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Polyvocality in Kerala Café: Through a Sociological Looking-glass

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Abstract:

This paper looks at the multiple voices of Malayalee (belonging to the southern Indian state of Kerala) consciousness as observed in the film 'Kerala Café' (2009), an anthology of 10 short films by 10 different directors, on the common theme of 'journeys'. The culture sensible voices in each of them underlie the contemporary face and phase of Malayalam film industry (Mollywood), which has always been known for its story-centric filmmaking inspired from the psyche of its own people. In this paper, each of those films are reviewed and analyzed for its sociological significance, exploring in the process what it takes to be a native of Kerala, the larger motives and circumstances that influence the lifestyle, habits and attitude of the people here. Though the paper doesn't claim to define the characteristics of an average Kerala-born individual, surely it is an attempt at deeply probing the driving factors of life in Kerala, as reflected in the film. More than a social critique, it is intended as a social and psychological inspection, going by the belief that cinema can be a mirror to society.

Keywords: Malayalee, Kerala Café

1. Introduction

Story-telling or narration is an age-old process whereby men make themselves intelligible to other beings. It brings an order and direction by focusing on issues of meaning. According to Barry and Elmes, narration emphasizes the simultaneous presence of multiple, interlinked realities, and is thus well positioned for capturing diversity and complexity present at a situation (Robin, 2011). It is in collective story-telling systems, where multiple stories and realities come in, that the idea of many voices or polyvocality exists. It can result in a text with more than one story teller and/or in which more than one story teller interacts with each other during the performance of the story, such as in *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoyevsky or *Ladies' Coupe* by Anitha Nair (Robin, 2011). According to Bakhtin, texts may contain many social languages about the same topical domain (heteroglossia) or many voices of individual characters (polyvocality). Its limitation is that voices may also be actively or unwittingly excluded from discourses (Linell, 2009).

Experiments in collective story-telling have been done in cinema too. Along the lines of the successful French film *Paris Je'taime* (2006), Malayalam film industry (Mollywood) has made a unique and maiden treatment of integrated film making with *Kerala Café* (2009), the brainchild of veteran director Ranjith. This attempt is different from how multiple directors collaborated for a single movie like the climax of *Manichitrathazhu* (1993) and multiple stories in one movie like in Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Naalu Pennungal* (2007) and *Oru Pennum Randaanum* (2008) (Pradeep, 2009).

Kerala Café is veritably a "kaleidoscope of great images, issues and emotions" (IndiaGlitz, 2009) with fresh concept. An ensemble of ten short films by ten different directors, on the common theme of 'journeys', it achieves cinematic expression of contemporary times in Kerala. The advantage of this innovation is that a short film of ten minutes can speak much and evoke more intense feelings than one film that extends for an uncontrolled 150 minutes (IndiaGlitz, 2009). It has brought together the talent of many artists and technicians on a single platform.

The choice of stories in *Kerala Café* is a motley mix, having a personal touch of each director. In the beginning, a prologue is uttered by another veteran director of Mollywood, Sathyan Anthikad, where he says the films are separate self-actualisations of each contributing director. All the assembled shorts take the audience too in a subliminal journey through various circumstances of life of Malayalee, in fact a poly-vocal platform.

This paper listens to those culture-sensible voices of Malayalee identity that is portrayed in each of the ten short films and tries to put it down lucidly. Perhaps only another Malayalee can relate to the ethos of those portrayal of life circumstances but few films also deal with universal pathos that can be appreciated by the larger film viewing fraternity. Such a sociological foray into the themes dealt by cinema, facilitates a better understanding of how and why the industry recurrently engages in particularities within those themes in their every single release and enjoy the loyalty of regional audience. Understanding the context is half-way to understanding the visual narratives.

Kerala Café has been specifically chosen as primary text because it is akin to choosing ten different texts with multiple voices, each exposing how the Malayalee psyche works or ought to work in the current milieu. This paper takes a different stance than the usual response of typical film reviews occurring in print and electronic media. The researcher has also taken an open-minded pre-disposition to the film considering the exceedingly positive acknowledgment it has gathered from critics and viewers, and hopes to substantiate its overall merit by examining the individual voices in each narrative. Thereby a new kind of academic viewpoint in the practice of reviewing of regional cinema is intended to be inspired.

To begin with, the very idea of the setting may be examined. Any frame narrative (overall unifying story within which one or more tales are related) requires a situational conditioning to take it forward i.e. the need or likelihood for stringing individual stories together has to be established. The invariable staleness of creating a heterotopic space like Chaucerian tavern where people engage in story-telling pursuit has not been resorted to. Here it is the quintessential railway cafeteria which hosts characters from multiple separate stories of life. The setting itself implies imminence of a journey. Kerala Café is a transient respite in the comfort of regional food for the community of commuters. The protagonists of all the ten stories, who in a direct or indirect way come in relation to the café, undergo journeys, physical, emotional and psychological. It is 'Kerala' café as it is different facets of Malayalee that are explored through the different stories. Let's look how.

1.1. Segment 1: Nostalgia

Inspired from well-known South Indian Poet R. Venugopal's 'Naattuvazhikal' (Country Roads), the mind-set of rich Gulf Malayalees from the South Indian state of Kerala is examined in M. Padmakumar's short film *Nostalgia*. The movie deals with the hypocrisy and masks of a man, Johnny, who lives abroad as he decides to come home and who manipulates his personality, attitude and even his personal relations for his own monetary gains; dealing with conflicts in living abroad and homeland. He has a wife who knows his true colors who says her husband has only one religion, 'nostalgia.' Anyhow, one comparison uttered by the protagonist Johnny that 'vacations for expatriates are like parole to the affluent prisoners of sand desert' is relevant. Half their life would have been spent toiling for wealth by the time they are finally released home-bound.

Nostalgia is an agreeable feeling, but here Johnny embodies the darker hypocrisies of this sentiment. While wallowing in memories of his homeland and culture and singing old songs of legendary South Indian musicians Vayalar and Yesudas, in front of his friends at Dubai constitute his patriotism. Once he reaches home, the charm of nostalgic bubble is broken; he becomes a complaint box, criticizing the rain, government, bureaucracy, potholes, people and what not. Selfish and money-minded, his short visit is to pitch a sale of his 'tharavadu' (Family House) for building villas instead. He insensitively wishes to dispose of his aged parents, send off daughters to boarding school, sends away his favorite high school math teacher, fearing monetary assistance and cheats his childhood friend who is waiter at Kerala Café by failing a promise to help and stonewalls him instead. In spite of his riches, he is miserly and materialistic, taking undue advantage of others without scruple.

Liquor is an integral part of celebrations for many Malayalees, Johnny nonetheless. His socializing in Dubai home is nourished by liquor that accentuates his favorite topic, lament of nostalgia - a fraud feeling used for lip service only - a case of fence-sitting.

His wife though reasonable, is only a puppet who does not cross the line drawn by her husband, because that's what a dutiful Malayalee wife is supposed to be. The only time she voices her opinion is in the climax scene of the movie, when describing Johnny's ailment to the taxi-driver that he suffers from the malady of Nostalgia.

1.2. Segment 2: Island Express

Perumon railway tragedy is a scar in the recent history of Kerala and for the people who witnessed the accident and lost their loved ones that fateful night, when the Central Island Express train from Bangalore to Thiruvananthapuram derailed on the Perumon bridge over Ashtamudi Lake, near Perinadu, Kollam, Kerala, India and fell into the lake, killing 105 people on 8 July 1988. Debutant director Shankar Ramakrishnan pulls off an absorbing personal narrative in *Island Express*, by bringing diverse characters from different walks of life, survivors of the tragedy, to the site of Perumon Bridge to commemorate their beloved deceased.

The union of these Malayalees with impromptu solidarity, united by the memory of the tragedy is symbolic. A nomadic artist-writer idolizing the trio of Jesus, Frankenstein and Mangalassery Neelakandan (a classic character from Mollywood), along with his girlfriend; another character is a dignified old lady with a prosthetic leg along with a Jawan accompanying her from the bus stand; the train driver, who is now a depressed school teacher, at the receiving end of physical advances from a teenage girl in his lodge; and an ex-Ranji cricketer with a pensive romantic memory of his girlfriend who died in the accident. They, along with their grief, journey thither after twenty-one years to share condolences with each other, hoping their beloved ones would visit them there too. The segment is about these people who gather together at the spot of the accident to respect memories of their dead dear ones.

The narration itself is eloquent homage to this regional, lesser known tragedy, as the artist Leon says, 'memory with a water mark'. It shows how strong the bond with kith and kin is for a Malayalee that they come all the way back to their homeland leaving their individual pursuits in life. The incident inspires faith in human goodness, and the power of technology to bridge the distance between man and man.

Also interesting are the poignant themes outlined in the narration. "The film is about life and death- death giving a new meaning to life itself and life going on despite death taking away near and dear ones" (Rediff.com, 2009). The Jawan reads a quote from Mata Amritanandamayi, the regional spiritual guru, that 'there's nothing to cause sorrow at the moment, only the recollection of the past or anticipation of the future'. The short engages with one common sorrow from the past of all characters converging there.

It is the Jawan who, by the end of the film, sits at Kerala Café and e-mails his officer about his experience. He is impressed by the old lady's moral courage in the face of death of her scions, which he compliments as the real strength of India.

1.3. Segment 3: *Lalitham Hiranmayam*

Marital infidelity is taboo in Malayalee marriage institution. Yet like any other society, random cases do happen and lead to grapevine indulgences and moralizing discussions. Tolerance has naturally been the woman's classified obligation in patriarchal Kerala. With the change in the status of modern Malayalee woman, literally from kitchen to the stage, broad-mindedness and rebellion in the fairer gender is gaining acceptance.

In Shaji Kailas's *Lalitham Hiranmayam*, the hero Ramesh, a husband and father, is a meek, sentimental, super-sensitive, and a conflicted man torn between his two women, one is his wife and another lover who he cannot afford to miss; the emotional and moral quandary of which muddles his spirits irrevocably. He chooses to confess about the affair to his wife, who forgives him, who even offers to let the mistress to live in their house. The mistress insists him to choose between either one of them. Not wanting to hurt either one of them, he tells himself that he is trapped in the marsh of overpowering circumstances. The culmination of it is a traffic accident and results in his death. In fact, no reasonable happily-married Malayalee woman expects her husband to be a Hero and often due to circumstantial pressure has donned the cloak of responsibility and practicality, within the family and outside it.

Ramesh's wife, Lalitha, the banker and legitimate wife is magnanimous and forgiving about her husband's extra-marital affair because she understands her role as a wife as well as a best friend to her husband. On the other hand, Hiranmayi is young and discontented with her tacit relationship status as Ramesh's mistress and urges him to choose either of them. Lalitha is indecisive at first about fulfilling her husband's last words at his deathbed; who pleads with his wife to be kind to the other woman. Yet she grants him his wish for the fate of the unborn child of the pregnant mistress, thus being the strong woman she is.

The happy ending tone of the film with the two mothers amiable and sustaining each other seems like a message to audience. Contrasted with the spate of recent murders in Kerala where the accused viciously plot the elimination of spouse and child along with lovers, as happened in the case of Thiruvananthapuram techie Nino Mathew killing his lady love's minor daughter and mother-in-law, injuring husband, in 2014 (Times of India); the bond springing between this duo is touching, almost a Khaled Hosseini touch. Hiranmayi waits in Kerala Café with her baby before the journey that will take them to Lalitha's expecting arms. Also of note is the repeated reference that Lalitha and Ramesh make about the wise words of a Swamiji – once again, the gullibility of Malayalee mind for spiritual leadership and direction!

1.4. Segment 4: *Mrithyunjayam*

An average Malayalee, by default is, to some degree, gullible to tales and instances of the supernatural and the mysterious which are deep-rooted in their folk tales, culture and religion. The most important element of these tales is the ever raging time-immemorial *Yakshi*, (Ghost) with knee-length hair, white sari, ravishing figure, flower-scented, betel-chewing, pointed canines and echoing chill of a laugh; to the more modern borrowed practice of Ouija Board rendezvous, horrors of all kinds have been enacted and re-enacted countless times in art, literature and cinema. A shudder is suppressed only with difficulty at the midnight howling of distant dogs or the glistening yellow pricks of a black cat from a dark nook. This thirst for the supernatural in their psyche has spewed forth soap operas and feature programmes dealing with mysterious places, occurrences, people, exorcisms and myths in regional television channels, such as 'Kadamattathu Kathanar', 'Viswasichalum Illengilum: Believe it or not' in Asianet, a popular Malayalam entertainment television channel.

Director Uday Ananthan is assured when he brings a flavour of the horror-thriller genre in *Mrityunjayam*. Following the beaten track, there is the promise of a haunted mansion. The fourth segment's story happens around 'Vanneri mana' (the haunted mansion featured in the movie), a spooky old proprietor and dire warnings of ill-omens. For contemporary relevance, garnished with allusions to Tunisian black magic and voodoo of Khazak, few Hollywoodized apparitions and the backdrop of investigative reporting.

The interesting element of the plot, apart from the mischievous horror theme, is the impulsive Times reporter and his quick blossoming of romance beginning with a proposal altogether gives an eerie charm to the film. What more, the handsome young reporter and the mysterious granddaughter represents the new-generation – reckless, flexible, quick-thinking, affinity to English and practical. A generational gap is evident between the Tirumeni (the old priest and the grandfather) and the young couple. The earnestness of the marriage proposal of the young and impulsive reporter, who claims he has never made a bad decision in his life, is out-of-place, yet that diminishes the mawkishness of the situation as it leaves the young woman in shock.

The climax succeeds to engulf the viewer in mystery. The loose ends are undeniably out there which are left unquestioned and unanswered. In spite of reported uncanny deaths, more darers are willing to take up the challenge again, who plan over a cup of coffee at Kerala Café. Certainly the market for mystery is perennially ripe in Kerala.

1.5. Segment 5: *Happy Journey*

It's virtually impossible to find many women out on the roads of Kerala after eight at night; most would retire within the walls of their home by six in the evening. But changing times have necessitated travelling at night and night-shifts in job. The fifth segment by Anjali Menon takes several steps ahead of Saki's 'The Open Window' in her witty and hilarious short film *Happy Journey*. The story is about a middle-aged man who goggles at every woman he sees and who views women as instruments to evoke pleasure for men and how he meets a young girl in the bus on his way to Kozhikode. He strikes up a conversation with her to flirt with her and she scares him off saying she is a feminist-cum-terrorist who fights for women liberation and tells him that she has planted a bomb in the bus they are currently on. Here romanticism is at its best because the double-ended goal of delight and instruct is met effectively.

How women are looked at with roving eyes by middle-aged Malayalee men, particularly at public places, is shown frankly and shamelessly in the film. The freedom to travel alone comes at the expense of constant anxiety and vigilance for them. For young

women, long-distance journeys at night are worrisome, because safety and security is not guaranteed. The worst instance in Kerala's recent history would be Soumya rape and murder case took place in the year 2011 (The Hindu).

The clever and cunning young girl in the film teaches a lesson to all men who see women as a toy to play with and becomes the role model of every Malayalee girl. Initially discomfited by a flirtatious uncle's overtures, whom she meets in the bus, she soon outsmarts him with the creepy composure and fanatic words of a suicide bomber. Using sinister implications and overpowering secrecy, she convinces him that he will die soon along with the other people in the bus. The womanizer regrets his inattentiveness to his wife's phone calls and turns out to be a man who values humanity now. She, however, gets off at her stop and waves at the poor fear-struck man who is evidently in shock, realizing that she wasn't a suicide bomber after all. By the end of the film we see him at Kerala Café where he jumps to a far-off seat when another young girl occupies the one next to him, having learned his lesson on women. For a change, it is heartening to see a man's vulnerability brought to the fore by the mere implication of a bomb, as he deals with the trauma before one's own fate, on board the bus they are travelling. The film plays on the usage of the word 'bomb' in three ways: the man calling the soft-spoken girl 'a bomb' on first look; real combustible 'bomb' that the girl claims to be in a mobile-button away as she cleverly deals with the flirty old man and her father's casual banter to know how many she 'bombed' on that bus. The short film gives a message to men to treat women with more respect and acknowledge their intelligence and their right as individuals of the society and it also implores the young girls to be witty in dealing such circumstances.

1.6. Segment 6: 'Aviramam'

For happiness in life, the needs of an individual must be proportionate to his means to satisfy them, otherwise results in friction, anxiety, lack of productivity and weakening of the desire to live. Society, as the superior agency, has to regulate the numerous needs and aspirations of its individual members. In times of social change, like an Economic Recession, there occurs a temporary disequilibrium in society when it cannot properly exercise its regulative role. Some individuals find it difficult to cope with the changes around them and resort to self-inflicted death, what Emile Durkheim calls 'anomic suicide.' Crisis in agriculture, industry and commerce leads to a large number of suicides.

Ravi, the IT entrepreneur in B. Unnikrishnan's *Aviramam* is an example of social factors necessitating voluntary death to escape. He plays the role of a doting husband and loving father to perfection and sends his wife and kids to in-laws' house for a vacation before attempting to take his life. He entrusts his friend, the waiter in Kerala Café, to look after his family at the Railway Station. To his surprise, he finds he cannot give up on life after all because of his family's love. The film talks of "life that would go on, even as one strives to put an end to it all" (Now Running, 2009).

Suicide is fashionable in the Malayalee mentality as the ultimate solution to every problem in life. Probably the media plays a huge role in indirectly propagating the idea. Right from frustrated students to deceived lovers, committing suicide is a viable option when there is a fear of inescapable emotional stress and loss of footing.

But, from the sociological point of view, individual acts of suicide are extensions and expressions of the moral constitution of society - its insufficient or excessive degree of integration or regulation. Therefore, each suicide case in Kerala can be case study for analysing the social factors and changes which motivated the act, on the basis of which appropriate alleviating measures can be taken.

1.7. Segment 7: 'Off-Season'

Veteran director Shyamaprasad, in *Off-Season* takes an unusually funny take on the repercussions of global economic recession, unemployment and its impact on tourism sector. Through an incident in the life of a typical local tour guide Kunjappai in Kovalam beach, Kerala, who befriends a Portuguese couple, the attitude of guides and some preconceived notions about the industry can be perceived.

Kerala's tourism sector suffers from paucity in qualified personnel and amenities for the welfare of visiting people. Kunjappai represents the under-educated, uncouth, struggling tour guide, who speaks heavily accented broken English, whose big ticket is the Euro-filled pockets of foreigners to partake of which he bestows, and imposes, all attention to his clients. A little investment of his Indian money and time, together with an understanding with the restaurant/resort owners, leadership skills and basic knowledge of the attractions of the place are enough to run his business.

Still to his character's credit, Kunjappai sheds his business-cum-revenge mindedness and melts at the ironic plight of the touring pauper couple. The awakening of 'real friend' in him is a model for all tour guides and reinstates that faith in humanity is never lost in any corner of the world. Brotherhood and compassion rule over other considerations in the hardest of times. That is a good Public Relations for God's Own Country's tourism. Moreover, it fosters the idea of inclusive and participatory tourism where the tourist and the destination benefit symbiotically.

Kerala tourism is unthinkable without sea-food, boating and an Ayurvedic massage; the latter of which charges exorbitantly from visitors. The unconventional travelling beach band, of locals and tourists singing re-mixes of evergreen Malayalam classics, towards the end of the movie is a refreshing imagery for the tourism package.

It is so normal to expect tourists to be lavish that a penniless backpacker couple comes as a shock. Instead of taking it for granted that tourists come ready to shower foreign exchange, why not treat them as ordinary folks, breathing and working in other parts of the world, with their own share of problems in life? That is why the last scene where Andre and Mary, the Portuguese couple, who wish to share one plate of Masala Dosa and one glass of Jeeraka water at Kerala Café, to cut cost, is amusing. Hence the opening shot of a dog (slum-dog!) at the beach sniffing at an upside down Yoga-practising foreigner (millionaire?) is rendered ironic.

1.8. Segment 8: 'Bridge'

Two parallel storylines intersecting each other on a heartrending note in Anwar Rasheed's *Bridge* open up deep doubts about how modern Malayalee looks at street animals and human senility. Timu, the pet kitten from street, is forcefully taken away from the motherless small boy by his dad's displeasure while the old, ailing grandmother, in another family, is abandoned on the street because her impecunious younger son and the family is incapable of taking care of her needs along with their own. Both the unwanted beings lie in wait together outside Kerala Café in the Railway Station.

More than the mushrooming of old-age homes in Kerala, it is when aged parents outlive their family, or are left alone at home while their children live separately, or worse, when they are reduced to a life of alms and open air, that paradigm shifts in cultural values are visible. But when the root cause is poverty, values and niceties turn harsh and barren. Once the big family systems have given way to nuclear and extended families here, all aging parents go through the angst of role crisis, fear of loneliness and slowness in adapting to changing times and power equations within family, apart from suffering health problems and security uncertainties.

Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act 2007, is a comprehensive one in India that has provisions for the elderly in the country who are "unable to maintain themselves through their own earnings or out of their own property", that they can "apply for maintenance from their adult children or any legal heir (who is in possession of or is likely to inherit their property). This maintenance includes the provision of proper food, shelter, clothing and medical treatment." Yet, we have moral obligations to look after our parents who, in their youth, have brought us up.

For animal welfare, we have laws like Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960 and the Wildlife Protection Act 1972. But hundreds of animals suffer here in Kerala for the sake of religion, commerce, science, health, recreation, public nuisance etc. Instead of throwing the helpless kitten away in a wasteland, ideally it could have been handed over to the nearest animal shelter or to an animal friendly neighbour. Thus besides its brilliant visual imagery and poignant narration, the film speaks for the rights of animals and senior citizens. The striking contrast as well as similarity of two abandoned characters in the movie is poignant to the viewer.

1.9. Segment 9: 'Makal'

Reality is often more dramatic and stranger than fiction. The terror of child trafficking may be dramatized, but the truth of it is terrible and pertinent. Revathy's straightforward social commentary *Makal* engages with the theme of poverty that facilitates flesh trade under the disguise of adoption. The film shows a Malayalee fake couple deceiving a poor family in Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu by promising job for the father and better future for the girl. It is at Kerala Café that the drugged young girl is paid-off to another agent.

The non-stop woe and helplessness of the girl's mother, the warmth of sibling bonding, the girl's reassurance that all is for the best, the whole leave-taking scene are all that make it very personal and heart-touching. Audience have the narrow consolation that the girl's parents are cheated, when in the real world, there are parents who pimp out daughters, marry her off at a young age to aged rich grooms from the Middle East, even molest their own blood themselves.

It is an entreaty to take care of our young ones. Furthermore, it is an admonition to look at kindness, smartness, generosity etc. cynically, particularly when scheming Malayalees are involved. Literacy doesn't guarantee a fair practice of knowledge and rights, but may exercise crookedness and wile.

1.10. Segment 10: 'Puram Kazhchakal'

A bus ride through the beautiful landscape and hilly terrain of Malakkapara and Vettilapara forms the backdrop for renown Malayalee director Lal Jose's big screen adaptation of C.V. Sreeraman's, a well-known South Indian writer, short story, *Puram Kazhchakal*. The narrator takes this long-forgotten rustic route to revisit his past in native land, to brush up youthful memories associated with the place – a journey every migratory Malayalee yearns to undertake at a later period in life.

Travels in public transport are singular experiences because random people of any age, attitude, purpose and behaviour can be your co-passengers, whom you may never see again, perhaps. When an obnoxiously unpleasant man boards the bus, surly and impatient at delay in stops, the other passengers are amused, the youth mock at him. But finally he gets down with maximum displeasure from everyone on board, and rushes to a house in anguish, where a woman's cries can be heard, presumably the man's wife; clearly the signs of funeral being held, which is confirmed when a coffin arrives; the coffin barely big enough for a young child. The disillusioned travellers are shocked to the point of self-remorse, now that the mystery of the surly man, who must have lost his son or daughter at a very young age, dawns on them.

Intense and unsettling the climax being, this kind of tragic twist is reminiscent of an O. Henry magic. "It banks on some of those vital moments in our lives when we pause and experience reality; reflect on what had happened before and on what is yet to come" (Now Running, 2009). The passengers may never know who was lost to that man that day, but haven't they been too quick and erroneous in judging him by first impression?

The narrator himself has been half-way between dream and romantic laziness. The others are pleasantly enjoying and the young crowd noisy, fussy and fun-seeking, singing crude film songs and demanding a halt for photography by the waterfalls. Imagine the emotional turmoil of the man rushing for a dear one's funeral masking his inner sombre feelings by unpleasantness to conform unsuccessfully to the general positive vibes. His personal sorrow overshadows and dismisses their right to cheerfulness. In the face of the grim reality of death, the pleasure of the narrator and the young crowd is reduced to vanity. This is an appeal to the world. The narrator, who is deeply moved, is inspired to write about the incident while waiting at Kerala Café.

The relevance of time is of significance. For those staggering along the rugged path of reality, time is precious; one moment missed may steal the last breath out of a dear one before they reach. For those strolling along easy path of illusion, time is aplenty, full of

colours and brightness, signifying trifles. This is again a wake-up call to Malayalee, to slow down the pace of modernity's running shoes and feel the dirt of earth with one's naked feet and breathe in a puff of fresh air before you know it's too late.

2. Conclusion

Kerala Café, ten independently inter-related stories, is a rare conceit for Malayalam film industry both in technical brilliance and in depicting a cross-section of Kerala society. It's unconventional in that it does away with the characteristic heroism of South Indian movies. Experience and amateurism have been struck at a balance. The experiment has come off commendably well. As one review said,

"Open up this box of assorted candies, and you see them all laid out on a salver, quite uneven in manner and matter, posture and perspective and yet it all builds into something quite incredible that makes this ambitious enterprise a fascinating filmic feast" (Now Running, 2009).

The film wraps up with a theme song penned by lyricist Rafeeq Ahmed that is an ode to the famous verse of ThunchathEzhuthachan, father of Malayalam language, "*Kathaya mama, Kathaya mama, Kathakalathisaadaram...*" It sketches the art of storytelling. The layers of meanings of the word 'katha' – from 'katha' (story) to 'kathanam' (narration) to 'kadanam' (grief) - and the relevance of each in the continuum of human existence is played within the 20-line verse. The first two lines are from his '*Adhyathma Ramayanam Kilippattu*'.

Hence there is more than one conclusion in the end, co-existing and equivalent towards each other. Postmodernist approach appreciates this as there is a better understanding of realities through multiple voices. Instead of having the best or the most common opinion as truth, this technique offers room for every opinion. Yet, it has also to be understood that the author exercised the ultimate power over what story to tell and what not to tell.

Through the poly-vocal perspective, certain nuances of Malayalee psyche have been defined and accounted for. It is not an unwarranted glorification but a careless assurance of who they are and who they ought not to be. Media in that sense can be used to orient the society with good values. Although the contrary is happening by media's power and penetration.

Whether cinema realizes social change or affects behavioural patterns, whether this particular movie has the potential for follow-up actions (other than less successful attempts at anthological narratives with a feminist theme like '*Anju Sundarikal*' (2013)) or not, *Kerala Café* is undoubtedly an ode to Kerala and its people.

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