

ECOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL READING OF DR. BIJU'S MOVIES PERARIYATHAVAR AND KAADU POOKKUNNA NERAM

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Abstract

Dr. Biju from his first movie *Saira* (2005) to *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, it was a different path for Dr. Biju as each film addresses different social issues and holds different social concerns. Since then most of the parallel movies confined within realistic portrayal of families, their lives, their issues, rather than the issues concerned with the current issues prevailing the society. Dr. Biju's movies thus tend to be making a new trend in Malayalam film industry. Being a homeopathic doctor, Dr. Biju opted to direct movies as he considers film as the best medium for activism. By drawing inspirations from the movies of Satyajith Ray, Majid Majidi, Roman Polanski, Kim Ki Duk and Inarritu portrays his movies with different undertones. The aspects which inspired him were their political and social approaches, the visual styles in their courage to take unusual subjects and realistic treatments. He always strives to encompass strong visuals and powerful imageries to depict his politics and social thinking. Most of the films talk about the marginalized sections including dalits and adivasi communities. According to him, it is important to be their voices, as they are also living in the same social situations in which we live and should not be marginalized or confined within the boundaries of religion, caste, class etc. So for him, being their fellow being, being an artist, he considers it as his duty to throw light on social realities and the sufferings which they face, through his films. He believes that most of the problems faced by the marginalized sections all over the world, whether it be the sections in Syria, Gaza or the suppressed sections all over the world can whether it can be the sections in Syria, Gaza or the suppressed sections in our society like the Dalit and the tribal communities, are all the same. Their economic and social statuses are poor. He also claims that challenges they face and their struggles for resistance as well as to exist in a fast developing world has same phase anywhere in the world and in certain countries, wars added to the sufferings. The aim of this paper is to analyze how Dr. Biju substantiates, through his movies *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, his social, political and ecological concerns by negotiating the lives of the subaltern sections. The movie *Perariyathavar*, despite its Dalit centered narrative, discusses various environmental issues by giving face to the nameless sweepers, the manual scavengers, who clean and provides rare grace and dignity. The film, apart from reading the lives of the dispossessed and marginalized, breaks a lot of stereotypes associated with the characterisation of the people from the marginalized sections, where they usually are portrayed as loud creatures, angry towards the system, mostly on the verge of revolt. *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, portrays the endless fight between the state and the cause of human rights where the characters are nameless representations of the social groups they belong. The film is a humanitarian text with its portrayal of policeman (part of the institution), also as a victim, that of ignorance, suspicions and prejudices injected to him by popular discourse and the power that be. These were represented amidst the beauty of the forests, where the narrative also portrays the relationship, the tribals or the indigenous sections hold with nature as well as how their lives are entwined with these forests.

Keywords: ecology, environment, forests, dispossessed, displaced, marginalized, government.

Introduction

Everyone is a product of their culture and society and this is no different for those who make films. Popular culture has played a great role in influencing films. The term popular culture was coined in the 19th century to connote, 'the world surrounding us.' Television and film are part of our world today much as they inform about our contemporary world. Popular culture is mass produced. It is delivered in large quantities through the mass media. Similarly, films are produced in large to a mass audience.

As far as popular culture scholars like Tom Adaba, Briggs Adam and Copley Paul are concerned, film is a medium which is a strong enough to alter the established cultural norms in a society. According to Modelling Theory humans have a tendency to get influenced by observing different models. They can observe a model and can imitate the model. Through observation, they will learn what to do, what not to do, when to do it and what one should expect while doing a particular thing. This particular concept can be used to describe the influence of mass media like film and television. Spectators would imitate the actions and things portrayed on those film and television models and accommodate their own forms of behaviour. Cultural norms Theory possess a close link with the above mentioned

aspect according to this theory mass media will produce a socially acceptable behaviour pattern. On the basis of these two theories we can substantiate the fact that film and television had contributed a lot in transforming the living style of most of the people as it plays a major role in altering ones culture.

Apart from just influencing the lives of people, popular culture also expresses a country's distinctive traditions, history, and language, as well as its current social, economic and political systems. How events, institutions, and artists or performers shape popular culture and how in turn popular culture shapes and lives and identities of cultural consumers is a complex reality that defines much of contemporary life.

By producing various forms of mass media and popular culture, they strive to accommodate aspects like poverty, social discrimination prevailing in the society, sexism, homophobia and different economic and political disparities that exist in our current social scenario. Many people adheres into the insight that, the idea of sexism portrayed in mass media, as lively and provocative, are the base for different kinds of gender inequalities. But the truth is that, media images attempts to normalize them. Thus social problems should be negotiated to a next level, beyond media. Media can help us to think how social problems have a base beyond the sole individual.

One such social problem that caught attention of the whole nation recently is the issue related to the dalits. In order to present their issues and problems in front of the world there is no better means than films. For years Dalit literature has raised its concerns through a realistic portrayal of oppression. Poems, short stories, novels, autobiographies written by dalit writers give insight into the question of dalit identities, yet none of them actually succeeded in bringing national attention as big as the ones brought in by films. Film makers like Rajeev Ravi, Chitanya Thamhane, Dr. Biju, Nagraj Manjule etc, brought Dalit characters in their narration and there by addressed the issues related to them.

For the past few years, new debutant directors are coming forward with some promising films accommodating different levels of caste narratives. The important among them is Guruvindher Singh's Punjabi movie, '*Anhey Ghor Daan*' (2011), based on Punjabi novelist Gurdial Singh's novel, which portrays the plights and struggles in the lives of the downtrodden sections. The list also includes *Court* (2014) and *Maasan* (2015). When it comes to Malayalam film industry, Jayan Cherian's English- Malayalam film *Papilo Bhuddha* acquires initial position. The film grabbed media attention even before its release, as the film did not get censor board's clearance certificate due to the reason that the film portrayed Mahatma Gandhi in a sarcastic manner. It talks of the displaced conditions of Dalits prevailing in the Western Ghats who follows Buddhist ideology like that of Ambedkhar, so as to escape from caste oppression. Regional industries are now interested in making genuine attempts to portray dalit consciousness in their movies. In Malayalam cinema, even though they portray realistic themes, sub- altern issues are not discussed widely. Recently Rajeev Ravi through his '*Kammattipaadam*' and Dr. Biju through his movies *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, made attempts to draw attention to some of the serious issues of the marginalized sections.

Initially, the paper attempts to discuss the relevant ecological problems portrayed in both the films. The chapter unfolds how nature is being portrayed in his movies by throwing light to some of the recent environmental issues in the history of Kerala. In the film *Perariyathavar*, he discusses issues like issues of Vilappilshala Waste Plant, protests conducted at Laloore, Kureepuzha and many other places in Kerala, in the onset of dumping city wastes into these villages causing different environmental as well as health problems to the people living there. It also attempts to negotiate how the lives of adivasi communities are portrayed in the movies, discusses how their lives are deeply merged into nature, how small changes in the nature affect their lives, how the actions of humans adversely affect the stability of the ecological system. *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* never addresses environmental issues directly, but is depicted in such a way that the lives of indigenous tribes are intervened with nature. Forest plays a vital role in the film. The last part of the paper attempts to discuss the identity crisis which the displaced, dispossessed and down trodden sections of the society face. These underprivileged sections were denied of their basic human rights. The chapter unfolds the lives of the people in the outskirts of city, whereas the other extreme includes the marginalized sections living in the forest areas. The problems they face are common, the fear or forceful eviction, their issues of lands, lack of basic amenities, denial of rights etc. Director attempts to include these issues in both the films. This is what as a whole, I am trying to negotiate in this journal.

The Environmental narrative

The 2016 Oscar winner Leonardo DiCaprio made his epic speech by touching the world's most debated, discussed and researched and overlooked topic of a huge magnitude- Man's relationship to nature. He beckoned his crowd to work collectively together and stop procrastinating to take the first step towards saving the earth.

We need to support leaders around the world who do not speak for the big polluters, but who speak for all humanity, for the indigenous people of the world, for the billions and billions of underprivileged people out there whose voices have been drowned out by the politics of the greed. I thank you all for this amazing award today. Let us not take this planet for granted. Thank you so very much.

- Leonardo DiCaprio (Giffiths, 2016)

Apart from referring to those ecological instabilities, he made reference to some of the underlying truths regarding these issues. In one way or other, these environmental issues deteriorate the equilibrium of the lives of the poor indigenous communities. These issues end up in devastating their lives. Nature and people hold an interdependent relationship as both are reciprocal to each other. One can't be isolated from the other. They possess a harmonious relationship with nature. They respect it, worship it, and hold a physical as well as an emotional bond with nature. Thus a single change in nature can adversely affect their lives. For them, nature is their past, present and future, whereas for the authorities and other sections of humanity, satisfying their present needs is of primary concern rather than preserving it for the future generations. These acts may affect the balance of the ecosystem in its long run. In order to meet their prior requirements, they involve in deteriorating nature. Everywhere, the issues of the environment have a greater impact on the lives of the marginalized sections of the society including the people belonging to the indigenous tribes.

These are the exact insights which Dr. Biju in his films *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* tries to substantiate. Anywhere in the world, issues concerning nature can't be discussed in isolation to the lives of the indigenous communities. In most of the cases exploitation of the nature by the authorities and other profit-seeking sections of the society, make advantage of the relationship that the nature and these indigenous sections hold. For example, when we discuss the issues of land encroachments in the forest areas of Kerala, large multinational companies with the help of different political parties conducts protests among the tribal communities in the name of regaining their lands snatched off from their hands by the the government. In the background of the protest, these multinational companies establish their authority and autonomy over these forest lands. This particular chapter attempts to make an eco-critical analysis of Dr. Biju's *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, with reference to some of the important contemporary environment issues negotiated in the movies which adversely affected the ecological balance of the nature and environment of Kerala.

What then is eco-criticism? Simply put, eco-criticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, eco-criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies (Glottfelty, 18)

'Eco' and 'critic' both derive from Greek, 'oikos' and 'kritis', and in tandem, they mean "house judge", which may surprise many lovers of green, outdoor writing. A long-winded gloss on eco-critic might run as follows: "a person who judges the merits and faults of writings that depict the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action." (Howarth, 69). As far as literary theory is concerned, 'the world' is synonymous to the society in which we live. But for eco-criticism, 'the world' include the entire eco-sphere as if Barry Commoner's first law of ecology, "Everything is connected to everything else". (Commoner, 220).

Eco-criticism possesses two waves, first-wave eco-criticism and second-wave eco-criticism. First wave eco-criticism focuses mainly on the prevention and protection of the natural world through political means. It is more or less bio-centered. Whereas on the other hand, the second wave eco-criticism holds a more anthropocentric approach. It examines the relationship between humanity and nature. It also throws light into the lives of the dispossessed and displaced and discusses the negligence from the part of the the government regarding different environmental issues affecting their lives. On this ground we can say that Dr. Biju adapts the second wave eco-critical approach to read some of the real ecological issues in lives of the Adivasis, how their lives are merged with nature and how indifferently the authorities deals with issues that adversely affect their lives and their interconnection with nature, which he tried to portray in his movies *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*. Lawrence Buell in his work, 'The Future of Environmental Criticism', claims that second wave eco-criticism refers to different problems such as toxification of the local environment and the dumping of wastes and polluting industries that discriminate against poor and other disempowered communities especially the minority communities.

For more than a decade or two, eco-critical theory has been in use for analyzing different areas of written texts, both fictions as well as nonfiction. But eco-criticism is not widely used in the areas of popular culture such a film, music etc. While we eco-critically examines a literary text, we need to discuss so many aspects such as the relationship which humans and natural world, how humans react to different changes in the natural world, how humanistic actions affect the balance of the ecological world, how nature is attributed with anthropomorphic traits etc. Thus similarly, eco-critical reading of a film should also include the above-mentioned focuses. In a general sense when we consider nature or landscape in a movie, it will be confined within the boundaries of the settings of the action rather taking it to the next level. Here landscape adds to the meaning of the action of the characters. Martin Lefebvre, in his work, 'Landscape and Film', discusses how landscape can be autonomous in films. He put-forwards

two ways in which nature can be autonomous. The initial way is on the basis of the gaze of the audience. The audience has the ability to distinguish the landscape from the narrative and make it autonomous. The second way relies on the cinematographic techniques. A particular scene can be shot in such a way that it can differentiate the landscape from the narrative and can make it autonomous. In the first part of the film, *Perariyathavar*, there is a scene in which Suraj Venjaramood, who is working as a temporary staff of the Municipality, after collecting the garbage along with other workers comes to the corporation in order to dispose the waste they collected. In this particular scene Dr. Biju introduces the audience with the tragic image of the large areas of land dumped with large heaps of city wastes. In order to portray the unpleasant tone of the scene, he here uses wide shot by placing camera angle at top in order to accumulate the entire image of the heaps of waste in a single steady shot. Here the landscape is shot in such a way that, it appears to be autonomous rather than the characters and their actions. The issues underlying these images remind the audience of the Vilappilshala waste plant (Thiruvananthapuram), even though it never makes direct reference to this particular issue. Dr. Biju here portrays the inefficiency of the the government to provide adequate and sufficient waste disposal systems so as to purge city wastes. Through that single shot, Dr. Biju tries to brilliantly execute the putrefaction of city wastes, the other end of the urban development. In order to increase the standards of their lives, many people from villages get shifted to cities and towns. The phase of urbanization has growing effects into their lives. They become more and more materialistic and consumerist. As a result of increasing population at municipalities and corporation, there is an increase in the amount of garbage that gets accumulated around different parts of the city, due to the lack of sufficient measures to dispose of these wastes. This will increase the environmental as well as the financial encumbrance on state and local the government. At different instances, director tries to portray contrasting images between the sections of urban population and the sections including Suraj Venjaramood's character in which the former being part of the urban civilization, pollutes the natural resources, and the latter who is assigned with the responsibility to clear out the city wastes, for which he is not responsible, and to sustain the ecology of a place to which he never belongs. In a particular scene Suraj Venjaramood's character and Sona Nair's character, belonging to the unknown strata of the society engages in a conversation while washing their clothes in a river which appears to be polluted by the wastes coming from the factory nearby. In this scene when he tries to clean the wastes at the edges of the river, she reminds him that there is no use in clearing them off because the entire river is filled with factory wastes. She sarcastically says that they won't be able to clean these factory wastes off even if entire employees of the municipality come. Here she, through her words draws the attention of the audience, into the pathetic conditions of the river. In a scene when Suraj Venjaramood's character and his son are walking through the streets, they happen to see a dead cat on the road. As the duty of a citizen, even though not being one, he takes it and dumps it into the dustbin along with the waste heaped around the bin. In the very next scene itself, the director presents the images of the boy re-placing the fishes into clear new pot of water. Here contrasting images of death and life are incorporated in the adjacent scenes without any abnormality.

In many parts of the film, the director seeks our attention to the problems of waste disposal. Dr. Biju tries to portray two different phases of this particular problem. The first one is the inefficiency from the part of the authorities itself. Authorities are unable to provide adequate facilities and systems for disposing the urban waste to its subjects. Even if the the government won to provide such measures itself, the sustainability and reliability of such measures and systems are always under question. A major example for this is the issue regarding Vilappilshala Waste plant. Vilappilshala is a village situated about 22kms away from central Trivandrum. In the year 2000, the LDF the government put forwarded initial plans to establish a centralized waste processing plant in the fast growing scenario of the city life. Thus the Trivandrum City Corporation started to make primary steps regarding the project. The plant was said to be operated by a private company so as to process biodegradable waste to produce fertilizer, dispose the leftover rubbish in scientifically managed landfills within the facility and the problem of contaminated water coming from the dump is resolved by setting leach ate treatment plant. But soon a silent problem began to evolve. It got proved that the waste management plant is of low quality. Day by day waste was dumped in the facility in truckloads from far flung areas. The waste, bacteria and toxins started seeping into the water bodies mainly into Karamana River. Thus in order to bring the attention of the authorities to the respective issue, protests got initiated from the part of the villagers. The protests were not taken seriously at first. What then followed through constant protest is that The Centre for Development Studies (CDS) conducted a study of the plant in 2005. It was found out that the average quantity of waste dumped in the plant per day was 203 tons while the capacity of the plant, on the other hand, was only 90 tons. After popular protests fell on deaf years, the 46-acre plant was forcibly shut down on December 21, 2011. First such agitation against villages being made waste dumps was at Lalur near Thrissur, which got initiated in the year 1998. But this agitation wasn't fruitful. Today many such agitations have sprung all over Kerala- at Kureepuzha (near Kollam), Chakkukandam (near Guruvayoor temple), Pettippalam (near Thalassery), Njelianparamba (near Kozhikode), Chelora(near Kannur), Vadavathoor (near Kottayam), Sarvodayapuram (near Alappuzha), Kannattupura (near Pala), Brahmapuram (near Kochi), Paarakkadavu (near Thodupuzha), Kollangana (near Kasargod) and many more. These are to name a few. Scenes reflecting such protests were portrayed in *Perariyathavar*. Yet another phase of this issue which our director tries to draw is that in order live up to the standards of a city, people raises their quantity of food clothes other materials which later get accumulated as different forms of urban wastes. Thus we can say that growing consumer life of the people also contributes to the issues of waste management. They dump waste until the ecological stability shatters and with the passage of time, when these issues

start to affect them, they start to protest. That is the irony which Dr. Biju tries to depict in these scenes. On the other side director also tries to discuss contrasting lives like that of the character played by Suraj Venjaramood. Being a temporary municipal staff, he never possesses enough money to buy his son a single toy, but manages to make toys from the wastes he used to collect every morning from the city outskirts. They try to make waste to something productive. Likewise in many scenes, Dr. Biju throws light into the underlying lives of the poor employees of the corporation among many are temporary workers, who never belong to the urban civilization, but got assigned with the duty to carry the garbage of the upper strata of the society. The characters played by Suraj Venjaramood (father) and Master Govardhan (son) are nameless, homeless, never belong to those big cities and possess nothing. Even though being unknown, coming from unknown places and going to unknown destinations, these characters manage to uphold a social commitment towards the society and surroundings, which are a temporary home to them. This is evident from the scene when Suraj Venjaramood's character and his son are walking through the city during the night, then he happens to see waste packets being carelessly thrown into the streets of the city. He suddenly takes them and put it in a dustbin nearby. There are many such scenes in the film. Through these scenes, the director brilliantly tries to portray his marginalized characters with so many good traits which the subjects of the cities lack. Thus here he unfolds the bitter reality which lives in the city hold.

Dr. Biju, in order to convey his opinions towards the severe environmental issues regarding the inefficient waste management plants in Kerala, introduces poet Kureepuzha Sreekumar into the scene. In this particular scene, the poet addresses the protesters who are striking against the government's act of dumping large heaps of waste into the village outskirts thereby making so many environmental as well as health issues to the people living there.

"All our rivers are getting polluted. All the garbage and junk from the city are being dumped in this crowded village. This trash is now carried away by the birds and being deposited in our wells. Our kids drink the same water. They fall sick with unknown diseases. This strike is for our survival. We born and brought up in this land."

- Kureepuzha Sreekumar (*Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*)

In the backdrop of the protest, the officer asks the employees not to collect garbage from the city, until consent is reached and asks them to leave after collecting their wages till then. Here director portrays the plight of these employees including Suraj Venjaramood's character who lose their job due to the same waste which they try to eliminate from the city outskirts to make those cities clean and beautiful. It is the inefficiency and negligence from the part of the the government that made them jobless. Because it is the measure undertaken by the the government to dump these city wastes into villages like Vilappilasala, Laloore, and Kureepuzha rather making reliable waste plants to dump these wastes. Dr. Biju tries to present the two contrasting faces of the city life in a particular scene in which the face of the development is being contradicted by the face of city wastes. In this particular scene, Dr. Biju uses reflecting image shot by placing the camera at top angle. This particular shot is to show the contrasting images in which the image of skyscrapers being reflected in the muddy water. All of a sudden the waste collecting tempo from the corporation passes and blurs the reflection. Dr. Biju uses this technique of reflecting image shot as being inspired from Iranian film director Abbas Kiarostami. He had widely used this technique in his film 'Taste of Cherry'.

Then in the second half of the film, the director shifts the setting of the film into the depths of the forest. The setting shift takes place when Suraj Venjaramood's character and his son goes to Chami's house(Indrans) who belongs to a tribal community living in the forest area. The scenes portrayed here are on the backdrop of Muthanga agitation. Here characters are portrayed in such a way that they engage in a protest against the government, to provide them with land to live as they got deprived of their own lands.

Forests are not different from cities when it comes to the issues of the environment. In cities when environmental issues are initiated by the inhabitants itself, in the depths of the forest, the resources are being exploited by the encroachers from cities. On one hand the children of forest try to conserve their lands and environments, on the other hand, people from cities encroaches into the forest areas, as tourists, in the name of development and claiming various other purposes. Dr. Biju tries to substantiate that the people from cities are the ones who lack commitment to their society and the environment around which live. According to him, civilization is the prime reason for this. It is made clear through a particular scene in which Suraj Venjaramood's character wanders around the forest to enjoy the beauty of deep forests along with the brother in law of Indran's character Chami. After washing his face with the water from the river he suddenly gets struck by seeing the dreadful condition of the river there, polluted with plastics bottles cans etc. Then he manages to clean them up. Indran's character's brother in law tells him that the people from cities are responsible for this.

"All these are done by the people from the city. Weekends they will come here, booze, eat and will leave all the trash right here. Uncultured fellows."

- Chami's brother in law (*Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*)

We can relate this scene to the scene where Sona Nair's character and Suraj Venjaramood's character make a conversation while washing their clothes in the polluted river in the city outskirts. The scenes tells us about the degrading culture possessed by the people of urban civilization and contrasting images of the people living in the forest areas who holds a culture in preserving these natural resources, even though they are not subjected to any profound civilization. Dr. Biju portrays how these people belonging to the tribal community holds an eternal relationship with nature. They satisfy their needs by using the natural resources in the forest, whether it be the needs regarding food, shelter, medicine etc, they depend only on nature. It is evident from the scene where Indran's character and his wife depend on the medicines from nature when their son gets injured while playing. We audience can also witness Indran's character cultivating vegetables near his home which they use for their survival. Thus we can say that their lives are inseparable from nature.

Kaadu Pookkunna Neram relies much on the game of power and politics and how it is imposed over the marginalized sections. Even though it never addresses environmental issues directly, Dr. Biju tries to intervene the ecological issues in certain scenes in the film, thereby personifying nature. In the film, like P.B Shelley's West Wind in the poem Ode to the West Wind, nature acquires double role, the role of a savior and role of a destroyer. The role of nature switches from one to the other according to the power shifts among the characters. Dr. Biju provides anthropomorphic traits to nature here. In the beginning of the film, he depicts the scene in which two teachers are reciting poems to the Adivasi children. Here director uses 'jump-cut' editing technique to narrate parallel shots of both the teachers.

Teacher 1: Oh parrot, oh parrot...don't fight with each other...

Teacher 2: Ant has a nest built with leaves....(in the other classroom)

Teacher 1: If you fight each other, you will die...

Teacher 2: As many kinds of creatures....So many kinds of habitats....

- (*Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*)

Here the director wears the cloak of a prophet to endorse his idea of a harmonious ecosystem through these poems. Through this particular scene, Dr. Biju tries to convey that in this universe there are many kinds of creatures. And for each of them, nature had provided its own habitat. So one should not encroach into the life and habitat of the other and should come forward to preserve them. This is what our director attempts to execute by blending the two poems. As an irony to this, a group of policemen is seen entering into the scene in order camp in that school. Forest is a core element in this film as every character's existence relies on it. The plot of the film unfolds when Indrajith's character nabs the character of the women activist, played by Rima Kallingal, by claiming her to be a Maoist. But later he realizes that he got trapped in the depths of the forest. The one who possessed power outside the forest lost his power when he loses his way out the forest. Thus the power structure is deeply associated with the forest. Even though he poses a weapon itself, he is unable to act. Because he knows that the only one whom he can depend to get outside the forest is the woman activist. Thus forest here possesses an invisible power to control men with weapon. What the director tries to tell is that much deeper sound inside the woods is more dangerous than the weapon he holds.

M.J Radhakrishnan's cinematography had helped the movie a lot in enhancing the natural beauty of the woods onscreen. In most of the scenes in both *Perariyathavar* and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* M.J Radhakrishnan uses natural light to shoot. Jayadevan Chakkadeth's craft in using sync sound techniques brilliantly renders the rhythm of the deep woods to the audience. Another ironical scene which Dr.Biju tries to portray is the scene where the indigenous people, whom the policemen try to brand as anti-nationals and Maoists, feeds Indrajith's character with food to survive in the deep woods.

"Villages away from the forest is not for us. We like staying here. We like staying here. This is something they don't seem to understand. They say, they will build homes with doors and windows shut. We don't need any of that. If they allow us to live peacefully, is fine. This forest gives us everything. It doesn't hurt us and we never disturb it. If the the government and police don't disturb us we are fine."

- The old man (*Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*)

This is the most dramatic dialogue in this film is when the old man belonging to the tribal community, who fed them with food, claims that forest is their heart and soul and villages are not meant for them. Usually, Dr. Biju uses wide shots, but here he uses the close shot of the old man in order to convey the dramatic aspect of the scene to the

audience. The particular dialogue is strong enough that it has the ability and depth to make Indrajith's character to rethink on the ideology he believes.

"Man didn't weave the web of life; he merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does o himself. But we will consider your offer to go to the reservation you have for my people. We will live apart and in peace...."

- Chief Seattle (Gunawardene, 2009)

Displaced, Dispossessed and Marginalized

"Names can be restrictive as they carry the baggage of religion and ethnicity. My characters represent a certain strata of people, they symbolize them as a whole; the characters by virtue of their birth or occupation inhabit certain economic and social spaces. They are the displaced, the dispossessed, the marginalized and the oppressed in society. That representation is more important than names."

- Dr. Biju (Director)

Dr. Biju, a man who quitted his medical profession only to make movies. Not 'just' movies, but movies with a social cause and concern. For him film is a medium for activism. He adhered to this particular medium for activism in order to address the issues of the marginalized, subaltern sections of the society. In Malayalam film industry, the trend of discussing the issues of the down trodden is not widespread and are not widely accepted. A film maker should possess great guts to depict such sensitive issues onscreen. Even if he or she manages to make such films itself, taking them into the screen is something very difficult. Not only the hash-tag of offbeat movie makes difficulties in their way, but also the questions regarding the politics you placed in the movie will pose immense struggle in making a way to move further. This is because while dealing with most of such issues in films, at the end, questions will be raised against the ruling authorities. Because to an extent, the authorities are responsible for the plights and sufferings of the marginalized sections of the society. So a trend got developed, as the film makers and films negotiating such issues get widely attacked. These films will be subjected to strict rules of censorship and scenes portraying offensive scenes against the current political agenda will be cut off. Otherwise these films and film makers will be widely criticized.

Dr. Biju is an exception, who executes his political orientations on different issues of different social causes even if they are against the authorities or the hegemonic sections of the society. In his movies *Perariyathavar* (Names Unknown) and *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom) he speaks of the issues of the marginalized and the indigenous tribal communities, who gets subjected to different social political and ecological problems, posed especially by the negligence of the authorities.

Perariyathavar tells us the story of the marginalized at two extremes of the society, of the city outskirts as well as of the deep forests. The story unfolds through the lives of Suraj Venjaramood's character and his son (Master Govardhan) and many such lives, who are unknown, coming from unknown places and moving to unknown destinations. Suraj Venjaramood plays the role of a temporary municipal sweeper who lives in a rented room at the outskirts of the city along with his motherless eight year old child. The sweeper character of Suraj Venjaramood reminds us of the characters in Thakazhi SivaSankara Pillai's novel "Thottiyude Makan", which portrays the story of an untouchable family in which every generation are assigned with the duty to collect the wastes of the upper sections of the society which branded them as official beings of collecting garbage. Every coming generations will engage in the same profession of scavenging. The film has a non-linear kind of narration. And the story is being narrated by the eight year old son of Suraj Venjaramood, a character played by Master Govardhan as if he narrates the story to his dead mother. Govardhan received award for Best Actor at Fajr Film Festival, for portraying this character, in the year 2015. Dr. Biju uses the technique of unveiling such a strong theme through the innocent narration of a child. He uses this technique by drawing inspirations from Iranian film maker Majidi Majidi who widely used this technique in his film *Color of Paradise*.

In the beginning shot of the film, two boys are seen running into the frame. The shot is presented to the audience using black and white tones, capturing the scene in a wide shot placing the camera at top point. This is to produce anxiety in the minds of the audience regarding the incidents happening there, as the audience can only hear the sounds of the agitations. The boys then join the agitators. The scene ends when the boys close their ears. Suddenly the voices of the agitation also get muted. From the sudden silence it is clear that the scenes are depicted in their point of view. This technique of silence is widely used in the films of Dr. Biju's favorite Iranian film maker Abbas Kiarostami. He uses the technique of silence to make powerful meaningful images.

Dr. Biju attempts to portray the distinction between socially privileged classes and underprivileged classes evidently in many scenes. Children sitting and playing inside large pipes near railway lanes are the initial images

introduced to the audience to disclose the pathetic conditions of the slum in which the main characters live. He uses wide shot here rather than close one, in order to address a general issue rather than specifically focusing on his characters emotions. The characters of Nedumuni Venu, Shashi Kallinga, and Sona Nair who live in that slum of the city along with the main characters were not given any name. Director has deliberately done this as he doesn't want the characters to be known in their names, whereas should represent different marginalized sections of the society. He wants to discuss the problems faced by them rather their names. Thus they were addressed as Ashan (Nedumuni Venu), Band Ashan (Shashi Kallinga) etc according to the professions which they uphold. As the titles suggests, their names are unknown to us. But these people are not unknown to us. We encounter these people at different parts of lives. We know them but we purposefully neglect them. Our negligence and indifference are due to the privileges they lack and the privileges we hold in the political and social scenario in which we live. They may be sweepers, street dwellers, maids, mechanics etc. They also include migrant workers from different parts of the countries. But we should rethink whether these sections of society receive the basic rights and acceptance which we receive. In a particular scene, we audience watch the pathetic condition in which the people living in these slum areas are forcefully being evicted from their own lands. The act of eviction is on the basis of the government order. From the words of the characters, audience can realize the awful truth that these people are evicted from their lands in order to protect the interests of the privileged classes. Here the government is acting according to the interests of the hegemonic classes. They are evicting the marginalized sections in order to construct a road over their houses. While satisfying the needs of the privileged here the government is denying their 'right to live'. Here they lose the only possession they hold, their own lands.

These marginalized sections lack basic amenities to live. In many scenes Dr. Biju tries to portray the government's negligence in providing them adequate facilities. They don't even possess proper toilet facilities. In a particular scene,

Boy: Dad I need to go to the bathroom.

Father: That is why I ask you to wake up early. Now people will see you going to the bathroom.

- (*Perariyathavar*) (Names Unknown)

In this scene, the boy uses the public place near the railway lane as toilet. We can see many others doing the same in that particular scene.

Dr. Biju touches issue related to the marginalized in a scene from *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* when he takes us to the general issue when food grains assigned to the tribal people are hoarded and wasted in the government go-downs. In the beginning of the film, audience encounters with a scene in which someone gets attacked in the night. In the morning audience came to know that, it was a protest against the indifferent actions of the the government. It is seen that many posters were pasted in the walls.

"Stop the hoarding of food grains!! Ensure proper distribution of free rationing for the tribals!! Let the struggle be victorious".

- *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom)

There is yet another scene which is presented as the continuation of this incident. It is when the woman activist draws the attention of the policeman to the packs of grains that they had stolen in order to satisfy the hunger of the tribal people who starves without food for many days, when the government hoards these grains to their go-down. Ironically it is when; the old man in the forest feed them with food inside the depths of the forest.

"You people came here because some rice was stolen by the Maoists from the government go-downs. Here is that stolen rice. The food we ate was prepared from this rice. At times, people starve here. On such occasions, they are forced to do such things. It is better than tons of rice getting wasted in the government go-downs."

- Rima Kalligal's character (*Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*)

Similar such situation is portrayed in *Perariyathavar* too. The tribals are not provided with a good dispensary during to cop up with causalities. These government dispensaries lack inevitable medicines. In a particular scene when Chami's son got injured during playing, he was taken to a nearby dispensary. But medicines were not in stock. At the end of the scene it is revealed that, the one who made the check up is not a doctor, but a sweeper. This is a scene which shows the authorities' negligence, towards these people, at its peak. Another scene in *Perariyathavar* which portrays the adamant nature of the government is when policemen snub the street dwellers off from the streets due to reason that Prime Minister is visiting that place. Here the director raises so many questions against the authorities. Even after eradicating the religious atrocities which once persisted in our society, who hash tagged these poor sections as untouchables as they got discriminated from the society? What is the relevance in hiding these people

and denying them their rights to survive, when the government becomes the primary cause for their sufferings? Why should they be taken away from the sight of our Prime Minister? In many scenes in *Perariyathavar* so many migrant people were seen living in the outskirts of the city that never possess anything, not even a shelter to live. In a particular scene the son's character enquires his father about these migrants.

Son: Dad, where did they come from?

Father: From different places.

Son: Don't they have their own homes?

Father: May be not.

- *Perariyathavar* (Names Unknown)

This scene is ironical in many ways. This is because both the characters, the father and son are also, in one way or the other, passes through a similar phase of life. They got evicted from the only shelter which they possess. Not only these two characters, but the other nameless characters living along with them in the slum were also evicted. Thus on the other hand, they are also destined to be unknown, lack their own identity, made detached from their culture, root and land, same as that of these migrants.

Dr. Biju tries to encapsulate an imagery of the train to portray the fate of these people. The frequent showing images of the moving train symbolically represents their lives, which is not static, as they come from unknown places and are moving to unknown destinations. In many scenes Dr. Biju tries to accommodate disparities and contradicting images in a single shot. In a particular scene, when Suraj Venjaramood's character enters into a shop to buy a toy, which his son longed for, the salesman tries to be ignorant and indifferent towards him. He tells him that these toys are of high prices. Suddenly a well dressed family enters the scene, to which the salesman behaves very warmly. The shot accommodates two sections of the society, the privileged and under privileged. In this scene, director tries to say that, in our society people are valued on the basis of their social status. The scene depicts the bright and dark shades of power-politics. Even though these people never hold any social status itself director tries to portray these nameless characters as his last hope of perpetual humanity.

The characters of father and son remind the audience of the characters Alfredo and Salvatore, master-assistant combo in Italian film maker Guiseppe Tornatore's *Cinema Paradiso*. The humanitarian concern which they hold to their fellow beings is similar in these characters. Dr. Biju possesses great brilliance in differentiating beauty and vulnerability in the scenes. In the scene where a poor migrant child gets raped, the director hardly uses any melodrama. He shows the victimized without any abnormality, but he makes sure that the issue addressed here should not lack its intensity. He tries to highlight the social problem, he addresses it rather than highlighting that particular scene. The scene tells us about the insecurities which these marginalized sections face. The mother here is helpless as she couldn't offer any security to the child as the authorities are ignorant towards them and never offer them any protections. The government is unable to offer them a shelter that protects them from being exploited by the civilized world. He throws light into the lives of many such girl children growing in the streets, without offering any protection, neither from their parents nor from the authorities.

The most powerful imagery which Dr. Biju used in *Perariyathavar* is when the migrant workers along with character of Suraj Venjaramood are loaded in a tempo which get stopped at the traffic signal. Suddenly yet another tempo loaded with buffaloes taking for butchering stops next to it. Here Dr. Biju uses visuals as the most powerful medium to represent the awful realities of life. He makes us realize that the lives of these marginalized sections are not different to the lives of these buffalos. Their lives are butchered under the greed and arrogance of the power politics played by the hegemonic sections of the society who hold supreme power and authority.

Dr. Biju portrays the two different ends of life in *Perariyathavar*. On one end when a protest is being resolved and on the other end a new protest is being initiated. Both the protests are for survival. *Perariyathavar* also tells us about the issues faced by the people of the tribal communities. These people are exploited by the the government and big multinational companies who got encroached into their forests. These people were deprived out of their lands. *Perariyathavar* begins from their voices against the the government. The scenes portrayed here depict the onset of Muthanga agitation and the cruelty of the police force that fired into the protestors. The film enters into a surrealistic tone when we audience came to know at the end of the film that, in that firing the son gets killed and his soul is narrating the story to his mother. This is the only instance in the movie where our director uses some melodrama.

Kaadu Pookkunna Neram focuses mainly on the how the government suppresses the voices of the people who speak for the subaltern and marginalized sections living in the deep woods. This film is Dr. Biju's protest against branding these voices against the acts of the government as Maoists or anti nationals. They are denied of their freedom to speak, they are denied of their freedom to express. Dr. Biju questions the reliability of a democracy here. If the government denies the rights of these poor sections then who will preserve their rights? This is the major question he throws into the audience. There is a scene in which innocent tribal people are being arrested by claiming them to be Maoists. These policemen are unable to distinguish between who a Maoist is and who is not. They believe in the perception of a Maoist put forward by the government. The government distorts their perception by making them believe that Maoists are the ones who stand against the government. This wrong perception makes them believe that anyone who protest against the government for their or the rights of the subaltern and marginalized sections as Maoists. Initially Indrajith's character also believes in the same distorted perception. But two nights and two days inside the forest had changed his entire perception. He understood the atrocities which the authorities hold. The adamant nature of the authorities and policemen are clear from the ending scenes of the film. Indrajith's character, who is one among the policemen, who camped inside the forests to arrest the Maoists who they believed to be working among the tribals, got trapped inside the deep woods manages to escape from the forest. On this ground some tribals were arrested, charging the crime of murder and were remanded for six years under non-bail able offence. In that particular scene,

Indrajith's character: Now, case against the tribals can be withdrawn.

Senior Policeman: That is the problem. If we withdraw, police statements will be proved as false.

Cops making false allegations on Maoist connection will be the news later.

Indrajith's character: Aren't they innocent?

Senior Policeman: Only we know that fact. That's not a big deal.

- *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom)

In this scene the policeman are making deliberate attempts to establish their claim on those tribals as Maoists, in order to hide their inefficiency. They are so adamant that they never pay any attention to the lives and feelings of the tribals. No the government is there to protect them.

Dr. Biju tries to use so many imageries in the film to unfold the plights of the lives of the subalterns and to criticize the ruling class who is responsible for it. In the beginning of the film, in a particular scene the Indran's character who teaches the Adivasi children, teaches them of constitution and the rights which it offers.

Teacher: Rights for education. Children between four and sixteen of age have the right for free education. No education should be denied to any children in the name of caste, religion and community. Special attention shall be given for the education and financial support of scheduled caste and tribes and also in protecting them from social injustice and exploitation.

- *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom)

A parallel shot is included along with this particular shot by the director in which a facial mirror gets break between the renderings of this dialogue. We audience can assume that the mirror represents the society which shatters the dreams and aspirations of these indigenous and underprivileged people. Another imagery director uses here is when the poor, innocent tribals were arrested claiming them having Maoist connections. In the scene prior to this, when this police force is on their way to arrest them, director makes a focus shift from the police jeep to a spider making its web. This is to portray that the entire police force is making web to trap these poor tribals. He also uses folk songs as a critical weapon all over the film. This is because these folk songs represent their traditions, their culture and their lives. Their helpless conditions are being addressed through a folk song in the beginning. The teacher is reciting this poem to the children. The children are also reciting it along with the teacher.

Teacher: Oh little crab of the paddy field..

Where will you sit while harvesting?? I will sit beneath the clay bricks...

Where will you sit when the clay bricks fall?? I will sit on my father's lap...

Where will you sit when your father dies?? I will sit on my mother's lap...

.....Where will you sit when your little brother dies??

Will live according to my destiny...

- *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom)

This particular song symbolically represents their lives. The the government and political parties who have the responsibility to protect their lives and rights, and whom they should rely upon, deprived them off. They now have no one to dependent and are destined to according to their destiny. Yet another usage of folk song is at the end of the film. This is when the police force left their school after their camp. It is seen that they destroyed all the furniture there. But they didn't make any complaints. They have the capability to adapt to any situation. Thus they came to their normal life in which they enjoy the little thing the life and nature offer them.

"We are one...We all are one...We are our masters...We are the masters of this land...Masters of this forest....are all US...."

- *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram* (When the woods bloom)

And Dr. Biju ends the film by placing the camera over glass inorder to get the low angle image of a girl cleaning the waste. It symbolically represent that are back to their normal life in which they cleans all the waste which society dumps over them.

Dr. Biju makes sure that his films are the voices of the subaltern sections, their lives and their problems. Living in the same social background, being a fellow being, being an artist, he believes that it is his duty and responsibility to throw light into the severe issues faced by these marginalized sections. True art should posses a social commitment. Thus his films are true testament to his idea of commitment.

Analysis of both the movies from the perspective of power play shows how these movies work collectively in highlighting the plight of dispossessed and marginalized. The laws which are meant to make them powerful and be in the decision-making process is distorted to make them even more mute. The piercingly feeble voice of the underprivileged remain under the carpets of bureaucrats and is made to remain so in order to ensure the lawlessness in the minds of privileged class in society with absolute disregard for the suffering humanity. The director through his craftsmanship has rendered this film which such uniqueness that it acts as a loud speaker for generations to come. Both the films will remain in Malayalam film as true reflection of Kerala society's past present and future. All though there is a silver lining cloud of hope and change in future the lion's share of what is depicted by this brilliant director on silver screen will continue to remain for decades to come unless there is a collective initiative by each and every individual to make this society a better place to live in. The mute voices of the subaltern will only be heard only if each and every individual in society is sensitized of the true issues and the politics that goes behind the making of sensational news. The sheer disregard for the marginalized need to be cleansed at all levels for a better humanity to prosper.

Portraying the lives of the marginalized communities, the social, political and economic disparities they face are not widely discussed in Indian cinema. Whereas in the International scenario, foreign films such as Iranian movies, Korean movies, Italian movies etc, for the past many years, have been attempting in portraying the lives and issues faced by these marginalized sections. Nowadays a small change has witnessed in the consciousness of India Film-makers, in the way in which they view these subaltern issues. The growing influence of fascism is the reason why these filmmakers show reluctance in portraying these issues onscreen. These issues can't be addressed, without raising their voices against the authorities, as to an extent they are responsible for the plight of the marginalized. Thus the the government has been suppressing every form of art that communicate with the people and tries to throw light to the current socio-political scenario. This is the psychology that works behind attacking Dalit writers and movie makers who accommodate subaltern issues in their movies. They even try to alter syllabuses of universities, schools in order to eradicate whatever models working against the the government. One such recent issue is deleting the history of Channar revolt in Kerala which initiated protest against breast taxation from CBSE texts. Fascist the government suppresses every movement that glorifies such revolts of the marginalized. Yet another similar issue trending in our society today is the government's blatant act of exerting different laws over the people who strive to raise their voices and opinions against the the government by branding them as Maoists and anti-nationals. Analysis of both the movies from the perspective of power play shows how these movies work collectively in highlighting the plight of dispossessed and marginalized. The laws which are meant to make them powerful and be in the decision-making process is distorted to make them even more mute. The piercingly feeble voice of the underprivileged remain under

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Dr. Biju tries to substantiate the same idea regarding nature and environment by using film as its medium. He criticizes the ecological situation that persists today and guides the audience to the truth that, man belongs to nature, never nature belongs to man. A closer scrutiny of the select films shows how the director and his crew has carefully weaved layers of meanings in each shot to highlight the audacity of man in spoiling the decorum that nature gave all of us and at the same time draws a parallel line between the humble man and his actions in giving the true message of striving for a sustainable ecosystem. According to Dr. Biju, the significance of environmental conservation is highlighted in both the films. Nature holds an important role in both the films. In *Perariyathavar*, issues related to the dumping of garbage, are discussed on a larger scale. Whereas in *Kaadu Pookkunna Neram*, it focuses mainly on the issues regarding our forests and through this film we tried to convey the message that we need to protect and conserve nature for the future generations.

CONCLUSION

Portraying the lives of the marginalized communities, the social, political and economic disparities they face are not widely discussed in Indian cinema. Whereas in the International scenario, foreign films such as Iranian movies, Korean movies, Italian movies etc, for the past many years, have been attempting in portraying the lives and issues faced by these marginalized sections. Nowadays a small change has witnessed in the consciousness of India Film-makers, in the way in which they view these subaltern issues. The growing influence of fascism is the reason why these filmmakers show reluctance in portraying these issues onscreen. These issues can't be addressed, without raising their voices against the authorities, as to an extent they are responsible for the plight of the marginalized. Thus the the government has been suppressing every form of art that communicate with the people and tries to throw light to the current socio-political scenario. This is the psychology that works behind attacking Dalit writers and movie makers who accommodate subaltern issues in their movies. They even try to alter syllabuses of universities, schools in order to eradicate whatever models working against the government. One such recent issue is deleting the history of Channar revolt in Kerala which initiated protest against breast taxation from CBSE texts. Fascist the government suppresses every movement that glorifies such revolts of the marginalized. Yet another similar issue trending in our society today is the government's blatant act of exerting different laws over the people who strive to raise their voices and opinions against the government by branding them as Maoists and anti-nationals. Analysis of both the movies from the perspective of power play shows how these movies work collectively in highlighting the plight of dispossessed and marginalized. The laws which are meant to make them powerful and be in the decision-making process is distorted to make them even more mute. The piercingly feeble voice of the underprivileged remain under the carpets of bureaucrats and is made to remain so in order to ensure the lawlessness in the minds of privileged class in society with absolute disregard for the suffering humanity. The director through his craftsmanship has rendered this film which such uniqueness that it acts as a loud speaker for generations to come. Both the films will remain in Malayalam film as true reflection of Kerala society's past present and future. All though there is a silver lining cloud of hope and change in future the lion's share of what is depicted by this brilliant director on silver screen will continue to remain for decades to come unless there is a collective initiative by each and every individual to make this society a better place to live in. The mute voices of the subaltern will be heard only if each and every individual in society is sensitized of the true issues and the politics that goes behind the making of sensational news. The sheer disregard for the marginalized need to be cleansed at all levels for a better humanity to prosper.

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