

**A Perpetual Subject of Male Gaze : An Analysis of Amal Neerad's
Malayalam Movie *Varathan***

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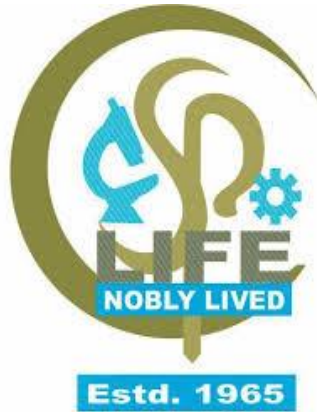
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Declaration

I do hereby declare that the project a study on “A Perpetual Subject of Male Gaze: An Analysis of Amal Neerad’s Malayalam Movie *Varathan*” is the record of genuine research work done by me under the guidance of Professor Lima Sunny, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the project work A study on “ A Perpetual Subject of Male Gaze : An Analysis of Amal Neerad’s Malayalam Movie *Varathan*” is a record of the original work carried out by Sharon Perera under the supervision and guidance of Professor Lima Sunny, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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Introduction

“what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance”. This is quoted by Laura Mulvey on her famous Male gaze theory. The film critic Laura_Mulvey coined the term *male gaze*, which is conceptually contrasted with and opposed by the female gaze.

" The “gaze” is a term that describes how viewers engage with visual media. Originating in film theory and criticism in the 1970s, the gaze refers to how we look at visual representations. These include advertisements, television programs and cinema. In feminist theory, the male gaze is the act of depicting women and the world, in the visual arts and in literature, from a masculine, heterosexual perspective that presents and represents women as sexual objects for the pleasure of the male viewer.

Laura Mulvey is a feminist film theorist from Britain, best known for her essay on *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Her theories are influenced by the likes of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, is one of the first major essays that helped shift the orientation of film theory towards a psychoanalytic framework. Prior to Mulvey, film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz used psychoanalytic ideas in their theoretical accounts of the cinema. Mulvey's contribution, however, inaugurated the intersection of film theory, psychoanalysis and feminism. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" brought the term "male gaze" into the academic lexicon and eventually into common parlance. Mulvey states that she intends to use Freud and Lacan's concepts as a "political weapon". She employs some of their concepts to argue that the cinematic

apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably put the spectator in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire and "the male gaze". In the era of classical Hollywood cinema, viewers were encouraged to identify with the protagonists, who were and still are overwhelmingly male. Meanwhile, Hollywood women characters of the 1950s and '60s were, according to Mulvey, coded with "to-be-looked-at-ness" while the camera positioning and the male viewer constituted the "bearer of the look".

Mulvey suggests two distinct modes of the male gaze of this era: "voyeuristic" (i.e., seeing woman as image "to be looked at") and "fetishistic" (i.e., seeing woman as a substitute for "the lack", the underlying psychoanalytic fear of castration).

She argues that the only way to annihilate the patriarchal Hollywood system is to radically challenge and re-shape the filmic strategies of classical Hollywood with alternative feminist methods. She calls for a new feminist avant-garde filmmaking that would rupture the narrative pleasure of classical Hollywood filmmaking. Being one of the most notable film theorists in the world, her ideas and clear proof of misogyny in film opened up the eyes of many, and in 1975, something that people simply accepted was finally questioned. Although Mulvey's theory has helped identify issues with gender in film, why do we still have the same issues decades later? Why do we still see the same roles for women in film and television regurgitated over and over again?

Mulvey states that "the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses." This means that the male viewer is the target audience, therefore their needs are met first and that this problem stems from an old fashioned,

male-driven society. Her theory on how women are portrayed in film and the media is just as prevalent today as it was in 1975 when her text was first published. She believes that women are in fact “the bearer of meaning and not the maker of meaning,” which suggests that women are not placed in a role where they can take control of a scene, instead they are simply put there to be observed from an objectified point of view. In addition, she believes that this way of watching film is never alternated so that the men are in fact the ones who are being viewed in this manner. This inequality enforces the ancient and outdated idea of men do the looking, and women are to be looked at.” From the feminist perspective, this theory can be viewed in three ways: How men look at women, how women look at themselves and finally, how women look at other women. Typical examples of the male gaze include medium close-up shots of women from over a man’s shoulder, shots that pan and fixate on a woman’s body, and scenes that frequently occur which show a man actively observing a passive woman.

The Male Gaze suggests that the female viewer must experience the narrative secondarily, by identification with the male. In 1929 Salvador Dali released a film called *Un Chein Andalou*, which is an abstract short film that portrays a perfect example of this. One scene in the film, a man is found dissecting the iris of a young woman’s eye, which infers this idea of female sight not being central, and that men are not only the audience, but also in control of the action, the camera, the direction, the writing, et cetera, therefore completely running the show, dominating the entirety of the narrative and how it is depicted. Not only is the Male Gaze theory relevant to cinema, but it also correlates with every-day life. Some theorists have noted that in advertising, objectification and sexualised portrayals of the female body can be found even in situations where sex or

representations of sex have nothing to do with the product being advertised. Although as of recently, movies like *Frozen* (2013) and *Suffragette* (2015) do Mulvey justice in highlighting women's independence and empowerment, breaking away from the Male Gaze, decades later we still see the same broken record playing, with films like *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) and *Star Trek Into Darkness* (2013) revealing women in extremely sexual and somewhat unnecessary manners.

One reason for this is simply that the movie companies producing these films are male-dominated, as cinema is predominantly a male-run industry, and just like when Mulvey originally wrote this critical analysis of film, producers are still churning out the same work that has proved to be successful in the past with audiences as they invest to make profit. They believe that they are giving the public what they want, when that isn't necessarily true. They are giving audiences what a proportion of males want, and what the rest of society has been brainwashed to accept.

One film which stands out when considering this theory is Michael Bay's Transformers franchise. Firstly, these movies have a huge difference in the male/female character ratio, instantly making it an unrepresentative movie as it doesn't depict 50% of its audience. All the women Bay casts in this franchise are sexualised in some way, and it has no relevance to the story line, or as Mulvey would put it: it is just to please the heterosexual male, rendering it a movie with touches of irrelevant objectification and misogyny.

Another movies in Hollywood which male gaze can be applied are *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), *Transformers: Age of Extinction* (2014), *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella* et cetera etc.

Mulvey has shown a light on the old-fashioned and repetitive style of cinema we see every day, and her ideologies have helped create a more modern and truthful version of cinema as we now have more realistic portrayals of women than ever before. For example, the films *Spy* (2015) and *The Hunger Games* franchise (2012-present) allow audiences to have a refreshing look at women in strong and powerful positions without a man by their side, thus enforcing the important message that women do not have to be put in a box and objectified, they can play a variety of different, versatile roles and they can be considered through the eyes of society in a way that doesn't patronize and sexualise them via the Male Gaze.

- A Political Use of Psychoanalysis
- the function of woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is two-fold
- woman stand in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning
- unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form
- -the ultimate challenge: how to fight the unconscious structured like a language while still caught within the language of the patriarchy
- important issues for the female unconscious which are scarcely relevant to psychoanalytic theory: the sexing of the female infant and her relationship to the symbolic, the sexually mature woman as non-mother, maternity outside the signification of the phallus, the vagina

- cinema has changed over the last few decades – technological advances (16mm, etc) have changed the economic conditions of cinematic production, which can now be artisanal as well as capitalist
- unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order

Pleasure in Looking/Fascination with the Human Form

a) scopophilia: “love of looking”; sexual pleasure derived from looking at sexually stimulating scenes or at another person’s genitals; voyeurism

– arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight -> separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen

b) scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect

– image of oneself; it is an image that constitutes the matrix of the imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification

– the cinema has structures of fascination strong enough to allow temporary loss of ego while simultaneously reinforcing the ego

– developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen -> demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator’s fascination with and recognition of his like

Both:

– are formative structures, mechanisms not meaning. In themselves they have no signification, they have to be attached to an idealisation

– pursue aims in indifference to perceptual reality, creating the imagised, eroticised concept of the world that forms the perception of the subject and makes a mockery of

empirical objectivity

fetishistic scopophilia:

– builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself

-can exist outside linear time as the erotic instinct is focused on the look alone

voyeurism:

– has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt , asserting control and subjecting the guilty person through punishment / forgiveness; sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end.

Chapter 1

Woman as Image, Man as Bearer of the Look

World is ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female: woman traditional exhibitionist role, to-be-looked-at-ness, displayed as sexual object woman as icon as Budd Boetticher has put it:

“What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who

makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.” Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. For instance, the device of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man’s-land outside its own time and space.

Through In many Hollywood films there has been a shift in the way women are represented on screen. In the past, many classic films have used female characters to become an image, while the male characters are the bearer of the look. It implemented the idea of having the active/male and the passive/female characters existing within the eye gaze, this concept of Scopophilia was developed by Sigmund Freud in 1905. Scopophilia focused on pleasure in looking, making people become objects to a controlling or curious gaze of another individual. There was a clear representation of Scopophilia occurring in many Hollywood films, which included *To Have or Have Not* (Hawks, 1944) and *Vertigo* (Hitchcock, 1958). Each of these films implemented the concept of Scopophilia and the role of woman in film.

In *To Have or Have Not*, any visual presence of a female character “works against the development of the storyline, freezes the flow of action in moments” (Muvley, 1989). In one particular scene from the film it shows the impact a woman has on the pausing the

narrative. The scene of a group of male characters discussing crucial story elements is paused when a female character enters their office. With a woman's presence on screen t

Women have always connoted a passive role and are instead of looking, looked at, in film. They display to-be-looked-at-ness. Examples are given such as pinups. A woman interferes with the narrative of a story because of this. This has spawned the "buddy movie" in which the "active homoeroticism of the central male figures can carry the story without distraction." The woman is there only as an icon for the "buddies" to react to, and to aid in the spectator's relatability to his likeness. the entire mood in the scene shifts co "A man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative for power in a further sense, as the bearer of the look of the spectator." This stems back to the spectators childhood in which he recognizes himself in the mirror, he does not see perfection, when he sees the actor he sees perfection, maybe not in the actors actual face, but through camera techniques, projection into the scene, and plot interest.

-Both of these connote a woman icon, which inevitably promotes the displeasure of not having a penis and castration. This can only be escaped from by both "pre-occupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery)" and or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the woman into a fetish so that she becomes reassuring rather than dangerous from threat of castration completely. The representation of woman as signifying castration is contradictory in film because subconsciously she is ve ry much that, but cinematically she is desirable because of camera techniques, distance, and the displacement of space and time.

The actors inevitably control the camera and the audience but the two looks of the audience and the camera are, because of patriarchal upbringing, controlled by the “neurotic need of the male ego” She says at the end that the preparedness of the movie (being the disposition of patriarchal societal roles) destroy the satisfaction, pleasure and privilege of the invisible guest.

Laura Mulvey Quotes

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.”

“the film opens with the woman as object of the combined gaze of spectator and all the male protagonists in the film. She is isolated, glamorous, on display, sexualised. But as the narrative progresses she falls in love with the main male protagonist and becomes his property, losing her outward glamorous characteristics, her generalized sexuality, her show-girl connotations; her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participating in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too”.

“As Budd Boetticher has put it: What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, or who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.”

“Woman's desire is subjugated to her image (...) as bearer, not maker, of meaning.”

The Sexism of Film

At the crux of Mulvey's thesis is her belief that mainstream Hollywood cinema is an inherently sexist enterprise. She contends that female characters are fetishized, objectified and positioned only in relation to male characters. To support this point, Mulvey uses Marilyn Monroe as an example, highlighting the ways in which certain aspects of her body were filmed solely to evoke eroticism and desire in the male viewer. From a psychoanalytic perspective, Mulvey also suggests that female characters are symbolically castrated, and are portrayed solely in the wake of this castration; they are guilty, anxious, and unable to receive pleasure.

Film as a Source of Pleasure

As the title of the essay suggests, Mulvey views cinema as a source of pleasure. Her definition of pleasure, however, is not merely a matter of fun or entertainment, but a deeper psychoanalytical experience with associations to desire and fantasy. She indicates that this experience of pleasure is linked to *scopophilia*, the voyeuristic pleasure derived from viewing others as objects, and the narcissistic relationship the viewer forms with characters on-screen. This is not to suggest that Mulvey does not see simpler senses of

pleasure in film, such as entertainment and humour but she seeks a more complex understanding.

The Power of the Director

Mulvey does not suggest that sexist cinematic tropes have emerged organically. Rather, she looks at specific films and directly names directors. Analyzing Sternberg, Hitchcock, and their respective films, Mulvey gestures towards the ways in which the directors place male desire, voyeurism, fantasy and eroticization at the center of their work. In this sense, the role of the director is an incredibly powerful one. They decide not only what the spectator sees, but how they see it, and further, the trends that tropes that will emerge in cinema. As their work is done behind the scenes, they are so often not held accountable for the implications of such work. By addressing these directors directly, Mulvey intends to hold them accountable for their sexist practices, and in the process, change the course of cinema.

The Relevance of Psychoanalysis

Writing in 1973, Mulvey bases her approach on the psychoanalytic practice devised and developed by Sigmund Freud. Instead of looking to contemporary theory, Mulvey reaches half a century into the past into the past. In doing so, she implies that Freud's theories have continued relevance not only in the field of psychology but in broader fields such as film studies and gender studies. As she writes, "psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriate here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the

unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.” That’s a tall order for a single theoretical approach but Mulvey’s reliance on psychoanalysis demonstrates the lasting power of Freud’s work.

Chapter 2

Laura Mulvey’s visual pleasure and narrative cinema

Laura Mulvey’s bafflingly influential essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” represents a high water mark in the barking lunacy of psychoanalytically inflected film theory. For Mulvey, ‘patriarchy’ and ‘phallogocentric in all its manifestations’ depends upon the image of the ‘castrated woman’ to give order and meaning to its world: ‘Woman’s desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it.’ The woman’s lack of a phallus gives meaning to the man’s possession of such, and the power and status it brings. This process is both displayed and reinforced in the cinema.

Cinema, according to Mulvey, affords two forms of pleasure: 'scopophilia', the erotic, voyeuristic pleasure of subjecting others to a 'controlling and curious gaze' and which is associated with the 'libido'; and the 'narcissistic' pleasure of 'identification' with the male protagonist (or the camera's point of view) which Mulvey associates with the 'mirror phase' of *Jaques Lacan's* crackpot psychology: the moment that the child misrecognises himself in his own reflection, thereby constituting his 'ego'.

For Mulvey identification is always with the male point of view, even for the female audience, and female characters are always subject to the controlling male gaze. Male protagonists and audiences are active, female characters and spectators are passive. There is no room in Mulvey's ramblings for the pleasures of the female viewer, other than masochism, and no room either for identification across gender, or for identification for gay audiences: the male form cannot be subject to eroticization in the way that the female form can.

The female body exists for the pleasure of the male gaze. However, since the female form has no phallus, it is identified with the 'threat' of castration and the spectator resorts to either the sadistic, voyeuristic pleasure in the spectacle of the punishment of women, the bearers of guilt (who, being 'castrated', must have done something to deserve it) or disavowal of the threat of castration through 'fetishism'.

This fetishism can take almost any form: extravagant set design, excessive camera movement, musical numbers – just about anything that can't be explained by 'sadistic voyeurism' in fact, meaning that Mulvey can claim to have explained the entire cinema experience with a minimal number of psychoanalytical terms.

Since 'pleasure' is identified purely with patriarchal domination, pleasure must be done away with. Mulvey advocates the 'destruction of pleasure' as a 'radical weapon': 'The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked.' The whole article reads like a parody of joyless feminism. If it all sounds like gibberish to you, that's because it is. There isn't a shred of evidence any of the psychodynamic processes involved actually exist and Mulvey offers no attempt to establish that they do. Instead she just regurgitates the work of Freud and Lacan and expects us to take their lunatic theories on trust.

The theory is pessimistic, deterministic and also 'essentialist' in that it is trans-historical; it is deeply reactionary as it rests upon a view of a universal, unchangeable human nature. Mulvey's theory takes masculinity as 'normative' in that the feminine as is defined in terms 'deviation' from the masculine (hence 'lack', 'absence', 'otherness'). Her uncritical support for the '*avant-garde*' also displays the usual pseudo-left contempt for 'the masses' in upholding the capitalist division of labour which valorises the intellectual labour of the ruling elites over the physical labour of the oppressed; in fact issues of class, 'race' or alternative sexualities which might over-ride simple sexual dichotomies are entirely absent from her work. Psychoanalysis is simply inadequate to even theorise about differences other than those which are sexual. Likewise there is no discussion of 'camp' readings of film.

There's no discussion of the context in which films are viewed other than the darkness of the cinema, something Mulvey inevitably associates with voyeurism, and the fixed seating which she sees as a 'repression' contributing to identification with the screen image – but are the psychodynamic processes involved in watching a film at the

cinema the same as those involved watching a DVD in the more relaxed context of the home? In any case, audiences are often far from 'repressed': witness the cheers, jeers and laughter of the cinema audience.

Even if we were to suspend our utter disbelief in psychobabble Mulvey's essay contains much which is demonstrably wrong: In Hitchcock 'the male hero does see precisely what the audience sees' according to Mulvey. However Hitchcock usually employs two strategies to create suspense: situations in which the perceptual points of view of the protagonist and the spectator correspond; and situations in which the viewer holds the privileged position of knowing things that the protagonist does not. In *North By Northwest* the audience is well aware of Eve's divided loyalties before Roger Thornhill. It's about time this gibberish was cast into the trashcan of history. It is a blight upon both film theory and feminism in general.

Chapter 3

Male gaze in Malayalam movie '*varathan*'

We have been discussing masculinities for a while: from the virulent nationalist political masculinity to the toxic misogynist men of popular culture, contemporary debates entrench within them aspirations of being the right kind of male. The current moment of activism around film industry is as much about this inflated male, as it is about women speaking out. In this context, Amal Neerad's Malayalam movie, released

last week, *Varathan* (outsider), is a rightly timed one. It is about various dichotomies that we deal unknowingly within ourselves. It is also about shattering the myths of these expectations.

The movie opens with a shift from Dubai, the commercial capital of the new-world, after the failure of the hero, Aby (Fahadh Faasil), in impressing his interviewers. Subsequently he is assured by his IT professional wife, Priya (AishwaryaLakshmy), to take his time in being successful, experimenting a little. Taking time is an interesting concept in the movie, because the entire spatial dislocation is woven around the framework of this temporality. The usual myth of the city being fast and furious and the village being slow and peaceful is woven, debated and finally mercilessly chopped off within this temporal imagination.

In the due course, the plot shifts to the village in a huge leap from the hustle and buzzle of Dubai to a hill station in Kerala. The encounter is between the city and the village, the modern and the feudal and finally masculinity and the so-called effeminate. What is interesting is in all these conflicts is that nostalgia is not a vantage point, as it has been brushed off mercilessly by a hero, who hardly knows how to pronounce the word, *gruhaathurathvam* (nostalgia in Malayalam) The movie plays around the idea of inside and the outside quite a bit. Right from the title, *Varathan*, a derogatory term that speaks of the outsiders in Kerala, the movie throws open important questions related to this fencing. (connect with Kerala's intolerance to immigrant communities.) At the same time, the movie experiments with the idea of the private and the public quite a bit and resolves it to the modern notion of private lives of individuals. Trespassing is a culture in Kerala, where people assume a right to speak about, judge, interfere and constantly

engage with other people's lives. This social world thus is a world of male fantasies all the time imagining transgressive escapades with women, at the same time living under the constant demand of a regulating public gaze. Therefore, the double standard is between the constant gaze towards the private lives of others and the tight borders we keep to fence the outsider "out."

The village/city dichotomy with which the popular cinema had worked so far, is ruthlessly torn to pieces for a vilified version of the countryside. If Amal Neerad's action heroes used guns and swords in the past, here the chopping is more of a breaking down of the symbolic order Malayalam cinema has so far circled around. The rest of the story-line is about how a woman is systematically victimized and then assaulted in the beautiful landscape of a pristine, unviolated space. But there is more to read. It is quite a tradition to attribute masculinity and femininity to cities and villages in popular representations. City is often the masculine space, so full of movement, development, competence, modernity and moreover a space for the hero to assert his masculinity. The village, however feudal it is, is also a space of tradition, feudal values, lethargy, and often inability (the typical feudal heroes of anti-reservation movies, getting lost in the city is a part of our cinema-imagination.)

This feminine / masculine version of spaces is shattered when the dislocation happens from the city to the village, as in the village we do not see many women. It is a male world, mostly circling around repressed sexuality and voyeurism. There is a conscious (?) absence of women in this space, and the only women who are available, are objects of the masculine assertions. The critique has a larger framework, when we think

of Kerala mostly as a suburban locality, that does not have much to do with large cityscapes. Cities of Kerala thus are more or less suburban villages.

It is here, the question of sexuality becomes a statement that can be connected to the concerns raised by feminists and feminists in Malayalam cinema of late. We have the depiction of a woman who is abducted, violated inside a running vehicle, and is portrayed as coming back to fight with vigour and courage. This is not a serendipity in the plot. Hats off to Amal Neerad and his team for this brilliant representation!! The violence is not visually shown, but is again brilliantly portrayed by the leading female actor Aishwarya Lakshmy. The trauma is in her expressions, and in the controlled script, where she utters the violence she felt inside the moving vehicle and in her vehement desperation of washing her body parts after getting home. The representation of sexual assault or rape is quite a change from the cliché as the director shows a way of representing rape taking away the risk of creating a sexual spectacle.

Denunciation of voyeurism is not new to Amal Neerad. His film, *Kullante Bharya*, part of the anthology *AnchuSundarikal*, centres around voyeurism. So does *IyyobintePusthakam*, where voyeurism and its follies are dealt with. The camera that follows the heroine like a voyeur is brilliantly done, juxtaposing the horror and thriller elements with lights, shades and jump scares, portraying the uneasiness of a woman constantly being treated as an object of this look. Most often the camera is behind the action, following the characters, especially when it comes to the heroine. We get a glimpse of this, from the moment they land in Kerala in the cab, where the driver turns the mirror to see Aishwarya. This strikes a chord in any woman who has travelled in

Kerala in an auto or a cab, to be an object to this 'pleasure of looking.' The scarecrow that is turned towards the house is an experience of living a woman's life in Kerala.

A hero who cries, not just by the inability to act, but by the pressure of expectations to rise up to the situation, is a rare substance in a popular movie. The tears do not come from his victimhood, but are products of centuries long expectations we place on men and masculinity. The conflicts within the central characters, reflect the tension between the myth and the reality, between conforming and being different. The heroine who constantly reminds her husband that he can take his time to be successful and earn, is torn between popular expectations and her personality. That discomfort comes out when she faces her mother's jibes about her jobless husband. At the same time the final blurting out on the image of the lost father underlines this dichotomy. There is always that father (and even the grandfather) who is present in the house, as the symbol of the protective masculine patriarch whom she invokes at a crucial moment through the statement "had my father been here, I would not have ended up this way." The pressure to give in to this patriarchal order is thus the constant conflict in the movie. The tension between the aspired and the actual in the movie is this conflict.

What is interesting in the plot is that the resolution is not about how her husband termed as effeminate by many grows to become the so-called masculine. I have seen many reviews to that effect, where the movie is read as yielding to the popular demands of masculinity. I would still like to take the movie challenging the conventional formats of masculinity, as the final scene of crushing the cockroach by the hero need not be the idea of the coming of age of the masculine ideal. The movie leaves it open, the hero is still jobless, he is still the one who makes tea. But there is a gate that

says, 'trespassers will be shot,' with the picture of a man and a woman who intend to live together for hundred years. It is a relief to see the new directors like Rajiv Ravi, Ashiq Abu, Dileesh Pothan and many other younger-ones moving away from the myth of larger than life heroes. There is a possibility of Malayalam popular culture being cured of toxic masculinities.

Conclusion

Mulvey's analysis in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" combines semiotic methodology of cinematic means of expression with psychoanalytic analysis of desire structures and the formation of subjectivity. The semiotic end of Mulvey's analysis enables the deciphering of how films produce the meanings they produce, while the psychoanalytic side of the article provides the link between the cinematic text and the viewer and explains his fascination through the way cinematic representations interact with his (culturally determined) subconscious.

Mulvey's main argument in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" is that Hollywood narrative films use women in order to provide a pleasurable visual experience for men. The narrative film structures its gaze as masculine. The woman is always the object of the reifying gaze, not the bearer of it (this has something reminiscent of John Berger's "Ways of Seeing")

The cinematic gaze is always produced a masculine both by means of the identification produced with the male hero and through the use of the camera. Mulvey identifies two manners in which Hollywood cinema produces pleasure, manners which arise from different mental mechanisms. The first involves the objectification of the image, and the second one the identification with it. Both mechanisms represent the mental desires of the male subject. The first form of pleasure relates to what Freud termed as scopophilia or the pleasure derived from subjecting someone to one's gaze. The second form of pleasure other which operates alongside the scopophilia is the identification with the represented character which is brought about by needs stemming from the Freudian Ego.

It was really Mulvey who, with her concept of the male gaze, defined psychoanalytic terms and set into motion a specific agenda. Arguing that narrative cinema assumes a masculinized spectator, whose desiring gaze takes the female as its object, she emphasized the way that sexual difference is articulated in structures of looking, altering our whole approach not only to film but across the gamut of visual culture. This makes her not simply the author of a particular text, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', but the generator of an entire discourse: 'in this respect', as the film theorist D.N. Rodowick has remarked, 'we all owe a great debt to the work of Laura Mulvey'. Furthermore, scholars in semiotic such as Umberto Eco, Christen Metz, Coffman and Fiske draw different kinds of film analysis models to some extent based on feminist film theorist in 70s to 90s. They tried to operate abstract concepts of

psychoanalyst theories and find applicable indexes for analysis the contents of the films and numerating the visual data. However, other feminist film theorists have challenged and refined Mulvey's arguments. After Mulvey and other psychoanalysts so many poststructuralist feminists critic them first: because of binary opposition look that consider all variety of gender merely in two opposite sex. Psychoanalytic feminist film theories have often been criticized for deploying abstract and overgeneralized psychoanalytic paradigms. The need for them to address other differences than the sexual difference between men and women has been reiterated many times, often with an appeal to 'history' or the 'real' experience of women watching films. Although it is easy to say that feminist theory must account for differences among women, such as those of race, class, and sexuality, it is much harder to carry it out especially in a way that acknowledges the complex relations between all these differences. Second: they did not consider spectator as an active human that could have interfere in getting, responding and changing the messages based on its own connotations in its own culture. Third: these theories are efficient for making feminist film analyze but these are not sufficient for applying them to all kinds of cinema, it seems it merely customize for Hollywood films and it looks like a grand theory that tries to impose itself on all diversities. Although Hollywood is the dominant cinema in most parts of the world .

Creating a discourse on the images of women in Malayalam cinema is a deeply problematical task beset by multiple perspectives, histories and lineages. The visual culture and photography significantly alter the image of woman and the function of the visuals of woman. The dissemination of imaging in visual media allows the visual field to expand and bridge the fissures of gender and community in films. As a vehicle for

transmitting meaning and imaginative power, the visual culture acts as a metaphor for social development in its shifting consumption patterns and socio-economic concerns. One of the ways in which the contemporary era has been negotiated in visual culture is imaging. The meanings are given for images in excess of those assigned by the culture and context from which they arise. The uniqueness of images is often analyzed on how images are conveyed to the viewers and as a result of that one has to rethink how images are read in the contemporary moment. Women images complicate the otherness of gendered sexuality by taking it beyond the narrow historicity of female sexuality. Women images have devised materials mean to transfigure the sanctioned notions of identity by a theoretical rendering of gender. Feminist consciousness in women images reduplicates the experience of social loss in order to gain a contrary mandate for a promise of survival incarnating in the form of the witness, the pain and desire, the abjection and refusal of otherness. The contemporary visual culture simultaneously over-presents and erases the female in its social register. In the case of the film industries spread over the world, the visibility of the female as body and her absence as a creative or narrative agent in filmmaking defines this problem. There is a systematic exclusion of the female voice: this, on the one hand, legitimizes the objectification of the female on screen, and on the other, reinforces the patriarchal melodramatic apparatus that is responsible for the moral centers around which film cultures revolve. Critics like Kaja Silverman (*The Acoustic Mirror*) and Teresa De Lauretis (*Technologies of Gender:Essays on Theory, Film,and Fiction*) argue that the look of the cinema or camera has become of utmost importance to the postmodern day semiotics. As a matter of principle, Silverman in fact even proceeded to locate the female voice within the system of international cinematic visibility. The current

thesis tries to locate the visual logics of contemporary Malayalam cinema with reference to its gross gender bias. The thesis maps the larger discourse of feminism in which such a project needs to be read, and uses sources from both western and post-colonial to accomplish this. It is also necessary that the thesis identifies the evolutionary landmarks in the native history of visibility with reference to female body. It is imperative to think through the histories of both international cinema and feminism in its western and native versions, to arrive at larger conclusions regarding the imaging of women in Malayalam cinema. The thesis explores how women are portrayed in Malayalam films with reference to social change in Kerala and also explores how women body images are described in Malayalam films. The common charge against films is that the films tend to reinforce and perhaps even worsen sex role stereotypes of women and men. There is an idea that women are supposed to look very pretty, be domestic, have children and then look after them while the man goes out to work and does many activities. When a woman character is powerful, strong and unfeminine, she will often fail or flounder and either change to become more sensitive and caring, or be condemned to a life of misery and loneliness. The current study analyzes the counter imaging of women in 3 Kerala cinema. One of the objectives of this thesis is to study the characterization of the actors especially that of the lead female and to analyze the type of behavioural pattern the female characters exhibit. ever, it is not that universally.

Amal Neerad's *Varathan* (Outsider), a film that mostly deals with the daily violence faced by women until it explodes into a thriller, is commendable for one very important reason. Neither Priya (Aishwarya Lekshmi) nor her husband Abin (Fahadh

Faasil) ever blame her comfortable, fitting dresses (which stand out in a Kerala village) for the fact that she is stalked and assaulted.

When we first meet them, they are an extraordinarily loving couple living in Dubai who don't exchange harsh words or display too much emotion even when Abin loses his job and Priya has a miscarriage. She convinces him that the best place to recover would be the village in Kerala where she grew up, and they make the move.

Varathan is occupied by the male gaze—the first inkling we get of this is when the couple's taxi driver from the airport adjusts his rearview mirror to focus on Priya, who immediately challenges him. When they stop at a small tea shop in the village on their way to their new home, they are confronted with the Kerala staple of the elderly man who reads a newspaper while keeping an eye on everyone and everything in the place. His piercing glare makes Priya hastily leave her grip on Abin's hand—Malayalam movies have often tended to treat the figure of the old lech who is excessively interested in what women do in a "humorous" manner, but not this one.

As the number and intensity of eyes surveilling Priya increase every day, the viewer starts fidgeting uncomfortably. From the kitchen to the bedroom to the bathroom, there is no place where she is free of the patriarchal male propensity to view every woman as just another body. While thankfully, the camera here doesn't want to titillate the viewer (we are not subjected to any bathing scenes or others of a similar nature), its positioning from the voyeur's angle makes even an innocuous activity such as Priya licking chocolate syrup off her hand while baking seem like more than it actually is. Whenever she tries to talk to Abin about this, he dismisses her fears.

Neerad ratchets up the tension and discomfort in the first half to such a point that this viewer wondered why she was paying money to feel anxious and fearful inside a theatre when she could just step outside and experience this for free.

But this is a Neerad movie, so at some point the big guns have to come out (there is even a "guns and explosives" credit) and that is when the agency slides from Priya to Abin. After Priya is traumatised from being sexually assaulted, the viewer is shown Abin's pain at not being able to "protect" her (after she tells him that this would never have happened if her father were alive). From then on, her character becomes an afterthought (apart from one token scene at the end) whose trauma becomes an excuse for the filmmaker to show that Abin is not as passive as he comes across.

There are allusions to sexual violence everywhere in *Varathan*—a man and woman are menaced and threatened for sitting in a car together, the camera lingers on a rock bearing a campaign slogan for unrepentantly sexist politician PC George and there is a strong reminder of the 2016 abduction and assault of a Malayalam actor. That incident divided Kerala's film industry into two clear camps, and the shockwaves it dealt will not go away anytime soon. *Varathan* is a clear indication that Kerala's young filmmakers want to engage with the subject of sexual assault seriously.

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