

NEGOTIATING NATIONALISM: MALAYALAM CINEMA AND 1921

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Submitted by

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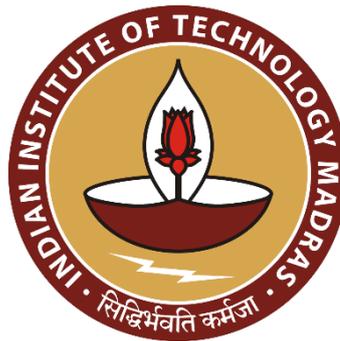
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Shahal B. (HS17SFP0025), pursuing Master of Arts (M.A.) in Communication at the University of Hyderabad, undertook the Summer Research Fellowship Programme 2017 at the Indian Institute of Technology Madras, Chennai, in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, under my guidance. This report titled “**Negotiating Nationalism: Malayalam Cinema and 1921**” was prepared as a requirement for the completion of the programme.

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ABSTRACT

Malayalam Cinema had its own peculiar relationship with the nation of India. This was one of negotiations and compromises. Also, there are particular ways in which different communities engaged with the cinema (and cinema to them) and the nation (of Kerala and India). In the post-colonial period, the history of the nation and nationalism was often told from a/the centre unlike during colonial times. To write a history of Malayalam cinema would be map all these various engagements between a number of agents. Malayalam cinema had its role in the very making of Kerala, and the Malayali elites have used it for assuming, and imagining their position as spokespersons of the whole. The film *1921* which is about the Malabar Rebellion was released at a significant time when the negotiations between the nation and the sub-nation were going through a period of change. The project maps the contradictions and condensation thus appeared in the film and looks us at through what discourse the film tried to legitimate the rebellion to integrate the Mappilas as others to the nation.

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Shahal B

INTRODUCTION

The project intends to complicate the idea of autonomy of communities in relation to the nation with reference to Muslim identity. The Malayalam film *1921* (I.V. Sasi 1988) is taken as a reference point from which I try to discuss the issue. This project is as much personal as it is academic intended to critique an egalitarian concept of the nation, to destabilise the notions of democracy and secularism associated with it and to take sides with those who may not have a stake in it.

There is a general notion of exceptionalism in the writings about South India, and it is also there in the writings about Kerala when locating it within South India. Other South Indian sub-nations were constructed and fuelled by passionate linguistic movements, and the people are identified with their emotional attachment to language too. Why is it not the same about Kerala? Surely answers of higher rationality, higher literacy or intellect will not be adequate. Where was this emotion and passion channelled to instead, if not to the mother tongue? How did such a consolidation ever happen on the linguistic lines without this attachment to the mother tongue? How did various communities respond and engage with this new nation in formation? Who owned/s this nation (of Kerala)? Who were party to the construction of Kerala?

Unlike the case studies of Telugu and Tamil, a study about Malayalam and Kerala cannot be imagined without talking about cinema. Cinema is central to the imagining and realising of Kerala, along with poems, novels, newspapers, drama, and most importantly caste and religion. These are not distinct tools, but which formed a network of symbols and meanings. A study of these would expose the politics of images usually recognised as part of Keralaness. In the following pages are the many doors through

which a path can be taken to unmould the construction of Kerala, as a sub-nation of Malayali elites.

The first chapter would frame some questions theoretically regarding the autonomy of communities and their engagements with the nation. The second chapter is about tracing a history of Malayalam Cinema and possible engagements from various locations with the form and ideology of it, taking *1921* as a point of entry. This chapter would also explore how the forms were adapted and appropriated differently to talk about different concerns and issues. It will argue that Malayalam Cinema until a certain point was consciously unconscious about the nation to solidify the sub-nation. The third chapter would look at how *1921* embodies contradictions, varying concerns and through what ways it solves or legitimises them.

SECTION I

National Modern and Communitarian Modern: Participations and Contestations

Throughout the years, after the formal independence of 1947, various histories, historiographies, popular discourses, scholarship and pedagogy have created the impression that it is impossible to think, act, perform or live beyond the clutch of colonialism and nationalism. The discourse of nationalism, as a grand narrative, has over-shadowed any investigation into the past of post-colonial societies such as India.¹ This logic would repeat how communities in India very easily and conveniently fashioned themselves into the categories that colonial modernity created for them without any resistance. Pre-colonial, colonial, anti-colonial, nationalist, and post-colonial have become readily available, but largely uncontested, categories to understand anything. Was (is) it possible for one to live outside or beyond these dominant discourses and structures? This is an introductory thought which I would like to provoke.

James C. Scott's seminal work on Upland Southeast Asian tribal communities *explored* how almost everything about the hill people's livelihoods "can be read as strategic positionings designed to keep the [Han-Chinese] state at arm's length"² and how it "effectively serve[d] to avoid incorporation into states and to prevent states from springing up among them."³ What characterised these slip-aways were their "rugged terrain, their mobility, their cropping practices, their kinship structure, their pliable

¹Jameson's proposal that every third world texts are "national allegories," has been widely debated. See Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," *Social Text*, no. 15, (1986): pp. 65-88; I. Szeman, "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization," *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 100, no. 3, (2001): pp. 803-827; Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text*, no. 17, (1987): pp. 3-25.

²James C. Scott, *Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (Yale University Press, 2009), p. x.

³Scott, p. x.

ethnic identities, and their devotion to prophetic, millenarian leaders.”⁴ Were such “strategic positionings” available for communities that are static and are in constant interaction with pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial states? The Muslim community, using many of the above in more or less similar ways, and through their particular faith structure has always been trying to distance themselves, if not to avoid incorporation or to keep the state at arm’s length, strategically from such power structures.⁵ It gets messy when pre-modern forms of state translate itself into nation-states, and how this particular translation has been deeply informed and shaped by the colonial state.

Keeping this thought in mind, I would try to partially frame the question of whether the Malabar Rebellion of 1921⁶ and various “*moplah*”⁷ uprisings before that in Malabar were, more or less, manifestations of this struggle against the intervention of a power-greedy colonial state, feudal lords and the nationalism, to keep them at a strategic distance from the autonomy of the community, spiritual and otherwise. Since already incorporated into, because of the participation in agriculture and trade, was it performance of the politics of the possible⁸ in order to be, at least, a little bit away- if not to be anarchist or anti-national- from the state? This is not in any way to suggest that the Muslims were successful⁹ in it or to suggest their “deliberate and reactive

⁴Scott, p. x.

⁵This requires elaboration which is beyond the purview of this study.

⁶An armed uprising in 1921 against British authority and Hindu Land lords in the Malabar region of Southern India by Mappila Muslims, usually seen as the culmination of a series of Mappila revolts that occurred throughout the 19th century and early 20th century.

⁷Moplah and Mappila refers to Muslims of Malabar, in this project.

⁸An idea associated with *Realpolitik*, the original phrase goes “politics is the art of the possible”. It is politics or diplomacy based primarily on considerations of given circumstances and factors, rather than explicit ideological notions or moral and ethical premises. In this respect, it shares aspects of its philosophical approach with those of realism and pragmatism. See “Realpolitik,” *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 27 June 2017, 01:34 am, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Realpolitik, accessed 07 July 2017.

⁹In fact, many writings have shown how they failed in it.

statelessness”¹⁰ but to simply put forward one possible hypothesis, which would remain speculative even at the end of this project, to explain the involvement of the mass of the Muslims in the rebellion. As stated already, the aim of this project is to frame new questions, since many things have been already asked and have been answered in more or less convincing ways. M.T. Ansari had recently called for the need to make a new “civilisational argument” and a shift from “culture to civilisation,” neither as a move away from cultural studies nor to lose the “hard earned lessons” of cultural studies.¹¹ Ansari had shown before how the image of a Muslim fanatic was constructed as a reason/cause to the Mappila Uprisings of the nineteenth century in colonial as well as nationalist and communist texts.¹² Scott’s “deconstruction of Chinese and other civilizational discourses about the “barbarian,” the “raw,” and the “primitive”” would show that they only mean “ungoverned, [or] not-yet-incorporated.”¹³ The practical meaning of the “fanatic” would also be something similar, with an added tint of religion to it. Ansari notes “[t]he “fanatic” is commonly defined, “normed,” as a person excessively, abnormally, religious; s/he needs to be controlled.”¹⁴ How is it that a community with such civilizational characteristics, then, are constantly imaged with the people who “voluntarily went over to the barbarians”? Does it suggest that Muslims of this region, even when being part of the Islamic *civilisation*, contains affinity to evade state? How did the reforming/modernising movements among Muslims engage with this question? How would, then, one explain the Arakkal Kingdom?¹⁵ In the course of this paper, I deliberately intend to fall into the trap of the discourse of nationalism,

¹⁰Scott, p. x.

¹¹M.T. Ansari’s talk at the International Islamophobia Conference in Calicut. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZeEceGHZQg>

¹²M.T. Ansari, *Islam and Nationalism in India; South Indian contexts*, (Routledge, 2016), pp. 73-120.

¹³Scott, pp. x-xi.

¹⁴M.T. Ansari, *Islam and Nationalism in India; South Indian contexts*, (Routledge, 2016), p. 74.

¹⁵A former city-state on the Malabar Coast ruled by the only Muslim dynasty existed in the region.

partly in the realisation that, by getting this state-funded education and through other means, I have no way out.

All of this is also viewed in connection to the non-academic debates happening in Kerala, and elsewhere, among thinkers from Dalit-bahujan¹⁶ communities about the question of the right to resources based on the presumption of *lack* and the question of community based on the (Ambedkarite) idea of *exclusion*.¹⁷ I will be quoting from non-academic sources such as Facebook posts and web portals, for theory as well as for facts, and this is to say that there is a need to theorise/understand a new public sphere that is being created in the new media spaces¹⁸ which give anonymity and autonomy. This public sphere is usually understood as a hypocrite space since all these people do not work on the ground, but only post.

NATIONALISTS, MARXISTS, SUBALTERNS, AND DALIT-BAHUVANS

If we are to categorise the scholarship and literature existing about nationalism, and thereby the question of modernity and community (since all these are connected in an intricate web), we can identify three broad streams. The first will be the nationalist and

¹⁶ A term used by Kanshiram to suggest a possibility of the formation of a political community through the coming together of the OBCs, SCs, STs, Religious minorities and other marginalised sections of Indian society.

¹⁷ See K.K. Baburaj, “Vibhavaasthreeyavum Dalitarude Aadipaapavum” [“Politics of Resource and the Original Sin of Dalits”], *Utharakalam* 15 June 2017, <http://utharakalam.com/?p=19997#.WULYEdOZsDk.facebook>, accessed 01 July 2017; Sunny M. Kapikkad, “Kerala Model: A Dalit Critique,” translated by Nivedita Menon, in *No Alphabet in Sight; Dalit Writings from South India* edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu (Penguin Books, 2011), pp. 464-473.

¹⁸ Utharakalam.com, a web portal publishing articles on caste-related issues, says in its ‘about us’ page “[t]he prolonged struggles of marginalized groups have resulted in the formation of a new political sensibility. It was necessary to bring together the elements of this fragmented consciousness that was multi-layered to build a powerful social agency. For this, it is necessary to build up a new media culture. Further, contemporary mainstream media has its own deep-rooted race/ caste/gender character and class interests. In this context, it is necessary to create an independent media establishment that represents this consciousness,” http://utharakalam.com/?page_id=5, accessed 05 July 2017.

Marxist history of the nation where we can include people such as Bankimchandra Chatterjee to Gandhi, Nehru, and Ramachandra Guha; in the Marxist spectrum, this would include (in the case of Kerala) EMS, K. Damodaran, and many new intellectuals of that tradition. The second one would be the post-colonial/the Subaltern Studies¹⁹ and the post-Subaltern Studies (cultural critics) histories of nationalism which would include people like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Ranajit Guha, Deepesh Chakraborty, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and in Kerala Dilip Menon, Robin Jeffrey, Arunima G., J. Devika and so on. These groupings are not obviously in terms of the similarity of their arguments but from the common point of departure or break from the earlier writings. These groupings do not also mean that they do not counter each other. And the third category would be writings by people from the Dalit-bahujan communities, who also take ideas and tools from the above two streams, who make use of the new media spaces. They constantly invoke people like Ambedkar, Phule, Ayyankali, Sri Narayana Guru, Sahodaran Ayyappan and such philosophers and thereby bring about a new intellectual tradition. This includes both academic thinkers (institutional and non-institutional), and non-academic thinkers. It would include people like Kancha Ilaiah, G. Aloysius, M.S.S. Pandian, Satya Narayana, Gopal Guru and in Kerala K.K. Kochu, Sunny M. Kapikkad, Ajith Kumar A.S., Jenny Rowena, K.K. Baburaj, Rekha Raj, M.T. Ansari, Pradeepan Pampirikkunnu, M.B. Manoj, Ajay Shekhar, Shyma P. and so on. A shift here would be to say that these writings are primarily about community and thereby about the nation, not the other way around. Keeping aside all the indigestibility of this grouping, what I would do in this part would be a mixed, short and general review of these streams in relation to nation, Kerala and Malayali mobilisations and identities. The latter almost always stresses on the question

¹⁹Subaltern Studies collective was group of scholars, who are also called as Subalternists or Subalterns.

of communities that are autonomous and that are in constant interaction with each other. All the above streams have now started invoking Ambedkar to legitimise arguments, and this is particularly more so after the *Justice for Rohith*²⁰ movement.

In its most reduced sense, what nationalist historiography did was to define the truly 'Indian,' as also the glory of *our* culture, the Indian culture which was recognised as best reflected in the past: in *our* ancient scriptures, *our* monumental architecture, *our* performing arts, *our* textiles. The stress was clearly on a 'high' culture which claimed unbroken continuity with the Brahmanical pre-colonial past.

An attempt to define nationalist discourse can be found in Sudipta Kaviraj. For him it "refers to the intellectual process through which the conception of an Indian nation is gradually formed, the discourse that forms it, is in favour of it and gives it historical shape."²¹ Nationalist thought attempted to establish "plausible but misleading narratives about the society it [tried]... to bring under its political control and its historical self-representation."²² The subalterns have argued that to expose the nationalist ideology, it is vital not to believe its autobiography.²³ Kaviraj has pointed out that "[t]he power of modern ideologies depends often on its self-portrayal, its rendering of its own history."²⁴ It is in "this primary move that the Marxists had failed,"²⁵ thereby falling into the trap of nationalism. This is why they are grouped together, among other reasons.

²⁰ A Dalit research scholar at the University of Hyderabad, who committed suicide while being suspended. His suicide note went viral and the student movement for *Justice for Rohith* that followed inspired many similar Dalit movements across the country.

²¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, *Imaginary Institution of India* (Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 88-89.

²² Kaviraj, p. 87.

²³ Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* (University of Minnesota Press, 1986): p. 51.

²⁴ Kaviraj, p. 88.

²⁵ Kaviraj, p. 88.

The conventional Marxist historians of Indian nationalism like Rajni Palme Dutt, and A.R. Desai tried to see the class character of the national movement. They concluded that the bourgeois leadership of the movement shaped the movement to suit their interests at the cost of the interests of the masses. Rajani Palme Dutt,²⁶ commenting on the 1857 revolt, which is dominantly regarded as the first war of India's independence, said that it was not a moment of nationalist movement and was merely a revolt of the old conservative and feudal forces and dethroned rulers. The Indian National Congress, which for him was the premiere organisation of the Indian national movement, was brought into existence as a 'safety valve,' through official British initiative, pointing to the role played by Hume in bringing about this organisation. For Dutt, this helped prevent a full-scale insurgency against the British rule. Another important work in this tradition is the *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (1948) by AR Desai. Desai presents five developmental phases of the Indian national movement and identifies the particular class base of it in each of these periods. This Marxist historiography of the national movement of India, which followed a class approach and economic determinism, was criticised by some later historians like S.N. Mukherjee, Bipin Chandra and Sumit Sarkar. Mukherjee argued that Indian nationalism was a complicated process with multiple layers and meanings, and cannot be understood by a reductionist class analysis. He pointed out the importance of caste as a crucial factor along with that of class and showed that traditional languages of politics were mixed with the modern ones during the movement.²⁷

Sumit Sarkar, another Marxist and an ex-Subaltern, criticised these paradigms and termed it as a simplistic version of Marxian class-approach, in his book *The Swadeshi*

²⁶In Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today* (1949).

²⁷S. Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, (Orient Blackswan, 2004).

Movement in Bengal 1903-1908 (1973). He saw the error of “assuming too direct or crude an economic motivation for political action and ideals.”²⁸ In his book *Modern India* (1983), Sarkar warned against indiscriminate use of analytical tools of Marxism such as ‘class’ and ‘class consciousness,’ and suggested that they should be used more “skillfully and flexibly.”²⁹ He further recognises various internal tensions existing within the Indian national movement, between two levels of anti-imperialist struggle: elite and populist.³⁰ He argued that we need to look at the complex interactions between these two levels, to be able to understand the complexities of the national movement in India.

Another point where nationalist and Marxist historiography converges is the attitude towards caste and religion, and thereby community. These narratives saw caste and religion as embarrassing pre-modern obstacles for the new nation to overcome, in Indian and Kerala context. Shyma’s work has shown how in parts of Kerala “where a certain kind of trade unionism was taking shape as early as the 1920s as part of the assertions of the Ezhava backward community, have been undermined by the official histories of communism in Kerala.”³¹ This image is put in contrast with that of North Malabar “as the realm of traditions and customs, the real embodiment of a modern, secular and casteless culture.”³²

In Subalterns’ critique of the earlier historiography, even Marxist scholars like Vivek Chibber had endorsed the Subaltern School’s historiography as a “positive alternative to the kind of nationalist historiography that had been in place for decades in a country

²⁸Sumit Sarkar, *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal, 1903-1908*, pp. 510-12.

²⁹Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885 -1947*, (New Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), p. 11.

³⁰Sarkar, *Modern India*, p. 11.

³¹Shyma P., “Nostalgias of The North: Malabar And the Popular in Malayalam Cinema,” Diss. University of Hyderabad (2012), p. 10.

³²Shyma, p. 10.

like India, in which the leaders of the independence movement were seen as something akin to saviours.”³³ He had a huge difference with them of course and he wrote a book too. Not just the nationalism but the historiography was also elite history. Ranajit Guha wrote “[t]he historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitism—colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism” and this “[e]litist historiography of the colonialist or neo-colonialist type counts British writers and institutions among its principal protagonists, but has its imitators in India and other countries too.”³⁴ It neglected “the politics of the people,”³⁵ or the subaltern classes, in the making of the nation. In the context of Kerala, Shyma would extend this tendency in historiography to the “writings of many historians (A. Sreedhara Menon, K.K.N. Kurup, etc.), cultural critics (Dilip Menon, Robin Jeffrey, etc.) and Marxists (E.M.S. Namboothiripad, A.K. Gopalan, etc.), most of whom are upper castes.”³⁶ She argues that there is a common elitist perception in all these people which is to “completely disregard what one could call a populist basis of communism significantly present since the 1920s, especially in the various factories and industries in South Kerala, and which significantly had a prominent backward caste agency.”³⁷ These narratives, instead, posit “the peasant revolts, especially since the late 1930s, as the foundation of communism, what such a historicization also does is to produce the upper caste reformers, the leaders of these peasant protests, as the agents of change and modernity.”³⁸

³³Vivek Chibber, “How Does Subaltern think?”, Interview by Jonah Birch, *Jacobin Magazine* 21 April 2013, <https://jacobinmag.com/2013/04/how-does-the-subaltern-speak>, accessed 01 July 2017.

³⁴Ranjit Guha, “On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India,” in *Subaltern Studies I: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 3.

³⁵Guha, p. 5.

³⁶Shyma, p. 11.

³⁷Shyma, p. 11.

³⁸Shyma, p. 11.

The point of departure for the Subalterns is their readings of the elitist historiography of Indian nationalism regarding the elitist role in the construction of Indian consciousness and the making of India as a nation. For them, the Marxist school also merged into the nationalist ideology of modernity and progress by ignoring the “ideology of caste and religion” as a factor in Indian history. Thus, they called for a subaltern historiography which tried to establish the voice and contribution of marginalised sections of Indian society by adopting the method of looking at ‘history from below.’ Gyan Prakash puts it as a “[r]eading [of] colonial and nationalist archives against their grain and focusing on their blind-spots, silences and anxieties, ... seek to uncover the subaltern's myths, cults, ideologies and revolts that colonial and nationalist elites sought to appropriate and conventional historiography has laid to waste by their deadly weapon of cause and effect.”³⁹ Guha argues that “[t]he general orientation of the ... elitist historiography is to represent Indian nationalism as primarily an idealist venture in which the indigenous elite led the people from subjugation to freedom.”⁴⁰ In other words, the whole arguments of elitist interpretation of Indian nationalism only highlighted the contribution made by the elites either ‘colonial’ or ‘native bourgeois’. This elitist historiography ignored “the contributions made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite.”⁴¹

Moving on to the third category of thought and action, one which is still new and still forming, there is no single methodology of research and thought, nor is it the aim, that connects all of these people. Very much like the Dalit-bahujan social movements in the country, this intellectual movement is also largely fragmented. Spaces like *Round Table*

³⁹Gyan Prakash, "Subaltern Studies as Postcolonial Criticism," *The American Historical Review*, vol. 99, no. 5 (1994): pp. 1475–1490.

⁴⁰Ranjit Guha, “On Some Aspects,” p. 2.

⁴¹Ranjit Guha, “On Some Aspects,” p. 3.

India are attempts to bring together these wide variety of voices from all around India and abroad. If we are to believe in Chatterjee and Kaviraj about how they insist on not believing the autobiography of any ideology, perhaps we have to do the same to Subaltern Studies. Subaltern Studies have been attacked by Marxists, but some glimpses of criticisms to the Subaltern and to the nationalist discourse from the Dalit-bahujan intellectuals will be noted here.

One of the key dilemmas in the Dalit-bahujan movements is about the claim to the nation. That is, whether to own it or disown it. At the wake of the suicide of Muthu Krishna's, a Dalit scholar from Tamil Nadu, at JNU, Kuffir Nalgundwar, the founder of *Round Table India*, wrote on Facebook; "all bahujan efforts until now have been to own india. it's clear now, emancipation is possible only through disowning it."⁴² This issue is at the centre also because of my topic, concerning what Muslims can/should/tried-to do.

One of the main criticisms against the Subaltern School from such locations is about the absence of works by them on Ambedkar, Phule or such people. While acknowledging "[t]he very effort to create an alternative historical discourse by exploring non-archival material ... [as] an immensely important intellectual contribution made by"⁴³ the Subalterns it should be said that "the determining bulk"⁴⁴ of their work has been characterised by "deafening silence on the question of caste,"⁴⁵ a "concern not to land in caste,"⁴⁶ and how they "turned a blind eye to the culture

⁴²Kuffir Nalgundwar, On nation, *Facebook*, 19 March 2017, 12.22 a.m., <https://www.facebook.com/kuffir/posts/10155923274667195>, accessed 07 July 2017.

⁴³Kalyan Das, "Subaltern Historiography to Dalit Historiography; Tracing Heterogeneity in Dalit 'Subalternity'", *EPW*, vol. 7 (14 Feb 2015): 61.

⁴⁴G Aloysious, "Subaltern Studies is sociology of Knowledge of one particular group" Part 3, Interview, *YouTube*, uploaded by Dalit Camera, 2 Sept. 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAb2qPanBXo, viewed on 22 June 2017.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

specific subalternity.”⁴⁷ G. Aloysius, in an interview with *Dalit Camera*, proposes that Subaltern Studies should be seen “as a subject of sociology of knowledge” brought about by a particular group from a particular region and social scale to address a crisis of historiography. Initially “instead of looking at the subaltern in a more straightforward and transparent way,” they set up subalternities in all corners of the nation to avoid “the most obvious subaltern.” According to him, the original plan of Guha and others to create an alternative historiography to address the issue of “failure of the nation to emerge” and of “the responsibility placed squarely on the hegemonic classes within the subcontinent” was undermined by the later Subalterns when they tried to locate Subaltern Studies within the post-colonial theory and when they tried to define subalternity as a post-colonial character determining the relationship between colonised and the coloniser. This “post-colonial subalternity rather than the caste subalternity,” Aloysius, says is “a hundred percent U-turn from the original idea of Guha.” This was possible also because “the original volumes of Subaltern Studies have not been rooted into the actual subalternity of the masses.”⁴⁸ In some way how Partha Chatterjee answered such a question was to accept the absence of Dalit questions as a “disadvantage” and to explain problem as something rose out of such a condition as how the Dalit question was never articulated powerfully in Bengal, thereby making it “very difficult [for him] to frame” such questions. He accepts that the “subaltern class” was imagined as a homogenous one and “the difference within the subaltern was not clearly made” in the beginning because the stress was on the distinction between elite politics and subaltern politics.⁴⁹ This supposed ignorance of articulation of Dalit

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Partha Chatterjee, “Subaltern Studies: No Dalit Movement So No Dalit Question,” Interview by Javed Alam, YouTube, uploaded by Dalit Camera, 30 June 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67m-UuI9268>, viewed on 07 July 2017.

questions in his surroundings undermines the very idea of the Subalterns about “autonomous domain” of subaltern politics, in the sense that they exist “independent from elite.”⁵⁰ Kalyan Das, trying to understand the gap between Subaltern historiography and a new Dalit historiography, identifies it in the Subalterns’ failure to “take note of the profound heterogeneity of the Dalit movement and this ambivalence of Dalits vis-à-vis the statist ideology.”⁵¹ He criticises that their reading of ““rags to riches” tales as suffering from an influence of liberalism or to recognise post-Enlightenment thought behind a particular conception of the nation-state is one thing, and to superimpose such assumptions on Dalit narratives and Dalit politico-cultural assertion is another.”⁵² He identifies that “[f]or most of the Subaltern Studies scholars, particularly Pandey and Chakrabarty, “the common sense of the modern” acts as a “universal prejudice” in Dalit consciousness in the post-Ambedkar era.”⁵³ Chakrabarty and Pandey “read Dalit assertion in social, religious, political and cultural fields as the assertion and expression of this modernity that is, as per their reading, unambiguously determined and ideologically informed by the liberal view of the state, or in other words “statism.””⁵⁴ He asserts that,

Therefore, the “common sense of the modern,” as it is traced in the Dalit struggle narratives by Pandey (2013a), is not a historically fixed point. On the contrary, the Dalit struggle or anti-caste struggle in India relies on several continuously mobile and highly contingent, infinitely heterogeneous, and socio-historical factors that constitute it.⁵⁵

⁵⁰Guha, “On Aspects,” p. 3.

⁵¹Das, 63.

⁵²Das, 63.

⁵³Das, 63.

⁵⁴Das, 63.

⁵⁵Das, 64.

It should be accepted that many ideas that Dalit-bahujan scholars and intellectuals later developed were in some ways used by the Subalterns, like that of the conception of the other, or the importance of the community. Partha Chatterjee, for example, had identified “community” as the primary organising principle for political mobilization.⁵⁶ The Subalterns had begun to rethink by the end perhaps. Kancha Ilaiah begins his interventions in the *volume IX* by saying: “Mainstream historiography has done nothing to incorporate the Dalit-bahujan perspective in the writing of Indian history. *Subaltern Studies* is no exception to this.”⁵⁷ Ilaiah calls for fellow Dalits to write their own history: “our history is a book of blank pages to fill with whatever letters—language—we wish to write...as we would wish to write.” For him this means constructing narratives which highlighted the “productive labour” of Dalits in the making of Indian society over a period of three millennia. These are the attempts which Kuffir referred to as owning the nation. Perhaps the latest version *Subaltern Studies XII* did was to focus on this question of Dalits and Muslims as part of the subaltern condition.⁵⁸

I firmly believe that the various trajectories mentioned here, would certainly help me frame the questions I seek, regarding Malayalam Cinema, the Muslim community and the nation.

⁵⁶Partha Chatterjee, “More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry,” in *SS II*, edited by Ranajit Guha (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 311-349.

⁵⁷Kancha Ilaiah, “Productive Labour, Consciousness and History: The Dalit-bahujan Alternative,” *SS IX*, pp.165-200.

⁵⁸Shail Mayaram, M.S.S. Pandian and Ajay Skaria, eds., *SS XII: Muslims, Dalits, and the Fabrications of History* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).

SECTION II

From 1921 to Back and Forth:

Construction of Minority Identity in Malayalam Cinema

1921 is a point of entry for me to the highly complicated and mediated history of Malayalam Cinema and how it took part in the construction of the nation of Kerala and the newly formed concept of the nation. Even though the construction of Indian nation and its nationalism has got a good amount of scholarly attention, the case of sub-nationalities is still very less talked about. T. Muraleedharan argues that the examination of the “‘writing in’ of the ‘region’ into the ‘nation’ ... [is] of tremendous significance to any evaluation of our post-colonial predicament.”⁵⁹ The negotiations of regions located “beyond the metropolitan mainstream of modernity” should get more detailed attention.⁶⁰ His position is that “the discourse of regional cinemas could constitute a deconstructive gaze capable of rendering unstable the facades of normative nationhood.”⁶¹ Borrowing from Rajadhyaksha, he notes that Phalke’s film was considered the ‘first Indian’ film not only because it was produced first, but also because he conceived it as a nationalist swadeshi enterprise. His films were “defining viewing pleasures for the new nation in the making.”⁶² The fact that there was a need to make silent films in regional languages speaks volume about the dissatisfaction regional viewers had with the national. How was the “viewing pleasures” of the sub-nation different from that of the nation?

⁵⁹T. Muraleedharan, “National Interests, Regional Concerns: Historicising Malayalam Cinema,” *Deep Focus Film Quarterly*, (Jan – May 2005): pp. 85-93.

⁶⁰Muraleedharan, p. 86.

⁶¹Muraleedharan, p. 86.

⁶²Muraleedharan, p. 86.

While the number of films produced in India after the 1930s saw a growth in Hindi, Bengali and Tamil films, Kerala had shown only a slow growth. Only four films were made from 1938 (the year of the release of *Balan*, first Malayalam talkie) to 1947 in Kerala. This temporal disparity between the national and Kerala should say something. This was also the period of high-spirited, passionate nationalism. A period when the hegemonic Congress centred anti-colonial force assimilated and appropriated many mass struggles across the nation. After 1947, the story of the nation, as it was told from many points was no longer possible, and it had to be told from the/a centre. The fifties were the times when Malayalam cinema was defining itself as a different film industry and the nation was engaged in new negotiations with “potentially disruptive subjectivities.” This era, in Kerala, is noted for its left movements and theatre movements. Theatre could establish ‘social realism’ as a main theme, which was to be taken up by the early films in Malayalam.

A look at some of the film journals of the 40s and 50s would tell that Malayalam films started getting attention by the 50s, and it had been assigned the political mission of unifying Kerala. Muraleedharan, quotes these lines written in 1940, to show this;

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 or social link 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* (goddess of Malayalam).⁶³

The integration of the new nation was impossible without imagining an Other. And this was the Tamilian, including the aesthetics of their films too.⁶⁴ The fact remains that many of early Malayalam films were shot at studios in Madras. Also, many of the early theatres and film studios in Travancore were monopolised by the Tamil Brahmins.⁶⁵ So this othering was also in the sense of being economically independent of the Tamil. Articles in those early journals also prove this and a call was made for an assertion of the ‘authentic regional’ and ‘authentic local culture’ in films. A ‘reflection’ of the distinct Kerala culture in films was expressed in them. Othering of Tamil film aesthetics happened simultaneously with the embracing of English and Hindi films. Also seen is the naturalisation of a regional identity- with *Sahyagiri*. So, people on this side of the *giri* were assumed to have a common culture and aesthetic sensibility. The other was the Tamil (films). The aim was not to imitate Tamil film in its aesthetics and was to appreciate the ‘authentic Kerala’ imageries in Malayalam films. The gradual relocation of the Other from Tamil to Muslims is the history of Malayalam Cinema.

The cinema more or less followed the above-described trend until the 1960s. The 1970s in Malayalam cinema was marked by the art films and the film society movements; interestingly I think these are the first films where we see India appearing as a concern. The cultural capital many of those directors had from the national institutes of film (like FTII) and the economic capital (National Film Development Corporation of India) situate them in the national. The inception of state-funded film festivals should also be

⁶³ Quoted in T. Muraleedharan, p. 90.

⁶⁴ T. Muraleedharan and C.S. Venkiteswaran, “Mapping the Nation”

⁶⁵ Jenson Joseph, Diss. University of Hyderabad.

seen in this context. All of these signify how the nation-state itself took part in the cinematic imaginations regarding “contestation over the state form.”⁶⁶ Prasad also notes that state played a major role in creating a national audience.⁶⁷ Malayalam was the industry where this experiment with national capital took place, and had positive results.

So, while during the post-colonial times state itself acted in these, in the nationalist phase this was only possible through other means. T. Muraleedharan notes how nationalism could discipline “regionalisms into solidarities of subordination” which was the defining character of the progressive writings of Malayalam which later was known as Literary Renaissance in Malayalam. Vallathol Narayana Menon’s famous lines would be telling in this context;

Whenever the name Bharath is heard, pride should fill our minds;

Whenever the name Kerala is heard, blood must boil in our minds.

The absence that I encountered in the works of both Sumathy Ramaswamy⁶⁸ and Lisa Mitchell⁶⁹ is that of the case of cinema. Anderson’s work was to explain how vernacularization of language and the associated growth of print capitalism resulted in the rise of nationalism.⁷⁰ Mitchell, on the other hand, focuses on the language itself “not as an inevitable handmaiden of the nation, but as a focal concern of communities whose aims *may not* include national sovereignty.”⁷¹ The most interesting part of her work is

⁶⁶ Madhav Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (OUP, 1998), p. 9.

⁶⁷ Prasad, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Sumathi Ramaswamy, *Passions of the Tongue: Language Devotion in Tamil India, 1891-1970*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft5199n9v7/>.

⁶⁹ Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009)

⁷⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 1.

⁷¹ Mary Hancock, Review of *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* by Lisa Mitchell, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 114, No. 5 (December 2009): pp.1431-1432.

the sixth chapter titled “Martyrs in the Name of Language? Death and the Making of Linguistic Passion,” in which she, in a way, contradicts herself. Chapter 6 is supplemental to the book's main argument, it can also be the beginning of a new work, by examining how different communities claim differently to the concept of nation (Linguistic nation and India). Arunima G. had suggested that “[i]t is this difference in the experience of laying claim variously to the language itself ... that creates differences *within* the notion of a ‘Malayali’.”⁷² Mitchell explores how the actual story that of the martyrs were different and contradictory to the "evidence of the unified passions of the masses for linguistic statehood"⁷³and intense "emotional commitments to language"⁷⁴ in South India. She ends her book saying,

That we can now recognize the interests of Dalits, tribals, and members of Other Backward Classes in the stories of the family members of the four young men who were killed in Nellore may have more to do with the recognizable meanings and narratives of the early twenty-first century and their differences from the dominant idioms of the 1950s than it does with any essential elements of the stories themselves. It is only by tracing the multiple historical forces that have helped to produce the dominant available idioms of a particular historico-cultural context—like Coastal Andhra in the first half of the twentieth century—that we can fully understand the process of the making of a mother tongue.

My larger aim is to trace such forces in the creation of a Malayali identity and in the construction of Kerala, which would remain incomplete even at the end of this project since here I am just mapping the various directions and points from which this tracing

⁷²Arunima G, “Imagining Communities Differently: Print, Language and the Public Sphere in Colonial Kerala,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2006): pp. 63-76.

⁷³ Mitchell, p. 213.

⁷⁴ Mitchell, p. 22.

could happen. Mitchell's last chapter shows how the oppressed sections of Andhra simply disowned the dominant available idioms of one's relation to language. Extending from this point, I would argue that those communities that were kept away from the feudal, colonial and post-colonial power centres had themselves imagined another nation beyond the modern borders and a homogenous empty time. These communities would rather imagine solidarities with the global oppressed than with the native oppressor.

Muslim community and their claim to the nation and the language are very different and complex. Such a study is out of the scope of this project. I would, in the rest of this project, try to look at how Malayalam Cinema attempted to deal with Muslims and tried to integrate them as *others* to the sub-nation, thereby coming to terms with the nationalistic project. The story of Malayalam Cinema told in such a perspective would be the story of a cinema industry trying to construct Kerala? as a sub-nation for the native elites to rule, and later to completely give it away to the nation when it comes to the question of Muslims. This would require a thorough analysis of the way Muslims engaged with the Malayalam cinema and vice versa. This will also have to be put aside for later.

What role did cinema play in the constitution of the new nation will be a starting point to this plan of mine. Its role is significant for the simple fact that, at the time of the debates around linguistic states, the only thing that was similarly available to the mass in Kerala was cinema. The role played by print capitalism in the west, and the role played by print capitalism in the colonies have been proved to be completely different. Anindita Ghosh,⁷⁵ among others, for example, took the case of the popular literature in

⁷⁵Anindita Ghosh, "An Uncertain "Coming of the Book": Early Print Cultures in Colonial India," *Book History*, vol. 6 no. 1, (2003): 23-55. *Project MUSE*, doi:10.1353/bh.2004.0009

Bengal and showed how the standardisation mission of the print modernity was a failure. G. Arunima has also tried to frame such questions in the case of Malayalam language and print.⁷⁶ The role of literature in the form of poems and novels and performances of dramas had their role in the making of the nation. The role of cinema in such a making would be partially addressed in this project.

The question of whether region or nation is tough to answer, but comparatively easy to frame. A.C. Sreehari notes how “a trans-regional dialect” of early Malayalam poems and how they “subsumed ... in a pan Kerala identity” is being contested by the contemporary poems from Malabar in their “anti-subnationalist and anti-colonial stance.”⁷⁷ He asserts that “recovering the region becomes an act of ‘de-keralisation,’ which is as indispensable as decolonization.” “Contemporary poetry attempts to dismantle this coerced unity” through going back to the regions and through their specific utterances. Recovering regions, in the sense of reclaiming it-for the idea of claiming something is very modern- become impossible for certain communities who are integrated as *others* in the sub nation of elites. Dilip Menon had talked about how lower caste Malayalam novels tried to imagine their conditions in comparison with the slaves of the West, or refer to a universal condition of slavery.⁷⁸ This tendency of going beyond the nation, like in 1921, when Muslims responded against the British abolition of the Ottoman caliphate, is thus a statement of post-national sensibility. This was unattainable for the elites since all of their discourses were trapped within the endless chain to capture, recapture or attempt to capture power over resources and discourses pertaining to the nation.

⁷⁶Arunima, “Imagining Communities Differently.”

⁷⁷A.C. Sreehari, “De-Keralisation: Recovering the Region in Poems of North Kerala.” forthcoming paper.

⁷⁸Dilip Menon, “No. Not the Nation; Lower Caste Malayalam Novels of Nineteenth Century,” *Early Novels in India*, edited by Meenakshi Mukherjee, (Sahitya Akademi, 2002), pp. 41-72.

The imagination of the nation of Kerala had its centres and peripheries on the basis of region also. A “First world” was constructed inside Kerala. Sreehari observes how midlanders mediated and “exported the literary-everyday innuendoes of midland to the high/hill and low/coastal land,”⁷⁹ like in the case of *Chemeen* (1956) which was written by/from Thakazhi. He notes that until the release of “*Kocharethi* (1998) by Narayan, an Adivasi from Idukki district, which narrates the life of the Malayarayers⁸⁰... *Indulekha* (1889) was the novel that represented the region Idukki, sharing the pan Kerala legacy.” Sreehari further argues that the way poets perceive “Wayanad as ‘*Vayal*’ *naad* (paddy, that’s cultivated in midland) makes it mandatory that such lapses are read politically” and how it “makes the coffee and tea estate [workers and their issues] invisible.”

For first worlders like Balamani Amma the nation of Kerala is like “a plantain leaf, a verdant island extending from the north to the south - from Gokarnam to Kanyakumari.” E.P. Rajagopalan critiques suchimagi/nations in his article on Balamani Amma in his book *Kavithayude Gramangal*.⁸¹ A Kerala that is constructed on the basis of the Parasurama myth is questioned by him to map an “intimate locality.”⁸² Sreehari, very interestingly, notes how such a “traditional geographical imaginary, supported by the higher myth of Parasurama, is fostered and maintained in modern time and space by Parasuram Express that runs from Mangalore to Nagarkoil.”⁸³

Dilip Menon’s interesting article titled “No. Not the Nation; Lower Caste Malayalam Novels of Nineteenth Century” provide a very good point on the question of difference

⁷⁹A.C. Sreehari.

⁸⁰a tribe inhabiting the hilly terrains of mid-eastern Kerala.

⁸¹E.P. Rajagopalan, “Deshiyatha, Swathwam, Daivam,” [Nationalism, Identity, Deity], *Kavithayude Gramangal*. [“Villages of Poetry”] (Kozhikode: Medha Books, 2004): 40.

⁸²Rajagopala, 45.

⁸³Sreehari.

of imaginations and concerns. There is an assumption of kinship between novel and nation, in the sense in which novel narrates the nation. Echoing Ashish Rajadhyaksha's and Madhav Prasad's notion about the film form, Menon says that the "novel was a do-it-yourself form that came from the West without any instruction."⁸⁴ What the novels from the location of lower caste, and about the public debate on caste inequality, did was to address a troubled present. They were largely inspired by the social reform movements. They were "a vehicle of reform through other means."⁸⁵ Even when we understand modernity in terms of focus on the individual, in the type of modernity that was present in colonies, the individual was always located in the perception of her/his community. In these novels, which are about slavery in one way, there is a *universal* experience of slavery.

Coming to his second topic, the juxtaposing of the nation and novel, the idea of Anderson, should be questioned. According to Anderson "the nation and the novel become expressions of the disenchantment of the world and the need for a secular imagination of community."⁸⁶ A collection of unknown others bound by a new affinity and occupying "empty, homogeneous time."⁸⁷ It would be assumed that novels prevent religious imaginary, which is what Menon argue-against. He argues, against Jameson, that writings produced at the margins serve as a supplement to the dominant discourse and the nation is exactly what is not inscribed in them. Lower caste novels, for Menon, is beyond this and they "speak of a place *elsewhere* beyond the geographical and social map that a "collectivity" of the subordinate are forced to inhabit."⁸⁸ Although Menon

⁸⁴ Menon, "Not the Nation," p. 42.

⁸⁵ Menon, p. 42.

⁸⁶ Menon, p. 48.

⁸⁷ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983, (Verso, 2006) p. 24.

⁸⁸ Menon, p. 58.

was talking in the context of lower caste communities, it could be applicable to the minority community as well. Muslims were also imagining a place elsewhere.

While India is a concern, in *Indulekha*, Menon notes that lower caste novels seem to be “unconscious of the nation.” After a thorough look at the motifs related to death, travel, individual self, city/village, family and home, Menon comes to a conclusion that “individuals, families and homes have to be imagined before the nation can.”⁸⁹ This is the point where I would depart from Menon. Rather than understanding this as a *lack*, this should be seen more as a “strategic positioning.”

This positioning strategy was assimilated by Malayali elites through films by consciously being unconscious about the nation of India, and carrying out the imagining of Kerala. The flexibility and adaptability of the film form have been noted by Ashish Rajadhyaksha saying that film has a modern-context, it is a genuinely collective art-form and it has been proven to have the potential to transform centuries-old material tradition into contemporary interventions.⁹⁰ For Madhav Prasad “[t]he technology did not bring with it, readymade, a set of cultural possibilities which would be automatically realized through the mere act of employing it. At the same time, the technology is not neutral, simply sliding into the role assigned to it by the cultural-political field it enters.”⁹¹ The native elites of Kerala found their opportunity in cinema since the position of wholesalers of Indian nationalism was already occupied by the Bengali elites. C.S. Venkiteswaran notes in a study about the Malayalam films of the 1950s that,

Significantly, in all the films [that he looked at; *Jeevithanowka* (The Boat of Life, K Vembu/1951), *Neelakuyil* (Blue Koel, P Bhaskaran and RamuKariat,

⁸⁹ Menon, pp. 71-72.

⁹⁰ Rajadhyaksha, Ashish. “Of More Than a Certain Tendency in Indian Cinema”. *Journal of Arts & Ideas*, no. 5 (Oct-Dec 1983), p. 5-16.

⁹¹ Madhav Prasad, *Ideology of Hindi Film: A Historical Construction*, (New Delhi: OUP, 1998), p. 2.

1954), *NewspaperBoy* (P Ramdas, 1955) and *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (Citizen Rarichan, P Bhaskaran, 1956)], except *Jeevithanowka* there is an adolescent in the middle and running through all is a deep ambivalence about the 'nation,' a simultaneous process of yearning for it and its impossibility, a deep conflict between imagi-nation and the space actually lived in. And it is not the nation of India that these films imagine, but an 'elsewhere', an imaginary nation of a classless secular society. More than the overarching idea about the nation of India, these films seem to be 'looking forward' to an urban or secular, modern society, though in a deeply ambivalent manner. It is not an imagi-nation that is fired by nationalism; but a society that looks out, looks forward, in search of a nation and a state.⁹²

So, while marginalised communities were imagining an elsewhere beyond the nation and state, Malayalam cinema was trying to imagine this elsewhere within the nation, or among the available forms of nation. For Venkiteswaran “the language or vernacular cinemas within India also have their own histories *within* the national History” and the difference that I am trying to explain here is that this ‘within’ was only the concern of elites and not of the subaltern. The real question is, in the process of looking-out, who all are left-out? Who is, in fact, (able to) look-out?

The elsewhere of Malayalam cinema was found very strategically inside the state borders of Kerala. At a time when “cinema in other parts of India was fired by the new-found optimism of the post-independence era, and the Nehruvian nation-building project, and was vociferous about a new subjectivity marked by nationalist hopes,

⁹² CS Venkiteswaran, “Malayalam Cinema of the 50’s – Mapping the Nation,” Paper presented at the seminar *Theorizing the Region: Configurations, Contestations and Alliances*, February 10-12, 2006. Organized by the Centre for Comparative Literature, University of Hyderabad.

defined often by politics, language and culture ... such 'nationalist' or patriotic films were conspicuous by their absence in Malayalam and the landmark films of the period looked at the future with a lot of circumspection."⁹³ What this absence signifies for me is just the imagination of the sub-nation, whose sole spokesperson would be the progressive Nair. Jenson Joseph's observation is notable here, "[t]he anxieties surrounding the position of various communities/castes in this newly imagined rational-secular Malayali nation animated the narrative preoccupations in the socio-realist films of the 1950s."⁹⁴ In his note on *Neelakkuyil* (P. Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat 1954), he shows how the film imagined "the subaltern social groups that nominate the ideal rational figure Shankaran Nair to represent them, authorizing him to speak/act on behalf of them."⁹⁵

Venkiteswaran argues that those who enter the talkies were entering a 'new, secular' space, where "playing out or 'performing' of the secular nation" was taking place. He goes on to say "it was a desire to see oneself 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... This desire to see Kerala in film is also a desire to imagine and bring into being a Kerala through cinema. It is also the desire to see and make one's nation in a new medium translating one's narratives into it." A song in the film *Rarichan Enna Pouran* (P. Bhaskaran), released in 1956, the year in which the state of Kerala was formed, graphically sketches a virtual resource mapping of Kerala mentioning its geography and various products and places associated with it. Even the films about anti-colonial struggles were about regional struggles and nothing that had national signification until *1921. Veluthambi Dalawa* (G. Viswanath and S.S. Rajan,

⁹³ Venkiteshwaran

⁹⁴ Jenson Joseph, p.70.

⁹⁵ Jenson, p. 92.

1962) for example had tried to imagine a pan-Kerala alliance to fight the British, to save *desam/raajyam* from *vellakkaar*.

Parallel to all of this, there are two more things that should be studied. One would be the expansion of the meaning of the word *Malayali* and of the word *desam*. In school textbooks, until some years before, national symbols of both India and Kerala were termed as '*Deseeya...*'. This seems to have caused a confusion between which is the real nation? Or can both be equally nation? The change in very recent text books to denote the symbols of Kerala state as *official [audyogika]* symbols of Kerala and to the symbols of India as the only *national [deseeya]* is telling. The semantical ambiguity of the word *desam* is in the process of rectification.⁹⁶ This process of *desam* denoting the intimate locality-to Kerala-to India need to be studied in parallel with the study of the cinema. There are enough materials that were made to prove that Malayali meant Nair. The question here would be to ask, then, how is the language Malayalam connected to the (old) Malayali? And what was the claim of the Muslims to the language? In short, why Arabi Malayalam? Was it a claim to both the languages? Nuaiman has noted that the history of Arabi Malayalam should be read in the background of the relation between Malabar and the Arab region.⁹⁷ He suggests that Arabi-Malayalam could have been a pidgin at one point of time which was developed later. It could have been a means of overcoming the in-betweenness of Muslims of the region, in between Arabi and Malayalam speaking communities. He points out that rather than insisting on the trade-related aspect of Arabi-Malayalam, that it is important we identify it with faith-related day-to-day life of Muslims of Malabar. To the question of origin of that

⁹⁶ This is currently an experience and memory based comment, rather than authentic.

⁹⁷ Nuaiman, "Arabimalayalathinte Bhoothavum Bhaaviyum" ["The Past and Future of Arabi Malayalam"], *Risala* 27 Aug. 2014, 20-25; "Aaranu Arabimalayalthin aa Perittathu?" ["Who named it Arabi-Malayalam?"], *Risala* 10 Sept. 2014, 4-7.

language and about the name, Nuaiman argues that it is possible Arabi-Malayalam originated from Tamil since Malayalam was not even developed when literature in Arabi-Malayalam was being written. The claim of Malabar historians' that Islam arrived in Malabar during the time of prophet Muhammed through Cheraman Perumal might be a means to get legitimacy through the story of a king's conversion. He argues instead to study Malabar in relation to its relations with other regions

SECTION III

1921; Contradictions and Condensation

The memory of Malabar rebellion hasn't vanished. On 28 May 2017, the idols of Pukkottupadam Sreevillyath Mahadeva Khshethram were desecrated in the Muslim majority district of Kerala, Malappuram on the first day of Ramzan. Malappuram has been the prime target of Sangh Parivar in South India. The incident followed concerted attempts by Sangh Parivar to spread communal hatred. Hindu outfits like Hindu Aikya Vedi declared local hartal and blocked roads. In addition to social media campaigns, which said that Muslims are behind this and Hindus were facing threat in Malappuram, the state witnessed protests by Hindu organizations.⁹⁸ One of the Facebook post by called Unnikrishnan Karthikeyan, who is an RSS member, wrote:

A temple was demolished in Malappuram. Sivalingha was hacked into two. Sree Kovilakam was pissed-excreted on.

Hindus of the south Kerala should start refugee camps. Malabar is captured by the secular terrorists. There is every chance for a second *Mappila Lahala* [Mappila Outbreaks].

The first Mappila Lahala has become *Freedom Struggle* only because Hindus have been animals. You can decide whether the second *Mappila Lahala* be freedom struggle or not.⁹⁹

⁹⁸The person responsible was arrested soon by the police and he was a Hindu, the rhetoric was then changed that he was a CPIM member. See Mohanakumar S.S., "Kerala police arrests man for temple attack," *Deccan Chronicle* 29 May 2017, www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/crime/290517/kerala-police-arrests-man-for-temple-attack.html, accessed on 01 July 2017; Shafeeq Hudawi, "Police foil Hindu right wing's bid to evoke communal violence following desecration of temple in Malappuram," *Twocircles.net* 29 May 2017, twocircles.net/2017may29/410317.html, accessed on 01 July 2017.

⁹⁹The post has been later removed. See "Failed attempts of Sangh Parivar to start a Communal Riot," *Dool News* 28 May 2017, www.doolnews.com/how-sanghparivar-tried-for-a-communal-riot-in-malappuram-using-social-media.html, accessed on 01 July 2017.

One among many such hate-filled posts on Malappuram by the Hindu nationalists is quoted here to note the kind of memory that has been circulated nationally, and now being used by the Hindu nationalists. The suggestion that the outbreaks have become part of the freedom struggle is significant. These outbreaks were appropriated by the Communist Party as an agrarian revolution. So, the earlier mentioned Facebook account holder, could have meant, a contradiction of Ansari's observation, that at some point the political projects of the Communist Party and its claims got translated into that of nationalist discourse.

1921 was the *Randamoozham*¹⁰⁰ of 1988, in the sense that the budget was Rs. 1.20 crore, the most expensive film in Malayalam until date. The producer was Muhammed Mannil, written by T. Damodaran and directed by I.V.Sasi. The upcoming release of *Randamoozham* with a 1000 crore budget is the first such step into that kind of a 'national' from the region of Kerala. Malayalam film industry used to get national attention only through its art films and occasional remakes to south Indian industries and Bollywood. But here, Malayalam is attempting to claim something common to India differently. *1921* was released at a remarkable year in 1988. The stage was being set for the neo-liberal policies on a global scale India, a couple of years later would see the agitations by upper caste youth against Mandal report implementation. In the global context, however, the 1980s was actually quite significant. Al-Qaeda was founded in 1988 by Osama bin Laden, Abdullah Azzam, and several other Arab volunteers who fought against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s.¹⁰¹ This would lead to the 9/11, the War on Terror and the glorious Good Muslim-Bad Muslim binary.¹⁰² It

¹⁰⁰ An announced movie based on the re-telling of *Mahabharatha* by M.T. Vasudevan Nair, of the same title.

¹⁰¹"Al-Qaeda's origins and links," *BBC News*, July 20, 2004, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/1670089.stm, accessed June 3, 2014.

¹⁰² For an interesting read of the story of how CIA and USA mediated all this, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*, (Pantheon, 2004).

has been noted by film studies scholars that Hollywood started imagining their main villains in the figure of the Muslim terrorist from this period. This was a shift from the former USSR villain. Not just in the action, adventure, war genre but even in the family and romance dramas, the threat of this Muslim terrorist was very visible. In the context of India however, Muslim terrorists, except lately, had the figure of Kashmiri Insurgents. Islamophobia in India is never a post-1990 phenomenon here as it is usually manifested in the west. It only got a global legitimacy in the form of global Islamophobia which encouraged the Indian films to tread in this construction of the Muslim other even more rigorously. In the social sphere, this project has been supported by the growing Hindu nationalists and their violence in the form of the demolition of Babri Masjid. It has been observed that the Indian Muslims have been bearing the burden of the partition ever since. How this image has been circulated and constructed by films has not been getting enough attention, especially so in case of Malayalam films. I would like to jump straight into my problem here, to the case of Malayalam films.

E.V. Ramakrishnan has noted in the introduction to Ansari's book in Malayalam how the characterisation of Jabbar in the story "Higuita" has a cinematic element.¹⁰³ The fact that the story was published in 1990, and the fact that E.V. Ramakrishnan wrote the introduction in 2008 would sufficiently provoke certain questions. Was E.V. Ramakrishnan talking about the similarity of the character to the image constructed very aggressively in the post-1990 Hollywood, Indian and Malayalam films? Or was he talking about an image already available in the market at the time the story was being written and published? If such a character was already present in Malayalam cinema

¹⁰³ E.V. Ramakrishnan, Introduction, *Malabar: Desheeyathayude Ida-paadukal [Malabar: The Transactions of Nationalism]* by M.T. Ansari (DC Books, 2008), p. 16. "Higuita" is written by N.S. Madhavan.

pre-1990, why is it that it waited until the global legitimacy to make it blunt? Here is where I see the significance of *1921*, and its release in this peculiar time.

Though being the most expensive film till date, it has been reported as “not doing as well as expected.”¹⁰⁴ Perhaps, it was a little bit early, as the stage was still being set. *Roja* (Mani Ratnam 1990) and its wide popularity across the nation had caused an interesting debate in the form of a few articles that appeared in EPW about *Roja*. This was the first discussion of its kind regarding the way a particular film constitutes nation. The discussion begun by Tejaswini Niranjana through her article “Integrating Whose Nation?” in the wake of *Roja* getting the National Integration Award. Niranjana talked about how “an ‘ordinary’ middle-class person is inserted into a national conflict”¹⁰⁵ in Mani Ratnam films. She argues that the “hegemonic definition of the nation *today* may not overtly manifest itself as Hindu”¹⁰⁶ however, that “the claiming of the nation by the new middle class and the series of exclusions (of Dalits, of Muslims) it produces as natural feeds into the agenda of the forces of Hindutva, and that the portrayal of 'mainstream' and non-exceptional characters in commercial cinema provides one point of access to this complex configuration.”¹⁰⁷ She observes how “Rishi usually appears only in jeans and shirt or sweater” while “the Kashmiri militants always appear in clothes marked as ethnically Muslim; their ethnicity reveals them as anti-modern (therefore anti-national or anti-Indian), intolerant and fundamentalist, while Hindu ethnicity as displayed by the chief protagonists is merely part of the complexity of being Indian.”¹⁰⁸ The religiosity of the Muslims “is always portrayed as grim and humourless,

¹⁰⁴Sreedhar Pillai, “Celluloid Sultans of Kerala,” *India Today*, 31 December 1988, indiatoday.intoday.in/story/mammooty-and-mohan-lal-emerge-as-unprecedented-superstars-of-malayalam-films/1/330129.html, accessed 1 July 2017.

¹⁰⁵Tejaswini Niranjana, “Integrating Whose Nation? Tourists and Terrorists in 'Roja'”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, (15 Jan. 1994), p. 79.

¹⁰⁶ Niranjana, p. 80.

¹⁰⁷ Niranjana, p. 80.

¹⁰⁸Niranjana, p. 80.

Roja's prayers are funny and endearing, inviting the audience to identify with her hopes and anxieties.”¹⁰⁹ Niranjana also notes the similarity of the portrayal of Rishi and that of “upper-caste/class anti-Mandal agitators in 1990, agitators who claimed that they were truly secular because they did not believe in caste but only in merit.” In short, for her, *Roja* signifies the accomplishment of middle class desire.

Venkatesh Chakravarthy and M.S.S. Pandian wrote a reply to Niranjana. They are countering Niranjana’s argument that the film entails the defeat of the state. On the contrary, their argument is that “the apparent inability of the state in the film actually masks its silent and powerful ability and in that sense the ultimate victors in the film are the state and the Hindu-patriarchal culture with which the desire of Rishi Kumar, the hero, coincides.” In their understanding, “the entire narrative of the film is keyed to the disavowal of the violence of the state and the proclivities of female subjectivity.”¹¹⁰ They are using the Freudian ideas *condensation*¹¹¹ and *displacement*¹¹² to explain their point. For them condensation in the film “is an imaginary and non-logical fusion of often contradicting elements of signification or it picks up its force from a cluster of signifying elements. This is the same condensation that I have used in this chapter’s title. This tool employed by Pandian and Chakravorthy can be used in the case of *1921* also. Displacements like in the case, “what should have followed immediately after the arrest of Wasim Khan is his torture by the army authorities. Instead, our attention is displaced to the idyllic locale of the southernmost part of India and in the bargain the

¹⁰⁹Niranjana, p. 80.

¹¹⁰Venkatesh Chakravarthy and M.S.S. Pandian, “More on *Roja*”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, (12 March 1994), p. 642.

¹¹¹For Freud, Condensation is one of the methods by which the repressed returns in hidden ways. For example, in dreams multiple dream-thoughts are often combined and amalgamated into a single element of the manifest dream.

¹¹²Displacement is an unconscious defence mechanism whereby the mind substitutes either a new aim or a new object for goals felt in their original form to be dangerous or unacceptable. Displacement operates in the mind unconsciously, its transference of emotions, ideas, or wishes being most often used to allay anxiety in the face of aggressive or sexual impulses.

above-mentioned possibility is silenced.” Also in the end, “Rishi walks towards Roja, the army moves in the direction in which Liaquat left. Now, this is displaced to another image in which, for no reason, Roja falls at the feet of Rishi and with that act she is fully transformed into a middle-class wife.”¹¹³ As Ansari pointed out about the case of *Indulekha*, the Muslim-threat is used to tame woman.¹¹⁴

Next article was written by S.V. Srinivas. His point is how *Roja* worked in such a political context of globalization and the retreat of the state. *Roja* “interpellates the 'common man', upper-caste-middle-class male really, to protect 'national interest' by fighting terrorism. The correspondences between family and nation ... serve to 'bring home' larger problems like terrorism by turning abstract concepts like national security into immediately recognisable ones like family well-being.” He also looks at what the audience is already aware of before watching the film, in the sense of the casting.¹¹⁵

This is another methodology which I can use in case of *1921*.

1921 tells the partially fictionalised story of the Malabar Rebellion. It traces the incidents and causes that led to the rebellion. It maps the locality with various agents and concerns and also the rise and fall of the rebellion. We are given an introductory information in the form of a voice-over about the context of the Malabar Rebellion globally, and nationally, in the beginning;

“During the first world war, the Mohammedans in India stood with the British and against Turkey Sultan, who was the saviour of Islam and representative of the God, because of the belief in the promise of British King that no harm would

¹¹³Venkatesh Chakravarthy and M.S.S. Pandian, “More on *Roja*”. *Economic and Political Weekly*, (12 March 1994): pp. 642-644.

¹¹⁴ M.T. Ansari, *Islam and Nationalism in India* (Routledge, 2016), pp. 139-159.

¹¹⁵S.V. Srinivas, “*Roja* in 'Law and Order' State,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, (14 May 1994): pp.1225-1226.

be done to the holy spaces of Mohammedans. But when they won the war, the British forgot this promise. Turkey was shared among the allies. Sultan was humiliated. The position of the Caliphate was lost. This hurt the Muslims. To reconstitute Caliphate and to re-establish the holiness of Jazirat Al-arab and other holy places, they started the struggle against the British. Mahatma Gandhi called the Hindus and the Indian National Congress to be part of this holy war against the common enemy. When Congress and Khilafat started working cooperatively, the region was awakened. The waves of it were felt more in the taluks of Ernad and Valluvanad in Kerala. To crush this mass movement the British appointed the Army and Police against the *locals*.”

The iconography, that the film opens to while the above voice-over is playing, situate the context within Kerala. The suggestion is Kerala being contextually located within the turbulent global and the national. The language of visual and otherwise, join to mean this subordination. The use of the word *locals*, *naattukkaar*, is a very strategic move towards where the movie sees the problem. It is suggestive of the claim that the rebels have towards the *naad*, the region, and will see whether this *naad* is translated into nation. This introduction also denies the role of Land Lords and the alliance between the British and them in causing the rebellion, which is shown throughout the movie, but not in this directorial-authoritative voice-over.

The story of the rebellion is fictionalised mainly through the insertion of the characters of Mammooty (Khader) and Suresh Gopi (Unnikrishnan) which has multiple layers of meaning. This movie was released at a time when Mammooty and Mohanlal were building their superstar personas and many people from the industry were anxious about such a process. Mammooty and his characters in Adoor Gopalakrishnan films were also blurring the gap between the Art (award) films and the commercial/popular ones.

T. Damodaran himself, the writer of *1921*, has said “A few years back history could have been told as it was in Malayalam cinema but today I have to weave an actual incident in masala form with a larger than life character for the sake of Mammooty.”¹¹⁶ But it would be suicidal to give all credit of the characterisation of Khader to the fact of the superstar persona and leave it at that. The film features complex concerns and perspectives within one character and among characters. It is also confused about what kind of legitimacy should be given to the Malabar rebellion. The complete endorsement of the national, which could have helped in giving it a nationalistic legitimisation was even though hinted in the film, wasn't the whole aim.¹¹⁷ Legitimation in the Communist sense, calling it nothing but an agrarian revolution, is also not completely endorsed in the film. The safe way out, for the film, was to put everything in the name of the British and thereby wash the blood off from the hands of the Congress and the Land lords.

The insertion of Khader who has a personal history of being in the First World War, and thereby a direct connection to the Khilafat movement is telling. I argue, this global background of the character of Mammooty should also be seen as the anxiety over the perspective that Muslims' “fundamental loyalty [is] to the religion, pan-Islam and the international Muslim community.”¹¹⁸ Unnikrishnan is the type of character who appears in the films of M.T. Vasudevan Nair, that is, those Naxalites from upper caste who sacrifice themselves for the cause of the Adivasis, the helpless and thereby patronizable. Unnikrishnan is a terrorist, as opposed to the Gandhian non-violent mode

¹¹⁶ Quoted in Sreedhar Pillai, “Celluloid Sultans of Kerala.”

¹¹⁷ “While the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of 13 April 1919 (in which 379 people, as per official sources, were killed) and the Chauri Chaura incident of 5 February 1922 (in which 23 policemen were burnt alive by angry peasants) find their place in the history of the Indian nationalist struggle for independence, the 1921 Malabar rebellion is often reduced to a mere footnote.” In M.T. Ansari, *Islam and Nationalism in India; South Indian contexts*, (Routledge, 2016), p. 73.

¹¹⁸M.T. Ansari, *Malabar: Desheeyathayude Ida-paadukal [The Trans-actions of Nationalism]* (DC Books, 2008), p. 7.

of protest. These two characters, along with Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji (T.G. Ravi) forms three faces of the rebellion as far as the film is concerned. The figure of Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji, a religious figure and one with a known history, was inadequate for the writer to tell the story.

The first face of the rebellion, Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji, the rebel leader is a religious figure. The first meeting is shown as happening between Ali Musliyar and Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji inside his house. Variyan Kunnathu Kunjahammed Haji's concern is shown as personal revenge, he wants to 'hack everyone who humiliated his family.' Variyan Kunnathu is "unaware" of the national leaders and so does not care about the non-cooperative movement. But he unambiguously states that he will only listen to Ali Musliyar because he taught him *oth* [to read Quran] and the Arabic alphabets. A dialogue that Haji says to Musliyar strikes me more in the context of the current debate on the question of Pasmadas. Haji says to Musliyar that "since he is *poth vandikkaaran* [buffalo-cart puller] he would live like a buffalo" hinting at the superior position of Musliyar due to him being a *Thangal*, a Syed.

Ali Musliyar (Madhu) is introduced with the background sound of Allahu Akbar (sang by the companions and not just a background music). Musliyar turns back and asks them "what are you doing?" and they stop. Musliyar, is shown, in the rest of the films as being a non-assertive Muslim who keeps religion to the private sphere (meeting Haji in house) begins from this very first scene. The first encounter with Ali Musliyar and Amu Sahib (K.P. Ummer; the villain police man) happens in a Madrassa, a semi-public space, partially religious. Musliyar asserts that the arms that "Mappilas of the region" [they become, from the unbracketed locals in the voice-over to someone bracketed] carries with them are not for war, but are tools for work, *paniyaayudham*. This is to

suggest the agrarian character of the rebellion. But the same Musliyar would later announce jihad once the police fire at the Mambaram mosque.

Khader is introduced in the crowded market place, *Manjeri Chantha*. He is the second face of the rebellion, the secular Muslim, while Haji is the first face who is the more religious and so a possible fanatic. Khader's moral and masculine superiority over Moideen who is a police constable comes from his experience of fighting in the First World War and his experiences of walking above dead bodies while guns and canons were firing, all this even before he had his moustache. Khader is using him being part of a modern repressive apparatus to claim power over another repressive apparatus, which does not do him any good later. Khader would locate the whole problem in being a Mappila. For him the solution to it all is to ask Allah not to make anyone Mappila in the earth (*Duniyaav*, means this-world, literally). He angrily explains to Kunjahammed Haji and Hydros's (Mukesh) Umma this fate: "The whole of the land is either with the Namboodiris (Brahmasvam), or Temples (Devasvam) or Thampurakkanmaar [Land lords]. The fate of the Mappila is to work there as a dog. Even then it won't be enough to pay *paattam*. Debt and starvation is what is left." What this explains is how Khader sees the problem as that of a tenant and not a tiller.

One of the many gaps and complexities that I have found in the written histories about the rebellions is the involvement of landless Muslims, the tillers, in the rebellion. The rebels capture Appunni Thampuran (Janardhanan) and as for Khader's suggestion, their punishment was to work in field, this contradicts his earlier notion of the issue's location in the tenancy, the alliance with the Adiyans have now forced him recognise issues beyond. Khader, announces that the *Malika*, the mansion, now belongs to Adiyans. Next, we see Adiyans taking everything they see and acting like characters of

Bamboo Boys (Ali Akbar 2002). Here, all of their need was limited to certain lacks and the lack of luxury.

Kandam Kutti (Vijaya Raghavan), who is an Adiyar, is the representative of those who converted to Islam for dignity. Lakshmi (Rohini), whose name was changed by Radha (Seema) and who covers her breasts, was raped by Appunni Thampuran (Janardhanan) and her would-be Kandam Kutty wants revenge. This is portrayed as the main reason for him to convert thereby erasing other social and cultural reasons behind the conversions. He tells Radha who is shocked on seeing his shaved head that “he can now walk confidently after shaving-off the hair, not as some cattle but as a *human being*.” He asks Lakshmi to go with him and that he would give her the head-cover, *thattam*, and then no one would dare touch her, suggesting conversion (Love Jihad?). Lakshmi on the other hand believes that not even conversion would help her clean herself, and so rejects his proposal. He tells Radha not to call him Kandam Kutti and instead call him Muhammed. However, for people like Unnikrishnan even after his conversion, and after his assertion, even by the end of the movie, he remains Kandam Kutty. Tulasi (Urvashi) and thampuran (Jagannatha Varma), both from Vadakke Kovilakam, becomes just *human beings* when they took refuge in Khader’s home with the help of his father, Beeran (Balan K. Nair), who was manager to Vadakkedath. While for Muhammed Islam is upward mobility to the position of *human beings*, for Tulasi and Thampuran their helplessness, vulnerability and their “coming down” from their privilege is what makes them *human beings*.

Tulasi is the opposite of Muhammed. She converts out of having no option. She was introduced to us singing "Dheerasameere Yamunatheere," a *Keraleeya* (non-Muslim) folk song. Her vulnerability and she being the cast-out from her home, just like Unnikrishnan, is because of the sacrifice they have done for the subaltern.

Unnikrishnan (Suresh Gopi), whom I would call the third face of the rebellion appears soon after the introduction of Khader. He meets Khader on his way to Kizhakkedath tharavdu, his mother's home. He saves the Dalit woman Lakshmi from the humiliation by land lords who insist on her being topless. He is the representative of the writer/director. He is also the protagonist of the History of the rebellion. The characters he meets are the characters we meet first, and where we meet them. For example, Khader and Unnikrishnan meet at the market after we have just met him. His position in the next shots suggests that he was witnessing the scene from a distance, like us, and like the film-makers. Most interestingly, it is Unnikrishnan, the terrorist, who asks Khader to mobilise the ex-military Muslims of the region and to collect arms because he has got information that the British is preparing for something, *nationally*. Unnikrishnan and his project of National History is slowly unfurling here. How did he got the information is unexplained, only to suggest his voice being that of the writer? He tells the Muslims to get ready. He fights with Khader based on the actions of Chembrasserry Thangal and of Abdullakkutty's (Bheeman Raghu). A change of conscience occurs later by the Wagon Tragedy. Wagon tragedy is the only relation the Malayali public has with the Malabar rebellion. Often, only Wagon Tragedy would appear in the school textbooks. It is the epitome of the colonial violence which touches the protagonist of the History to return to the "fanatics," to forgive.

The fact that Abdullakkutty (Bheeman Raghu) is bad (Muslim) is already available for us through his roles in other films. In the words of Kunjahammed Haji, Abdullakkutty is in the group of Satan. Kunjahammed Haji himself brings him to the police after one of his robbery, but even then Kunjahammed Haji is more dangerous than the bad Muslim for Inspector Narayana Menon. He later joins the rebels, by claiming to

Chembrassery Kunhikkoya Thangal that he “knows how to kill” and he asserts that he doesn’t have anything to do with the Khilafat.

Shekharan (M.G. Soman), husband of Radha, is the former army captain who always wears saffron. He changes to his army uniform only once to save the otherwise bad apples among land lords, Appunni Thampuran and others, from Khader and rebels. Khader, who still has his loyalty to army power structures, obeys Shekharan and leaves. This loyalty of Khader to Shekharan and of Beeraan, Khader’s father, to Vadakkedath Thampuran is parallel. While Beeraan’s is because of a “fair” treatment he got from the Vadakkedath thampuran, the good land lords, and the fact that he was not evicted or kicked out from his job, it seems like Naik Khader’s loyalty to Captian (Shekharan) Varma does not need any more explanation other than the fact that he was Shekharan’s subordinate during the First World War. Later, Shekharan would lament Hindus not standing against the Mappila rebels unitedly, calling for a Hindu unity, very much echoing the current Saffron brigade. While Radha, his wife, locates the barrier of this Hindu unity in caste. Shekharan doesn’t get the same loyalty from the British Captain who comes to capture Haidros (Mukesh) and others who had taken refuge in their home, during the fall of the rebellion. Somehow, he did not play that army uniform part with the British Captain.

The march with drums and noise for Pullara Nercha was stopped by Ali Musliyar condemning the police violence on Khilafat volunteers. Dilip Menon has noted how these kinds of processions had caused provocations.¹¹⁹ When Pukkottoor Thangal tried to stop the processions and a fight broke out, between those in the side of Ahmad Kutty (who is a landed Muslim, who is with the land lords) and Pokkottoor thampuran tried

¹¹⁹Dilip Menon, “Becoming 'Hindu' And 'Muslim' Identity and Conflict in Malabar 1900 – 1936,” (Trivandrum: Centre for Development Studies-WP255, 1994), p. 12.

to stop the fight, Mammad tells him not to intervene in this matter because this is a matter of “*deen*” [faith]. Menon also refers to one incident where land lords did intervene in the matter of debate as mediators between the Ahmadiyyas.¹²⁰

The triangulation of tenant’s movement, Khilafat and Congress’s non-cooperation is shown by Katlasserry Muhammed Musliyar inviting Radha to burn the foreign dresses when he was invited by K Madhavn Nair. Interestingly he Musliyar calls her Thampuratti, only to change it since she would rather be called “Sreemathi Radha Varma.” The former has the bad history of Feudal violence and the latter being secular. Radha is a worker of *Kudiyam Sangham* [Tenant’s Association]. While Tulasi is representative of helpless Kerala, Radha is the agent of India. She dies as India(n nationalist history did) for the Mappilas. In a telling scene, while Radha is singing Vande Mataram to Sara, her foreign friend, and translates the lines, she is stopped by Sara’s husband before she could define Motherland. Sara asks her what does Vande Mataram means. Radha replies, “We worship Amma, Amma-Mathrubhoomi-Motherland,” and Lancaster shouts “Stop it,” thereby not allowing her to clarify what is motherland for her. Though it could be assumed that it is India that she meant, why is it that she is not able to say it, but had to limit herself to the voice-notion of *naad*.

Asiya (Parvathy) is the only important Muslim woman in the film. Her relationship with the rebellion is defined through her relationship with her lover, Khader, and through her brother, Haidros. Asiya and Radha coming together to save Sara, the wife of the Police Superintendent Lancaster, is the suggestion towards women’s coming together. Asiya gives her purdah (which she never wears in the film), the tool of anonymity, to Sara to hide, to impersonate Asiya, from the rebels. It is unlikely that

¹²⁰ Menon, p.4.

Muslim women of the period wore purdah, but it appears at a significant moment from the future to save the white lady. The question of martyr cult, which is one of the dominant explanation theory of the rebellion, is reduced in the film to that of Asiya. Asiya and her sisters ask Haidros to kill them to save themselves from being raped. This martyr cult is not obviously inscribed by the ulemas or sufis obviously. They are the only ones who willingly (though forced) walk towards death as part of the rebellion.

The violence by the army at Thirurangadi and firing at Mambaram mosque was followed by a procession of Mappilas chanting 'Bolo Thakbir, Allahu Akbar...'. An attempt to distance the rebellion from the Congress and Central Khilafat Committee was shown as Khader disregarding their argument that Ali Musliyar had no right to call for *Jihad* and that power belongs to Central Khilafat Committee. And while some bad apples among them lute Kovilakams, mansions of land lords, and kill land lords, Ali Musliyar and Kunjahammed Haji try to stop this as the fight would become one between the locals. Kunjahammed Haji tells to those who say that the land lords (native oppressor) should be killed, that their power would deplete if they didn't stand together with Kudiyans or Jenmies and people of other religion against the common enemy. Kunjahammed Haji and Ali Musliyar saw this as a fight with the British. Kunjahammed Haji also insists to Khader that they should only ask and take, and not lute arms and rice from Kovilakams.

People like Lavakkutty's wished to give a prosperous life to the *common people* of this region who toil day and night. He thought the British's departure would make it possible. Haidros's father Kunhimoosa was a tenant and the *Karyasthan*, manager, who was later to dispose- off both positions as well as his land.

The songs in the film also show this mixing up of various concerns. It has songs written by Moyinkutty Vaidyar and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (Vande Mataram...). K. S. Chithra singing "Dheerasameere Yamunatheere" also is part of this process... a mixing up of the national (Indian), sub-national (Keralaness) and communitarian (Mappilaness) through songs. It is significant where these songs appear, Muslims are part of the national (Vande Mataram) only when they are with the Congress, they get access to such literatures only then, and in other situations they sing the songs of Moyinkutty Vaidyar. It is also interesting to note that the songs written by Moyinkutty Vaidyar are sung by Naushad and Vilayil Fazila (both Mappila paattu singers) while K.S. Chitra's voice is acceptable to sing both Vande Matram and "Dheerasameere ...," the national and the sub-national.

Above are the many concerns and aims that the film embodies, out of which the concern of the national-progressive Hindu dominates everything that is Unnikrishnan's. He becomes the representative and the only external point of legitimisation of the rebellion. His tool is History. Him being a terrorist, is I would argue more in the Naxal way than in the old nationalistic way taking into consideration his anger towards the feudal customs mixed with anti-British sentiment. In the confusion of the scholars and writers who wrote on the rebellion, to locate the inspirations of it to the material/agrarian reasons, to the (mildly) other-worldly [question of Caliphate] and to both, I think, we can see the confusion faced by the Muslim community at the time itself the encounter with modernity and the dilemma between other-worldly concerns, and this-worldly ones, between the immediacy of this-worldly issues and the permanence of other-worldly. It would be wrong to group the whole of Muslims into one of this category, for the confusion has always been there and will continue to be. So, it is crucial to see the anxieties and confusions among the community regarding the promise of the nation,

and the emergence of the national, the dilemma to own it or disown it. The complicated choice of whether the community should aspire for political power, whether it should be politicised, whether it was always-already politicised, whether the Muslims should only ask and pray to make the changes to Allah, I don't think all these questions which confuses Muslims to this day were not there during 1921. The use of the logic of *jihad* would certainly explain this confusion to an extent—about how the leaders of the rebellion sought an Islamic legitimacy to the rebellion. As Nuaiman had asserted about Malabar, the history of Malabar rebellion could also have its connection with the movements among Muslims globally, for reformation. It would be suicidal to not connect issues happening outside Malabar.

The film ends with three speeches; by Unnikrishnan, Kunhahammed Haji and Khader. Thus, suggesting some kind of a centrality of these three characters in the rebellion. Unnikrishnan says that history won't forgive them if the people who led the Khilafat *revolution* is to be portrayed as communalists. And that people would see it as yet another divide and rule policy of the British to create a fight between Hindus and Muslims. As already mentioned, Unnikrishnan's concern regarding what future would write about the rebellion stays with him. No one else is concerned about the future, but to the present. His announcement about what the history would say is confusing since the history that he mentions, was a history already written about the rebellion, thereby making the fanatic. Is he, as the protagonist of the History, trying to make a History of the History? Use of the nationalistic logic of divide-and-policy, and not deploying army at the right time seems to be criticised in the film. Haji says that it is true that they took arms to fight the British and had killed many who betrayed them. And he asserts that Khilafat people did not go to kill Hindus or to loot them. Haji doesn't have the agency to speak for History, but only himself and his community. While Unnikrishnan thinks

beyond the present, he is not trapped in the *past* or *present* but becomes part of the imaginations he is “looking-out” to. And finally, Khader says that they should not put the brave soldiers who fought the British for the actions of some ignorant losers and looters, apologetic of the actions of some among them, the current-global crisis of Muslim conscience. Khader accuses the British and the native loyalists of the British who are responsible for such wrongs. Khader also could only speak for himself, and for his community.

Thus, while Muslims are trapped within inorganisation, multiple concerns, in the responsibility of the actions of few (bad Muslims) among them, and the present. The protagonist can think beyond the present and seems to have a clear idea of what kind of history will be written about the rebellion. This authorship over History belongs in the hands of the progressive national-caste-Hindu.

CONCLUSION

I write this after Rohith Vemula, and amidst nation-wide uprisings of Dalit-bahujan struggle and resistance; in the context nation-wide attack on Dalits and Muslims in the name of the Cow, among other reasons, in the form of lynching and other forms of violence, physical and otherwise, by the Hindutva brigade with the backing from the centre; at a time when university spaces are under attack, humanities and social science discipline research are being severely discouraged and made difficult.¹²¹ This is a time when very moment of life is a resistance and a privilege.¹²² Dipesh Chakrabarty, in a look back at the *Subaltern Studies* project, realises “how important being young was to the original *Subaltern Studies* project” and being so “at a very particular historical conjuncture.”¹²³

The project was intended to start or follow some significant questions regarding the idea of a post national imaginary, with reference to a particular community. The network of power and hegemony that brought about what we now call as Kerala was the point of origin of the project. Just like how different regions, in general, responded to the nation of India, the responses within various locations of the region were also different and at times, uncared for. The question of autonomy of the communities could not have been completely undermined by colonialism or nationalism. These communities invented, employed and in many ways negotiated with the nation for a space and autonomy. How all these manifests today are in the form of a call for a

¹²¹Nilesh V, “New UGC Guidelines Make It Difficult to Pursue PhD,” *New Indian Express* 03 June 2017, www.newindianexpress.com/states/telangana/2017/jun/03/new-ugc-guidelines-make--it-difficult-to-pursue-phd-1612355.html, accessed 25 June 2017.

¹²² Vaikhari Aryat, On Privilege, *Facebook*, 18 Jan. 2016, 11:36 p.m., www.facebook.com/vaikhari/posts/10208283086024227, accessed 25 June 2017.

¹²³Dipesh Chakrabarty, “*Subaltern Studies* in Retrospect and Reminiscence,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol.48, no. 12 (23 Mar. 2013): p. 24, www.epw.in/journal/2013/12/commentary/subaltern-studies-retrospect-and-reminiscence.html, accessed 25 June 2017.

communitarian alliance, not just as a political pressure group, but as an egalitarian unity. The immediacy of the question of survival is day-by-day becoming crucial. Strategies are being looked for.

This cannot be a conclusion since this is only a beginning. This can only be a non-conclusion. To conclude, at this point, would be to ask more questions, questions that anticipate strategies or negotiations as part of a post national discourse, which is intended in this project.

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