

**HISTORY OF MALAYALAM CINEMA FROM 1975 TO 1991 WITH  
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO K.G. GEORGE**

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## Introduction

The history of cinema is the history of curiosity; the curiosity to know how people and events can be captured eternally in a machine. The love of eternity drew human beings to the inventions of those machines as well as ideas by which any moment can be captured. Once captured, the moment and the person are eternal. The kid one sees as part of the first cinematic experiences of the Lumiere Brothers, *Feeding the Baby*, is thus eternal.

The optical toys such as Zoetrope based on the idea of persistence of vision of human eyes were the initial steps to capture a moment or a motion.

The invention of camera and the invention of celluloid by George Eastman made the works of cine-enthusiasts easy. It was Edward Muybridge, a young camera-man, who captured an original movement for the first time in the history. He arranged a photo shoot with 24 cameras that captured the movements of a horse ride. (KUPSC, 2003).

Inspired from the success, Muybridge started a new business of producing photo albums of live moments. Photographic gun by Etienne-Jules-Marey and a moving picture camera by Louis Le Prince gave momentum to the whole process.

Combining the experiments of Muybridge, Marey, Le Prince and Eastman, the American businessman and inventor Tomas Alva Edison along with his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson built a machine for recording movement on film, Kinetograph, and another one for showing the film, Kinetoscope.

The first experimental film with Kinetoscope was *Monkeyshine No.1* (1889) and the first public demonstration of the two machines featured Dickson taking his hat off and greeting a gathering namely *Dickson Greeting* (1891).

The credit for the first public projection to a paid audience goes to the Lumiere brothers and hence they have been honoured as the Fathers of Modern cinema. They built a combo machine with movie camera and projector Cinematographe. They tested the efficiency and acceptance of their machine on March 22, 1895 in their basement. Later, in December 28, 1895 Lumiere brothers projected a cinema show with ten short films in front of a paid gathering at Grand Café, Paris.

The drama associated with modern cinema was brought about by a French conjurer George Melies. The most famous film of the actor/director/camera man was *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le Voyage dans la Lune* 1902). In the later years, Edwin S Porter, David Wark Griffith and the like proceeded with the stream of storytelling feature films in which the German, French, Italian directors introduced new visual grammar.

## **Indian Cinema**

India had a rich and vivid visual culture with shadow drama, drama settings and properties. The dramas of Sanskrit writers Kalidasa, Bhasa and the like were so intense that they created pictures in the minds of connoisseurs with the splendid use of visually communicating words.

But the practice of film making got its route in the film shows organised by Lumiere Brothers. They visited all over the world with their film show and came to Mumbai (then Bombay), India and organised a show at Watson Hotel (Kumar, 2002). Understanding the strength of the moving visuals, Harischandra S. Bhatvadekar popularly known as Save Dada produced several Actualities which could be termed as the earlier form of Indian documentary. *The Wrestlers* (1899), *Delhi Durbar* (1903) etc. were some of his documentaries. Dhundiraj Govind Phalke or Dada Saheb Phalke was the man who dreamt of making a feature film for the first time in India. And the first feature film of India, *Raja Harischandra* was released in 1913 making Dada Saheb Phalke the father of Indian cinema. *Keechaka Vadha* (1916) is the first South Indian movie.

Ardeshir Irani directed the first Indian talkie *Alam Ara* (1931) and the first colour cinema *Kisan Kanya* (1937). It was Satyajith Ray who brought the element of reality to India cinema deliberately. His *Pather Panchaly* (1955) drew a new perspective in front of the Indian viewers which was later eagerly followed by a number of directors. The government run Film and Television Institute of India taught a new breed of directors with a taste for experimenting (Thomas, 1987).

## **Malayalam cinema**

The beginning of Malayalam cinema is controversial. For a long time *Balan* (1938) the first talkie was considered as the first Malayalam cinema as well. Later, a film historian Chelangattu Gopalakrishnan in a study found that *Vigathakumaran* directed by J. C. Daniel in 1928 was the first Malayalam movie. Later, the State Government declared J. C. Daniel as the father of Malayalam cinema and announced an award in his name - J. C. Daniel Award for Life Time Achievement - for the veteran film personality (Vijayakrishnan, 2004). In 1938, the first talkie *Balan* was released. During the initial years a few films were released in Malayalam and they were produced by Tamil Studios. It was during the 40s that Malayali people started their own studio and ventured in to the production of Malayalam cinema. 1951 saw the first hit Malayalam cinema *Jeevitha Nauka*. The decade also witnessed the first neorealist movie *Newspaper Boy* in 1955. The decade 1960 was filled with movies inspired from literature. The great works of the great writers were filmed.

The decade 1970 was said to be the decisive decade as far as Malayalam cinema was concerned. Young people educated from the Film and Television Institute of India and inspired from Satyajith Ray brought about changes in Malayalam cinema (Vijaykrishnan, 2004). Adoor Gopalakrishnan, K. G. George and John Abraham came up with their debut films with newer perspectives. The year 1972 was as important to Malayalam cinema as 1955 was to national cinema. In 1955, the same way *Pather Panchaly* of Sathyajith Ray changed the perspectives of Indian cinema, *Swayamvaram* of Adoor Gopalakrishnan changed Malayalam cinema in 1972. *Swayamvaram* received critical acclaim as well as different State and National awards. Several directors followed the path shown by Adoor. K. S. Sethumadhavan with *Achanum Bappayum* (1972), John Abraham with *Vidyarthikale Ithile Ithile* (1972), M. T. Vasudevan Nair with *Nirmalyam* (1973), K. P. Kumaran with *Athithi* (1974) and G. Aravindan with *Utharayanam* (1974) were some of the directors who followed Adoor in this experiment. K. G. George too was one of them (Thomas, 1987). He joined the group with his debut film *Swapnadanam* in 1975. Besides having all the characteristics of art movies of the 1970s, like no songs, low pace etcetera, *Swapnadanam* dealt with the inner mind of the protagonist.

Many directors who started their career directing art/parallel cinema or rather cinemas that moved away from the commercial genre, devised a new stream that stood almost middle of the two opposing streams – that is, middle or mid cinema. One of the most prominent proponents was Padmarajan. Though he started with parallel cinema experiments such as *Peruvazhiyambalam* (1979) and *Oridothoru Phayalvan* (1981), in the next phase of his career, Padmarajan started focussing on themes that aimed to entertain the audience. His *Thinkalazhcha Nalla Divasam* (1985) and *Namukku Paarkkan Munthirithoppupukal* (1986) are examples of Middle Cinemas. All these cinemas dealt with unconventional story ideas. The directors of middle cinemas include Bharathan, Mohan, Sibi Malayil and Hariharan. *Ormaykkayi* (1982) and *Kattathe Kilikkoodu* (1983) by of Bharathan, *Salini Ente Koottukari* (1980) by Mohan and *Thaniyavarthanam* (1987) and *Kireedam* (1989) by Sibi Malayil were part of the movement. Directors like Fazil, Balachandra Menon and Kamal, started directing in the middle stream and subsequently moved to popular steam. K. G. George throughout his career occasionally entered the middle stream.

90s became decisive in the way that the leading actors became stars and super stars. Films began to be made for super stars; not for actors and the stream of Art cinema and Middle cinema faded away. The new millennium brought a changed aspect of film making under the informal name of New Generation movies. The middle cinema ceased to exist and

few directors turned to parallel cinema. Padmarajan and Bharathan passed away and K. G. George stopped making films after a failed attempt to re-enter the film world after eight years of silence with *Ilavankodu Desam* (1998). Directors like Sathyam Anthikkad and Sibi Malayil completely moved to popular stream.

### **K. G. George**

K. G. George started his cinematic career in 1975 with his debut *Swapnadanam* after his education from Film and Television Institute of India. The film was critically applauded by the cinema lovers and this movie was followed by four films, about which K. G. George even refused to mention. He made a comeback to the art stream by directing *Ulkkadal* (1979). After that he never looked back and directed around a dozen films with the touch of an auteur (Venu, 2015). He declared that the films he directed were ultimately his films by creatively intervening in every department of filmmaking, such as script, camera and editing. He never repeated a genre. He directed the first detective film with psychological approach in Malayalam cinema *Yavanika* (1982), filmed the dark side of the film industry in *Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback* (1983) and made the first ever political satire in Malayalam *Panchavadippalam* (1984). Later in the 1990s, he directed a mythical cinema *Ilavankodu Desam* (1996). But, unable to cooperate with the super star system, he quit film making (Asokan, 2016).

### **Specialities**

George is a complete auteur. He has made it clear in many of his interviews that he is the last word in his film as far as aesthetics are concerned. George approached all his plots psychologically. From the debut *Swapnadanam* to his last movie, his interest was how the psychology of a person may affect the people around him as well as the society. He always critically examined family, society, nation and the world. He questioned the superficiality of happy family, nice village and prosperous nation. His themes revolved around violence, inner as well as outer. His movies dealt with either personal violence or violence of a group within the family, society or the state or the nation.

From the debut film itself he received both National and State Awards and he received the first J. C. Daniel Award from the state of Kerala. In 2016, 10 prominent film critics voted George's film *Irakal* as the best original screenplay of all time in Malayalam cinema. His seven films have been included in the Indian Panorama of various film festivals across the globe. *Swapnadanam* was screened in the Delhi Film Festival by the Delhi Film Society and was also selected to the Russian Film Society. *Lekhayude Maranam Oru Flashback* became the second film to be invited to the London Film Festival after

*Elippathayam* of Adoor Gopalakrishnan. *Yavanika* was screened in the Soviet Union Film Festival.

### **The list of the awards**

1975 – Best Film – *Swapnadanam*; National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam

1975 – Best Screen Play – *Swapnadanam*

1978 – Kerala State Film Award for Best film with popular appeal and aesthetic value – *Rapadikalude Gatha*

1982 – Best Film – *Yavanika*

1982 – Best Story – *Yavanika*

1983 – Second Best Film – *Aadaaminte Variyellu*

1983 – Best Story – *Aadaaminte Variyellu*

1985 – Second Best Film – *Irakal*

1985 – Best Story – *Irakal*

2016 – J. C. Daniel Award (instituted by the Kerala State Government, for his lifelong contributions to cinema)

### **K. G. George - the hero neglected**

In his whole career, even after bagging 11 Kerala State Awards, one National Award and six other awards, George never received due respect. The historians of Malayalam cinema either failed to consider or merely mentioned him in their elaborate writings. The writers who praise the ability of the foreign directors to find special story thread from non-popular literature and convert that into masterpieces, completely ignored George's works. The historians, who lamented the lack of innovations in regional cinema, ignored the fact that George was a forerunner to several genres in Indian cinema. His *Ulkkadal* set the trend for romantic, slow-pace campus movies. But later movies like *Chaamaram* (1980) or *Salini Ente Koottukari* (1980) got the credit. Similarly, *Yavanika* experimented with multiple narration but it was the New Generation movies of the new millennium that were celebrated for similar treatment.

### **Previous Studies on K. G. George**

There are 7 studies on K. G. George. When the researcher went through the main texts on History of Malayalam cinema, it was found that none of these books acknowledged K. G. George and his works. A few acknowledged his *Swapnadanam*. Those academicians who describe the aspects of an auteur, never considers the works of K. G. George.

## **Research**

Research is an investigation to find new facts, substantiate or alter the existing knowledge or to understand the behaviour pattern of certain group towards a social element. In the prologue of their edited work Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland quote R. C. Roberts and W. J. Wood to affirm that research is not something to prove one's prejudices rather it is a tool for those who are open to critically examine one's own previous knowledge. At the same time, a researcher critically and systematically searches for those details which will help to find out explanations to assert or negate what one asserts or negates [Branigan & Buckland (ed.), 2014, p. xvi].

## **Research Problem**

This researcher is exploring the films of the Malayalam cinema director K. G. George and tries to find out how his cinema represents that particular period which is considered to be the most turbulent when the political history is considered and golden as far as the art history of the country is concerned. The researcher wants to understand how certain historical moments are encrypted in his films in a subtle way. And thus, the researcher states the research problem as: 'History of Malayalam cinema from 1975 to 1991 with special reference to K. G. George.'

## **Objectives**

The objectives of this study can be made into a nutshell as:

1. To study in detail how the cinemas of K. G. George represent the period.
2. To study how the cinemas of K. G. George are ahead of its time compared to the films of that period and reach the level of Hollywood movies.
3. To study how prophetically the violence is used in his films
4. To study how effectively he depicts the villages and their intricacies.
5. To enquire why K. G. George was neglected by the critics of his period.
6. To enquire how he skilfully depicts the micro-politics in the relationship within the members of a family.
7. To enquire how '*Panchavadippalam*' stands unique in the political cinema genre.

## **Hypothesis**

1. K. G. George is an auteur.
2. The films of K. G. George approached each subjects psychologically, whether it was a love story, family life or a murder mystery.

3. George critically analysed family life and problematised it in his films. He analysed closed family, mind and society. He analysed the problems of closed communities in *Kolangal*, closed families in *Aadaaminte Variyellu* and *Mattoral*, the closed and corrupted society in *Panchavadippalam*, *Kathakku Pinnil* and *Ilavankode Desam* and closed minds in *Swapnadanam* and *Yavanika*.

4. The films of K. G. George reflected the violence in the society, especially domestic violence, through inherently violent characterisation and never resorting to glorifying violence.

5. K. G. George's films represented the family concept with a Victorian morality.

6. The films of K. G. George serve as historical documents

7. The films of K. G. George are political.

8. Academicians neglected K. G. George, leading to an abrupt end of his film career.

### **Methodology**

The researcher employs qualitative analysis for the study and conducts descriptive analysis of all the available cinemas K. G. George. Besides, the researcher conducts a personal interview with the director and seeks the opinions of 13 experts as the methods of data collection.

### **Scope of the study**

The scope of the study lies in the fact that K. G. George deserves due respect from the people who love and respect Malayalam cinema. The study tries to understand how his films represented the period and made prophecies regarding the future society.

### **Limitation of the study**

The main limitation of the study is that four films of K. G. George are lost forever. Secondly, there are no good prints of those films by K. G. George left, not even with him.

K. G. George is in the misery of old age. He is now 76 years old, dealing with age related issues and health problems. His health does not permit him to exert a lot, mentally and physically. Besides, being a gentleman, he only hints at the sorrow he faced in the industry during the 90s as a result of which he had to quit the film scene. For such data, the researcher has to depend on secondary sources, like previous interviews to get a picture.

### **Chapter scheme**

The thesis is organised in the following chapter scheme. The first chapter introduces the World cinema, Indian cinema and Malayalam cinema. Then it explains the concept of

auteurs and gives detailed description of major auteurs. Later it introduces K. G. George and his specialities.

The second chapter reviews the literature happened in this area. The third chapter explains the research problem, methodology, methods, objectives and hypotheses. It also provides operational definitions to the terms used in the research. The fourth chapter conducts a detailed analysis of the films of K. G. George observing certain characteristics. Secondly, it concludes the relevant parts of the detailed personal interview with K. G. George. Finally it conducts an elaborate interview with systematic questions with experts and compiles these opinions. The fifth chapter concludes and tests the hypotheses. It also provides an additional finding and suggestion for further studies.

## **Analysis**

### **Subjects of observation**

The researcher described seven main aspects the films of K. G. George while watching them. Besides, there are some subsidiary aspects such as detailing, the compromises, the problems due money and compromises etcetera. The main aspects are

1. Auteur
2. Portrayal of village
3. Portrayal of victims
4. Victorian morality
5. Portrayal of inner politics
6. Portrayal of closed minds and closed spaces
7. Use of properties

### **Findings**

George in all his films displayed auteurship except in *Ilavankodu Desam*. And that film became his last film also. He creatively intervened in all the departments of film making ranging from casting to editing. He strictly insisted for detailing while shooting his cinemas. He used properties in such a way that they give more insight to the life of the character. He filmed the intricacies of the village life honestly. Through that honest depiction he shattered the 'all-is-good' concept related to villages proposed by commercial Malayalam cinema. His films like *Aadaaminte Variyellu*, *Irakal* and *Mattoral* problematised the family system and the romantic concepts followed by Keralites. At the same time, as a Malayali who has been living in Kerala for a long time, he displayed a known or unknown Victorian morality concept in his films. He reserved punishments for all the estranged wives and mothers while provides free pass to their partners. Through a psychological approach, he looked into the

minds of both predators and victims. In a way he sought the psychology behind a crime. Even the minor characters have a personality, in his films. He used the space, the closed space, to show the closed nature of the people and the society. He discussed the micro-politics within the members of the family; husband and wife and father and son.

### **Questions asked to K. G. George**

The researcher conducted a detailed personal interview with the director and the main thrust of the interview can be listed as

1. Auteurship
2. The problems related to money
3. Feminist cinema and Victorian morality
4. Detailing
5. Depiction of violence
6. Political cinema
7. The negligence faced
8. Unsuccessful cinemas
9. Archiving
10. Compromises
11. Cinemas in 90s
12. Cinema as the representation of time

### **K. G. George about K. G. George**

In his personal interview George explained how he insisted for control over all the departments of cinema making. He asserted that the camera man and the editor should be subordinate to the director and he was particular while selecting them. According to him they are technicians. He pointed out his view regarding violence as he feels that people are violent. He defined political cinema as open ended and the one with a point of view. He obviously stated that his films never received any due recognition and expressed his feeling that nobody would understand his films clearly. He narrated the compromises that he had to make during the shooting of *Mattoral*. But he was reluctant to make any comment on his failure in *Ilavankode Desam*. He is very sure that his films represented the then time and the central Travancore very well. He finally indifferently said that most of the prints of his films are not with him and some of them were lost forever. Regarding the Victorian morality, he agreed that such a reading is possible but reasoned that there was some negligence from the part of the characters that were punished at the end.

### Questions asked to the experts

The researcher conducted a detailed interview with 13 experts in Malayalam cinema using phone and compiled their opinions. Besides the questions listed below, individuals are asked about their personal relationship with K. G. George.

1. The specialities of the decade seventies for Malayalam cinema
2. The role of K. G. George in Malayalam cinema
3. K. G. George as an auteur
4. The feministic approaches in George's cinemas
5. The influence of Victorian morality
6. Political cinema
7. The status of *Panchavadippalam* as a political satire
8. The presence of violence in George's cinemas
9. The presence of 'closed-ness' in the cinemas of George
10. The futuristic approaches in George's films
11. The reason for the abrupt ending of George's film career in nineties
12. The neglect that George faced from the Malayalam academicians
13. The historical value of George's cinemas
14. The negligence of the society in archiving cinemas

### Compilation of opinions

The opinions can be compiled as

1. **The specialities of the decade seventies for Malayalam cinema:** All the experts are of the unanimous opinion that seventies are the decisive decades as far as Malayalam cinema is concerned. There were some additional opinions expressing that Malayalam cinema did not suddenly become cinematic in the seventies. But it was due to the small sprouts that happened in previous decades.

2. **The role of K. G. George in Malayalam cinema:** K. G. George had made an important contribution to the new sensibility in Malayalam cinema started in seventies was also a statement to which all the experts responded positively. The innovative techniques that George introduced in story-telling, editing and the like were considered as remarkable.

3. **K. G. George as an auteur:** Though one expert had some reservations in applying a French theory to Malayalam cinema, no expert had a doubt regarding auteurship of George. The fact that he personalised all the departments and used the technicians well to put a signature in all his works was not challenged.

4. **The feministic approaches in George's cinemas:** No directors had approached the female problems, issues as honestly and sympathetically as George had done is a statement that got undisputed support.

5. **The influence of Victorian morality:** Though George detailed the female issues from a female perspective, did a Victorian sense of morality influence him was a question which sought several excuses from the part of the experts. A few opine that since George is a Malayali male living in Kerala, such an influence is quite natural. But most of the experts tried to give excuses for that. Since he was honestly depicting the society such endings were natural, he never made a perfect male protagonist and thus how come it was possible to criticise him for not making perfect female characters were the main excuses. As a whole, they were not denying the influence but finding excuses for that influence.

6. **Political cinema:** All the experts defined political cinema differently. But the thrust point is the cinema which has a stand is political.

7. **The status of *Panchavadippalam* as a political satire:** No experts have any reservations towards the statement that *Panchavadippalam* is the best political satire film in Malayalam.

8. **The presence of violence in George's cinemas:** George depicted violence or violence is the undercurrent in his films was stated by all the experts with an addition that while depicting a society honestly violence was unavoidable. They said unanimously that George never glorified violence in his films but, portrayed the act of violence in the society in its minute details. Some pointed out the violence exercised by the victims. They feel that it was a kind of escape mechanism from a world in which they were entrapped.

9. **The presence of 'closed-ness' in the cinemas of George:** Though all the experts unanimously agreed to the statement, a very few tried to provide a thought provoking reason for his approach- it is the true nature of a Keralite to create closed circles around him, family and the society.

10. **The futuristic approaches in George's films:** Two experts did not buy the term futuristic. But, in a way they too joined with the others in agreeing the futuristic approaches of the director.

11. **The reason for the abrupt ending of George's film career in nineties:** Except Ramachandra Babu and C. V. Balakrishnan, all the others have only some notions about the abrupt ending of George's career. They blamed the changed film making practices which gave less importance to the director and the star system for his withdrawal in general. Some added the introduction of new media of that time - T. V. - to the bandwagon.

Ramachandra Babu and C. V. Balakrishnan explained the numerous efforts that George had made along with them to make a magnum opus and receive a decent retirement.

12. **The neglect that George faced from the Malayalam academicians:** Here also no experts have a different opinion. A few added that not only George, but many directors also have not received due respect.

13. **The historical value of George's cinemas:** Cinemas document history was the unanimous opinion. With a clear knowledge of the society that is being represented and illustrating that truthfully George provided a documented history through his cinemas.

14. **The negligence of the society in archiving cinemas:** The experts expressed universal pain and dismay about not archiving the cinemas properly.

### **Conclusion**

From the data collected the researcher could conclude that:

#### **George is an auteur**

From the analyses, personal interview and the opinions of the experts it is clear that George is an auteur, an auteur who never received due respect. Thus, it is important to state that he is an auteur as he never repeated himself and had full control over all the aspects of his film making.

#### **George approached every subject psychologically**

George analysed the psychology behind man-woman relationship, the relationship between family members and relationship between predator and prey. He analysed the psychology of crime.

#### **George critically analysed the family concept and problematised it**

George problematised the concept of family. He shattered the romantic concepts of Muracherukkan and Murappennu, the son and daughter of male and female siblings. He showed the problems in love-less families. At the same time, he put across his concept of an ideal family.

#### **He analysed the problems of closed-ness**

He analysed how a person, a society or a state behaved when the character is closed. More than detailing the characters in cinemas, he used the space to show the closed nature. He used closed hotel rooms or rubber estates to depict the minds of the characters.

#### **Violence is inherent to the movies**

George himself states that human beings are violent. But from the observation and the opinions it is clear that George never glorified violence. He never showed crime as an acceptable response to the violent system. He showed the violence of the helpless people who

were entrapped within themselves or within the system. He displayed the violence of the victims.

### **George exercises Victorian morality, though unconsciously**

Though George showed the rebellion of females, an unconscious Victorian moral preaching is visible in his films. He punishes all the females who have extra marital affairs, while treats every male partners with sympathy.

### **The films of K. G. George serve as historical document**

George made cinema with commitment and sincerity. The seriousness with which he made films makes his films historical document. They depict the time, the culture and the politics honestly.

### **His cinemas are political**

George has directed only one political satire- *Panchavadippalam*. But even without putting slogans forward, his other films are also political. They dealt the micro-politics between the members of the family. He problematised the happy family concept. In *Irakal*, he analysed allegorically how the madness of a family, the single unit of our society, could ruin the lives of other people. He discussed the politics of the victims.

### **George was a neglected auteur**

George never received the due respect. Some of the experts displayed guilt in neglecting George in their studies.

### **Additional finding**

#### **Kerala lacks archiving**

George and all the experts exhibited pain in the lack of archiving in Kerala. Because of the lack, many films of K. G. George and other directors were lost forever. They suggested Kerala should have a mechanism to digitally archive the remaining films made in Malayalam.

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