them as not manly, instead a display of power, authority, physical and emotional toughness, etc. were regarded as signs of masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity percolating down from the upper echelons of the society, especially the ruling classes and the upper-caste Brahmins were inevitably connected to the caste system and the land laws that ruled the region. The land in Kerala was divided into small *rajyams* or *naadus* under the naaduvazhi system. A temple economy was prominent in the sixteenth century Kerala. The land owned by the Brahmins was called *Brahmaswoms*; the land owned under the property of the deity was called *Devaswoms* and the land under the control of *naaduvazhis* was called *cerikkal* (Ganesh 303). Immense control over property and wealth gave enormous powers to the upper strata, which eventually shaped their model of hegemonic masculinity.

The caste-ridden precolonial land system in Kerala was based on relations of *Janmam*: Brahmanical birthright over land, and *Kanam*-leased land, mostly to Nair *Kanakkars,* who then redistributed them among cultivating peasants and landless labourers for cultivation. K.N. Ganesh notes, "Rulers and *naduvali* chiefs made land grants and other allotments as permanent rights to temples that were being established. The growth of the temples and brahmans as large landowners was manifest during the tenth and eleventh centuries" (301). In *Aithihyamala,* Kottarathil Sankunni gives a detailed account of the 'brahmanificaiton' process that set the stage for the construction of hegemonic masculinity in upper-caste Brahmins and the ruling class.

Aithihyamala legends, namely 'Kumaranalloor Bahagavathi', 'Thirunakkara Devanum Aviduthe Kalayum', and 'Achan kovil Sastavum Parivaramoorthikalum' show

that the gods/goddesses demand land from the rulers or *naaduvazhis* to be added on to the temple register. In the legend 'Chengannur Bhagavathi', the covert operations of hegemonic power structures and their inextricable link to the land and temple economy are visible. The legends say that the land where Chenganoor temple is situated now once belonged to Vanjipuzha Thamban, a local ruler. He leased the land to Nayanarupilla and the land was tilled by a lower-caste woman who found an idol that started bleeding when she sharpened her sickle on it. She immediately informs her employer and the local ruler along with the Brahmin priests arrives to consecrate the idol (782). This legend gives insight into feudal practices from pre-colonial Kerala, especially from the twelfth century where hierarchy over land rights was created with ". . . the *naduvali* chief at the top, followed by *uralar* (land owners and temple trustees), *karalar* (tenants and intermediary landholders), *kudiyar* (settled tenant cultivators), and the *adiyar* (bonded service classes) on the lowest rung" (Ganesh 301). This hierarchy over land rights contributed to shaping the feudal system in Kerala and the hegemonic construction of masculinity with the power being positioned in the hands of the *naaduvazhi* chiefs and upper-caste Brahmins. In his book, *The Gender of Desire: Essays on Male Sexuality*, Michael. S. Kimmel observes, "Manhood is neither static nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed" (25). The power wielded by certain sections of society is inextricably linked with caste politics in the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala.

The pre-colonial Kerala and the hegemonic construction of masculinity in this period are intertwined in a web of caste, class, and gender matrices. In his essay, "Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," Michael Kaufman suggests,

> In a world dominated by men, the world of men is, by definition, a world of power. That power is a structured part of the economies and systems of political and social organization; it forms part of the core of religion, family, forms of play, and

> intellectual life. On an individual level, much of what we associate with masculinity hinges on a man's capacity to exercise power and control. (142)

Thus, Brahmins exerted power over society based on their claims to ritual purity. They had control over scriptures as well as over vast tracts of land. The Namboothiri *janmis*/owners of temple property controlled large areas of land in pre-colonial Kerala. They leased the land to the Nairs of the region, who became their tenants. In her article, "Shifting the Ground of Fatherhood," Praveena Kodoth observes, "holding land from the *janmis* were intermediate (rent receiving, rent paying) and /or cultivating tenants {kanakkar/venanpattamkar) with distinctions according to the terms and conditions of tenancy{kanam)" (17). The Nairs who served as tenants were constantly threatened with control over their women by the Brahmins. K.N. Panikkar observes that the Namboothiris as *janmis* were able to demand sexual favours from the wife of the Nair tenants by threatening them with ending their tenancy (36). The *sambandhams* or alliances with Namboothiri *janmis* and the Nair tenants resulted in the rise of a Nair middle class in the nineteenth century. In the nineteenth century, a radical change occurred within the community through the social reform movements patronised by them.

The familial structure in pre-colonial Kerala was dominated by a matrilineal system that subjugated property relations and sexual organisation of *tharavads* (ancestral homes). It is often misunderstood that a matrilineal system was headed by a female member of the family, but this was not true. In fact, the families were headed by a *karanavan* (the eldest member of the family), while the family lineage was passed down through the eldest women of the family. G. Arunima observes "in the nineteenth century, nearly fifty per cent of the Malayali population, of different castes and communities, were matrilineal" (2). The system favoured the dominance of *marumakan* or the nephew after the demise of the uncle or *karnavan* and the role of the mother who acts as a link between

the two was undermined. The absence of a caring and nurturing father figure in the matrilineal communities was replaced with an overarching *karanavan,* who acted as a symbol of power to retain the image of a patriarch in the production of hegemonic masculinity.

The presence of an overbearing *karanavan* who controlled the household became problematic with time. In her article, "Multiple meanings: Changing conceptions of matrilineal kinship in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Malabar," G. Arunima observes, "The creation of the karnavan as a natural, all-powerful figure of authority meant relegating all others within the taravad to the status of dependent kin, accompanied by the assertion that the karnavan was the sole guardian of every member" (297). The dominance of a *karanavan* can be seen as an instance of hegemonic masculinity. In her article, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, R.W. Connell points out "hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, ..." (834). Thus, the *karanavan* wielded enormous power in the family and he was the authoritative figure in control of the land and other assets of the ancestral home. The *tharavads* under the control of the *karanavan* typically owned vast tracts of land and property holdings, which happened to be the main source of revenue for most joint families.

The matrilineal system was continued through a conjugal practice called *sambandham*. The conjugal system of *sambandham* allowed only the elder brother of a family to marry within the Brahmin community. He could marry up to four women from his own caste. All other siblings had to be satisfied with *sambandham*. Under *sambandham,* the younger siblings of the family could consort with women from the Nair

community. This system allowed women to stay in their own family, where their partners enjoyed visiting rights. Her children were considered as part of her family rather than that of the biological father. The children would eventually become the sole inheritors of the family controlled by their uncle. Namboothiris occupied the top echelons of caste order in the social structure of Kerala. Although the community enjoyed high social status, the patriarchal structure oppressed the lives of the namboothiri women with rigid customs and traditions. They were confined within the claustrophobic spaces of *illoms* and bound by the stringent rules of matrimony. People who entered into marriages did not do so out of love, but only as part of fulfilling a social obligation. Vineetha Menon in her essay "Matriliny, Patriliny and the Postmodern Condition: Complexities of "Family" in Kerala" states "it is a scripturally and ritualistically ordained family life that gets projected under Brahmanism. Individual intimacies or affect or considerations of love are of no prime significance, but conjugal duties and duties to ensure *moksha* (salvation) after death are" (48).

In the legend, *Payannur Gramam* (Village) in *Aithihyamala,* Kottarathil Sankunni gives a detailed account of the Brahmins of Payyanur village following the matrilineal system. The legend states that Parashurama brought Brahmins from abroad and made them follow a matrilineal system rather than a patrilineal one, especially in a particular village called Payannur. The villagers of Payannur insisted that since the rest of them including the *Shudras* followed a matrilineal system, the Brahmins of the village should also follow a matrilineal system (791). As Sankunni observes, "The Brahmin girls of the village can have bridegrooms from other villages. But the bride shall not go and dwell in her husband's house. The men folk of the Brahmin families shall not marry from the same caste. They shall marry from other castes in the form of *sambandham*" (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran] 2: 360). This legend gives an insight into the rigidities of

sambandham in erstwhile Kerala. This practice of matrilineal system was found among the majority of Nairs, Ezhavas, Vellalars in Trivandrum, the Muslims of Northern Malabar and the Brahmins of Payyanuur (Ammukutty 270).

Pre-colonial Kerala was embittered by oppressive class and caste distinctions. Women were seen as tools for subjugation and as mere progenitors for ensuring the lineage of ancestral homes, often under a patriarch or *karanavan* who exerted power over the members of the household. Caste markers on the bodies of men and women were taken to be a sign of their adherence to rigid social hierarchies. The leased-out land was yet another symbol of wielding power over tenants, where they had to be subservient to the feudal power structure under the landlords. The latter half of the nineteenth century witnessed rampant social changes through the encounter with colonial education that weakened the caste system. The social reformers envisioned to eliminate the injustices that prevailed in the system with the help of legal reforms, education, and a change in the kinship structures.

Nationalistic masculinity versus Colonial masculinity

The political domination of the British over Kerala was complete by 1805. According to Meera C., "nineteenth and twentieth century was a crucial juncture for Keralam. An age of change in which multiple routes of the modern converged under the influence of indigenous, subcontinental and cosmopolitan forces" (39). In Kerala, the colonial agenda was geared to obtaining raw materials for trade, ensuring the spread of Christianity, and keeping the princely states under check. The colonial administrators and Christian missionaries pushed for significant reforms through the universalisation of education, the eradication of the caste and class hierarchies, by redefining the marriage laws etc.

The masculinity of the colonisers is represented as quite problematic in *Aithihyamala*. Even though with the onset of colonial modernity there was a transition in family structures, marriage laws and property rights, the masculinity proposed by the colonisers was "the cult of masculinity that rationalised imperial rule by equating an aggressive, muscular, chivalric model of manliness with racial, national, cultural, and moral superiority" (Krishnaswamy 15). The British government wields a "hyper-masculine" ideology in India, where they stick to a clear boundary between masculinity and femininity dating back to a post-Enlightenment Europe (Nandy 63).

The white man's burden characterised much of the British rule in India. The representation of colonial modernity in *Aithihyamala* largely pertains to Colonel Munroe, who served as the Diwan and the Resident of the British East India Company in Travancore and Cochin from 1810 to 1814. In the nineteenth century, the provinces in Kerala were under the control of the British Resident and the local rulers could appoint the Diwans only with the consent of the British government (Namboothiripad 135). This underlines the fact that the kings of erstwhile Kerala were not autonomous since they were under the control of the British government. But, in *Aithihyamala*, as a project of upholding indigenous heroes of the region, Sankunni depicts colonial masculinity as being skeptical of indigenous practices and their forms of worship, yet having to give up on the strengths of the native culture. Colonel Munroe appears in several legends in *Aithihyamala* like 'Sasthamkottayum Kuranganmarum,' 'Chengannor Deviyude Thrippotharattu,' 'Panayannarkavu,' etc. All these legends play up the trope of colonial masculinity embodied by Colonel Munroe. He is shown as adamant, commanding and skeptical of the native culture. He questions the indigenous practices of worship; brings numerous reforms in the temples and discontinues the previous offerings/grants made by the local rulers. But, Sankunni states that the Resident had to face the wrath of the Gods/Goddesses and had to

finally restore what was given to the deity by the local rulers. Finally, in the legend, “Oru Europeante Swamibhakthi’, Colonel Munroe is portrayed as a devotee of Lord Padmanabha where he is seen completely submitting to the power of the colonised people’s deity (625). Similarly, in the legend, “Achan Kovil Sasthavum Parivara Moorthikalum,” the British administration is making plans to confiscate land that belongs to the temple. The oracle of the deity requests him not to do so but he doesn’t listen and his wife starts having a burning sensation over her body and no one can heal her, and it is only when the collector decides not to conquer temple land that his wife starts healing (517). As J. Beynon observes, “Imperial masculinity was a product of time, place, power, and class, along with firmly held and unquestioned conceptions of racial and national superiority” (28). In *Aithihyamala*, Colonial masculinity is challenged by several indigenous traditions, where imperialist forces have to finally bow down before native traditions.

The projection of heroic traits on indigenous rulers at the expense of colonial masculinity is a common trope in *Aithihyamala*. The masculinity of rulers like Marthandavarma, Sakthan Thampuran, and Samoothiri was treated as examples of hegemonic form masculinity as opposed to the colonial masculinity in *Aithihyamala*. This happened with the onset of the nationalistic spirit, where there was an upsurge of heroic projection of masculinity, immersed in patriotism, resistance and retribution, endurance, and sacrifice. According to Joane Nagel, “terms like honour, patriotism, cowardice, bravery and duty are hard to distinguish as either nationalistic or masculinist, since they seem so thoroughly tied both to the nation and to manliness” (252). The colonial interpretation of masculinity was intertwined with the concept of a Victorian man, who ventured to explore the world with new scientific and technological enterprises. Revathy Krishnaswamy put forward three concepts of masculinity such as “Brahmin masculinity”

which upholds “asceticism”; Kshathriya masculinity which upholds valour, “aggression,” “and pleasure”; androgyny which was held as a “spiritual ideal” in the Indian context (4). These concepts that emerged during the colonial period were instrumental in shaping the Indian notions of masculinity. During this period, there was a common misconception of identifying Hindu masculinity with nationalist masculinity.

Aithihyamala’*s* focus on the hegemonic masculinity of the ruling classes remains intact. The *Kshatriya* masculinity and valour are portrayed as resistance against colonial forces. There are occasions when Kottarathil Sankunni extols the hegemonic masculinity of the rulers. For instance, in the legend “Swathi Thirunal Thirumanassu Rajavukond,” Sankunni recounts how Swathi Thirunal’s Diwan on one occasion requested the King to employ a capable person to perform his duties in his absence as he was going off duty for a few days. The King did not fill up the leave vacancy instead he kept a broom to occupy the Diwan’s chair, which implied that the king was in control and efficient enough to look after administrative responsibilities (416). As observed by E.M.S Namboothiripadu, a kingdom can be administered even if a puppet was made a king, whereas if Diwan’s seat was adorned by someone reckless, the entire administrative machinery could make life miserable for people (145). Thus, the historical sources claim that the power and the masculinity extolled by the native rulers were kept in check by the British government unlike that of their idealisation in *Aithihyamala*.

Aithihyamala goes on to give an account of a British official who wanted to impose further taxes on the king. The official goes in for a direct meeting with the King but falls unconscious, finding himself unable to meet the king’s intense eyes (416). Again, this could be an attempt to provide a counter-narrative to colonial masculinity by valorising Hindu masculinity. Similarly, *Aithihyamala* extols the masculinity of rulers like Sakthan Thampuran as aggressive, violent and dominant and he brought in severe punitive

measures. For instance, he orders that a group of robbers be drowned. Similarly, Kunhitti Menon, his confidante who was accused of corruption had his eyes gorged out before being shot dead. He severely punishes a soldier for attempting to molest a woman (298-299).

The discourse of masculinity alongside nationalism hinged on physical strength, power, valour, bravery, etc. Kottarathil Sankunni glorifies Sakthan Thampuran's masculinity further by focusing on his adventurous childhood spent on hunting expeditions (356). By using the man versus wild trope, Sankunni is seen trying to elevate his masculinity. Sankunni describes Sakthan Thampuran as "strong and well-built. His valour and courage were going to earn him the title Sakthan (the strong one)" (Sankunni 315). It is interesting to note that Sakhthan Thampuran who severely punished his subjects for petty crimes went soft on the French and the British East India Company. Sankunni notes that he admonished his nephews that they would surrender the land to foreigners after his death (355). Also, on his deathbed he orders his nephews "to never fight with those who are stronger than us and be friendly with the British" (357). It was with the aid of rulers like Shakthan Thampuran that colonial forces first found a firm foothold in the region, these local rulers favoured the British (Nambbothiripadu 108). In his book, *Keralam: Malayalikalude Mathrubhoomi,* EMS Namboothiripad notes that in a letter written by Sakthan Thampuran to the Portuguese Company, he requests, "the Portuguese should come with their forces to conquer the common enemies for both the Portuguese (Kumbangi) and myself in Malayalam [erstwhile Kerala]" (my trans.; 108). This shows that the native rulers were occupied with a vested interest in expanding their region by yielding before colonial powers and their masculinity was elevated as a part of the indigenous project of attributing ideals such as strength, bravery, mettle etc to these local rulers.

Sankunni's effusive accounts of the history of the ruling classes and dynasties of Kerala in *Aithihyamala* provide a deep insight into the popular form of masculinities that existed in Kerala. Sankunni associated the virtues of nobility, power, courage and strictness as important traits of authority. He defined these qualities as essential for the ruling classes. He had also skilfully sketched out a relevant comparison and contrast between two influential rulers of Kerala, Swathi Thirunnal and Marthandavarma, in his essay "Randu Maharaajakkanmarude Swabhaavavyathyasam" (227). When Marthandavarma was a prince of Travancore, upon returning from his visit to the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple, he observed that people had polluted the public roads by spitting on it. In order to prevent this, he instructed to plant *thulsi* along the public roads so that people wouldn't dare to spit on a plant so revered. Later, his uncle Swathi Thirunal who was the King of Travancore, found that the *thulsi* plants were desecrated by people spitting on them. He became angry at this and reprimanded his nephew for being such an amateur ruler. He believed that strict measures had to be taken against poor civic behaviour. A handcuff was immediately placed on the public road and ordered that if anyone dared to spit on the road he would be handcuffed (Sankunni 227). In this legend, Sankunni associates domination as a regal trait and seems to promote it over a more collaborative approach. He believed that a violent and aggressive display of masculinity was appropriate for the ruling classes.

The project of elevating the masculinity of the local rulers indeed resulted in the representation of Muslim masculinity as a counterforce to Hindu masculinity. *Aithihyamala* makes many references aimed at the "abjectification" of Mappila or Muslim masculinity. In her work, *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva observes that "an abject. . . disturbs the identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good

conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior. . .” (4). The abjectification of Muslim masculinity ostracised them into the fringes. They were depicted as criminals, treacherous and violent. The socio-political milieu of Kerala fuelled the abjectification of Muslims and *Aithihyamala* plays into that sentiment. In several legends, they are presented as robbers, outcasts, and men indulging in crimes. Among several historical episodes that bred bitterness between Hindus and Muslims, Tippu Sultan’s invasion of Malabar in the seventeenth century was the most divisive. In the aftermath of the invasion of Mysore, he favoured Muslim settlers. Tippu’s revenue settlements incurred huge losses on the Hindu landowners. As a result, a large number of landowners fled to Travancore. In the legend “Idivedikattu Namboori,” Kottarathil Sankunni discusses the plight of many Brahmins who fled to Travancore (Sankunni 790). Tensions flared between the Hindus and Muslims due to land settlement that favoured the Mappilas of the region (G. Menon 486). In legends like “Chila Eeswaranmarude Pinakkam” and “Kollom Visharikkavu,” Sankunni discusses Tippu’s invasion and the anxieties of Hindus who fear temple demolitions. Also, several legends in *Aithihyamal*a portray Muslims/Mappilas as robbers deepening Muslim ostracisation. In legends like “Aranmula Mahathmyam” and “Vettaikorumakankavu,” Muslims are depicted as brigands who loot the gold from the temples. It is interesting to note that the deity himself traps the invaders as they fail to escape with the loot. This could be seen as an attempt to project the Muslim masculinities as invaders or as a common enemy against the Hindu *savarna* (elite) masculinity.

Modernity sparked baseless suspicions of subordinate masculinities, contributing to the construction of Hindu masculinity around Islam as the common enemy; dating back to the colonial construction of the ‘violent’ and ‘fanatic’ Muslim to projecting Muslims as a challenge to Hindu *savarna* masculinity. In the introduction to their book, *Screening the Male: Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema,* Steven Cohen and Rae Hark

observes, “masculinity is an effect of culture—a construction, a performance, a masquerade—rather than a universal and unchanging essence” (7). This constant performance of masculinity, especially through hypermasculine traits projected by *savarna* Hindu masculinity against Muslim masculinity was overt in *Aithihyamala*. In the legend of ‘Kunchikuttipilla Sarvadhkaryakar’, the army chief of Travancore, Sankunni presents him as a ‘brave’, ‘valiant’ man with enormous physical ‘prowess’ (498). The legend says that upon realising that Tipu’s army was stationed on the banks of Periyar River, “he pushed one of the huge boulders aside, causing the water gush down wildly into the torrent, deluging the valley and the sudden and gusty outbreak of water from the mountains led to a flood in the river” (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran] 2: 556). The celebration of indigenous masculinity which is essentially the Hindu *savarna* masculinity that counter the invaders tied patriotic sentiments to *savarna* masculinity, thereby creating a collective consciousness of protecting one’s own region/nation.

Kerala Modernity and Gender (Masculinity)

The gender formations in Kerala in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century were largely deployed by the changes brought out by the Kerala Renaissance, nationalist movements and the growth of the Communist Party. There were drastic changes to the kinship and family structure in *tharavads* or ancestral homes, which eventually advanced the transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal system. As a result, new masculinities emerged in the public and the private spheres. The legal reforms brought through colonial intervention regulated discrepancies in land distribution, marriage, and the property rights of the individuals.

Masculinisation of Kerala society takes fresh turns towards the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The disintegration of the *tharavad* accelerated the transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal system. It also marked the shift from a

primitive order to a modern moment. Praveena Kodoth argues that "the reform in matriliny was an attempt to "produce men" out of those who lived as useless entities under the matrilineal system" (qtd. in Radhakrishnan 218). Richard Collier's concept of the crisis in masculinity may be useful to understand this context closely, the term refers to:

> . . . the occurrence of a breakdown of traditional masculine authority in relation to the family and around men's relationships with women and children. The scale of the transition in men's familial relations has been marked by the perceived diminution of specifically legal rights- notably over women, children and property (13-14).

One of the reasons for the crisis in masculinity stemmed from the implementation of the Madras Marumakkathayam Act in 1933, which legalised all *sambandhams*, thus putting an end to the debates around immorality associated with a conjugal system that entertained polyandry. On the contrary, the colonial administration felt the need to follow monogamy in marriages as essential for regulating female sexuality. The primacy of marriage had to be established and "women had to be 'marked' differently or recast as monogamous, 'chaste' and dependent upon husband and father (both of whom were in the official discourse on marumakkatayam, legal nonentities)" (Kodoth 356). The legality of these marriages was ensured through the ritual of *pudamuri* or the act of giving a piece of cloth by a man to a woman. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act "sealed the demise of many households by legitimising its partition into branches, by either a male or a female member, as well as ratifying the right of wives and children to inherit a man's property and succeed to it" (Arunima 177). Thus, the Act paved way for replacing the "patrilineally inscribed *karanavan* of the colonial law" with that of 'the father' as the new head of the household (Kodoth 2). She sees this as a gendering project of modernity to define 'normative masculinity', where: "Men as husbands and fathers were imagined as

everything the karanavan was not. If karanavan was arraigned as distant, dictatorial and negligent of the interests of the taravad, the father was sketched as accessible, naturally inclined and enterprising in the interests of his wife and children" (Kodoth 8). Thus, the presence of a protective and responsible 'father' figure replaced the *karanavan*. The Madras Marumakkathayam Act further enabled the partition of the property, which resulted in the formation of a new kind of household with a male head. Thus, a changing family structure resulted in the formation of nuclear families, where men became the head of the household and the sole breadwinners of the family.

There was a constant tussle for power between the *karanavans* and nephews of the matrilineal families. The nephews sought freedom, as seen in the legend, "Perumbilavil Kelumenon" in *Aithihyamala*, Kelu Menon who was born in a household called Perumbilavil in British Malabar was educated by *karanavan* but he fell out with him and left the household being a "free spirit," he couldn't remain under the control of the *karanavan* (811). This constant power struggle between the two led to the nephews moving out of the families and starting a household of their own. The transition from joint families to nuclear families signalled the emergence of a modern conjugal system with notions of romantic love and mutual interest in marriages. It also re-fashioned women's sexuality by restricting them within the realm of the conjugal family, which stressed monogamy as the new norm.

The production of the modern conjugal nuclear family also redefined property relations within it. Various kind of legal reforms issued by the colonial administration such as the Malabar Marriage Act of 1887, the Land Registration Act of 1896, the Compensation for Tenants Act of 1897, etc., resulted in the loss of vast tracts of land under the control of the *tharavadus*. The abolition of the matrilineal system marked the final straw in the disintegration of the *tharavadus*. As an aftermath of the crumbling of this

matrilineal system, the power wielded by the dominant sections of society, especially the Nair community was dismantled. In short, to borrow an oft-quoted one-liner from Robin Jeffrey, by then "the decline of the Nair dominance" (75) was complete by then.

The educated members of the community moved out of the *tharavads* in search of better living conditions and they demanded their share of the property, with which they started individual households where female sexuality was controlled under the conjugal system, and a pattern of normative masculinity was visible. Here, Saradamony reflects on the disintegration of matriliny as an aftermath of various legislative and reformative measures:

> It had political and social ramifications on all Malayalis directly or indirectly. With its transformation into patrilineal system, man was vested with the responsibility of providing for his wife and children. But the ability to shoulder responsibility could not be achieved all on a sudden. Many men became impoverished after the *Taravad* was allowed to be partitioned. But the new role of provider or breadwinner gave them a new status within the family. (56)

The new role of man as the head of the family gained popularity with colonial modernity. The conjugal system was also restructured for both men and women, who had to stick to monogamy. The notion of masculinity was redefined under the patrilineal system. The nationalist movement also backed these reconfigured notions of masculinity.

The native encounter with colonial education produced a middle-class intelligentsia, with a growing affinity for government jobs. As a result, more people were entering into government jobs which provided them with financial incentives on a monthly basis. Men with government jobs were seen as successful and their prospects in marriage alliances increased. This phenomenon catered to "the very many young Hindus who are increasingly willing to make money in any way possible present a radical challenge to

family and community insistence on the primacy of *manam* (dignity, status) and an orientation towards the symbolic capital of 'salaried government job'" (qtd. in F. Osella and C. Osella 121). Soon the families in the twentieth century turned into a "consumption-oriented unit supported by a wage/salary, mainly of the father/householder" (Devika 37). As salaries became central to meeting familial needs, families evolved into a consumption-oriented unit with limited family members and the parents taking care of the children.

The gradual shift in family values along with English education brought more people into salaried jobs. This was also a period marked by far-reaching changes in the feudal order, where the contract between the feudal lord and tenant entailed wages. Following the disintegration of the matrilineal system, more people started feeling that their lives would be secure in government jobs. This helped in carving the modern nuclear family model with the father taking over earning responsibilities. Even though the position of the rulers or *naaduvazhis* remained more or less intact, the British government created an entire system of government bureaucracy with office bearers that fulfilled various roles. In 1871, the officers of the Cochin government comprised of administrative roles such as Diwan, Peshkar, Dalwa, Sambrathi, et.al (Bhaskaranunni 1074). Thus, as modernity strengthened within the region, the conviction in a good salaried job and man being office-bearers was considered as a symbol of manliness.

The legends in *Aithihyamala* certainly marked a shift in masculinity from feudal times to one in which a modern salaried model becomes the cornerstone of power and standing in society. In *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni mentions that indigenous Ayurvedic practitioners like Eledeth Thaikkattu Moossu earned a salary of ten rupees, which, later was increased to twenty rupees by the King of Cochin (556). This period marked a transition from the concept of giving paddy in exchange for labour to a system of wages where there was an exchange of money and later this transformed into a salaried model.

Therefore, the newfound affinity for government jobs with salary marks the birth of a modern moment where there is a transformation from the barter system, where goods were exchanged to that of a monetary system, where money became the foundation for a new social order. This transition is reflected in *Aithihyamala* as well. Thus, the veneration of salary bearers became the new idealised form of masculinity. In the legend on Nalekkattu Pillamar in *Aithihyamala,* Sankunni gives an account of Yogeeswaran Ramanpilla and the privileges he had as a serving accountant in the Travancore government. Sankunni describes him as "courageous" and "gallant" (184) and as a young man, he was inducted into government services. This marks a shift in glorifying the masculinity of the ruling classes to that of men who held superior posts in government services. Sankunni refers to an array of government jobs with specific details about people who worked in them such as Diwan C.P. Madhawarayar, tahasildar Kunju Panikkar (194), Munsif Court advocate Kumara Menon, Headmaster of Kottayam C.M.S College Mr.P.M. Chacko (587), Cheranalloor Kunju Karthavu who collected taxes for the Cochin Government from the north of Vaduthalapuzha (336) et al. Thus, *Aithihyamala* reflects a gendering project of modernity where a modern salaried model of masculinity became popular in the socio-political milieu of Kerala.

The formation of the Malayali Memorial in 1891 and the mass agitation, the Abstention Movement (1932-1936) was based on realising the immense potential inherent in salaried government jobs. It was originally a protest gathering organised by a group of Nairs from Travancore against the domination of Tamil Brahmins in government services. Later, educated youth from other communities like Ezhavas and Christians also joined the protest and demanded the appointment of qualified natives in government services. In his work, *Political History of Modern Kerala,* A. Sreedhara Menon notes, the vigorous public campaigning that followed the submission of the petitions symbolised the beginning of the

modern political movement in the state" (8). This political tumult depicts the power and social status wielded by salaried men in society.

In her book, *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Twentieth Century Keralam*, J. Devika assumes that 'engendering' of individuals took place from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. She uses the term engendering in two senses: in the first sense, it refers to the coming of age of an individual. In the second sense, the word is split with 'en'- as the prefix. Here engendering signifies surrounding or placing gender upon or into the individual (11). She identifies the modern notion of gender as:

> a) The presupposition of the division of the world into 'public' and 'private' domains, appropriate for men and women respectively (b) compulsory heterosexism (c) a strong claim to represent the 'natural' foundations of human social order, with the cautionary rider that for this 'natural' aspect of humanity to manifest in society, a great deal of social activity, ranging from legal interventions to training through modern education, is necessary. (Devika)

The new patriarchy shaped by modernity in Kerala designed the public space with clear demarcations as a space dedicated to men and the private domain as a space dedicated to women. The construct of gender was limited within a heterosexual world between the binaries of men/women. Even though, women had access to education, it was not purported for her benefits but to fulfil the needs of the family. Also, the people from the marginalised sections of the society started their rebellion against the stringent customs and traditions that ostracised them and denigrated their status as individuals in the society.

Counter-Hegemonic Discourses and the transition to Contemporary state of Masculinity

Many colonial subjects who received the benefits of colonial education challenged rigid caste hierarchies existing in the society. Oppression and resistance were central to the

operation of subordinate masculinities. Social reform movements and resistance movements presented the marginalised sections of the society with an opportunity to fight for their right to education, and right to access public spaces such as roads, wells, religious institutions, etc. This period saw an outpouring of protesting masculinities who fought against oppressive caste, class, and gender relations in the society.

The new masculinity was shaped by their encounter with colonial modernity and nationalism. Vinod C.P. observes that Kerala Modernity and the resultant social transformation were accelerated by two factors. Firstly, the revolution that was happening within the Hindu community against the hegemonic structure of the caste system and the Renaissance movements. The second factor was the growth of colonialism and the regional freedom movements to resist them (68). The colonial encounter with princely states had caused a re-imagining of modern 'spaces' in Kerala.

Social reformers like Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, Chattampi Swamikal, Poykayil Yohannan, et al., advocated the eradication of the caste system and untouchability in Kerala. They worked towards the upliftment of the society by campaigning against caste and class distinctions. The Temple Entry Proclamation declared by Travancore ruler, Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma in 1936 lifted the ban on the lower caste members from entering the temple premises in Travancore. The movements such as the Vaikkom Satyagraha (1924-25), Guruvayur Satyagraha (1931-32), Kalpathi struggle (1923-25), etc., chipped away the oppressive caste order prevalent in Kerala. This was an open rebellion against the caste system and Brahmanical hegemony in Kerala; and, indeed a marker of a modern sensibility. This shift in outlook is critical to understand the upsurge of subordinate masculinities to alter the power politics that dominated gendered spaces in Kerala.

The counter-hegemonic discourses by lower-caste men challenging the masculine ideals of the upper castes find their resonance in *Aithihyamala* as well. Its success is a testament to the assertion of subordinate masculinities against upper-caste hegemony. Subordinate masculinities can be defined "as the kind of masculinity experienced by men who challenge the dominant or hegemonic form either through their behaviour or their attitudes" (Connell 12). In *Aithihyamala*, it is possible to witness lower-caste members in the legend "Parayi petta Panthirukulam" challenging upper-caste hegemony through their constant dialogue and debates. For example, in the legend of Pakkanar, he requests some Brahmins who had returned from a pilgrimage to the holy city of Kasi on the banks of the Ganges to dip his cudgel in the river and bring it back to him. But the cudgel had slipped from their hands into the water and they had to return without it. When they narrated this incident to Pakkanar, he asked them to follow him and when they reached a pond beside Pakkanar's hut, he raised his hand and the same cudgel appeared on the water body (63). Pakkanar proceeds to advise the group on what it means to have true devotion and he extols the power of faith by stating that if you have true devotion, you need not go to the holy river. It is enough if you bathe in your own pond (63). In *Aithihyamala*, it is possible to witness the lower-caste members in the legend *Parayi petta Panthirukulam* such as Pakkanar, Akavoor Chathan, Perumthazchan et al., challenging the upper-caste hegemony through their constant dialogue and debates. This is true for the public sphere of Kerala as well, where men like Sree Narayana Guru revolted against upper castes through watershed events like the consecration of the Shiva idol in Aruvippuram in 1888 which marked the beginning of a reformed and inclusive social 'consciousness' in Kerala.

In the legend "Chembra Ezhuthachanmar," Sankunni refers to *odiyans* or animagus from the lower castes and how they performed black magic against upper-caste members on the insistence of other feudal lords or for personal gains. Sankunni talks about Kelu

Menon, a wealthy Nair in the British Malabar district, who was threatened by the odiyans and he in turn, seeks the help of a magician called Chembra Ezhuthachan (285). The legend of the *Odiyans* are symbolic of lower-caste resistance against upper-caste hegemony and, "the common belief is that the Parayan community started practising the Odi seva, when they felt that they are been oppressed to be work under the upper class and used the black magic against these people to gain respect" (Joseph and Kannan). This serves as an instance of protest by the subordinate masculinities against upper castes in *Aithihyamala*. This rebellion resonated in the public sphere of Kerala, where several other mobilisations were made by the lower castes who demanded equal rights and opportunities.

The Shannar Rebellion in 1857, The *Kallumala* Rebellion that took place at Perinadu, Kollom, 1915, Villuvandi Samaram (Bullock Cart Strike) by Ayyankali in 1893 etc., were popular movements, which mobilised people from the fringes of society to a common cause. The end of the colonial period coincided with efforts and mobilisations for self-expression by the subordinate classes. Several caste-based organisations dedicated to the cause of social reforms like the SNDP Yogam, the NSS, the Namboodiri Yogakshema Sabha, the Keraleeya Kshatriya Mahasabha, and the Kerala Muslim Majlis were associations that functioned on an all-Kerala basis. The masculinisation of lower castes empowered them with new courage to assert their rights and helped them to gain access to the 'public spaces' in Kerala.

The Communist Party which emerged in the late 1930s in Kerala shaped a new socio-cultural milieu in its fight against feudalism. It also invented an alternative kind of masculinity with a new style, new cultural expression, and a new language of equality. It rekindled the spirit of a collective Malayali consciousness. The male figures in the domain of the Communist Party symbolised a revolutionary masculinity. Thus, the image of a

comrade or *sakhavu* celebrated by the popular culture of Kerala was that of a serious man invoking less humour. Another symbol associated with a comrade was that of the *beedi* or cigarette which was locally produced and consumed by the working classes, a powerful symbol to evoke class consciousness. Similarly, the Indian Coffee Houses in Kerala were a hub of several mobilisations by the workers and it was under the insistence of the Communist leader A.K. Gopalan that coffee houses started functioning in Kerala, where the workers themselves formed a cooperative society to run the outlets, that were hitherto under the monopoly of the Coffee Board. The aesthetics of visual representations also favoured the figure of proletarian masculinity, who fought against the evils of the oppressive caste system and feudal system.

The legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni in *Aithihyamala* envisions a utopian socialist who tries to curb the difference between haves and have-nots. This may be viewed as a representation of revolutionary masculinity, who rebelled against class differences in the society. This legend has to be read against the backdrop of social conditions before the land reforms. P. Radhakrishnan in "Land Reforms in Theory and Practice" observes, "in the traditional society of Kerala, if the landlord belonged to the high-status caste and the tenant belonged to a polluting caste, he was expected to deliver to the former his share of the crop through persons of non-polluting caste" (3). As a result, a large amount of land was amassed by the feudal lords when the poor sections of the society starved. Kochunni represented a revolutionary masculinity. His legend was celebrated to such an extent due to its Marxist overtones. He was a brigand who looted from the rich people and distributed the wealth among the poor. He embodied a proletarian form of masculinity that rebelled against the feudal status quo.

Malayali modernity has witnessed drastic changes in contemporary times. The state has witnessed large-scale migrations of people to the Gulf countries from the 1970s

onwards in search of jobs and for a better income. In their article, "Migration, Money and Masculinity in Kerala," Filippa Osella and Caroline Osella note that "migration may accelerate an individual's progress along a culturally idealised trajectory towards mature manhood; it may accentuate characteristics already locally associated with essentialised categories of masculinity" (118). Migration to the Gulf was always associated with material success. Young men who migrated to the Gulf believed that the newly found wealth would enable them to transcend class and caste boundaries back in their homeland. The display of wealth and success from toiling in the Gulf are important attributes of his masculine power and agency. By the end of the twentieth century, the public sphere of Kerala had become inclusive of sexual minorities. A society where heterosexuality was the norm became a site of critical debates towards the end of the twentieth century. Later, sexual minorities, including lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders began to demand their rightful place on the table through annual mobilisations like the Queer Pride in Kerala. This resulted in the recasting of masculinity from being a monolithic notion to one that incorporated diverse gender identities in the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala.

Reflections of Gender in *Aithihyamala*

It will be insightful to discuss the narrative universe of *Aithihyamala* against the project of Kerala modernity by paying attention to entrenched power relations, caste hierarchy, and gender equations. Jorgen Lorentzen views "masculinities as plural," that "men's attitudes and practices are vastly different and must be understood as such. Masculinity therefore varies from culture to culture, from one historical period to another, within a man's life and between men within the same culture at the same time" (111). The plurality of masculinity within the matrix of caste, class and gender is represented in *Aithihyamala*.

Eight elephant tales in *Aithihyamala* reflect the concept of anthropomorphism. Sankunni observes that "some might consider the use of 'he' rather than 'it' more inappropriate, that this elephant (Vaikathu Thiruneelakandhan) is not an animal by nature" (Sankunni 230). Here, the elephants are depicted as 'he'- as masculine figures who perform acts of kindness, bravery, vengeance, etc. In *Aithihyamala*, "heroic feats and peerless abilities of the 'elephant' protagonists were depicted in detail" (Rajeev and Sudhakar 91). The animal heroes in *Aithihyamala* tend to possess masculine traits such as heroism, courage, violence, and intelligence. Sankunni observes that Kidangoor Kandankoran was an elephant who had an individual will of his own. Kandankoran's intellect proved that no one could cheat him with matters of money. He could not be persuaded to do hard labour unless he was sufficed with abundant food and the right wages (Sankunni 155). In this legend, Sankunni projects the elephant hero with an enormous sense of justice, strength, loyalty, and a rebellious spirit. Elephants had the privilege of fulfilling the status and pride of Malayalis as no other animals ever had (Rajeev and Sudhakar 88). These elephant stories became an inevitable part of the cultural sphere of Kerala since it was the masculine traits of these elephants that were celebrated in popular culture. Therefore, these stories and the masculine traits of their enormous strength, power, and intelligence became etched in the Malayali psyche and they became a symbol of pride in Malayali households.

The legends of Kulappurathu Bheeman, Pathayikkara Namboothirimar, Kallanthattil Gurukkal in *Aithihyamala* explore the hyper-masculine performance of these characters in the society. Hyper-masculinity is a psychological term for the exaggeration of male stereotypical behaviour such as an emphasis on physical strength, aggression, and sexuality. According to Matt Zaitchik and Donald Mosher, "hypermasculinity is an extreme form of masculine gender ideology, often comprised of a cluster of beliefs that

includes toughness, violence, dangerousness, and callous attitudes toward women and sex" (8). Hyper-masculine characters display their physical prowess and vigour to a large extent. The legend of Kulappurathu Bheeman presents a powerful man who could lift a great amount of weight. He could carry more than six to seven bundles of salt alone. His family could not satisfy his massive appetite and to gratify his hunger, he would hunt every day (Sankunni 446). Bheeman had some divine powers as well and after his death, he was worshipped in his locality. Similarly, the legend of Pathayikkara Namboothirimar and Kallanthattil Gurukkal showcase their enormous physical powers.

The representation of women is problematic in *Aithihyamala*. Sankunni had generalised female characters of his text into "divine" and "diabolic" (Bini 29). The ideal 'feminine' characteristics propounded by *Aithihyamala* are chastity, honour, obedience, meekness, etc. Any woman figure who upsets this pattern was 'othered'. The representation of women in *Aithihyamala* needs to be understood in relation to the construction of 'good' women in Kerala. In her article, "The Divine and the Diabolic Feminine: Dynamics of Caste and Gender in the Narratives about the Goddesses and the Yakshi in *Aithihyamala* Texts," Bini B.S observes that the "threads of mythology, legends, popular beliefs, customs, and rituals weave together the texture of the past. Thus, these legends and myths can be read as subtexts to history that capture an indeterminable period of time as lived experience" (29). The legends of *Aithihyamala* offer many insights into social practices, customs, and traditions of the past besides shedding light on familial and socio-cultural constructs of the 'ideal' woman.

Yakshi myths of Kerala show that typically only the celibate male priest and the upper caste Brahmin had the power to tame the *Yakshi* because it was believed that the unbridled sexuality of a *Yakshi* could only be tamed by a man wielding enormous power in the society (Rajeev 29) . This throws light on the connection between 'power' and

'masculinity'. In his article, "Men, Feminism and Men's Contradictory Experiences of Power," Michael Kauffman states, "The equation of masculinity with power is one that developed over centuries. It conformed to, and in turn justified, the real-life domination of men over women and the valuation of males over females" (146). Celibacy was seen as an extreme form of masculinity at the time of nationalism. In his article, "Celibacy, Sexuality, and the Transformation of Gender into Nationalism in North India," Joseph S. Alter observes, the concept of celibacy or:

> . . . *brahmacharya* developed as a strategic concept opposed to Westernization. More specifically, it was developed as the moral/physical alternative to various forms of postcolonial desire-both gross and subtle-which were thought to directly afflict the body and undermine its strength and integrity. The forces of postcolonial desire are manifold, and mostly defined by way of contrast to the pristine, natural, and non-erotic environment of "traditional" India. (49)

During the national movement, *brahmacharya*, endorsed by Gandhi, was seen as a spiritual and traditional path as opposed to Western notions of masculinity, which believed in self-gratification and pleasure. In Kerala, *brahmacharya* was often practiced by some men, and therefore celibacy and sexuality were viewed in binaries. Celibacy was viewed as a powerful form of masculinity, where holy men exerted their moral authority over the rest. The *Yakshi* who became an "abject" inspired fear of her sexuality because of the power she wielded over men. When patriarchy seeks to control the movement of women, *Yakshis* exercise their free will and bypass patriarchal authority. Her sexual choices challenge monogamy, adopted from Christian morality, by seducing many men. The practices that are employed to tame the *Yakshi* are, in other words, male policing of the female body. In *Aithihyamala*, it is always celibate priests such as Kadamattathu Kathanar, Thevalasseri Nambi, Surya Kaladi Bhattathiri, et al., who overpowers the *Yakshi* by

exerting their moral supremacy arising from celibacy over the sexual powers of an 'abject' like the *Yakshi*.

The *Yakshi* trope in Kerala has to be read alongside the ongoing project of Kerala modernity. The colonial government was instrumental in creating the ideal of the 'new women', with the promulgation of new laws governing marriage, education, land ownership, and so on. There were changes to marriage laws, of kinship and family structure from matrilineal to patrilineal descent. The sexuality of women was reimagined within this changing social and cultural milieu. The family, as well as religion, was reinvented under the head of a patriarchal figure and the women became domesticated within the realm of the household. As noted by Devika in her work, *En-gendering Individuals*, "modernity" did not abolish "female domesticity" (11). Rather, it further enslaved women to patriarchy.

It is under pre-modern excesses that *Yakshi* became the symbol of the libertine 'other'. The Malayali masculinity imagined women as obedient, fragile, and subjugated 'other', whereas man was seen as the dominant patriarch who was intellectually and morally superior. The excessive feminine energy of the *Yakshi* was treated as an antithetical force to the domesticated 'ideal' woman. Thus, the *Yakshi* was seen as the monstrous female figure and probably the only female monster in the popular culture of Kerala. In the popular culture of Kerala, the mythology of *Yakshi* is that of a liberated female entity or a cultural fantasy. Her sexual energy creates fear, insecurities, and anxieties in the Malayali man. By violently taming her libidinal energy through an alpha male figure, men are trying to assert their superiority.

In *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni documents the origin stories of various goddesses ranging from Kumaranelloor Bhagavathi to Cherthala Karthyayani and the noble women from the royal families such as Vattaparambil Valiyamma, Arakkal Beevi, Queen of

Kaipuzha, et.al. In the former category, the author mentions goddesses connected to a particular place; pious women being elevated into the status of goddesses and chaste women attaining divinity. The legends of many goddesses like 'Makkam Bhagavati' and 'Chamkrothamma' are about virtuous women who are elevated to the status of goddesses. In the legend, "Panayannarkavu," diabolic females like *Yakshis* are defeated by a celibate priest or the goddess, *Bhagavathi* (Bini 115). Usually, they are instilled within the premises of the Bhagavathi temple where they are converted into asexual mother goddesses. According to Bini B.S., "the devi and yakshi, both beautiful and powerful, represent two manifestations of femininity: the former is predominantly good and chaste and the latter is predominantly evil and lustful" (34). Therefore, the moral codes of the society entrust supremacy to goddess figures who emerge victorious by overpowering evil, whereas the *Yakshi* is punished and imprisoned within the realm of a Bhagavathi temple; her sexuality is curbed by the inherent goodness of the *Devi* or goddess.

In *Aithihyamala* certain women characters including goddesses represent a trait of "female masculinity," which refers to the expression and/or performance of masculinity situated within the female body (3). Jack Halberstam observes that a display of female masculinity occurs when female-bodied persons display masculine traits such as power, authority, display strength or courage, etc (10). In the legend *Pathayikkara Namboothirimar*, the *antharjanam* or wife of the elder Namboothiri depicts enormous strength. She is depicted as a hypermasculine character on par with her male counterparts. Sankunni notes that she requires five kilograms of rice per day. Once, her husband keeps the huge grinder on the rooftop to test the strength of his wife. She easily fetches it, grinds the rice and leaves it in the kitchen. Upon realising her strength, her husband exclaims, "You are a perfect match for me" (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran] 1: 179). On another occasion, a Brahmin visits them and challenges the brothers of the house. The

antharjanam serves him lunch with just rice and coconut. The Brahmin was perplexed at not finding any condiments. She instructs him that they have coconut milk along with rice and "she squeezed the coconut one after the other as if they were ripe mangoes" (180). The Namboothiri was terrified and he felt that he couldn't even match the strength of the woman of the household and exited the house.

This performance of 'female masculinity' can essentially be traced back to the gendering project of modernity. As Susan Cohen observes, "Women's athletic freedom requires that certain attributes long defined as masculine—skill, strength, speed, physical dominance, uninhibited use of space and motion—become human qualities and not those of a particular gender" (qtd. in Halberstam 272). Jack Halberstam further observes that attaining "female masculinity" might be an attempt to achieve gender parity. In Kerala, the elements of female masculinity can be seen in Goddess Kali of the mother goddess cult of Kerala (Y. Thomas 208). In legends such as 'Kodungalloor Vasoorimala' and 'Pallipurathukavu', the goddess has more power, strength and ferocity than her male counterparts.

In *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni portrays the goddess as a 'mother' figure who is benevolent to her Brahmin male devotees, grants their wishes, and protects them from the ire and vengeance of the ruling class. The goddess's attempt to protect her upper-caste allies illustrates her compassionate nature towards her Brahmin devotees. The story of Muttassu Namboothiri who secretly ate the sacred sweet offering for the goddess Mookambika, and the story of Puliyampilly Namboothiri whose ritual offerings consisted of alcohol and meat forbidden to Brahmins are fine examples where the Brahmin devotees are protected from their enemies by the powerful goddess. In *Aithihyamala,* Sankunni observes that the devotees of the goddess were protected from possession by evil spirits, as well as illness. Even though these mother goddesses display strength, anger and revenge

on par with men, these traits are visible only on certain occasions, on the other hand, they nurtured the traditional notions of femininity, especially their image as benevolent mother goddesses that are idolised in popular culture of Kerala (208). This shows that in patriarchal societies like that of Kerala, the project of modernity redefined the understanding of caste and gender, and new discourses that redefined conventional notions of masculinity and femininity gradually gained currency in the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala.

There are several legends in *Aithihyamala* were the dominant male figures of the society transfer the guardianship of the ideas of honour, shame and virtues to their female counterparts. In the legend, "The Chastity of Pakkanar's Wife," Sankunni elevates Pakkanar's wife as an embodiment of *pativratadharmam* or chastity. Pakkanar and Agnihothri are members of the Parayipetta Panthirukulam clan, who were adopted by a pariah family and a Brahmin family respectively. They assembled once in a year at Agnihothri's illom to perform the rites of their biological parents, Vararuchi and Panchami. Once, when the ceremony was underway, Agnihothri's *antharjanam* or wife arrived there with an umbrella (*marakkuda*) covering her face since the customs demanded that the face of a Brahmin woman should not be seen by another man. Pakkanar was agitated at the custom and claimed that when it came to the observation of chastity there was no woman at par with his wife. Agnihothri insulted Pakkanar by saying that since his wife belonged to a lower caste, the laws of chastity did not apply for her. Pakkanar challenged him by saying that his wife was far superior than Agnihothri's and they put their wives to a test; Pakkanar asked his wife to cook some rice by grinding the grains, later she was asked to throw away the cooked rice and was made to repeat the process all over again. She respectfully obeyed him without any reluctance, whereas Agnihothri's wife questioned him for making her execute half-baked ideas and severely reprimanded

him for wasting food. Pakkanar took this as a victory and proof of his wife's chastity who remained as a passive subject never once defying his irrational commands.

The conventional norms of masculinity hold that the dignity of a man depends upon the chastity of his women. Pakkanar's assertion of his masculinity over his wife and his notion of chastity based on the obedience of his wife was absurd. Agnihothri's wife, being a woman with a voice of her own, was seen as a threat to patriarchy. Kottarathil Sankunni's comment about women being subservient to men reveals the notion of masculinity that prevailed at the time where the status of women ranged between 'meek' or as a threat to the society. He concedes that there will be many debates among the *parishkaris* or progressive people of contemporary society. However, he believed that many women in Kerala flout the wishes of their male partners simply for the sake of an argument and that it is against the concept of a chaste woman who dutifully obeys her husband. He notes that such women should not be called as *grihanis* (family women) but as *gehabadhakal* or as a curse upon the house (226).

This could be deemed as a project of nationalism that resulted in a re-masculinisation process with the image of masculinity being associated with virility and heroism, whereas the image of women was tied to spiritual pursuits confined within domestic boundaries. During the nationalist struggles, there was a division of ". . . the social space into *ghar* and *bahir*, the home and the world. The world is the external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's inner spiritual self" (120). This division resulted in relegating women into the private domain whereas men continued to transgress their potential and attain new heights. Many nationalist leaders were unwilling to accept the autonomous agency of women and instead imposed the roles of a dotting wife and nurturing mother upon them. According to Revathy Krishnaswami, "Gandhi. . ., upheld the domestic ideal, emphasizing moral qualities such as patience, self-sacrifice and

suffering. It sought to subsume female liberation under the grand narrative of national liberation" (46). They believed that the welfare of women through increased educational opportunities and healthcare, would, in turn, benefit the family and that home was a site for training and retaining one's inner spirituality and women were duty-bound to nourish men with chastity, sacrifice, motherhood, and self-effacing qualities. This general tendency of the nationalistic period is reflected in a cultural text such as *Aithihyamala* as well; also, the trajectory of the text is aligned with that of the nation formation and redefining the boundaries of a region.

Aithihyamala was instrumental in representing the complex nature of masculinities that existed in Kerala. The re-organisation of family and property relations through legislative reforms redefined masculinity in Kerala. There was a major transition from a matrilineal system to a patrilineal system. One can identify different patterns of masculinity within the text. The role of women in the society was identified in relation with the agency of power associated with men. Her mobility and freedom were restricted by the patriarchal society. The text is located in a period where heterosexuality was regarded as the norm. However, in the succeeding decades of developmental modernity and what is being widely regarded as a unique Kerala model of development, there has been a crisis in the hegemonic patterns of masculinity.

Conclusion

The chapter has contextualised *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity by tracing the trajectory of masculinities produced by a complex interweaving of various notions of caste, class and gender in Kerala. It has located the text as a site where different kinds of masculinities occur at different historical moments. A transition from the matrilineal to patrilineal society followed by the re-masculinisation process under colonial intervention and the growth of a new kind of masculinity based on the new salaried system

was inevitably connected with the project of Kerala modernity. So far, this chapter has contextualised a text such as *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity and the next two chapters are analytical—it attempts to analyse the different types of masculinities that operate in the legends such as Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar and how these narratives were celebrated by popular media, especially in film and television serials. Further, these chapters try to look at the projection of a masculine hero and how other men and women are constructed to elevate the position of the hero. These chapters attempt to reflect the gendering project of modernity occurring through the visual adaptations of these legends from *Aithihyamala.*

Chapter 3

Visualising the Legends: Cinema and the Masculine World

Modernity as a social construct crystallised itself into the Malayalam silver screen in the 1930s. Cinema became a popular canvas to channel modern subjectivities renewed in the newly territorialised/de-territorialised region. In her article, "Bearing Witness: Malayalam Cinema and the Making of Keralam," Meena T. Pillai, observes "cinema is crucial to this fashioning of the architecture of modern subjectivities, as it involves the onerous task of transposing the conventions of caste, gender, space, and mobility to the more modern registers of representation through the visual codes and images onscreen" (292). There was a tremendous change in Kerala as an aftermath of the social reform movements in Kerala. Thus, cinema catered to modern subjectivities by nullifying caste, class and gender distinctions and the vestiges of a matrilineal past that existed in Kerala.

Malayalam cinema, essentially, tried to instil a collective Malayali identity. Cinema evolved to be the principal popular entertainment hard on the heels of the theatre tradition in Kerala. Theatre performances that enthralled multitudes in temple grounds gradually found themselves making way for cinema talkies, and later, modern cinema halls and multiplexes. Malayalam cinema, thus, contributed to creating a modern, democratic and secular space in Kerala where rigorous notions of caste hierarchies as well as stringent ideas of "purity and pollution" existed (Pillai 278). This chapter attempts to bring out the problematic nature of masculinity in the popular culture of Kerala by analysing the legends from *Aithihyamala*, which are integral to the discourse of Malayalam cinema.

Sabina Zacharias rightly observes that *Aithihyamala* can essentially be read as a "social" and "historical" document of the cultural past of Kerala (1). *Aithihyamala* provides a detailed account of the hegemonic masculine past of Kerala, which was

essentially upper-caste or *savarna*. Though *Aithihyamala* has portrayed heroes such as Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar, it cannot be stated that this 'portrayal' upholds the democratic, secular and unified attitude of Kerala.These legends were adapted into films and television serials. For the continuation of a unified Malayali identity, it was necessary for the flagbearers of modernity to recover such masculine heroes from cultural texts such as *Aithihyamala*. The legends of Kathanar and Kochunni were sufficient to appease the audience, where they could see visible representations of a secular, democratic, noble, and virtuous hero who fought against social evils. The legends of these native heroes were possibly appropriated into the popular culture of Kerala to validate the dream of a collective fantasy for a united Kerala.

The discourse of cinema elevated these heroes to cult status by celebrating their masculinity through action-packed sequences, with the accompaniment of scintillating music/background scores, visual effects, etc. The politics of these visual representations can often be problematic. In her article, "The Laughter Films and the reconfiguration of masculinities," Jenny Rowena observes that "male identities came to be crucially situated on performance" (157). These heroes constantly display a spectacle of performance to assert their hegemonic masculinity in the form of performing heroic feats, by wielding power over the other masculinities and women characters and by exerting an intellectual or moral superiority over the rest of the community. She notes that "achievement becomes inescapable in the formulation of a male identity; this pressurises men not only to be successful but also to be constantly poised towards the performance of success-to be driven, virile and forceful, whether or not they are ready to adopt these attitudes" (158). For example, in the film *Kadamattathachan* (1984), the priest of Kadamattom perpetuates violence over the cultural body of *Yakshi* by driving an iron nail into her head. This can be identified as an overt attempt to control her sexuality and to restore his intellectual and

moral superiority over women as an alpha male. The anxiety to succeed can cast self-doubt and the display of success can take violent forms in cinema (159). This performance of violence panders to the whims of a large section of society, where the hegemonic structures ensure the maintenance of gender fixities by regulating female sexuality and 'other' masculinities within Kerala society.

When Kottarathil Sankunni appropriated the legends of Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar into the popular culture of Kerala, he had left many problematic issues such as caste, class and gender unattended, he wanted these issues "to be solved by the scholarly who can examine these questions logically, the result of which will be a boon to all" (qtd. in Zacharias 165). However, the discourse of cinema has only addressed some of these issues and has further complicated the dynamics of caste, class and gender. The next section will analyse the successful representation of these heroes in the popular culture of Kerala as an outcome of modernity's project of gendering in the region. This study will also focus on the hegemonic structures of masculinity that operate on caste, class and gender dynamics in Kerala through a re-reading of selected films. It also addresses the points of divergence in the representation of these masculine heroes in the visual medium of cinema from the core text *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Sankunni.

Problematic Representation of Masculinity in the film *Kadamattathachan*

The legend of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* appears as the 72nd legend in Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala*. It is the only legend about a Christian priest and magician to appear in *Aithihyamala*. It became immediately popular since magic was believed to be an upper-caste forte. In the aftermath of the roaring success of the play *Kadamattathu Kathanar* by Kalanilayam Theatres, it was adapted into a film. The first film *Kadamattathachan* based on Kadamattathathu Kathanar's story was made in 1966, jointly directed by Fr. George Tharyan and K.R. Nambiar, under the banner of Tharyan Pictures.

The role of Kadamattathachan was played by well-known actor Thikkurussi Sukumaran Nair in the film. But the film was not a box office success since it could not outsmart the spectacle put on by Kalanilayam's stage adaptation. Since this film is out of print, the researcher will focus on the film *Kadamattathachan* that released in 1984. In 1984, the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar was once again rehashed in a film featuring a star cast, with Prem Nazir "in and as Kadamattatachan" directed by N.P Suresh and produced under the banner of Sreedevi Movies by Uma Thankam, which was an immediate success at the box office.

In the 1980s, Malayalam cinema had witnessed a frenzied reassertion of masculinity caused by the Gulf migration and the ensuing crisis in masculinity. As an aftermath of this crisis in masculinity, there was a restructuring of the economic structures of the family, where the idea of men as sole breadwinners of the family crumbled as more and more women entered the workforce. This crisis in masculinity resulted in "a paranoid masculinisation in Kerala society, which was increasingly voiced in the movies of the 1980s" (Pillai 323). Thus, this general mood of the period is reflected in the film *Kadamattathachan* (1984) where Prem Nazir as Kadamattathu Kathanar exerted moral and intellectual superiority over the cultural body of the *Yakshi*.

In *Aithihyamala*, the titular character is named "Kadamattathu Kathanar," whereas in the film, the title *Kadamattathachan* is employed. Both the opening and closing shots of the film are set within the church premises. The opening shot introduces the Kadamattom church with a close-up of Jesus Christ (*Kadamattathchan* 00:03:29–02:01:51). The camera zooms out to reveal three men praying to Jesus. The camera rests on the character of Paulose, a naïve-looking young man, through a medium close-up of his face. Similarly, the film ends with a close-up shot of Kathanar in front of the holy cross and Kathanar walking in through the church door (*Kadamattathachan* 02:01:51–21:39). Thus, the film

revolves around the depiction of Kadamattathu Kathanar as a Christian priest rather than a sorcerer as portrayed in *Aithihyamala*. In the film, Kathanar embodies a moral masculinity as he is portrayed as uncompromisingly righteous and virtuous. He is treated with respect by other members of the society. He takes responsibility for his actions. He finds solace in Jesus Christ in times of crisis. He does not defeat the *Malayarayas* who turned up to attack him in order to keep his word to a Bava from Jerusalem who advised him against sorcery. Thus, Kathanar is shown as an embodiment of moral masculinity who holds on to his faith, values and beliefs.

Prem Nazir as Kadamattathu Kathanar embodied moral masculinity through his body. The image of Prem Nazir in the early 70s and 80s was "gentle and almost feminised, who constructed an image of the ideal conjugal" (Kumar 33). He portrayed characters that depicted masculine ideals such as bravery, honour, strength, virtuousness and moral uprightness. The film, *Kadamattathachan*, highlights his transformation from a naïve, innocent hero to a bearded, masculine figure once he embraces priesthood. In their book, *Men and Masculinities in South India*, Filippa Osello and Caroline Osella observe that Prem Nazir being a star in the Malayalam film industry was ". . . credited by fans with having laboured towards harmony by making it commonplace to take cross-communal roles, working against crystallisation of any one star with one community or one political affiliation, deliberately breaking up the star's intertextual consistency in these arenas" (183). His identity as a Muslim was effaced because of the vast cross-communal roles that he played in Malayalam cinema. Thus, he was celebrated as an icon in the popular culture of Kerala. Prem Nazir was seen as a 'unifying' image credible enough to be cast as a celebrated Christian priest who was also simultaneously a revered saint, magician, and exorcist in the Christian tradition of Kerala.

When Prem Nazir, the legendary actor who retained a romantic hero image was cast for the role of Kadamattathu Kathanar, numerous plots and subplots were added to capitalise on his star value. The marketing strategies of the film added several songs, popular stars, action sequences, etc., to elevate the masculinity of the hero. Prem Nazir was hailed as an 'evergreen hero' of Malayalam cinema and the 'romantic hero' image of Nazir is explored through subplots involving two different heroines in the film.

Unlike that of *Aithihyamala*, other love plots are also woven into the film. Kathanar was in love with Marykutty before he was initiated into the priesthood and was later drawn to Valli, the tribal leader's daughter who falls for him. These love stories enhance the hegemonic construction of the hero. The heroic status of Prem Nazir was further elevated by the presence of various female characters, including a centrally positioned heroine. In the film, the heroic image of Prem Nazir overpowers the role of Kathanar in several instances. It tries to follow the box office formulas of the 1970s and 80s. The two love stories are added to the plot of the film to elevate the grandeur of Prem Nazir as a 'romantic hero'. This romantic aspect of masculinity is usually explored in Malayalam cinema through sequences involving courtship, wooing, and love songs frequently shot outdoors. In *Kadamattathachan*, the romantic image associated with Prem Nazir's film persona is depicted through outdoor romantic scenes between Paulose and Valli (*Kadamattathachan* 00:33:16–34:38). When Valli first meets Paulose inside the cave, the camera zooms in for a close-up of a girl's love-smitten face. In her article, "Becoming Women: Unwrapping Femininity in Malayalam Cinema," Meena T. Pillai depicts the representation of heroines in early Malayalam cinema as:

> a romantic ideal, with flattering eyelids and timid gait, treated with loving reference by the cameras in soft focus and gentle backlighting. But it is her essential submissiveness, and coy charm which she offers at the altar of her male

> ego ideal that earns her this halo of romantic. . . . Serving a hegemonic function, these stereotypes strive to naturalise and legitimise the gender hierarchies existing in society even in those times. (21-22)

Here, the 'desire' for the hero elevates the hegemonic aspect of his masculinity. The hero as an object of 'desire' drums up supremacy through the depiction of various heroines. Nazir's romantic hero image is further capitalised through his flirtations with Marykutty on the one hand and Valli on the other. Even after several days since Paulose goes missing, Marykutty desperately waits for him despite others trying to convince her that he might be dead. Similarly, Valli falls for his virtues and a sense of duty embodied by the hero during his stay with the *Malayarayas*. Therefore, the romantic hero image of Prem Nazir overpowers the character of Kadamattathu Kathanar in the film.

The agency of the two heroines can be contrasted through Marykutty's plight in the civilised world, where she is denied a choice in marriage versus Valli's choice to express her love towards Paulose without any inhibition. Marykutty mirrors the image of a modern Malayali woman confined by the fetters of patriarchy. The growing distance between Paulose and Marykutty, as her mother insists on their breakup is shown through a song sequence, *nithyasahaya mathave*, where Marykutty is shown crying in front of the portrait of Mother Mary, while Paulose looks on longingly at her through the window panes (00:15:25-00:17:26). She is further pushed into a marriage with Pulimoottil Kariah, who is abusive to her over her past with Paulose.

Interestingly, Valli who resides in the forest asserts her agency in marriage and she expresses her love for Paulose without any reservation. This reveals the caste politics of the time, where most upper-caste women didn't have much agency in marriage as opposed to their lower-caste counterparts who could choose their partners. The conjugal laws of the upper-caste community didn't allow women to assert their sexuality and patriarchy

wielded control over her life's choices. In both these love plots, the heroines are represented as selfless, sacrificing and obedient women who concede to the hero's decision. Thus, they are stereotyped to the role of lovers to accentuate the hero's masculinity, where he acts as the decision maker and authoritative figure in the love plot.

Prem Nazir as Kadamatttahu Kathanar undergoes a transformation from an innocent young man to a bearded man once he is initiated into the priesthood. Before he is initiated into the priesthood, Paulose is depicted as a clean-shaven and innocent man who is meek, obedient and often easily intimidated by Marykutty's mother. As opposed to a hero who is always up for a duel, Paulose flees from the scene when Marykutty's suitor Kariah confronts him. The evolving masculine traits of Paulose are shown from the time he is initiated into the priesthood by a senior vicar. His costume changes to white priestly robes with a blackbelt around the waist. Suddenly, there is a change in his demeanour from a naïve youth to a mature man, who is being trained to succeed the vicar. This transition also marks his initiation into celibacy.

Under captivity, his appearance turns into a bearded man in glittery robes and animal feathers just like his captors, the *Malayarayas*. As he takes charge of the Kadamattom church as the priest, there is a drastic change in his appearance as he appears more mature, wise and virtuous. His costumes turn into brown garments accompanied by his magic stick; his beard is an indication of his growth into adulthood. As a priest, he begins to display hegemonic masculine traits by commanding over subordinate men like the verger, Thomachan and the thief, Ithappiri. Also, he subdues his contemporaries like Kunchamon Potti. Thus, his transition from a naïve youth to a mature man charts his growth from an effeminate figure into a hegemonic masculine figure.

It was common for popular cinema of the time to employ the trope of love triangles. Here, the two suitors of the heroines with whom Paulose falls in love come into

play. The masculinities of these men conflict with Paulose. Jenny Rowena analyses Malayalam cinema's representation of masculinity via its portrayal of hegemonic masculinity as "Hindu Savarna moral masculinity" and the 'other' as *themmadi* (rogue) or "Sudrasubaltern masculinity" (qtd. in Xavier 98). She argues that Kerala modernity was appropriated by the body of moral masculinity whereas rogue masculinity was 'othered' into the fringes (Rowena 49). Further, she observes that moral masculinity always takes pride in heterosexual relations (68).

The role of Pulimoottil Kariah, the suitor and later the husband of Marykutty, is played by a well-known Malayalam actor, M.G. Soman. He is represented as a toxic and abusive husband who suspects his wife of having an affair with Kathanar. He is also a drunkard and womaniser; Soman's muscular physique and rugged appearance add to his appeal as a rogue masculine figure. He depicts toxic masculinity through his aggression. Before his marriage to Marykutty, he warns Paulose from seeing Marykutty and picks up a fight with him. As Paulose elopes from being dragged into a duel, another man with a thick moustache and a muscular body, who is also a friend of Paulose, offers help. A fight erupts between the two men while Paulose slips out of the tussle. Here, the hero is presented as weak and effeminate, not displaying hyper-masculine traits unlike that of the other male characters onscreen. The duel between Kariah and Paulose's friend can be seen as a clash of masculinities between equals. Both men are hefty, well-built, have a moustache, and fight against each other. Unlike the effeminate masculinity displayed by Paulose, the men who fight show the same kind of vigour and are placed on the same turf.

Kariah expresses toxic traits to his wife Marykutty. He is aggressive and inflicts violence on her and abuses her for her love affair before marriage. He goes to quarrel with Kadamattathachan inside his mansion but he is forcefully taken away from there by one of

his friends. Thus, Pulimoottil Kariah is depicted as a rogue masculine figure who is arrogant, violent and toxic in society.

Karuppan, Valli's suitor is also depicted as a villain. He hates Paulose because Valli falls for him. He tries to control Valli and further attempts to prevent her from meeting Paulose. But Valli doesn't heed his advice. He is represented as a rogue masculine figure with thick black hair, a big moustache, and a dark complexion with costumes of animal fur and headgear adorned with animal feathers. This is a stereotypical representation of tribal people employed in films. *Karuppu* means black in Malayalam and Karuppan means the one with a dark complexion. He is depicted as evil and barbaric, as a binary to the good and virtuous hero. As Karuppan tries to murder Paulose for eloping with Valli and ruining his chances to be the succeeding *Malayaraya* chief, Valli's father, saves Paulose and banishes Karuppan from his clan. Displaying a far cry from his feeble response to Pulimoottil Kariah, Paulose fights back and it marks his transformation into a powerful masculine figure following his initiation into the world of magic. When the chief orders capital punishment for Karuppan, Paulose expresses his moral masculine traits. He requests the chief of *Malayarayas* to let Karuppan go. Paulose does what is ethically right in the image of the hero who is expected to be the epitome of endurance, forgiveness and morality. Therefore, saving Karuppan from the death sentence once again elevates the moral masculinity of the hero.

Kadamattathu Kathanar was the only Christian priest with knowledge of magic, which he picked up from the *Malayaraya* tribe. In *Aithihyamala*, Kadmattathu Kathanar had to spend twelve years in the captivity of the *Malayarayas*. The leader of the *Malayaraya* tribe found him worthy enough to be his successor and taught him various magic techniques ranging from black magic, sorcery, and exorcism. The representation of the *Malayaraya* community is quite problematic in the oral accounts of Kerala. They are

referred to as *pisachu, rakshas,* or evil whose magical powers were geared to malicious ends. But in *Aithihyamala*, the forest dwellers are represented as *Malayarayas*, a tribal community from Kerala. This could be viewed as part of an attempt by Sankunni to make sense of orally passed-down legends in the context of colonial modernity (Thomas and Arulmozhi 61). Nevertheless, Kottarathil Sankunni refers to them as naked, barbaric, cannibalistic and terrible to look at (Sankunni 466). Thus, a conscious 'othering' of the marginalised masculinities in the wake of colonial modernity is visible in *Aithihyamala.* Sankunni observes that it might have been difficult for someone as sophisticated as Paulose to live among these cruel, terrible and untidy people. Further, he observes that once Paulose entered the cave he had to shed all pretensions of the civilised world, abide by tribal laws and live naked among them (466). This could be seen as an oriental way of looking at the natives through a coloniser's lens.

In the film as well as in *Aithihyamala*, it is obvious that the rise of Kadamattathu Kathanar as a 'powerful holy man' has been due to the training he received from the *Malayarayas*. According to Cilff Cheng, "infact, many members of these marginalized groups perform hegemonic masculinity to gain patriarchal privileges within their group, if not the larger society. Performing hegemonic masculinity by a marginalised person is seen as a passive behaviour that distracts his/her stigma" (299). This is depicted through the assertion of his masculinity by the tribal leader and his control over the members of the group. When the members of his tribe wanted to eat Paulose alive, the leader intervenes to say "Wait, I will test him first. If I don't find him eligible I will definitely allow you to eat him" (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran] 1: 520). Further, he informs Paulose that he might come across quite a few men like him in the community, who lived there as his servants. In the film, he makes Paulose promise that he would never leave the place without his permission nor will he betray him. Corinne Dempsey observes that these

people might have kept Kathanar in captivity in order to protect their privacy and for preserving their secrets (125).

The legend depicts the *Malayarayas* as tribals with cannibalistic traits and also highlights the difficulties faced by Kathanar to adapt to the *Malayaraya* way of life. The marginalised existence of the *Malayaryas* and their representation as evil, uncouth, and savage is problematic. Further, they are denied entry into the Christian church. It is only in their abode that they dare be themselves or exercise any autonomy. Once they venture outside their realm into any other religious/public spaces, they are marginalised and discriminated against. On the contrary, the film doesn't represent the name of the tribals as *Malayarayans,* nor does it portray them as savage, barbaric or cannibalistic. But the film highlights the binary that exists between a *kattumanushyan* (forest-dweller) and *nattumanushyan* (man who dwells in the town). The tribals want to sacrifice a man coming from the civilised world to their deity or *kuladevatha*. Similarly, the film indulges in reiterating their 'primitiveness' through a stereotypical representation of the tribals through their costumes and settings, such as they are adorned with animal fur and ornaments made of beads, feathers and tiger-claw and their setting is inside a cave located far aloof from the outside world. The tribal chief and his daughter, Valli are shown as kind and understanding, whereas Kathanar spends almost twelve years among the *Malayaraya* tribe and his coming into his own as a powerful 'male hero' has its roots in the indigenous magic of the *Malayaraya* tribe which he appropriates for personal gains.

Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kunchamon Potti: The clash of Hegemonic Masculinities

Kadamattathu Kathanar's legend exemplifies the assertion of hegemonic masculinity, where he seeks control over the figure of *Yakshi* through violent exorcism or by driving an iron nail into her head. In his article, "Nailing Heads and Splitting Hairs:

Conflict, Conversion, and Bloodthirsty *Yaksi* in South India," Corinne Dempsey defines *Yakshi* as "young shape-shifting woman who is truly ravishing—in both senses of the word—she is, in actuality, a fanged, voracious, vampiric ogress" (112). It is interesting to note that the *Yakshi* stories of Kerala's Brahmanical and Christian traditions are located on the same religious and philosophical frameworks (Krishnan 333). In the *Yakshi* legends from *Aithihyamala*, a *Yakshi* will always be tamed by an upper-caste Brahmin or a Syrian Christian priest like Kadamattathu Kathanar. A *Yakshi* can be treated as an 'abject' which does not conform to the patriarchal ideals of the society. A *Yakshi* is a female monster that constantly engages in a power struggle with religious shamans or self-proclaimed arbiters of morality who try to convert her from a sexually charged ogress to an asexual mother goddess through violent exorcism or by driving an iron nail into her body. The legend has it that Kadamattathu Kathanar tamed the Parumala *Yakshi* aka Kalliyankattu Neeli or Panayannarkavil *Yakshi*, who reigned on the route connecting Trivandrum and Padmanabhapuram in erstwhile Travancore state. Thus, the trope of *Yakshi* remains a symbol of fantasy, desire, and sexuality in the popular culture of Kerala.

The *Yakshi*'s body can be seen as a site where the religious shamans or the priests exert their authority and power to showcase their masculine strength and heroism. Corinne Dempsey has observed that the victory over the female body of *Yakshi* was seen as a way to "prove their mettle" by religious authorities (111). Thus, in the film, *Kadamattathchan*, the clash of the hegemonic powers of masculinity operates through the *Yakshi* narrative. The victory over the abject remains the reason for the ensuing rivalry between the two great sorcerers of the time: Kunchamon Potti and Kadamattathu Kathanar. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni had already established Kunchamon Potti as a great sorcerer through the legend "Kunjamon Pottiyum Mattapalli Namboothiripadum" (131). Therefore, Kunchamon Potti's identity as a sorcerer is already established before the

readers move on to the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar. Also, Kunjamon Potti believed that he was superior to Kathanar because *chathans* or goblins were at his beck and call. On the other hand, Kathanar believed that Potti was not as good a sorcerer to challenge him.

In the film, the reason for the rivalry between Kunchamon Potti and Kathanar was due to Kathanar's victory over the *Yakshi*- succeeding at something where an upper-caste magician like Kunchamon Potti had failed to succeed. In the film, *Kadmattathachan*, Kunchamon Potti is introduced with an extremely tight close-up of his saffron-coloured mark (*kunkumapottu*) on his forehead (*Kadamattathachan* 1:26:46–27:06). He is featured as offering prayers in his prayer room. He is depicted as a well-built man belonging to the upper echelons of society. His body displays the privileges of his caste origin. He wears gold ornaments, an amulet on his right hand, and a sacred thread (*poonul*) worn by upper-caste brahmins. Also, his body is smeared in sandal paste and his hair is tied into a tuft; again, a caste indicator worn by upper-caste men in Kerala. He conjures up a red garland and lights the lamp using his magical powers.

Kunchamon Potti is also depicted as a hegemonic masculine figure who needs a subordinate masculine figure by his side in the form of an assistant. As Michael Kaufman notes, "patriarchy exists as a system not simply of men's power over women but also of hierarchies of power among different groups of men and between different masculinities" (145). Potti exerts his dominance over his assistant whom he always calls *ebhyan* or stupid. The film employs a popular trope in Malayalam horror movies where the powerful sorcerer will always be assisted by a 'stupid' disciple. Here, as Kunchamon Potti fails to domesticate the *Yakshi*, he blames the failure on his assistant who ran away from the scene in the middle of the ritual. It depicts Kunchamon Potti as a hegemonic masculine figure who has the constant urge to perform his masculinity in order to stay relevant and exert his

authority. As a patriarchal figure, he transfers the blame to his assistant since he cannot accept the fact that he has failed in his mission of overpowering the *Yakshi*.

The *Yakshi* is represented in the canvas of Malayalam cinema as a figure of ethereal beauty and seduction, often donned in a white saree or the traditional *kasavu mundu* of Kerala and roaming with loose hair; she will try to lure young men who travel alone through the forest at night. She will transform into a beautiful damsel, ask for lime, and invite them over to her abode. According to the popular belief, the *Yakshis* used to slay men by sucking their blood once they cross their boundaries. Typically, by morning, only their nail and hair would remain intact. As Kunchamon Potti and his assistant venture into the forest, the *Yakshi* first approaches them as a beautiful damsel in *mula-kacha* (breast cloth) and *kasavu mundu*, an attire of Kerala, decked in gold ornaments and loose hair (*Kadamattathachan* 1:25:16–25:30). Potti offers her lime on the wedge of an iron nail. *Yakshi* is constantly seen to be afraid of iron. This is a recurring trope in *Yakshi* films, as V.V. Haridas in his work, *Yakshisankalpam* observes that the plausible conclusion for the '*Yakshis*' fear of 'iron' might be that she might have been a goddess of the stone age who was marginalised by the arrival and worship of new gods and goddesses in the iron age (94). The *Yakshi* declines Potti's offer of lime and vanishes. Potti ventures inside the forest and performs a ritual to tame the *Yakshi*. Potti is depicted as an arrogant and domineering figure who boasts about his victory over evil spirits like *brahmarakshas* and he feels overconfident about taming the *Yakshi* because of his legacy as an established sorcerer. The film depicts the rituals performed by Potti in the middle of the forest. As Potti's assistant places a cane to tame *Yakshi's* spirit whilst Potti utters incantations, *Yakshi* twists the cane and mocks Potti's ritual (*Kadamattathachan* 1:30:58–32:59). Here, *Yakshi* is depicted as an 'other' who shares as much strength and power as the religious shamans, which makes her worthy of putting on a challenge to the establishment

(Dempsey 126). Kunchamon Potti's ego is hurt as he competes and eventually fails the *Yakshi* who mocks him, and, therein poses a threat to his hegemonic masculinity. Finally, the *Yakshi* makes an appearance in her diabolic version, in a skull garland, white paint on the lips and canine teeth, as well as clumsy hair as opposed to her seductive nature. (*Kadamattatachan* 1:25:02-1:25:06).

The trajectory of the *Yakshi* story is more or less the same in the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar in *Aithihyamala* and in the film *Kadamattathachan* (1984). When people stopped taking the forest path, Sankunni reveals how *Yakshi* started to trespass into the nearby villages looking for fresh prey. In "Modernity's Nightmares: Narrating Sexuality in Kerala," Navaneetha Mokkil observes, "Scholars have argued that the popularity of the conception of the yakshi reflects the gender dynamics of contemporary Kerala in which women who are agential, mobile, and expressive about their sexual desires are perceived as a threat and therefore rendered monstrous" (244). The figure of *Yakshi*, thus, operated on the outskirts of family values and thrived at night; she wandered through the forest, exerted her own free will, and upended monogamy. Thus, *Yakshi*, promptly branded as the 'other', was seen as a potential threat to the foundations of modern family values. Patriarchal structures took it upon themselves to regulate the sexuality of women by completely erasing any remnants of a matrilineal past.

The film *Kadamttathachan* contains several elements of *film noir*. The scenes where Kathanar encounters *Yakshi* for the first time occur in the backdrop of an eerie setting with low-key lighting and ominous shadows. The scene is rife with tension, fear, and suspense. The trope of *Yakshi*, a sexualised figure who lures young men for sex and murder, fits perfectly well into the mould of the *femme fatale*. In his essay, "The Politics of the Supernatural: *Yakshi* Stories in Malayalam and the Social Context of Fear," Saji Mathew observes, "she herself is desire personified, which is to be tamed later, her image

is constructed in tune with the male desire. She is the 'other' of the ideal feminine in her engagements, but her outward appearance is that of the ideal; beautiful, inviting desire" (1). The film transforms her into this feminine ideal of Malayali men. The role of *Yakshi* was played by a popular Malayalam actress, Sreevidya. The casting played with the patriarchal fantasies of Malayali men who deemed her as an embodiment of ideal Malayali womanhood. Her role as '*Yakshi*' was well-received by the audience since she had already established her success at the box office through mythical films such as Chottanikkara Amma (Dir. by Crossbelt Mani 1976), where she was cast as the *Devi* or goddess who battled against the evil forces. The seductive nature of *Yakshi* was represented by a fair, well-dressed, lovable 'Malayali' woman, whereas her loathsome other was depicted as black, untidy, and terrifying.

Kadamattathu Kathanar is eventually invited to domesticate the *Yakshi* at the request of several villagers. He ventures into the forest at night and the eerie mood of the setting is captured in low-key lighting. When the *Yakshi* asks him for lime, Kathanar readily gives her a wedge of lime but on the tip of an iron nail. Kathanar, thus, tricks her and droves the iron nail into her head. She subsequently loses all her powers including her freedom and mobility; she has to follow Kathanar obediently. They reach Kayamkulam and she is transformed into a maid and Kathanar orders her to live at his aunt's place as domestic help. The status of the *Yakshi* is shown to change from a libertine, free-spirited woman to a meek and obedient woman without any agency of her own under Kathanar's grip. While Kathanar's aunt braids her hair, she comes across the iron nail on her head and removes it. The act of braiding her hair can be seen as an attempt by patriarchal structures to further domesticate her. Kathanar follows her; he politely asks one of the natives to cut down a banana leaf for him (*Kadamattathachan* 1:47:56–58). This incident reveals Kathanar's depiction as a moral masculine figure, whose masculinity is tied to his ethical

and moral principles, that he deems it is necessary to ask permission before cutting the banana leaf rather than fetching it on his own. This notion of masculinity can be linked to J. Beynon's concept of "imperial masculinity" which created the ideal of the "Christian gentleman," (30) who is strong, decisive and follows stringent codes of morality and ethics.

The polite, ethical and moral masculinity that Kathanar maintains in his community is absent when he deals with the *Yakshi*. She is seen as an 'abject' or a threat to the social order. The *Yakshi* fleeing on a boat can be seen as a desperate move from her to be rid of Kathanar's patriarchal insistence on controlling her. There is a constant power struggle that occurs between herself and the religious shamans. Corinne Dempsey observes that the Hindu and Christian holy men use their religious turf to fight against their common enemies like that of the *Yakshi*. She, however, notes that the *Yakshi* cannot be seen as an 'other' in this scenario but is more of an opponent to these holy men who are dependent on her for their legitimacy (1). Kathanar who is an embodiment of moral masculinity takes it upon himself to annihilate the threat posed by the *Yakshi*, which is largely sexual. Therefore, Kathanar overpowering the *Yakshi* can be viewed as the victory of a 'celibate' priest over a *Yakshi*.

Both the text and the film portray that upon reaching Pannayannarkavu, Kadamattathachan threatens to burn her alive if she does not 'obey' his orders. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni depicts the ensuing conversation as "I won't allow you to harass anyone. If you are to defy my command, I will give you in sacrifice to fire or else I will allow you to stay here in the temple. The choice is yours!" (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran] 1: 528). In the film, the encounter between the *Yakshi* and Kathanar is depicted through an over-the-shoulder shot, in dim lights, where the scene ends with the *Yakshi* deliberately shot from a high angle to indicate her inferior position.

Yakshi begs him to leave her alone. Kathanar asks her whether she would be willing to obey him.

> YAKSHI. I promise you Father that I won't attack anyone
>
> ACHAN. If you obey me, it is good for you, otherwise I will destroy you. I will leave you with a choice either to be destroyed or to be worshipped by thousands as a mother goddess
>
> YAKSHI. I will obey you, but please grant me permission to walk freely, at least once in a year. (my trans.; *Kadamattathachan* 1:48:47–49:04)

It is interesting to note that Kadamattathu Kathanar expects total subjugation from the *Yakshi*. Navaneetha Mokkil observes that the concept of "*Yakshi* raises disturbing questions because it presents masculinity as a fraught scene of violence and vulnerability" (245). He leaves her with little choice, he gets to have the last word. The *Yakshi* doesn't have much of a choice between annihilation and total subjugation. She chooses to be the latter and lets Kathanar convert her into the mother goddess of Panayyanarkavu, a temple dedicated to Goddess Bhadrakali in the Hindu pantheon. It is only with the consent of holy men that she is allowed her occasional tryst with freedom. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni observes that even today people see her in the form of a beautiful damsel or a fireball on Fridays and new moon nights (529). Here, Kadamattathu Kathanar is represented as a hegemonic masculine figure that subjugates the *Yakshi* that falls outside the realm of patriarchal control. He doesn't leave her a choice, and he converts her into an asexual Hindu goddess by positioning her beside a female deity. Kadamattathachan might have found a place in popular culture because of the inherent celebration of masculine strength and heroism animating his legend. Also, as a Christian priest who took the vow of celibacy, Kathanar was able to evade from the *Yakshi's* vociferous nature. Kathanar stands for the greater good of his community and anoints himself as a saviour to the community

as he feels men should be protected from the lustful advances of the *Yakshi*. He justifies his violent retaliation, in the form of driving the iron nail into the *Yakshi*'*s* head, as moral and ethical.

In the legend and the film, the *Yakshi* couldn't be tamed by many sorcerers including upper-caste magicians like Kunchamon Potti. According to Dempsey, ". . . the dual message of Achan's *yaksi* story is that his magical might helps him gain victory not only over a female adversary but, in a different way, over his Hindu magician colleague" (123). Kunchamon Potti, a famous magician and sorcerer, was a contemporary of Kadamattathu Kathanar. This is seen as a reason behind their rivalry. On one occasion Kadamattathachan accepts Kunchamon Potti's invitation to his *illom*. Potti wants to use this opportunity to settle scores with Kadamattathachan. The clash of hegemonic masculinities often led to violence against women. Potti puts Kathanar through a test of his magical abilities; he vanishes the chair on which Kathanar was about to sit and performs several other tricks to offend Kathanar. Finally, his accomplices called *chathans* (goblins) drive Kathanar's boat atop a tree. Kathanar issues a warning to Potti that if he doesn't bring his boat down, the *antharjanams* (women folk) of his *illom* will have to bring it down. Potti mocks him and continues to be belligerent. Soon enough, the *antharjanam* or his wife came out. Further, Kathanar threatens Potti that if he cannot return his boat, his *antharjanam* could find herself on the treetop without any clothing (*Kadamattathchan* 1:57:30–58:09). Upon hearing this, Potti pleads with Kadamattathachan to spare the women of the house and reinstates the boat. The same incident is depicted in *Aithihyamala* as well; Kadamattathu Kathanar threatens Potti that *antharjanams* might have to fetch the boat for him naked. Potti eggs him on and very soon the *antharjanams* from Potti's *illom* or house come out in the nude (Sankunni 475). This is a shred of compelling evidence for Achan's mistreatment of women, ". . . many of his

stories do not portray human females as agents who can act or be harmed but as caricatures, vessels into which male honor, shame, and hopes for the lineage are placed" (Dempsey 127). Thus, male honour and insecurities are thrust upon women and family honour is tied to their chastity and obedience. Kottarathil Sankunni has *antharjanams* emerging out of the *illom* in the nude, whereas the film depicts Potti's wife, Thathrikutty, dressed in a *mulakacha* (breast cloth) and holding a *marakkuda* (cadjan umbrellas were used by upper-caste women to cover their face; as a symbol of chastity). Kadamattathu Kathanar's moral masculinity takes a backseat in this incident. Here, he uses the women of the household to defeat Potti. After this incident, they vow to never compete with each other and remain friends forever. Dempsey adds that ". . . Kerala's ancient branch of Syrian Christianity has peacefully co-existed with and in many ways ritually assimilated into high caste Kerala culture for centuries" (123). The decision to end their rivalry is to restore peace between the representatives of hegemonic masculinity from two prominent upper-caste communities in Kerala.

Both in the film and the legend, there is a passing reference to a Bava from Jerusalem, who admonishes Kathanar for practicing magic. Kathanar by this point had performed several spectacles such as conjuring up a pot full of rice for an old woman from three grains of rice and many exorcisms. In the film, the Bava, the patriarch of the Syrian Orthodox Church, prohibits him from performing magic and asks him to abstain from giving in to such temptations. He advises him to reaffirm his faith in Jesus Christ. Kadamttathachan assures him that he will henceforth perform magic only for the benefit of humanity and Bava blesses him. However, *Aithihyamala* notes that Bava had gone a step further by setting fire to Kathanar's magic books, which, however, flew on their own to deter the assault. As Sabina Zacharias notes "this can be seen as an attempt of the European Catholic church to hegemonise its faith over the marginalised cultures in the

colonised lands" (16). This was because Christianity condemned the use of witchcraft, sorcery and exorcism. This happened after the 1599 Synod of Diamper at Udayamperoor, where the Portuguese Church attempted to Westernise the indigenous Christians of Kerala (Zacharia 11). The incidents involving burning the libraries and other retaliatory moves are not shown in the film in order to show the church in a good light. Also, the film depicts Kathanar's masculinity intertwined with his Christian indoctrination as well. This was another colonial venture that aimed to dilute indigenous beliefs and knowledge, especially of the indigenous knowledge systems such as the ancient *Malayaraya* tradition from which Kathanar assimilated his sorcery.

The popular box office formulas of the film involve pleasing all dominant religious groups. The film celebrates Kathanar as a popular male icon who is appealing to all religious groups. Therefore, the film added yet another subplot to highlight his appeal among other religions as well. This plot revolves around a Muslim family, where Kathanar's friend Aliyar invites him to conduct his daughter's marriage with his nephew. But, Aliyar is killed by a group of thieves, and they steal the gold reserved for the wedding. Both his daughter and nephew are grief-stricken, and Kathanar comes to their aid. He conducts their marriage and becomes their guardian. The wedding ceremony is depicted through a song sequence, where a dance form called *oppana* (a traditional Muslim art form that occurs especially during the wedding ceremony) is performed. This scene was incorporated to uphold the image of Kerala as a secular and democratic state and this was a marketing strategy employed by the filmmaker to draw audience interest from diverse religious groups. The emphasis on the theme of religious harmony through cultural markers like *oppana* calls for peaceful coexistence among different religious groups in the state. When a legend such as Kadamattahu Kathanar is disseminated to the mass audience, this kind of religious representation from different sections of the society

was an attempt to foster communal harmony and to ensure equal representation as an aftermath of the United Kerala movement.

The film depicts several other masculinities as Jenny Rowena observes, "the hegemonic status of the hero was supported by the hesitating, fumbling, falling masculinities of the comedians who often represented non-dominant and marginalised communities" (160). Several characters in the film evoke laughter which includes a *Kappiar* (verger); a character called Ichappi, a petty thief, who has an illicit relationship with Kappiar's wife, Eliamma. Yet another character is Kunchamon Potti's assistant, whom he calls *ebhyan* or stupid as he commits so many mistakes evoking laughter. Jenny Rowena observes these comedians/fools facilitated "a sudden diffusing of anxiety and fear associated with the performance of competence and importance given to the ideology of masculinity" (159). They evoke laughter in the audience while the hero is constantly involved in the performance of masculinity.

Mostly these comedians belong to lower-caste groups and their bodies are projected in such a way as to evoke laughter in the audience. In *Kadamattathachan*, the thief, Ithappiri steals money from the church and the verger catches him stealing money; also, Thomachan doubts Ithappiri of having illicit relations with his wife. Thomachan and Ithappiri accompany Kathanar to capture an evil spirit but when they witness fire being conjured up. They run back and hide behind a tree. It is only after Achan overpowers the evil spirit that they return. Similarly, Kunchamon Potti's disciple is also portrayed as a comic character. His slender body and the gesticulation creates laughter. Potti forcefully takes him along with him to capture the *Yakshi* but he shivers out of fear and he slips behind a tree. He constantly calls him *ebhyan* or stupid and slaps him as well. The representation of the comedian's subordinate masculinity is in opposition to the hegemonic masculinity of upper-caste priests such as Kadamattathu Kathanar and

Kunchamon Potti. The alpha males of the society are not afraid of the abject: they can venture into the wild to capture it and they are depicted as brave, and powerful and also show enormous morality. On the contrary, men like Ithappiri, Thomachan and Kunchamon's Potti's disciple are depicted as weak, stupid and characters with loose morals. But, they aspire to attain such hegemonic masculine traits displayed by Kathanar and Potti, however, their inferior position and marginalised status in society prevent them from reaching that position.

The film and the legend as told by *Aithihyamala* foregrounds Kadamattathu Kathanar as the only Christian priest who excelled in the art of magic and sorcery. His actions might have caused a terrible uproar within the community since witchcraft was forbidden in Christianity. But, his representation in the film elevates him into a heroic figure who asserts his hegemonic masculinity in society irrespective of caste and class differences. In his essay "Lessons in Miracles from Kerala, South India: Stories of Three Christian Saints," Corrine Dempsey notes the "Tales of Achan's miraculous exploits, rather than calling into question his means, describe him as serving a variety of noble ends such as managing evil, settling feuds, humbling the haughty, and winning wars" (123). The film depicts Kathanar in a Christian setting, where he embodies moral masculinity. He is ethical, wise and firm, whereas *Aithyamala* depicts Kadamattathu Kathanar as a powerful sorcerer. Kottarathil Sankunni says that Kathnar's tradition of sorcery is known by the name "Kadamattathu *Sambradayam* (tradition)" (Sankunni 471). Also, Sankunni notes that Kathanar had written several books on sorcery but all those books are written in an evil language (471). In the legend, "Pallipurathukavu" in *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni provides a detailed account of Kathanar's identity as a sorcerer. Once, Kadamattathu Kathanar sends seven deadly spirits to destroy Vayaskara Potti's *illom* based on a request made by his enemies. The demons troubled Potti in many ways and finally, he prayed at

Pallipurathukavu Goddess to rescue his family from the evil spirits (548). These legends show Kathanar in the grey, as a sorcerer often with occasional indulgences in black magic, but the film completely transforms him into a hero and celibate priest who shows courage, shoulders responsibility and he is shown as a beacon of integrity. Therefore, Kadamattathu Kathanar was celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala for his unique feats in magic, exorcism and penchant for miracles.

The film digresses from *Aithihyamala* in several aspects with its representation of the Malayaraya tribe, its vivid love plots, several other sub-plots and the song sequences. This was an attempt to appease the audience and to cater to their fantasies and desires. Similarly, the star cast, such as Prem Nazir playing the role of Kadamattathachan along with the popular heroine, Sreevidya cast as *Yakshi*, was an attempt at aiming the commercial success by giving more importance to the star value than the characters drawn from the legend themselves.

Problematic Representation of Masculinity in the film *Kayamkulam Kochunni*

The legend of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* was adapted into a Malayalam film for the first time in 1966. Sathyan, the legendary actor enacted the role of Kayamkulam Kochunni in the film directed by P.A. Thomas in 1966. Later, in 2018, the legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni was once again adapted into a film directed by Rosshan Andrrews. The role of Kayamkulam Kochunni was played by a popular actor Nivin Pauly, and Mohanlal, a legendary Malayalam superstar, makes a cameo in the role of a brigand called Ithikkara Pakki. The film was made on a budget of forty-five crores and grossed above hundred crores at the box office.

In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni describes Kayamkulam Kochunni as a handsome, well-built, muscular, and fair-skinned man. Sankunni says, “he was tall and hefty, his long and muscular limbs gave him the looks of an athlete. He was fair-skinned,

handsome with lotus eyes, and had a sharp nose and thin rosy lips enhancing the charm of his round face. He was also gentle and soft-spoken" (Sankunni, *Aithihyamaala* [Ramachandran]1: 216). When *Kayamkulam Kochunni* was released in 1966, Sathyan performed the role of Kochunni. He was short and hefty, dark-skinned, and embodied working-class masculinity. The cinematic medium projected Kochunni as a hero like Sathyan who represented rogue masculinity. This transition of Kayamkulam Kochunni from a fair-skinned, handsome man in *Aithihyamala* to a symbol of working-class masculinity on the silver screen might be an attempt to capitalise on the emerging working-class's revolutionary masculinity in the aftermath of the *Aikya* Kerala formation.

Sathyan had essayed several roles with revolutionary masculine characteristics, dating back to1950s and later through the 70s. He has acted as a revolutionary in films such as *Mooladhanam* (Dir. P. Bhaskaran 1969), *Ningalenne Communistakki* (Dir. Thoppil Bhasi 1970), *Anubhavangal Palichakal* (Dir. K.S. Sethumadhavan 1971) etc. Therefore, the audience could easily identify with his portrayal of Kochunni. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan notes that "Sathyan's machismo is a popular manifestation of the model of the revolutionary that was being fashioned by the left in contrast to other popular celebrities of the time like Prem Nazir" (167). *The Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema* depicts Sathyan as the "[T]op star, …, in Malayalam cinema, providing the embodiment of Malayalee machismo" (Rajadhyaksha and Willemen 208) and he embodies the masculinity of a "brooding, remote and unreachable outlaw" (208). Thus, Sathyan was a perfect choice to play the role of Kayamkulam Kochunni. He symbolised a rebellious, revolutionary, and humanitarian masculine figure in the discourse of Malayalam cinema.

In 2018, Nivin Pauly was cast as Kayamkulam Kochunni in the film directed by Rosshan Andrrews. As opposed to Sathyan's Kayamkulam Kochunni, Nivin Pauly depicted a relatable everyman character. His face as a new-generation actor resonated well

with a younger section of the audience. He displays enormous physical strength in action sequences like that of a skilled martial art expert. He also plays roles that elevate his masculinity through the romantic hero image. Unlike Sathyan's movie, Nivin Pauly captures the romantic side of Kochunni. He brings out the emotional dilemmas of Kayamkulam Kochunni ranging from his childhood trauma of being a thief's son to the feudal lords pushing him to become one, which helped in better identification of the hero with the audience. Nivin Pauly as Kayamkulam Kochunni could also add emotional complexities to the character of an outlaw hero who championed the rights of the downtrodden.

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal's cameo as brigand Ithikkara Pakki pushes the film's focus to gravitate toward him; his cameo brought great attention to the film across the globe. His charisma and swag were enough to appease audiences in Kerala and across the world. In their article, "Young Malayali Men and their Movie Heroes," Caroline Osella and Filippo Osella observe, "Mohanlal's flexibility suggests qualities of mutability permitting him to embody a variety of interesting and alluring imaginary positions with which to play, while always remaining safely anchored to a stable and recognisable core identity as 'Mohanlal'" (255). Mohanlal's stardom operates on a different level as the Malayali audience identifies with him as their alter-ego. This enables him to play an array of roles that play with the imagination of Malayali spectators who identify with him in these varied avatars even as he retains his superstardom. Mohanlal plays Ithikkara Pakki, a highwayman, and yet another popular brigand like Kayamkulam Kochunni. Interestingly, the character of Kayamkulam Kochunni is initiated into harnessing hyper-masculine traits through a character essayed by a legendary actor like Mohanlal.

It was observed that when the legend was adapted into a film in 1966 and in 2018, certain elements from folklore played a larger role in the construction of the masculine

image of the hero. In his work, *Outlaw Heroes in Myth and History*, Graham Seal observes, "outlaw heroes are found in historical circumstances where one or more social, cultural, ethnic or religious groups believe themselves to be oppressed and unjustly treated by one or more other such groups who wield the greatest degree of power" (168). He points out that such a hero would be "kind and courteous to victims of the system, happy to distribute loot among the poor and sympathetic to their plight. The outlaw outwits and eludes the authorities" (170). He observes that the trope of outlaw operates by a narrative framework in which the hero defies the law against the injustices done by governments or by those who wield power (170).

In both of these films, the trope of an outlaw hero and his masculinity operates since the hero projects himself as a savior of the poor, oppressed, and marginalised sections of society. His rebellion is against caste hierarchies as well as the feudal system which exploits poor peasants and labourers. Both films follow the transition of Kochunni from a naïve young hero who grows as an outlaw to rebel against the oppressive caste and class order. Also, the heroes in both films are seen to be in constant power struggle with the authorities. This masculine trope of the outlaw hero enables him to frequently use "magic to defy vulnerabilities, go unseen, or attain superhuman speed or another useful attribute" (Seal 170). Sometimes, they disguise themselves or use their presence of mind to escape from a situation. In the first film, Kayamkulam Kochunni disguises himself in the form of an ascetic and his accomplices also go along with them to trick a feudal lord called Thomachan. He is a miser and a cruel money lender as well. Therefore, through his disguise as a saint, Kochunni and his friends get inside the house and steal everything (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 01:18:06–19:45). Here, the masculine trope of an outlaw hero operates through his ability to go unseen as he accomplishes his mission of robbing the feudal lord. Further, he distributes the loot among the poor. In the second film,

the hero uses his presence of mind to save himself and his friends at the time of crisis. This happened once Kochunni and his gang got trapped inside the house of a feudal lord amidst a robbery. Kochunni had to distract the household and save his gang. He suddenly grabs the kids of that house and throws them into a nearby field. This gives enough time for the rest of the gang to escape and save themselves (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 1:19:26–20:29). Here, the hero's masculinity operates through his presence of mind, he was able to evade a crisis by his quick thinking and rapid action, thereby saving himself and his gang.

Kochunni acts as a saviour to the womenfolk in his village. The establishing shot of the film depicts Kochunni as a child defending a little girl called Aisha from bullies who try and steal mangoes from her (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 00:01:25–02:14). Despite being a child, Kochunni defends her for what is rightfully hers. This establishing shot traces Kochunni's struggles against injustice to his childhood, thereby heralding the birth of a revolutionary hero. Similarly, Kochunni saves a girl from being forcefully married to an upper-caste Brahmin. It is interesting to note that the girl's mother complains to Kochunni to save her family from an upper-caste alliance. Kochunni agrees to protect them and teaches a lesson to the upper-caste man who forces young girls into marriage and threatens him into promising that he won't indulge in any such activities in the future (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 00:54:16–57:12). In the second film, Kochunni protects the girls from his village from the exploitation of the feudal lords and the clutches of the colonial forces. Kochunni and his gang save them from ruthless exploitation, this, in turn, contributes to the hypermasculine performance of Kochunni who indulges in fights and action sequences to protect the honour of women in his village.

The Diwan and the Tahasildar instruct the police to capture Kochunni. Hence, he is constantly on the run. Kochunni's accomplices signal him when the police are in the

vicinity (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 00:32:15–32:48). Thus, in the first film, Kochunni is depicted as an indigenous hero who fights against caste and class injustice, as also against the oppressive system through his tussle with the local police force appointed by the Diwan and the Tahasildar. Therefore, this film confines the legend of Kochunni to the boundaries of a region and to an audience that exclusively belongs to that region. In the second film *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (2018) succumbs to the temptation to elevate the masculine hero to a demi-god. According to Graham Seal, "the ability of these figures to maintain a heroic persona is determined by a number of factors, including their actions, their personal propaganda efforts and the extent and nature of their romanticisation and commodification during their time and after" (167). In this film, Kochunni's masculinity is elevated to that of a national hero, who fights colonial powers.

Similarly, the police force is under the control of the colonial government; Keshava Kurup symbolises an indigenous man trained by the colonial forces to tame Kochunni. The constant power struggle between them can be analysed beyond the personal equations as well. On the one hand, it is a clash between two hegemonic masculinities, one fighting for the imperial government and the other, a subaltern hero resisting colonialism. On the contrary, in Keshava Kurupp's character, "something of the dominant style of colonial masculinity was appropriated by native men themselves in subordinate positions of authority, thus becoming a trusted buffer between the ruler and the ruled" (Beynon 34). Kurupp feels it to be his moral obligation to capture a brigand such as Kochunni. Thus, the colonial government created a community of indigenous men fighting for them. Even though the British commander presents Kochunni with a gold medal for his chivalrous act of saving the lower-caste boy from death, his real intention lies in getting Kochunni's help to capture another notorious brigand called Ithikkara Pakki. The colonial agenda, thus, was to capture a rebellious masculine hero like Ithikkara Pakki

using another icon of resistance, Kochunni. Therefore, the first film elevates Kochunni into an indigenous hero, whereas the second film transcends its hyper-local elements and presents the legend of Kochunni on a pan-Indian canvas. This was amplified when it became available on OTT platforms like Amazon Prime.

Kayamkulam Kochunni is depicted as an icon of resistance in the popular culture of Kerala. He does not conform to authority and he is ready to sacrifice his life to feed the poor and the needy. Kayamkulam Kochunni is represented as a heroic figure who wants to herald a revolution against colonialism as well as against oppressive structures of caste and class in nineteenth-century Kerala. He uses his body as a tool of resistance. He attains this through the performance of the martial art form called *Kalaripayattu*.

Kalaripayattu is a martial arts practice unique to Kerala. According to P. Balakrishnan, "*kalaris* are the space where *payattu* is conducted, giving the compound word 'kalaripayattu'-literally, "place of exercise" (12). With the onset of colonialism, there was a decline in the art form since firearms were widely used in *Kalaripayattu*. The peasant-led Malabar Revolt of 1921 in Kerala catalysed huge anti-colonial agitation and insurrection that occurred across India in the 1920s, which led to the resurgence of *Kalaripayattu* in the twentieth century (McDonald 149). *Kalaripayattu* embodied a unique and heroic projection of Kerala's rich cultural heritage and masculinity.

With the advent of colonialism, in order to humiliate and domesticate people from the colonies, the colonisers tried to subjugate the primary masculine martial art of Kerala, *Kalarippayattu* and attempted to curb the indigenous knowledge system, therefore the British banned the art form in 1793. The colonisers categorised male bodies from the colonies as absurdly feminine or ruthlessly savage. These bodies were subsequently transformed into Europe's 'other', serving as a mirror to reflect the colonialists' own identity and a desired representation of the colonised as enslaved (Mukherjee 5). Owing to

its ideals of bravery and power, which became symbols of a particular kind of "privileged masculinity," "this martial art gained a lot of popularity and was subsequently adopted by Muslims, Christians, and Jews" (5). As Indrani Mukherjee observes, "…the *Kalaripayattu* community continued to stick to its secularist nostalgia of a Malayali identity as its idealised embodied masculinity" (15). The performance of the martial arts was organised against the colonisers as a part of the anti-colonial struggle, providing a distinctiveness to the Malayali culture. Later, this nostalgia for the heroic past was injected into the popular culture of Kerala, especially through films, television serials, advertisements, and marketing strategies of the tourism department.

In both these films, *Kalaripayattu* is depicted as a hyper-masculine performance to elevate the image of the hero. The first film depicts *Kalaripayattu* as a martial art performance that helps to elevate Kochunni's masculinity to an indigenous hero (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 00:07:53–10:53). In the second film, *Kalaripayattu* is employed as a vehicle of resistance against the colonisers, in order "to decolonise the subject male body and re-masculinise its effete character" (Alter 53). The martial arts performers organised themselves to oppose the colonial government in the wake of nationalism. Kochunni's body is depicted as a site of performance, a weapon to hold on to the indigenous Malayali essence. Later, Kochunni's revolt against the colonial masters and the upper castes is aided by his expertise in *Kalaripayattu*. His foe Keshavan defeats him by targeting his Achilles' ankle in the action sequence or the fight that erupts between them. In the climax of the film, Kochunni's guru, Thangal helps him to escape by teaching him the last and final straw in *Kalaripayattu*, which makes Kochunni invincible. The film gives tremendous importance to the martial art form and through a song sequence, *Kalari adavym chuvadin azhakum kandu njan, Cheralanattin veerane* (I could see the beauty of Kalari in deft moves, Kochunni's body as a martial art performer) (*Kayamkulam Kochunni*

[Andrrews] 00:36:39–00:43:08), Kochunni's blossoming love with Janaki along with his martial arts performance are showcased. When a charismatic hero like Kayamkulam Kochunni practices *Kalarippayattu*, (a martial arts tradition), the nostalgia and the proud assertion of strength, valour and courage exhibited by the hero are disseminated into the popular culture of the region.

The masculinity embodied in the body of Kayamkulam Kochunni strictly adheres to his Muslim or Mappila identity. The costumes of Kayamkulam Kochunni in 2018 align with the 1966 film as well. He wears a checked *lungi*, (an ankle-length checked cotton waist cloth) along with a vest, a belt draped around the waist, and a cap called *Kulla* worn by Muslim men. In both these films, Kochunni carries a knife called Malappuram knife – a signature prop. It also highlights his character's identification with rebellious masculinity and how he can also inspire fear.

Sathyan's portrayal of Kochunni presents a stubborn body language. His closed arms are tightly held and he projects his chest while walking. Thrusting the chest out is a trope associated with masculinity in Kerala, as the mannerism represents confidence, pride and assertion. He has a moustache and flaunts a handkerchief that is woven around his neck. Two other thieves are often mistaken for Kochunni by ordinary people. They are shown with a shaven head, a bare torso and *lungi* and wear a handkerchief around their neck as well.

In the second film, Nivin Pauly as Kochunni depicts physical prowess and his body is that of a martial arts expert. He diligently performs the moves of *Kalaripayattu* on screen and his body language is more fluent and flexible. As Kochunni transforms from a naïve young man to a brigand, his facial features also undergo a transition. Before he is branded as a thief by the feudal lords, he is clean-shaven, but after he joins Ithikkara Pakki's gang, his face turns wild, acquires terrifying eyes, styles differently spotting

stubble hair and visible scars. Rough facial features and the presence of scars indicate the ruggedness and wildness associated with his masculinity.

Ithikkara Pakki is portrayed as an aggressive character who initiates Kochunni on a quest of heroism, courage, and adventure. In his book, *Representation of Men: Maleness and Masculinity in the Media,* Kenneth Mackinnon observes:

> it seems to be culturally believed that violence is a natural, practically genetic component of masculinity. The strength of that belief does not silence the viability of the persistent counter-view, that violence is learned, that some men learn better than others, or that learning has a relation with systems of rewards and punishments. (12)

Ithikkara Pakki is depicted as a violent figure, who fights against injustices around him. His character constantly associates masculinity with violence and courage. Ithikkara Pakki says that the reason for him to save Kochunni was "when I heard of a boy who stopped a foreigner touching a lower-caste woman, I thought he was a man of courage. And that is why I saved him!" (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 1:11:40–47). He advises Kochunni "to be the terror of Kayamkulam" and encourages Kochunni to return as the most feared thief of Kayamkulam (1:12:48–49). Pakki says that he shakes hands only with the brave. Thus, Kochunni turns into a brigand. He is encouraged to put on hyper-masculine performances by Pakki. The overt glorification associated with Pakki's character probably might be an attempt to capitalise on the market for Mohanlal's commercial value. A song sequence introduces the audience to Kochunni's rigorous training drills under Pakki. Under Pakki's rigorous training, Kochunni is made to intensively train and increase his physical strength. This includes rigorous exercises, training in combat, dipping hands in hot sand, running alongside a horse, etc. Pakki is depicted as a strict trainer who often whips Kochunni when he fails to perform well

(01:13:49–16:25). The hyper-masculine gestures performed by Kochunni are depicted as further glorification of his male body which acts as a weapon of resistance. Ithikkara Pakki arrives to save Kochunni on horseback, a tight-close-up of his eyes is shown, he carries a gun and his outfit is that of a blend of different cultures. He wears a dress resembling a cowboy style as well as a military uniform. Ithikkara Pakki carries yet another prop, a rifle which is symbolic of his threatening hyper-masculine features.

Kochunni's world is essentially a homosocial one. Ithikkara Pakki introduces other gang members like Mammad, Noorammad, and Kunju Marakkar to Kochunni. Popular media tends to evade discussions on homosociality and homosexuality in favour of action sequences, while intimate conversations are avoided; often they worry about women as well (McKinnon 19). Male camaraderie is seen among the brigands. Since they support each other and they share a sense of community through friendship and mutual trust. It is Kochunni's friend who helps him escape when he is arrested for the first time. He was carried inside a cage to the Central jail in Trivandrum. His friends save him by breaking open the cage and they fight against the police (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 02:06:30–07:02). But, later discontent brews in the gang, as his friends feel Kochunni is making certain decisions according to his whims and without consultation in the gang. The growing discontent eventually leads to deepening mistrust and finally, his friends Kochu Pilla, Mammad, Bava, et al., betray Kochunni. Even though the outlaw hero is brave and strong, he is eventually betrayed by a confidante (Seal 170). His friends drug him in his drink and as he falls asleep, he is tied to a bed. But Kochunni being a rebellious hero, breaks the rope and fights with them. A high-angle shot is used to show his helplessness and his inferior position while his friends switch sides. But, another close friend Vava thrashes him and breaks his knees by targeting his ankles (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 2:13:10–2:14:16).

The film further attempts to locate the legend in the historical and cultural past of Kerala. An encounter with Swathi Thirunal Ramavarma, the King of Travancore is depicted in the film. This imaginary sequence further elevates the masculinity of the two powerful men. During a hunting expedition, the King is saved by Kochunni from a wild animal. The man versus wild trope operates here as Kochunni's valiant nature is projected when he chases the wolf away. Kochunni sees an injured man in the forest and saves him without realising that it is the King himself. Kochunni gifts his knife to him so that the King can protect himself from wild animals. In return, the man writes something on a palm leaf and hands it over to him. The leaf contains the instruction, "Whoever shall come to the palace with this whether in my lifetime/after that without violating any laws shall have one wish fulfilled. This is my order, by my royal authority" (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 1:29:50–30:33). This was signed by none other than King Swathi Thirunal, a role performed by actor, Sudev, who makes a cameo in the film. Also, the King's injured horse is looked after by Kochunni. This scene elevates the heroic conduct, ethical nature and honour shown by the two powerful men to each other. This order becomes instrumental in saving Kochunni's life from the gallows.

The image of revolutionary masculinity such as Kayamkulam Kochunni enjoyed popular appeal since it was constructed principally by the left movement in Kerala. Even though they did not celebrate 'a common tradition', they were moved by the myth of the long-lost *Mavelinadu,* where a long-lost utopian society could thrive based on the ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality. EMS Namboothiripad observes that united Kerala, in the communist perception, was based on modern republican democratic rule, which puts an end to the autocratic rule of feudal ruling families and their hangers-on (92). Thus, after the united Kerala formation, legends like that of Kayamkulam Kochunni, who rebelled

against feudal lords and fought for marginalised sections of society, also simultaneously invoked a Malayali identity rooted in a shared cultural past.

Both these films employed commercial formulas that aimed at box office success like the use of catchy and romantic songs, melodrama, action sequences, etc. The first film was more in tune with the plot of *Aithihyamala*. Evidencing the technical limitations of the Malayalam films of the sixties, dated editing techniques like 'iris out' are used for transitions. A shot tracks Kochunni as a child weighing jaggery and suddenly the camera pans left to reveal Kochunni as a teenager working in the shop (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 01:52:51–32). It was a common theme of films in the 1960s to depict communal harmony. Kochunni saves a Christian priest who is about to be stabbed by his accomplices. Kochunni scolds them and asks them whether they are going to kill a noble soul. He immediately releases the priest and asks for his forgiveness and in return the priest gifts him a Bible (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 00:45:18-46:26). This scene might have been incorporated into the film to show Kochunni's ethical character and to assert that he is guided by a sense of right and wrong. Also, it is a marketing strategy to draw audience interest from different sections of society and to foster communal harmony.

The popularity of the film at the box office is marked by its entry into the hundred crore club. The marketing strategies of the film have capitalised on Mohalal's stardom through his cameo as Ithikkara Pakki. The film also comprises of several song sequences, action sequences etc. According to Rosshan Andrrews, "it took 3 hours to set up the human pyramid and shoot the sequences. We laid the gravel below and hid the cameras" (Simon). The sequence was shot at a budget of seventy-five lakhs to one crore. Further, he added that "this scene was made taking into account of various technical aspects in cinema and it gives me immense pleasure to know that people loved this scene. This was perhaps one of the best action sequences in Kochunni" (Simon). This kind of carefully

choreographed sequence is used to project the hero's hyper-masculine traits to the mass audience. The cinematography radiates grandeur to accentuate the masculinity of the hero with elevated shots. The background score treats the hero in a divine light.

The commercial considerations of popular cinema are played out through an item dance by Norah Fatehi irrelevant to the plot being incorporated into the film. The female body is embodied as a site of spectacle for fulfilling male fantasies. The dominant codes of cinema turn a woman into an object to be looked at. The spectatorial position of women themselves is being converted into male, where she subjects herself to the "male gaze" (Mulvey 62). The erotic gaze on the female actress is unmistakable and explicit, as McKinnon observes "the more the female is objectified, the more masculinity seems to be guaranteed to the hero-and thus, to follow Mulvey's logic, to the male spectator" (29).

This item dance is set against the backdrop of a folk song, where a fusion of indigenous music along with contemporary dancing style spotlights the performing women as a thing of 'wonder' or a spectacle for the male audience (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 00:23:27–25:41). In this song, a large number of men, including both the English and the natives, 'gaze' at the performing woman. Kochunni and his friends stare at the scantily dressed dancer while the Englishmen watch her dance by sipping alcohol. The dim lights evoke the atmosphere of a dance bar. The camera is positioned in such a way that the performing body of the woman is a site of spectacle for colonisers as well as the colonised. The body of a woman is depicted as an object of gratification for the onlookers. The close-up shots of her perfectly slim and curvaceous body acts as a sexualised and erotic object for the spectators in the song and the male audience. The item dance performances in Malayalam films are usually a terrain of celebrating masculinity where men assert their dominance in these songs.

Vazhapilli Janaki is an important woman character in both films. She acts as a vamp figure in these films. In her article, "Becoming Women: Unwrapping Femininity in Malayalam Cinema," Meena T. Pillai observes, "the vamp is the stereotyped representation of the sexualised female body whose identity is contained and crippled by the very act of such representation" (29). In the first film, Sukumari plays the role of Janaki, a seductress. She tries to lure Kochunni several times but he is repulsed by her advances. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni doesn't attribute a name to Janaki. Instead, she is merely called a *shudra* woman with whom Kochunni had illicit relations. Upon realising that the *shudra* woman had blown his cover, he escapes from the jail and goes to her house. He stabs her and her paramour to death (Sankunni 214). But unlike that of the legend, the film does not feature Kochunni having an affair. He is presented as a loyal partner and saviour to his wife, Aisha.

In *Aithihyamala*, Sankunni refers to Kochunni as a womaniser who helped several women become rich, whereas the film omits such references altogether. In the film, Vazhappilli Janaki is tricked by Tahasildar and Diwan therefore, she betrays Kochunni, as he falls asleep, she gives a signal to the police eventually leading to his arrest (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 01:36:27–37:08). Kochunni flees from the jail to kill Janaki but spares her lover. Later, he surrenders to the police. It is interesting to observe that Kochunni is portrayed as a man having strict moral codes. In his conversation with the Diwan, he accuses Janaki of destroying several families, therefore, he feels that murdering Janaki is justified. Kochunni advices the man, who was Janaki's paramour on strict codes of morality. He rebukes the man to return to his home since his wife must be waiting for him. Some of these gestures are employed to elevate the masculinity of the hero as morally upright and to capitalise on Malayali audiences' codes of morality. The film portrayed the hero as a moral and ethical man, and these ideals were brought out through

Victorian morality, especially with the advent of colonial modernity. The hero was supposed to be faithful to his wife; there was a celebration of monogamy, where a man was expected to be loyal to his partner. This can also be seen as an attempt to completely erase the remnants of a matrilineal past built on polygamous marriages called *sambandhams*. These moral codes are projected onto the hero. Since he adheres to these stringent codes of morality, his narratives become popular among the Malayali audience.

Janaki has an important role in the film. The figure of the vamp is essential to the construction of the masculinity of the hero (Sreedharan 105). She is portrayed as Kochunni's lover and it is with her help that Kochunni enters Thangal's *kalari*. She initiates him into a hypermasculine performance. When the upper caste members falsely brand Kochunni as a thief, Janaki is also punished along with him for falling in love with a man from a different religion. An inter-religious marriage between a *shudra* woman and a Muslim man was too scandalous for nineteenth-century Kerala. This eventually leads to her ostracisation in society. She is publicly humiliated by the upper caste. They brutally stone her, shave her hair and exile her for falling in love with a man outside her religion. She seeks revenge on Kochunni for betraying her since it took only six months for him to get married to another woman following her public humiliation, torture, and exile. Eventually, it is Janaki's revenge that leads to Kochunni's arrest. Here, Kochunni is depicted as a faithful lover and he trusts her when she returns. But his heroic position is treated as an ideal one and placed within strict moral codes. When Janaki returns, Kochunni's friend Mammad warns her that Kochunni is now married and there is no need to rekindle the feelings that they had for each other. Kochunni feels sympathetic to Janaki since she is brutally whipped and hurt by the brother of the British commander. He feels compelled to take revenge on the enemy, and to his credit, he feels that his retaliation must be directed at the colonial forces. Unlike that of the first film, Janaki is not portrayed as a

seductress or as a social climber here but as a woman who is betrayed in love. In the film, she is given a motive for revenge; she feels that Kochunni cheated her because of his marriage to Suhara. The marriage was also to elevate Kochunni in the eyes of the readers as a saviour since he wanted to protect Suhara and her abandoned family. The hero, therefore, is portrayed as an ideal and morally upright man, who acts as a saviour to the women surrounding him.

The scope of a blockbuster hero film and its commercial formulas intended for success at the box office doesn't allow the masculine hero to face a tragic end in prison. Both these films celebrated the hyper-masculine ideals of indomitable courage, heroism, adventure, and armed rebellion against injustice in the popular culture of Kerala. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni gives a realistic account of the death of Kochunni. He was arrested for the murder of his mother-in-law along with the murder of the *shudra* woman and her lover. He had a miserable end in Trivandrum central jail, where he died at the age of forty-one, where he spent only ninety-one days in prison in the year 1859 (206). But, in the first film enacted by Sathyan, Kochunni is handcuffed and he is walked through the streets by the police. The film suggests that a rebellious masculine hero such as Kochunni couldn't be defeated by the police and he surrenders upon his own will.

After Kochunni surrenders to the police, the film shows people protesting for his release. The outlaw heroes entice the audience with their desire for justice, freedom and solidarity with the cause of the downtrodden. Further, he has his own sense of right and wrong and he is depicted as confident in it. Kochunni's heroism is further elevated through a low-angle shot. The immense power he possesses is depicted through the low-angle shot, where his rebellious masculinity is elevated among the people. He addresses the crowd and asks them to calm down. He acknowledges that since he has committed a crime he should bear the consequences and requests his supporters to abide by the laws of the land.

He asks them to serve the government and protect the land (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Thomas] 01:54:51–57:44). The film ends on a note of simmering betrayal where rebellious masculinity like that of Kochunni succumbs to the powers and vouches for the State. The underlying politics of the film seems to be that outlaws will have to finally betray their cause and be persecuted by hegemonic power structures within society.

In the second film, Kayamkulam Kochunni is elevated to that of a demi-god. The closing sequence of the film seems to dispel the notion that a masculine hero cannot face defeat in Kerala's popular culture. The *mise-en-scene* further heightens the rebellious spirit of the hero: dim lights, heavy rains, and an agitated crowd. Suddenly an arrow strikes him and pierces his heart. Finally, Kochunni is brought to a public space and a folk song is heard in the background "*Naaduvazhuka, nagaram vazhuka…Kayamkulathe Kochunni vazhuka*" (*Kayamkulam Kochunni* [Andrrews] 02:21:21–22:45) commemorating the glory of the land and its hero. This background score elevates the mood of the closing scenes, where thousands of people, who had assembled for the trial, hail him as their hero. The film, however, ends on a note of fantasy. It shows Kochunni manoeuvre his escape from his captors, he is lifted by the people and he climbs over the wall and flees. This might be an attempt to preserve the heroic ideal in popular cinema, where the hero lives on rather than being killed by enemies.

The legend of *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, entrenched in the psyche of Malayalis, depicts the story of a thief elevated into a heroic status. The film ends with a voice-over by Mohanlal which notes that transcending religious divide, a Muslim man who stood up for the poor and hungry lives to this day. The temple dedicated to Kayamkulam Kochunni in Idappara Maladevar Nada, a village in Kozhechnchery near Pathanamthitta district, exemplifies an apotheosis of the brigand, Kayamkulam Kochunni, in the hearts and minds of the people of Kerala. Despite, the rigid caste and class hierarchies that exist in Kerala, it

is interesting to note that a brigand such as Kochunni found a home in the premises of a Hindu temple.

A common trope recurring in both the films are the presence of a large crowd waiting for Kochunni in the climax scenes. The presence of the crowd who eagerly waits to see Kochunni as a parting gesture further elevates the rebellious masculinity of the hero. This feeling resonates with the audience as well; the collective consciousness of the audience is projected onto the figure of the hero. They are fascinated by masculine rebellion against authority, the hero's devotion to the upliftment of the downtrodden, his sense of freedom, his pursuit of justice, his confidence, and his charismatic presence, therefore, he is elevated to be an icon of resistance. This shows the immense impact that the legend had on the popular culture of Kerala.

The legend of Kochunni should be analysed in relation to the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala. The nineteenth century was marked by stringent caste and class hierarchies alongside a feudal system and a colonial regime on top. But, one can spot several lacunae in the representation of this legend in *Aithihyamala*. Kottarathil Sankunni has failed to read these legends in the context of the socio-cultural ethos of the time. He chisels a hero out of Kayamkulam Kochunni as a counterpoint to the hegemonic masculinity of upper-caste, Hindu men. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan points out "M.T. Ansari has demonstrated how mainstream Malayalam literature has always posited the Muslim man as the 'other' in relation to ideal modern heroes" (79). There is a tendency to represent Muslim men as cruel, violent, and aggressive in *Aithihyamala*.

In the wake of anti-colonial consolidation, the British painted Muslims as 'fanatics' and 'robbers' (38-39). This accelerated in the aftermath of the Malabar rebellion of 1921. A major consequence of the 'othering' of Muslims was the birth of a loaded term, "fanatic":

> The "fanatic" was enforced, and administrated, into existence. A construct first deployed by the colonial administrator for the political control of a people, the label puts together a particular kind of "individual," an anthropological object, and in doing so conceals the machinery of control exerted on the Mappila. . . . The designation "fanatic" is of immense use to the colonialist since it institutes "disciplinary control and the creation of docile bodies [both] unquestionably connected to the rise of capitalism. (Dreyfus and Rabinow 134)

The discourse on the Malabar rebellion has correctly identified the project of demonising Muslims as violent fanatics. M.T. Ansari observes that Malabar came to be associated with Mappilas; a region juxtaposed with the term Muslims who were branded as short-tempered, angry, and violent (80). In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni depicts Kayamkulam Kochunni as a womaniser, murderer, and man of violent temperament. He has killed off his mother-in-law for questioning his illicit relationship with a *shudra* woman. Sankunni says that Kochunni finished her off with a blow to her head. The old lady dies on the spot. Kochunni wraps her body in a mat, tying it to a heavy stone, and drowns the corpse in the backwaters (213). Kochunni has also murdered the *shudra* woman and her paramour. Here, Kottarathil Sankunni explores several layers of Kochunni's character unlike that of his glorification as a hero in the films.

When a united Kerala came into being on 1st November 1956, enjoining Travancore, Cochin, and Malabar, it was required to project a secular and non-stereotypical image of a Muslim hero, who represented the majority population of Malabar in a positive light. This might have influenced the legend of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* becoming popular on the Malayalam silver screen. In the 2018 film adaption of the legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni eponymously titled *Kayamkulam Kochunni* featuring actor Nivin Pauly as Kochunni, the director situates the legend in a wider socio-political

context. The underlying politics of the film as evidenced by its *mise-en-scene* and narrative strategies severely criticises the feudal, colonial, and caste hierarchies in society.

Both these films diverge from the narrative structure in *Aithihyamala*. It deals with the themes of caste-discrimination head-on and does not make light of the wedge between the rich and the poor. Similarly, these films add numerous plots and subplots to elevate the masculinity of the hero. It is critical of the stringent policies implemented by the colonial government. It addresses these issues that are completely absent in *Aithihyamala's* version, although written during a period characterised by rapid changes in the socio-cultural dynamic of Kerala. The text does not address major social evils like caste-system, feudalism and colonialism, whereas the film makes a political statement by addressing them. Several sub-plots like that of Ithikkara Pakki, the feudal elites' betrayal of Kochunni after he retrieves the treasure, et al. find no mention in *Aithihyamala*. However, in *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni presents a realistic account of Kochunni's legend.

Conclusion

So far, we have been analysing the discourse of masculinity in the films: *Kadamattathachan* (1984) and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966 and 2018). The elements of the masculine body, star cast, and marketing strategies that contribute to the projection of the heroes in popular culture have been analysed in this chapter. Kadamattathu Kathanar symbolised a Christian masculinity and he wields the power as a hegemonic masculine figure in his community from the magic drawn from the indigenous tradition of *Malayarayas*. Similarly, the egalitarian vision of Kayamkulam Kochunni has a Marxist overtone. He is also presented as a morally and ethically upright man in the films. The common factor binding these legends is both these heroes fought for the poor, irrespective of class and caste differences. This communal harmony fostered in the representation of these heroes closely aligned with the image of a democratic and secular region, named

Kerala, owing to the immense success of these legends to the mass audience. The legends of Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar were further disseminated into popular culture through the medium of television as well and this will be analysed in the next chapter. Since these legends invoked the memory of a collective past, it was well-received by the audience from all walks of life.

Chapter 4

Visualising the Legends: Television, Modernity, and the Masculine World

Television is a popular medium that appeals to collective identities and nostalgia of a region. It has redefined the boundaries between the domestic and the public spheres by getting itself implicated in political and social media collectives that encourage, if not require, viewers to participate in "broader collectivities" (Morley 40). Television brought the 'viewing' families into the forefront by drawing them into the modernising project. This chapter analyses television serials like *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* which became immensely successful in the popular culture of Kerala. The study will focus on decoding the semiotic codes engaged in the dissemination of masculinity to the domestic spaces in Kerala. The elements of camera, lighting, editing, music, casting, sets, make-up, action, and dialogue contribute to the representation of different aspects of masculinities in these serials. This chapter reflects on the aspects of television modernity that blur the boundary between the public and the private sphere. Further, it also looks at how nostalgia is activated through audience response-even in contemporary times.

In India, television was launched in 1959 as a "developmental tool" for disseminating government policies, educational programmes, and new agricultural technology to the masses (Mankekar 35). This was implemented through the founding and broadcasting of Doordarshan at the national level. Poornima Mankekar observes, "The postcolonial state's commitment to modernize the nation rested on the axiom that modernity would have to be "Indianized," thus bringing about a convergence between discourses of modernity and nationalism" (36). Thus, Doordarshan aimed at unifying the nation through its programming of content intended for national integration, at the cost of creating a "viewing family" that could modernise its subjects (32).

Television could bring global culture into the drawing room of a remote rural place. Television allowed its viewers to commingle imaginarily with broader collectivities like community and nation, further entwining the local, national, and transnational realms, blurring the borders of the family (Mankekar 35). Thus, television was instrumental in heralding the modernity of the nation-state to its farthest corners; on the other hand, it was conscious of blurring the boundaries that transgressed the public and private spheres.

Television became popular in Kerala during the eighties. Before that, Malayalam had less representation on the small screen limited to a dedicated thirty-minute monthly slot along with an additional thirty-minute slot for film songs from the Madras Station. It was only in 1985 that Doordarshan began broadcasting from Trivandrum, following the inauguration of the broadcasting centre by the former Chief Minister, K. Karunakaran. Television was a commodity that wasn't affordable for many families at the time. People from different households huddled together at a nearby house to watch various programmes. As Baiju Chandran observes, "This would inevitably lead to the commingling of the private and public sphere" (9). Thus, the introduction of a "new public" took place within the private sphere, which resulted in the domestication of the public sphere (Benjamin 5488).

The introduction of television in Kerala coincided with major socio-political changes. Kerala had seen major state interventions in land reforms, education and primary healthcare, public distribution of food grains, etc. that were instrumental in shaping its socio-political milieu (Sreekumar and Parayil 250). The period also saw large-scale migration of men to the Gulf countries which helped avert a looming economic crisis domestically. This resulted in a "local cosmopolitanism" in the region (Bose and Varughese 7).

The consumption practices of the region witnessed tremendous changes with the emergence of private channels. The satellite channels cultivated new viewing habits in Kerala. Asianet from Kerala was the first-ever registered private channel in India (Chandrashekhar 350). Later, in the 1990s, several other private channels such as Surya, Kairali, Jeevan, Amrita, Mazhavil Manorama etc., emerged. Even though the advent of television serials started with Doordarshan, it was the private channels like Asianet and Surya TV that made monetary benefits from the serials.

Television serials are imbued with elements of melodrama, sentiments, violence, etc. The target audience is largely women, along with a cross-section of men and children as well. The serials were telecasted from Monday to Friday with advertising revenue generated from advertisements in between. Initially, the serials occupied twenty-seven minutes out of the thirty-minute slot for the programme, but later the content got reduced from eighteen to sixteen minutes with a greater number of advertisements (Chandrashekhar 351). The prime time of the serials was geared to fit the convenience of household women.

As an aftermath of the Gulf Boom, many of the men migrated to Gulf countries and the women married to Gulf migrants were left to fend for themselves and their families. They were easily drawn into patriarchal capitalism. Women easily became "viewing subjects" under the influence of television and they were entangled in a web of "national and transnational economies of desire and consumption" (Mankekar 41). As a result, modernity was able to control the identities of women either as objects of consumption or subjects of consumption (Benjamin 5496). Women viewers are active television viewers. Even as it incites their consumerist desires, they are also objectified on the small screen by soap operas and advertisements.

When serials such as Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar were introduced on the small screen, they attracted a cross-section of audiences from different classes, castes, age groups, and genders. These serials projected a masculine hero drawn from Kerala's cultural and mythical past and were based on Kottarathil Sankunni's delineation of these masculine heroes in the legend, *Aithihyamala*. Even though the serials digressed from the text because of their episodic nature, they generated nostalgia and an affinity for the cult of local heroes. Later, when television went global with the advancement of technology, the narratives of the indigenous heroes cut through regional boundaries and began to have a transnational appeal wherever Keralites resided.

A brief analysis of the serials such as *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and its sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* will showcase the different aspects of masculinity disseminated into the popular culture of Kerala through the discourse of television. Also, the representation of women in these serials portrays how the stereotyping of women by the patriarchal society occurs; either to fit them into the mould of an ideal woman or to punish them by the powerful men within the society.

Problematic representation of Masculinities in the serial *Kadamattathu Kathanar*

Kadamattathu Kathanar, a Malayalam supernatural drama belonging to the horror genre was broadcast in Asianet from 2004 to 2006. The serial immediately attracted a large audience base irrespective of caste, class, religion and gender. Due to popular demand, the serial was re-telecasted on the Asianet Plus channel in March 2016. Later it was uploaded to the Over-the-top (OTT) platform, Disney Hotstar from 2016 onwards. *Kadamattathu Kathanar* is re-telecasted and streamed on OTT platforms with this desire to commodify the legend of an indigenous hero to a large audience—both local and global. Asianet's entertainment channels owned by the Walt Disney group in fact reveal the immense potential of local narratives to transcend national and transnational boundaries.

The serial comprises six seasons spanning 266 episodes with the lead actor Prakash Paul playing the role of the Syrian Christian priest, Kadamattathu Kathanar - a tall, well-built man with deep eyes and brown hair. Kadamattathu Kathanar embodies hegemonic masculinity in Kerala's culture through magic and by exerting his authority over marginalised sections of society, especially over other men and women. Prakash Paul was perfectly cast for the lead role of Kadamattathu Kathanar. The serial was directed by T.S. Suresh Babu and was produced by Merryland Studio. It featured a remarkable array of actors from both the Malayalam film industry and the serial industry. Sukanya, a lead Malayalam actress played the role of the *Yakshi*, the dreaded Kaliyankattu Neeli, in the series. Several other stalwarts of the Malayalam film industry like Bharath Gopi, Rajan P. Dev, Prathapachandra, Sukumari, Aranmula Ponnamma et al., acted in it. It was iconic to see the blurring of boundaries between the film and television industry happening around a story that is inextricably linked to the folk culture of Kerala.

Actor Prakash Paul as Kadamattathu Kathanar pulled off a unique performance. The masculinity that he embodied was that of a hegemonic masculine priest who controlled other men and women who sought his help. Depicted as a tall, masculine figure in brown garb, he was spotted with a hat and a magic stick in all six seasons. His magic stick was an important prop aiding his sorcery. It helped Kathanar maintain his dominance in society as he could overpower evil spirits and control them with this prop. Thus, this image of Kadamattathu Kathanar walking with a magic stick and a hat to the accompaniment of the background score got inscribed in the popular culture of Kerala as an embodiment of heroic masculinity that could ward away evil spirits and restore peace and order in the community.

The television serial *Kadamattathu Kathanar* portrays the hegemonic masculine figure of a Syrian Christian priest who punishes evil and saves the inherent goodness in

humankind through his magic. According to Michael S. Kimmel, the hegemonic definition of manhood is "a man in power, a man with power, a man of power" (125). Hegemonic masculinity was deemed to be the perfect model against which all men are judged and evaluated (184). R.W. Connell notes that 'hegemonic masculinity' can be viewed as the most venerated and ideal way of being honoured as a man (832). Even though, a television serial such as *Kadamattathu Kathanar* was intended to fascinate the audience with gripping tales of horror and fear, it created the representation of an ideal man, a hero who acts as a saviour for people around him with magic.

Kadamattathu Kathanar acts as a saviour of his community. He solves several crises that occur within families and between individuals. With numerous plots and sub-plots that deviate from Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala*, the serial focuses on elevating Kathanar to an indigenous hero by tapping into his Christian identity. The good versus evil binary operates throughout the serial. It draws a parallel between Kathanar and Jesus Christ. He expresses his gratitude to Jesus after performing each miracle. In season six, all the evil forces get together to destroy Kathanar. He is whipped, severely injured and loses all his powers. But an angel comes to his rescue and restores his powers ("Kathanar is Saved by an Angel" 02:30–05:04). In another instance when Kathanar is facing death after having poisoned curd, a power emanates from Jesus's image and heals him ("Kathanar Survives" 12:58–13:50). In the final season, he battles with Lucifer or Satan – an evocative biblical allusion. In the final battle against Lucifer, Kathanar frees his village from his control ("Lucifer Misleads the Villagers" 09:50–12:49).

Kadamattathu Kathanar is depicted as a devout Christian priest whose masculinity is intertwined with his religious faith. He is depicted as having abilities to confront and overcome evil forces through magic and sorcery. In season two, he saves the villagers from the evil sorcerer Chadayan. In season four, he saves the fisher folk in Chambakkara

from evil spirits. Also, in several seasons, Kathanar restores peace in ancestral homes or *tharavad*s, namely Vamanam, Kumkumathu, Chandanamangalam, Vadakkan Veedu, etc., by exorcising evil spirits. Similarly, in season six, he saves his village from the clutches of Lucifer. Here, Kathanar is portrayed as a Christ-like figure who shows extreme self-sacrifice and devotion to serve God and his community by putting the well-being of others above everything else. Therefore, his masculinity is elevated as an idealised form of masculinity.

Kadamattathu Kathanar is depicted as a 'modern' subject who raises his voice against the stringent hierarchies of caste. On one occasion, when he requests drinking water, some upper-caste women hesitate to offer it. A furious Kathanar retaliates by making their well disappear ("Kathanar's Magical Powers" 10:0313:17). This representation is quite problematic since caste acts as a site that "haunts all assertions of return to a pre-modern past, all claims about the glories and values of tradition,' whereby 'it may be a precipitate of the modern but a specter of the past" (Dirks 18). Even though Kathanar rebels against caste hierarchies, he himself entertains dominant ideologies within the upper-caste households. When Madavana, an upper-caste Brahmin, invites Kathanar to tame Neeli, after his own disciple Mepradan's futile efforts, Kathanar remarks that a great Brahmin like Mepradan should not be falling on his feet but instead should command ("Madavana Meets Kathanar" 8:45–11:25). Similarly, when Kathanar reaches Vamanam *tharavadu* to protect its inhabitants from a *Yakshi*, the *karanavar* of the *tharavadu* invites him to stay inside. But Kathanar says, "I won't sleep inside since I am from another caste. I don't want to cause pollution" ("Panchali Panics" 12:46–13:17). Such contradictory statements are incorporated in the television serial. Although Kathanar is venerated as a religious reformer on the one hand, on the other hand, he is not able to transcend the regressive ideas of 'purity and pollution'. This can be seen as a historical documentation

of a bygone era, where caste and class hierarchies existed, also, these dialogues must be an attempt to appease the upper-caste audience.

Hegemonic masculinity involves the subordination of marginalised sections of men as well as the subjugation of women. As Connell observes sometimes it can involve men's assertion of their agency by indulging in toxic practices such as the use of physical violence to preserve gender dominance in particular settings (834). In television serials such as *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, the use of violence to conquer evil recurs, Kathanar's foes like Chadayan, Durgamma and Vettiyala Veezhala Guru whip Kathanar and force him to commit the sin of blasphemy. The hero temporarily loses his strength but receives divine help from the archangels who restore his powers. Kathanar unleashes violence on his enemies and emerges victorious in the end. Similarly, the enemies are denigrated for being dwellers of the netherworld ("Kathanar is Saved By an Angel" 02:30-17:12). This continues the oppressive pattern of denigrating the *Malayaraya* tribe to evil entities unlike that of the *Aithihyamala* legend and the film *Kadamattathachan* which talks about how a naïve young boy named Paulose became a powerful sorcerer under the tutelage of the *Malayaraya* tribe; the serial doesn't address this plot, and instead, he is shown as a hero and a powerful masculine figure from the beginning inside a Christian setting. There is a conscious attempt to portray *Malayarayas* in a negative light as his enemies such as Durgamma and Vettiyala Veezhala Guru from netherworld are depicted as wicked, violent and evil in an eerie, dark setting.

Kadamattathu Kathanar employs extreme use of violence to tame the *Yakshis* that evoke terror in ancestral homes such as Vamanam, Vadakkan Veedu, Chandanamangalam, etc. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni doesn't attribute a past life to the *Yakshis* in the legends. On the other hand, in the televised version, a revenge story is attributed to all the *Yakshis*. All the *Yakshis* in the serial, *Kadamattathu Kathanar* shared a lower-caste origin.

They are reborn to avenge their death and destroy the progeny of the culpable *tharavadu*. Jeffrey Cohen in his monster theory suggests, "a monster is best understood as an embodiment of different, a breaker of category and a resistant other" (vii). The serialisations portrayed *Yakshis* and the ghosts in their previous life belonged to lower-class origin. They were either violently or treacherously murdered by the upper-caste men of the *tharavadu*, who saw their sexuality as a threat to the *tharavadu* or the ancestral home.

The serial discusses the life of several *Yakshis* such as Kalliyamkattu Neeli, Thiramala, Kalyani, Gauri and an *odiyan* (animagus) spanning from season one to season six. They were brutally murdered, disfigured or burnt to death by the upper-caste men of the *tharavadu*. These stories interpellated a sense of revenge and rebellion against the dominant classes in Kerala. Further, Saji Mathew observes that the hegemonic masculine power structures were in favour of the feudal patriarchal system, which made it impossible for a woman to fight against it and stay alive at the same time. It was only after her death that she was allowed to have some revenge (6). In the serial, a girl from *pulluva* community (a scheduled caste group in Kerala) called Kalyani is seduced and made pregnant by Udaya Varma, an upper-caste man from Ilayidom palace. He promises to marry her but later not only does he fail to fulfil his promise but also kills the pregnant woman and her father. The girl Kalyani takes rebirth as a *Yakshi* and plots to revenge against him. She was unable to avenge the upper-caste man who betrayed her while she was alive; she was forbidden even from entering his palace. This made the possibility of revenge for the lower-caste woman against an upper-caste man only after her death. Thus, the *Yakshi* stories encapsulate the collective fear of feudal patriarchy which feared backlash from lower-caste women.

Several episodes in *Kadamatath Kathanar* are dedicated to Kathanar taming *Yakshis* in different *tharavadus* or ancestral homes. All *Yakshis* are, in fact, the dead spirit of the lower-caste women who come to destroy upper-caste feudal lords and cause disruptions in their mansion. In season one, the story of Kaliyankattu Neeli reveals the past story of Neeli and Kannappan. Neeli belonged to a family of pot-makers, she was fair and beautiful and she instantly fell in love with Kannappan, who was the nephew of Ittan, a martial art expert from a famous Nair family. His uncle opposed their marriage. He slayed Kannappan and a pregnant Neeli along with her family to protect the honour of his family. Neeli decides to kill Ittan and destroy his family and all his progeny. In the initial episode, Neeli disguises herself as an old woman and tricks a young woman from the *tharavadu* in the middle of the forest. Later, Neeli transforms into a *Yakshi* and kills the pregnant woman. She tears open the young woman's body and kills the foetus. Gail Hinich Sutherland argues, "devouring of offspring is the formal and ethical opposite of the usual maternal function of discharging rather than physically withholding the infants" (144). Thus, the *Yakshis* performed a function quite opposite to the maternal function of giving birth. Yet, another *Yakhshi* narrative depicted in the serial is that of Gauri, a *Yakshi* who plans on destroying the Chandanamanagalm *tharavadu*, where once she had fallen for the heir of the *tharavadu*. His mother was against their alliance since she belonged to a lower-caste family and upon the matriarch's orders both lovers were burnt to death. Similarly, in the serial, the narrative of an *Odiyan* who is liberated from his miserable life by Kadamattathu Kathanar is also mentioned. *Odiyans* are called animagus. They transform themselves into the shape of animals and appear out of nowhere, threatening unsuspecting passengers at night. *Odiyans* were typically black magicians from the *paraya* community, a lower-caste community with immense skills in *odividya*. Sindhu Jose asserts that in several studies *Odiyans* were depicted as tools of upper-caste feudal lords who

fought each other (106). In the serial, the character of the *Odiyan* is punished by the *karanavan* of the upper-caste feudal families for stealing coconuts at night. He is whipped and hot oil is thrown on his face. As a result, his face is burnt and he becomes disfigured; this leads to a burning revenge in *odiyan* against the upper-caste members.

In all these narratives, the 'monsters' belong to men and women from the lower rungs of society who share a marginalised existence. As Sindhu Jose observes, "using the allusion of the abnormality of the abjects, the casteist-patriarchal structure thus subdues lower class resistance and keeps them inside their boundaries" (105). The upper-class feudal anxieties about the disintegration of the *tharavadus* as well as the land reform acts gave more power to the tenants. As Saji Mathew observes the land reformation acts and bills which were passed in the legislative assembly of Kerala were instrumental in restoring the land to the tenants (11). The land reform bill of the sixties gave authority over the land to the tenants; this further improved their social conditions, especially of the lower-caste women, who were ruthlessly exploited by the upper-caste men. Thus, the trope of *Yakshi* and *Odiyan* depicts empowered lower-caste members reclaiming their right to land and property. But the politics of television serials, which disseminated a dominant class ideology was reluctant to confer agency on lower-caste victims. Therefore, the trope of a Brahmin priest or a Syrian Christian priest who retrieves power and agency from the 'abjects' and restores order within the ancient *tharavadus* recurs in the episodes of the serial.

These 'abjects' are depicted as diabolic figures who goes on avenging and trying to annihilate all the members of the *tharavadu* for several generations. It is at this juncture, that a Christian priest such as Kadamattathu Kathanar has to interfere and save the rest of the members. Sometimes, Kathanar resolves the conflict within the *tharavadu* even when he is uninvited. When a *Yakshi* called Thirumala murdered several children from

Vadakkan *tharavadu*. Kathanar goes there uninvited and tames the *Yakshi* since he cares for the lives of the rest of the children in the house. In the television serial, *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, he always resolves the issues within the *tharavad* by exerting his patriarchal control over the 'abjects' with his magic and restores absolute freedom and control exerted by the *karanavan* for the welfare of his extended family. Thus, a transfer of power from Kathanar, an alpha male of the community to the *karanavan*, yet another patriarch takes place here. This led to the assertion of their hegemonic masculinity in the domestic spaces by relegating the position of other men and women under their control.

The tussle between Kadamattathu Kathanar and the *Yakshis* and the victory of the religious shaman in the television serial can be seen as a conflict between the contradictory ideals of "celibacy" and "sexuality" (Jose 161). According to Jeffrey Cohen's sixth formulation of monster theory, he vouches "fear of the monster is really a kind of desire" (17). The simultaneous attraction and repulsion that we feel towards the construct of the monster immensely contribute to its appeal in popular culture; therefore, there is a constant feeling of simultaneous hate and detest towards the monster, with a constant envy of its freedom and its supreme yearning (Cohen 17). Thus, the trope of the *Yakshi* is inextricably connected with the male desire whereas Kathanar is depicted as a Christian priest leading a life of celibacy. This might be a reason for Kathanar to emerge victorious after an encounter with *Yakshsis* whereas other men fail to succeed in taming her. Even after hearing Neeli's tragic story, Kadamattathu Kathanar doesn't spare her and forces her to kneel before him. He commands, "I don't want to annihilate you, but you should bow down before me" ("Ittan Burns Neeli alive" 11:01-11:03). Kathanar subsequently drives an iron nail into her head. Later, he converts her into an asexual mother goddess and places her in a sacred grove. Here, Kadamattathu Kathanar is portrayed as a saviour of humanity. He believes that the *Yakshi* poses a greater threat to

the inhabitants of the Vamanam *tharavadu* as she has already killed two men and a pregnant woman. Kathanar feels compelled to save the rest of the family and he is left with no other choice but to tame her for the greater good. The semiotic codes of television narratives seem to justify Kathanar's behaviour because, in the final season, Neeli escapes and joins forces with Kathanar's enemies. She also inflicts extreme violence on Kathanar's body. Later she kills a pregnant woman from Chandnamangalam *tharavadu* as well as an old woman called Savithriamma. Gerard Grebner notes that "heroes and villains are equally likely to use violence and to initiate it, but that heroes were successful in their violence, whereas villains finally were not" (qtd. in Fiske 9). The villains/villainess who use similar modes of violence, however, are portrayed as deviant or the 'other'. Thus, the *Yakshi*'s use of violence encourages the audience to identify with the hero, Kadmattathu Kathanar and the collective consciousness of the Malayali audience feels that the diabolic woman needs to be punished. Therefore, when Kathanar eventually kills her, his courage and strength are celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala.

When Kathanar's enemies plot against him, Kathanar uses violence as a mode of defence without a second thought. In his book, *Television Culture*, John Fiske notes, "We may use Gerbner's findings to theorize that heroes are socially central types who embody the dominant ideology, whereas villains and victims are members of deviant or subordinate subcultures who thus embody the dominant ideology less completely, and may, in the case of villains, embody ideologies that oppose it" (9). When the hero resorts to violence, it is treated as a moral victory of good against evil. Kathanar, an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity, resorts to violence to make his adversaries obey. For instance, in season one he punishes some robbers who pounce on him by beating them with his magic stick ("Kathanar's Magical Powers" 15:53–18:47). Similarly, Kathanar punishes a few children who ridicule him. They lose their clothes and remain naked on top of the tree

until their parents beg for forgiveness from Kathanar. He conjures some canes and asks their parents to beat them to inculcate the value of obedience ("Ammu Apologises to Kathanar" 13:00–14:24). Kathanar uses violence against men who pass lewd comments on Panchali, a girl from Chandanamangalam *tharavadu*. When Kathanar and Panchali were taking a stroll through the village, the men were bathing elephants in a nearby river. Kathanar looks into the elephant's eyes and all of a sudden it turns violent and attacks the men. Only when they seek Kathanar's forgiveness does he leave them ("Ammu Apologises to Kathanar" 15:40–17:43). Therefore, Kathanar's masculinity is clothed in his moral authority in the community and he employs violence to punish his enemies.

Kadamattathu Kathanar embodies Christian masculinity, the idea of hailing Kathanar as a masculine hero can often be traced back to the elevation of Jesus Christ as a masculine figure from the Bible. The concept of Christian masculinity is aligned with the notion of selflessness, sacrifice, and submission to God. Yet another key ideal of Christian masculinity is drawn from Christ's teaching of putting the needs of others before their own, being humble and serving others as a father figure. Kadamattathu Kathanar's image as a Christian priest is often connected with that of Jesus Christ. He is also presented as a fearless hero who confronts supernatural entities and evil spirits. He shows enormous physical strength, courage and determination in his battles waged against the forces of evil, enduring the challenges thrown at him like a stoic hero. Kathanar once goes to save a child named, Appu, from an evil spirit. The spirit could only be destroyed by giving Kathanar's blood in return. He was ready to sacrifice his life for the child ("Kathanar Visits Appu" 10:49–12:38). This idea of Jesus Christ's blood purifying everything can be drawn from the Biblical verse, "but if we live in the light, as God is in the light, we can share fellowship with each other. Then the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from every sin" (*New Century Version Bible*, John 1.7). In the television serial, when Kathanar

sacrifices his life in order to save the child's life; the evil spirit leaves the child's body only when Kathanar's blood is given in return. Thus, this instance draws a parallel to the Biblical allusion where Jesus Christ's blood would purify others from every sin. Similarly, when his enemies like Chadayan, Durgamma and Vettiyala Veezhala Guru join forces, Kathanar endures severe lashing to save his assistant Kochouseppu, Manga and Lakshmikutty. When he is miraculously saved by the archangel, he transforms into an action hero; he conjures up a wooden stick and beats up Vettiayala Veezhala Guru and Chadayan ("Kathanar Hits Vezhala Guru" 00:10–15:30). Here, Kathanar's transformation into an action hero can be juxtaposed with the image of Jesus Christ whipping the Jews out of the temple, "Jesus made a whip out of cords and forced all of them, both the sheep and cattle, to leave the Temple. He turned over the tables and scattered the money of those who were exchanging it" (*NCV Bible,* John 2.15–17). In this incident, Jesus turns into an action hero; similarly, Kathanar enters into a series of action sequences as he punishes his enemies on the forefront. Kathanar's masculinity is glorified through his courage, endurance and unwavering commitment to the innocent.

The television serial explores other masculinities including Kochousseppu, Kathanar's assistant. Kochousseppu is depicted as a subordinate masculine figure who obeys Kathanar's orders reminiscent of a recurring guru-disciple trope in the horror genre. Kochouseppu's mannerisms and demeanour elicit laughter amidst the audience. He wears white costumes and is a close companion of Kadamattathu Kathanar. While Kathanar is travelling to distant places, he is in charge of the house. Kochouseppu displays a subordinate kind of masculinity; he asks stupid questions and makes a fool out of himself. He also craves power and hopes to be Kathanar's successor.

The male characters in the serial belong to different categories. Most of the upper-caste men, especially the *karanavans* of different *tharavadus,* are depicted as patriarchs.

They control the young within their families and they wield enormous powers. Most of the *Yakshi* stories in the serial are based on this trope of the cruel, dominating *karanavars* harassing lower-caste communities. It is Ittan, Kannapan's uncle, who murders Neeli and her family to protect his honour. Similarly, the cruel *karanavar,* Vadakkanveettil Kelumenon, murders his brother's adopted daughter Thirumala. Next-generation *karanavars* such as Chandukutti Medan and the *karanavar* of Vamanam Tharavadu are portrayed as kind and benevolent, even though they are depicted as patriarchs. When the *Yakshi* destroys Vadakkan Veedu, a power struggle between the *karanavan* and the nephew occurs. The *karanavar,* even in times of crisis, holds on to stringent caste practices. When the young girl of the *tharavadu* is possessed and deaths happen, the nephew is adamant to call Kathanar, but the *karanavar* exercises his authority to demand complete subordination and obedience from his nephew. There is a constant tussle between the nephew and the *karanavan* for supremacy over the affairs of the *tharavadu* and other members. This is emblematic of changing familial values following the reformation acts. But the dominant discourses of television dilute these changes and restore the aristocratic space to the *karanavar* by eliminating the threat of the 'abject', and the protesting nephew finally gives up before the *karanavan*'s authority.

The new generation of nephews are shown as supportive and kind; they are also portrayed as understanding husbands. They embody a complicit masculinity since they do not exert hegemonic masculinity but they benefit from the pattern (Connell 79). Even though, they benefit from the patriarchal system, they believe that it is important to respect women, marriage and family life along with a compromise between partners rather than domination (76). In seasons one to six, the viewer encounters many possessed women and when these women transform into their fierce alter egos, their husbands are shown to be nurturing and caring. In the case of Ambika Thampuratti, Emily, Saramma et al., their

husbands take care of them when possessed. Meek and obedient women transform into dangerous monsters when possessed. Another strong woman character, Durgamma, is depicted as cruel, wicked and manipulative.

The women characters are crafted in such a way that they wait to be rescued by Kadamattathu Kathanar. From season one to six, he is a saviour to the women characters. Starting from Panchali whose voice is restored by Kathanar; he saves the young girl Lakshmikutty from death; he exorcises the evil spirit that entered the body of women characters such as Ambika, Manga and Emily. Similarly, he returns Mythili's long lost son Raman to her; Kathanar returns Kathambari who was abducted by the evil spirits back to her parents; Mariamma and her daughter retrieve the stolen gold with the intervention of Kathanar. Instead of treating the plot to develop the women characters, the serial uses it to promote the heroic masculinity of Kadamatttathu Kathanar.

The television serial diverges from the retelling of the legend in *Aithihyamala*. Numerous plots and sub-plots are incorporated into it since the television serials requires prolonged episodes. The origin story of Kathanar, his childhood, and his custody under the *Malayarayans* are omitted from the serial; Kathanar is presented as a full-fledged priest from the outset itself. Similarly, his rivalry with Kunchamon Potti recurs but with some modifications. A character called Kulamana Potti replaces Kunchamon Potti. Kulamana Potti is a famous magician who is in an affair with Bhanu. She had been excommunicated by the Brahmin community. She accumulates a lot of wealth through gambling. Kulamana Potti give her a magic dice which she could use to beat anyone. Kathanar upends Potti's magic dice through his magical powers. This agitates Potti and he sends an evil spirit to kill Kathanar ("Bhanu's Evil Plan" 00:10–06:15).

The stage for a clash between the two hegemonic masculinities is set here. Potti invites Kathanar to his house but tries to humiliate him. Kulamana Potti is shown as

commanding, aggressive, and violent towards his disciples. He is represented as a powerful Brahmin priest with a ferocious nature. Further, his masculinity as a powerful hegemonic figure is embodied through his body and stature. Reminiscent of the plot in *Aithihyamala*, Kulamana Potti moves the boat to the treetop. Kathanar forces the women of Potti's family to fetch the boat. Finally, Potti has to apologise to Kathanar to put an end to the humiliation. In the television serial, Potti resorts to extreme acts: invoking an evil spirit to destroy Kathanar, refusing help to the Vadakkan family for seeking Kathanar's help, and so on. Thus, Kulamana Potti is depicted as a domineering and aggressive man who seeks power and control. He apologises only when it becomes a question of family honour, recognising that the dishonour brought to the women of his family will also affect his credibility as a magician ("Potti Apologises to Kathanar" 2:17–18:53). Unlike that of the legend and the film, the television serial employs more graphic violence in the clash of these hegemonic masculinities.

Costumes and make-up

The visual cues of Kadamattathu Kathanar included a brown garment, a white belt, and a hood that fell back, along with a pendant with a holy cross on his neck. Kathanar held a magic stick in his hand. The magic stick is like a signature prop that asserts his masculine agency and power within his community and across the region.

The *Yakshis* on the small screen are fair and spotted in white sarees, overdone make-up, loose hair, red-coloured lipstick, etc. As John Fiske observes, "the same merging of the ideological codes of morality, attractiveness, and heroism/villainy, and their condensation into a material social code, can be seen in something as apparently insignificant as lipstick" (12). The *Yakshis* being the perennial symbols of seduction are often depicted as wearing a red lipstick in the serial. The camera typically zooms in for a

close-up of their face, often a tight close-up of the lips with red lipstick follows. The *Yakshis* on the small screen are objectified, designed to titillate male fantasies.

The *Yakshis* are constantly seen wearing white sarees. In her article, "Matriliny to Masculinity: Performing modernity and gender in Malayalam Cinema," Meena T. Pillai notes, "The saree does not have a long history in the soil of Kerala and its valorisation created a past that never existed and, in the process, erased histories when many women of Kerala did not have the right to cover their breasts" (106). An attempt to depict saree as the ideal costume was conversely an attempt to obscure a historical past that saw lower caste women fighting to cover their breasts. The upper-caste men prevented them from covering their upper bodies. The Channar rebellion of 1857 was an attempt by Channar women to revolt against this age-old custom. In her book, *Engendering Individuals: The Language of Re-forming in Early Twentieth Century Keralam*, J. Devika observes the ideal of *kulina* and the 'other' woman, *kulada*, emerges in the light of this historical background. The other woman was seen as a *Veshya* or prostitute capable of delivering artistic, intellectual, and physical pleasure, again for a fee and to certain men. The figure of *Kulina* or the ideal woman also emerges in the context of such constructs (281). In the television serial, Kathanar transforms *Yakshis* like Neeli and Thirumala into asexual mother goddesses. From preferred white sarees, fangs and red lipstick, their costume choices transition into saffron clothes, and rosaries and are presented as meditative. Here, it is Kathanar's masculinity as a celibate priest that results in the conversion of the *Yakshis* into an ascetic costume.

Villainous characters like Chadayan, Durgamma are represented as vile and treacherous with extra makeup so that they appear more wicked. Durgamma wears a red saree; she carries a huge magic stick covered in red; she wears a big, round red *bindi* with a black mark on her forehead; her hair is tied in a tuft on top of her head, and she wears

several beaded ornaments around her arms and neck. Her make-up highlights her cruelty, wickedness, and treachery. Similarly, Chadayan's make-up choices are loud and are typically seen in a red or black dress with loud jewellery comprising of beads and several black and white lines on his forehead that reveal his vile nature.

The upper-caste men in the television serials wear a *melmundu* or upper garment with golden borders or *kasavu*, worn over the shoulders, along with a *mundu* beneath, whereas lower-caste men don't cover their torso. They wore dhotis or *mundu* of a low-cost material. Both men and women of upper-caste communities wore sandalwood paste on their foreheads which indicated their religion. These dominant codes of caste, class and religion were thus disseminated into the popular culture. For example, the character Kulamana Potti wears a red coloured scarf to cover his torso along with a red coloured *dhoti*, further, he is adorned with jewellery such as a chain and earrings with beads; his hair is tied in a tuft and a saffron colour *bindi* adorns his forehead to indicate his upper-caste origins. Also, he has a magic staff adorned with a lion's head on its top. The influential Brahmin priests in the serial such as Mepradan, Kalidasan, Kulaman Potti, Kilimangalam Namboothiri, etc., distinctly wore Hindu religious markers. They wore a red-coloured *melmundu* or the upper garment with the *mundu* or dhoti and different types of jewellery with gold etchings of Hindu gods.

Setting

Many of the plots in the television serial *Kadamattathu Kathanar* are set inside upper-caste mansions called *tharavadu*. These mansions became the focal point where tradition met with the interstices of modernity. The remnants of the matrilineal past crumbled between 1896 and 1976, when a series of legislations diluted the matrilineal system and reformed the dynamics behind the transfer of ownership, inheritance of property and the legal guardianship of children (Jeffrey 43-44). It began with the

enactment of the Madras Marumakkathayam Act 1933. In her book, *There Comes Papa: Colonialism and the Transformation of Matriliny in Kerala, Malabar c. 1850*-1940, G. Arunima notes, "the abolition of the *tharavadu* and the joint family system was the product of combined efforts of government policy, legislation, caste movements and tenancy activity in the first three decades of the twentieth century (189)." As a result, the joint family system was no more the norm and the mantle of power fell from the hands of the *karanavan*. Modernity embraced monogamy but familial spaces continued to breed gender inequality and patriarchal power structures were intact.

Film and television culture veered towards glorifying a hegemonic past through caste, class and religious markers which intensified the assertion of hegemonic masculinity and feudal patriarchy by eschewing the matrilineal past. This nostalgia for the feudal past has resulted in setting most of the narratives inside the feudal mansions called *tharavadu.* The *tharavadu* is portrayed as an ideal setting for Kadamattathu Kathanar to exert his masculinity. He travels through different places and reaches the ancestral home and bungalows to exorcise the evil spirits. Kathanar restores 'peace and order' in the *tharavadus* through the performance of his magic. The television discourse in Kerala has always tried to evoke nostalgia for a feudal past in the way it represented aristocratic spaces in society.

The forest also acts as a site for adventure and exploration. Kadamattathu Kathanar's supernatural powers, magic and the chasing of evil spirits occur within the forest. Night, moon, blood, forest path etc., appear as recurring motifs to induce horror and fantasy. The dark blue colour tone employed in the serial, especially in the settings inside the forest indicates mystery, enchantment and a sense of foreboding. The forest becomes a key setting for expressing Kathanar's strength, bravery and resilience as he overpowers most of the evil spirits within the forest.

Music

The television serial *Kadamttathu Kathanar* belongs to the horror genre. A lot of suspenseful music is employed throughout the serial. The title song of the serial became an instant hit with Malayalam viewers. The song "Manthrikan Mahamanthrikan, Keerthithan Sahayathrikan, Kadamattathu Kathanar, Kathanar" was penned by Chunakkara Ramankutty and was composed by M.G Radhakrishnan. The title song was ample enough to hype up the thriller elements in the serial. It recreated CGI versions of *Chathan* or goblins, *Madan*, *Marutha*, *Yakshi*, etc., the supernatural beings familiar to Keralaites. It was one of a kind as it succeeded in inducing collective fear among the Malayali audience. The title song was used throughout the serial to glorify the masculinity of Kathanar and his heroic endeavors. Whenever Kathanar overpowers a *Yakshi*, performs a magical act or acts as a saviour to humankind, the title song is played in the background as the hero walks in slow-motion flaunting his prowess.

The melodramatic scenes in the serial are often accompanied by a sentimental background score. When Kadamattathu Kathanar undergoes an emotional dilemma or whenever there is a crisis to his hegemonic masculinity like when his enemies torture him, his emotional turmoil is depicted through the sentimental background score. Similarly, when the villagers accuse and hold Kathanar for the death of a young man called Thoma, emotionally distraught, he leans on a pillar and cries ("Chacko Chettan is Manipulated" (07:44–15:07). This emotional sequence is accompanied by a sentimental background score. Thus, the television serial employs sentimental music to portray a crisis in masculine performance and depict the emotional dilemma of Kadamattathu Kathanar. In these moments, he is an ordinary man drawn from everyday life rather than a hero.

Lighting

The serial belongs to the horror genre and most of the events take place at night. To signify the eerie mood, low-key lighting is used. Kathanar overpowers most of the spirits inside the forest, where frontal lighting is used to highlight his face and the villain/villainess's face is shown amidst a spooky setting. High-key lighting is employed in the serial only when the tone and mood of the scenes do not look to induce horror.

Editing

Television serials are episodic and they follow continuity editing. According to John Fiske, "the heroes are given more time (72 secs) than the villains (49), and more shots (10 as against 7), though both have an average shot length of 7 seconds. It is remarkable how consistent this is across different modes of television" (8). The screen space allotted to the hero is much more than that of the villains. In *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, the entire sequence of actions follows his heroic acts as opposed to the plotting of the villains. The hero, Kathanar, is introduced in the fifth episode. Till then, suspense is built in such a way that the hero is introduced to solve the crisis at the right place, at the right time.

The serial employs slow-motion techniques in plenty to celebrate his victories. From season one to season six, as Kadamattathu Kathanar conquers his enemies to save humankind, his heroism is exalted through slow-motion scenes along with the scintillating title track in the background. Thus, Kadamattathu Kathanar is represented as a hegemonic masculine figure who exerts enormous power over his fellow men and women.

Actions and Dialogue

Kadamattathu Kathanar is oriented towards the performance of magic to a large extent. As Frances Timbers observes, "masculine desire for power and control could be acted out via the practice of magic" (12). It is through the performance of magic that Kathanar asserts his hegemonic masculinity in society. He wields control over the spirits,

both male and female and flaunts his dominance over them (Timbers 12). Earlier, it was considered that the performance of magic would elevate a man's honour and prestige within his community (12). Kathanar's magic has been instrumental in his elevation as a holy father. John Fiske observes that man's endless performance and affinity for action are attempts to prove his worth, which are characteristic traits of capitalism (209). He points out that masculinity is "constructed as an agent of capitalism," which makes men strive for achievement and successful performance (209). Kathanar acts like a saviour and performs miracles to help humankind. He helps an old woman and feeds her by conjuring up rice. He advises, preaches and helps not only upper-caste men but also men from the marginalised sections of the society. He is also a healer with knowledge of medicine. He has healing powers for various illnesses, including madness. He helps women characters such as Panchali of Vamanam *tharavad* and Parvathi of Chandanamnagalam to regain their voice, who lost their voice to a *Yakshi's* curse. Similarly, he cures the illness of Krishnan, his friend's wife and children. Throughout the serial, masculinity is encountered in the mould of a capitalist construct as Kathanar remains consistent in playing out his hegemonic masculine traits.

The charged language of invocation used in the serial to subjugate the evil spirits is a significant part of his performance. Walter J. Ong observes "certain practices are index of the amount of residual primary orality in a given culture. . . they were never first language for any individual, were controlled by writing, were spoken by males only, and were spoken only by those who could write them and who indeed, have learned them initially by the use of writing" (111). These powerful incantations were in Sanskrit, an exclusive domain of the Brahmins. In the television serial, these incantations were performed at the rituals to exorcise evil spirits such as *Yakshi's* or they were directed at controlling the female bodies as an attempt to appease "hegemonic patriarchal forces"

(Jose 116). From season one to season six, the ritual ceremonies performed by the sorcerers are shown in detail. Several violent acts like driving an iron nail into the head of a *Yakshi* or issuing threats of immolation are examples of attempts to weaken her resistance and rebellion against the patriarchal structures. In the initial episode, the Brahmin priest Mepradan (enacted by actor Narendra Prasad), performs a ritual where he makes a small female idol out of mud, symbolic of the *Yakshi*, and a midrib is pierced into the idol ("Thirumeni Captures the Demon" 3:23–11:36). Similarly, Kathanar drives an iron nail into the head of Kaliyankattu Neeli and he also overpowers several other evil spirits by threatening them with tragic consequences. He performs magic with the help of his magic stick. VFX and special effects are used to induce believability in spectators. Whenever he does magic, a holy light is seen emanating from the magic stick, which blinds or thwarts the moves of his opponents. When Kathanar tries to overpower the ferocious spirit of Gauri, yet another *Yakshi*, she is reluctant to obey him at first as she wants to continue with her revenge. Kathanar is furious about her disobedience and warns her that her disobedience could take her to the netherworld. Kathanar conjures up a holy cross that radiates light and enters into her body. She is thrown into the ground while Kathanar is elevated using a low-angle shot that signifies his domination over her ("Kathanar Versus Gauri" 4:58–10:38). She gives up, begs for forgiveness and Kathanar promptly transforms her into an old woman. A lot of action sequences are employed as he fights with the *Yakshi*. Kathanar's language is violent and often misogynist when he tries to overpower *Yakshis* such as Kaliyankattu Neeli and others. He uses graphically violent language when pitted against the 'abject' or the other. He uses a vocabulary that seeks complete obedience from the *Yakshis*. He frequently uses words like obedience, control, settle, etc., to tame the *Yakshis* and expects complete control over them.

Camera work and elevation of Masculinity

The camera angles in relation to the subject and away from it are considered instrumental in the elevation of a hero. John Fiske observes that television employs "normal camera" distance ranging from "mid-shot to close-up," which helps the audience to easily identify with the characters (12). He also explains the three conventionally used camera shots in television sets such as long shots, close-ups, and a range of medium-long and medium close-ups in between (Fiske 162). These three shots are widely used in Kadamattathu Kathanar to capture emotions and exchanges of dialogues that occur between characters. In several scenes, the close-up of Kathanar's eyes and his gaze is captured. The extreme close-up shots of his eyes show his control over the monsters such as *Yakshis* and other evil spirits. Similarly, "the villain/villainess are shown in extreme close-ups as a codified way of representing villainy" (Fiske 12). In *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, the evil characters from the netherworld such as Chadayan and Durgamma are shown in extreme close-up to depict their vile and treacherous designs. Similarly, the *Yakshis* wicked and ferocious laughter is shown in extreme close-ups to represent her villainy. When Kathanar overpowers an evil spirit, the camera elevates his dominance over the opponent through a low-angle shot. On the other hand, when he is under threat or when his enemies overpower him, he is presented at a high- angle shot to depict his inferior position. When Kadamattathu Kathanar gets introduced in the fifth episode, a low-angle shot of the crucified Christ image is shown alongside ("Neeli Kills Meprad Thirumeni" 00:54–1:08). The camera introduces the hero through a close-up as he knees in front of the Christ figure. The audience is trained to look at Kathanar in a certain way when his image is juxtaposed with Christ. The *mise-en-scene* is dotted by white crosses and lit candles. These images immediately help the audience to see Kathanar in a reverential light just as Christ, a universal epitome of sacrifice.

Audience Response

The dominant codes of television constantly reinforce iconographies, religious symbols, superstitions, etc., from the Hindu tradition. As C.R. Wright observes, "[I]n the hypodermic needle model; each audience member in the mass audience is personally and directly 'stuck' by the medium's message" (79). The hypodermic needle model refers to the transfer of dominant ideology into the audience. The performance of 'hegemonic masculinity' exemplified in driving the iron nail onto a woman's body and performing extreme violence to 'tame' her in conjunction with a wildly successful hero played up the hegemonic masculinity in action. Stuart Hall found television messages to be polysemic in line with Umberto Eco's argument that since "the modern 'mass' media addresses the heterogeneous audiences, an audience with diverse cultural backgrounds, aberrant decoding of the message is, therefore, normal and only to be expected" (qtd. in McGuigan 131). A heterogeneous audience and their method of decoding a message has led to Hall's 'Preferred reading theory' which proposes that the dominant reading of a text aligned with the audiences from the privileged classes who subscribed to a dominant ideology; the preferred meanings most often tend to agree with the dominant ideology. Several other viewers find themselves in a position of disagreement with the prevalent ideology (124). There are certain viewers who positions themselves in a mediatory position, often they align with the dominant ideology; at times they alter it to fulfil their own purpose (Hall 126).

In *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, there is continuous dissemination of dominant ideological codes, especially of rituals, beliefs, iconography and *mise-en-scenes* drawing from the upper-caste Hindu sensibility. This limits audience engagement to preferred readings at the cost of alternate readings. At first, people used to visit Hindu sorcerers for help and when they did not succeed in annihilating the evil forces, they approached Kadamattathu Kathanar. In the television serial, *Kadamttathu Kathanar*, it is possible to

notice a camaraderie between Brahmin priests and the Syrian Christian priest, Kadamattathu Kathanar. He constantly seeks their input and support to overpower the evil spirits. From season one to season six, religious shamans like Kalidasan, Keezhettu Namboothiri and Killimangalam Namboothiri, et al., are adept magicians who are portrayed as friendly adversaries of Kathanar. Even though the narrative is about Kathanar's victories, he needs the help of Brahmin adversaries to assert his credibility. They complement each other and use their agency as powerful men. For instance, Kathanar prepares for a final battle with the devil after Lucifer disguises himself as Kadamattathu Kathanar and tricks the villagers. The villagers lose their trust in Kathanar. At the time, out of nowhere, an upper-caste Brahmin priest—Bhattathiri appears, and not only reinforces the villagers' faith in Kathanar but also paves the way for his victory. It is revealed in the end that it was none other than Lord Muruka himself who had come to Kathanar's aid ("Kathanar Fights Lucifer" 2:12–13:13). There is an attempt to reinvigorate the faith in a dominant religion as well as to cater to a large audience. Since, the serial incorporated elements from both the Hindu and the Christian tradition, this could be seen as a marketing strategy to draw the audience from both religions.

It was a novel attempt at exploring the horror genre based on folklore and *Aithihyamala*. The collective fear and fantasy inspired by the abject, simultaneously creating desire and repulsion, was explored in detail. Special effects and VFX were for the first time employed on a large scale on Malayalam television. The General Manager of Asianet, Anto Puthiry points out, "The TVR for the four weeks (between 07th Mar to 03rd April 2004) for TG C&S 4+years is 17.53" - during the inaugural run of this serial. Regarding the viewership, he notes:

> The newly launched daily Serial Kadamattathu Kathanar is a great success, it has gathered excellent viewership in all age groups and has been on top order in week

> after week ratings since its launch. Kadamattathu Kathanar is horror based serial with a gripping story line. This serial has been accepted by all TGS (male, female and kids) since day one, as it is the first time ever in Malayalam small screen industry where there is so much of graphics and animation incorporated. A lot of care is being taken to make this serial more and more exciting so the performance keeps growing. ("Asianet successfully experiments with horror genre")

The serial was a novel attempt to draw on animation technology and graphics but projected onto a familiar story. People from all age groups, including women and children, began to watch it. The serial targeted children as its major audience. Kathanar was fond of children. In several seasons, he made friends with kids such as Lakshmikutty, Raman, Aleena, et al. At the end of season six, he decides to leave the village of Kadamattom, since the villagers had begun to hate him under the influence of Lucifer. When the villagers realise their mistake, they plead with him but he doesn't heed their request. On the other hand, when the children from the village request him to stay back, he pauses and reconsiders ("Kathanar Decides To Leave" 7:49 –8:09). As per the marketing strategies of the television serial, the super-hero image of Kadamattathu Kathanar can be seen as he flies to chase Kaliyankattu Neeli ("Neeli Attacks Panchali" 02:30-10:45). This elevation of the indigenous hero to a superhero might be an attempt to attract global viewership. The popularity of the serial was still intact when it was re-telecasted on Asianet Plus in 2016, a subsidiary channel of Asianet, and it was later telecasted on Disney Hotstar. The commercial formulas of the serial have marketed on nostalgia, as well as the collective desires and fantasies of the Malayali audience through the re-representation of the legend, *Kadamatttahu Kathanar*, in new forms fit for the new mediums.

Problematic Representation of Masculinity in the serial *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and its sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan*

The legend of the brigand Kayamkulam Kochunni which became all the more popular through its retelling in *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Sankunni was further celebrated in films and television serials. The serial was telecasted on Surya TV from 2004 to 2007. It was written by Anil G.S., directed by P.C. Venugopal, and produced by Seagull Communications. It unveiled the story of the brigand, Kayamkulam Kochunni in more than 150 episodes. The serial enthralled family audiences and enchanted a generation of viewers. A sequel of the serial entitled *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* was written for television by the same writer Anil G.S and was directed by M. Padmakumar. It was broadcast in the Sun NXT App from 12 December 2016 to 16 June 2017, but after a few episodes its popularity waned. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, some of the episodes from *Kayamkulam Kochunni* were made available on YouTube.

In the initial episodes, the titular character of Kayamkulam Kochunni was played by actor Shammi Thilakan from the Malayalam film industry. Later, the character of Kayamkulam Kochunni's teenage years was played by an actor called Manikuttan. His character was instantly celebrated and this made his entry into the big screen. Later in the final episodes, Kochunni's character was played by actor G. Prakash. The titular character in the sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* was played by Askar Ameer, who played the role of Sulthan, Kochunni's son who takes the same path as his father—a thief with an egalitarian vision. All these actors performing the role of Kayamkulam Kochunni were well-built, had a big moustache, tall stature and carried a pocket knife. The physicality of the masculine hero shows itself through his efficiency in the martial arts performance *kalarippayattu*. When they enact the role of a brigand such as Kayamkulam Kochunni, their bodies act as a tool to perform action sequences. They depict an enormous ability to engage in combat and overcome physical challenges.

Even though many actors played Kochunni's role, the audience didn't have difficulty identifying with them as Malayali viewers are well-versed in Kochunni's story and they looked forward to the recreation of the outlaw hero with more action sequences. The television serial depicted the transformation of Kochunni into a thief by the upper-caste feudal lords. They harassed and tortured him for no fault of his own and ostracised his family. This constant 'othering' and denigration brings out the best and worst in him.

The success behind the television serial *Kayamkulam Kochunni* was his portrayal as an outlaw hero. Also, the serial elevated his masculinity to a heroic status along with a cultural connection imbued with nostalgia. The television adaptation of Kayamkulam Kochunni branded Kochunni as the 'other' based on his Muslim identity. Shahin Gerami observes that masculine identities in "Muslim cultures have a double life," these "gender identities have indigenous faces and external stereotypes" (449). He observes that while the former is a result of "fundamentalist resistance movements" and media combined, "the latter are the gender identities of real men formed across boundaries of nationality, ethnicity, and class" (452). The discourse of 'othering' in the history of Kerala as well as at the national level needs to be examined further. This history of 'abjectification' has led to the Mappila/Muslim masculinities being stereotypically represented as violent, fanatic and rebellious.

With the rise of militant Hindu revivalism on the national stage, Muslims are stereotyped as invaders or a threat to the Hindu majority. As M.T. Ansari observes, "colonial representations of the "fanatic" involve a two-fold reduction: a reduction to religion as well as a reduction of religion" (88). He notes that Muslim masculinities are often reduced to the status of 'fanatics' or religious fundamentalists (62). The growing discontent against Muslim masculinities in the nationalist discourse, as observed by Muhammadali P. Kasim, resulted in their depiction as "foreign, violent, fanatical,

intolerant, untrustworthy, and anti-national that should only be destroyed" (544). He notes that the colonial narrative of the dangerous sexuality of Muslim men heralded the formation of "militant Hindu masculinity" to safeguard the nation and its women from the Muslim invaders (545). However, the discourse of the Muslim terrorists intensified nationally in the aftermath of the Mumbai terror attacks and at the global level after 9/11.

In the television serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, the problematic representation of an indigenous hero rebelling against the hegemonic masculine forces of feudalism and colonialism is drawn from the remnants of history and nostalgia for a violent past dating back to the Malabar rebellion of 1921. According to Muhammadali P. Kasim, "an important counterinsurgency tactic of the British toward these rebellious outcomes was depicting them as excessively masculine" (546). A gory and violent past has influenced the construction of a rebellious masculine hero like Kochunni. As Ansari asserts there were several attempts by the colonial government that thrust 'fanatic', barbaric', and 'ignorant' upon Muslims (21). The underlying politics of religion that cast them as the 'other' is intertwined with the oppressive feudal system and colonial rule. This influences the representation of a masculine 'hero' like Kochunni being portrayed as rebellious, violent and challenging oppressive structures of feudalism and colonialism.

When the events in the life of the indigenous hero unfurled on the television screen, this evoked a sense of nostalgia in the audience. The everyday struggles of Kochunni and his family, being tortured by the feudal lords and *naduvazhis,* lead to his emergence as a rebellious masculine figure who tries to help the poor in every way. Kochunni's father was a thief and this was immediately prefixed to his identity. Therefore, his family was considered as an outcast by the feudal lords of the *tharavadu*. The society expected Kochunni to turn out to be nothing more than a thief. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that in a caste-based society reeling from the remnants of an oppressive history.

The forest, Vavvakavu was one of the major settings in the serial where Kochunni depicted his acts of heroism and resistance against oppression. His daring acts of looting the rich and distributing the wealth to the poor sections of society occurred here. It is also a place where the wildness can be associated with the outlaw trope of Kochunni, where his courage, strength and bravery are constantly tested. The title song of *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, "Kochunni, Kochunni, Kayamkulam Kochunni" was popular even today. The title song was extremely popular with children and adults alike. In the middle of action sequences or during Kochunni's victorious moments, the song could be heard in the background. The title song created a sense of power and dominance for the hero. Further, the lyrics and the music contributed to the elevation of the masculinity of an indigenous hero.

The television serial was celebrated in Kerala's popular culture because it was action-oriented. It involved numerous choreographed stunt sequences where Kochunni and his friends fought a feudal patriarchal system. He was considered a threat to society—his assertion of masculinity and his vision for an egalitarian society was utopian and anti-establishment. The dialogues elevate the hypermasculine performance of Kochunni. They are structured in such a way as to provide an idea of what is expected from a man. For example, dialogues such as "A man dies only one death as per Padachon's (God) will" (my trans.; "Episode 2" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 16:12–15). Another statement about Kochunni that elevates his masculinity is "he is a man with a strong heart and enormous physical power" (my trans.; "Episode 3" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 24:15–25:32). These dialogues lay out societal expectations of how a man should play out his gender. The television serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, suggests that society is behind the creation of every brigand. The stereotype of branding Muslims either as 'good' or 'bad' is broken here and he is depicted as a 'subaltern hero'.

The fictional world of Kayamkulam Kochunni on the television screen can be traced back to his identity as an 'abject' from the fringes. Later, he rises to a heroic status. The television discourse depicts the masculine narrative with "a single hero, tightly knit hero pair or hero team" (217). The serial is made up of characters like Mulamoottil Adima, Kakkapulli Sankaran, Kochupilla, et al. who fought along with Kochunni against an oppressive feudal system. The serial celebrates male camaraderie. As Kenneth MacKinnon observes, "the world of heroes is often homosocial, involving close contact with and dependence on men alone" (38). Kochunni was saved by Mulamoottil Adima from a human sacrifice. Brigands like Ithikkara Pakki, Kaduvacherry Bava, Nooru, et al., are among his associates and they are depicted as outlaws. Among them, Mulamoottil Adima who is an accomplice is himself a subaltern hero. He fought against the colonial invaders. The world of these heroes is filled with action and fight sequences and constant performance of masculinity through their hyper-masculine behaviour. Kochunni and his accomplices looted from the feudal lords and redistributed the wealth to the poor since the feudal lords of Kerala exploited the tenants.

Most characters such as Kochunni and his friends in the serial wear traditional Muslim dress. In television serials, "Muslim men invariably appear as rural and uncouth: dressed in an ankle-length checked lungis (rough cotton waist-cloths) held up by wide belts, wearing a vest and skullcap over a shaven head and a beard and talking in rough Malayalam" (qtd. in F. Osella and C. Osella 13). Filippa Osella and Caroline Osella note that this attire, with *lungi* and vest, along with a shaved head was an attempt to depict the Muslims in Kerala as 'backward others' (13). Another factor that was unique to their style was wearing the *mundu* to the left, unlike men from the Hindu and Christian communities. In *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, Kochunni and his friends adhere to this dress code along with a black amulet on his neck and his left hand. Kochunni is depicted as a well-built, masculine

young man with a big moustache. The make-up is done in such a way as to make Kochunni look like a rogue hero. In addition to this, he keeps a knife that plays up his formidable masculinity. The knife can be seen as a prop that symbolises power, authority and combat; it also contributes to his militant challenge to the upper strata of society. His accomplices like Mulamoottil Adima and Ithikkara Pakki also look rustic in their make-up.

Before a united Kerala came into existence, Kerala was divided into numerous small *rajyams* under the *naaduvazhi* system and these provinces were constantly competing with each other for power. As a result, certain feudal lords wielded more power than small kings and vice versa (Namboothiripad 104). The upper-caste members of the society had control over large portions of the total land. This system of land distribution was called *janmi-kudiyan sampradaym* or *janmam-kanam-maryadai*.

The serial gives an insight into the hegemonic masculinity that existed before united Kerala came into being. The *janmis* or the landlords wielded enormous power and influence over the lives of the common people who toiled on their land as tenants or labourers. In the serial, the feudal lords such as Keshava Kuruppu, Bhargava Pilla, Tahasildar Kunju Panicker et al., showed traits such as dominance, control and authority over the life of other men and women around them. Unlike that of Europe, the customary birthright over the land called *janmam* rights was perceived differently in Kerala. The *janmis* created several tenures under *verumpattom* (a lease under which the tenant could be evicted from the land by the *janmi* at any point of time), which included *kanapattom*, a provision given by a *janmi* to a *kudiyan* (labourer) in relation to a *janmam* land after the *janmi* receives a sum as a loan, known as *kanam*. The *kudiyan* is required to pay the *janmi* a rent or *pattom*. With this *janmis* started levying heavy taxes and forcing many *kudiyans* to give up their property. The tenants had to provide with a disproportionate portion of

their hard-earned labour to *janmis* (160). These land rights gave enormous power to the feudal lords to exert their power and dominance over the marginalised sections of the society.

The serial opens with a feudal lord being looted when the feudal lord and his accomplices are en route to submit the fealty they owed to the Travancore king. His fealty totalled a hundred and one sovereigns (*ponpanam*). The feudal lord, Bhargava Pilla boasts that there is no other family in Kayamkulam who is of greater service to the king. This shows Kerala's feudal past, where wealth was accumulated by the upper echelons of society, especially the Kings, the Brahmins and the Nairs.

The land in the erstwhile Travancore was under the control of the king. During King Marthandavarma's reign, the entire land was brought under the control of his administration, and land taxes were being levied. The king identified himself as a devotee of Lord Padmanabha and surrendered his kingdom to the lord. The entire assets of Travancore were seen as *Pandarapattaom* that belonged to the treasury or offertory of the deity, Sree Padmanabha. The rest of the land was under the control of the *janmis*, mostly upper-caste Brahmins (Namboothiripad 68). Therefore, the rebels, like Kochunni constantly questioned the authority of the feudal lords and asserted their masculinity to hand over the wealth from the lords to the poor people. In the opening scene, while Bharagava Pilla talks about his devotion to the king from his private boat, he sees a floating pot moving in the direction of his boat. A close-up of the pot is revealed to show the head beneath it. The man beneath it suddenly jumps on the boat and grabs the lord. His servants desert him and they jump into the lake in panic ("Episode 1" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 1:20–4:15). Here, the feudal lord Bhargava Pilla is depicted as dominant, assertive and can be seen as commanding to his servants. On the contrary, the rebellious spirit of the hero is highlighted by the background score of the title song playing in the

background. This scene does not reveal Kochunni's face, only his demeanour and his grabbing of the box containing hundred and one gold coins are shown.

The rebellious masculinity of Kayamakulam Kochunni is embodied through his defiance against oppressive forces, for his fearless and daring acts and also for his resistance and rebellion against unjust authority. The ominous night that leads to Kochunni's arrest reveals that no one could fight against a rebellious spirit like Kochunni and he could be arrested only through treachery. The eventful night is characterised by thunder and lightning and a full body shot of Kochunni is shown, with the camera zooming to reveal his legs, his knife and his attire. He is shown somersaulting since he is adept at martial arts and this scene highlights his body as powerful and couldn't be defeated using force. He enters Kochupillai's house. His face is revealed in a tight close-up, with a big moustache and stubble hair. Kochunni asks Kochupillai, "Are there no courageous men in Diwan's kingdom to fight with him?" (my trans.; "Episode 2" *Kayamakulam Kochunni* 2:45–47). Kochunni assures his friend that his children will be rescued. But, Kochupilla is misguided by another member who was thrown out of their gang, Kaduvacherry Bava. Kochunni is drugged by Kochupilla and he is tied to the bed. Soon, he becomes unconscious and he is arrested. Thus, this scene reveals that the rebellious spirit of Kochunni could only be tamed using treachery and betrayal.

Kochunni is guided by his own sense of ethics and moral codes. While he is produced before Hajoor Kecheri or the court under the Travancore King Ayilyom Thirunal, he pleads guilty and confesses to committing crimes like burning the vault of the feudal lords. He notes that it was his responsibility to distribute the assets in this world to the poor and the needy from the hands of those who hoard wealth; he has seen the poor children crying out of hunger. As Graham Seal observes, the outlaw trope occurs, "whenever and wherever significant groups of people believe themselves to be oppressed

and unfairly treated, especially to the benefit of another such group or groups, the many variations of Robin Hood are likely to continue rising up and striking back" (165). Kochunni is not afraid of the death sentence and he proudly asserts, "brave men die only once" (my trans.; "Episode 2" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 6:15–6:17). The hero is depicted as fearless even in the face of a death sentence. Here the elevation of Kochunni's masculinity as a rebellious hero who acts as a champion of the downtrodden and the marginalised sections of society is celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala.

Kochunni stays in prison and he reminisces. He thinks about his wife and his son. A policeman tries to help him escape from the prison as Kochunni was like a saviour to his family. Since Kochunni is guided by his own sense of ethics and moral codes he is reluctant about fleeing the prison because if he escapes, the policeman would be punished by the authorities. He remains in prison, lost in memories. The camera elevates his character through a low-angle shot while glimpses of his past are shown along with a voice-over. The voice-over goes, "[I]t is about a historical truth beyond the myths and legends. It is fascinating how a thief found a place in a region's history instead of the kings and *naduvazhis*. One needs to retrace the past to get to the bottom of this" (my trans.; "Episode 2" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 3:52–54). The serial employs the technique of flashbacks to reveal Kochunni's childhood and how he emerged into a rebellious hero.

Kayamkulam Kochunni's childhood is depicted as traumatic since he was constantly ostracised by the rest of society because of his identity as a thief's son. His teenage years were spent inside a *tharavadu* called Valiyaveetil Tharavadu, where he worked as a servant. Here Kochunni encounters Shankaru, the nephew in the *tharavdu*. He torments Kochunni, and constantly reminds him of his identity as an 'other' in society. Shankaru displays toxic masculine traits such as aggression, dominance and violence. He expresses an extremely violent attitude towards his cousin, Narayani, and attacks her on

every occasion when he finds her alone. He even tries to kill Kochunni by plotting to drown him. But Kochunni regains consciousness and beats him. There are a lot of fight sequences where the rebellious masculinity of Kochunni is out on full display. Shankaru hates Kochunni because he suspects that his cousin, Narayani is in love with Kochunni. He wants to marry her and take control of the *tharavadu* and ancillary properties after the death of his uncle. Finally, Shankaru tricks Kochunni; he steals a golden flute from a Krishna temple and places it in Kochunni's backpack. Kochunni is thought to be the robber by the Tahasildar and the police. He is brutally whipped, stoned and attacked by the people of Evoor ("Episode 11" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 02:50–03:49). In the television serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, this incident is presented as a turning point in Kochunni's life. He, along with his family, is ostracised by the upper castes of the neighbourhood. He is labelled as the thief's son and his religious identity has been a cause for further isolation, which fuels his rebellious spirit to protest against the constant abjection in society.

Keshavan Nair, Narayani's father, is a feudal lord. He is the *karanavar* of the Valiyaveettil *tharavadu*. Kochunni is employed in his shop. He dominates other inhabitants in the *tharavadu*, especially his wife and daughter. He is the decisionmaker of his household, embodying a patriarch of feudal times. When he suspects a love affair between Narayani and Kochunni, he slaps his daughter for proposing to marry a man from the Muslim community. The honour of the *tharavadu* seems to intertwine with patriarchal prescriptions of womanly virtues like obedience and chastity. He dismisses Kochunni after retrieving the golden flute that belonged to the temple from his backpack. Keshavan Nair enjoys the authority to scold his nephew, Shankaru. But, oftentimes, he fails to do so. He acts blind to Shankaru's wickedness but banishes Kochunni from his household.

Keshavan Nair is tall and well-built and his hair is tied in a tuft – a mark of his upper-caste origins. He does not indulge in physical activities even for self-defense. It is Kochunni who protects him in crisis. Kochunni saves him from a thief looking to get away with his money bag. Keshavan Nair encourages his masculine traits with compliments such as: "[H]e thrashed the thief. He is a man with enormous mental and physical strength" (my trans.; "Episode 3" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 24:15–25:15). A constant affirmation of his hypermasculine performance is facilitated by society even as they loathe his Muslim identity.

Keshavan Nair uses Kochunni's physical strength for his own protection. But when he finds out that Kochunni has been going to the *Kalari* behind his back and that he trespassed into his house to take jaggery, he becomes agitated and proceeds to dismiss him. His hatred towards Kochunni intensifies upon finding out that his daughter, Narayani, has fallen in love with him. He punishes Kochunni and sends him away to save the honour of his *tharavadu*. Also, his double standards come to the fore as he wants Kochunni only for protection not for any deeper association beyond utilising his skills and services. Keshavan Nair feels insecure when Kochunni goes to learn in the *Kalari*. He fears that one day Kochunni might turn against him. Thus, Keshavan Nair shows hegemonic masculine traits as he acts as a patriarch who dominates other members of the *tharavadu*, particularly his daughter Narayani and other men such as Kochunni and Shankaru.

Kochunni is taught *Kalaripayattu* by Ponnani Thangal Gurukkal. Thangals are a privileged group among the Muslims of Kerala; they are thought to be direct descendants of Prophet Muhammed (Kasim 8). Thangal was invited to stay in a *tharavadu* and to teach *Kalari* to the young men of the locality. It is a unique martial art form of Kerala that celebrates martial arts heroes and their masculine bodies. Television serials, often valorise

the martial art performance to stir up the nostalgia of a collective Malayali audience. Thangal's role is performed by Captain Raju. He is tall and well-built and his character as Thangal displays enormous physical strength and toughness. Kochunni wants to learn *Kalari* but Thangal refuses to teach him for being Perumkannu's (a thief's) son. But Kochunni secretly observes Thangal's training from a treetop. The camera tracks Kocunni's expressions in a low-angle shot. But he is soon found out by other students. Thangal insists he gets down and asks him to perform what he has learned. Thangal is mesmerised by Kochunni's phenomenal display of different techniques. He praises Kochunni, "You are a real man. Upon padachon (God), I didn't expect you to perform like this" (my trans.; "Episode 8" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 8:32–8:34). Throughout the serial, Kochunni is appreciated by other characters for displaying hypermasculine traits. On the other hand, Kochunni is mocked by one of the disciples of Thangal called Ramankutty. He detests Kochunni's foray into *Kalari*, a fight erupts between them that ends with Kochunni threatening Ramankutty at knifepoint that he studied *Kalari* in order to teach a lesson to the feudal lords and their sons ("Episode 8 *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 10:56–11:30). The propensity for violence as displayed in the act of taking out the knife is part of the colonial construction of Mappilas as 'fanatic' and 'violent'. Also, he continues his act of violence when he burns Karthikappilli Tahasildar's cellar and steals the rice sacks and re-distributes the loot among the poor ("Episode 12" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 2:28–5:11). Kochunni's atrocities begin from there. His friends such as Kochupilla, Mulamoottil Adima, Kakkappulli Sankaran etc., join his egalitarian mission. Kochunni and his gang rebel against the feudal and colonial masters throughout. Their hypermasculine performances are directed at the oppressive system that denigrates the poor.

The serial only superfluously explores the female characters - Kochunni's wife, his sister, or his mother. They don't have independent identities but rather act as stereotypical

characters fulfilling the roles of a ‘sacrificing’ mother, a ‘dutiful’ wife, a ‘suffering’ daughter, and an ‘obedient’ sister (Usha 12). All these tropes of female stereotypes appear in the serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni*. Kochunni’s mother is depicted as a symbol of suffering and is constantly addressed as robber Perumkannu’s wife; the sister is very fond of her brother and supports him in his fight against the feudal lords. Similarly, Kochunni’s wife dutifully obeys him and prays for him. She is depicted as an overtly sentimental character. When the news spreads about Kochunni’s arrest, she constantly worries about him and prays for his safety. She weeps silently out of fear since she suspects that Kochu Pilla’s, (one of the close accomplices of Kochunni) arrest might soon lead to Kochunni’s captivity by the authorities as well (“Episode 1” *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 13:58–14:39). As Usha V.T. observes, the central women characters are “very much seen but not heard,” and if they are positioned as good characters within the story, “they suffer all along in silence” (13). Often, women are used as tools to project patriarchal ideas of honour and chastity. They are constantly visible on screen but sidelined to support the hero. Often women characters have to endure violence from the villains, which makes way for the male lead to brandish his physical prowess as he heroically takes the helpless woman under his wings.

The serial depicts the plight of the women characters such as Narayani, who is constantly tortured by her cousin Shanakru; Kochunni’s mother and his sister who is thrown out of the house by a man named Chathan. Also, Kochunni’s identity as a rebellious hero is further validated through his daring acts of saving Narayani from drowning. In all these cases, Kochunni acts as a saviour, he fights against these men and protects the women folk. Irrespective of whether the productions are from Hollywood or India, the stereotypical notions of women continue to be prevalent in popular culture; equally prevalent within Kerala’s ‘educated’, ‘privileged’, and ‘socially conscious’

citizens (16). When Narayani confesses her love to Kochunni, he reminds her of his Muslim identity. He says, "a *thampuratti* (a young woman from the royal household) from the Valiyaveettil *tharavadu* shouldn't fall in love with a *metha cherukkan* (a derogatory term used to describe Muslim men)" (my trans.; "Episode 6" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 19:09–20:16). Usha V.T. notes that the agency of women in television serials occupied a marginalised position since "of course, no woman is consulted with regard to her opinion in the matter, for she is not expected to have an individual opinion, as different from the commonly accepted one (the male-centric one)" (13). The women in the serials do not have any independent existence, they are often portrayed as props for the assertion of hegemonic masculinity.

The serial portrays Kochunni as resolute, defiant and unyielding even in the face of death. The serial ends on the note of a sequel, where Kochunni's son, Sulthan, is introduced. Kochunni begs his son not to hate him. After kissing his son on the forehead, Kochunni walks towards the gallows. In the last episode, Kochunni's son Sulthan who is still a kid looks angrily at the Diwan and asks several questions which pushes him towards rethinking his decision to send Kochunni to gallows. The child asks whether it is wrong to help the poor or feel moved by starving children; is it his father's crime that some people are poor and others are rich? Diwan replies that he arrested Kochunni based on circumstantial evidence ("Episode 143" *Kayamkulam Kochunni* 10:11–11:36). The camera reveals a close-up shot of the gallows and a tight close-up of Kochunni's face behind the hanging rope. Kochunni's face is tilted towards it, smiling at the rope. This camera angle further highlights his identity as an outlaw hero and valourises the unyielding nature of his masculinity even before his death. His hands are tied by the policemen and they proceed to blindfold him. He requests not to be blindfolded as he wished to face death with open eyes. The scene transitions to his child questioning Diwan in the background in a

flashback. The scene cuts back to Kochunni behind the hanging rope. The camera zooms in to reveal Kochunni's expressions. He embraces death with a smile. The image is frozen here and a voice-over solemnly announces the passing of a thief who walked towards truth (13:14–17:32). The climax scenes are accompanied by dramatic music. Kochunni's stoic attitude towards death further elevates his rebellious masculinity in the television discourse.

The trope of the outlaw hero thus rekindled nostalgia in the popular culture of Kerala. When Kochunni's story from Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* was televisionised, it digressed from the text by adding numerous plots and sub-plots, but at the same time, it contained several elements to capture the audience. The legend brought with it a nostalgia for a bygone era. The serial was welcomed by children, men, and women alike since the life of the rebellious folk hero resonated with their cultural memories. The outlaw hero emerges when there is injustice. These heroes will be glorified and mass media will romanticise them, while the tourism and heritage industry turn them into commodities (Seal 167).

When audiences watch television, they are constantly engaged in a series of identification processes. There are different levels to the identification process starting with identification with the television medium, where it unveils a fictional or non-fictional world, with characters from far-off places and times, also it appeases the viewer's desire to experience life in someone else's shoes (Bignell 104). On analysing the YouTube comments under the re-telecast of the serial *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, there are comments like "Thank you Surya TV for re-telecasting and uploading the serial" (my_thoughts). Several comments highlight the "nostalgia" that the serial brings to a particular generation. Some other comments appreciate the 'mass' dialogues (referring to dramatic and colourful one-liners and dialogues). A set of comments highlight their fascination for action and

fight sequences. Most of these comments have come from a predominantly male audience. According to Jonathan Bignell, "the desires to look and hear are experienced through the viewer's relations with a set of signs and codes that offer meanings to him or her" (105). These signs and codes can be decoded based on the viewers' cultural background. Masculine genres often tend to identify with a diverse audience whose reading position is that of a negotiated one, where they align with the patriarchal system rather than resisting the hegemonical ideologies (Fiske 222).

When the sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* was aired, it did not gain as much popularity as its predecessor. Even though the serial was written by the same writer, and was aired in December 2016, its popularity waned after a year. Certain programmes fail to gain popularity since it does not have the power to connect with the audience. As Jonathan Bignell observes,

> Narrative requires the shifting of the viewer's position into and out of the television programme, and a rhythm of identification and disavowal of identification. But the positioning and repositioning of the viewer as an audience member might succeed or fail for individual viewers in different programmes or parts of the same programme. (104)

In the television discourse, the viewing patterns of the audience in a narrative involve constant identification and rejection of the characters. But the same viewer can immerse himself in certain parts of the narrative whereas he can altogether reject certain other parts. The audience was not able to identify themselves with the sequel due to a variety of potential reasons: the plot points were not familiar, the dialogues were misogynistic; also, the rebellious traits of the hero were shaded by chauvinism, who indulged in constant clashes with the villainess.

In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni discusses the details of Kochunni's family. Kochunni had three sons and a daughter (Sankunni 200). But the television adaptation depicted Kochunni with just one son named Sulthan. The child is seen questioning Diwan, Sir Madhava Rao for convicting his father. As per Sankunni's account, it was after the ascension of Diwan Sri Madhavarayar that life became miserable for Kochunni and his accomplices (194). The Diwan was instrumental in bringing progress in many fields. While serving as the Diwan of Travancore from 1857 to 1872, he appointed Vazhappaliyil Pappadiyil Kunjupanikkar as Karthikappilli Tahasildar. Both the Diwan and the Tahasildar are depicted as negative characters who abuse their power to sideline Kochunni and his family and discriminate against them based on their religious identity. They are adorned with fashionable robes and heavy jewellery to show their regal status along with a turban on their head. Kochunni and his family were also labelled as the thief's family by the authorities. In the climax scene, Kochunni's son questions Diwan for punishing his father, pleading when it became a crime to serve the needy. The sequel begins with a flashback of the child, who wants to bring vengeance upon those who were involved in his father's downfall. After Kochunni's death, his family relocates and Sulthan returns after several years to his native place to destroy his father's enemies.

The serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* tried to recreate the next generation through the life of Kochunni and his friends. Kayamkulam Kochunni was tricked by a woman called Vazhapilli Janaki who gets him arrested. But Kochunni kills her later in the television serial. In the sequel, Janaki's sister, Mathangi, is plotting to destroy Kochunni's family. She is portrayed as a powerful figure. As John Fiske observes, "the villainess turns traditional feminine characteristics (which are often seen as weaknesses ensuring her subordination) into a source of strength . . . . she uses her insight into people to manipulate them, and she uses her sexuality for her own ends, not for masculine pleasure" (190).

Mathangi dominates the sequel. She wants to destroy Sulthan. She manipulates other characters to exact her revenge. She exerts power over the men in her life, especially a policeman who assists her. A merchant aids her in getting back at those associated with Kochunni. She seduces the men to do her bidding but never yields to them. However, her power is curbed by the rebellious and aggressive masculine self of Sulthan. In the end, the villainess is murdered by Sulthan. He stabs her with a knife and he rubs her blood over his face. This scene depicts extreme violence inflicted upon a woman's body. He proudly asserts, "I have met with the same fate as that of my Bappa. We never knew how to hide from society. The thief's son serves as a constant reminder" (my trans.; "Episode 143" *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* 19:45–47). The scene cuts to a flashback of Kochunni hoping for a transformation in society, "There will be a time when law and order and justice can be availed by both the rich and the poor" (19:58–20:01). Kochunni says that he will be remembered for his egalitarian vision.

The sequel attempted to disseminate yet another masculine narrative into popular culture. However, the audience was unable to identify with the hero. They took it as a pale imitation of the original serial. Dialogues like "every woman will yield in the end" (17:30–31), and the violence inflicted upon the female body were in tune with patriarchal power structures in society. Usha V.T. observes that if the women characters are selfish, "they are normally rewarded with some punishment at the end" (13). Here, the villainess is stabbed to death for resisting patriarchal power structures.

The television serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, and its sequel celebrate Kochunni as a cultural icon fighting against an oppressive feudal system. He constantly challenges social norms and fights injustice. Kochunni becomes a subaltern hero as he empowers the marginalised sections of society by instilling hope and a sense of justice for the poor and needy. He was not afraid to question the authority and was even ready to sacrifice his life

for humanity. The serial also celebrated Kochunni's gang which comprised Mulamoottil Adima, Kakkapulli Sankaran, Ithikkara Pakki, etc. They were like-minded outlaws who fought from the marginalised sections of society. The television serial successfully traces the trajectory of Kochunni's transformation from a young boy alienated by the upper castes based on his religious identity. Also, he struggles to outgrow the stigma of being a thief's son before transforming into a hero for the downtrodden. In the television serial, *Kayamkulam Kochunni,* and its sequel, the hero repeatedly asserts his vision is to restore justice to the poor. He further dreamed of a classless society where the poor didn't starve and were free of feudal exploitation.

Conclusion

The adaptations of legends such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* in popular culture of Kerala sketch different aspects of masculinity depicted in various visual platforms. The chapter discusses how the elements of camera, lighting, editing, music, casting, sets, make-up, action, and dialogue contribute to the representation of different aspects of masculinities in the serial. This chapter reflects on the representation of women by popular media and how they cater to the elevation of masculinity in the popular culture.

Screen adaptations of legends such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* from *Aithihyamala* helped the audience to connect with the memories of a feudal and colonial past. This rekindled the nostalgia associated with these legends. The serial digressed from *Aithihyamala* adding new layers to the legends. The screen adaptations also favoured dominant ideology limiting the text to preferred readings. The domestic spaces were hypodermically infused with masculine sensibilities. The construct of masculinity was thus reinforced in popular culture via the constant performance of masculinities, often with hypermasculine traits or through the hero's moral victory over

evil. The different aspects of masculinities and femininities as a continuation of the gendering project of modernity in Kerala are explored further in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Kerala Modernity: Reflection of Visual Representation, Gender and Masculinity in *Aithihyamala*

Malayali modernity evolved through a complex process and its theorisation has been shaped by the experiences of colonial modernity and interaction with nationalism. It is important to understand the curious case of *Aithihyamala* in this regard. *Aithihyamala* became popular in the wake of print modernity, a colonial by-product. As Nivea Thomas observes, "this tendency to revive and preserve the tradition was certainly a product of colonial modernity and new intellectual trends in Europe" (60). If it hadn't been the case, these legends might have gone into oblivion due to a dearth of a documentation culture. Myths and legends are accounts of a distant past. There is, however, a point of departure at which these legends break off from historical specificities, beginning to chart their own course. The relevance of Kottarathil Sankunni's magnum opus, *Aithihyamala,* should be understood in this context.

This chapter focuses on the dissemination of masculine tropes to a global audience and how the hegemonic aspects of masculinity recur in contemporary popular culture. This chapter further reflects on modernity brought about by cinema and television serials and their specific impact on the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala. This chapter also explores the representation of indigenous heroes and the proliferation of legends in contemporary popular culture through new media Over-the-top (OTT) platforms. It argues that the re-representation of any legend evokes a collective memory and they diverge to create multiple narratives to appease contemporary audiences. Thus, these narratives remain alive in popular culture.

A text such as *Aithihyamala* is linked to the project of constructing a 'Malayali consciousness.' It heralded the seeds of modernity by presenting a consolidated repository

of narratives on Kerala. Even though the myths and legends of *Aithihyamala* were scattered among the provinces of Cochin, Travancore, and Malabar, they carried the essence of a unified or collective Malayali identity. The transformation of these narratives from the oral to the print and the digital medium is inextricably linked to the discourse of masculinity.

Among the 126 legends in *Aithihyamala,* 123 tales deal with Brahmins, the kings, martial arts experts, astrologers et al. The remaining three tales such as the legends of *Kadamattathu Kathanar*, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Arakkal Beevi* deal with members from the other religion. The legend of Arakkal Beevi depicts the conversion of a Hindu princess to Islam. But the legend of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* celebrates the life of a Muslim brigand and the legend of *Kadamttathu Kathanar* centers on the life of a Syrian Christian priest. It is interesting to note how legends of these heroes from other communities became an immediate success in the popular culture of Kerala. These legends elicit the collective fantasies of Malayali audiences across the globe since they projected a secular, democratic, and unified essence of Malayali identity.

The legends of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* celebrated the hegemonic aspects of masculinity in popular culture. The common factor that binds the two heroes together is that they stood with the downtrodden. This tendency to stay with the downtrodden is an essence of the collective Malayali consciousness. It is possible to see that the celebration of Onam, the cultural festival of Kerala, is held even today to commemorate Mahabali, the Dravidian King's yearly return to visit his people after the unjustly forced submission to the netherworld by Lord Vamana, the fifth avatar of Vishnu. In his article, "Culture of Resistance - Liberation, Tolerance and Malayalam Literature," Syam Sudhakar notes, "this blatant display of solidarity with the oppressed king reveals the very nature of the Malayali psyche that always leans to the idea of resistance against

supremacy of hegemonic power structures" (Muse India). Therefore, this tendency resonated in the popular culture of Kerala as an aftermath of modernity's gendering project where people adore masculine heroes who uphold this egalitarian vision. They used their powers to fight against injustice in society. Both in the text *Aithihyamala* and the visual adaptations that glorified their masculinity, they served the poor and needy irrespective of religious, caste or class difference. They fought for the marginalised sections of society, in an environment where the lower caste people were denigrated and the authorities did not hear their call for help. It is precisely at these historical junctures that heroes like Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni are born.

The legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni is set against the backdrop of a colonial and feudal Kerala, ravaged by oppressive caste and class differences. Kochunni was the first brigand to rebel against social and economic injustice. The legend of Kochunni has a Western parallel in Robinhood. The legend of an indigenous hero who fiercely rebelled against feudal lords and the upper-caste sections of the society fulfilled the collective fantasies of the Malayali audience. The various adaptations of Kochunni's legend capitalised on the collective memory and nostalgia evoked by a brigand who fought for the downtrodden members of the society.

The unfinished project of modernity continues to disseminate into popular culture through these legends. In the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar in the film and televisual representations, he embodies 'Christian masculinity', where a trope of the Christian gentleman is kept alive through his upholding of morality and ethics. These are ideals drawn into the indigenous culture as an aftermath of colonial modernity. When the re-representation of these legends occurs through the visual medium, it is these constructs of morality, and ethics that are disseminated to the audience. The gendering project of modernity which clearly distinguished between masculinity and feminity, along with

controlling the pre-modern excess of 'abjects' such as *Yakshis* by eliminating the possibility of a polyandrous female figure rekindling the nostalgia of a matrilineal past is effaced from popular culture through the moral and ethical codes drawn from the Victorian morality.

Similarly, when the legend of Kayamkulam Kochunni is disseminated into popular culture through films and television, modernity's project of creating a secular and democratic space, irrespective of caste and class hierarchies is kept alive. This egalitarian vision had its resonance in the Communist Party's vision of eliminating the threat of a feudal past by erasing the caste and class differences that existed in Kerala. The representation of Kochunni as a hero, often by projecting a quite different picture from *Aithihyamala* resulted in the possibility of creating a 'hero' who projected a secular, democratic, and unified essence of Malayali identity. The ongoing project of Kerala modernity in carving a modern state was nurtured once these legends were propagated into the popular culture of Kerala.

As an aftermath of the *Aikya Kerala* project, a new region bound by a common culture and common language evolved. A unique 'Malayali identity' took shape in the process. The legends of indigenous heroes like *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadmattathu Kathanar* were essential to give credence to hegemonic masculinity in popular culture. The elements of magic, fantasy, horror, heroism, etc, that these legends portrayed helped in mainstreaming hegemonic masculine traits to a mass audience. Also, these legends forged a continuum with the present; these heroes helped to reinvent nostalgia and tradition by tracing the discourse of masculinity to the present. The united Kerala movement also envisioned an egalitarian society and these heroes were able to lend a secular and democratic face to the newly-formed region. The legends were disseminated into the popular culture initially through print, and later through feature films, television

serials, satellite television, YouTube videos, and over-the-top platforms. The relevance and contemporaneity of these legends gave rise to multiple narratives in new forms and through new mediums.

From indigenous heroes to universal heroes

The disintegration of a caste-based social order gave rise to a new 'public space' that went beyond conventional upper-class gatherings, both in letter and spirit. Every individual got an opportunity to participate in the processes that propelled modernity. Malayalam cinema was instrumental in contributing to the *Aikya* Kerala Project in which the former princely states of Cochin, Travancore, and Malabar merged based on a shared language. In his article, "Imagining the Malayali Nation: Early Malayalam Cinema and the Making of a Modern Malayali identity," Muhammed Afzal observes that people who advocated for the *Aikya* Kerala Project also demanded the popularisation of Malayalam cinema since they wanted to liberate Malayalam cinema from the clutches of Tamil influences by establishing a cinematic production unit in Kerala (8).

There was a conscious attempt to create a 'Malayali identity' through the medium of cinema. As critic C.S Venkiteswaran argues, "the desire to see Kerala in film" was a "desire to imagine and bring into being a Kerala through cinema" (72). Malayalam cinema, therefore, was instrumental in consolidating the regional identity of Malayalis during the *Aikya* Kerala movement or United Kerala movement. To the people of Kerala, Malayalam cinema manifested their desires and anxieties. Muhammad P. Afzal notes that the Malayalam language provided the "kind of unified linguistic and cultural identity that the people of Kerala strove for" (5). The cultural ethos of the Malayalam-speaking region got intertwined with the vision of a secular, democratic, and egalitarian society.

For upholding a regional identity, Malayalam cinema broadened its spectrum to address major social shifts in Kerala. *Vigathakumaran* (1928), the first silent movie in

Malayalam, and the first talkie *Balan* (1938) belonged to the 'socials' genre, which addressed the shift away from a matrilineal past to a patriarchal present. The legacy of a joint matrilineal past had crumbled in Kerala, paving the way for "new discourses like that of cinema to legitimise the logic of patriarchal nuclear family systems" (Pillai 291). In her article, "Women in Malayalam Cinema," Meena T. Pillai observes, "this may be the cause of the mother figure's lack of popularity in Kerala, which otherwise had been a cliché for homeland everywhere else in the country" (27). The trope of *Bharathamba* gained popularity at the national level during the independence movement, but imagining Kerala or the region as a mother figure did not apply well with Keralites. This must have been part of a conscious attempt to create a 'chaste' and 'monandrous' ideal by eradicating the remnants of a matrilineal past and transferring the spectre of power to masculine and patriarchal logic through the discourse of cinema (Pillai 27).

There was rapid change in the socio-cultural milieu of Kerala once the caste and class order weakened, with various legislations that hit out at its feudal as well as matrilineal past. The Communist Party was instrumental in the assertion of a unified linguistic identity. Patricia Swart notes that "it was Kerala's communist movement and its attendant Marxist ideology that often took centre stage in the construction of this citizen-subject in the early decades of Malayalam cinema" (125). The Communist movement was instrumental in shaping the identity of a modern Malayali man through the medium of cinema. Even though modernity tried to erase decrepit practices in Kerala, it was not able to address the complexities of gender that regulated the socio-cultural dynamics of Kerala.

The modernity brought to the region through the discourse of cinema and television was different, yet they converged at certain points. Cinema halls became emblematic of the 'public sphere', where people from different walks of life gathered in a dark room and formed a "heterogeneous" group (Venkiteswaran 97). On the contrary,

television reduces the audience to a “homogeneous and continuous” group that comprises family and friends. Venkiteswaran notes that the target audience of the cinema is a crowd whereas that of the television are individuals (97). Television theorist John Ellis distinguishes “how the viewer merely ‘glances’ at the television, rather than the concentrated ‘gaze’ of the film spectator” (195). The gaze involves active participation, whereas the glance implies a lack of voluntary effort. Therefore, television has to face up to the challenge of providing an immersive experience to the viewer and generating revenue through advertisements.

The representation of heroes like Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar in films and serials often converged and diverged at different points. The unifying factor that bound both film and television was the celebration of masculinity. Both in films and the serials, the heroes were glorified and the camera angles elevated their masculinity. The background score played up the hero’s wins and often projected them as superheroes. The hero’s body was a site for the expression of their masculinity. Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni were depicted as both saviours of their hometowns – their frame of spatial reference ranged from a few villages to a full-fledged nation. The heroes always demanded justice and they punished the forces of evil. Similarly, props like the staff and pocket knife aid their masculinity both in the film versions and the serials. Kadamattathu Kathanar performs magic with his holy staff and Kochunni always carries a pocket knife to threaten his enemies. These props can be viewed as phallic symbols highlighting hegemonic aspects of their masculinity. Thus, these props gradually become an inevitable aspect of their film and television persona.

The point of distinction between the representation of heroes from the film and television occurs primarily because of the standard practices on the duration of feature films which varies between 90 minutes and 180 minutes whereas the serials contain

prolonged episodes often deviating from the main plot with numerous subplots geared to expand the hero's sphere of influence. The masculinity of the hero is projected based on his interactions with other characters. Television widely disseminates images of masculinity influencing a large number of people (McKinnon 66). Unlike that of movies, stereotyping and typecasting of gender roles are rampant in television. Television indulges in stereotyping to a large extent, in which men are "perceived as more intelligent, powerful, stable, and tolerant by those who maintained belief in male stereotypes" (McGhee and Frueh 179-80). In television serials like *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni*, the hegemonic masculine aspects enable them to protect other men and women who are subordinate to them. Television actors are type-casted easily more than film actors. For example, the actor, Prakash Paul who plays the role of Kadamattathu Kathanar in different television versions of the serial, *Kadamattathu Kathanar* is type-casted into this role and the audience identifies them as specific characters and their careers tread around similar roles.

Television serials often employ close-up shots more than films. Serials use close-up shots to highlight villainy and to connect the viewers with characters as well as for the glorification of the male body, especially its "strength and grace" (Fiske 246). Television serials like *Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni* are also made up of numerous close-up shots to capture the heroes' vigour and actions as well as their expressions of masculinity through close-up shots. Thus, the representation of masculinity in films and serials often diverges and converges at different moments.

With the advent of globalisation, a "brand conscious" community based on consumer culture developed. And television gave them more entertainment options. It has more potential than cinema halls to unite audiences since a diverse audience can watch "the same programme at the same time" (Venkiteswaran 112). C.S. Venkiteswaran

observes that "The visual culture industry witnessed two major shifts during the last decades – first, the coming of television and second, the advent of digital technology that radically transformed the film industry – production, distribution, exhibition and reception." ("Local narratives"). From the era of the talkies to the new multiplexes, there has been a gradual change transforming the cinema hall into a space mediated by new consumption practices.

The commingling of the 'private sphere' and the 'public sphere' took place with television modernity. One of the reasons for this convergence came about with the advent of satellite television when the film industry became inextricably linked to television programming. According to Tejaswini Ganti, "these channels offer filmmakers new avenues to publicize, promote, and market their films and serve as another source of revenue since they are willing to pay large sums for the telecast rights of popular films" (36). The television channels offered big money to procure satellite rights of popular movies and later these films were hoisted onto their OTT (over-the-top) platforms as well. For example, *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (2018) was the second Malayalam film after *Pulimurugan* to enter the hundred crore club in Malayalam cinema. The satellite rights of the film were purchased by Amazon Prime, taking the film to a larger global audience. The adaptations of these legends are intended for a target audience that includes the diaspora, especially Gulf Malayalis.

The trend of transferring 'hyper-local' detailing in television programming increased further with the expansion of satellite networks into mobile apps and OTT platforms. As C.S Venkiteswaran observes:

> The contemporary challenge of Malayalam cinema is to rediscover itself and to creatively engage with the inexorable but exciting possibilities opened up by new media technologies, and the globalized tastes and expectations of its viewers. For

> this, it has to reinvent its 'locality' in order to address the new 'globality', both as an economic model and an aesthetic form. ("Local narratives")

The visual culture of Kerala has witnessed the migration of a large-scale of its population to Gulf countries and other European nations. The consumption practice of the audience has transitioned from the theatre-going audience to mobile apps and OTT platforms, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the scattered population of Kerala across the globe required a means to relive their nostalgia and tradition. This can be linked to the concept of "critical cosmopolitanism" that J. Devika "writes about in the context of modernity in twentieth-century Kerala, where there is a desire to imagine a 'worldwide community of shared values' that can challenge traditional power formations (qtd. in Sreedhar 92). The transnational power of media has taken home into the private spheres of a global audience. This has led to tracing the discourse of masculinity operating in global cultures by examining the re-representation of legends such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* for the contemporary audience since these legends contain an element of locality juxtaposed into the spectrum of globality where there is a celebration of the victory of the masculine hero's quest.

The project of modernity legitimised the hegemonic aspects of masculinity in the popular culture of Kerala and to a transnational audience through OTT streaming. The visual culture of Kerala was bombarded with "mediascapes," referring "both to the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film production studios), which are now available to a growing number of private and public interests throughout the world, and to the images of the world created by these media" (Appadurai 35). The construction of masculinity in the era of globalisation crystallised through the representation of indigenous heroes who exhibited elements of locality on a global canvas.

Films such as *Kadamattathachan* (1984) and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966) depicted the representation of an indigenous hero rooted in the contours of the region. In the contemporary era, the legitimisation of masculinity through visual spaces occurs through new technological innovations and marketing strategies. The film teasers, trailers and first-look posters are released to enthral the audience. Often, the teasers and trailers are packed with the use of VFX and special effects to elevate masculine heroes; with elevated camera angles, background music, make-up, etc., they make a spectacle of the hero's hypermasculine performance.

The representation of masculinity in the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* that are aimed for the consumption of a global audience and the transformation of these indigenous heroes to universal heroes are examined through the analysis of the teasers of the upcoming film, *Kadamttathu Kathanar: The Legend of the Wild Sorcerer* (Part 1) (Dir. Rojin Thomas).

The teaser of *Kadamattathu Kathanar: The Legend of the Wild Sorcerer* was launched on 20 February 2022 by Friday Film House, a leading production house in Kerala. The production of the movie has been taken over by the Friday Film House by Sree Gokulam Movies. Later, the new teaser was released by Sree Gokulam Movies on 31 August 2023 and soon after the release the teaser hit 2.8 million views. These teasers evoke suspense in the audience since they contain elements of horror and magic. The project is planned in two parts as a big-budget 3D film with an estimated budget of 75 crores. These teasers project the treatment of a Hollywood movie since the legend of an indigenous hero is marketed to a global audience as a wild and masculine sorcerer intermingling elements of magic, horror, fantasy, voice-over, etc.

There is a transition from the hero's depiction as *Kadamattathachan* in 1984 to *Kadamattathu Kathanar: The Wild Sorcerer* Part 1 since the former recounts the cinematic

representation of an indigenous hero, whereas the latter portrays a hero of universal appeal. Kathanar embodied a rough and wild masculinity since he dwelled in the forest. According to the scriptwriter, Ramanand, Kathanar was "Kerala's greatest ghost hunter and had bound Kalliyankattu Neeli, our most vicious *Yakshi*" (Mathews). The teaser reveals Kathanar as a wild sorcerer with an aura of mystery around him, who lives in the forest along with a wild dog and his silhouette is revealed in the darkness. In her essay, "Becoming Women: Unwrapping Femininity in Malayalam Cinema," Meena T. Pillai points out "today, Malayalam cinema's attempt to create a pan-Malayali identity revolves around the images of an increased machoistic and tradition-bound modern hero" (36). Thus, the change in the title from *Kadamattathachan* (1984) to *Kadamattathu Kathanar: The Wild Sorcerer* reveals the transition from the moral and ascetic masculinity of actor Prem Nazir to that of the rough and wild masculinity in actor Jayasurya. This reassertion to validate the hegemonic aspects of masculinity may be an attempt to refashion an indigenous hero for a global audience. The re-packaging of the legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar for a contemporary audience can be viewed as an attempt to portray pre-colonial Malayali masculinity as hegemonic and otherworldly.

In both the teasers, the title of Kadamattathu Kathanar is written uniquely, as the alphabet 'ka' in Kadamattathu Kathanar is replaced with an ancient font reminding us of a runic symbol to invoke an additional element of magic and horror. Jayasurya as Kadamattathu Kathanar appears in brown garments with a cloak covering his face partially. The teasers present Kathanar with a scar on his forehead and the right side of his face. As Nivea Thomas observes, "scars act as an important element in characterisation because characters with scars always have a background story that deals with pain, adventure, fight and survival" (184). To enact the role of Kathanar, Jayasurya has transformed his body to lend the appearance of a universal hero. His scarred and bearded

face along with his mysterious blue eyes add to the character. The colour tone of the teaser is dark blue adding a layer of mystery to the visual experience.

The initial teaser released by Friday Film House instructs the audience to use headphones for a better audio experience. This is to cater to an audience who typically rely on digital add-ons to enhance their cinematic experience. The teaser begins with a voice-over, where a female voice is heard narrating the story. This is a technique to situate to foreground the story in the folk culture of Kerala. The video also begins and ends with incantations uttered by a male voice to further build suspense. The camera tracks the setting and zooms into a waterfall and its sounds are heard in the background along with incantations. Later, a high-angle shot captures the forest canopy and pans the eerie dark setting of the forest to amplify a sense of the wild. The teasers also show Kathanar with a magic staff and accompanied by a black panther in a thick forest.

The teaser explores the raw, rough, and wild masculinity of the hero by introducing binaries such as “Man vs Wild” (00:28–01:36), “Man vs Man” (00:32–01:36), “Man vs Kingdom” (00:38–01:36), “Man vs Supernatural” (00:43–01:36). The voice-over implies that knowing oneself deeper may not be as pleasant as it is made out to be. The idea of “Man vs Wild” is introduced with the voice-over dwelling on the deep and mysterious forest populated by wolves, tigers and panthers. The teaser projects the raw masculinity of Kathanar through this.

As the voice-over introduces the concept of “Man vs Man,” Kathanar is pictured defending himself against the arrows coming at him from a gang of robbers. Here, the concept of good versus evil is at play. Kathanar’s magic is shown as a hypermasculine trait that triumphs over evil. Similarly, the idea of the “Man vs Kingdom” is introduced and the camera reveals a swaying ship in the ocean and glittering city lights, portraying Kathanar as someone who looks out for his subjects. Finally, the voice-over discusses the

idea of the “Man and the Supernatural,” going into the details of blood-thirsty vampires hiding on desolate roads. This foretells Kathanar’s victory over the evil spirits and asserts his identity as an alpha male as well as a sorcerer. The teaser also reveals Kathanar’s pet the black panther approaching the church. The black panther accompanies Kathanar inside the forest. This gives further insight into his raw masculinity as he tames the wild and exerts his power over it. The teaser ends with the caption “An Epic that comes in Duology-3 D” (01:32–01:36) and plays with the notion that Kathanar is an indigenous and universal hero.

The new teaser released by Sree Gokulam Movies enthrals the audience with elements of fantasy and horror. The teaser projects Jayasurya as Kathanar being imprisoned by the church authorities. The teaser begins with a powerful male voice of a Christian priest exhorting that “he has deceived all of us by stating that he is the disciple of Mar Abo. He has woven a dark web of sorcery around this church and this will lead to the loss of the divine light gracing this chapel forever” (00:15–19). It presents Kathanar as an excommunicated priest who is condemned by the church for indulging in sorcery. Jayasurya as Kathanar is introduced through a close-up of his blue eyes and his hands are tied with ropes that slither away (01:15–19). The teaser also reveals villagers suffering for unknown reasons probably as an aftermath of his supernatural powers (00:41– 43). Further, it reveals a cloaked figure of Kathanar approaching the church in his priest’s attire. The teaser ends with the following note “it is time to witness the fantasy ‘Kadamattathu Kathanar” (01:37–39).

The teaser evokes a sense of mystery and an eerie atmosphere. Here, the masculinity of Kathanar appears as rough, wild and untameable. He is depicted as a sorcerer who has the potential to threaten the church authorities. The visual effects along with the intriguing background score and incantations in the background lift the teaser to

that of a Hollywood movie. Therefore, the teaser presents Kathanar as a sorcerer indulging in fantasy, mystery, and supernatural spectacle by transforming Kathanar from an indigenous hero to a universal hero for the consumption of a global audience.

Traces of *Aithihyamala* in popular culture

Different iterations of legends like Kadamttathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni have given rise to multiple narratives about them in popular culture. The legends already popular in oral culture were appropriated by Kottarathil Sankunni for his magnum opus, *Aithihyamala*. Later, several of these legends were adapted into the canvas of visual media that capitalised on nostalgia and heritage of the region. These narratives interpolated popular culture and kept the process of legend-making alive.

The legend of Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kaliyankattu Neeli was adapted by popular media, which predictably hyped up the elements of horror and fantasy inherent in the legend. Neeli is explored in C.V. Raman Pillai's novel, *Marthandavarma* (1891) which depicted the past life of Kaliyankattu Neeli and her propensity for revenge. Similarly, other literary works such as *Neelavelicham* (1952) by Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer, *Cheriya Cheriya Bhookampangal* (1933) by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, *Yakshi* (1967) by Malayattoor Ramakrishnan, etc., provide imaginative and fictional accounts of the *Yakshi* myth in Kerala. The legendary sculptor, Kanayi Kunhiraman's statue of *Yakshi* (1969) in Malampuzha, Palakkad is integral to Kerala's popular cultural imagination. There are numerous films like *Bhargavi Nilayam* (Dir. A. Vincent, 1964), *Chottanikkara Amma* (Dir. Crossbelt Mani 1976), *Lisa* (Dir. A.G. Baby, 1978), *Kaliyankattu Neeli* (Dir. M.Krishnan Nair, 1979), *Veendum Lisa* (Dir. A.G. Baby, 1987), *Manichithrathazchu* (Dir. Fasil, 1993), *Ente Swantham Janakikutty* (Dir. Hariharan, 1998), *Akasha Ganga* (Dir. Vinayan, 1999), *Indriyam* (Dir. George Kithu, 2000), *Meghasandesham* (Dir. Rajasenan,

2001), *Akam* (Dir. Shalini Usha Nair, 2011), *Neeli* (Dir. Althaf Rahman, 2018) dealing with the *Yakshi* myths, expanding the market for the horror genre in Malayalam.

The film *Meghasandesham* depicts a Christian priest, Fr. Rosario, a sorcerer and exorcist, plotting to annihilate a female ghost. The film hints at Fr. Rosario being in the lineage of Kadamattathu Kathanar. Similarly, the *Yaksh*i movies use prevalent tropes like *Yakshis* with white sarees who let their hair down and elements such as fire, wild cats, old mansions, ritual ceremonies, etc. The iterations of the *Yakshi* myth in contemporary popular culture continued through rap songs like 'Pani Paliyo' (1 and 2) by Neeraj Madhav which broke the internet in the wake of the pandemic. This song again portrays *Yakshi* as a vampire who transforms an unsuspecting young man into a vampire himself. Thus, even in contemporary popular culture, the relationship between a vamp figure such as *Yakshi* and the Malayali masculinity is explored by reflecting on the collective fantasies and desires of the Malayali audience.

The trope of Kayamkulam Kochunni operates through its various adaptations in visual culture. The film *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* (Dir. J. Sasikumar, 1976) was projected as a sequel to the film *Kayamkulam Kochunni* in 1966. The outlaw trope of Kayamkulam Kochunni is also explored through television serials such as *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan* telecasted in Surya TV from 2016 to 2017 and *Ithikkara Pakki* (Dir. S. Karthikeyan) telecasted from 2020 onwards and the eponymous film *Ithikkara Pakki* (Dir. J. Sasikumar, 1980) depicted the life of Ithikkara Pakki who is believed to be a contemporary of Kayamkulam Kochunni. There are passing references to Kochunni in the serial. The trope of the outlaw hero who fights for the poor and wipes the tears of the downtrodden is, therefore, familiar to the Malayali audience.

The film *Patthonpatham Noottandu* (Nineteenth Century) directed by Vinayan and released in 2022 depicted *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (Chemban Vinod) as a villain. The film

traced the life of Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker (1825–1874), a renaissance hero from the Ezhava Community who found no mention in the canonical versions of Kerala history. The encounter between two powerful men from marginalised communities and the tussle between them is depicted through prolonged action sequences. Panicker spares Kochunni's life after catching his attempt to murder him. He forgives Kochunni since he had a feeling of solidarity towards him since both of them were fighting for the cause of the lower-caste people and Kochunni himself belonged to the Muslim religion outside the *varna* system. Also, he realised that it was the upper-caste members of the society that was behind this murder attempt (Shekhar).

Contrary to historical accounts, the film depicts Kochunni in a negative shade. Even though the film doesn't deny that Kochunni gave a share of his loot to the villagers, at the same time, the narrative presents Kochunni as selfish and he manipulates the people around him for personal gain. Kochunni attempts to loot the Travancore King but is arrested by Arattupuzha Velayudha Panicker after a fierce encounter. The film explores the tussle between two masculinities from the fringes. Portraying Kochunni as a villain can be seen as an attempt by mainstream cinema to 'other' Muslim masculinities. However, there is a clear denial of historical sources that uphold the bond between Panicker and Kochunni based on their shared commitment to the upliftment of their communities (Sekher). The film *Pathonpatham Noottandu* thus explores the power dynamic between two men, where their bodies become the site of their power struggle. Their hypermasculine traits are expressed through action sequences and dialogues, where the politics of the film pushes Kochunni to surrender before Panicker, the hero.

The reiterations of the legends remain relevant in popular culture through new forms that cater to a contemporary audience. Initially, it was the project of Kottarathil Sankunni to compile the legends scattered across different parts of Kerala in print form.

Later, these legends were adapted by the television and film media. These legends have got a unique way of circulating in popular culture by constantly adapting to new forms.

Today, oral narratives are still popular on digital platforms. As Richard M. Dorson observes, "printed and oral texts do not necessarily compete with each other but may act in conjunction, in a mutually stimulating camaraderie" (466). These legends continue to make their way into popular culture via print, digital platforms and YouTube videos. As Marcel Danesi observes, "YouTube and other social media create mythologies of all kinds" (386). The legends of Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni are kept intact through retellings by vloggers. The *YouTube* vlog, "Prethangalude Pediswapnam: Kathanarude Manthrika Katha," explores the legend of Kathanar as a sorcerer, and the vlog features a poster of the upcoming film *Kadamattathu Kathanar* in the backdrop (0:47 –12:20). The vlog gives a detailed account of Kadamattom church and Kathanar's story as depicted in *Aithihyamala*. It has around seven hundred and fifty-three thousand views. Another vlog entitled *Kadamattath Kathanar/Untold Story Malayalam* with ninety-four thousand views explores the Kadamattom church and its mysterious *pathala kinaru* or *poyedam kinaru* (underground well) which is associated with a popular belief that Kadamattathu Kathanar disappeared through this well to the abode of *Malayarayas*. The vlog also discusses practices like *Kozhikuruthi* (the sacrifice of the hen) and consuming it along with alcohol by lighting candles around the well to fulfil one's wishes. Even though the practice is banned by the church, it is still carried out in secrecy (0:03–3:52). This narrative allows the audience to see Kadamattathachan's masculinity in a new light. In her article, "Lessons in Miracles from Kerala, South India: Stories of Three Christian Saints," Corrine Dempsey observes that "For those who come to his shrine, it is his invincibility, not his good standing within the Jacobite tradition, that enables him to bestow blessings

and therefore be worthy of devotion" (128). His masculinity as a sorcerer and a rebellious spirit opposed to the generic Christian tradition is revealed here.

After the box-office success of the film *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (2018), there was a sudden surge of *YouTube* videos of people visiting the temple of Kayamkulam Kochunni in Idappara Maladevar Nada in Pathanamthitta district. The vlog *Kayamkulam Kochunni, Kayamkulam Kochunni Moshanathin Keriya Tharavad* gives a historical account of Varanapilly Tharavadu in Kayamkulam robbed by Kochunni. The house is said to have retained a hole made by Kochunni to break into the structure (12:00–13:36). Similarly, another vlog entitled *Kayamkulam Kochunni: Kshethravum Charithravesheshippukalum* provides a detailed account of Kochunni's history and his installation on the temple premises. The former vlog has one hundred and twenty-seven thousand views and the latter has 80 thousand views (0:20–17:20). These videos attempt to cater to the rebellious masculinity of Kayamkulam Kochunni for a new-generation audience. They try to preserve the collective memory of a brigand who rebelled against a stringent caste and feudal system for the poor. By keeping alive this collective nostalgia, they try to foreground the rebellious aspect of masculinity as a heroic trait deserving of adulation.

Most of the vlogs on the legends of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* begin with a reference to Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala*. Also, there is a tendency to brandish historical sources for every claim. The vlogs capture the historical accounts about the Kadamattom church and Kayamkulam Kochunni's temple. This can be seen as a project of modernity, attempting to appeal to reason and logic. Kottarathil Sankunni made the readers believe through his spatial and temporal references about events, dates and times in *Aithihyamala*, whereas today this is done through revisiting the sites and documenting them through videos. These historical accounts are provided for the

consumers to further glorify and celebrate the hero's masculine persona. Thus, these narratives remain alive and fresh in popular culture.

Conclusion

A text like *Aithihyamala* is inextricably linked to Kerala's culture. The text itself acts as a reservoir of myths and legends preserved for posterity. It can be considered as a project of modernity; the trajectory of the text being closely linked with the unification of Kerala. The discourse of masculinity is inextricably linked with modernity's gendering project. The public sphere of Kerala celebrates hegemonic masculinity and the desire to see the male self in a hegemonic masculine mould. This tendency to celebrate male heroes has become an inevitable part of the popular culture of Kerala. The major inference to draw from the retellings of the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamttathu Kathanar* is that heroes who stand for the downtrodden and act as saviours of other men and women are celebrated in popular culture. Their notion of justice is always considered right since the heroes always fight the forces of evil.

Modernity in Kerala turned cinema halls into egalitarian spaces. Later, television and other digital platforms tried to bridge the gap between the public and the private domains. The legends of these heroes rooted in the indigenous culture of Kerala were reshaped in different ways for the consumption of a mass audience; these indigenous heroes slowly transformed into universal heroes on various OTT platforms. The parochial boundaries that confined indigenous heroes to a specific locale transcended transnationally. Finally, YouTube culture kept these legends alive in popular culture by making the young generation aware of these masculine heroes. As a consequence, even if a text like *Aithihyamala* fades out with time, these legends will remain, as they get re-represented in new forms and through new mediums.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

Aithihyamala has become an inevitable part of the cultural history of Kerala. A critical study of the text will offer various dimensions of the text in several interdisciplinary domains. A spatial study of the text is possible since it contains legends from erstwhile Travancore, Cochin and the British Malabar before the unification of Kerala. The spatial history will further provide a deep understanding of the formation of a 'region' such as Kerala. A text such as *Aithihyamala* gives an insight into the ruling dynasties, places, temples and heritage locations of Kerala. Thus, a spatial study of the text will throw light into a thorough understanding of the history, architecture, geographical locations and cultural dynamics of Kerala.

Aithihyamala can further be studied as a text significant in memory studies. The text's relevance in contributing to the 'collective memory' of a region can be unveiled in this process. The orality of the legends has an immense power in evoking the collective memory of a region. The folk element within the text and its power to bemuse an imagined community within a region can be analysed through this aspect of memory studies.

Yet, another scope of the research lies in the domain of translation studies. There are several translations of *Aithihyamala* attempted at different periods. These translations and their inextricable connection with the region formation and the nation formation can be further examined. The linguistic aspects of the text and the difficulties that the translator encountered while translating such a text can be studied. Similarly, a linguistic study of the text can be made possible by examining the emphasis of the Sanskrit slokas, the narrative style, especially the use of proverbs, quibbles etc. can be added to this study.

The text was integral in the popular culture of Kerala, and its relevance in the *Amar Chithra Kathas* or the comic strips can be examined further. Even though, the *Amar*

Chithra Kathas are branded as children's literature, the underlying politics within them is closely related to the nation formation and the representation of masculinities in its diverse form. The dissemination of these comic strips into popular culture can be further analysed.

A text such as *Aithihyamala* was instrumental in mapping the masculinities in Kerala in the nineteenth century. The contemporary scenario of masculinities in Kerala and the gender equations along with a subaltern study of the masculinities can be analysed. The text has often focused on the representation of the elite or the upper-caste men wielding enormous power in society. The study can further be elaborated by filling the lacunas of this particular aspect of Kerala history and it could be more inclusive of the subaltern characters such as Pakkanar and others as well.

Conclusion

Kerala has a riveting tradition of myths and legends. *Aithihyamala* is a unique production and a worthy attempt to venture into an area that has not been explored before. *Aithihyamala* essentially depicts a masculine world. It comprises 126 tales in eight parts, of which most of the tales document men who have excelled in different fields significantly linked to the culture and history of Kerala. They comprise valiant kings, martial arts experts, astrologers, sorcerers, prominent *vaidyas* or ayurvedic experts, etc. Sankunni attributes terms such as 'valiant,' 'brave,' 'heroism,' etc. to depict masculine heroes within the text. This representation inevitably connects the text with the formation of masculinity within Kerala. The text can be used as a site where the production of masculinities took place within the discourse of Kerala modernity. The problem of the research was to find out how a text such as *Aithihyamala* which was replete with myths and legends scattered across Kerala, was embraced by the project of Kerala modernity while its major aspects were focused on the renaissance spirit and technological advancements. The aim of the research was to find out the unifying factor behind these legends. The research further attempted to trace the politics of representation in popular culture with a well-known text like *Aithihyamala* and to study the inextricable link between the discourse of modernity and the construction of masculinities within the region by focusing on legends such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* from *Aithihyamala*.

A detailed textual analysis led to the finding that it was the discourse of modernity that heralded a change in masculinity formation in Kerala and it contributed to the formation of a region by upholding its common language and culture. The methodology adopted for the research was that of Cultural Studies. Among the 126 tales in *Aithihyamala*, the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* were chosen based on their success

in the popular culture of Kerala both in print and on visual media (film and television). These legends from *Aithihyamala*, along with their film and television adaptations were studied since these legends helped to unveil the celebration of the hegemonic masculinity in the popular culture of Kerala.

The thesis is divided into six chapters along with an introduction and conclusion. The first chapter traces the dissemination of a text such as *Aithihyamala* in the popular culture of Kerala from the oral tradition to the digital age. The second chapter is theoretical and it contextualises *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity and analyses the masculinity formulation, its transition from a matrilineal to a patrilineal society and eventually to a modern salaried system. The third chapter is analytical and it re-reads the legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadmattathu Kathanar* on the canvas of cinema and examines the celebration of the masculinities within these films and how it differs from the representation of the legends within *Aithihyamala*. The fourth chapter is also analytical and it examines the television adaptations of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and traces modernity shaping gendered desires and anxieties of the Kerala audience. The fifth chapter focuses on the re-representation of these legends for the consumption of a new generation of audience and it concludes with the fact that even though the popularity of a text such as *Aithihyamala* wanes, these legends will remain intact in the popular culture through new forms. The sixth chapter is recommendations and it discusses the advanced scope of the study in spatial, literary, and academic fields.

The first chapter titled, "*Aithihyamala*, Popular Culture, and Masculinity: An Introduction," deals with the contemporary relevance of *Aithihyamala* in popular culture. The study traces the significance of the text starting from the oral tradition to the onset of print modernity and finally its popularity in visual media. It also addresses the celebration of hegemonic masculinity in popular culture, especially in the construction of the heroes.

The chapter traces the evolution of *Aithihyamala* as a popular text as it nurtures the Malayalam language and the text heralded the *Aikya* Kerala or the United Kerala movement by compiling the myths and legends that were scattered across the erstwhile provinces of the Malayalam speaking-region. Further, the chapter explains the relevance of the text in academia since the text was included in the syllabus of schools and colleges in Kerala, and numerous translations of the text came up in different periods. The study further focuses on viewing the text in a Pan-Indian context and how it attempts to resist the colonial encounter by upholding the indigenous traditions of Kerala. The chapter continues to explain the significance of a text such as *Aithihyamala* in Children's Literature. It also focuses on the various adaptations of the legends from *Aithihyamala* into *Balarama Amar Chithra Kathas* as an attempt to conceal the hegemonic ideology of an upper-caste, elite, Hindu nationalism, and the glorification of hegemonic masculinity and was invariably consumed by audiences irrespective of caste, class, age, and gender.

The latter part of the chapter traces the relevance of the text in popular media ranging from theatre to modern digital platforms. It provides details about the way in which the text entered the aesthetics of visual media through theatre. The Kalanilayam dramas were instrumental in popularising several legends such as *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* in Kerala. The chapter further delves into the role of a text such as *Aithihyamala* on the silver screen. It emphasises the formation of a collective Malayali psyche that emerges in the aftermath of the region and from one's ardent desire to see one's identity being projected on the screen. The idealisation of hegemonic masculinity took place through the cinemas. Similarly, popular television also contributed to region formation, essentially by bringing regionalism within the larger fold of nationalism. It shaped the masculinities and femininities of Kerala by a commingling of the private and the public spheres. The popularity of the text has not waned; the narratives are further

adapted to cater to the taste of a contemporary audience via modern digital platforms. Therefore, this chapter attempts to trace the relevance of a text such as *Aithihyamala* in the contemporary popular culture of Kerala and how it resulted in the formation of a collective consciousness among the Malayalis.

The second chapter titled "*Aithihyamala* and the Discourse of Kerala Modernity: Masculinity in Context" is theoretical and it delves into the integral role of masculinity in understanding Kerala modernity. The first section looks at the role of *Aithihyamala* in the discourse of Kerala modernity. The region was considered as a geographical entity that was constantly territorialised/de-territorialised, but at the same time, it shared a common language and culture. The role of *Aithihyamala* and its popularity through print modernity is discussed in this chapter. *Aithihyamala* was instrumental in heralding the *Aikya* Kerala project. The latter part of the study focuses on masculinity formation within the discourse of modernity in Kerala. The period under study ranged from the late nineteenth century to early twentieth century Kerala, especially from the pre-colonial era to the formation of the modern state of Kerala. It analyses the transition of Kerala society from a matrilineal system headed by a *karanavan* to that of a patrilineal one under the control of a 'father' figure. The chapter problematises the formation of masculinity within the matrix of caste, class, and gender relations within society. Even though the framework of masculinity is diverse or plural, the hegemonic aspects of masculinity are reiterated and disseminated through a cultural text like *Aithihyamala*. The text can be considered as a site for identifying different types of masculinities that are projected on specific moments of Kerala history. This chapter also reflects upon the problematic representation of gender in *Aithihyamala* and how it shapes the construction of the ideal woman and tends to brand women who do not fit in with patriarchal ideologies as diabolic *Yakshis*. Further, it discusses the concept of region formation and masculinity as theorised by Jurgen

Habermas, Judith Halberstam, Michael Kimmel, Michael Kauffman, R.W. Connell, and several others.

The third chapter titled, "Visualising the Legends: Cinema and the Masculine World," is solely dedicated to the analysis of films based on the legends from *Aithihyamala*. The films considered for the study include *Kadamattathachan* (1984), *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (1966) and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* (2018). This chapter reflects on a conscious attempt to create a model of Malayali identity through these films. When the narratives of indigenous heroes such as *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* were made into films, they were seen as an attempt to project 'Malayaliness' or collective consciousness within the region in the aftermath of the *Aikya* Kerala project.

The chapter opens by analysing the problematic representation of masculinity in the film *Kadamattathachan* (1981). Further, it focuses on the moral masculinity embodied by Kathanar within a Christian setting, unlike that of his identity as a sorcerer in *Aithihyamala*. The moral masculinity of Kathanar is depicted as an ideal. The chapter also analyses the marketing strategy of the film in casting Prem Nazir as Kadamattachan and examines how his image as a romantic hero added to the construction of heroic masculinity. This romantic hero image was celebrated with the addition of two love plots along with several song sequences and romantic scenes. The chapter examines two heroines Valli and Marykutty and their role in aiding the construction of the hero's masculinity, where the hero becomes an object of desire, whereas the heroine's position was relegated to flattering eyelids and falling in love with the hero. The depiction of *Yakshi* as an abject, where she becomes a site for the clash of hegemonic masculinities is analysed through the duel between Kunchamon Potti and Kadamattathu Kathanar which recurs both in *Aithihyamala* and the film. The chapter continues to explain the role of a woman as an object in the power struggle between hegemonic masculinities. Further, it

analyses the celebration of communal harmony in the cinemas of the eighties by adding sub-plots such as a theme of Aliyar and his family in crisis to foster the secular and democratic image of a state in the aftermath of the united Kerala movement. This is also a device to attract audiences from different communities to the film as well.

The chapter also focuses on the problematic representation of the *Malayaraya* tribe in the film. It follows a stereotypical representation of tribal people whereas *Aithihyamala* depicts *Malayarayas* in the wake of colonial modernity. Kottarathil Sankunni portrays them as barbaric, cannibalistic, and savages who indulge in sorcery whereas the film shows them in a positive light but indulges in stereotyping that recurs in several other Malayalam films. In the film, there is an attempt to tie Kathanar's magic to the Christian tradition rather than tying it up with the indigenous tradition of *Malayarayas*.

Other masculinities such as the masculinity of the comedians or fools are examined in this chapter. Their masculinity is constructed in opposition to the hero's. Their bodies and mannerisms evoke laughter; they are depicted as docile and weak. Usually, they run off at the time of crisis whereas the hegemonic masculine figure of Kathanar and Potti bravely confront the *Yakshis* or other evil forces in front of them. The chapter reflects on the transformation of Kadamattathu Kathanar from a naïve hero to a powerful man who embodies Christian masculinity and establishes his authority as a Syrian Christian priest. Further, this section focuses on the representation of masculinity in the film *Kadamattathachan* and its difference from the depiction of Kadamattathu Kathanar in *Aithihyamala*.

The second section of the chapter analyses the film *Kayamkualm Kochunni* which was recreated in the years 1966 and 2018. The chapter analyses the working-class masculinity enacted through the body and mannerisms of actor Sathyan. Also, it ponders on the difference in the representation of Kochunni from a fair-skinned and handsome man from

Aithihyamalala to the rebellious and working-class masculinity embodied by Sathyan. His masculinity was in tune with that of proletarian masculinity projected by the Communist governments following the unified Kerala project. Further, the chapter compares the difference in the representation of masculinity in the film *Kayamkulam Kochunni* in 2018 from the first film. Nivin Pauly played the role of Kochunni and he displayed a volley of emotions as well as a relatable everyman character. It was Mohanlal's cameo as Ithikkara Pakki that made the film a success at the box office. Pakki's character displayed hyper-masculine performances that captivated the Malayali audience. The chapter also focuses on the outlaw trope that operated within these films and how the cinematic medium represented the rebellious nature as well as the moral complexities in the representation of an outlaw hero like Kayamkulam Kochunni. He is placed as an indigenous hero who encounters the police as his enemy in the first film, whereas the latter locates the legend in the wider socio-political milieu, where Kochunni's rebellious masculinity is in constant tussle with feudal, colonial and caste structures.

The chapter unveils the portrayal of Vazhapilli Janaki as a vamp figure, leading to Kochunni's arrest in both films. In *Aithihyamala*, Kottarathil Sankunni depicts Janaki as a *shudra* woman without any name whereas in the first film, she is portrayed as a social climber and the commercial formula of the second film expands the plot by attributing a love story between Janaki and Kochunni. In the first film, Janaki is stabbed to death whereas in the second film, she is arrested by the police. Further, it analyses the commercial formula of the Malayalam cinema's tendency to punish the vamp figures. The chapter delves into the attempt by popular cinema to elevate the hero's masculinity by projecting his identity as a savior to woman characters around him. Similarly, the second film included an item dance catering to the male gaze. Also, it involved several action sequences to project the masculinity of the hero.

The chapter analyses the stereotypical representation of Muslims as fanatic and rebellious in the aftermath of the Malabar rebellion and how the sentiment resonates in *Aithihyamala*. Kottarathil Sankunni portrays them as the 'other.' Unlike that of the films, Kottarathil Sankunni depicts Kochunni in a grey shade. In the films, Kochunni was celebrated as a symbol of resistance since the collective desires and fantasies of the audience were projected onto the hero's masculinity. Further, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the attempts made by the commercial formula of a film that does not allow the hero to fail. He is under constant pressure to perform his masculinity. Therefore, to fulfill the mass audience, the climax of the film deviates from *Aithihyamala*. In the legend, he dies at Trivandrum Central jail. However, the cinema projects him as an undefeated hero; the commercial formula of the film does not prefer a normal death for the hero. In the second film, the apotheosis of the hero happens since he is instilled inside the premises of a temple and, until today, continues to be celebrated in the popular culture of Kerala.

The fourth chapter, "Visualising the Legends: Television, Modernity, and the Masculine World," deals with the popularity of television in Kerala, which resulted in blurring the boundaries between the private and the public spheres. The chapter focuses on the celebration of masculinity in the popular culture of Kerala through television serials *Kadmattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni*. Further, it analyses the hegemonic masculinity of Kadamattathu Kathanar as an indigenous hero in a Christian setting. He acts as a saviour; often a superhero and a wise and venerable man in society, where his image is often juxtaposed with that of Jesus Christ. The chapter moves on to discuss the good versus evil binary that operates throughout the serial. It analyses the elevation of the hero's masculinity when he employs violence, whereas if the villain/villainess employs the same kind of violence, it is considered evil.

The chapter traces the role of the *Yakshis* in the serial to lower-caste origins and the *tharavadus* as a space that *Yakshi* tries to control through the possession of the members within the ancestral home. Further, it examines how these spaces become a site for exerting Kathanar's masculinity. He eliminates the threat of the abject and transfers the mantle of power back to the *karanavan,* yet another patriarch. It contains numerous plots and sub-plots to elevate the masculinity of the hero. The camaraderie between Kathanar and the Brahmin priests is highlighted since this could be a marketing strategy to attract audiences from both the Hindu and Christian folds in the chapter.

The second part of the chapter deals with the analysis of the serial *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and its sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan*. The chapter examines the 'abjectification' of Muslims by the mainstream media and traces this process of othering back to the colonial construction of viewing Mappilas as 'violent' and 'fanatic' in the aftermath of the Malabar rebellion. Kochunni's family is constantly derogated based on their religious identity and for being a thief's progeny. Further, the chapter analyses how a ruthless feudal system exploits the poor and contributes to the birth of a rebellious hero like Kochunni and the operation of the outlaw trope. It moves on to discuss the rebellion of Kochunni and his accomplices against feudal and colonial masters and their constant efforts to uplift the downtrodden. The collective desires and fantasies of the Malayali audience resonated with Kochunni's egalitarian perspective. An identification process with the hero's masculinity occurs through such representation, whereas this was absent in its sequel *Kayamkulam Kochunniyude Makan*. Further, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the audience's response which focuses on the serial's role in rekindling and capitalising on the nostalgia for a bygone era.

The fifth chapter, "Legends Beyond the Screens: Kerala Modernity, Masculinity and Popular Culture," focuses on the relevance of legends in the contemporary popular culture

of Kerala and the contribution of these legends in forming a collective Malayali consciousness. The first part of the chapter focuses on the difference in the discourse of modernity perpetuated by film and television in Kerala. The legends of *Kadamattathu Kathanar* and *Kayamkulam Kochunni* converge at several points since they are both heroes with an egalitarian vision. The chapter analyses the role of these heroes and their secular and democratic image being projected as the face of the united Kerala movement and how these legends fuelled a collective Malayali consciousness. The chapter focuses on viewing the legends of Kadamattathu Kathanar and Kayamkulam Kochunni as a part and parcel of modernity's gendering project in Kerala.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the transformation of these indigenous heroes into universal heroes and how the element of 'hyper-locality' paved the way for a global audience. Further, this chapter analyses the teasers of *Kadamttathu Kathanar: The Wild Sorcerer Part 1*, to examine the elevation of the masculinity of these indigenous heroes transcending their local contexts and catering to a global audience. Further, the chapter focuses on diverse ways through which these narratives proliferate in new media platforms. It provides a brief overview of the diverse narratives that these legends branch out through films, television, and YouTube videos. The legends document the heroic endeavors of Kochunni and Kathanar against the backdrop of historical evidence and rekindle nostalgia as well as validate their hypermasculine performance in contemporary popular culture. The chapter argues that all these legends branch out from the source text *Aithihyamala* and notes that even if the popularity of the text wanes these narratives will remain afresh for the consumption of a new generation of audience via new mediums and new forms.

The major finding that has emerged as a result of this Doctoral Study is that a text like *Aithihyamala* projects a masculine world and the concept of masculinity is not monolithic;

it is plural. The different aspects of masculinity found in the text comprises of—feudal masculinity, colonial masculinity, nationalistic masculinity, salaried masculinity, communist masculinity etc. The legends of *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* symbolise resistance. They stood behind the downtrodden irrespective of caste and class differences. These legends projected a secular, democratic, and unified essence of Malayalee identity which essentially led to the formation of a collective psyche among the Malayalee audience. With the rise of OTT platforms and the proliferation of digital technologies, there is a tendency to elevate indigenous heroes like *Kayamkulam Kochunni* and *Kadamattathu Kathanar* to universal heroes for a transnational audience. When the heroic figures are represented in a cultural text like *Aithihyamala* and its various film and television versions, the researcher came to the finding that it is the hegemonic aspects of masculinity and hyper-masculine traits that are re-iterated and disseminated through popular culture for the audience.

The relevance of the topic should be seen in connection with *Aithihyamala* being an integral part of Kerala culture, especially in connection with the questions on gender relations, caste hierarchies and the social status quo. The proliferation of the text through its various adaptations in popular culture (film and television) is significant for the study. The thesis traces the trajectory of masculinity vis-a-vis the discourse of modernity from pre-colonial times to the present. It proposes that the hegemonic aspects of masculinity act as a recurring trope in the construction of heroes that continue to hold sway over the popular culture of Kerala.

Among the 126 legends in *Aithihyamala*, it is only the legends of Kayamkulam Kochunni and Kadamattathu Kathanar that became widely popular, often outgrowing the popularity of the text as well. These heroes embark on a quest to capitalise on nostalgia and the collective cultural fantasies of the Malayali audience through their performance of

masculinity. The audience could easily identify with these heroes since they were also icons of resistance and they stood with the downtrodden irrespective of caste and class barriers. They projected a secular, democratic and unified essence of Malayaliness rooted in the cultural past of Kerala. *Aithihyamala* becomes a focal point for a unified Kerala project as well as disseminating the hegemonic aspects of masculinity into popular culture. Multiple narratives are created from this source text and they recur in new forms and they remain intact in the popular culture of Kerala.

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