

Production of Space and Dissemination of Hegemony in Malayalam

Cinema

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, in partial fulfillment for the award of M.A. degree in English Language and Literature.



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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Production of Space and Dissemination of Hegemony in Malayalam Cinema** is a bona fide record of sincere work done by Anagha M R, Register Number: 220011028687, Bharata Mata College, under my supervision and guidance and that no part of this thesis has been presented for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition of this or any other university.

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I hereby affirm that the dissertation entitled **Production of Space and Dissemination of Hegemony in Malayalam Cinema** is a record of *bona fide* research work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Rose Sebastian, Assistant Professor and that no part of this project has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, title, or recognition of this or any other university.

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Acknowledgement

I find myself fortunate to be surrounded by people who are forever willing to help and guide me. I take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Rose Sebastian for guiding me in accomplishing my research work titled “Production of Space and Dissemination of Hegemony in Malayalam Cinema”. Her supervision and support truly helped in the progress and timely accomplishment of this research work.

I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the scholars and artists with whom I consulted and whose works I referred for my work.

I express my sincere thanks to Dr. Lissy Kachappilly, Principal, Dr. Johnson K.M, former Principal, Dr. Thara Gangadharan, Head of the Department, and all other faculty members of my college for their support and concern.

I’m also grateful to my beloved Mother and Father, family members, and friends for their loving encouragement. Above all, I thank God Almighty for constantly supporting me and for blessing me with such wonderful people in my life.

Anagha M R

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This dissertation follows MLA 9th edition

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

In understanding the mechanisms of societal power structures, we cannot consider any physical space as a random arrangement, rather a methodically planned canvas that supports and perpetuates hegemony. Cities are often designed to fulfil the needs and preferences of the elite, with well-to-do neighborhoods, well-maintained parks, and exclusive amenities, while marginalized communities are relegated to dilapidated areas with limited access to resources and opportunities. Urban developers strategically plan streets and infrastructure in a manner that reinforces hierarchies, maintaining the divide between the privileged and the marginalized. Cinema, as a powerful medium of storytelling, plays a pivotal role in portraying these constructed spaces and their influence on societal norms and values. Most of the filmmakers, consciously or unconsciously, produce space for their characters within narratives that reflect and reinforce prevailing power structures. Therefore, studying the production of space in cinematic representation becomes imperative in clarifying the complexities of hegemonic ideals and their manifestation in societal spaces.

In the pre-2010 era, experiencing Malayalam cinema felt akin to immersing oneself in the imagery of a traditional hero dwelling in an idyllic village, where virtue reigned supreme. This portrayal depicted an idealistic narrative of perfection, woven around the protagonist's high caste, affluent status, flawless family dynamics, and a picturesque home. An exemplary illustration of this portrayal of the traditional hero within an idyllic setting can be found in the iconic Malayalam film *Devasuram* (1993),

directed by I. V. Sasi. The film follows the character of Mangalassery Neelakandan (played by Mohanlal), a powerful and affluent feudal lord residing in a grand ancestral mansion in Kerala. Neelakandan is depicted as a charismatic and morally upright figure, revered by his community for his valour and righteousness. His luxurious lifestyle, adorned with opulent surroundings and loyal subjects, reinforces the image of the traditional hero dwelling in an idyllic village where virtue prevails. *Devasuram* serves as a classic example wherein films created spaces for their heroes

Similarly, *Manichitrathazhu* (1993), directed by Fazil, offers another compelling portrayal of this style. The film revolves around the character of Ganga (played by Shobana), who epitomizes the traditional heroines of the pre-2010 era. Ganga belongs to an affluent Nair family residing in a palatial ancestral home in Kerala. The film meticulously crafts an idyllic setting, portraying Ganga's life within this luxurious household as one characterized by harmony, elegance, and moral rectitude. This film also serves as a prime example of how filmmakers constructed spaces for their heroes within narratives steeped in tradition, morality, and idealism.

Alongside this archetype, another hero emerged, embodying modern ideals and residing in bustling urban centers like New Delhi, Kochi, Trivandrum, Chennai, Bengaluru, or Mumbai. The emergence of this type of hero embodying modern ideals and residing in bustling urban centers can be found in many Malayalam films. One such example is the film *New Delhi* (1987), directed by Joshiy. In *New Delhi*, Mammooty portrays the character of G. Krishnamoorthy, a dynamic and ambitious journalist based in the bustling city of Delhi. The film's depiction of a hero residing in a bustling urban center like Delhi resonates with the evolving narrative conventions of older Malayalam cinema, where

characters were portrayed within contemporary and dynamic settings reflective of the changing times.

There is another group of heroes representing the lower middle class and often depicted within the confines of idealized or imaginary village settings crafted by filmmakers. *Meeshamadhavan* (2002), directed by Lal Jose, provides an excellent example of a hero from a lower-middle-class background depicted within an idealized village setting in Malayalam cinema. Set in the imaginary village of Chekk, Palakkad, the story of Madhavan, played by Dileep, who comes from a humble background. The depiction of Madhavan as a hero from a lower-middle-class background within an idyllic village setting aligns with the narrative conventions prevalent in Malayalam cinema.

Regardless of the diverse settings in which heroes are placed – be it the traditional idyllic village, the modern urban landscape, or the lower-middle-class background – one common thread unites them all: the idealization of their surroundings. Filmmakers craft spaces for their heroes that exude an aura of perfection and virtue, regardless of the socio-economic backdrop. Whether it's the opulent ancestral mansion of a feudal lord, the bustling streets of a metropolitan city, or the rustic charm of a village, each setting is imbued with a sense of idyllic allure. This deliberate construction of idealized spaces serves to perpetuate hegemonic ideals, reinforcing the notion that the hero's environment mirrors their moral righteousness and societal standing.

By consistently depicting protagonists in settings characterized by affluence, beauty, and virtue, filmmakers inadvertently contribute to the marginalization of individuals from marginalized or excluded spaces. This portrayal reinforces the hegemonic notion that goodness and moral righteousness are inherently linked to specific

socio-economic backgrounds, further marginalizing those who do not conform to these ideals. As a result, audiences may internalize these representations, perpetuating the belief that individuals from marginalized spaces are somehow less worthy or virtuous. This cycle of idealization and marginalization perpetuates societal inequalities and reinforces the dominant power structures that govern our perceptions of morality and virtue. Thus, the production of space within Malayalam cinema becomes a powerful tool for disseminating hegemony, shaping audience perceptions and reinforcing established power structures.

The adoption of imaginary villages, big cities, or idyllic places for heroes has undergone a significant shift after 2010, particularly from around 2015 onwards. Malayalam filmmakers began to explore real, excluded, marginalized, and alienated lands, homes, colonies, and all those once considered unliveable places as locations for their films. Heroes are no longer the archetypal figures hailing from idyllic spaces; rather, they are the products of these excluded spaces. This shift in narrative focus reflects a broader societal acknowledgment of the diverse experiences and backgrounds of individuals. Films such as *Kammatipaadam* (2016), *Udahanam Sujatha* (2017), *Ee. Ma. Yau* (2018), and *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019) exemplify this trend, presenting protagonists who emerge from the margins of society. While there were a few instances before this period where heroes lived in colonies, as seen in films like *Karutha Pakshikal* (2006) and *Chotta Mumbai* (2007), they were limited in number. However, after 2015, this trend became more pronounced, with many films actively adopting these previously marginalized spaces as integral elements of their narratives. This shift not only reflects a

changing cinematic landscape but also signifies a broader cultural shift towards acknowledging and embracing the diversity of human experiences.

Both eras of Malayalam cinema engaged in the production of space to disseminate hegemonic ideals, albeit in different ways. For instance, Shaji Kailas's spaces for characters like Kanimangalam Jagannadhan, emphasizing their high social status and affluent backgrounds, thereby perpetuating traditional notions of virtue and morality associated with such settings. Conversely, filmmakers like Madhu C. Narayanan produced spaces for their heroes that reflected their low origin and financial status, challenging traditional narratives by depicting characters from marginalized or excluded backgrounds. Despite inhabiting marginalized spaces, these heroes were portrayed with complexity and humanity, challenging dominant narratives of morality and virtue. The authenticity and realism with which these spaces were depicted offered a nuanced portrayal of life on the margins, thereby challenging dominant narratives and offering a more inclusive perspective on societal norms and values. Hence, this project aims to conduct a comparative study of how pre-2015 filmmakers produced space for their heroes versus how post-2015 filmmakers produce space for their heroes by examining the Malayalam films *Aaraam Thampuran* and *Kumbalangi Nights*.

Aaraam Thampuran is selected for its perfect depiction of space as a reflection of hegemonic masculinity and caste hierarchies. The film, set in the fictional village of Kanimangalam, uses its grand mansions and traditional settings to symbolize and reinforce the power and dominance of the upper-caste protagonist, Jagannadhan, played by Mohanlal. The space for Jagannadhan mirrors the societal structures and values of Kerala, highlighting how spaces can embody and perpetuate social hierarchies. Analyzing

Aaraam Thampuram offers insights into the role of space in maintaining and disseminating hegemonic order.

Kumbalangi Nights is selected for its deep exploration of family relationships and societal expectations within the backdrop of a marginalized fishing village in Kerala. Set in a run-down yet charming coastal village, the film artistically blends themes of masculinity, vulnerability, and personal development. Its portrayal of four estranged brothers dealing with their individual struggles while managing complex family dynamics offers a poignant reflection on the human condition. Director Madhu C. Narayanan masterfully constructs a space where societal expectations clash with personal aspirations, providing a nuanced examination of gender roles, mental health, and the quest for identity amidst societal constraints. Through its authentic portrayal of life on the margins, *Kumbalangi Nights* challenges traditional notions of masculinity and family structures, making it a compelling choice for analysis in the context of post-2015 Malayalam cinema.

This project mainly relies on theories of Antonio Gramsci and Henry Lefebvre to analyze how the production of space for characters disseminates hegemonic ideals. By examining the ways in which space is depicted in films like *Aaraam Thampuram* and *Kumbalangi Nights*, this study seeks to uncover the underlying power dynamics and societal values embedded within these representations. The project is divided into five chapters. The primary chapter serves as the introductory chapter, laying the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of the production of space in Malayalam cinema. Following this, the subsequent chapter functions as the literature review, delving into the primary theoretical texts of Antonio Gramsci, Henry Lefebvre and, Michael Foucault whose

theoretical frameworks inform the analytical lens applied to the selected films. The third chapter focuses on the analysis of *Aaram Thampuran*, while the fourth chapter examines *Kumbalangi Nights* employing the selected theories to unpack the production of space within each film. Finally, the concluding chapter summarizes the research conducted and highlights the key insights gleaned from the analysis, providing a cohesive conclusion to the study.

CHAPTER 2

A Methodological Journey into Spatial Dynamics and Hegemony

This project explores the study of social space, its production, and the dissemination of hegemony. To analyze the production of social space, it employs spatial theories from Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault. For understanding hegemony, the project incorporates ideas from Antonio Gramsci.

This project applies spatial and hegemony theories to the settings of selected movies to analyze whether any differences exist in the social production of space and the dissemination of hegemony between the two locales. By examining these elements, the study aims to determine how each movie portrays the dynamics of space and power within its unique context.

This project primarily draws on Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* for theoretical support. Henri Lefebvre, a French Marxist philosopher and sociologist, is renowned for his pioneering critique of everyday life and for introducing the concepts of the right to the city and the production of social space. His significant contributions have influenced many later theorists, such as Edward Soja, to further explore the study of space. *The Critique of Everyday Life* and *The Production of Social Space* are two of his major works in this field.

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre details a profound analysis of the political role that an understanding of space plays in shaping and relating to our environments. Lefebvre argues that capitalist societies produce an abstract space dominated by mental constructs over natural and social realities.

He posits that every society produces its own space through various actors and practices, which in turn affect social practices and perceptions. By conceptualizing space from physical, mental, and social perspectives, Lefebvre highlights that understanding the production of space is crucial for informing future spatial practices. His work remains essential for fields such as urban planning and architecture, emphasizing the intricate relationship between space and society.

“Every society — and hence every mode of production with all its subvariants . . . produces a space, its own space” (Lefebvre, 31). This project studies this idea which acknowledges that the physical and social environments in which we live are not just natural or neutral backdrops. Instead, they are actively shaped by the economic, social, and political practices of the time. For instance, a capitalist society creates urban spaces designed for commercial activities, high-rise buildings, and transportation networks that facilitate the movement of goods and labor. These spaces reflect and reinforce the values and needs of capitalism, such as efficiency, profit, and consumption.

Moreover, this concept highlights that space is both a product and a means of social relations. Each mode of production, whether it be feudalism, capitalism, or socialism, generates distinct types of spaces that embody the ideologies and power structures of that society. These spaces, in turn, influence the behavior, interactions, and experiences of individuals within them. By understanding how space is produced and organized, we can gain insight into the underlying social relations and power dynamics at play in any given society.

This project employs Lefebvre’s idea of body as a space.

There is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before producing effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before producing itself by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before reproducing itself by generating other bodies, each living body is space and has its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies. (Lefebvre, 170).

Lefebvre asserts that there is a direct and immediate relationship between the body and the space it occupies and creates. He argues that the body's deployment and occupation of space are intertwined processes, emphasizing that the body's presence in space is not passive but active and dynamic. The body, with its capacity for action and energy, actively engages in the production of space. Lefebvre further asserts that the body is engaged in the process of creating and producing space even before it interacts with the material world by creating tools or reproducing itself. He suggests that the body is not merely in space but generates its own space through its actions and energies. This perspective challenges the conventional view of space as a mere container for physical actions, highlighting the body's role in the active production of space. This project studies how the character Unnimaya in *Aaram Thamburan* becomes a space.

Foucault was a French thinker who studied power, knowledge, and freedom. He looked at how these are used to control people in society.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault details the evolution of Western criminal punishment, tracing it from public spectacles of torture and execution to a regime of private, psychological control. He argues that this shift reflects a broader transformation in societal structures and the mechanisms of power. The spectacle of public execution, once a demonstration of the sovereign's power, gave way to a more insidious form of control. This new disciplinary power operates through surveillance and normalization, making individuals constantly visible and therefore subject to continuous regulation.

Foucault introduces the concept of "disciplinary space," where individuals face restrictions on freedom and are subject to constant surveillance and control. This disciplinary space is not limited to prisons but extends to various institutions such as hospitals, schools, military barracks, factories, and offices. These institutions share similar architectures and functions, all designed to observe, record, and train individuals, creating "docile bodies" that are ideal for the economic, political, and military demands of the modern age. This pervasive surveillance leads to the internalization of disciplinary norms, where individuals regulate their behavior because they believe they are always being watched.

This project employs Foucault's ideas on how spaces and its architecture control people. To analyze this, Foucault's question is necessary and significant. "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons"(Foucault, 228). Throughout this question, Foucault highlights the striking resemblance between prisons and other social institutions such as factories, schools, barracks, and hospitals. By drawing this parallel, he underscores the idea that these spaces share common architectural features and practices that are designed to produce

docile bodies through the exercise of discipline. This project employs Foucault's concept to examine the architecture depicted in selected movies, analyzing how discipline is practiced within these spaces and how it contributes to the creation of docile bodies.

By investigating the portrayal of various settings in films, this study aims to reveal the subtle mechanisms of control and regulation that operate within these environments. The analysis will focus on how the design and organization of these spaces facilitate the enforcement of discipline, thereby shaping the behavior and identities of the individuals who inhabit them. Through this exploration, the project seeks to deepen our understanding of the pervasive influence of disciplinary practices in modern society and their impact on the human experience.

A key symbol in Foucault's analysis is Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, an architectural model for prisons that allows a single guard to observe all inmates without them knowing when they are being watched. This "unequal gaze" ensures that prisoners internalize the sense of being observed, thereby regulating their behavior without the need for physical force. Foucault argues that the principles of the Panopticon extend beyond prisons to other institutions, creating a panoptic society where surveillance is a fundamental mechanism of control.

Foucault's exploration extends to the broader implications of disciplinary mechanisms, noting that they create a new form of individuality. This individuality is cellular, determining spatial distribution; organic, ensuring activities are natural for bodies; genetic, controlling the evolution of activities over time; and combinatorial, allowing the combination of many bodies into a single force. These characteristics

facilitate the efficient operation of power across various institutions, blending seamlessly into the fabric of everyday life.

Ultimately, Foucault asserts that modern society is characterized by a carceral system, a network of institutions that function to observe, classify, and control individuals. This system ensures that power is omnipresent and operates through a combination of visible surveillance and invisible, internalized norms. The disciplinary mechanisms that emerged in the early 19th century continue to shape contemporary social structures, making the prison not an isolated institution but part of a wider network of control that pervades all aspects of life.

Antonio Francesco Gramsci was an Italian Marxist philosopher, linguist, journalist, writer, and politician. He wrote on philosophy, political theory, sociology, history, and linguistics. His *Prison Notebooks* are considered a highly original contribution to 20th-century political theory.

In the *Prison Notebooks*, Antonio Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, penned a series of essays between 1929 and 1935 while imprisoned by the Italian Fascist regime. These writings delve into Marxist theory, critical theory, and educational theory, presenting concepts that have become closely associated with Gramsci's name.

Gramsci introduced the idea of cultural hegemony, explaining how the capitalist state maintains power not only through violence and coercion but also through ideology. He argued that the bourgeoisie perpetuates its dominance by making its values the 'common sense' of society, thus gaining the consent of the working class and other social

groups. This consensus culture leads people to identify their interests with those of the ruling class, preventing the socialist revolution predicted by orthodox Marxism.

This project employs Antonio Gramsci's ideas on Cultural Hegemony, particularly his widely used terms 'consent' and 'common sense,' as discussed in his work *Prison Notebooks*. As Gramsci suggests, "Common sense is not something rigid and immobile, but is continually transforming itself, enriching itself with scientific ideas and with philosophical opinions which have entered ordinary life" (Gramsci, 630).

The project applies these concepts to movies to trace how space disseminates hegemony through consent and common sense. By analyzing cinematic representations, the project aims to uncover the ways in which spatial dynamics contribute to the maintenance of cultural dominance.

Gramsci gives many definitions to 'consent'. "Consent is presumed to be permanently active; so much so that those who give it may be considered as "functionaries" of the State" (Gramsci, 425)

Gramsci's theory of hegemony is foundational for understanding how ruling classes maintain their dominance. He posited that this dominance is achieved through a blend of consent and coercion, with a significant emphasis on the former. Institutions like schools, churches, media, and popular culture play crucial roles in disseminating the dominant ideology, making it appear natural and inevitable. This cultural leadership stabilizes the social order by legitimizing the ruling class's leadership.

Central to Gramsci's analysis is the distinction between political society and civil society. Political society includes institutions directly tied to governance and

enforcement, such as the government, police, military, and judicial system, which exert control through coercive means. In contrast, civil society encompasses a broader range of social structures, including families, educational institutions, religious organizations, and various associations, which exert influence primarily through the production and maintenance of cultural and ideological norms.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony challenges simplistic views of social power by presenting a multidimensional approach that considers both ideational and material factors. He underscored that hegemony is dynamic, requiring constant negotiation and reassertion. The ruling class must continually adapt its strategies to address emerging threats and oppositions, aligning its interests with broader social needs to maintain its privileged position.

Gramsci's work remains influential in contemporary analyses of power and cultural politics. His exploration of hegemony reveals the interplay between culture, ideology, and power, demonstrating how dominance is cultivated through a complex melding of persuasion and enforcement. This nuanced understanding of social control offers a robust framework for examining the maintenance and challenges to dominion within any society.

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined a methodological journey into the dynamics of spatial production and the dissemination of hegemony, drawing on the foundational theories of Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci. By integrating Lefebvre's insights on the social production of space with Foucault's examination of disciplinary mechanisms and Gramsci's analysis of cultural hegemony, this study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding how space and power are interwoven in

society. The application of these theories to the settings of selected films provides a nuanced exploration of how spatial dynamics and hegemonic practices are represented and perpetuated in different contexts. Through this analysis, the project aims to reveal the subtle ways in which space and power interact to shape social relations, behaviors, and perceptions, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex mechanisms that sustain societal order and control.

CHAPTER 3

The Production of Space and Hegemony in *Aaraam Thampuran*

The Malayalam audience will never forget ‘Jagannadhan Thampuran of Kanimangalam Kovilakam.’ Played by Malayalam’s evergreen superstar Mohanlal, Jagannadhan remains a cultural icon for film buffs of Kerala. Both then and now, the movie is celebrated for its hypermasculine protagonist, his actions, his body language, and especially his dialogues. Numerous Malayalam films follow a similar plotline featuring such a commanding lead character, and they continue to be celebrated over time. Mohanlal has delivered many blockbusters in this genre, with each character he portrays becoming immensely popular. For instance, Mangalassery Neelakandan in *Devasuram* (1993), Mangalassery Karthikeyan in *Ravanaprabhu* (2001), and Poovalli Induchoodan in *Narasimham* (2000) are some of the most iconic characters in Malayalam cinema.

Although there are many popular Malayalam movies from the 1990s to 2010 that do not follow this specific plotline and are still celebrated, the characters and their names did not achieve the same iconic status as Neelakandan, Induchoodan, and others. This raises the question of why these particular characters garnered more fame than the films themselves. A hidden or sometimes overt thread ties all of these characters together: they are all upper-caste Hindu males, upper class, wealthy, and inhabiting palatial dwellings in their villages. In these films, the Hindu male protagonist is a leader who enjoys immense popularity among the masses and manipulates public sentiment through affective politics. This is well connected to R. W. Connell’s theory of Hegemonic Masculinity in which he states that “the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are always the most

powerful people. They may be exemplars, such as film actors, or even fantasy figures, such as film characters”. Thus, Mohanlal’s fame continuous through this act of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 77).

For a generation of middle-class individuals feeling stymied by the humongous structures of capitalism and the values of neoliberalism that demanded individuals to be selfish, self-centered, and competitive, the desire for a leader who is all-powerful and father-like becomes a comforting solution and a possible future for the nation and its people. This leader figure’s machismo combines a deeper bullying, masculine set of performances with a paternalistic dominance that claims to protect their ‘own’ people. This new male identity is distinctly hypermasculine, arrogant, bellicose, and with a body and mind disciplined to perfection. (Gopinath, 156).

Jagannadhan, the character from *Aaram Thampuran*, epitomizes this archetype, embodying the same qualities and serving as a figure of strength and protection for his people.

The story follows Jagannadhan (Mohanlal), a stranger who comes to a village named Kanimangalam and shifts the balance of power there, eventually coming to be known as “Aaram Thampuran,” or the Sixth Lord. The movie revolves around the fight between two Kshatriya families: the Kolappulli and the Kanimangalam. People associated with the Kanimangalam palace in the movie are considered inclined towards good, while those associated with the Kolappulli are portrayed as leaning towards the demonic side. The rest of the characters in the movie are the poor, vulnerable villagers and a few administrative officers who are associated with the Kanimangalam palace, as well as the brutal henchmen of the Kolappulli family. The villagers on the screen serve to

strengthen the value of the good Thampuran. *Aaraam Thampuran* is proclaimed as one of the must-watch movies of Mohanlal and is considered an all-time blockbuster in Malayalam cinema.

Out of the many forms of hegemony he possesses, including his high caste, wealth, and education, which one makes Jagannadhan more strong and powerful both within the plot and among the Malayalam audience? Space. Space becomes the ultimate reason for his supremacy. Jagannadhan cannot exist without Kanimangalam, just like Poovalli Induchoodan and Mangalassery Neelakandan. Their names are identified with their spaces, and the names of these spaces often precede their own. In *Aaraam Thampuran*, the imaginary village of Kanimangalam becomes his powerful identity.

In integrating Henri Lefebvre's concepts into the analysis of the film *Aaraam Thampuran*, we can draw parallels between Lefebvre's idea of the state producing a space of homogeneous society and the way the film constructs the space around Jagannadhan and Kanimangalam. "Each state claims to produce a space wherein something is accomplished- a space, even, where something is brought to perfection: namely, a unified and hence homogeneous society. In fact, and in practice, what state and political action institutes, and consolidates by every available means, is a balance of power between classes and fractions of classes, as between the spaces they occupy"(Lefebvre, 281). Kanimangalam mansion functions as a microcosm of the state, where the power dynamics and class hierarchies are clearly delineated and maintained. The village and mansion are depicted as idealized spaces where traditional values and hierarchies are upheld. This idealized representation serves to mask the underlying power imbalances and the exclusionary practices based on caste and class. The villagers' unquestioning

acceptance of Jagannadhan's leadership reflects the internalization of these hegemonic values, presenting an outwardly homogeneous society that conceals the power structures at play.

Lefebvre argues that the state produces a space to ensure the interests of certain classes are imposed on society. In *Aaram Thampuran*, the Kanimangalam mansion embodies this concept. The mansion, as the central space, becomes a symbol of Brahminical and upper-caste hegemony. The character of Jagannadhan is constructed within this space to reflect and reinforce these power dynamics. The mansion, and by extension the village of Kanimangalam, becomes the physical and symbolic territory where Jagannadhan's authority is absolute, much like a state enforcing its dominion.

Lefebvre describes the state as a centralized power that sets itself above other powers and eliminates them. Kanimangalam, under Jagannadhan's leadership, becomes such a space. His authority is unchallenged within the village, and he effectively eliminates any opposition, particularly from the Kolappulli family. This mirrors the state's role in consolidating power and suppressing dissent to maintain a unified front.

Director Shaji Kailas and writer Ranjith produced spaces for the Brahmin, hypermasculine, artistic, and educated Jagannadhan, reflecting the hegemonic order prevalent in society. Jagannadhan is considered the embodiment of masculinity and a godlike figure. This need for a godlike figure produced directly from their 'common sense'. Common sense as Antonio Gramsci points out is the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become "common" in any given epoch (Gramsci, 1996).

He is depicted as a protector for everyone, including his friends and the villagers of Kanimangalam. In Bangalore city, he becomes the saviour of his friend, helping him in business without expecting anything in return, speaking like a wise person who proclaims he doesn't need money and doesn't like to discuss financial matters. He even describes himself as a person who knows everything, hence the name Jagannadhan, which means the saviour or protector of the world. He is portrayed as a well-travelled individual with extensive worldly knowledge. Bangalore city is portrayed as place where Jagannadhan rules over everyone and nothing is impossible with him.

When it comes to the Hindu Brahmin Jagannadhan, the idyllic village of Kanimangalam was crafted to showcase his upper caste, class, and artistic identity. Kanimangalam is produced in a way that mirrors and amplifies Jagannadhan's greatness. The people of Kanimangalam are depicted as large-hearted and virtuous, all eagerly awaiting a leader to conduct the *ulsavam* (annual festival) of their village temple. This beautiful village, with its traditional values, good-hearted people, and grand mansion, serves as a tool to emphasize Jagannadhan's high caste identity. On the other side, the people associated with Kolappulli Appan, the antagonist, are portrayed as leaning towards the demonic side. The antagonist for the Brahmin Jagannadhan is also from an upper caste and class and owns a huge mansion. Thus, the space around Jagannadhan is lovely, traditional, and aristocratic, especially in contrast with the antagonist, who, despite being from a similar upper caste and class, embodies negative traits.

It is evident that the directors of these films did not adopt real places as spaces for the characters; rather, they created imaginary villages and gave them elite-sounding names. This can be viewed as an attempt by filmmakers to produce an ideal space around

the character so that the character becomes ideal. Kanimangalam's people and the oneness they maintain exemplify this, as everyone believes their lives will improve only once the temple's *ulsavam*, stopped for 16 years by Appan Thamburan, is conducted again. Perhaps, these imaginary spaces contribute to the movies' success, as audiences often crave the ideal environments crafted by dominant powers to discipline and shape societal perceptions.

The movie gives significant importance to space, starting with a scene that showcases the serene Kanimangalam village accompanied by peaceful music. The next scene transitions to the Kanimangalam Kovilakam, where another piece of music emphasizing traditionality plays. This scene focuses on the grand *padippura* (grand entrance) of the house and then the traditional front door, highlighting the mansion's richness and the goodness that surrounds it. The kovilakam's name being the same as the village underscores its importance, as the mansion becomes a major identifier for the villagers, who take pride in calling themselves Kanimangalam people.

The following scene shifts to another Kovilakam, the mansion of Appan Thampuraan, the antagonist. This mansion is also grand, but the accompanying background music is different, evoking a sense of conflict or violence. In the front yard, people are practicing *Kalaripayattu*, an Indian martial art originally developed for warriors in battle. This juxtaposition creates two distinct introductions to the homes: one peaceful and the other inclined toward violence. However, both share similarities in terms of wealth and traditionality, reinforcing their status as significant spaces within the narrative.

“We are speaking of a space where centralized power sets itself above other power and eliminates it; where a self-proclaimed ‘sovereign’ nation pushes aside any other nationality, often crushing it in the process; where a state religion bars all other religions and where a class in power claims to have suppressed all class differences.” (Lefebvre 281).

Just as a state may suppress other nationalities or religions, Kanimangalam under Jagannadhan’s rule suppresses any elements that threaten its homogeneous image. The narrative constructs Jagannadhan as a sovereign figure whose decisions and actions are beyond reproach. This sovereignty is reinforced through the exclusionary practices at the mansion’s *padippura*, which acts as a gatekeeper to preserve the purity and sanctity of the space, mirroring the state’s suppression of divergent elements to maintain its authority.

The *padippura*, or traditional gateway, is a significant element in the analysis of space in *Aaraam Thampuran*. Both the Kanimangalam and Kolappulli mansions feature prominent *padippuras*, which serve as symbolic thresholds of power, class, and caste. The film starts with a scene at the *padippura* of the Kolappulli Kovilakam, where the villagers of Kanimangalam wait to visit Appan Thampuran to request permission to conduct the *ulsavam*, a temple festival halted for 16 years due to Appan’s personal vendetta. The elder of the Kolappulli family instructs the villagers to remain outside the *padippura*, deeming them unfit to enter based on their caste, wealth, and class. This scene establishes the *padippura* as a gatekeeper of social hierarchies, reinforcing the exclusionary practices of the upper caste.

The villagers accept this exclusion without question, demonstrating the deep-rooted acceptance of caste hierarchies. When they return to request Appan Thampuran’s

permission again, they willingly stand outside the *padippura*, reinforcing their subservient position. This exclusion is particularly directed towards Hindu visitors, who, despite being upper caste, are not from the same Kshatriya community as Appan Thampuran. The film further emphasizes this through a scene where Baapootty, a Muslim friend of Jagannadhan, accompanies him to visit Appan Thampuran and chooses to stay outside the *padippura*. His mockingly stated reason—to avoid disrupting the home's purity—highlights the hypocrisy of Appan Thampuran's caste-based exclusion. In contrast, the film portrays Jagannadhan as an inclusive leader, allowing friends of all castes, classes, and religions to enter his *padippura* and mansion.

However, despite this portrayal, Jagannadhan is not entirely free from the hegemonic order. This is evident in a scene involving Unnimaya, Jagannadhan's love interest and a member of the Kshatriya caste, who refuses to let certain women enter the *padippura* because they are known for their affairs with many men. Unnimaya's denial of entry is depicted as a defense of the mansion's purity, reinforcing her own virtue and upper-caste status. This scene underscores the persistence of caste-based purity and exclusion, even within a seemingly progressive framework. Thus, the *padippura*, as a space, supports and perpetuates the existing hegemonic order, illustrating the complexities and contradictions in the representation of social hierarchies in the film.

The significance of the *padippura* extends beyond a mere architectural feature; it becomes a narrative device that highlights the power dynamics and social stratification within the story. By showing who is allowed to pass through this gateway and who is not, the film reinforces the idea that space and access to it are crucial in defining one's social standing and authority. The contrasting depictions of the *padippura* at the Kanimangalam

and Kolappulli mansions serve to underscore the differences between the protagonist and the antagonist, while also revealing the underlying social structures that both characters navigate.

Additionally, the *padippura* is an ideal subject for studying Foucault's concept of disciplinary spaces.

A whole problematic then develops: that of an architecture that is no longer built simply to be seen (as with the ostentation of palaces), or to observe the external space (the geometry of fortresses), but to permit an internal, articulated and detailed control –to render visible those who are inside it; in more general terms, an architecture that would operate to transform individuals: to act on those it shelters, to provide a hold on their conduct, to carry the effects of power right to them, to make it possible to know them, to alter them. (Foucault 172).

Thus, in *Aaraam Thampuran*, the *padippura* is not merely an architectural element designed to showcase the mansion's richness or elegance; it serves a far more critical function of controlling and monitoring others by determining who can enter and who cannot. This traditional gateway acts as a gatekeeper of power, class, and caste, enforcing social hierarchies and exclusionary practices. By dictating access, the *padippura* reinforces the authority of the upper caste and maintains the existing social order. It operates as a tool of internal, articulated control, making visible those within its boundaries and regulating their behavior, in line with Foucault's concept of architecture used to exert power and influence over individuals.

Unnimaya is a carefully constructed character designed to enhance Jagannadhan's stature and highlight his virtues. Described as a good girl with desirable feminine traits, obedient, and talented, Unnimaya is an idealized female figure in the narrative. Although she is an orphan, the film avoids portraying her as a woman of unknown caste. Despite the mystery surrounding her mother's identity, the narrative subtly establishes Unnimaya's upper-caste lineage through small conversations and scenes. It is revealed that she is the daughter of Dathan Thampuran, whose house was the Kanimangalam Kovilakam. This connection ensures that Unnimaya is perceived as a legitimate and rightful descendant of the Kovilakam, making her an appropriate match for Jagannadhan. The film strategically includes this detail to affirm her suitability as Jagannadhan's partner, thereby reinforcing the hero's greatness and the importance of maintaining an upper-caste lineage for his future generations.

Unnimaya's role as a produced space for Jagannadhan is evident in her attributes and actions throughout the film. She is depicted as a proficient singer, a skill traditionally associated with upper-caste individuals, which complements Jagannadhan's own talent in traditional Hindu music. This musical compatibility is showcased in a scene where Jagannadhan impresses his peers with his singing, underscoring his upper-caste identity. Additionally, Unnimaya's virtue and her role as the protector of Jagannadhan's virtue and space are highlighted in a scene where she refuses entry to women of a lower class into the Kanimangalam Kovilakam. This act is portrayed as a defense of the sanctity and purity of the space associated with Jagannadhan. Furthermore, Jagannadhan's rejection of a marriage proposal from Nayanthara, a highly educated, beautiful, smart, and wealthy friend who knows him well, in favour of Unnimaya, underscores his preference for

traditional femininity and upper-caste status. Unnimaya, with her Kshatriya heritage, is presented as a more suitable partner for Jagannadhan, reinforcing the film's theme of preserving upper-caste purity and traditional values. Therefore, Unnimaya is a socially produced space for Jagannadhan to disseminate hegemony.

In conclusion, *Aaram Thampuran* meticulously crafts the character of Jagannadhan as a godlike figure, epitomizing the ideal Brahmin savior within the traditional Hindu societal hierarchy. His role transcends merely conducting the *ulsavam*; he is portrayed as the ultimate protector of Kanimangalam, a figure eagerly awaited by the villagers to restore their cultural and spiritual sanctity. This is evident when he declares his love for Unnimaya, not solely out of affection but as a means to protect a vulnerable orphan, showcasing his paternalistic benevolence. The space surrounding Jagannadhan is carefully constructed to reinforce his hegemonic status. He is supported by influential figures such as high-level government servants, and his respect among elders is underscored by his middle-aged peers. The presence of high-caste Unnimaya and Krishna Varma Thampuran within his home further accentuates his Brahmin identity, often highlighted by the background mantras that accompany his scenes. By portraying Jagannadhan as the saviour of the vulnerable masses, the film reinforces the notion of Brahminical supremacy and perpetuates the accepted societal hierarchy. The filmmakers have produced a space for the hypermasculine, Brahmin Jagannadhan that disseminates hegemony, which he actively reproduces through his social actions and protective role, thereby supporting and maintaining the existing hegemonic order.

CHAPTER 4

Spatial Hegemony and Identity in *Kumbalangi Nights*

The production of spaces in society is not random but rather a thoughtful act composed by urban planners and architects. These plans carefully allocate individuals to specific spaces based on factors such as class, caste, and financial status. Henry Lefebvre delves into this phenomenon in his book, *Production of Space*.

“Important aspect of spaces of this kind is their increasingly pronounced visual character. They are made with the visible in mind: the visibility of people and things, of spaces and of whatever is contained by them” (Lefebvre75)

Kumbalangi Nights emerged as a trendsetter in Malayalam cinema, setting new vagues and appealing to audience with its portrayal of life in the quaint village of Kumbalangi set along the backwaters of Kerala. Director Madhu C. Narayanan constructed the space for the characters in *Kumbalangi Nights* with thorough attention to the deep-rooted societal ideologies and hegemonic order prevalent in society and Malayalam cinema. This movie provides an excellent case study for examining the production of space in society, particularly in how it shapes individuals’ living environments based on their social status. The film skillfully narrates the lives of two families, each coping with its own set of challenges.

Within any given space, there exist multiple spaces well-defined by societal ideologies, class distinctions, and other criteria, mirroring the various experiences and identities of individuals. These varied spaces within a single environment influence the lived experiences of those occupying them. Individuals within a shared space may inhabit

distinct social spheres based on their status, beliefs, and affiliations, underlining the deep interaction between personal identity and societal constructs. In *Kumbalangi Nights*, there are two families living in the village of Kumbalangi. Despite residing nearby in the islets of Kumbalangi, the living spaces of the two families represent starkly different societal constructs. The first family with a set of half-brothers—Saji, Bonny, Bobby, and Franky, played by the actors Soubin Shahir, Sreenath Bhasi, Shane Nigam, and Matthew Thomas respectively—represents the Christian fishermen community and the lower class. Their lives are marked by aimlessness and disorderliness emanating from lack of parental guidance, with their father figure deceased and their mother absent, having joined a religious congregation. Their living space and immediate environ reflect the brothers' class and economic status, denoting their struggles within the larger context of societal norms and expectations. In contrast, Simi's family, comprising her mother, and younger sister Baby Mol, and Simi's husband Shammy, belong to the Hindu middle class and they represent the 'perfect' family system created by hegemonic ideals.

Thus, Simi's family is identified as "well-organized" by societal standards, complete with a mother figure, married daughter, and husband, who assumes patriarchal protective authority in the absence of a father figure. Their 'valid' family occupy the sanitized and orderly family space of a middle-class Malayali. On the contrary, Saji and his brothers, inhabit a secluded island home devoid of neighbors, indicating their alienation from mainstream society. While Simi's family symbolizes the Hindu-middle class "ideal" with a structured family unit and societal approval, the "dysfunctional" dynamics of Saji's 'invalid' family challenge conventional norms. This disparity in living spaces underscores how societal hegemony constructs and perpetuates notions of ideal

family structures and societal roles, thereby strengthening existing power dynamics and class distinctions.

The environment in which individual lives not only shapes their identity but is also influenced by their thoughts and actions, leading to a continuous production of space. As Lefebvre suggests,

“(Social) space is a (social) product. The space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and domination, of power” (Lefebvre 26).

In *Kumbalangi Nights* too, the space produced for the characters becomes a tool to shape their thoughts and actions. Saji’s house serves as the main space for Saji and his family, reproducing their social and economic precarity. Their home is depicted as incomplete, disorderly, and lacking doors. The absence of a front door indicates their vulnerability, economic situation and casts them as marginalized members of society. Characters like Franky, Saji, Bobby, and Boney actively contribute to the shaping of their surroundings through their interactions and adherence to societal norms and measurements. Surrendering to societal ideologies, they unconsciously become instruments in disseminating and reinforcing the prevailing constructs within their lived spaces.

The film, in a sense, progresses through Franky, and he is the first character shown whose thoughts and actions are controlled by the space he occupies. In the opening scene of the movie, Franky shines on the football school playground, earning praise for his skills and securing a scholarship. However, when his friends propose to

visit his home for vacation, he concocts a tale about his family's illness to avoid the invitation. Franky's discomfort with his home and his lie to his friends illustrate the internalization of dominant ideologies about class and social status. In the subsequent scene, as Franky returns home, he grapples with feelings of shame regarding his living conditions, highlighting the societal pressures and constructed ideals that influence his perception. Franky later refers to his home as a "hell" due to constant fighting among the brothers and their lack of effort in seeking employment. He calls his house "the worst house in the Panchayat" indicating his perception of the home's condition relative to others in the area. This characterization reflects how the actions of individuals like Bobby and Saji underwrite the unpleasant atmosphere of the home. Furthermore, their behavior is influenced by the challenging living conditions they experience.

Like Franky, each character in the film perceives their space through a lens shaped by their understanding of the world around them and this in turn rules their thought and action. During a pivotal scene where Bobby and Saji visit Shammy to seek Babymol's hand in marriage, Shammy and his colleague at the barber shop belittle them by ridiculing their living conditions, financial instability, and lack of employment. Their focus on Bobby and Saji's living space is particularly noteworthy, as they use it to diminish the brothers' worth. Shammy and his friend disparage the brothers' home as a place where people discard leftovers, supporting negative stereotypes associated with their background. This instance exemplifies how societal perceptions of individuals are influenced by the spaces they inhabit, as the constructed image of their living space becomes a tool for forming opinions and marginalizing them. Moreover, Bobby and Saji's silence in response to Shammy's insulting remarks underscores how space can be

wielded as a means of control, domination, and power, suppressing their voices and perpetuating societal inequalities.

Bobby takes a similar yet different perception of his space. His perception of his space can be seen as an example of individuals willingly and unconsciously giving their consent to the dominant class. As put forward by Gramsci, “The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the Population to the general direction imposed on social life by the Dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the Prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys Because of its position and function in the world of production” (Gramsci, 145). Bobby, after getting ridiculed by Shummy and his friend for their living condition especially their space of living starts to perceive their space as a bad one, unfit for building a decent family with Bay Mol. Bobby considers leaving their place in order to marry Babymol. Then he goes to work in a fish factory but later leaves as he cannot find satisfaction in working there and tells Babymol that “we shouldn’t get married as our family set up do not match and my own set up is wrong”. Thus, Bobby’s thought of his space as ‘wrong’ leads to the action of trying to convince Baby Mol to rethink their decision to get married, even though he knows that Baby Mol wouldn’t mind his living conditions. This action by Bobby is his ‘consent’ to the dominant class to maintain the existing hegemony.

This portrayal aligns with the notion of hegemony, as it highlights how dominant societal ideologies dictate and normalize certain family structures while marginalizing others. The dysfunctional dynamics within Saji and Bobby’s family can be seen as a reflection of their marginalized status within society. By deviating from the hegemonic ideal of a well-structured family, the film sheds light on the complexities and realities of

familial relationships in marginalized communities. Furthermore, when Murugan's wife expresses her intention to leave Bobby's home, citing a belief that wherever she stays, the place becomes destroyed or unfit for living, Bobby's response shows his acceptance of the negative perceptions associated with his living space. He dismissively and humorously acknowledges the dilapidated state of their home, remarking that "there is nothing left here to be destroyed," and characterizes it as a place where people discard the unwanted, whether it be things or people.

Saji's perception of their space diverges notably from Bobby's, as he endeavors to view their home in a more positive light regardless of societal judgments. When Shammy belittles their living conditions by labeling their space as a site for discarding, Saji responds differently compared to Bobby's silence. Instead of acquiescing to Shammy's critique, Saji attempts to refute it by asserting that their home has improved over time and is now a suitable living environment. However, Saji's efforts to defend their space also reveal his adherence to societal ideologies, as he ultimately consoles Bobby by suggesting alternative job prospects, albeit they eventually revert to fishing for their livelihood. This nuanced response shows Saji's complex relationship with his living environment, oscillating between defiance of societal judgments and adopted acceptance of their marginalized status within hegemonic structures.

The perception of space by a foreign visitor, such as the girl Bonny dates, offers a contrasting viewpoint to that of the residents like Franky, Bobby, Saji, and Bonny. Upon visiting their home, she expresses admiration, describing it as "such a beautiful house." This disparity in perception highlights how outsiders with different ideologies may view the space differently than those who inhabit it, illustrating the subjective nature of space

within societal constructs. The foreign visitor's positive interpretation of the home highlights the notion that the space, considered undesirable by the residents, is perceived differently within the broader social context, exemplifying space as a social product shaped by diverse perspectives.

The portrayal of the fight between Bobby and Saji serves as another notable instance illustrating the film's exploration of familial dynamics and societal perceptions. It offers interesting insights into the representation of a "disorganized" family structure within the film. Their repeated fights and disagreements not only depict familial discord but also suggest a lack of cohesion and harmony within the household. From a societal perspective, the disarray within the family can be interpreted as a deviation from the normative family structure propagated by hegemonic ideals. In contrast to the idealized portrayal of families in mainstream media, where unity and stability are emphasized, the discord within Saji and Bobby's family challenges these conventional norms.

The depiction of the characters' space extends beyond their home to include the various places they frequently visit, including their interactions with friends and the larger background. These settings together contribute to the picture of their life within the societal structure. Bobby's friendship with his sole friend, Prasanth, who shares a similar lower middle-class background, stresses their aimless existence as they gallivant on their bikes and relax at the local shore, avoiding job opportunities. Although Prasanth's home is not shown in the film, his mention of its poor condition lines up with general perceptions of a disorganized youth. Meanwhile, Saji depends on Murugan, a Tamil individual, for support, opting not to work and spending time only with him, showing their downgraded status. Bonny, separated from Saji and Bobby, stays with a dance

troupe, distancing himself from his brothers' company. Their infrequent gatherings occur at a bar, where they maintain separate circles of friends, with Bobby and Saji occasionally engaging in scuffling.

The juxtaposition of scenes depicting the contrasting living spaces of Saji and Simmi serves to highlight the stark disparities in societal standards of living. As viewers observe the disorganized and chaotic environment of Saji's space followed by the orderly and pristine setting of Simmi's home, they are confronted with the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within society. This disparity is further underscored by the dining practices in each household. The dining table at Simi's house exemplifies Foucault's concept of disciplinary spaces, where architecture extends beyond its functional or decorative purposes to serve as a tool for control and influence.

At Simi's house, the well-set dining table is a central feature where everyone sits together, with Shammy, the patriarchal figure, occupying the head seat. This seating arrangement is not merely a reflection of cultural norms but a deliberate choice by Shammy to assert his dominance and authority over the household. In Indian society, the head of the table is traditionally reserved for the male figure, symbolizing his role as the dominant, godlike protector who oversees and maintains the family's status. By taking this seat, Shammy displaces the elder mother figure to a corner, reinforcing his control over the family dynamics. This act is more than just a matter of seating; it exemplifies how space within the home is structured to enable surveillance and regulation of behavior. Shammy's position allows him to observe everyone and their conversations, subtly controlling and influencing their actions and interactions. Thus, the dining table, and the house as a whole, embody Foucault's idea of architecture that operates to permit

internal, articulated, and detailed control. The space is designed to render visible those inside it, facilitating surveillance and enabling Shammai to exert power over the family members. In this way, the dining table and the home serve as tools of disciplinary power, aligning with Foucault's notion that architecture can be used to monitor, regulate, and change the behavior of people within it.

In contrast, at Saji's place, each person eats when and where they please, reflecting the absence of a structured space and the familial practice of eating together. This scene transition effectively underscores the hegemonic norms and expectations that shape our perceptions of individuals and their living conditions. Viewers, as members of a hegemonic society, are implicitly guided to measure the characters and their spaces against the dominant yardstick of societal success and acceptability. By presenting these contrasting spaces in succession, the filmmakers prompt viewers to critically examine their own biases and assumptions about social class, privilege, and worth. The juxtaposition challenges viewers to question the legitimacy of hegemonic standards and to recognize the inherent injustice in the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within society.

Our actions have the power to structure the social spaces we inhabit, and the social spaces we inhabit have the power to structure our actions. This is visualized in one of the scenes in *Kumbalangi Nights*. In a light-hearted exchange, Babymol jestingly questions Bobby, her lover, and his friend about their activities as they head to the local shore in Kumbalangi. She humorously asks if they are indulging in illicit drugs, immediately after they mention their destination. This casual inquiry sheds light on how individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds perceive spaces and people from

lower-class backgrounds without proper understanding. Baby, representing the Hindu middle-class family, jokes about this stereotype. Interestingly, Bobby and his friend, both from a lower-middle-class background, reciprocate with a joke, without showing any offense or aggression, implying their acceptance of societal stereotypes associated with their background. This interaction subtly underscores society's tendency to associate certain behaviors with specific spaces and socioeconomic statuses, even without concrete evidence.

Another incident involves Saji, Bobby's brother, accusing him of drug use during a heated argument. This accusation, made in anger, serves as another example of prejudiced perceptions based on appearance and background. Saji, belonging to the same socioeconomic background as Bobby, unwittingly perpetuates societal biases by aligning with dominant class narratives that stereotype the subaltern as engaging in undesirable behaviors. The perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices within social spaces reflects the broader dynamics of hegemony, wherein dominant ideologies shape perceptions and behaviors, ultimately maintaining existing power structures and societal inequalities.

The production of space for the characters in *Kumbalangi Nights* extends beyond the physical environment, with Saji's non-heteronormative family also serving as a masterfully constructed space for their 'invalid' lives. Their family, lacking female figures, is viewed by society as not normal. In the film, there is an emotional moment when Baby Mol jokingly asks Bobby, "How many fathers and mothers do you have?" This occurs as Bobby explains his complex family background, where Saji's father married Bonny's mother after Saji's mother passed away, resulting in Saji and Bonny not being biologically connected, while Bobby and Franky are the children of Saji's father

and Bonny's mother. Baby Mol's question, although intended as a light-hearted jest, unintentionally touches on Bobby's sensitivity about his family's unconventional structure, making him sad.

Kelly Oliver, an American philosopher, in one of her journals, *Antigone's Ghost: Undoing Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, which talks about family and contemporary family values, gives the best explanation for Baby Mol raising such a question.

"the only family that is valued is the heteronormative family, and any alternative to the heterosexual nuclear family is seen as a threat to the family and, as a consequence, a threat to society" (Oliver 86).

Therefore, the interaction highlights the leading societal ideology of the nuclear family, which idealizes a perfect family structure with a protective father figure, a homemaker mother figure, and their children. Anything deviating from this ideal, such as Bobby's family lacking consistent parental figures, is often viewed as a deviation from the norm. Baby Mol's question, despite being made in jest, is underpinned by these deeply ingrained societal expectations. Her seemingly innocent joke reflects the broader societal biases that classify families like Bobby's as incomplete or dysfunctional. This scene underscores how hegemonic ideals of family structures influence perceptions and interactions, reinforcing the notion that spaces and familial setups diverging from the nuclear family model are considered inferior or abnormal. Thus, the space around Bobby and his brothers is produced and perceived in a way that underscores their deviation from societal norms, perpetuating their marginalization.

In conclusion, Madhu C. Narayanan's *Kumbalangi Nights* presents the dissemination of hegemony in society through the social production of space. Analyzing the various spaces in the film by employing Henry Lefebvre's ideas on the social production of space, we understand that physical space is inseparable from hegemony. By applying Gramsci's concept of 'consent,' it becomes evident how dominant classes marginalize certain spaces and the people related to them without coercion. Furthermore, Foucault's notion of disciplinary spaces supports the claim that physical space also becomes a tool to control human action, thus maintaining hegemony.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The aim of this project was to examine the intersection of space and hegemony in Malayalam cinema of pre-2015 and post-2015 periods through an in-depth analysis of two films, *Aaraam Thamburan* and *Kumbalangi Nights*. By studying two movies from different timelines, the project explores the differences in the production of space for heroes in these periods. The project analyzes the various spaces in the two films to trace how hegemony disseminates through each.

The introductory chapter outlines the project's central theme: the production of space and its role in shaping identity of the subjects and the construction and maintenance of hegemony. It sets the stage for the analysis by introducing the significance of space in social and cultural contexts and explains why *Aaraam Thampuran* and *Kumbalangi Nights* were chosen as case studies. This chapter also presents the research questions and objectives, emphasizing the need to understand how Malayalam cinema portrays and influences societal norms and power relations.

The second chapter details the methodological approach used in the project. It describes the qualitative research methods employed, including textual analysis of the films and critical discourse analysis to interpret the cinematic portrayal of space and identity. The chapter also explains how Lefebvre's concept of the production of space, Gramsci's theory of hegemony, and Foucault's idea of disciplinary spaces are applied to analyze the films. The methodology ensures a comprehensive examination of the films'

narratives, characters, and settings to uncover the underlying social and ideological constructs.

In the third chapter, the film *Aaraam Thampuran* is analyzed to explore its depiction of spatial hegemony and identity. The film's narrative centers on the restoration of a feudal lord's power and the reclaiming of his ancestral mansion. The analysis highlights how the film reinforces traditional power structures and social hierarchies through its portrayal of space. The mansion and its surroundings are depicted as symbols of authority, heritage, and dominance. The chapter examines how the film constructs a spatial narrative that legitimizes the feudal lord's control over the village and its inhabitants.

The third chapter provides a detailed analysis of *Kumbalangi Nights*, focusing on its portrayal of two contrasting families and their living spaces. The film presents the lives of the marginalized Christian fishermen brothers and the middle-class Hindu family. The analysis delves into how the characters' living environments and social interactions highlight class distinctions, power dynamics, and the internalization of hegemonic norms. The chapter discusses key scenes to illustrate how space influences identity and behavior, reinforcing Lefebvre's, Gramsci's, and Foucault's theories. The portrayal of the disorganized, marginalized family versus the orderly, idealized family structure serves as a critique of societal expectations and the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The research was conducted primarily through cinematic analysis of the films *Aaraam Thamburan* and *Kumbalangi Nights* on the basis of the inferences from reading

theories on space and hegemony. Both films give significant roles to space, making it an essential aspect of the characters' identities.

The research establishes that space and hegemony are inherently connected, with space being a carefully planned construct that reinforces existing hegemonic orders. It reveals that the spaces occupied by elites are often genuinely superior to those of marginalized communities, who frequently live in secluded areas, thereby perpetuating societal hierarchies. Additionally, the research identifies that the spaces we inhabit are continuously shaped by our actions, and in turn, these spaces shape our identities and behaviors, highlighting the dynamic and reciprocal nature of space production.

The comparison between *Aaraam Thamburan* and *Kumbalangi Nights* reveals how space and hegemony are portrayed and disseminated. Jagannadhan's power in *Aaraam Thamburan* is deeply rooted in his commanding space, a grand mansion symbolizing his dominance and the societal order that upholds elite status. This is epitomized by the *padippura* (grand entrance) of his mansion, which signifies elegance, discipline, and control. Conversely, Saji and his family's marginalized status in *Kumbalangi Nights* is intrinsically tied to their dilapidated home, reflecting their societal exclusion and vulnerability, underscored by the absence of a door, indicating an open, unprotected space. Jagannadhan's hypermasculine persona perfectly fits his space, needing no female presence except for Unnimaya, whom he later decides to marry. In contrast, Saji's space is initially devoid of women, and the narrative centers on their efforts to bring female presence and stability into their home, highlighting their struggle for acceptance and normalcy.

The body language and dialogues further distinguish the characters and their spaces. Jagannadhan's active and strong body language, coupled with his commanding dialogues, emphasizes his singular hero status and the strength derived from his space. In contrast, Saji and his family exhibit passive and subordinate body language, with loose and natural conversations reflecting their fragmented, marginalized existence. The elite, upper-caste, and educated characters in *Aaraam Thamburan* inhabit pure, sanitized spaces that mask power imbalances, while *Kumbalangi Nights* portrays real, natural environments of a lower-middle-class community, exposing the raw, lived experiences and inherent struggles of marginalized individuals. This realistic depiction in *Kumbalangi Nights* set a new trend, shifting from idealized to authentic representations of space and identity.

Moreover, both films produce space according to the prevailing hegemony. *Aaraam Thamburan* crafts an imaginary, idyllic village with a space that reinforces the hegemonic order through its well-planned mansion and elite characters. Similarly, *Kumbalangi Nights* follows the existing hegemonic order by depicting real, marginalized spaces for its characters in an authentic village setting. However, *Kumbalangi Nights* performs a counter-hegemonic act by making these marginalized characters the heroes of the story. Director Madhu C. Narayanan includes these marginalized spaces and characters, highlighting that their lives and spaces are equally important and filled with love and harmony. Despite their different approaches, both films illustrate how space is not randomly constructed but is a deliberate process that shapes and is shaped by the characters, reinforcing existing societal constructs and hierarchies while also offering potential for inclusivity and recognition of marginalized experiences.

The project perceives films as powerful tools for understanding and analyzing societal structures and cultural narratives. They offer a visual and emotional medium through which complex issues such as space, identity, and hegemony can be explored and conveyed to a broad audience. Through cinematic techniques, filmmakers can highlight social inequalities, challenge prevailing norms, and inspire critical reflection, making films an invaluable resource for both academic study and societal change.

This research project opens avenues for further study; however, due to the constraints of being a postgraduate dissertation, these opportunities are deferred for future exploration.

Madhu C. Narayanan and other new filmmakers of the post-2015 era are bringing significant change by highlighting how the production of space supports prevailing hegemony. They are urging society to reflect on the spaces we inhabit and how they contribute to the marginalization of certain groups. This shift aligns with the transformative vision that Lefebvre dreamed of, an appropriate production of space that negates hegemony.

“‘Change life!’ ‘Change society!’ These precepts mean nothing without the production of an appropriate space” (Lefebvre, 59).

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