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Reflections of Society: Exploring the Sociology of Malayalam Cinema

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ABSTRACT

The symbiotic relationship between Sociology and cinema helps in unravelling how films serve as a mirror reflecting the intricacies of societal constructs. Renowned for its nuanced narratives, Malayalam cinema provides a compelling lens through which to analyse the multifaceted dimensions of Kerala society. Using sociological theories and methodologies, this paper analyses a diverse array of Malayalam films across genres and eras, investigating their treatment of pivotal social themes such as caste, gender, class, politics, and religion. By means of this multidisciplinary investigation, the paper aims to further our understanding of the role of cinema as a cultural artifact and a powerful tool for critical discourse, shaping and reflecting the features of the community at large.

The research also delves into the reception of Malayalam films within society, analyzing how they are interpreted, discussed, and appropriated by audiences. By examining the socio-cultural context in which these films are produced and consumed, the study offers insights into the evolving dynamics of Kerala society and its cultural landscape.

Keywords: *Sociology, Malayalam cinema, societal norms, cultural critique, sociology of film.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Cinema, with its ability to capture the essence of human experiences and societal dynamics, serves as a powerful tool for exploring the complexities of life. Among the diverse landscape of cinematic expressions, Malayalam cinema stands out for its keen observation of Kerala's societal intricacies and its engagement with pertinent social issues.

The relationship between cinema and sociology offers a broad spectrum of possibilities. Films can serve as reflections of social realities or as platforms for expressing ideas and attitudes towards society. In the study of the sociology of film, researchers may analyse how films depict and interpret social phenomena, comparing them with sociological knowledge to gain deeper insights. Indeed, many significant sociological perspectives have been illuminated by creative artists, prompting scholars to examine films for such insights.

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When sociologists analyse individual films, they often adopt a macro-sociological approach, seeking to understand the broader social context in which the film exists. Reflection theories of cinema view the cinematic world as a mirror, albeit sometimes distorted, of the real world. Meanwhile, studies exploring the relationship between film and social phenomena often focus on the concept of influence, considering how films may shape or reflect societal attitudes and behaviours.

As satisfying as the metaphor of the movie as a cultural mirror, the power of the camera to set the scene of culture is a power much stronger than that of a mere reflection. The cinema literally contributes to a culture's self-image, inflecting, and not just capturing, daily experience. Style here is the personal, nontransferable character of discourse as opposed to Roland Barthes's famous scheme and Rubens's genius. While traditional historical documents tend to privilege great events and political leaders, historians now use other records to discern the lives of "ordinary" people: census records, accounts of harvests and markets, diaries and memoirs, and local newspapers. Film is more like these records of daily life. Hence a cultural history of cinema must reconstruct the temper of the times not by direct amassing of "relevant facts," but through an indirect reconstruction of the conditions of representation that permitted films to be made. Thus, the movies create as well as display a culture's imagination. As a record of time and motion, films preserve gestures, gaits, rhythms, attitudes, and human interactions in a variety of situations. Thus, film exists in culture and culture in film

In this study, we undertake an inquiry into the sociology of Malayalam cinema, endeavouring to elucidate the intricate connections between cinematic narratives and societal realities in the context of Kerala. By scrutinizing how Malayalam films depict and analyse social issues such as caste, gender, class, politics, and religion, our aim is to shed light on the complex interplay between cinema and society. Through this interdisciplinary exploration, we aspire to augment our comprehension of cinema's role as both a mirror of societal dynamics and a potential catalyst for societal transformation.

II. THEORIES OF MEDIA SOCIOLOGY

The Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, formulated by George Gerbner, is a sociocultural framework that examines the profound influence of television on viewers' perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, and values.² As a fundamental theory in the realm of media effects, cultivation theory posits that individuals

² Shrum, L. J. (2017). Cultivation Theory: Effects and underlying processes. *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects*, 1–12.

who regularly consume television content are more susceptible to its messages, which can shape their understanding of reality and worldview.

Central to cultivation theory is the notion that prolonged exposure to television programming cultivates specific ideas of reality and reinforces prevailing cultural norms and values portrayed on screen. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among individuals who engage in frequent and extensive television viewing. As viewers immerse themselves in televised content, they internalize the dominant themes, narratives, and representations depicted on screen, gradually adopting them as their own beliefs and assumptions about life.

Gerbner's theory suggests that the cumulative impact of television exposure contributes to the formation of a shared cultural reality, wherein viewers' perceptions align with the predominant values and ideologies perpetuated by the medium. Consequently, individuals who consume television content extensively are more likely to espouse beliefs and attitudes consistent with the portrayals presented on screen. The key characteristics of Gerbner's theory were that it focused attention at the macrolevel of broad scale institutional practices, widespread meaning, and long-term acculturation. It was naturalistic, that is, it did not manipulate exposures or messages but instead acknowledged individuals' typical patterns of media exposure in their everyday lives (Potter,2014).

Originating in 1967, cultivation theory posits that mass media, including television, exert subtle yet pervasive effects on audiences, influencing their perceptions and interpretations of the world around them. Gerbner refers to this process as the "cultivation of dominant image patterns," wherein the repetitive exposure to certain themes and messages leads to the cultivation of common beliefs and understandings about society.

Agenda Setting Theory

The concept of agenda setting theory can be traced back to as early as 1922, when Walter Lippmann expressed concerns about the significant role of mass media in shaping public perception by setting certain images in the minds of the audience. Initially, the theory emerged as an explanation for how mass media influences changes in political behaviour, particularly during elections. Over time, it has evolved to inspire numerous explorations into how mass media both primes and frames issues for their audiences, as well as how it shapes the public agenda and opinion.

The term "agenda setting" was coined by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw³ in 1972,

³ McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187.

within the context of election campaigns where politicians seek to sway voters by emphasizing certain issues. This theory seeks to elucidate how news stories are selected, packaged, and presented—a process known as gatekeeping—and how this selection process influences the resulting agenda and subsequently affects public perception of the relative importance of issues.

McCombs and Shaw conducted a seminal study using the 1968 U.S. presidential election as a case study to investigate the relationship between the priority issues of the mass media and those of the public. To measure the public agenda, they utilized survey research, asking voters to identify the most important issues in the election. Concurrently, they analysed the content of major news sources to determine the media agenda. The study revealed a significant correlation between the two agendas, demonstrating that the issues receiving the most coverage in the news were also perceived as most important by the public.

According to research conducted by McCombs and Shaw (1993), there exists a reciprocal relationship between the public agenda and the media agenda. They argue that to a certain extent, mass media outlets are compelled to align their content with the demands and interests of their audience, as evidenced by factors such as ratings, audience studies, market research, and consumption patterns (Reese, 1991). This alignment is understandable given that mass media entities operate within the context of business and market dynamics, which are influenced by the interests and priorities of the public.

Play Theory

In the theory of mass communication proposed by William Stephenson⁴, the prevailing discourse regarding the potentially harmful effects of mass media is challenged. Stephenson argues that, above all else, media outlets primarily serve audiences as sources of entertainment and play experiences. He contends that even traditionally informative mediums such as newspapers are predominantly consumed for pleasure rather than solely for the acquisition of information or enlightenment. According to Stephenson, the media functions as a buffer against anxiety-inducing conditions, providing what he terms "communication-pleasure." (Williams, 1971).

Stephenson's Play Theory of Mass Communication draws inspiration from the earlier works of scholars such as J. Huizinga and T.S. Szasz. In his seminal 1967 book "The Play Theory of Mass Communication," Stephenson elaborates on the concept of play as an activity pursued for pleasure. He challenges the notion that mass media consumption is solely a means of escapism or mass manipulation, instead portraying it as an anti-anxiety mechanism that offers individuals

⁴ Stephenson, W. (1967). *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*.

a form of communication-pleasure.

What distinguishes Stephenson's research is his innovative methodology, which focuses on analysing how communication processes are subjectively received by individuals. Unlike his predecessors, who approached mass communication from an objective and sociological standpoint, Stephenson emphasizes the psychological and subjective aspects of media consumption.

Stephenson suggests that mass communication can be categorized into two main types: work-related and play-related. Work-related communication pertains to practical matters such as weather forecasts, shipping news, and agricultural information. On the other hand, play-related communication encompasses leisure-time pursuits, including the arts, sports events, and travel information. However, Stephenson acknowledges the ambiguity inherent in categorizing media consumption as work or play, as these distinctions may vary from person to person.

Uses and Gratification Theory

The Uses and Gratifications theory emerged as a shift in focus from examining the effects of media on individuals to exploring how individuals actively engage with media. Proposed by Katz in 1959, this theory posits that audiences are active participants who seek out media to fulfil specific needs and desires. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), the theory delves into the social and psychological origins of these needs, leading to differential patterns of media exposure and subsequent gratifications. This theory adapts a functionalistic approach to communications and media, and states that media's most important role is to fulfil the needs and motivations of the audience. Therefore, the more these needs are met, the more satisfaction is yielded (Windahl, Signitzer, and Olson, 2008.)

The theory identifies five categories of needs that drive media consumption: cognitive, affective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release. Cognitive needs involve seeking information and knowledge, such as through documentaries or news analysis. Affective needs relate to seeking pleasure or fulfilling emotional desires, often met through entertainment media like music videos or movies. Personal integrative needs revolve around bolstering one's status or self-esteem, often through advertisements or lifestyle media. Social integrative needs entail using media to connect with others, commonly through social networking sites or email. Lastly, tension release needs involve using media for catharsis or escapism, providing relief from everyday stresses.

The Uses and Gratifications theory underscores the active role of audiences in selecting and utilizing media to fulfil their needs. It shifts the focus from media content to audience

motivations, highlighting the importance of understanding why individuals choose particular media. By adopting a functionalistic approach, the theory emphasizes that media's primary role is to meet the needs and motivations of its audience, leading to greater satisfaction. This perspective revolutionized mass communication research, redirecting inquiries from "What media does to individuals?" to "What individuals do to media?" Overall, the Uses and Gratifications theory provides valuable insights into the dynamic relationship between media and its consumers.

III. FILM AND SOCIOLOGY

Film, as Talcott Parsons elucidates, serves as an "expressive symbol system," wherein the dominant orientation is expressive. Just as emotions necessitate objects, an expressive orientation requires a focus. Consequently, expressive symbol systems inherently possess cognitive and evaluative references, distinguishing, relating to, and appraising the objects they engage with. In the realm of film as an expressive symbol system, orientations manifest towards three primary domains: the film itself, real-world states of affairs (realism), and potential states of affairs, encompassing both desired and feared scenarios (fantasy).

Despite this, the sociology of film maintains a degree of independence, particularly in its exploration of influences and isomorphisms between filmic patterns and societal structures. Sociologists are more inclined to examine films based on their societal impact rather than delve into specialized interpretations.

Mayer's conception of the "sociology of film" gravitates towards a "study of reception." Here, he aims to elucidate the ethical values imparted by films and their correlation with the real norms guiding people's lives. Furthermore, Mayer delves into the intricate relationship between filmic and real norms in shaping "absolute value" standards. Ultimately, Mayer contends that entertainment and moral norms are inseparable, as even seemingly pure entertainment possesses inherent values.

Another influential sociological perspective emerged in 1970 with Ian Charles Jarvie's "Towards a Sociology of the Cinema." Jarvie's work delves into cinema as an entertainment industry, exploring questions regarding film production, consumption, and evaluation. He anchors his analysis on three pillars: industry, audience, and the value system encapsulated within cinematic experiences. Jarvie posits cinema as a social institution warranting scrutiny akin to other societal structures.

Maynard (1971) advocates for the incorporation of films into academic curricula, contending that films are as legitimate educational tools as books. Anthropologists have long utilized films

to depict social conditions and individual sensitivities, underlining their multifaceted utility.

In the viewing experience, particularly with impactful films, viewers transcend passive observation to active participation. They often identify with characters from diverse backgrounds (Jones 1967, p. 64),, enabling them to gain insights into varied perspectives and experiences. This phenomenon, akin to Weber's *verstehen*, fosters empathy and understanding across societal divides.

Films serve as a lens through which to examine the intricate relationship between culture and society. While films initially portray societal structures, they culminate in cultural statements, reflecting the prevailing *zeitgeist*. In contemporary society, this relationship has evolved to reflect a more complex and fractured dynamic. Films now convey heightened cynicism and challenge societal norms, reflecting a nation grappling with its loss of innocence.

IV. HISTORY OF MALAYALAM CINEMA

The history of Malayalam cinema traces back to its inception in 1928 with the release of J.C. Daniel's silent film "*Vigathakumaran*" (The Lost Child), considered the first feature film in Malayalam, although it was not credited to Daniel until recent times. Departing from the devotional film tradition of early Indian cinema, "*Vigathakumaran*" introduced social cinema to Malayalam audiences, portraying a family drama that reflected contemporary societal issues. However, the significance of "*Vigathakumaran*" transcends its cinematic narrative; it is renowned for the controversy it ignited among audiences. The film featured P.K. Rosy, a Dalit actress, in a prominent role, challenging the rigid caste hierarchy prevalent in Kerala society at the time. The portrayal of Rosy as an upper-caste character sparked outrage among the audience during the film's inaugural screening at Capitol Theatre in Trivandrum. This discontent escalated into caste violence directed towards Rosy, symbolizing a pivotal moment in the complex history of caste relations in Malayalam cinema.

Despite the tumultuous reception of "*Vigathakumaran*," Malayalam cinema experienced a revival in the 1950s, marked by the emergence of films with thematic depth and political undertones. Films like "*Navalokam*" (The New World) (1951), "*Neelakuyil*" (Blue Bird) (1954), and "*Rarichan Enna Pawran*" (Citizen Rarichan) (1956) reflected the leftist political ethos of Kerala during that period, serving as vehicles for mobilizational narratives and rhetorical discourse aimed at the masses.

The 1930s and 1940s saw the establishment of the Malayalam film industry, albeit with sporadic productions. However, the industry gained momentum in the 1950s, with films like "*Marthanda*

Varma" (1933) and *"Balan"* (1938), the first sound film in Malayalam. Despite facing challenges such as copyright issues and lost prints, these early films played a crucial role in laying the foundation for the burgeoning Malayalam cinema.

In subsequent decades, Malayalam cinema witnessed periods of creative resurgence and experimentation. The 1970s saw the emergence of New Wave parallel cinema, while the 1980s and 1990s are often regarded as the "golden era" of Malayalam films, characterized by a fusion of parallel and commercial cinema (Guru, 2015). However, the advent of digital technology in the 21st century brought about significant changes in the industry, transforming the concept of cinema and paving the way for the proliferation of short films and alternative storytelling formats.

1950-1970s

The year 1951 holds a special place in the history of Malayalam cinema, as it witnessed the release of *"Jeevitha Nouka,"* a groundbreaking film that became the industry's first major commercial success. Starring Thikkurissy Sukumaran Nair, celebrated as Kerala's inaugural 'movie star,' the film enjoyed an unprecedented theatrical run of 284 days, captivating audiences and establishing itself as a cultural phenomenon. Notably, *"Jeevitha Nouka"* achieved another milestone by being India's first trilingual production, shot simultaneously in Telugu and Tamil under the title *"Pichaiikkaari."* Moreover, in 1952, it broke new ground by becoming the first Malayalam film to be dubbed into Hindi, further expanding its audience across linguistic boundaries. The release of *"Neelakuyil"* in 1954, earning the prestigious President's silver medal at the National Film Awards, further solidified Kerala's presence on the Indian film map.

This period of Malayalam cinema also witnessed a rich tapestry of experimentation and innovation, with filmmakers exploring diverse genres and drawing inspiration from literary sources. The 1960s emerged as a 'decade of adaptation,' with notable films like *"Mudiyanya Puthran"* (1961) and *"Bhargavi Nilayam"* (1964) adapting acclaimed literary works into cinematic masterpieces. Directors such as K. S. Sethumadhavan and A. Vincent adeptly translated the essence of literature onto the silver screen, capturing the intricacies of Malayalee culture and consciousness. Concurrently, screenwriters like M. T. Vasudevan Nair delved into the depths of human emotions, resonating deeply with audiences.

In addition to literary influences, this era witnessed technical innovations and cinematic experimentation. Director P. N. Menon's groundbreaking film *"Rosie"* (1965) pioneered the use of outdoor locations for shooting, departing from the conventional studio-centric approach. This shift towards naturalistic settings breathed new life into Malayalam cinema, enhancing its visual

aesthetics and storytelling capabilities. The recognition garnered by films like "*Chemmeen*" (1965), which received a Certificate of Merit at the Chicago International Film Festival, underscored the growing acclaim and influence of Malayalam cinema on the global stage

1980-2000s

By the 1980s, Malayalam cinema had evolved into a captivating medium that resonated with the social and aesthetic sensibilities of its audience. This era marked a significant milestone as Malayalam cinema achieved complete independence from the influence of the Tamil film industry, reclaiming its cultural authenticity in both content and form. Influenced by the burgeoning migration to the Gulf region, urban life began to feature prominently in Malayalam cinema, reflecting the realities and aspirations of city dwellers.

The cityscape was often depicted as a haven of opportunity, where protagonists sought refuge from the hardships of rural life in pursuit of fortune. In contrast to the idyllic simplicity of village life, the city was portrayed as a complex and often alienating environment, characterized by shades of opportunism and moral ambiguity. Moreover, the 1980s saw a cultural revivalism in Malayalam cinema, wherein traditional values were juxtaposed against the perceived moral decay of modern society.

This period witnessed a proliferation of films that subtly reinforced casteism and patriarchy, often glorifying feudalistic ideologies and hypermasculine archetypes. Movies like "*Druvam*," "*Advaitam*," and "*Devasuram*" constructed narratives around benevolent feudal lords while downplaying the struggles against caste and patriarchal oppression, thereby perpetuating traditionalist and conservative ideologies with a veneer of capitalist modernity.

In terms of production and post-production, Malayalam cinema experienced unprecedented growth and innovation during this period. The screening of world classics and the emergence of the film society movement catalysed a shift in attitudes towards the industry, fostering a newfound appreciation for its artistic merit and cultural significance. Additionally, the rise of Parallel Cinema or New Wave Malayalam Cinema introduced a fresh perspective to storytelling, exemplified by Adoor Gopalakrishnan's seminal work "*Swayamvaram*" (1972), which garnered international acclaim for its innovative use of leitmotif and thematic depth.

As the new millennium dawned, Malayalam cinema underwent further transformations, with an emphasis on blockbuster films featuring slapstick comedy and romantic storylines. However, this era also grappled with pressing social and political issues such as globalization, religious fundamentalism, and the marginalization of women, Dalits, and Adivasis. Despite the diversification of cinematic themes, the representation of minorities remained a contentious

issue, highlighting the ongoing challenges of secularism and social inclusion in Indian society.

2010-Present

From 2010 to the present, the Malayalam film industry has experienced a remarkable renaissance, marked by a surge of creativity, innovation, and critical acclaim. This period, often referred to as the "New Generation cinema," witnessed a departure from conventional storytelling tropes and a renewed focus on exploring diverse narratives and themes.

One of the defining characteristics of Malayalam cinema during this period has been its willingness to push boundaries and challenge societal norms. Directors and writers have tackled a wide range of subjects, from contemporary social issues to deeply personal stories, with a level of depth and complexity that has resonated with audiences both locally and internationally.

The success of films like Rajesh Pillai's "*Traffic*" (2011) and Anjali Menon's "*Bangalore Days*" (2014) helped to usher in this new era of Malayalam cinema, characterized by its boldness and willingness to experiment. These films broke away from traditional formulas and offered audiences fresh perspectives on familiar themes, earning critical acclaim and commercial success in the process. Furthermore, the emergence of new talent both in front of and behind the camera has been instrumental in driving the industry forward. Young actors and actresses have delivered standout performances, breathing life into complex and multidimensional characters, while a new generation of directors has brought fresh vision and innovative storytelling techniques to the screen.

In addition to its artistic achievements, Malayalam cinema has also gained recognition on the international stage, with films like Lijo Jose Pellissery's "*Angamaly Diaries*" (2017) and Dileesh Pothan's "*Ee. Ma. Yau*" (2018) receiving accolades at film festivals around the world.

V. SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF MALAYALAM FILMS

In recent years, Malayalam cinema has emerged as a frontrunner in Indian cinema, showcasing unparalleled creativity and addressing crucial social issues with depth and sensitivity. With innovative storytelling and bold narratives, Malayalam films delve into topics such as gender equality, caste discrimination, mental health, and environmental conservation. Directors and actors collaborate to portray nuanced characters and thought-provoking scenarios, sparking meaningful conversations and driving societal change. . Films like "*Kumbalangi Nights*" delve into complex family dynamics and masculinity, while "*Uyare*" sheds light on the struggles of an acid attack survivor and "*Sudani from Nigeria*" tackles themes of racism and identity.

Malayalam cinema is a perfect subject for sociological analysis because of its complex

storytelling and in-depth examination of societal concerns. Sociologists can gain a deeper understanding of current issues and societal dynamics by examining how these films reflect and create social attitudes

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the sociological elements present in contemporary Malayalam movies. To narrow down the films, this paper will analyse the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam from the year 2011 to 2021.

1. Indian Rupee (2011)

"Indian Rupee," is a 2011 Malayalam film directed by Ranjith, and starring Prithviraj. In "Indian Rupee," a young Calicut man named Jayaprakash (JP) yearns for wealth and a better life. He is a part-time real estate agent who aspires to become wealthy. When Achutha Menon, a widower, contacts him about a land sale, an opportunity presents itself. Menon sticks with JP even after the business falls through, and JP appears to have more luck. Through cunning transactions, he begins to make money, but he quickly learns that these short cuts have a price. In the end, JP discovers that real success comes from hard effort as the movie examines the attraction and perils of easy money.

Social Stratification and Upward Mobility:

JP is the embodiment of a generation's dreams of dismantling established systems. Kerala faces socioeconomic stratification even if its literacy rate is high.

JP, a school dropout, represents a segment seeking upward mobility outside established educational pathways. He is drawn to the glitzy field of real estate, which offers rapid profits but is riddled with moral dilemmas. The film depicts the complexities of social stratification, particularly through the contrast between Jayaprakash, a struggling lower-middle-class man, and Chandrabose, a wealthy businessman. This disparity in social status and economic power highlights issues of inequality and social mobility, which can be examined through conflict theory and symbolic interactionism.

2. Celluloid (2012)

Directed by Kamal and once again starring Prithviraj, the movie "Celluloid" portrays the genuine challenges faced by visionary filmmaker J.C. Daniel during the 1940s in Kerala, as he endeavoured to create the first Malayalam silent film, "Vigathakumaran." He overcomes equipment hurdles and societal disapproval, but struggles to find a woman to act. Rosie, a Dalit woman, takes on the role, defying social norms. Their film, "Vigathakumaran," sparks controversy due to Rosie's caste, leading to her disappearance and Daniel's downfall. Years later,

a film researcher seeks to recognize Daniel's contribution, highlighting the triumphs and struggles of a cinematic pioneer.

Caste and Social Exclusion

The film throws light on the rigid caste system prevalent in 1920s Kerala. Daniel, an upper-caste Nair, faces resistance for his unconventional pursuit of filmmaking. However, the film's most poignant portrayal of social exclusion is Rosy's, a Dalit woman. Acting, considered a lowbrow profession, is further ostracized due to her caste. Rosy's courage to defy societal norms reflects the struggle of marginalized communities for artistic expression and social acceptance.

3. *North 24 Kaatham (2013)*

In "North 24 Kaatham" (directed by Anil Radhakrishnan Menon), Harikrishnan (played by Fahadh Faasil), a software engineer with OCD, is sent on a work trip. Due to a hartal strike, his journey gets disrupted. He finds himself on a train with Gopalan, an aging politician, and Narayani, a social worker. When Gopalan needs to return home due to a family emergency, Hari, in an uncharacteristic act, decides to accompany them. This unexpected detour forces Hari out of his comfort zone and into social interactions. As they travel, he begins to shed his rigid routines and anxieties, forging connections that alter his perspective on life.

State of Anomie

In the movie, the protagonist Harikrishnan's trip carefully depicts the idea of anomie, which was popularized by sociologist Émile Durkheim. Anomie is defined as a condition of normlessness or a collapse of social standards that results in emotions of confusion and alienation. Harikrishnan is forced to step outside of his comfort zone by his unplanned solo vacation, which throws off his daily schedule and exposes him to strange circumstances. He struggles with a sense of alienation from his surroundings and a lack of obvious social rules to lead him during the voyage.

4. *Pathemari (2015)*

In "Pathemari," directed by Salim Ahamed, Pallikkal Narayanan (Mammootty) leaves Kerala in his youth for Dubai as a lowly labourer. This is the start of a lengthy trip that will take decades. He forgoes spending time with his family back home and puts up with difficult working conditions. He persists in providing money to support their hopes for a better life in spite of the difficulties. The sacrifices made by Malayali workers in the Gulf, the effects of family separation, and the enduring need for home even after starting a new life overseas are all explored in the movie.

Globalization and the Push Factors:

The film portrays the economic realities that push individuals like Narayanan to seek employment abroad. Kerala, with its limited job opportunities, becomes a breeding ground for out-migration, particularly towards the booming economies of the Gulf region. In the context of Kerala, economic disparities and limited job prospects serve as push factors that drive many like Narayanan to seek employment abroad. The film underscores how globalization exacerbates income inequality and creates a disparity between urban and rural areas, compelling individuals to leave their homes in pursuit of economic stability.

5. *Maheshinte Prathikaram (2016)*

Maheshinte Prathikaaram is directed by Dileesh Pothan. It stars Fahadh Faasil as Mahesh Bhavana, a small-time photographer who lives with his father. Mahesh gets his world turned upside down after a local bully, Jimson, beats him up. Vowing revenge, Mahesh refuses to wear shoes until he gets even. Life gets tough without proper footwear, but his resolve strengthens. Just as he's about to strike back, Mahesh sees his girlfriend and realizes revenge isn't the answer. Shamefaced, he apologizes, discards the revenge sandals, and chooses forgiveness. Life returns to normal, the bizarre shoeless revenge a reminder of the power of letting go.

Gender Roles and Masculinity

The film depicts traditional expectations placed upon men to uphold notions of honour and machismo, as evidenced by Mahesh's journey to restore his pride after being humiliated. The act itself, refusing footwear, becomes a performative display of defiance, albeit an impractical one. However, as the narrative unfolds, Mahesh's character undergoes a transformation, challenging traditional notions of masculinity. Through moments of vulnerability and self-reflection, Mahesh learns to prioritize empathy, forgiveness, and non-violence over retribution, ultimately redefining his understanding of masculinity.

6. *Thondimuthalum Driksakshiyum (2017)*

Bringing back the director-actor duo of Dileesh Pothan and Fahadh Fasil, the film revolves around the theft of a gold chain from a woman on a bus, leading to a series of events that unfold in a police station. Petty thief Prasad swallows a stolen gold chain on a crowded bus. Caught, he denies the crime but X-rays reveal the truth. His journey leads him to doctors, healers, and ultimately, the rightful owner - Sreeja. Honesty prevails as Prasad confesses and Sreeja, surprisingly, forgives him. The film ends with a newfound respect between them, a testament to the power of redemption.

Bureaucracy

The movie illustrates bureaucracy as a double-edged sword, both empowering and obstructing justice. It highlights the bureaucratic system's rigidity and impersonality, with characters facing red tape and procedural hurdles when addressing theft and corruption. Prioritizing rules over individual needs, it often frustrates those seeking justice. The film exposes the power disparity within bureaucratic structures, with Prasad trapped in its grip. He grapples with navigating procedures enforced by authority figures more focused on protocol than swift resolutions. This portrayal emphasizes the challenges individuals face within bureaucratic frameworks, where adherence to rules can overshadow the quest for fairness and efficiency.

7. *Sudani from Nigeria (2018)*

Majeed, a passionate but financially struggling football coach in Kerala, recruits three talented Nigerian players, including Samuel ("Sudu"). Samuel is a star player, but a leg fracture lands him at Majeed's house for recovery. Townsfolk, initially suspicious of the "Sudani from Nigeria," become curious about Samuel's life and culture. As Majeed cares for Samuel, a strong bond forms. Despite financial difficulties, Majeed prioritizes Samuel's well-being.

Racism and Microaggressions

The film showcases microaggressions – seemingly insignificant comments or actions that communicate a hostile racial message. The label "Sudani" used for all the Nigerian players exemplifies this. It reduces them to their nationality, ignoring their individuality. The initial suspicion from the townsfolk also reflects underlying racial stereotypes about migrants from Africa. The film sheds light on the racial biases and stereotypes prevalent in society, as Samuel faces derogatory remarks and microaggressions based on his African heritage. Despite his talent and contributions to the team, Samuel is often treated with suspicion and mistrust solely because of his race.

However, as the narrative progresses, the film challenges these prejudices by highlighting the genuine human connections and empathy that develop between Samuel and the locals. Through meaningful interactions and shared experiences, Samuel gradually earns the respect and acceptance of those around him, transcending racial barriers and fostering mutual understanding.

8. *Home (2021)*

Oliver Twist, a 60-year-old father, lives a simple life with his wife Kuttyamma and their two sons, Anthony and Charles. Anthony, a struggling scriptwriter, returns home seeking inspiration

after a failed script and a troubled relationship. Despite his father's attempts to share an extraordinary event from his past, Anthony remains indifferent. As tensions rise, Oliver inadvertently records a video that attracts online hate, leading him to seek solace in therapy and Tai Chi. Eventually, Anthony learns to appreciate his family's support, realizing that true validation comes from within. The film concludes with a heartwarming reconciliation and appreciation of family bonds.

Societal Pressures and Technology

The characters in "Home" grapple with societal expectations regarding success, achievement, and social status. Anthony, driven by the desire for professional success and validation, feels pressured to meet societal standards of success as a scriptwriter. His relentless pursuit of success leads to tension within his family and affects his mental well-being. Additionally, Oliver, the patriarch of the family, faces societal pressures to conform to traditional roles and expectations of masculinity, further complicating family dynamics. Furthermore, the film explores the generational divide in technology usage, with younger characters like Charles seamlessly navigating digital platforms while older characters like Oliver struggle to adapt to technological advancements. This generational gap underscores broader societal shifts in communication and interpersonal relationships in the digital age.

VI. CONCLUSION

Sociology and cinema share a symbiotic relationship, with films serving as powerful vehicles for exploring sociological theories and concepts. Within this realm, Malayalam cinema stands out as a harbinger of progressive storytelling infused with sociological messages. By analysing contemporary Malayalam films, we gain insight into the profound influence of cinema on society. These films serve as mirrors reflecting the intricate fabric of Kerala society, shedding light on its norms, values, and social dynamics. Through compelling narratives and nuanced character portrayals, Malayalam cinema offers poignant commentary on issues such as caste, gender, class, and modernization, inviting viewers to engage critically with their own social realities. As a result, these films not only entertain but also provoke thought and spark conversations about pressing sociological issues, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human society.

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