

The Narrative and Space of the Subaltern: A Critical Reading of S. Hareesh's *Moustache*

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “*The Narrative and Space of the Subaltern: A Critical Reading of S. Hareesh's Moustache*” is a bonafide record of sincere work done by, Nevin Manadan, Register Number: 210011004033, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature under the Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2021-2023.

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Declaration

I, hereby declare that the presented dissertation “*The Narrative and Space of the Subaltern: A Critical Reading of S. Hareesh's Moustache*” is based on the research that I did on under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Rose Sebastian, Assistant Professor, Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature from Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam. This is a report of my hands based on the research done on the selected topic and it is my original work and interpretations drawn therein are based on material collected by myself. It has not been previously formed basis for the award of any degree, diploma or fellowship or other similar title or recognition.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The history of the subaltern has been persistently subject to falsification by the dominant communities who hold absolute control over documented history. Thus, the narratives of history become a device that reinforces and strengthens hegemonic control. As bell hooks asserts, the margins can become sites of resistance and production of counterculture. S. Hareesh's *Meesa* testifies to this argument by documenting the subaltern counternarratives that manifest resilience against hegemony. Such narratives are attached to Moustache as he metamorphoses into a symbol of subaltern resilience and is likened to other beacons of Dalit power such as Ravanan. These orally transmitted narratives defy the absolute authority presumed by the formally recorded history of the dominant classes.

The novel, in itself, becomes a documentation of the subaltern's counternarratives which is never documented. This is expounded in the following lines, which reflect upon the lives of agricultural workers in Kuttanad "a history that no one remembers, a place that was built for hard labour, and had to be vacated once the labour was done" (Hareesh 87). Thus, it is imperative that a research upon this rare and vital documentation of the subaltern speaking is undertaken.

Hareesh's narrative technique upholds the conventions of oral storytelling indigenous to Kuttanad rather than following the traditions of the novel as propagated by the European colonial forces. Further, the narrative endorses and empathises with the perspective of the subaltern rather than sympathising with them from a distant and unconnected position. Thus, this research attempts to portray how the subaltern's resilience against colonialism, feudalism, and casteism manifests in multiple dimensions

of the novel such as form, theme, style, space etc. However, it is to be noted that the novel truthfully documents the narratives of the subaltern which comply with the oppressive hegemony as well.

This research seeks to prove that the narratives that delineate Moustache humbling the active conformers of feudal, casteist, and patriarchal hegemony such as Thanulinga Nadar, Brendon, and Kunjachan among others are expressions of subaltern resilience. Thus, the research attempts to illustrate the politics behind the origin of narratives such as Moustache transforming into a symbol of hope and meaning in an otherwise meaningless world by assuming the role of *Matapathi* (183) at Chemmayikkari and Chekuthanparambu. Thus, the research attempts to analyse Moustache as a political space that houses, on the one hand, notions of patriarchy, feudalism, caste politics and, on the other, the resistance against all of these. The project attempts to unearth the societal and cultural picture of Kuttanad of a period that is no longer retrievable by analysing the narratives attached to Moustache.

S. Hareesh has won numerous literary awards such as the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for Best Story Writer and the Kerala State Film Award for Best Screenplay. Despite being one of the most famous prose writers of Malayalam literature in the contemporary period, his writings have been prone to controversy throughout his career. The novel *Meesa* was serialised in the Malayalam literary weekly *Mathrubhumi* and it attracted controversy for supposedly hurting Hindu religious sentiments. As a result, S. Hareesh withdrew the novel from the weekly. The novel received the recognition it deserved after it was translated into English under the title *Moustache* by Jayasree Kalathil in 2020, two years after its initial publication in Malayalam. The English translation was bestowed with the JCB Prize for Literature in 2020. Further, the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Novel, for the year 2019, was conferred upon

Hareesh for *Meesa* in 2021. Apart from *Meesa*, S. Hareesh's major works include *Aadam* (Short story anthology), *Jallikattu* (Screenplay), *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* (Screenplay), *Rasavidhyayude Charithram* (Short story anthology), and *Aedan* (Screenplay) among others.

The novel has a frame narrative that involves the speaker narrating stories to his son Ponnu, who is five years old. The speaker actively embarks on digressions and deviations and thus the novel follows the conventions of an oral storytelling session. The speaker tries in vain to appease his son with stories from Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arabian stories, Panchatantra, and Kathasaritsagara, among others. Finally, the speaker fuses the influences from these stories into the orally transmitted stories abounding in Kuttanad that he has heard over his life. In the many nights that follow, the speaker narrates the legend of Moustache blending legends, myths, folklore and history with imagination. S. Hareesh weaves the seemingly disconnected events narrated in the novel around a well-made frame. The fragmentary narration follows Vavachan being engulfed by the constructed entity of the Moustache and chronicles his quest to find Seetha and escape to Malaya. Thus, the novel vacillates back and forth from the twenty-first century where the speaker narrates the legends associated with the Moustache and the twentieth century when Moustache held sway across Kuttanad.

The novel is as much the lore of Moustache as it is the lore of the numerous other characters such as Ouseph, Seetha, Chella, Paviyan, Avarachan, the last crocodile, Kuttathi, and most importantly Kuttanad itself. S. Hareesh's poetic prose paints a vivid picture of Kuttanad and is inseparable from the locale as even his comparisons link the characters and spirits to the terrain's flora and fauna. Like a storyteller, completely immersed in the locale's specificities, Hareesh narrates stories to a listener who is assumed to be well-versed with the specificities of Kuttanad and its culture. The

postmodern self-reflexive and self-conscious narrative traces the numerous conceptions attached to Moustache as he is continuously created and recreated.

Moustache was born during a stage performance directed by Ezhuthachan in Neendoor, Upper Kuttanad, during the early twentieth century. Vavachan is a man belonging to the Pulaya community, which is a Dalit community. The Dalit communities of his time were barred from growing moustaches. Vavachan was made to grow a moustache for Ezhuthachan's musical drama. He was present on stage only for two scenes and had no real dialogues apart from a few grunts and roars. But the brief appearance of the Moustache-garbed *Rakshasa*-like figure rekindles a mysterious fear that was deeply ingrained in the audience. This becomes evident as people, who had come from faraway places to watch the moustached "Pulayan police" (Hareesh 37), flee the scene on hearing him roar. Notably, the majority of the audience who were appalled at the display of Dalit vitality and virility were from the "upper" caste. Thus, Moustache was born out of the fears and desires of the people of Kuttanad: the paranoia about the other by the upper caste and the desire for agency and retaliation by the lower caste. In fact, Vavachan's moustache becomes a metaphor for the structures of feelings that governed the people of Kuttanad in that era. Vavachan refuses to shave his moustache after the performance and thus, the aura of power and darkness persists and pervades the persona of Vavachan as he transforms into a beacon of Dalit resilience. Moustache is fed by the beliefs that abound in the space of Kuttanad and he soon asserts independence from the biological self of Vavachan and reigns across the endless fields and water bodies of Kuttanad. This is stated indirectly when he says there shall be 'No more performances' (43), which reveals that Vavachan has metamorphosed into the Moustache and it is not an interim transformation anymore. Moustache ultimately dies as he becomes insignificant with the advent of modernisation which altered popular beliefs.

Moustache seeks to embark on Malaya after he is introduced to this alternate space where “there’ll be no more troubles” (12). Moustache’s other major pursuit is of Seetha. The novel blends Ramayana into the narrative and we see Moustache, who is likened to “Ravanan, the ten-headed king of Lanka” (37), is irrevocably in love with Seetha, a woman of obscure origin who was brought to the Lanka-like Kuttanad by Kathu. We find parallels to Seetha from Ramayana who dared to defy Ravana with the Seetha in this novel as “unlike anyone else before, Seetha ignored the moustache and looked Moustache straight in the eye” (317).

The project is divided into five chapters. The primary chapter serves as the introductory chapter. The following chapter functions as the literature review which details the primary theoretical texts and the corresponding theorists such as Edward Soja, Michel Foucault, and M.N. Sreenivas, among others, whose theoretical frameworks have been applied to the text to arrive at interpretations. The third chapter includes the spatial analysis of the caste-based feudal patriarchy of the twentieth-century Kuttanad focussing on the Dalit experience. The penultimate chapter analyses the narratives that amalgamate around Moustache as a reflection of the beliefs that used to abound in Kuttanad. The final concluding chapter outlines the research undertaken and the inferences obtained.

The research methodology involved primarily a textual analysis of the novel Moustache. The project employed the ethnological method of research to a very limited extent by travelling to Kuttanad and visiting the places mentioned in the novel such as Kainakary, Kumarakom etc. Interactions with the natives of Kuttanad on how the advent of economic liberalisation had changed their lives were valuable to this research.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Compass of Space, Narratives, and Caste

This project employs Foucault's theory which perceives space as a product of social relations. Instead of being a passive backdrop, Foucault posits that the space is actively constructed by social politics. This project analyses how the politics of caste and the resultant social dynamics shape space as depicted in S.Hareesh's novel *Meesa*.

The project explores how the temporal shift aided by the advent of modernisation and later globalisation makes a heterotopia (24), as Foucault calls it, out of the same space. Foucault's concept of Heterotopia is that of a space that exists beyond the normal and is governed by alternate rules that reflect the nature of that society.

This project applies Foucault's theories on disciplinary spaces to the locale of the text and analyses how spatial arrangements are employed to exert hegemonic control over the individual's conduct. This project traces how this tyrannical control could take the form of caste-based feudalism which forces the "lower" castes such as Pulayas into conformity. The castes in power normalise marginalisation through the spaces that are designed to force discipline through surveillance, law enforcement and brutal punishment.

The project analyses how the space of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad becomes a site where power is spatialised. Spaces reflect the distribution of power in society and how space reinforces this division of power. Thus, the paddy fields reflect how caste-based feudalism is sustained by the fact that almost all of the land is owned by the Brahmins, Nairs and Syrian Christians who employ the "lower" castes such as Pulayans as hands of production. Thus, the caste-based hegemony is enforced through the control that the "upper" caste has over the means of production.

Foucault's theories on power have evolved over the course of his career and for this project we apply an amalgam of Foucauldian power theories. Foucault propounds the intimate connection between power and knowledge and argues that the people who control knowledge production and discursive formation have the power to determine the norms of society.

Foucault suggests that power is not centralised into entities such as feudal or governmental institutions. On the contrary, Foucault posits that power is an ever-shifting force and can alternate between the bourgeoisie such as the land-owning class such as the Brahmins, Nairs and Syrian Christians of Kuttanad, and the proletariat such as the landless Pulayas who worked in the fields and lived on the fringes.

By applying Foucault's concept of how power operates as a flux or field of influence, this project analyses how the paddy field which is a site of oppression of the Pulayas and other "lower" castes, becomes a site for the production of the counterculture by the Pulaya community, against the culture of servitude propagated by the "upper-caste", by seizing control over the knowledge production and discursive formation.

This project analyses Kuttanad as the Third space as posited by Soja. 'Third space is a purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings' (2). The concept of Third space is Soja's attempt to compensate for the insufficiency of the dualistic perception of space - First space and Second space. According to Soja, First space is the perception of space as the objective physical setting and Second space refers to the abstract and representational aspect of space. Third space is moulded from the engagements between First space and Second space.

The project initially analyses Kuttanad as the First space which is in line with Lefebvre's concept of Perceived space (40). Then, the project analyses Kuttanad as the

Second space which is in line with Lefebvre's concept of Conceived space (40). Lefebvre argues that the spatial triad (perceived, conceived, and lived space) is interlinked and that the dynamic engagements between them lead to the generation of space.

Third space analyses space through the postmodern and postcolonial lenses and it is inclusive of the lived experiences and perceptions of space. Thus, it overlaps with Lefebvre's concept of Lived space (40) which refers to the lived experience of space in all its manifestations. However, Third space becomes distinct from Lefebvre's Lived space, as it accounts the space as a site for potential resistance against marginalisation and social metamorphosis. Thus, the project analyses how new identities and practices are generated in the Third space of Kuttanad.

This project applies David Harvey's theory of 'Uneven Development' (137) whereby spatial inequalities emerge due to the disproportionate distribution of capital. The project traces the evolution of Kuttanad from being an agrarian economy, where the British colonial administration favoured the landlords over the labourers, to becoming a neo-capitalist economy where agriculture in itself was largely neglected. Through the diachronic approach, the project seeks to analyse the novel using David Harvey's theory of 'Accumulation by Dispossession' (137) which posits that the people who control the resources will always appropriate resources away from the marginalised. Thus, the overgrown bunds, stagnant fields, hyacinth-infested lakes of Kuttanad as portrayed in the concluding chapter point to how the space associated with the agrarian way of life has been "dispossessed" as the neo-capitalist economy takes over.

Michel De Certeau's theories which try to decode the agency of individuals in rendering everyday practices as potential sites of resistance applied into the space of Kuttanad. The project applies Certeau's propositions of strategies of the authorities and tactics of the pedestrians in relation to their engagement with the space (159-160).

The project studies Kuttanad as an Actor-Network as proposed by Latour in his Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (24). According to Latour, a network is a heterogeneous cluster of interlinked actants. Kuttanad as space becomes a network or a site of co-production, where the interactions between humans and non-human actants shape social realities. The production weaving together of Moustache's identity is an outcome of the interactions between the human and non-human actants within this 'Network'.

Latour's ANT is in contrast to traditional spatial theories as he emphasises the gravity of non-human actants. Hareesh stresses how the inanimate actants have the agency to act and exert influence upon the other actants via the personification that he renders upon the non-human entities such as the vengeful crocodile or the thankful coconut tree trunk bridge.

According to Latour, translation is the process by which the different actants engage with one another in a Network and could involve addition, modification and deletion of the actants. The project analyses Moustache as an actant and analyses his birth, evolution and death as a result of the interactions between the actants.

The project evaluates the process of blackboxing, as proposed by Latour, which involves obscuring the complex internal processes of the actants in favour of the relatively simple observable characteristics. The seeming simplicity and stability associated with the blackboxed actor allow the other actants to modify this actor in line with their presuppositions. Thus, the project explores the blackboxing of the complex psyche of Vavachan and the allied creation of the persona of 'Moustache' who is in a constant process of translation in the Network. Further, taking Ricoeur's concept of Individual Narratives and Societal Narratives the project delineates how the societal narratives that manifest in Moustache have effaced the Individual narratives of Vavachan.

Combining Latour's ANT with Steve Pile's theories, the project proposes that our emotions and affections influence our understanding of the various actants in the Network. Thus, the narratives associated with Moustache, an actant in the Network, will inevitably be based on the people's understanding and reflect their emotions and affections. Integrating Nigel Thrift's theories on spatial imagination into the statement above, the narratives associated with the Moustache are a reflection of the emotions of the people and the linked imaginations of the people.

The project incorporates Jerome Bruner's proposition of perceiving Narrative as a Mode of Thought (13). Bruner posits that storytelling and the existing narratives lead to narrative thinking and that this shapes our perception of space. Simultaneously, the cognitive structure that people use to make sense of the space they inhabit actively constructs narratives in line with their understanding. Thus, Bruner posits that narratives of a space are actively constructed by the cognitive structure of the people who inhabit that space and the narratives in turn shape the cognitive structure of the people.

Narratives are active ways of interpreting and constructing reality according to Bruner and he opines that our thought process is by narrative by nature. Thus, by applying Bruner's theory, the project analyses how the people of Kuttanad try to attach their abstract conceptions of life into a physical being through the narratives about Moustache. Thus, Moustache, Not Vavachan, personifies the cognitive system of Kuttanad.

The project analyses the narratives of Kuttanad over the years using Walter Benjamin's notions regarding storytelling. Narratives can be embodied in songs and stories which are orally communicated with each storyteller modifying the narrative. The advent of modernity in Kuttanad which involves the emergence of the written word and

advanced communication forms, brings this long tradition of storytelling and the resultant collective cultural memory to an abrupt end.

Oral storytelling was arguably a vehicle for the creation of popular culture and collective communal memory in Kuttanad. The sudden death of this tradition with the written word taking over led to what Benjamin calls fragmentation of historical experience. This is explicated in the concluding chapter as the people fail to recognise the sociocultural patterns that their ancestors endorsed.

Benjamin proposes that modern media narratives are without the depth, individuality and multiplicity that the traditional storytellers had embodied in their humane narratives. The project analyses the multiplicity of narratives in a space and how narratives change with time and space. Further, the project contrasts the modern narratives with the orally transmitted narratives of the past in Kuttanad.

This project takes up Ricoeur's theory of temporality of narrative which states that the temporal and sequential structuring of narratives is what renders coherence and meaning to human experiences and historical events. By applying Ricoeur's proposition of Mimesis and Diegesis (31), The project studies the possibility of multiple sequentiality (mimesis/emplotment) of the content of narratives (diegesis/narrated events). Through the concept of narrative identity, Ricoeur posits that identities are constructed through the narratives we tell ourselves as individuals and as members of society. Thus, the identity of Moustache has been constructed through the narratives of the people.

The project analyses the self-reflexive nature of the narratives in Moustache based on Hutcheon's theories. The metafictional elements in the act of storytelling and the blurring of the divide between the actual world and the world as presented through the narratives are put forward by Hutcheon. According to Hutcheon, the multiplicity as seen in narratives is a reflection of the multiple perceptions and interpretations of meaning and

identities. The text highlights contradictions and contests assumptions. Further Hutcheon's notion of narrative irony is used to analyse the constructed nature of the narratives and the difference between appearances and reality.

The project employs the concept of class struggle as posited in Marxist historical materialism. The theory proposes that the conflict between the Bourgeoisie or the class which controls the means of production, and the proletariat, the workers who carry out the production, leads to social change. The proletariat pines for a revolutionary transformation through this struggle which will establish an alternate space that is more equal. The project analyses the Moustache as the symbol of the oppressed class' struggle for revolutionary social transformation in Kuttanad.

The project employs M. N. Sreenivas's doctrines on caste. Sreenivas proposes that the dominant caste controls the resources within the space through the oppression of other castes. Such a space will inescapably be stratified on the basis of caste with caste pervading all the facets of the individual such as labour, social interactions, social status, marriage, social etiquette, codes of conduct etc. Further, community governance will be influenced by the power dynamics of caste. The project analyses the effect of modernisation in the space of Kuttanad using Sreenivas's theories such as Westernisation through the cultural borrowing of Western ideologies and values and blending them with the native culture. Sreenivas delineates the evolution of hybrid identity through colonisation and later globalisation. Sreenivas posits that since Westernisation permeates into the different facets of life, it comes in conflict with caste and challenges the basis of caste with the notions of rationality and equality. This process of change has been rapidly accelerated through what Thrift and May calls Time-Space compression (1-46). Here the economic and social transformations are sped up by the technological advancements linked with modernisation. This leads to a generational disconnect.

There have been similar studies of space as presented in novels. Some studies include Djawida Rebaa's *William Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County and R.K Narayan's Malgudi: Imaginary Homelands yet Alive Backdrops*, Alessandro Monti's *Epoch-Making Patterns of Resistance through the Refusal of Hybridity in Raja Rao's Kanthapura and RK Narayan's Malgudi*, Alice Sukdolová's *Crossing the Boundary: The Space of Hardy's Wessex Novels*, among others. After studying these projects, applying a corresponding paradigm to S. Hareesh's novel 'Moustache' seemed intriguing as it aligns seamlessly with the novel and promises interesting insights.

Chapter 3

Spatial Analysis of Kuttanad through Moustache

S. Hareesh's novel 'Moustache' is preceded by an author's note which contains an objective geographic analysis of Kuttanad, and an examination of the space's social, economic and cultural factors. The emphasis given to the various facets of the space in the author's note testifies that the space itself is an integral character of the novel.

Analysing Kuttanad as the First Space, it is a delta region that has formed out of the confluence of the Vembanad Lake along with many rivers. The region is marked by "coastal backwaters, intricate network of rivers and canals, vast stretches of paddy fields, marshlands, ponds and oozy black soil" (Hareesh).

Agriculture has been the major economic engagement in Kuttanad for centuries and this has earned it the sobriquet - The Rice bowl of Kerala. The Pulaya community had been bound to the site of paddy cultivation as slave workers till the abolition of slavery in 1854 (Thaliyath 1030). Thus, the Pulayas and other castes who were shunned to the lowest rung of the caste hierarchy were linked to the land in the form of institutional slavery and were traded with the land.

K.Satchidanandan aptly notes in the novel's prologue that the novel "narrates the history of the social transition of this fertile region (Kuttanad) in Kerala during colonial times". Despite abolishing slavery, the colonial policy of the British led to the concentration of land in the hands of a select few from the "Upper" caste. Figures such as Pallithanam Luca Mathai owned vast tracts of land and had close links with the colonial administration. Thus, landlords exerted control over the Pulayas who were landless agrarians. In effect, the site of paddy cultivation becomes a site of institutionalised exploitation by the caste-based feudal patriarchy. As explicated through the lines, "Mud

had an innate truth” (Hareesh 265), farming has been made possible in the below-sea-level region of Kuttanad due to the intimate connection that the agricultural labourers had with the land. Recorded history states how Kuttanad was made suitable for cultivation and subsequently human civilisation through the construction of embankments, bunds, canals, drainage systems and consequently the polder system of paddy cultivation. Historically, the Pulaya community has been the largest community in Kuttanad to be engaged in agricultural work and has been instrumental in the making of Kuttanad.

There exists a multiplicity of orally transmitted narratives about the origin of Kuttanad. One narrative has it that Kuttanad originated from the phrase “Kuttan kuthia naadu” (“History of Kuttanad City”) which is based on the belief that Kuttanad is a land-based ecological network that was dredged up from the water-based ecological network that once existed there.

Thus, we can never completely substantiate any of these legends but Hareesh masterfully integrates the historical nature of such legendary narratives into the novel as expounded in Nadar’s speech “Kuttanad is the only place in the world which is entirely made by human beings. God had only created swamp and water” (Hareesh 145).

Apart from paddy cultivation, seasonal occurrences, like floods, famines etc. are integral to the novel. Thus, as Kalathil opines in the translator’s note the novel is as much about the Moustache as much as it is about the “environment and biodiversity, its water, fish, birds, snakes, crocodiles, paddy, coconut, banana and tapioca” (Kalathil).

The novel’s concluding chapter presents Kuttanad's First Space after the economic liberalisation of 1991 which contrasts with the Kuttanad of the early twentieth century. The culture of commodification, as put forward by Debord, leads to the accumulation of capital in spaces such as the tourism sector, which belongs to the tertiary economic sector, and the decline in farming, a primary economic sector, which had once been

characteristic of Kuttanad. The contrast highlights how economic and social disparities are generated due to an unequal channelling of resources. The dispossession of resources from the traditional farming practices indirectly led to the dispossession of resources from the marginalised agrarian communities such as the Pulayas.

Characters such as Thanulinga Nadar, Khan Saheb, and Kariyil Saheb perceived Kuttanad as the Second space much in line with the voyeuristic understanding of the city planner in Michel de Certeau's 'Walking in the City'. The walkers, as proposed by Certeau, like Paviyan and Vavachan, easily manoeuvre and even find solace in the seemingly jumbled and complex fields and water bodies while the policemen, like Thanulinga Nadar and Khan Saheb, fail to fish Moustache out of what Hareesh calls the shapeshifting waters as they perceived the intricate waterbodies and fields of Kuttanad as the Second space.

Despite living in Kuttanad, Kariyil Saheb was never truly united with the intricately tied fields and water bodies of Kuttanad but perceived the space from the cold and detached vantage point of Baker Bungalow. Further, Nadar's attempt to decode Kuttanad using a map during the meeting with the government officials at the inn also explicates how space is perceived as a Second space. The narrator alludes to the inherent difficulty in perceiving Kuttanad as the Second Space when he describes Kuttanad as "a place that beguiles one with trapdoors and labyrinths" (Hareesh 87).

It should be noted that communities of agricultural labourers such as the Pulayas are united with the space in spirit and substance while most of the authorities, the majority of whom are from the "upper" caste, see the space as the Second space. Using Certeau's terminology, the "strategies" of the "upper"-Caste authorities to form an

ordered society find themselves lacking in front of the “tactics” of predominantly “lower” caste agricultural workers who skilfully traverse the complex landscape with ease.

The inadequacy of maps or perceiving a space as the second space as put forward by Certeau is explicated through the novel. This is because the members of the oppressed communities like Vavachan and Paviyan are actively constructing the space in an act of resistance against the hegemonic practices of the authorities.

The examination of Kuttanad as the Third Space starts with the history of Kuttanad. There lies an inadequacy in the formally recorded history of Kuttanad and that of the oppressed communities such as the Pulayas. Thus, the pre-colonial history of Kuttanad is through orally transmitted legends which often contradict one another. These oral narratives are vulnerable to manipulation and it is argued that the notion of impurity which is attached to the Pulayas, is a result of one such manipulation. According to this argument, the arrival of the upper-caste feudal elite, in the form of Namboodiris, led to the systematic oppression of the lower castes, such as the Pulayas, in a bid to establish a hegemony with the Namboothiris occupying the apex strata.

The most significant contributor to Third Space is caste. The caste system manifests itself through the divisions, discriminations, and violence in the various aspects of life. This ranges from occupation, religion, housing etc. to the most basic aspects of human life such as food, clothing, occupation, marriage, language and even touch. Caste is intrinsically woven with the notions of purity and impurity. The institutionalised murder of the members of the Pulaya and Paraya community following the violence on *Karkitakam irupathettu* (Twenty-eighth of Karkitakam) and the heinous murder of Kotha, the Paraya agricultural worker accused of stealing grain depict the barbaric ends that the "upper" caste goes to for enforcing the caste hegemony.

The Kerala Brahmins or the Namboothiris along with the Tamil Brahmins - Pattan, Pattar, Aiyers form the uppermost strata of the caste system. Nairs are the second most prominent “upper” caste with sub castes such as Pillah, Menon, and Kuruppu, among others and these sub castes are engaged in a wide range of occupations such as warfare, farming, and even service to the Brahmins. It should be noted that these "upper" castes only formed a minority of the population and the majority was made up of people belonging to the "lower" castes - Chovans, and Pulayas, among others. The novel lists other castes such as Marar, Asari, Kollan, and Ulladan among others and this seemingly endless list serves the purpose of depicting how the Kuttanad of that time was compartmentalised into the narrow confines of caste. Thus, Kuttanad becomes a disciplinary space with the feudal patriarchy integrating with the caste system.

The novel also follows the persistence of the caste hierarchy that existed among the Hindus who had converted to Christianity. People belonging to ostracised castes, which had been exploited by the caste system, were widely converted by the Christian missionaries in Kerala. However, the conversions led to the formation of a new caste system within the Christian community of Kerala. The Syrian Christians or the Nasrani Christians, who claim to have been converted by St. Thomas the Apostle exercised significant control over agriculture and trade. In contrast, the “lower” caste Christians, most of whom were converted recently by missionaries, were still denoted by the caste they belonged to before conversion. This is why Vavachan is called a Pulayan Christian and is “othered” by the Syrian Christians who take pride in having been converted from families that belonged to the Hindu upper caste. Thus, the hybrid and all-pervasive nature of caste that existed in Kuttanad is depicted. Kuttan, Vavachan’s son converting back to Hinduism is indirectly due to the minimal relief from caste oppression that Pulayans get through conversion.

The Pulaya community has been treated as untouchables based on the five-tier caste hierarchy that was practised in Kerala. This “Untouchability” manifested itself in many facets of life. The Pulaya community and the linked communities were barred from entering temples, and public institutions, and sometimes even public roads were closed for them, as it was feared that the presence of a person belonging to the Pulaya community would pollute others. This oppression leads the “lower” caste in search of alternate spaces and beliefs as seen in Vavachan seeking to escape to the heterotopia of Malaya which he might’ve believed to be an alternate space where hunger and discrimination cease to exist.

Moustache becomes a work of historiographic fiction as the fictional narrative analyses the nature of the recorded history of Kuttanad and much of Kerala with special emphasis on the first half of the twentieth century and follows the narrative up to the modern day.

Hareesh alludes to social reformers such as Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali. Through these references, the novel portrays the changing socio-cultural scenario of Kerala. Sree Narayana Guru was a social reformer, born into the Ezhava caste, who toiled towards eradicating caste hegemony. His advocacy for the rights of the oppressed classes such as Pulayas is epitomised in the dictum ‘One Caste, One Religion, One God for mankind’ (Joseph 321). Hareesh refers to how noble figures such as the Guru and N.N. Pillah were mistreated by the people for their honest ways. Thus, the author hints at society’s temperament towards people who refuse to conform to its hypocrisy.

Further, the novel traces how Ayyankali, the social reformer who became the sole Pulaya member of the Praja Sabha, was invited to Pallithanam by Luca Mathai. The grand welcome he was given shows the gradual reforms happening in the space of caste politics.

The control exerted by the feudals such as Luca Mathai and A.G. Baker over the government is representative of the dominance of the caste-based feudal system in Kerala. Various other historical happenings such as the Punnappa-Vayalar uprising, and the temple entry movement among others show the dynamically changing social landscape of Kerala as attempts were made from many sides to dismantle the caste system. The space is presented as the Third space as it becomes a site for societal metamorphosis where new identities are forged.

Analysing the novel through the lens of Marxist Historical Materialism, we see multiple cases of class conflict in the Kuttanad of the twentieth century. The oppressor-oppressed dynamics are manifested within various economic systems such as caste-based feudalism, colonialism among others. The oppression meted out on the Pulayas and other members of the “lower” castes is in line with the colonial oppression that was exerted across the country. Kuttanad is spread across the erstwhile princely states of Travancore and Kochi and had the British colonial powers acting upon them indirectly. As presented in the lines, “The arrival of the white man had changed many of the thousands-of-years-old traditions of the land” (Hareesh 269), the novel depicts the hybrid culture that was induced by colonialism. This is manifested in the desperate yet vain attempts of Little Saheb to deny the inherent British influence within him. The advent of British colonisation pervaded into the morality of the people as the Victorian morality combined with the traditional, patriarchal, casteist morality to form a new hybrid morality.

Brendon and Kariyil Saheb represent the exploitative colonisers. The former’s monopoly over his technological inventions in irrigation is a reflection of the wider exploitative economic practices of the British in their colonies which are often under the guise of the goodwill of advancement. This aspect of colonial oppression finds echoes in

the origin of the word “Brendon” which refers to someone who takes advantage of the context.

Kariyil Saheb promoting the rhetoric of hatred amongst the humans and crocodiles who had existed in harmony for centuries represents the colonial manipulation of the native fabric of Kuttanad by promoting communal conflicts on linguistic, caste-based, and religious lines among others. Baker had initiated the killing of the crocodiles due to his personal liking for crocodile meat but he justified it citing the number of ducks and cattle lost to the crocodiles. This has parallels to how colonial exploitation had been under the guise of the white man’s burden. The conduct of the natives who took away the land and ultimately life itself from the crocodiles becomes another case of class conflict.

Colonialism pervaded all spatial spheres of Kuttanad through English education and religious conversions brought out by the Christian missionaries. This becomes another class conflict, one between the colonial ideology as propagated by the missionaries in line with Macaulay’s *Minutes on Indian Education* and the native ideology. Thus, converts from the Pulaya community like Paviyan face double oppression, first for belonging to a marginalised caste and second for being at the receiving end of colonial oppression.

The novel intricately weaves the narratives of Ramayana into the text. However, Hareesh endorses the deities whom the high-caste feudal lords often refuse to acknowledge. While the temples of “elite” Gods barred Pulayas from entering, the deities of the oppressed such as Muthan, Ittichan, and Perumadan gave them refuge. The Pulaya community engages in the worship of their ancestors and evil spirits, the most prominent being Chathans. The multiplicity of beliefs that the members of the Pulaya community hold are expounded in the verse that the Vellon says during the Pulaya Wedding rites -

“May God and all the ancestors as well as the other minor Gods of this country manage this country without any discord” (Thaliath 1041).

The tyranny of caste made the conditions for education more conducive for the upper-caste members and gradually the “upper” caste members started occupying major governmental positions. Thus the government employees endorsed the caste system and manipulated the laws in accordance with it, leading to a casteist and patriarchal government.

The law that barred non-Brahmin women from covering their breasts, forms of institutionalised misogyny such as Thalikettu Kalyanam, Sambandham etc. and the sexual abuse of the so-called untouchables point to the rot within the system.

The contrast between the food that is offered to Moustache at Pallithanam house and the food Paviyan and much of the Pulaya community were accustomed to reveals the uneven distribution of wealth owing to the economic hegemony enforced by the feudal patriarchy. Moustache is served with “good-quality Koora rice, buffalo milk curd, pearlspot fish curry made with deseeded, ground chillies” (Hareesh 213) among many other things which is in sharp contrast to the kanji and sometimes mere kanji water alone which the Pulaya folk like Paviyan used to have. Pulayas bound in serfdom were compensated with a pittance of unhusked rice and vegetables after the day’s labour. On days when there was no work in the fields, the workers starved. The communities engaged in agricultural labour were perpetually entrapped within a vicious cycle of exploitation as they were provided with a bare minimum for sustenance, which ensured that they never escaped the cycle.

The Pulayas dwelled on the margins of the fields in one-roomed huts made out of bamboo, straws and palm leaves called ‘Maddam’ (Thaliyath 1031). Maddams were built

by the Pulayas themselves and they dismantled and rebuilt the huts according to the crop cycles and changes in the seasons.

The novel presents a graphic portrait of the gender dynamics that existed in the feudal patriarchy of Kuttanad. Both men and women from "lower" castes such as the Pulaya caste were engaged in agricultural labour but gender roles defined the work that they did in the fields, as explicated through the lines "Men worked the soil with long-handled grub hoes, snorting deeply like bulls, and others broke the clods, while women raked the roots and weeds" (Hareesh 211). The act of consumption and the manner of eating become markers of gender power dynamics as the men are served first with the women and children having to make do with what is leftover. Hunger is a recurrent motif in the novel and has been deemed as being regular amongst the oppressed communities such as the Pulayas. The novel portrays how the oppressed classes, like the Ulladan tribal folk who were forced away by the Nair and would later die of hunger, were forced to seek alternatives for survival.

Women were subject to institutionalised sexism through caste-based practices such as Pulappedi and Mannapedi. Further, Paviyan venting his anger, for being called an 'irupathettichar' (Hareesh 259), through the physical abuse of Chella and the children depicts the unequal power dynamics within the patriarchal family structure.

In conclusion, S. Hareesh's novel 'Moustache' presents the multiple interconnected layers of the space of Kuttanad. Analysing Kuttanad by employing Soja's triadic spatial analysis, we understand that the topography of Kuttanad is inseparable from its social, economic and cultural aspects. Thus, perceiving the space as the Second space alone becomes insufficient. The caste-based feudal patriarchy that existed in Kuttanad is examined with emphasis on the institutional oppression of the communities of agricultural workers such as the Pulayas. Further, the socio-cultural beliefs of the Pulaya

community are analysed. The project delineates the history of Kuttanad from ancient times, as recorded in oral narratives, to the colonial hybrid, and finally to the contemporary form rendered by the advent of modernity.

Chapter 4

Narrative Analysis of Moustache

The narratives in *Moustache* embody the beliefs of various social strata in Kuttanad. These narratives propagated as orally transmitted stories and songs house patriarchal, feudal and casteist notions and the subaltern's resistance to these notions. The subaltern cultural production via the narratives draws attention to the collective sense of oppression meted out to the people through various machinations such as feudalism, patriarchy, caste, colonialism etc. Thus, as bell hooks states, the margins become sites for the production of counter-hegemonic discourse and a space for imagining alternate realities. Notably, Hareesh doesn't merely depict the social beliefs from the detached vantage point of a contemporary man, but the narrative style endorses the beliefs and superstitions.

The novel self-reflexively presents the multiplicity of narratives. This multiplicity of narratives is a result of the spatial variations within Kuttanad and the temporal shifts. Thus, we have different versions of *Moustache* within Kuttanad, such as the *Edanadan Moustache* (Hareesh 285) and the *Moustache at Kainadi*. However, the themes linked to the caste-based feudal patriarchy, embedded within the narratives, endure the temporal and spatial changes. Thus, the narratives have similar characteristics but are not the same arguably because the subaltern of Kuttanad has experienced similar yet different cases of oppression.

In Kainadi, *Moustache* is killed by a mere tapping on the shoulders by Ittichan's mother. The change in narratives gives the people of Kainadi courage and they are able to travel without fear of being ambushed and robbed by the *Moustache*. Much like the *Chathan*, *Moustache* was feared as an evil spirit in Kainadi. Thus, in Kainadi, *Moustache* is not a beacon of collective resistance to hegemony but a non-conformer who rejects the

hegemony for his personal benefit. However, the narrative still encompasses the aspirations and fears of the people as Ittichan becomes the harbinger of justice when he defeats Moustache who was supposedly looting people of their belongings.

The multiple versions of a narrative lay emphasis on individuality and subjectivity, which cause the multiplicity. This becomes a form of resistance against the essentialist notions of the caste-based feudal patriarchy's disposition to treat the subaltern as a homogenous group. Thus, the narratives testify that despite sharing the collective sense of marginalisation, the subaltern experiences cannot be homogenised.

As illustrated in the lines which refer to the similarities in the narratives about Moustache and Ittichan, 'Had one person's life leached into the stories about the other' (Hareesh 207), the presence of multiple versions of the same narrative was accompanied by the amalgamation of the narratives as well. This phenomenon propounds the individual and collective characteristics of narratives. This amalgamation is self-reflexively presented multiple times in the novel, for instance, where the myth of *Chudalamadan*, the moustached graveyard dweller, is blended with the lore of Moustache.

Some narratives linked to Moustache are narratives of the proletariat. Moustache becomes the symbol of the oppressed class' struggle for revolutionary social transformation in Kuttanad. Moustache's life of non-conformity is an act of rebellion against the life that the bourgeoisie wants him to live. Velan attempts to convince Moustache to end his wanderings and offers him a life of wealth through the bourgeois lens as seen in the following lines, 'Why don't you find a good place, build a bund and live on it? I'll make sure that a couple of boatloads of paddy is delivered to you. And the *kayal* (Lake) fields have been sown. You could take over guard duty there' (Hareesh 206). But Moustache rejects the feudal logic of success altogether as he replies 'What

would I do with paddy?’ (206). He continues by saying that all he wants is to reach a place where there is no hunger and to live there with the woman he is seeking, with no one to disturb them. Thus, Moustache’s reply rejects the bourgeoisie notions of success and proposes an alternate narrative where he seeks to live in a space where his basic necessities are met and he is with someone who sees through his all-pervasive and shrouding moustache.

Examining the desires of Moustache through the Freudian lens, we see that Moustache seeks to fulfil his instincts rather than seeking to fulfil what is deemed necessary by the bourgeoisie-controlled social structure. As stated in the lines, ‘now he was looking for the road to a place where he imagined *kanji* was plentiful and always within reach. The search had exhausted him’ (Hareesh 50). The desire to go to Malaya is based on Moustache’s conception of Malaya as a heterotopia (Foucault 24) where there is no hunger and poverty. This narrative is representative of the desires of the subaltern to seek an alternate space and time where oppression ceases.

The narrative of the buffalo who was poisoned by Chella, who was supposed to take care of it, represents the vicious relationship between the feudal lord and the agricultural workers as noted in the lines ‘He would not have survived if he, too, had not run away from his masters’ (Hareesh 133).

The Pulaya caste believes in the presence of the supreme being or the ‘*Deivam*’ and the secondary beings such as Chathans, Akkans etc (Thaliyath 1032). These secondary beings were more accessible than the supreme being and were worshipped out of fear of misfortune or sickness. The Pulayas, much like the other oppressed communities of Kuttanad at that period, were more influenced by fear rather than by desire. The narrative associated with Akkan becomes an apt example of a narrative of the proletariat as the fear of losing their grain leads to the worship of Akkan. The practice of

pacifying Akkan with a rooster's blood before the planting season reflects the beliefs of the agricultural workers. The workers desire an abundant harvest and fear starving of a poor yield caused by a mishap such as the crack in the bund that killed Akkan.

Rather than being bound to the narratives of benevolent supreme beings, the oppressed communities are closely bound to the narratives of evil spirits and gods. They attempt to appease spirits and gods which they believe to be evil, through sacrifices and pujas, to avoid their wrath. Even the ghosts of their ancestors are worshipped out of the fear of evil designs that they may have. The diviner '*Madavathikaren*' (1034) prays to the ancestors on behalf of the people asking them through an elaborate ceremony not to enforce their evil schemes on the living.

Pulaya mystics worship these malignant spirits like the Chathans as they could otherwise potentially inflict harm upon the Pulayas. The innumerable Chathans are said to be incarnations of the various evils of the world. As an example, '*Arvila chathan*' (1044) is believed to push people into suicide and this indirectly refers to how people from oppressed communities were pushed to the extreme of committing suicide due to the dehumanising conditions in which they lived. Thus, the narratives attached to the Chathans reveal the harsh lives lived by the subalterns.

Further, the worship of these malignant spirits with offerings of milk, flowers, incense etc. points to how centuries of institutionalised exploitation through labour designs such as serfdom had forced the oppressed communities such as the Pulayas into a mental state where they had to appease the people in power who they deem evil. Thus, they conform to the notion of helplessness and dependency which was thrust upon them. This resignation is epitomised in the practice of requesting the aid of sorcerers and Panikkars to appease the evil spirits whose anger had led to sickness in a Pulaya. Thus, the narratives of fear dominate the lives of the oppressed.

The narratives linked to Moustache are manifestations of resistance against the multiple forms of oppression. At a period when the “lower” castes were deemed untouchable and barred from using the main roads as they could potentially pollute the “upper” caste, Moustache becomes the personification of subaltern resistance as he fearlessly walks through the casteist feudal Kesava Pillah’s fields. Moustache resists the institutional caste-based segregation when he reverses spatial politics by sitting in the easy chair as the Feudal lord, Pallithanam Luca Mathai, sits meekly in the ordinary wooden chair. The repulsive death of Thanulinga Nadar is attributed to Moustache as the people want this death to be interpreted as an act of resilience against the biased casteist, feudal, patriarchal government. Thus, the narratives associated with Moustache portray a non-conformist who rejects the hegemony of caste and feudalism and the narratives which proclaim Moustache humbling the pride of the people in power, like Luca Mathai and Thanulinga Nadar, point to the subaltern desire for a revolutionary social change that ends feudal privileges enjoyed at the expense of the subaltern.

Tharamma, a nun from a feudal family, being condemned to haunt the waters where her grandfather had inhumanly murdered a Paraya agricultural worker named Kotha, becomes a proletariat narrative of justice and revenge. Edanadan Moustache seeking revenge for the murder of his father at the hands of the people in power - Pravruthyar Sankunni Menon and his assistant Koyil, is a narrative of resistance against the biased authority. This narrative propounds the physical strength and bravery of the Moustache, characteristics valued by the proletariat. The act of burning the temple of the elite by Edanadan Moustache is also an act of voicing subaltern discontent.

Vavachan’s decision to retain the policeman’s moustache symbolises the assumption of authority which was till then inaccessible to the members of the subaltern communities. Notably, after seeing Vavachan with a moustache, Damodaran apologises

for almost bashing him earlier. Damodaran is unable to sleep for the rest of the night as the moustached Vavachan makes him recall ‘the statue of the cruel-faced, sword-wielding doorkeeper at the temple of a demon goddess’ (Hareesh 35). This narrative of the “upper” caste members being terrorised by the display of Dalit power reverses the norms of the caste hegemony.

Narratives of Dalit power attached to Moustache are in line with the narratives accorded to Dalit figures such as Ravana. Moustache encompasses multitudes within himself as he becomes an incarnation of various epitomes of Dalit power such as the Dusshasanan, Rakshas etc. The graphic description of the fear induced among the “upper” caste by the moustached policeman is the most important narrative in the novel as it is the narrative of the proletariat striking back against the oppressive regime of the bourgeoisie.

When Vavachan dons the role of the moustached policeman, the “upper” caste people in the front rows are petrified out of the mysterious fear associated with demon-like figures ingrained within them. The Brahmin who urinated on seeing the terrifying ‘Pulayan Police’ (Hareesh 37) points to the same idea. This narrative reaffirms that the exploited subaltern can potentially revolt.

Much like Damodaran, his feudal relative Kesava Pillah rises in reverence and fear on seeing Moustache who reminds him of a mad elephant. Moustache being held responsible for the withering of the palmyra tree in Kesava Pillah’s land and the broken coconut wood lamp post are narratives arising out of the feudal fear of their possessions being destroyed through revolutionary change.

This fear manifests in the supposed collective disgrace of the “upper” caste on being belittled by a Pulaya as expressed in the lines, ‘Still, we have to teach him a lesson. The Pulayans are getting too brazen’ (Hareesh 47). The “upper” caste fears the

destruction of their lucrative hegemony through a revolt. The inhuman atrocities inflicted upon the agricultural workers in the fields and the destruction of Paviyan's hut silently articulate this feudal fear. This narrative of feudal fear is exposed when they flee envisioning a demon-like moustached man looking at them from the darkness.

Despite Vavachan feeling that he is being engulfed by the 'terrifying stranger with a big moustache' (Hareesh 42), he gradually develops an affinity to the power and authority the new identity gives him to discard the hegemony that had oppressed him till then. Thus, as Avarachan proposes, Moustache's real purpose was not Malaya or Seetha but to metamorphose into 'the Moustache' completely.

Multiple inexplicable incidents rendered as the schemes of Moustache may be interpreted as being desperate attempts of the people to make meaning out of a meaningless world. Thus, Moustache becomes a scapegoat as he is held responsible for the attacks on Sraap Kunjan Panicker's and Chalayi Panicker's boats. However, the subaltern does not fear Moustache as much as the people in power does, as they are devoid of possessions to be looted. Thus, the narrative of fear attached to Moustache becomes a variant of the Pulaya narratives of fear of evil spirits like the Chathans.

Kunjachan's utter disregard for the plight of his workers is a result of never being accustomed to hardships, which was all the agricultural workers ever knew. Thus, Kunjachan fails to understand the importance of paddy cultivation which renders him authority amongst the people. Kunjachan's dismissive demeanour towards Kuttichovan and the female workers testifies that he lives in the ivory tower of his sense of pride. Thus, the narrative whereby Moustache defeats Kunjachan portrays the prevailing anti-feudal sentiments.

Ouseph disregards the colonial hegemony as articulated in the statement: 'He simply was not scared of Baker Saheb' (Hareesh 251). Consequently, Ouseph is

unaffected by Baker's threat that the people who steal coconuts will have their hands cut off and continues to cut coconuts. He rejects colonial dominance based on the idea that the British are outsiders who lack legitimate claim over the land and its produce, whereas Ouseph holds claim over the land through his ancestry. Ouseph reverses the white supremacist notions that the people of Kuttanad shared as expressed in the lines: 'his stature as their superior was written into his white skin' (251). Ouseph represents the people oppressed by the colonial regime and Ouseph's defiance is an anti-colonial narrative.

The vengeful crocodile shares similarities with the moustached villagers who took up arms against the British. Both are narratives of resistance put forth by the native inhabitants against the colonists who seek to destroy them. Moustache enabling Avarachan to end Brendon's exploitative monopoly in mechanised irrigation of fields is a significant anti-colonial narrative that represents the broader resistance against exploitative trade practices of the British forces in colonial India.

The moustache, once a symbol of power, is literally and metaphorically shaved off as the British colonial regime pervades all facets of life in India. Commencing with Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, Indian rulers who exercised commendable power as testified by their 'great big imperial moustaches' (Hareesh 31) conceded their powers to the British and lost their moustaches as well. This narrative is linked to the broader social transition as India as a nation is rendered subaltern under colonial rule.

Pravruthyar Sankunni Menon's letter expresses the apprehension of losing the caste-based exploitative system that is lucrative for the "upper" caste. This sentiment articulated in his statement that the feudals fear that the Pulayans might showcase poor labour standards as their masters fear entering the fields alone owing to the possibility of

an attack by Moustache. Notably, the members of the oppressed communities also fear the anarchy that might result from dismantling the vicious caste hegemony.

Various narratives govern the lives of the agricultural workers as voiced in the line 'Pulayans say that the fields have an innate truth' (Hareesh 140). One such narrative is that stealing someone's paddy wages which is secured by bounding it with burnt hay, would result in the thief's death within the next harvest. Such narratives were essential for maintaining order in Kuttanad. But it is to be noted that it is fear of punishment, rather than a strong moral conscience that prevents the people from doing misdeeds.

Pothan Mappilla is reprimanded for hoarding grain and exploiting his wife and son by the ghost, who begs for food. This proletarian narrative whereby Mappilla is left unable to have a proper meal afterwards seeks to promote equality and punish those who hoard resources at the expense of others.

The Nair's humiliation, suicide by self-inflicted starvation and ultimately damnation are attributed to his refusal to empathise with the Ulladan folk who had tried to satisfy themselves with the leftovers from a feast at Nattassery. Thus, the ghost symbolises the inescapable hunger which will 'eventually find them, and possess their bodies' (Hareesh 67). The ghost inflicts two forms of harm. It could make the well-fed individual lose their appetite for food and curse the starving individual to eternally wander for food. Both of these narratives are narratives of the subaltern's quest for survival. The former illustrates how the subaltern desires the oppressors to be punished for their ways. The latter expresses how the oppressed fear they will forever be trapped in their tragic circumstances.

For the people facing scarcity of basic resources such as food and shelter the Moustache becomes a mirage where their desires amalgamate. Thus, Moustache is seen taking refuge in the shelter made from his moustache and finding bountiful sustenance

during a famine. People associate their desires with the illusion of the Moustache as they see no logical solution to their predicament. This is expressed self-reflexively by the narrator in the statement ‘Perhaps these were just the hungry illusions of those stuck at home with nothing to eat’ (Hareesh 166).

Moustache being identified as Matapathi, the healer of ailments, exemplifies how Moustache becomes the beacon of hope for the hopeless who have been socially ostracised and abandoned owing to their diseases. Moustache evolves into the symbol of hope for the subaltern as illustrated in the statement made by the frog: ‘tells your stories when they are sad or in danger. It’s the songs about you that keep us going, give us hope that tomorrow will be a better day’ (Hareesh 289).

The narratives of the sexual prowess of Moustache, where women seek him out from the fields and waterways and lose control of themselves on seeing Moustache wherever and whenever they find him, reveal the beliefs and desires of the people. Another such narrative is that of the ‘old man with paan’ (66) who scares young girls of marriageable age with his ‘monstrous member’ (66). These narratives illustrate the suppression of femininity by masculinity as women are depicted as being afraid of the symbol of masculinity, the phallus. Thus, patriarchal notions abound in such narratives as the women are depicted as being afraid of the phallus which symbolises masculinity. Thus, the narratives regarding virility reflect the desires of the people and reveal the sexist and patriarchal undertones in society.

The narrative of justice whereby Thumbelkuruppu (310) is punished for spearheading a gang that loots wealth, rapes and murders women, reflects the proletarian desires of wanting to see such bandits punished for their deeds. Thumbelkuruppu’s niece is murdered and her ornaments are looted by the gang members. It is assumed that the gang might have raped the woman as well. Kattapulavan and his brothers, who are

bandits whose operation style resembles Thumbelkuruppu, being defeated by Moustache is also a proletarian narrative of justice.

Many of the narratives attached to Moustache emphasise his enormous physical stature and strength while obscuring his intellectual capabilities. Notably, Dalit communities like the Pulayas were employed in agricultural work where physical strength was valued over the emotional and intellectual abilities that the "upper" caste rarely attributed to them. Thus, Moustache, paradoxically, represents the rebellion against the hegemony while conforming to the hegemony as well.

The proletariat narrative of strength is depicted when Paviyan walks away with Machathil Luca Mappila's heavy bronze vessel which typically requires at least eight people to lift, after he chooses to trick Paviyan who came begging for food, instead of providing him with sustenance. Paviyan's father, Kankali's shapeshifting abilities is also a narrative of subaltern strength and Dalit power. This is voiced in the statement about Kankali: 'masters better be fair when measuring out his share of the paddy, or suffer the consequences' (80).

In the songs, Moustache is depicted as a strong, non-conformist, who encompasses multitudes within himself. The waterwheel workers' song of Moustache falling off the waterwheel and surviving without a scratch is a narrative of proletarian desire for strength. The line, 'Can you really dig a well with your bare hands in rocky, barren soil?' (123) spoken by a boatman, shows that the narrative attached to the Moustache is that of someone who accomplishes tasks that people desire to fulfil but find challenging. Thus, Moustache is presented as someone who communicates with and tames nature. Thus, the narratives of Moustache are spread across geographies through the songs and he transforms into a symbol of resistance and strength.

The narratives of fear linked to snakes result from the ability of snakes to render quick deaths to the most robust of humans from concealed locations. Thus, snakes represent the mysterious nature of death as illustrated in the deaths of Machovan and Chella. Thus, the fear of snakes is a narrative of the fear of the unknown. Moustache avenging Chella's death by massacring snakes and petrifying the officials with his indecipherable physical strength is a narrative that reflects the people's desire to achieve mastery over the mysterious and cruel nature of the world.

Much like Moustache, Ittichan is admired for subduing the elusive yet dangerous snakes. The narrative of Ittichan conquering snakes is a narrative of desire where a divinely blessed individual champions the people's desires by defeating the unpredictable and cruel nature. Thus, the narratives of Ittichan blend the fascination for superior strength along with the apprehension of that strength.

Moustache outmatching Kaalan and his associates is a narrative born out of the people's desires whereby they wish that the all-powerful Kaalan, who represents the inexplicable and mysterious nature of death, is outwitted by a mortal. Death could come swiftly and unexpectedly as it had come to Chella and Thanulinga Nadar. Thus, the narrative of the Moustache outclassing Kaalan represents the collective longing to trump the indifferent and unpredictable nature of death.

The narrative of Ittichan impaling the sun to the sky so as to make the workers complete their work expresses the collective desire to control nature. Mastery over nature is coveted as the people used to live in close association and often at the mercy of the unpredictable nature. Guruswamy's command over the natural world as portrayed in his prediction of the bountiful harvest from the coconut trees of Krishnavilasam testifies for the same.

Pachupillah manipulates the songs with the help of Panakkan Pulayan. Thus, the corruption of the narratives which were the vehicles of resilience against oppression become representative of the wider manipulation of popular culture for the benefit of private individuals and often at the expense of the collective good.

Hareesh portrays the periodic effacement of narratives and the disconnect with the past lifestyle with the arrival of socio-cultural modernisation and economic liberalisation. He points to the disbelief that people express on hearing that the lakes of Alappuzha had crocodiles and sharks in them a century ago. The temporal shift that permeated into the oral narratives impacts Moustache as he vanishes along with the Gods and spirits who used to take walks in the dark. Ironically, Vavachan's moustache is eventually cut off with a mere pair of scissors.

In Kuttanad of the early twentieth century many communities considered the ancestors in line with the Gods. The transmission of narratives in myths, and legends from the ancestral voice renders validity to the narratives. However the generational disconnect leads to a break in this transmission as the Kuttanad of the past appears to be a heterotopia (Foucault 24) for the people living in the twenty-first century. Thus, the narratives which had fed Moustache become insignificant as the socio-cultural conditions, which had kindled the narratives, change.

To reiterate, the narratives that abound in S. Hareesh's *Moustache* faithfully mirror the beliefs and aspirations of the people of Kuttanad of the early twentieth century. The novel traces how these narratives change and eventually fade as modernity and later globalisation wash across the shores of Kuttanad. The novel documents the embodiment of feudalism, colonialism, and patriarchal and caste-based sentiments in some narratives. Conversely, some narratives depict the subaltern revolt against these power structures and pursue an egalitarian space and time. These narratives are closely linked to the

experiences of the subaltern and voice their desires and fears by associating Moustache with strength, supernatural control, and virility. The narratives render Moustache a beacon of hope and resistance against the various manifestations of oppression meted out to the subaltern such as poverty, and lack of identity among others.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to examine the multiple layers of meaning in the narratives presented in the novel. The project aimed to decode the politics that work behind the construction of narratives. The multiplicity that exists in narratives and the endurance of certain elements in these temporal and spatial variants is examined. Thus, it is inferred that the themes of subaltern resilience to the hegemony exerted by the caste-based feudal patriarchy and the admiration and dependency that the oppressed have towards these institutions persist in one form or the other in these narratives.

The introductory chapter briefly introduces the author S. Hareesh and his novel 'Moustache'. The chapter lists the research methodologies employed in this project and depicts how formal historical narratives have persistently been subject to manipulation by the people in power. The novel chronicles the narratives of Vavachan metamorphosing into Moustache, a symbol of subaltern resistance and his quest to find Seetha and escape to the heterotopia of Malaya. The project aims to illustrate how the narratives of Moustache embody the hegemony put forth by the caste-based feudal patriarchy and the revolt against it.

The second chapter examines Kuttanad in *Moustache* using Foucauldian theories on power and space, portraying how power vacillates within the caste-based feudal patriarchy. By perceiving Kuttanad as the Third space as put forth by Soja, the emergence of new identities and social transformations is interpreted. The interdependence between the human and non-human actants is analysed in the process by which Vavachan is redefined as Moustache. This is manifested in the lines, "His moustache had outgrown him, and it was the moustache, not Vavachan, that now paid attention to the paths and canals" (Hareesh 120-121). Narratives and narrative thinking shape human cognition and

in turn, narratives are structured on the human cognitive system. The project aims to decode this codependent nature of narratives and the human psyche.

The third chapter examines the history, geography and caste-based social stratification of Kuttanad using Soja's triadic spatial analysis. The beliefs and aspirations of the marginalised communities such as the Pulaya community are studied with emphasis. By examining Kuttanad, the interconnectedness of the various facets of space is brought out through this project. The convergence of patriarchal, feudal, colonial and casteist powers in Kuttanad is explored as the evolution of Kuttanad from its ancient origins is traced.

The fourth chapter analyses the narratives in '*Moustache*' based on the spatial analysis of Kuttanad. The self-reflexive portrayal of the multiplicity of narratives is interpreted as the resistance against the colonial disposition to homogenise the experiences of the colonised. The subaltern narratives attached to *Moustache* originate as a reaction to the hegemony enforced by the feudal caste-based patriarchy. The narratives of fear as depicted in '*Moustache*' are interpreted as being born out of Kuttanad's subaltern population being forced to satisfy the exploitative feudal system due to the presence of institutionalised forms of oppression such as serfdom. Thus, certain narratives in *Moustache* portray the resistance against oppression while other narratives endorse these oppressive regimes. The chapter documents the erasure of these narratives with the arrival of modernisation and globalisation.

The research was conducted primarily through the textual analysis of the novel '*Moustache*' on the basis of the inferences from reading theories on Space, Narratives and Caste. The novel is a work of historiographic fiction and thus it was imperative that it involve interactions with the natives of Kuttanad.

Narratives are ingrained into the human cognitive system and we interpret the world around us through them. The human psyche creates and is created by the narratives. Narratives put abstract emotions such as fear and desire into tangible forms. Thus, the analysis of the narratives in *Moustache* and the subsequent unearthing of the power dynamics that function behind it has greater applications. The analysis of contemporary narratives will allow us to understand the space we inhabit much better and will help us understand the cause-and-effect relationships that led to the formation of such narratives.

The research establishes that narratives are not passive containers of human beliefs but rather active shapers of human beliefs. The narratives being active shapers and creators of meaning is seen in Pachupillah creating an aura around himself through the narratives that he makes about himself through the songs of Panakkan. The power of narrative is also manifested in Krishnan Thattan being associated with his character in *Kudiyaan* for generations after he played that role. Thus, the research has wider applications as narratives can be used as a vehicle for social development, whereby it promotes peace and coexistence and it can be used as a tool for social manipulation as done by Pachupillah. Thus, it becomes important that the power of narratives be analysed.

This research project offers scope for further study but it is put off for the future due to the limitations of being a postgraduate dissertation.

Thus, the analysis of S. Hareesh's *Moustache* has been a probe of the multiple facets of life and provides us with a deeper understanding of our relationship with space in all its manifestations. In conclusion, the analysis of narratives is an inquiry into the human psyche and thus, into the spatial, temporal and social factors that led to the formation of such a psyche.

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