

**AUTHORITARIANNISM AND POLITICAL THEATRE: A
STUDY OF THE EMERGENCY IN THE CONTEXT OF
KERALA**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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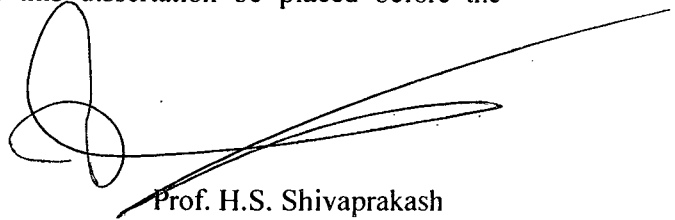
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, "Authoritarianism and Political Theatre: A Study of the Emergency in the context of Kerala", submitted by Ameet Parameswaran, the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is his own work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.



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This dissertation titled, "Authoritarianism and Political Theatre: A Study of the Emergency in the context of Kerala", submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy, is an original work and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of any University or Institution.



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Ammakkyum Achhanum

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Emergency as a Cultural Event: An Analysis of the	
Political Theatre of the State,	18
The scope of the performative	23
An analysis of state theatricality: the case of	
<i>Chaverppada: Oru Prati-Viplava Natakam</i>	26
Construction of a revolutionary public	37
The Production of a revolutionary moment	48
Chapter 2 : Aesthetics of Authoritarianism: The State of Exception	
as a Cultural Condition	62
Aesthetics of the authoritarian regime	65
Developmental aesthetic	67
The landscape of history	71
The event	80
The moment	80
Authoritarianism as a condition of existence	84
The regime of power	89
Chapter 3 : Figure and the Model of the ‘Hero’: A Critique	
of Theatrical Reason	95
Revolutionary Hero	99
The Revolutionary	100
The Revolutionary alias the Terrorist	108
The Citizen Hero	111
The Resistance Hero	124
The Anti-hero	134
Conclusion	139
Bibliography	146

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who have been part of my journey in writing this dissertation and they have made this work possible and meaningful for me.

I am deeply indebted to the faculty and my peers at the School of Arts and Aesthetics who have helped shape the way I think and engage with academic and other issues.

This dissertation would not been possible without my teachers:

Dr. H. S Shivaprakash - who showed me that complex and chaotic things are in reality very simple; for his smiles and sense of humour, and for always bringing me back on track when I wandered...

Dr. Bishnupriya Dutt - for inspiring me to be in this field; for the unlimited affection, books and food she provided and for always being there...

Dr. Soumyabrata Choudhary - for constantly opening up new directions of enquiry, for his tremendous patience in reading my work and discussing it with me; and above all for being an exception to the state of exception...

Dr. Urmimala Sarkar - who made possible some of my great experiences with her field trips and workshops, and for rooting my enquiries into a pragmatic domain...

I also thank the eminent scholars who made time for me and helped guide the scope and directions of my study - Late Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan, K. Satchidanandan, Civik Chandran, Vasupradeep, M. P. Parameswaran, R. Gopinathan and Ramachandran Mokeri.

Gopan Chidambaram who gave me direction in the initial part of my field work and particularly his suggestions regarding Malayalam plays of the emergency period.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the staff of School of Arts and Aesthetics - Jagdish Vidhyarti, Diwan Ram, Savita & Satish, the staff of SAA Library and the staff of the Kerala Sahitya Academy Library, Thrissur.

And my loved ones...

My family - Sumioppol, Shomu, Bulku, Ettan and Supriya, who have been my strength and weakness, and who have been too liberal Marxist with their love and affection.

Preema, for the love and joy she brings to my life.

For Preema's parents who fed me and gave me a space to escape from JNU.

Arathi and Sreejith for sharing with me their life, roti, kapda aur makaan.

And above all for your love and friendship.

Rachel and Rahul, for partaking in my trials and tribulations in our odyssey.

Rachel's Appa for his generosity and open-heartedness.

Ashammami, Kunjammaman, Itchamma, Perassamma...for always being there.

Introduction

In India, the 1970s has been regarded as a period of dynamism in the fields of politics as well as of culture. The present study is oriented towards analysing the cultural field of the 1970s in relation to the question of the rise of authoritarianism. The central event around which this investigation is based is one that unequivocally established the authoritarian character of the Indian nation-state - the nineteen months of emergency starting with the declaration by the President, of emergency "on internal grounds" on June 26, 1975. Though this emergency was a national one, its impact differed in the various regions. Therefore the present study, which is a preliminary one in the direction of analysing the relationship between authoritarianism and culture, will start the process by looking at one of the regions- the state farthest from the central seat of power and having a strong presence of left politics- the state of Kerala.

The basic question from which this work originates is the question of what happens to *political theatre* when the public sphere as a common space accessible to all, where various groups can involve in contestation of ideas and positions, effectively crumbles down. The event of emergency kicked off by the declaration in 1975 epitomised such a scenario of breakdown of public sphere as through various strategies, this public sphere was completely taken over by state agencies. Theatre, due to its special place in the public sphere keeping in mind the live spectator audience relationship it produces, was one of the first mediums to be brought under the control of the authoritarian state. Along with the changes that were brought about by the state in the fundamental right to life and organisation of the people, there was also the limiting of the right to freedom of expression and Rule 50 of the Constitution that deals with the control of dramatic performances (*Peoples Democracy*, Volume II: No 27, July 6, 1975, p1.).

The term 'political theatre' can be used in different ways. It has been invoked with the specific investment and interpretation of the term 'political' whereby it refers specifically to theatre that reveal a politics that could be called progressive/revolutionary¹. Contrary

¹ The terms progressive and revolutionary are itself contested terms and therefore the interpretation and definition of these terms is in turn what determines the 'political' nature of theatre. In theatre studies the

to this precise definition is the use of the term in a broader sense, where it could encompass all theatres that ally themselves with some politics and paradigm of social critique and social change. In this broader sense of the term the period of emergency might present some examples of and interventions by political theatre where it has been used by the state machinery to propagate its ideas. And in the precise sense of the progressive and revolutionary theatre, one may be able to unearth in different parts of the country, during the period of the emergency and particular after the lifting of the same, some interventions that were critical towards the authoritarian regime. However the present work is based on the premise that one needs to and can find a deeper link between authoritarianism and theatre and broadly culture, if one sidelines the predetermined notion of an event with the political magnitude as the emergency as primarily a 'political event'.

So far the studies in relation to the event of the emergency, particularly trying to bring out its relationship with culture, have been of a limited nature. What has come out can be categorised as follows:

- i. Speeches, pamphlets, editorials, during the time of emergency laying down the positions of various individuals, groups etc.
- ii. Biographies, memoirs of various people who were involved in emergency in various capacities.
- iii. Studies trying to bring into the forefront the rationale of emergency and focussing on the economic and political analysis of the claims and the reality of emergency.
- iv. Analysis of the 1977 poll defeat of Indira Gandhi.
- v. Studies focussing on the state initiated programs during the emergency, with particular stress on the nation wide family planning program and the slum eviction drive.

area of political theatre has assumed a significant position. The genealogy that one usually draws is the conscious use and redefinition of theatre for political objectives and theorisation surrounding the same by people such as Erwin Piscator, Bertolt Brecht, Heiner Mueller etc. See Piscator, Erwin, *Political Theatre: The Development of Modern German Drama*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1972.

- vi. Studies focussing on the constitutional changes brought about by the regime and the questions that it throws vis-à-vis the nature of the India's status as a functional parliamentary democracy.

In this whole corpus of works, what one encounters from the perspective of this project, is a real dearth of academic studies surrounding the relationship between culture and emergency. Some collections of literature, poetry and other cultural interventions that viewed the emergency regime critically have been published. For example, in the context of Kerala, two books that came out were the *Tadavara Kavitalakal* (prison poems) and Chintha Publications' *Amarshathinte Kavithakal* (poems of anger). A work published in 2006 titled *1975- Adiyantharavasthayude Ormappusthakam* (The memory book of emergency), edited by Shanawas M.A, brings together a number of essays, interviews, memoirs of various people highlighting the atrocities and debates surrounding the emergency. It has a small section on culture, where it brings together a collection of short stories and poems written against emergency and two articles - one by Gupthan Nair explaining why there was no immediate response by the people associated with culture, and another by V. Rajakrishnan pointing towards the passivity of the cultural workers and the need to study the period and develop a critique of the intelligentsia. These are only preliminary thoughts with regards to the relationship between authoritarianism and culture in this complex period.

Even in these articles, the writers views them primarily as political events that externally influence culture - the political event and its main actors directing and using culture for achieving various political ends. By questioning the very nature of the event of emergency in terms of its complex relationship with culture, this thesis posits that one has to look at the event of the emergency, at least partly, as a *cultural event*. It is this perspective that will give us insights into the deeper link between authoritarianism and what can be termed as *political theatre*.

The Event

What was so unique about the Emergency proclamation of 1975? This proclamation, the proposal of which was sent by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi to the President without the

official permission of the cabinet², was unique as this is the first time in the history of the free nation that an emergency was declared on apparent threats to the security of the nation by 'internal disturbances'. Till this point, emergency powers of national significance had been invoked on the grounds of external threat to security of the nation, i.e. in situations of war. In fact when this Emergency on internal grounds was declared, there was already in force an emergency declaration issued on December 3, 1971, by the President of India on the grounds of threat to security of the nation on "external grounds". This second emergency declaration stood out because of the force and effect it had in the next nineteen months of its existence in almost all aspects of social life, particularly what one would maintain as the rights of freedom of expression and life. Followed by the proclamation was the suspension by virtue of Article 358 of the constitution the "freedoms guaranteed under Article 19 of the Constitution restricting the power of the State to make any law or to take any executive action which the State would but for the provisions contained in Part III"³. After the declaration of the emergency the President of India issued an order under article 359 of the Constitution on June 27th 1975 suspending the right to move to any court for the enforcement of fundamental rights conferred by article 14, 21, and 22 of the constitution. This conclusively made the President of India's satisfaction as the only unquestionable authority in any actions taken during the time of the Emergency, even if they are against the fundamental rights of the citizens. "The right of equality under Article 14, the right of fundamental guarantee against deprivation of life and personal liberty according to procedure established by law also stood suspended and the protection against arrest and detention could not be challenged before the courts. The right of free speech and expression, right to assemble peacefully, to form associations and unions; to move freely throughout the territory of India; to reside and settle in any part of the territory; to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade or business, which were guaranteed under clause (1) of

² Rajeswari, K, 'Indira: Ekadhipatiyude Hemanta Dinangal', in *Adivantaravasthayude Ormapustakam* Edited by Shanawas. M. A, Pranatha Books, 2006, p 26.

³ SHAH COMMISSION INQUIRY (Appointed under Section 3 of the Commissions of Inquiry Act 1952), INTERIM REPORT I, March 11, 1978, p4.

Article 19, could not thereafter be exercised.”⁴ The 42nd amendment that about these changes, having 59 clauses due to the quantitative and qualitative changes it brought about to the constitution has been sometimes called as a “mini-constitution”. The amendment clearly brought about aiming to establish what has been described as a “constitutional dictatorship”, led to a situation where, as Dr. V. A. Seyid Muhammad, a Minister of State for Law in the Congress regime described, “government could eliminate all political opposition and establish a one-party dictatorship”⁵

The proclamation and the amendments to the constitution brought about a fundamental transformation in the status quo of the distribution of power and the checks and balances of power. These amendments in a way brought a transformation of power, first from the Judiciary to the Parliament and then from the Parliament to the Executive. And the Executive in reality meant the Prime Minister and her clique.

When the Judiciary lost its power to check the acts of the Parliament and the Executive, it was the State machinery that acquired, over the nineteen months of the emergency, unprecedented power, in the process becoming the central force determining and organizing the social order. While there were 80,000 police force in the states and the armed forces totaling one million, Indira Gandhi at the Centre had at her behest 700,000 policemen belonging to the Border Security Force, the Central Reserve Police the Central, Industrial Security force and the Home Guards. In addition to these the organization that came to the forefront as the best aid in acquiring political intelligence and operations was the Research Analysis Wing (RAW), the budget of which starting with five crores reached hundred crores during the period (Balraj Puri 1978: 110). On July 4th 1975, twenty six organisations including the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Anand Marg, Jammata-e-Islami-e-Hind, and the *Naxalite* groups were banned by the

⁴ Ibid, p6.

⁵ Puri, Balraj, ‘Constitutional Props of Authoritarianism’ in *Revolution Counter-Revolution*, Newman Group of Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, p 16-17.

Union government⁶ and it has been estimated that there was around one lakh forty thousand detentions during the period of emergency⁷.

So what was the event of emergency? Writers, activists, scholars all have called it by different names- bloodless coup, constitutional dictatorship, semi-fascist dictatorship, “putting back democracy on the rails” etc⁸. In the present work, I would look at the event of the emergency as the technique of governance whereby a ‘state of exception’ is instituted for bringing about control of the authoritarian agencies. By the term state of exception, I am referring to the use of the term by Giorgio Agamben for whom state of exception appears as a threshold of indeterminacy between democracy and absolutism (2005: 3). Agamben in his work *State of Exception* traces the history of the uninterrupted use of it in western democracies from the World War I to the present where he feels that state of exception has reached its maximum worldwide deployment (ibid: 86-87). According to him, the state of exception “is the device that must ultimately articulate and hold together the two aspects of the juridico-political machine by instituting a threshold of undecidability between anomie and *nomos*, between life and law...It is founded on the essential fiction according to which anomie... is still related to the juridical order and the

⁶ INDIA: A Reference Manual 1976, Published by Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1976, p 446.

⁷ Puri, Balraj, ‘Counter-Total Revolution’ in *Revolution Counter-Revolution*, Newman Group of Publishers, New Delhi, 1978, p 110.

⁸ In the paper presented to the Parliament after the declaration of Emergency, the government claims that the emergency was the needed to put “democracy back on the rails”. “No government worth the name could stand by and allow the country’s security, stability and economy to be imperiled. The nation’s interest demanded firm and decisive action to put democracy on the rails again.” (‘In Defense of Emergency’, Appendix I in *Counter-Total Revolution*, Edited Balraj Puri, p 136). On the other hand you have the opinions so clearly opposed to this such as that of S. Nihal Singh that “She (Indira Gandhi) subjected the country to the most tyrannical regime it has had for two centuries...⁸”, or Anand asking “When have we seen the fascism of the European countries so clearly in this country other than the Emergency?” by Anand. Or as P. Govindapillai writes in his foreword to the collection of poems of resistance to Emergency, “it was a strange era when the nation, freedom and humanism itself fell into a sordid pit.... By calling the pet name Emergency, when a group of power mongers celebrated the devils’ night...”

power to suspend the norm has an immediate hold on life” (ibid: 86). When one analyses the works critically looking at the emergency one can see a critique placed by them of the nature of the state of exception as a ‘device’ used for the maintenance of authoritarian structure . Further the effort of this thesis is to bring out the preliminary account of this ‘fiction’ in which the state of exception necessitates/justifies itself.

In the history of the third-world nations, the freedom obtained from the colonizers giving away to dictatorships has been seen in many different nations. India, with the second largest population, was till the 1970s seen as an exception. India in this regard was a model for democracy in the newly independent nations. With the declaration on June 25th 1975 and the reign of terror in the next nineteen months, the claim of the unquestionable character of the Indian nation as a functioning democracy, was destroyed. What was even more ‘shocking’ was the absence of an organized resistance that could throw this authoritarian regime out; instead the regime had to bring about its own downfall by declaring elections and consequent overthrow of the same through ballots.

When one looks closely at the nature of this authoritarian regime, one gets to know that it is in fact quite unique as compared to other dictatorships. For this ‘bloodless coup’ was not achieved by mere brute force (though force was a very important part even before the declaration and clearly after the declaration). It was a ‘hegemony’ that was achieved by use of force also, but which had managed to get into its side the ‘popular support’ or ‘consent’ of the people who were subjected to the same. This ‘popular’ or ‘public support’ was developed as a terrain distinct from the basic structures of a parliamentary democracy; in the process this space becoming the most powerful tool in thwarting other checks and balances. When one analyses the events and the debates preceding the declaration, one can identify a discursive terrain being created by all major political players that was used by the government in its own side to justify the state of exception. Balraj Puri in his analysis does a close study of the role played by all major political players including the opposition in building a climate for the authoritarian regime. In analyzing the climb of Indira Gandhi to power, Balraj Puri notes that she could attract the support of many people however passive and partial who otherwise had no belief in authoritarianism or personality cult (Balraj Puri 1978: 98-100). He further notes, “apart from such “collaborators”, a section of the opposition also supplemented her efforts-

equally unwittingly- in creating an atmosphere for authoritarianism. She, in fact, owned many political ideas popularized by the opposition. She appeared to be more nationalist, more socialist and more anti-imperialist than her opponents.”(ibid: 98)

What this “propaganda” and what one calls political theatre of the state did was to attain a specific legitimacy for the new sovereign structure, while masking many of the brutal uses of power and taking away of the basic rights of the masses. In Kerala, for example, this assertion at least in the initial phase won over most of the intelligentsia, except those associated with the organised left (except Communist Party of India, which supported the emergency) and the RSS. For example Gupthan Nair, writing about the response of the cultural workers, says that he initially welcomed the declaration. It was needed as a “shock treatment” for the Indian people, who unlike the people of France or Britain had no sense of parliamentary mechanism (2006: 276). It was an important step needed to control the anarchism that was spreading in the society. Then later, when it came to the fore that the emergency revealed the symptom of authoritarian tendency in Indira Gandhi (276) and it was not merely about the question of discipline but beyond that the emergency was about political revenge and power mongering, most of the intelligentsia responded (277). He ends his essay by saying that to think that only those who wrote against the emergency are patriots, is not a correct perspective. Intelligentsia did its work - teachers taught in the schools, lawyers went to courts - and may be their “silence” was a mode of resistance better than many who changed their positions for personal gains (278).

The linkage of the rise of authoritarianism and its efforts to mobilise and use the public will in favour of the same produced/created and presents a unique interrelationship with culture. Any continuation of power involves a propaganda and use of culture; but the emergency, as I see created very specific problems in the domain of culture that can be laid out as follows:

- a. The emergency justified itself by use of varied cultural forms - radio plays, songs, poetry, theatre, cartoons, paintings etc. These were oriented towards mobilising opinion on the ‘progressive’ steps taken by the state as also critiquing the

opposers of emergency, whom the state classified as the forces imperilling the democratic setup. This was the conscious use of culture for propaganda.

- b. The emergency along with this propaganda, many a times could effectively remove the opposing voices. Constitutionally this was done by the new proclamations issued by the State that took away the right to life, organisation and freedom of expression. Of the various statutory provisions made, the most relevant one, in our case, directly addressing the question of cultural expression, is The Prevention of Publication of Objectionable Matter Act, 1976, dated February 2, 1976. According to this Act, the expression “objectionable matter” included “any words, signs, or visible representations which are defamatory of the President of India, the Vice-President of India, the Prime Minister or the Speaker of the House of the People or the Governor of the State”. The Act provided for the seizure of copies of publication, closure of any printing press or other instrument or apparatuses used in publication⁹. With a censor editing everything printed, even assembly proceedings were censored, cutting off any debate in the same from the public. Along with setting up of its own agenda by the State, what these new regulations effected was breaking a cultural movement that was underway from the start of the 1970s (started partly in response to the authoritarian character of the State). A turn that the public sphere was taking in the form of the new interactive relationship between performers and audience was destroyed. One aspect of my thesis would be to look at how the emergency impacted on the new trend, the revolutionary trend that the Kerala cultural scene was taking. Even after such regulations poets such as Satchidanandan maintain that the intense cultural investigation in early 1970s is precisely what gave the strength for art and culture to respond to the emergency (2007: 22-23). Along with propaganda and the control of the public sphere, the relationship of emergency and culture needs to be seen in a closer manner. For, it is not just that the emergency was externally influencing and shaping/directing culture. Emergency itself has to be seen, at least

⁹ Shah Commission of Inquiry (Appointed under Section 3 of the Commission of Inquiry Act, 1952) Interim Report I, March 11, 1978, p4-69

partly, as a cultural event; an event that without being theatre, without being fiction, took on many elements from the latter. The emergency proclamation itself is a classic “performative” as laid out by Austin¹⁰. It is a performative act. Moreover, what transpired in the next nineteen months, through the various enactments of the State, was a representation of what a Nation State is in its pure basic form before the masses. The State defined and presented itself. Simultaneously, it presented its subjects- the “bad”, the “reactionary” forces attacking the democratic set up, the good “ideal” “performing” citizen, the leader (mother; goddess) leading the nation to progress and welfare etc. This phenomenon along with propaganda and take over of the public sphere is what I call “political theatre” of the State. This is not theatre in its ordinary sense. It is a real event. Yet parallels can be made, in time, to the idea of the nation as a stage, where the people are performing their roles.

I would enter into the wider definition of political theatre by using the methodological framework of *theatricality*. This term that is usually invoked as the basic characteristic defining theatre has been in recent scholarship been used to refer to phenomena outside theatre. In her essay on theatricality, Josette Feral in her study starts with the question that if theatricality is the language of theatre, then how one can define it. But, through her essay she arrives at an ironic position. Theatricality for her does not reside in the actor, the stage, the setting, or the dramatic text. By reworking the definition of the same provided by Evreinov in the 1920s, she concludes that theatricality is pre-theatre. Theatricality precedes theatre and therefore can reside outside the theatrical stage. She, writes, “Theatricality produces spectacular events for the spectator; it establishes a relationship that differs from the quotidian” (Josette Feral, 2005: 100). Theatricality for her rather than being a “property with analyzable characteristics” is a process that has to do with the “gaze”

¹⁰ For a detailed understanding of the theory of performative, refer, How to do things with Words, Austin. Performative for Austin, is something different from constative statements as it has a force and an effect. The performatives get this force and the consequent effect by their mere utterance. When using the constitution an emergency is declared, the mere utterance of the same has the force and effects to produce a new state of affairs as different from the existing state of affairs before the declaration.

that postulates and creates a distinct, virtual space belonging to the other, from which fiction can emerge”(ibid: 97) Therefore there are two possible ways of theatricality arising- first, by the conscious intent of the performer and the transformation of the space surrounding her/him and second, “through a spectator’s gaze framing a quotidian space that he does not occupy.” These actions divide the space into the “outside” and the “inside” of theatricality and this is a space of the “other”. It is thereby a space that defines both alterity and theatricality. What I would be looking at closely in this project is one aspect of the gaze that makes events/ performances/ works/ objects a site of theatricality thereby assuming a very different meaning than is attributed in normal situations. Emergency generated a ‘social gaze’, a space in the real life that could be framed it in the context of fiction, where the quotidian was transformed into something spectacular. In the emergency, working in offices in the right time (note here that this is what Gupthan Nair also says), trains running on time, is not a “normal” activity, a quotidian. It means/symbolizes and captures in itself the general character of the “ideal” nation. If one looks at the works critical of the emergency, it is precisely these symbols that are taken up for criticism- the falsity of the symbols, the alienation that these symbols produce. A critique of authoritarianism and the imagination of a revolutionary transformation involved a critique of this theatricality produced by authoritarian agencies and an imagination and production of a new theatricality.

At this stage I would not go into a detail of the concept of theatricality. I feel it would evolve in its complexity through the thesis. I would merely highlight two significant aspects. First, theatricality should be used as Joachim Fiebach maintains in the broadest definition of the term theatre and consequently historically and culturally located (Joachim Fiebach 2002: 17-20). Second that my own selection of particular cases of theatricality, is political in nature. I would here agree with Joachim Fiebach who maintains that

Pertinent studies should focus on *historically significant* cases of theatricality and thus address issues that are important to a critical understanding of cultural and sociopolitical realities, past and present. I cannot expand here on the problem that any approach to societal phenomena is to a greater or lesser degree socio-politically interest-governed,

and directed by a specific worldview, philosophy, and value system. I can only point to my own philosophical interest— the *critical* analysis of those cases of theatricality that are instrumental in maintaining power structures and blatant social disparities, on the one hand, and, on the other, attempts at resisting, subverting, and, perhaps, altering those realities. (ibid: 26)

The Emergency and Kerala

The present thesis, which is a preliminary investigation of the phenomenon of the emergency, takes Kerala as the case study. This presents some specific problems. The central problem is how to link emergency as a national phenomenon to its specific history and variation in Kerala. Emergency, though a national phenomenon, in its reality was felt differently by different regions within the country. While the visible brutality was more in the North India, some scholars have argued that it was not merely a difference of degree in the various regions; instead in villages for instance, the emergency did not make any difference at all (Lee Schlesinger 1977: 627-647). In respect to the protests and cultural resistance to the emergency too, the various regions differed. Kerala was for instance one region where the resistance is not regarded as being significant. In the election after the lifting of the emergency, the people who were at the helm of the authoritarian regime were voted back with huge margin to power. This is one of the central aspects that one has to take into account while studying emergency period in relation to Kerala. But rather than placing the study in the contexts of debates as to why there was no resistance in Kerala, or who is to be held 'responsible' for it, I would be following a different trajectory of investigation. This non-national aspect of Kerala provides us with a possibility of studying an important aspect of the event of the emergency- the phenomenon of 'consent' to the regime.

The specific regional location and history of Kerala also provides another central aspect to the study that one may not feel as significant in the case of other regions, say that of North India. It is the context revolutionary praxis, theory and imagination. Since the rise of communist movement in the 1940s, this aspect has assumed a central role in the political and cultural field of Kerala. We would be studying closely these political

developments and their relationship with culture, particularly in providing direction to the movement of progressive modernism.

Chapters

The thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter 1 will problematise the nature of the event of the emergency and why it needs to be viewed as a cultural event. It then proceeds to provide an overview of the political theatre of the period under our investigation - late 1960s to early 1980s. The chapter would give a perspective on the wide-ranging aspects of political theatre - the proclamations, speeches, plays, poetry in its performance context etc. The central argument is the need to move beyond the declaration as a single 'performative' that determined the force and effect of the event. The event as we will see assumed the force due to a series of performatives that defined the limit and scope of the declaration. Another aspect of the proclamations is the fluidity of the categories invoked by it. These categories, say that of the citizen, public etc are not juridically definable categories. They assumed force because of the contestations and definitions in the 'public sphere'. The chapter would present the state theatricality in the form of speeches and analysis of the play produced before the declaration. The notion of 'consent' to the regime has to be seen in this context. As opposed to the state theatricality, by looking at a movement happening in the field of poetry that was bringing a performance aspect into it, and a play that tried to produce a new theatricality, we will lay down the broad contours of political theatre based on counter-authoritarianism.

In chapter 2 we will move on to look at what can be termed the 'aesthetics of authoritarian period'. This chapter is an effort to lay down the aesthetics that is at the heart of both authoritarian regime as well as the counter authoritarian forces. Starting with the idea of 'developmental aesthetic' of the state, a framework posited by Madhava Prasad, we will move on to look the complexity that the period presented. The new forms of critique that emerged in the wake of the institution of emergency such as the parable, grotesque, tragic-comic etc will be studied in the context of the perception that a state of exception produces.

Chapter 3 would take one central element of the aesthetics laid down in the second chapter- the figure of the *hero*. We would look at the period of authoritarianism and crisis, in respect of how it addressed the notion of revolution/liberation and social transformation through the category of the hero. This will give us an entry into the relationship between authoritarianism and revolutionary and resistance culture. What is striking is that the period under our study offered not just a single conception of the figure of the hero. Both the efforts to produce an authoritarian mechanism, as well as struggle against this imagined ideal typifications of the hero that are related, yet very distinct. We would examine three different models of hero:

- a. The Revolutionary Hero: We would study this figure in the context of the figure of the *naxalite* as imagined and articulated both by the *naxalite* groups as well as the state apparatus.
- b. The Citizen Hero: This is the ideal hero of the state, the hero who “produces”, is self-sacrificing, efficient, on time and upholding the values of the sovereign. This hero comes to the forefront in the context of the crisis in the society and the role s/he plays in the moment of transformation.
- c. The Resistance Hero: This ‘hero’ is a unique position that came up in the wake of the state of exception and the questions it raised in relation to the role of the people in the institution and functioning of the authoritarian regime.

Chapter One

Emergency as a Cultural Event: An Analysis of the Political Theatre of the State

Introduction

At midnight on June 25, 1975, the President of India issued the following proclamation:

“In the exercise of the powers conferred by clause (1) of article 352 of the Constitution, I, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, President of India, by this proclamation declare that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India is threatened by internal disturbance.”
(Era of Discipline: (Documents on Contemporary Reality) 1976: 13)

This proclamation is an example of a 'performative utterance' or, in short, a 'performative' as defined by J. L. Austin. He defines a performative utterance as such utterances that:

1. Do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false,' and
2. The uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just,' saying something. (Austin 1962)

The proclamation of the emergency by the President of India resulted in a situation that is different from such a declaration by anybody else in the country. In the latter case, if somebody, even if it is the Prime Minister, says or declares that a grave emergency exists whereby the security of India is threatened, it is an opinion of the person about the state of affairs with the hint of an action that needs to be taken; but opinion can then be contested and deliberated upon. Such an utterance is contrary to a performative, it is a description of the state of affairs from the perspective of the person saying it, and it can be tested as to whether the utterance is true or false. When the same utterance is made by the President of India, who is authorised to do so according to constitutional provisions, the utterance is not one that is describing anything. It is part of an 'action'. The action being that of putting the country under the emergency provisions provided in the constitution. In the nineteen months of the national emergency kicked off by this proclamation, a multitude of new promulgations, rules and regulations were made by the national Government and the Parliament that fundamentally transformed the way of life, rights, freedom and expression of the people of the country. Though the legal side of

these developments has been very well studied by scholars, studies problematising the cultural implications of the same are lacking. What is pertinent to note is that independent India in the period from 1947-1975 had been put under similar emergency declarations before and this particular declaration is distinctive only because it was declared on the basis of 'internal disturbance'¹¹. Yet this particular declaration has been seen as something unparalleled in its effects on Indian society by almost all quarters. For instance, D. K. Borooah writes in the context of the declaration,

June 25, will go down in the history of India as a day of destiny. It marks the ushering in of a basic and qualitative change in the life of India. A major step was taken on that day towards realising the dreams for which the freedom fighters had struggled for long years and made innumerable sacrifices...It ushered in an era in which freedom has become deeper, wider and more real... (Borooah, Foreword, *Era of Discipline*: 1976)

Yet this overwhelming effect of the national emergency was not one that was immediately recognised in most quarters. On the contrary, most accounts that one comes across show that it was at first taken to be a 'normal' event, 'just like the state of affairs in other emergencies'. And since there was already an emergency declaration that had not been lifted, nothing additional was expected. It was only after the events of the next few days and the attitude of the state agencies, particularly that of the police, that it came to be recognised that this emergency was in fact something very unique. Dr. R. Prasannan in his work on the emergency period writes about the immediate reaction to the declaration of Emergency.

¹¹ There are mainly four provisions in the Indian constitution according to which emergency powers can be invoked by the President. "Article 352 pertains to an Emergency due to a threat to the security of India by war, external aggression or armed rebellion. Article 360 deals with financial Emergencies. The right of the Centre to protect every state against external aggression and internal disturbance is provided under Article 355". Article 356 "confers powers on the President... to declare an Emergency and dismiss a duly elected state government if he is "satisfied," on receipt of a report from the Governor of that state that there is a breakdown of constitutional machinery there". (Krishna K. Tummala, 'The Indian Union and Emergency Powers' in *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol. 17, No. 4, New Trends in Federalism. Les nouvelles formes du fédéralisme. (Oct., 1996): 367). She further notes that while there has been no emergency declaration on the grounds of financial emergency, as different from the national emergency of 1975 on internal grounds, there has been three national emergencies- in 1962, 1964 and 1972- on the grounds of war with China and Pakistan, and the article 356 has been invoked around a hundred times by the President of India. (ibid: 369)

Even after hearing¹² the speech of the Prime Minister to the nation and reading the newspaper next morning, many did not realise the seriousness of the same. Many thought that it was another emergency, just as one had while there was war against China and Pakistan. When the opposition leaders were put under arrest, it was merely seen as *an action a bit exceeding the normal*” (Prasannan 2000: 16. Italics mine).

As would have been in normal conditions, a march was held outside the Secretariat to protest against the Emergency. He writes,

“May be because of the ignorance of the Emergency conditions, there was a huge crowd before the Secretariat comprising of common activists of the opposition party and a big crowd of common people as spectators. They had not understood the changes that had come about in two days. Usually such protests follow a pattern- the police are informed well in advance about the protest, the protest starts in the morning finishes before evening as the heroes are taken away in the waiting police vans and the spectators disperse with the satisfaction of watching a cultural programme. The debut of the emergency was in stark contrast to this tradition. The policemen, who were now provided with the opportunity, put it in great use. There is nothing like learning from experience. When a few days later, there was another protest for the unreasonable custody of opposition leaders, not many people dared to participate in it.... (ibid: 16-17).

While this narration is about the event and its reception in Kerala, one can see that this was the general pattern of the reception of emergency across the country- it took some time for the reality and the scope of the emergency to sink in and when it sank in it was because of some *apparent* ‘drastic’ break in the domain of culture. Dr. R. Prasannan further writes about the realization of the difference that emergency had introduced in the society, “emergency was understood by people not merely as the arrest of the opposition leaders and the use of brutal force to disperse the protesters, people got to know through experience that it also meant the banning of protest tents in front of the secretariat, the public roads devoid of marches, the complete absence of strikes in factories, schools and colleges, and fields, the government employees of all levels of hierarchy coming to the office on time and staying in their seats till the evening and a beginning of now

¹² As television was not popular in towns and villages, people heard about the declaration through the speech of Indira Gandhi. (Prasannan, R, *Aditantaravasthayude Alayolikal: Niyamasabhayil Nishabdanayirandam bhagam*, Current Books, Thrissur, 2000, p16)

unfamiliar discipline” (ibid: 17)¹³.

Where does this lead to us in understanding the declaration of the emergency as a performative utterance? What is critical to note is the notion of the 1975 emergency being and exceptional phenomenon as compared to invocations of other exceptional provisions earlier¹⁴. Is it that the exceptional provisions by its invocations in repeated fashion had ‘normalised’ them for the people and it is this normalcy that 1975 broke? A performative such as the emergency declaration is an open-ended utterance, the limit and scope of which has to be defined and developed by the different players in the field. And this ‘scope’ of the declaration as is evidenced by the difference from the experience of other emergencies, does not lie in the single performative utterance, but is revealed in the series of performative utterances defining the event.

In the case of 1975, its scope was unlimited for two reasons. First, in the period after the declaration, through a series of performatives, what is commonly regarded as the ‘constitutional mechanism’, even the so-called inalienable rights of the people were taken away. Second, any discussion of the emergency cannot undermine the role of the extra-constitutional limitless power exercised by the clique of the Prime Minister and her son and this indeed was something that was to impact the way of life and experience and imagination of the people. A huge part of the success of emergency can be attributed to the terror that these extra-constitutional agencies produced. I quote here in detail the incident of January 1976 that Mulk Raj Anand describes as that which made him aware of the “prevalence of fear” during the period of emergency.

“I had gone to see a friend for a drink one evening. The ‘last one for the road’ may have gone to my head. But, as I walked along Amrita Sher-Gill Marg No 1, where I was camping, I suddenly heard a stirring in the hedge of House No 7. I felt that somebody,

¹³ Let us not get into the truth claim of this argument. The argument of government offices working on time and the general atmosphere of a discipline in the period of the emergency has been a widely contested argument.

¹⁴ Here one is not taking the argument for its truth claim. There has been in the case of the other emergencies critiques by various groups that have been very similar to the one in 1975. Yet one has to take into account the change in the intensity whereby the 1975 emergency impact and directly influenced the life of the majority. The parliamentary debates surrounding the emergency declaration of 1962 also reveal the same critique placed by the opposition that the DIR and other laws have provided the government with chances of arresting and detaining the members of opposition parties for any long without any reason. See for instance the resolution presented and the speech following it made by A.K. Gopalan against the misuse of DIR in 1963 in Gopalan, A.K., *Kodunkattinte Mattoli*, Chintha Publications, Thiruvananthapuram, 1979, p 260-271.

TH-16285



who had been waiting, was going to follow me. I did not look this side or that, but walked ahead with an uncontrollable thumping of the heart. I tried to rationalize my fear by tracing it to the hangover of the early childhood recoils against ghosts in the night. But there was another sharp rasping sound of leaves crackling and I began to feel, irrationally, that there was someone about. Another sound of what was probably a whiff of breeze and there was terror down my spine. I wanted to look back but could not. I quickened my pace looking straight ahead. As I passed No.5, where an old friend of mine, Dr Katyal, had lived and died, I wanted to stop and turn around, but could not for fear that I would come face to face with the CID man who might be following me. I stepped forward, but before I had lifted my head, a car passed by towards Safdarjung and I stood back startled. That was the limit, I thought, of my neurosis. I hardened my jaws against myself, accused myself of being a coward and turned into No 1. I realized what the fear of fear could mean. I had heard that Sanjay Gandhi was rumoured to have said 'all uncles must go'..." (Anand, Mulk Raj 1978: 33-34).

In these instances of changes in the nature of 'protest culture', 'working culture' and 'everyday experience' whether it be a real change or an imagined or propagated one, we should note the change in the way otherwise normal/mundane situations or the quotidian started to be framed in the period under consideration. An understanding of this framing would give insights into what one might call the experience of the emergency. The best tool to look at this phenomenon would be one that is derived from theatre. This new framing or what one could call a new theatricality, as Feral writes about theatricality, was the result of either a new mode of perception or a new mode of behaviour and expression¹⁵. The open endedness of the performatives is what gives the possibility of having such interpretations by the main players on the field. The success of the emergency lies in the fact that this framing was, by the use of the technique of the state of exception, monopolized by State agencies by the interpretations that these open-ended performative utterances offered them.

The present chapter is divided into four sections that give us an overview of the political theatre in the period spanning over a decade, starting from late 60s and early 80s. The first section looks closely at the speeches and the reaction of the press immediately after

¹⁵ Feral, Josette, 'Introduction' to *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality. (2002), p 6.

the declaration, that give us an idea of the key reference points for drawing the contours of this state theatricality. In the next three sections, starting from theatricality as a basic property of theatre, I move on to analyse how theatricality as a social manifestation is brought into the domain of theatre. In the process 'unmasking' or unleashing political spaces. The second section takes a play titled *Chaverppada: Oru Prati-Viplava Natakam*, written before the emergency that evidences one of the key aspects about political theatre of the state- that the theatricality used by the state after the declarations was not something altogether unique; instead it was something that was pieced together from the contestations in the pre-emergency period. The 'consent' the state managed to gain was in many ways aided by the alternate space of critique of the opposition put forward by plays such as *Chaverppada*. These tendencies have to be observed closely to understand what and how the different categories invoked by the state through open-ended performatives assumed a form in its subjects. The third section will look closely at one poem of Kadammanitta published the year emergency ended. Through this poem and the contextualisation of the 'recitals' of Kadammanitta, I will look into the phenomenon of how, in the pre-emergency period, poetry broke out of its characteristic as literature into a more theatrical space. This space of the recital, *kavi-arangu* and its further transformations, made it one of the most powerful popular media that had by the time of the emergency gained a unique language and aesthetics and a new public that made it one of the most vibrant and active modes of resistance and challenge to authoritarianism. The third section takes up another play title, *Nadugaddika*- a play that re-enacted the history of oppression from the perspective of the working class and critically re-created some real events of oppression, including the emergency.

The Scope of the Performative

Since the emergency declaration reached the majority of the people through the speeches of Indira Gandhi, one needs to closely analyse these to enter into the issue of limiting/defining of the declaration by the state agencies. The central word in the declaration that needs to be defined and on the basis of which the force and effect of the declaration had to be laid down was the term "internal disturbances". Indira Gandhi starts

her Address to the Nation with this point. She says, "The President has proclaimed Emergency. This is nothing to panic about." (Era of Discipline 1976: 14) This starting establishes the fact of the emergency and that one should look forward to her agencies for knowing the scope of the emergency provisions. This is an important step, for even though it is officially the President who declares the emergency, it establishes that in reality it has come from the Prime Minister and that it is her cabinet and executive that is going to define and impose it. It is also suggested that there is no need to panic, for the emergency is to control the factors that are creating the internal disturbance. What are these factors? "I am sure you are all conscious of the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures of benefit to the common man and woman of India. In the name of democracy it has been sought to negate the very functioning of democracy" (ibid: 14). She mentions that duly elected governments have not been allowed to function, in some cases elected members being forcefully made to resign, agitations have created an atmosphere leading to violent incidents, that her own Cabinet colleague has been murdered brutally and there was an attempt on the life of the Chief Justice. "Certain persons have gone to the length of inciting our Armed Forces to mutiny and our police to rebel.... The forces of disintegration are in full play and communal passions are being aroused threatening our unity" (ibid: 14).

The address of the Prime Minister to the 'nation' is very interesting in the manner in which it seeks to establish and defend the emergency. The first step involved is the establishment of a 'public' that can relate with the concerns of the speaker. Indira Gandhi starts her address with the same purpose. The first thing she does is to announce the fact of the declaration of the emergency and that she has full control over it- the author of the production has been established. Now it is the turn of the audience. "I am sure you are all conscious of the deep and widespread conspiracy which has been brewing ever since I began to introduce certain progressive measures..."- this establishes the audience. It is a knowing audience, one that has seen the actions before and what the Prime Minister had to do is to simply put these actions into an interpreted context- "In the name of democracy it has been sought to negate the very functioning of democracy... The forces of disintegration are in full play and communal passions are being aroused threatening

our unity". She continues with the stress on the relationship between her and her audience, latter having seen everything, knowing everything and in a way playing part in the actions preceding the present- "All manner of false allegations have been hurled at me. The Indian people have known me since my childhood. All my life has been in the service of our people. This is not a personal matter...the institution of the Prime Minister is important and the deliberate political attempts to denigrate it is not in the interest of democracy or of the nation" (ibid: 14). Now coming to the point of the immediate need of the action, "We have watched these developments with utmost patience for long. Now we learn new programmes challenging the law and order throughout the country... how can any government worth the name stand by and allow the country's stability to be imperilled... It is our paramount duty to safeguard unity and stability. The nation's integrity demands firm action..."(ibid: 14) Talking about the progressive measures that she is going to announce soon, she moves to the end of the address as to the effect of the same on the audience, "I should like to assure you that the new Emergency proclamation will in no way affect the rights of law-abiding citizens. I am sure that internal conditions will speedily improve to enable us to dispense with this proclamation" (ibid: 15). On 27th June in another broadcast to the nation, after elaborating the reasons for the proclamation of the Emergency, she highlights the ideas that became associated with the emergency as the basic cultural turn brought about by it- "Since the proclamation, there is normalcy all over the country except for partial *hartal* and minor incidents in Gujarat. This normalcy must be maintained.... This is a time for unity and discipline. I am fully confident that with each day the situation will improve and that in this task our people, in towns and villages, will give us their support, so that the country will be strengthened." (ibid: 16-17). This idea of the nation needing "normalcy", "unity and discipline" is then converted into a psychological state is further developed and becomes the trademark. This is brought out very clearly on Indira Gandhi's broadcast to the nation on 1st July where she announces the twenty-point programme. After saying that these programmes and others to be announced will make a difference to the economic outlook of the country, she ends her address with the following, "What is most urgent is that collectively we should shake off any sense of helplessness. The worst feature of the crisis, which was building over the last few months, was that it spread cynicism and sapped national self-confidence. There

is a chance now to regain the nation's spirit of adventure. Let us get on with the job." (ibid: 21).

What is critical in these speeches is the invocation of the categories of the "public", law-abiding citizen, extremists etc. While the declaration tried to define these categories through legal definitions, what gave force to the declaration was that many of these categories could not be precisely defined in the legal sense. These categories were fluid and emerged in the interpretations and the definitions by the various groups.

An analysis of State Theatricality – The case of *Chaverppada: Oru Prati-Viplava*

Natakam

In the previous section we looked at state theatricality and its broad framing by analysing the declaration and speeches of the period. We have noted that while the declarations try to define these categories through legal definitions, what gave force to the declarations was that many of these categories could not be precisely defined in the legal sense. What is critical is that the state even in the case of bringing in a unique state of exception was at the same time taking over some popular perceptions used and agreed to equally by the opposition as well as the ruling groups in the years preceding the emergency. And a study that wants to look at the phenomenon of 'consent' for the state regime and its argument of necessity of the state of exception will have to move in this direction. For this purpose we could take up for analysis a play written and produced before the emergency that tries to construct a popular common space that could be taken over by state theatricality. What is most interesting about the play is the manner in which it clearly produces an 'ideal public' and the categories of the 'extremists' that we saw being invoked in the last section through the technique of placing the 'political theatricality' in the domain of theatre.

Chaverppada: Oru Prati-Viplava Natakam (from now on *Chaverppada*) was written by A. Azeez¹⁶ in 1973 and the play won the Sahitya Academy Award of 1974 and was

¹⁶ The play has been reprinted in *Malayalanatakam 1947-2007: Thiranottam* (2007), edited by Vayala Vasudevan Pillai records a brief biographical note of Azeez: full name- P.M. Abdul Azeez. Born in 1938 in Thrissur district Azeez is a playwright and film director. Having taken his degree from the Pune Film Institute for direction and screenplay, Azeez went on to make films such as *Aval Manpeda Njavalpazhangal Atyunnatanggalil Koodaram* etc as well as directed more than thirty documentaries

widely performed in later years, particularly during emergency.

For the purpose of our analysis, one can divide *Chaverppada* into three distinct segments, each performing a specific function. The first segment is the *sthapana*¹⁷. Though the term is derived from Sanskrit theatre, the *sthapana* here performs a very different function. Moving away from the ritualistic aspect of the same, the *sthapana* performs a very modern project. Using the technique of the narrator, the *sthapana* contextualises the play for the audience. *Chaverppada* is striking in the manner in which addresses a discourse right from its title- A Counter Revolutionary Play. It is this perspective of defining itself to the audience that one sees as the most important part of the *sthapana*. In this segment it undertakes this contextualisation with respect to two central aspects. First, the explication and argument in favour of the theatrical techniques used in the play vis-à-vis the tradition it stands against- that of realism. The narrator highlights that there is a big difference between the use of technology and theatrical illusion in this play as compared to the other plays of the time. He says, “Unlike other theatre magicians, we do not intend to create a feeling of reality by performing technological stunts/tricks. Instead, our goal is to reveal certain realities by creating unreal magical atmosphere/setting” (Azeez 1973: 14). The objective of this contextualisation of the theatrical means used in the play is not merely that of a definition of the theatrical ‘style’. It is more than that a technique that is crucial to ‘unmask’ and visualise the otherwise experiential and hidden illusions. He says,

...The main subject of this play is the debut of the *chaverppada* who are getting ready to sacrifice their own lives for saving the honour of their king. Along with these historical personalities, there appear some people living in Thirunnavāya in the contemporary period. Surprisingly, one can see a great deal of similarity in the worldview and psychological make-up/state of these people who are living in different eras. May be due to this, here the boundaries of past and present melt away... (ibid: 15)

Therefore in this segment, the central project of the play is laid down- the use of the potential of the spacio-temporal logic of theatrical illusion for a critical analysis of certain other spaces of experiencing ‘realities’.

including *Mohiniyattam*, *Kootiyattam* etc. His major plays include *Vatakaveedu*, *Da...Da...Da*, *Balikkakka* and *Chaverppada*. (457)

¹⁷ This is the name given by the playwright for the first scene.

The second segment through the introduction of 'real' characters establishes the contemporary socio-political context and sets up what one could call the 'ideal public', the position that the play tries to put forward for its audience. It is from this demarcated position that one can 'see' through the magical events and realize the reality. This is achieved through conversations between the two characters- Moossu Thirumeni and Variyar, of which Variyar occupies the position of the 'ideal public'. One should note that when one is speaking of the position of the ideal public, one is not suggesting a character with whom the audience merely sympathises or recognises with. What is being suggested is that of a position that allows one to 'see' as in case of an audience of a performance. In the play this position coincides with that of Variyar because of some specific reasons. First, the character played by Variyar is to be performed by the same actor playing the role of the narrator. It is this person who earlier in the *sthapana* spoke about the context of the play and who in between the play, moves into the position of the narrator, commenting and intervening in the performance and interacting with the audience. Second, Variyar from the end of scene 1 assumes a position of a spectator to certain events that for him is like the illusionary space of performance. From this moment onwards, like the audience for *Chaverppada*, he is viewing a performance on the stage. It is this act of viewing the 'performance' that provides him the ability to see the trans-historical connections, to see the real nature of the theatricalised space of politics and in the end to make judgements. And the audience of *Chaverppada* sees this performance within the play from the perspective of Variyar. Let us now look closely at this figure of the ideal public and its construction.

Moossu Thirumeni represents the class of feudal landlords who are now in the changed context of the land reforms act, transforming themselves into a semi-capitalist class. In the interaction between him and Variyar, it comes across that he is a fat but young looking joyous man who is wealthy and relaxed, engaging himself in his 'hobby' of pursuing women. He has transferred his responsibilities to his enterprising son who has introduced new agricultural crops- the moneymaking rubber and cashew nut. Variyar on the other hand looks older than his age physicalising the torments and hard experiences of life that he had to go through. Variyar's story told to the audience by Moossu Thirumeni stands in contrast to the latter's happy and comfortable one. Moossu tells us that Variyar

at one point of time used to earn around 300 rupees by working for a British in his estate. There he started feeling “hatred” for British and was inspired by the freedom movement. So Variyar resigned the job, went to Wardha, fell on his knees before Gandhiji, asking the latter to make him also a “small fighter in the war for justice”¹⁸. What is striking in the conversation is the careless critical attitude of Moossu as opposed to the involved and at time theatrical mode of Variyar, as highlighted by the playwright in noting that in certain dialogues he assumes a manner of giving a speech. What is being created here the subject of a revolutionary, who moves in between through his ‘speeches’ into the revolutionary space of politics. And this move of Variyar into the theatrical space is broken and a consequent critique of the history of his actions is brought about by an intervention by Moossu that establishes the ‘public’ as those who have played a part in and are sympathetic to, but no longer the actors in revolutionary moments. The intervention is as follows:

Moossu: “...But after all this you, your country or your people, did anything prosper... You resigned your job, went to the seacoast and made salt. For that reason you were picked up by the police, beaten up and put in jail. And then what happened? British left. The real *khadar* people started ruling the country. Then, where were you? Did even a single person come to ask how many bones were left in the back of the freedom fighter K.E. Variyar?...” Moossu thinks even after all these experiences, if Variyar is not able to understand the reality, then it is indeed very tragic. And then he voices his philosophy, the critique of martyrdom and self-sacrifice in a punch line that runs through the thematic of the play- “If you are not there, there is no world for you. It is absolute stupidity trying to achieve prosperity for others by destroying yourself. Only if there is a wall can you paint on it?” (ibid: 25)

From this point on the ‘revolutionary’ Variyar is transformed into a ‘real’ person, for, he has realised what reality is from experience. While maintaining that he does not “regret” his self-sacrifice in the old days, he is sad about the post-colonial history where rather than giving him “the rightful position and respect for the services he has rendered” he sees the “same people who were always leading the tirade against us and throwing stones at us who were then seen in the front of everything that was happening” (ibid: 25). And to

¹⁸ Azeez, A, *Chaverppada*, Published by Author, Distributed National Book Stall, Kottayam, p23-24. Translation mine.

his lament that he is “not capable of competing with them... So, what use am I Thirumeni...” the position of the public vis-à-vis the state is laid down:

Moossu: “Only thing that I suppose you may be useful is as fodder for the horses. *You cannot rule the country, for sure.....*”

Variyar: “I did not need to rule the country. I have three four children... and my only wish is that they should be doing well...”

He is now in abject poverty and he now ready to do anything out of his principle. Now he has come for a favour from Moossu for getting a bank loan on mortgage of property to pay bribe for getting his daughter a job.

By the end of the second segment therefore, we have through a narration of the post-colonial ‘history’ of the nation in its regional specificities the ideal public. What is critical is the narration of the history of Variyar’s participation in the freedom movement and a break in the euphoria of the same after independence. Even the communist rise and movement for land reforms have led nowhere. The present moment is therefore a moment of ‘crisis’.

In the third segment, from this position he becomes a witness to events and personalities and their actions spread apart by centuries. These events are spread out in four scenes that have a special structure- scene three mirroring scene five and scene four mirroring scene six. The story and actions are pretty simple. In scene three we come to know about the *mamankam* that is going on to happen under the leadership of the head of the *chaverppada*, Kunju Panicker. The thrust is that through the perspective of Kunju Panicker a glorification of notion of martyrdom and the duty of a *chaver* to sacrifice their lives. To his wife, Chiruteyi, who is worried about the impending death awaiting the *chaver*, Kunju Panicker lays down the duty of a wife of the *chaver*- she should never forget- it is to tell the lore of courage deeds of their ancestors and in the process making them duty bound and charged up. In the next scene a break of this idealism of the *chaver* is brought about by the loss of sanity of character Raghava Kurup, brother-in-law and right hand of Kunju Panicker. Raghava Kurup on the crucial day of the *mamankam* is having visions of death and blood everywhere, the blood of *chaver*... flowing through Bharatapuzha and that all of his friends including Kunju Panicker and Chiruteyi and their

son in her womb is dead. When the efforts to get him back to sanity fails, Kunju Panicker orders former to be killed and the death is 'performed' off stage. The next scene is a short one where two spectators of *mamankam* are returning back home talking about the events of the day. To Variyar they inform how courageous and skilful the moves of the *chaverppada* was, that of Kunju Panicker in particular. He has become the hero and almost got the blood of the *Samuthiri*, but was taken from the back by the sword of the army leader of *Samuthiri*. The critique of the sacrifice comes in the form of the opinion of Variyar as to the pointlessness of the sacrifice except than that of being a spectacle for the audience. And interestingly, the play rather than showing this spectacle reveals the aftermath of the spectacle. The audience of the spectacle had a good time and they celebrate the skill and courage of the performers, yet the spectacle leads to nothing in real life as now the audience go back to their homes tired but happy after being witness to the *mamankam*, singing the lore about the present one till they watch the next *mamankam*.

The next two scenes mirror the preceding scenes in terms of action. The only difference is that now these characters barring Variyar belong to the contemporary period. The *chaverppada* has now become the band of 'extremists'¹⁹ working towards revolution by means of elimination of the oppressive bourgeois and landlords. Kunju Panicker is now comrade Kunju, Chiruteyi is Sreedevi and Raghava Kurup is transformed into comrade Raghavan. In Scene five we are given the idea of Variyar towards these extremists- Variyar sympathises with their idealism and intent but cannot agree with the means of violence used by them. After the meeting of comrade Kunju with his lover Sreedevi, there is the scene with comrade Raghavan is unsure and wavering on the groups' decision of killing the landlord Moossu. Rather than insanity in the case of Raghava Kurup, the issue before comrade Raghavan is that Moossu is his father, though latter does not acknowledge him as he is born out a low caste woman. Though he is an oppressive landlord, a terrible father, and a womaniser, for comrade Raghavan "blood is thicker than ideology". Even after Sreedevi tries to convince him, he cannot take the gun. Comrade Raghavan, in a manner similar to Raghava Kurup, is taken to the back stage and killed. In the last scene the group goes on to kill Moossu. Variyar was asked the direction where Moossu had gone and he had showed the wrong direction, for he cannot think of standing

¹⁹ The term used by comrade Kunju about himself and his group.

along with them in this murder. But in a short while the victorious extremists come back with Moossu's head in their hands and give it to Variyar along with some money. The extremists leave and Moossu comes in. Variyar is shocked and goes to check under the pipal tree where the head of Moossu was placed. There is nothing there. He checks his bag for the money that the extremists gave. It is not there. He cannot stand in the place and decides to leave for his home without waiting to get the documents he wanted from the landlord.

Everything looks like a bad dream...Without any evidence for what has happened here everything has reverted back to what they were...May be all this was just in my head... and yours too...(ibid: 85).

At this point I stop at this basic story of the play and take up for analysis two moments in the play that are relevant to us in our discussion on plays' critique of the theatricality of political spaces and its implication. These are moments where the play brings to its theatrical space certain other 'performative contexts' with the objective of presenting them before a viewing 'public'. The critical point to note is that these other performative contexts are brought in and presented before the public as modes of performance. By presenting them as distinct from the normal theatrical illusion as also 'reality', it attempts to bring out the basic paradox of political theatricality and moves on to put forward critique of the fundamental character of these other performative contexts.

The play, right from the *sthapana* itself, expressively puts forward a critique of realism as a form. The narrator breaks any form of illusion that the audience may want to relate by bringing to the forefront the materiality of a theatrical production. The techniques that theatre of the contemporary period use such as the mike, curtains, the customs of singing and mis-e-scene are shown to the audience by the narrator. In fact this brings in a break in the action at a crucial dramatic point when Kunju Panicker decides to kill Raghava Kurup. Even as emotions are peaking, Variyar who is seeing this suddenly transforms himself to the role of the narrator by putting the cloth around his body and interrupts Kunju Panicker. To the angry Kunju Panicker who has raised the sword to kill the pleading Raghava Kurup, the narrator interrupts and says,

"Stop! What are you doing? Aren't you a skilled and experienced actor? Isn't the

presentation of war, marriage, and cutting of head on stage banned by all great *natyacaryas*? (To the audience)... Sorry for creating a *rasa bhanga*. If you do not interrupt in advance, our kids may commit mistake on stage.... (ibid: 41)

Yet when we look at the moments of the play that I will be discussing in detail, it cannot be merely interpreted as an extension of plays' critique of realism as a form. It uses and in a way continues the modernist break achieved by theatre in terms of expunging realism. Yet the uses of the non-realistic are not merely restricted to the politics of rejecting realism. By bringing into its space some of the performative contexts that I would now discuss, the play is in fact trying to analyse those contexts and in a sense a parallel between them and theatre. By such an exercise, it tries to bring in a critique not just of realism but that of the materiality of the 'real' contexts as understood in a common parlance.

The first moment one can see in the play is as early as the second scene, where Variyar is responding to the question from Moossu as to what he got by becoming a freedom fighter. Variyar starts by saying that in those days he never used to think about himself and moves on to say the following dialogue *in the manner of a speech*-

When 40 crore people of this country are bound in chains of slavery, how could I live on the small amount given by the British? I cannot do that. Haven't you heard of the Judas who for 30 silver coins cheated Christ? Thirumeni...I could not become a Judas... (ibid: 23)

Moossu all the while is having pan, not interested in the speech given by Variyar.

The space that the play brings into the ambit of theatre is the space of politics in the form of political speeches. While one does see in *Chaverppada* as in many other plays, drama being developed through political debate between the characters sharing different political views, what is striking is the bringing in of the space of political speech into theatre, thereby creating a set of performers who are articulating the views from the space of a podium while spectators who are the 'public' is listening to these speeches. The above-mentioned speech by Variyar is the only instance where he becomes an active performer in the alternate performance space of politics. This transformation of Variyar is broken by the subsequent conversation between him and Moossu, where Variyar realises

the harsh 'reality'. From then on he starts occupying the space of a spectator- a spectator who is not part of the actors' space; instead one who is gazing at them, listening to them and in the end is in a position of making judgments about them. He is in this way transformed into the 'ideal public' whom the characters are addressing, the 'ideal public' with whom the audience of the play can relate to.

As the play proceeds, the small momentous political space alluded to by Variyar is developed to become a well charted out alternate space. The scene five offers a brilliant example. Comrade Kunju, Sreedevi and other members of the extremist group are present. The only one absent is comrade Raghavan. The scene so far has developed through idealised movements and actions of these characters except that of Variyar whose movements are following realist tradition. After the idealised entry of the members of the group they take their weapons and place them safely behind the pipal tree. Comrade Kunju theatrically takes two-three steps backward and stands with his "eyes closed as if in meditation". Suddenly he screams something in the manner of a sorcerer. Hearing the voice, all others become spellbound. As he shows a sign with his right hand, a dancer comes to the centre of the stage and moves like a puppet along following the movement of comrade Kunju's hands. This man standing near comrade Kunju is dressed like the others. But the back of his head that is facing the audience has a mask of a puppet. And his back has the painted sign of danger- the skeleton hands and head. As comrade Kunju starts moving his hands as a puppeteer, his followers start moving along with this like puppets. As this movement proceeds, comrade Kunju in control of all of them climbs up the platform around the *pipal* tree while his followers sit spellbound to what he has to say.

A central aspect about the critique of the work of the *naxalites* by various sections including the state was the explanation of the 'secretive' nature of their campaigns, organisation and attacks and yet a certain popular participation of people in these actions. What comes to the public domain (meaning a wider public sphere) of these actions is the culmination of this process- in the form of attack of police stations or the feudal landlords- and that too many often only the symbolic statements of these actions, such as corpses hung from the tree, painting on the walls etc. We would look at these in detail in the second and third chapter. At present it may be enough to point our attention towards

the function 'theatrical illusion' performs in this debate. Theatrical illusion has the potential of bringing to the fore these otherwise hidden and in a sense 'non-theatrical' (as opposed to the theatricality of processions, public meetings, demonstrations etc) aspect of the movement. *Chaverppada* in the process of bringing to fore these otherwise hidden aspects of political theatricality goes beyond it to make a connection of this hidden theatricality with that of another mode of performance, which though is done openly has the power of the mysterious- the rituals. Therefore the conscious allusions between the extremist leader to that of a magician and a puppeteer who could make people move to his whims. By this manner, the claim of popularity of these movements and participation of many in these movements could be countered- it is the particular theatricality of the space of politics and the 'skill' of the performers that could make people perform such extreme acts.

The magician/puppeteer now invokes the political space, and delivers the following,

"Comrades, though one of the senior comrade has not yet arrived, since it is getting late, let us start the meeting."

Others together in one voice: "Yes let us start, let us start"

Com Kunju: *"Though you don't know the exact person or the location, all of you understand broadly what is going to happen tonight. At this moment we can feel a sense of fulfilment that we achieved success in the two initiatives that we undertook before this one. Those have put the entire bourgeoisie and the state puppets into a state of frenzy and fright. They are now searching for our hiding places to hunt us down. But in spite of these we need not be alarmed. May be we all will fall into their traps, but this organisation of ours will not perish. Its roots are spreading to all corners and is in the process getting strengthened. And we are in the middle of it. For this reason our responsibilities also increase. Listen to what I am saying: (reading from a book, originally in English) 'The essence of guerrilla warfare is the miracle by which a small nucleus of men- looking beyond their immediate tactical objective- becomes the vanguard of the mass movement. Considered in this light guerrilla warfare takes a true greatness, a sense of destiny without the need for further rhetoric. Similarly an unfaltering will to fight and persistence are the greatness of the guerrilla...' Therefore, without shaking steps, with unwavering minds we should be ready to cross any difficulties in our way. In our journey to our goal, we should be ready even to sacrifice our own lives."* (ibid: 65-

66. Translation mine. The lines from the book are originally in English)

Others together in one voice: I am ready to sacrifice even my life...I am ready to sacrifice even my life..." (ibid: 65-66)

The second moment from the play that I want to analyse here is the moment at the end of scene five, just after Comrade Raghavan is killed. Sreedevi, though earlier making efforts to convince Raghavan to kill their father, is shocked at the sound of the gunshot. At this point a song sung by many people, both men and women, starts from backstage-

Red Salute...Red Salute...Red Salute...

The time has arrived...The time has arrived...The time has arrived...

The time has arrived. The red sun has risen in the east

Let us wake up and give red salute.

Red Salute...Red Salute...Red Salute...

Have you heard... have you heard our story...

Our voices that sound the trumpet of the red morning

....

Red Salute...Red Salute...Red Salute... (ibid: 73-74. Translation mine.)

All the lights have gone out. Only one light comes on stage- a light on Sreedevi from above. Musically joining the group song Sreedevi screams two or three times like a person suffering from hysteria. A light comes on on the white screen behind Sreedevi and all others break into a dance behind this screen. As the song proceeds to its end, Comrade Kunju gets down from the platform of the pipal tree and holds Sreedevi by her hands and joins the dance.

While in the earlier moment we took for analysis, it was the otherwise hidden political theatricality that was brought to the forefront, here the space of the popular, that of group assembling singing songs, dancing and organising is brought to critique. What is being done through the strategy of juxtaposition of this image of hysterical Sreedevi and her incorporation into the crowd is a de-familiarisation and thereby a critique of the now 'naturalised' theatre of politics. It is much similar to the movie, *Earth* by Dovchenko, that shows in its climax a huge crowd of proletariat and peasantry assembling and organising

in front of the corpse of their leader, while a young man who played a part in the leaders' murder belonging to the landlord class breaks into a hysterical dance. Only difference being the gaze- here through the pre-established critique of the extremist' organisation and action, the construction of contradiction is a closed one- with the extremists being the ones who has to be eschewed both by ideal public position of Variyar and the public of the play watching the performance.

Construction of a Revolutionary Public

One of the critical issues that arises in the context of the Emergency and its impact is the almost total monopoly of the public sphere by the State (particularly in Kerala) and the absence of an organised struggle against it in the political and cultural sphere. But this does not mean that there was no resistance at all or that whatever new ways of perception were brought in the period of the emergency is insignificant. The striking feature is the manner in which the emergency could immobilize the development of the revolutionary turn that the Kerala public sphere was taking in the years preceding the emergency that the works such as *Chaverppada* was engaging in a dialogue with. Among all other arts and cultural practices, it was poetry that had made a fundamental break with tradition in terms of charting out a new territory and trying to create a new public. And this radical break that it achieved in terms of creating a new public and a new aesthetics in the pre-emergency period was to a large extent responsible for facilitating a critique of the regime and creating an alternate vision of the society even during the time of the emergency. To lay down this creation of a new aesthetics and a public with a revolutionary potential and the questions it raised regarding the relationship between poetry and performance, let us look closely at one of the poems by the famous Malayalam poet Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan²⁰ titled *Kuratti*, published in 1978.

²⁰ Kadammanitta Ramakrishnan (1935-2008). Born in the village named Kadammanitta. The first collection of poems, Kerala Kavitha Granthavari's *Kavitha* published in 1976. Other than his collections of poems have publishes a collection of articles titled *Velhivelicham* and has also translated Octavio Paz Sunstone and Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Received Asan Prize and Kerala Sahitya Academy Award in 1982. A member of State Legislative Assembly in the period 1996-2001 from CPIM (*Granthalokam*, Volume 59, Issue 9, 29-30)

We look at this poem and its performance context²¹ with the objective of identifying the different public created by it as well as the space of dialogue that it produces through two different angles:

1. Kadammanitta as one of the best representatives of the new Malayalam poets who broke out of the limited readership of poetry through the process of developing a space of performance where poetry could be recited and, in the later stages, be performed. And *Kuratti*, written in the peak of his fame as a poet and performer, is one of the best representatives of the same within the entire work of Kadammanitta.
2. The creation of a performance space in *Kuratti*, a method similar to that of the creation of space in *Chaverppada*. Yet, as we would see later the performance space invoked and the politics of the same in Kadammanitta is fundamentally different from that of the latter. Rather than the middle class public of *Chaverppada*, here it is the revolutionary space generating a revolutionary public.

In the introduction to the collection of poems by Kadammanitta, Dr. Narendra Prasad starts by highlighting two aspects of Kadammanitta's poetry that are central to our project here. Firstly, the efforts towards the construction of new spaces of interaction and a new public by the cultural workers (poets in particular) in the late 1960s. He highlights that this move has to be seen in the context of emergency of 'modernism' in Malayalam literature. While the writers recognized and valued their own individuality, there was also a realization and a strong need felt by them of meeting and engaging in conversation with each other. Led by M. Govindan and Ayyappa Panicker, they first initiated certain spaces of social gatherings of writers where an exchange of ideas and artistic works could be done. It is in these friendly gatherings that Kadammanitta started reciting his poems.

²¹ Though what one would be studying closely is the performance aspect, in no way is this writer limiting the popularity and the power of Kadammanitta's poetry to its performance angle. In fact this has been one of the criticisms put forward against Kadammanitta's poetry by his critics. As literary critic M. Leelavati has argued, it is not only the performance aspect of these poems that has made Kadammanitta the legend in Malayalam cultural field. By doing a closer analysis of his works, particularly those of the his prose poems, she comes to the conclusion that Kadammanitta was equally popular in the other modes of poetry than the performance aspect epitomized by his works such as *Santa*, *Kozhi*, *Kuratti*, *Kattalan* etc (Ravi Kumar 2007: 33). Yet the performance aspect of these poems has played a major role in changing the entire cultural landscape of Kerala. As Dr. K.S Ravi Kumar in his analysis of Kadammanitta's poetry puts it, one of the "most important gains of the active cultural atmosphere of the 1970s was Kadammanitta's poetry recital" (ibid: 33).

These friendly gatherings and meetings had two direct effects. First, through these interactions provided space where new aesthetics could be debated and discussed among the poets and other cultural workers. Second, an organized effort could be made to create an 'aesthetically aware' wider audience through efforts such as that of starting of little magazines specializing on culture. The 1970s was a period of proliferation of little magazines and the role played by the cultural groupings cannot be understated, though an equally important role was also played by the political groups of the time. For instance let us look at the case of the starting of a very important little magazine, *Kerala Kavitha*.

In an interview Kadammanitta narrates the story of the starting of *Kerala Kavitha*. In 1967, when Kadammanitta was settled in Thiruvananthapuram, a meeting was organized in the hotel called "Kanni" in Thiruvananthapuram with the objective of starting a magazine for poetry. The people who participated in the meeting included the following: M. M. Basheer, K.S. Narayana Pillai, C. N. Sreekanthan Nair, V. S. Sharma, Dr. Sukumar Azhikode, Dakshinamurthi, Dr. K. Ramachandran Nair, Kavalam Narayana Panicker, Kadammanitta etc. And this heterogeneous group was led by Ayyappa Panicker who sat together to frame the content and aesthetics that were to be promoted. The magazine had an issue every three months. The release of these issues was also made into a huge event. Each issue was released in one place²² with a two day seminar and discussion on poetry as also poetry recitals and *chol-kazhcha*²³ directed by people such as G. Aravindan (Interview, Dr. R. Suresh 2000: 132). Therefore the effort of *Kerala Kavitha* was not just limited to the generation of an audience for literary works; instead it played a crucial role in bringing about a dialogue between the cultural workers as well as creating new spaces where various experimentations in the domain of culture could be made. In the case of Kadammanitta one can see that it is these two aspects that made him the cultural figure and an icon, defining his politics and aesthetics. It is important to note that all his works were first published in the little magazines and this was a political position that he held vis-à-vis the publishing groups in the state. Yet by the time the first book of the collection of poems by him comes out in 1976, he is one of the most popular

²² Kadammanitta notes that there have releases in Thrissur, Talassery, Madras, koothattukulam etc. (Interview, by Dr. R. Suresh 2000: 132)

²³ *Chol-kazhcha* (*chol*=speech *kazhcha*=sight) is the term used for audio-visual presentation of poetry developed in this period.

poets in the state.

The second point that Narendra Prasad highlights is something one may come across very rarely in analysis of poetry. He writes,

Ramakrishnan's voice is one that is malleable to variations from coarse to subtle movement of notes. It is capable of generating the scream inside when he sings, "where are my children..." and without screaming it can create the tremor felt inside when he asks 'you have burnt and fed on my black children...' It is the same voice that can make one laugh when he asks 'Has the bandicoot next door conked off?' while becoming delicate when saying, 'Krishne, tell me the complaints...' It provides the distance of the Dravida songs of the subalterns, sung by them with such intensity that they lose themselves in them as well as the nearness of the modern man piercing into the contemporary world. The voice has a spirituality of an ancient ritual. He sings without any consideration of external rhythm. Yet the verses fall into an ordered rhythm. Even in his everyday conversation, his voice retains village-ness. And when he recites poetry, this village-ness gets transformed into a power/energy that wakes our social consciousness. He believes that the poetry writing finishes only once it is sung before an audience and they in turn enjoy it. The pain of writing is relieved only when it is sung" (Prasad 1992: 9-10).

These words capture the impact that Kadammanitta's voice made in the creation of a new aesthetic experience in enjoying poetry. How could the literal 'voice' of a poet assume such significance in a culture before the entry of the 'cassette culture'²⁴?

Kadammanitta used to recite his poems such as *Kozhi*, *Kiratavrittam*, *Kattalan* etc on various stages across the country. Yet what later was regarded as the 'performance' by Kadammanitta was done first in 1967. Kadammanitta himself gives this performance an interesting name- *one-man show*. In the first one-man show of Kadammanitta in the Kozhikode town hall he sang various poems of his own as well as others for two and half hours with only some breaks in between the show. From here the one-man show travelled

²⁴ The cassette culture and the big way in which the poetry has been circulated as recited by poets themselves and by others is a later phenomenon. The recognition and the 'emotional' impact of Kadammanitta has to be therefore seen in a very different context than that of the present recognition of the 'voice' of O.N.V Kurup, Madhusudanan Nair etc. One could at this point merely highlight that the cassette culture and the issue of commercialization of poetry in its recited form has to be distinguished from the movement of live recital and performance and the former is an area of study in itself.

all across the state and even outside the state. Kadammanitta's one-man show was specially organized by the various cultural clubs in villages, by arts clubs in colleges and stages were organized by Janakiya Samskarika Vedi across the state etc.

This is the uniqueness that Narendra Prasad notes in the introduction in relation to the role, played Kadammanitta in the new cultural public sphere. While the movement of taking poetry to a wider audience involved many people, his own place in this movement was unique. Stages were organized specially for Kadammanitta in different parts of the state and his audience was not just limited to students and intellectuals, but it also included villagers and workers. And importantly his experiments led to a great number of experiments of form and built an intricate relationship between poetry and performance. To get an overview of the experimentations with performance, let us look at Kadammanitta's participation in these experiments and how his poetry its uniqueness led to greater number of experimentations. After the popularity of the one-man shows, various *kavi-arangu* began to be organized where Kadammanitta came together with other important poets of the time such as Satchidanandan, K. G. Sankarapillai, Ayyappa Panicker etc. He along with Sankara Pillai recited poems wearing masks and holding lighted torches in Thiruvananthapuram, Thrissur etc. This tendency was then worked upon to create a new form of cultural presentation called *chol-kazhcha*. This involved the audio-visual presentation of poetry and brought together creative people from various art forms. Kadammanitta notes his own participation in such *chol-kazhcha*- for example the one directed by G. Aravindan in Thiruvananthapuram- that brought together people working in different domains such as the theatre and film actor Nedumuni Venu, the poet Kunjunni master etc. And the trend of organizing such *chol-kazhcha* had caught on by that time with more actors, directors and poets such as Bharat Gopi, Kavalam Narayana Panicker etc playing an important role in organizing these. This practice was later on worked upon by Narendra Prasad, Natyagriham Gopalakrishnan and Murali to start a new form tilted the "poetic theatre". Kadammanitta's poems such as *Aikyamatyam*, *Njan Ivideyanu*, *Chakkala*, *Kanmurkotta*, *Nagarattil Paranja Suvishesham* etc were transformed in this. At this point Kadammanitta started to explore the performance aspect of his one-man shows further by bringing in the aspect of percussion into these performances. He records the start of his interaction with Njaralath Rama Poduval, the famous *edakka*

player. In one of the *kavi-arangu* organized by the Deshabhimani study circle, he asked the organizers to call Njaralath Rama Poduval too in the program. Without rehearsals they went on stage and improvised a performance. And he notes “the *edakka* as accompaniment for the recital made it more emotional and delicate”. After *edakka*, experimentations of recital with the percussion *tappu* was made. And this Kadammanitta notes was developed further to create a new fusion of poetry, *tullal* and *vadyam*. His poems such as *Kiratavrittam*, *Kadammanitta* and *Kattalan* thereby became *kolamtullal*. Further creative experimentations of Kadammanitta’s works was done by the actor, playwright Surasu, who started performing these as solo performances named by him *mozhiattam*. *Kuratti* is being performed in Wayanad in dance form while the poem *Chakkala* had a transformation in television. The poetry of Kadammanitta has also inspired an artist to make sculptures on them and these now stand in the village of Kadammanitta.

A closer look at these spaces of poetry recital is facilitated when we look at the reminiscences of Kadammanitta. In an interview, Kadammanitta says that he has recited his poems travelling every single village in Kerala. “I have recited them in the fields in the midst of agricultural workers”. In response to the comment that it feels that he enjoys being in the midst of the people, he narrates his own experiences and specific instances that for him were special. He narrates the circumstance of his recital in a place called Panjadu- “A recital was organised in Panjadu. At dusk when I reached people were involved in activities such as frying *pappad*- they are preparing food for the people who would be coming to listen. After some time, people started coming in through the fields holding *choottu*. I did a recital almost three hour long. The entire village was present there...” (*Granthalokam*: 40). He narrates incidents of recitals in contexts where the emotions are triggered in an audience that does not understand the language of the poems. He narrates one of the instances when experimentation was done with a *baul* singer in Santiniketan. He had gone to Santiniketan where he met a *baul* singer. At his request, the *baul* singer started to sing. After listening to him, Kadammanitta enthusiastically asked him whether he would accompany him while his recital. It became a big event and a recital was organised later in the evening. The audience was consisted of people from all groups- “from *adivasis* to the aristocrats. Once again I recited poems

and this was a crowd that did not understand the language of the poems. Yet after some time, some *Santhal* women started crying. They were moved into almost a trance state of mind. Though they did not understand the meaning, they could feel the bhava...why did the *Santhal* women cry? ... May be due the speciality of voice modulation...." He records that the same happened when he recited for some white people- "they, after the recital told him that they could feel the poetry." (ibid: 40)

It is in this wider performance context that one comes across the work we analyse closely - the poem titled *Kuratti* published in 1978. As noted earlier there have been very many transformations of Kadammanitta's works, say that to theatre, *tullal*, dance forms, sculptures etc. In the whole corpus of the work of Kadammanitta *Kuratti* stands out as the best work from the point of view of our own concerns in the present project. Along with *Santa*, *Aikyamatyam Mahabalam*, *Avar Parayunnu* etc it has been a work that has been written in the political context of the national emergency of 1975. Therefore it takes upon the issue of authoritarianism head on. As noted before, this project is something similar to the creation of the 'public' in *Chaverppada*- they both belong to the same political and cultural field. Yet *Kuratti* is radically different from *Chaverppada* as it tries to create a revolutionary public.

Kuratti takes one ritual performance form in Kerala called *Kurattiattam*, done by a woman performer called *kuratti*. Through the poem, the poet takes one through the process of a *Kurattiattam*, where by the *kuratti* belonging to the under-classes, through the performance transforms into almost the goddess of *raudra*, into *Kannaki* and other mythical figures, declaring war against the class enemies. The performance here becomes a moment where the under classes subjected to class and caste oppression starts an investigation of its own character and announces them to the upper caste sitting right in the front watching the performance. *Kuratti* announces what the class character of the subjugated class in reality is - they are nothing but slaves and in the process of this declaration to the oppressors, *Kuratti* breaks the 'false consciousness' and the mask of 'good' position- the *Harijans* - that this class of slaves has been bestowed upon by the society.

What is pertinent to note is that the moment of such transformation and gaining of

strength by the subjugated class is brought about through a performance. It is the performance space, the rhythm and the power that a performance space gives for transformation that enables the political transformation. Here the theatricality of a performance becomes embedded closely with political theatricality, both being redefined and enmeshed to create a revolutionary synthesis. As opposed to the coming in of political theatricality to the space of theatre in *Chaverppada* where it is ultimately the rational, all seeing spectator/public who is in the position to critique the political theatricality, here the potential of transformation in a redefined, revolutionized theatrical space gives the strength to the political theatricality. The poem starts with the description of the *kuratti* as she comes to the *tara* of *Kurattiattam* to perform. From this part onwards one can see the revolutionizing of the ritual space:

Malanchural matayil ninnum kuratti ettunnu

Vilanja chura Panambu Pole Kuratti Ettunnu...

Karilanchi kattil ninnum kuratti ettunnu

.....

Kurattiyatta tarayiletti kuartti nilkunnu

Karinagakalameri kuratti tullunnu...(Kadammanitta 1992: 219-220)

This is the first pause in the poem that allows the start of the transformation. *Kuratti* as described has come from the den of the cane-mountains and has adorned the costumes and has started the *tullal*. One of the most important aspects that make Kadammanitta's poetry powerful, particularly in relation to the performance aspect of the same is the use of particular kinds of rhythms. He, in his entire corpus of works uses three kinds of metres- Malayalam metres, oral metres (*Vaithari*) and prose poetry. As critics have noted what is important is that he, rather than using the metres in a fixed format, taking cue from the fluidity allowed by the Malayalam language metres and oral metres, individualised all the metres. And *Kuratti* is a good example of the same. In *Kuratti*, he takes a metre from the Padayani form but transforms it to give it a new rhythm that highlights the emotional aspect of the poem. The original metre from Padayani, Dr. R. Suresh notes is as follows,

tikita-taka-taka tikita-taka-taka.. teytuara teytaa

This metre is transformed in *Kuratti* by removing the '*teytaara teytaa*' in the last part *tikita-taka-taka--tikita-taka-taka--tikita takataaroo...* (R. Suresh 2000: 89)

It is this rhythm that runs through the poem. Yet the effect it creates is not one of monotonous repetition. The repetition in the first section of the poem establishes clearly the feel/identity of the regional traditions of performances, particularly the performances and rituals surrounding the *kaavu*. When the recital is with *edakka*, this 'regional' feel is set precisely. Following the traditions of *vaihari*, the rhythm is kept up not by following the exact number of letters in a line, but musically. The words are elongated, shortened or stressed musically with other techniques such as pauses, in the process giving stress and importance to the words of the poem. In the first section of *Kuratti* also we find these techniques. This freedom of interpretation that makes him break the rhythm of the *Padayani* can also be seen in his free interpretation of the myths and the ritual. Through the description of the *kuratti* as she comes and stands before her audience, what is being highlighted is the class character of the woman performer, one who brings along with her the real experience and pain of subjugation. Yet once she adorns the costumes and enters the space of the performance, she gets completely transformed into a figure who can represent the anger and desire of her entire class. This movement, something that is close to trance performances, is what brings about the transformation of the woman who is a part of the social reality to a figure who can move beyond the real and bring in herself the strength of the collective. This transformation lifts her to the mythic status- now she is the goddess whose children are the subjugated ones. Yet at this point what is critical is that she has not lost the sight of the actual politics and hierarchy within which the performance is happening. In fact it is precisely from this realization that she derives her strength and starts addressing the 'other'. In the moment of the transformation she divides the audience and addresses the landlords sitting idly having *pan* in the front of the stage with the question,

You have burnt and fed on my children?

You remind yourselves how you became what you are (ibid: 220. Translation mine)

Kuratti divides the audience and gains that strength to demarcate her children from the 'other' through a gesture- the pointing of fingers. Once the other is established, *kuratti*

starts her dancing. The dancing of the *kuratti* is a process of telling what is otherwise not 'realised' and more importantly not *said* to the dominant classes. It is the history of the domination of the upper class/caste. Kadammanitta's poetry recital style based on the oral poetry tradition of Kerala now uses the tradition of oral history as the tool to take off the ideological mask created by the dominant classes. This oral history starts with the history of the encounter of the two groups and the how the lower castes, close to nature, helped the dominant group to survive through feeding them and protecting them against the forces of nature, even at the risk to their own lives. Then this transforms into a history of the human labour, where the under-classes tame the forces of nature to produce and present to the other group bounties such as honey, milk, creating shelter and home. And all this while they thought they were together. As the under-classes engaged in day in and day out work of agriculture and irrigation and were asleep out of tiredness, they were caught in the net and made into slaves. Their backs were burnt, their intellect tamed. From here starts the history of sovereignty and authoritarianism and the alternate history of the working class and their struggle.

Ningal bharanamai, pandaaramai,

Janapadangal, puri purangal,

Putiya neetikal, neetipalakar

Kazhumarangal, chattavarukal

Kalthurungukal kottakottala-

mana terukaalavattam

asvamedhajayangaloro

digjayangal- mudinja njangal

onnumariyatutama ningal

kkai jeevan bali koduttille

pranan patiru pole

parammu pari chitari veenile...(ibid: 221-222)

Once the rule by them has been established, it is the contradictory history of new 'civilizations' that is narrated. It is the 'civilization that that brought in the 'new rules,

new lawmen, hangs, whips, stone prisons, elephants, chariots and the great war victories while the under-classes knowing nothing and losing everything, have sacrificed their lives for them. And *kuratti* takes one through the history of labour- the new cities and new roads built by breaking stones, the new chariots that can go piercing the mountains, that can fly across the sea, the new 'newities', the new mornings, new sky, the new moon, and the small human beings who are stooping down making holes in the ground. *Kuratti* takes one through the visuals of the coalmines and the rule of 'law' there. And when it was challenged, when questions were asked, the mines collapsed killing them.

Khani turakku, turannu poyi-

poyiyellam veliyilettikku

njangade vandi odikku

njangal vegamettatte

ningal vegamakatte...

.....

illillarivu Padilla....(ibid: 222-223)

The last part of the performance is the moment when the realization is made about the class character of the slaves.

Atima njangal, hariyumalla, daivamalla,

Madumalla, pidayumennal puzhuvumalla,

Kozhiyumennal ppoovumalla, atima njangal...(ibid: 223).

The ideological mask of the upper class/caste is taken off here. In midst of all this oppression, you have given us the grand name, *Harijans*, making us the poor gods. *Kuratti* says that we are no Hari, no gods, no cattle, though we crawl, we are not worms, though we fall, we are not flowers- we are slaves. With the burning images of oppression, *Kuratti* comes back to the question with which she started

You have burnt and fed on my dark children...

But now it is time to announce to them that the crisis point has been reached, there is no other way left for them. They will rise up like the towers they have built, they will face

them like the stone forts, from the garbage holes, they will strike at them like snakes... it is the *kuratti* who has risen from the spirit of the burnt earth and they are coming with the mental strength after having milk from her breasts. If you murder them, I will pluck these breasts and destroy this city into rubbles. By plucking my hair and striking it one the ground, I will destroy this land. Kuratti takes off her costumes and becomes the pure lower class woman.

The Production of a Revolutionary Moment

From the domain of poetry, let us now move on to a performance that has been probably one of the most controversial plays to be done in the history of Kerala theatre and cultural practice. While in the official histories this play gets mention at best as a casual one, there are widely contested positions on what this play represented and the effect it produced. What makes it very significant for our own study is that the play takes on the issue of authoritarianism, the political movements in the late sixties and early seventies as well as the event of emergency head on and for this precise reason came under the wrath of the authoritarian agencies. In 1981, May 22nd, the 18 actors of the group *Wayanad Samskarika Vedi*, most of them being *adivasis*, who reached Mutalakkulam Maidan in Kozhikode to perform the play were arrested by police²⁵ and put in jail for almost three months²⁶. And as Civic Chandran notes, this official intervention of the state in the form of banning of the play and the later arrest of the actors was after two years of tirade against the play - "They are coming to burn the land" "the 'head cutters' are coming" - as also attack by *goondas* and the police²⁷. Yet this extreme tirade and attack of the play was not just for the fact of a mere critique of the authoritarian structures by it; instead the 'violence' against the play was a response to a new experimentation with political theatricality, where what we saw earlier as the performance space redefining the political theatricality in *Kuratti* is taken into an intense moment where this performance space is actually 'produced' in a real context.

Though the play was made almost six years after *Chaverppada*, one feels that it engages in a direct dialogue with it. If *Chaverppada* is a 'counter-revolutionary' play,

²⁵ Sukumaran, T. P., 'Introduction' in *Nadugaddika*, Pub current Books, Thrissur, 1997 p. vii

²⁶ Chandran, Civic, *Nadugaddikayilekkulla Dooram*, in *Nadugaddika*, pub Current Books, Thrissur, p 66

²⁷ *Ibid*, p66

Nadugaddika is a 'revolutionary' play. Not only does it put forward the revolutionary logic, with the oppressed class gaining consciousness of their class character- as nothing but slaves, a notion we have seen in *Kuratti* earlier and the realization the possibility of getting organized as a class throws up to them, it also epitomizes what 'violence' this consciousness generates. While *Kuratti* announces to its upper class-caste audience sitting in front of the performance that there is no other way left for her children than to strike at them, this play in its first format (when it was banned)²⁸ visualises this event. K. J. Baby writes in the introduction about the reasons that prompted him to write the play,

“A present that seems to hold no future- unless their creative energy resurrected in an insurgence against the forces that hold them in the perpetual darkness of ignorance and slavery. A symbolic enactment of this resurrection should, at least for those few hours, unleash their creative energy. It should make them experience what it is to be a real human being fighting to be free. It should waken them up to the possibility of resisting the forces of stagnation, the possibility of re-commencing their once stunted cultural growth and the realisation that making use of this chance is their right and duty... (K.J. Baby 1993: 34-35).

Due to this visualisation of the insurrection and the idea of experiencing revolutionary time by “unleashing the creative energy” for the duration of the play, it was taken head on by the critics of the 'violence' as the spirit of the *chaver*, the blood thirsty ones. Inspired by the earlier *naxalite* movements and the work of communists within the *adivasi* population in Wayanad, particularly that of comrade Varghese, the play re-creates some 'incidents' of the past. Yet the play has the impact and becomes the object of the tirade not just for re-creating events that had resonances in many real events in the past, but in its ability to inspire its 'public' for the future course of action, the starting of which is the participation of the play. It has the effect not just as a theatrical production, an object of mimesis, but it represents a coming into the fore into the public space of the 'revolutionaries' and creating a performer-spectator relationship that tries to create an experience of 'revolutionary time'. It is this alternate revolutionary theatricality that we have to study closely.

²⁸ There are two versions of the play, the difference being in the climax. The first version as was done during the period of our study ends with the people killing their oppressor, Tamburan, while in the second version, the people organise themselves and defeating Tamburan walk towards their land take back their everything they have lost.

Civic Chandran in his analysis of the play refers to it as a "total theatrical presentation on the open stage"(Chandran 1997: 70. Translation mine). He distinguishes it from other street theatres that work through certain established characteristics. For him, *Nadugaddika* is the ideal street theatre as it uses/involves the entire street as the space of dialogue and engages the spectator in a dialogue making theatre a fundamentally democratic medium and in a sense making the medium the first love of the rebellious (ibid: 66)²⁹. He narrates the performance and how it unfolds from the perspective of a witness. In a village, a group of strangers consisting of young people get off a bus. Though the group members are wearing rugged clothes, the few young women, with sacks on their back, engaging in loud conversation, attracts the attention of the people of the place. After searching for someone, the whole group moves into a small lane. Through the fields they move on to an *adivasi* hill. This journey attracts some young *adivasi* kids who are now part of the group. A group song has started- a song about the land of the *tudi*. The children repeat the song. In the mean time, they have established friendship with the people of the hill. They tell them that they are artists who have come to perform a play and "that too today itself- now and here! Here in your midst, in the fields, under the open sky and in the light of the torches. Come let us beat the *tudi*, sing songs and go to every house and invite everyone to watch the play" (ibid: 67)³⁰. And by the time they reach the last house, they have transformed into a group consisting of almost all the people of the hill. As darkness is descending, the actors have started changing in a small space covered by cloth. While the whole village is waiting in expectation as to what is going to happen next, amidst the presentational song, a man from the group comes to the front and explains the nature of the play, giving some pointers that would aid the enjoyment of the play. Once the play is finished, the crowd does not disperse. The audience takes the group members to many of their houses. And the second part of the play is acted out in the various huts. In the morning, *adivasis* drop the actors till the bus stop. Civic Chandran notes that *Nadugaddika* was done in similar manner in almost all the *adivasi* hills of Wayanad (ibid: 67-68).

²⁹ In his analysis he goes on to the extent that *Nadugaddika* is the only street theatre in the history of Kerala theatre to take this direction. "It is the starting point that Kerala theatre should have taken. The historical moment that Kerala theatre has to travel a lot to reach" (Chandran, 'Nadugaddikayilekkulla Dooram' in *Nadugaddika* by K. J. Baby, 1997, p 70. Translation my own)

³⁰ Translation mine

This alternate space of performance is something that enables *Nadugaddika* to produce its force and the effect unmatched by contemporary plays. Yet different from a theatrical production done in front of the audience that has not seen many of them, *Nadugaddika* tries to create an experience of a revolutionary time, moment, which at the same time is rooted in the way of life of the people for whom and by whom it is done. Even during the writing of the play and the rehearsal such a space and the equations this space produces have gone into the conception of the play. For Baby, the inspiration for the play came from a ritual performance called *nadugaddika* that is performed by the *mooppans* (heads) of various tribes to exorcise the evil spirits of the land and to purge the society of these spirits that cause diseases. K. J. Baby notes the process of the ritual of *nadugaddika*. The *moopans* wearing the attire of the *gaddika* goes to every *Adiya* house, exorcising the evil spirits, while the people in return offer rice, coconuts, fowls etc. What is most important is the participation the ritual manages to do because as the *gadhika* people reach the final pre-appointed place, the whole village would be following them. The ritual finishes with the sacrifice of the fowls, cooking of the rice and other things. These are given as offerings for the gods and are shared and eaten by all the people assembled. Taking the structure of the play from the ritual, Baby notes,

“Essentially the aim of my play would be the same as that of a *Nadugaddika*- to exorcise the spirits of disease, of ignorance. The religious ritual transformed into a historic one...It deals with the history of Wayanad since some two hundred years back. Here was a group of people who have completely forgotten their past. I want to provoke their memories- from the vague legends repeated so unconcernedly at their rituals, through the different stages of history, up to the dreary present. (K.J. Baby 1993: 34)

One of the aspects that we noted in the analysis of *Kuratti* was the aspect of performance using and interpreting the oral history of the oppressed classes and in this process gaining class-consciousness. In *Kuratti*, the basic purpose of the performance-*tullal*- was to bring together and verbalise and physicalise the social group as a class, breaking the ideological mask created by the dominant class. In *Nadugaddika* too one comes across the phenomena of performance and a performer in particular bringing together people as a class. But here as different from *Kuratti*, the oppression is not something that is hidden and masked. The *adivasis* are ‘slaves’ and they do realise their status as the slaves of the Tamburan. What the performer does is to address the issues of break ups within this class

and how it has been created by the upper class as a strategy. The performer reveals these strategies of the dominant class and more importantly addresses the issue of need to re-imagine, dream and hope for a better world. Here the class does realise that they are slaves- but they have resigned to this fate due to unsuccessful efforts to liberate themselves and also because of their unquestioning belief in the myths and lies of the landlords, particularly the myth of the all powerful, punishing gods and goddesses. What the performance does is to start from what they have at this point - remnants of their old culture - and taking this as the starting point strike at the culture of oppression.

The performer in the case of *Nadugaddika* is the *gaddikakaran*- the one who is conducting the *gaddika*. He is a performer playing the traditional instruments *cheeni* and *tudi* of the *adivasi* population, triggering their memories of oppression. Wearing the traditional red cloth around him, he goes on commenting on their state of existence, telling them why they are presently in this state and after a point in the play giving them the direction forward to freedom. This central character is also the one who makes the play a historic one, for one often directly relate to him as a symbolic recast of the naxalite activist Varghese who was murdered by the state for organizing the *adivasi* population.

K. Sreejith in his study of Janakiya Samskarika Vedi notes,

Nadugaddika illustrates how the naxalite cultural activists, unlike their predecessors, were able to use the folk traditions and myths of a people to convey, from a working class perspective, the oppression they had been going through for generations. "Gaddika", a tribal ritual of the Adiyars of Wynad, was used to exorcise evil spirits. Here, the "*gaddikakaran*" (exorcist) is none other than Varghese, the naxalite leader who was killed by the police in Wynad during the early phase of the movement in the state (K. Sreejith, 2005: 5334).

The play moves along with the help four characters apart from - Yachan, Velli, Vella and Lakshmanan, who are one family and represent the *adivasi* population in its present "dreary" state. Yachan³¹ is an old and weak tribal, who has extinguished his health and energy by working for the Tamburan and presently unable to work is on the verge of becoming a beggar to make the ends meet. He has three children- Vella, the daughter is on the verge of becoming a prostitute for sustaining herself, Velli the blind son and

³¹ The word Yachan literally means beggar.

Lakshmanan, the only educated one of the lot, but whose education has alienated him from his kith and kin and their way of life. *Gaddikakkaran* through his songs brings them together, triggers their memories, makes the wounds of oppression come out, as Velli all along the play brings everybody face to face the immediate reality of poverty and hunger by his repetitive cry “*payikkinto...*”³², the cry of hunger. The cry of hunger makes the memories of Yachan come back and he remembers the history of oppression of their kith and kin for the last two hundred years by the same class of oppressors who is embodied in the character Tamburan in the play. In the sound of the *tudi* and *cheeni*, Yachan remembers the times of happiness, the era of *Maveli* when all were equal. Remembering the stories and songs they have got from their ancestors, they now start remembering their history- how their first parents, Melorachan and Keeyorithi ran away from the Karipoor Fort and reached Pakkom where they were made into slaves in the Pakkom Fort; how their great grandfather Uththappan and Uththamma reached Ippimalai in search of fruits and edible roots and were caught in the net and made slaves by the Ippimalai Tambaran, and in this manner all others. And they realize “...on the day we were made slaves, began our hunger. I remember, I remember how we were made to work like animals, to realize Tamburan’s dreams. I remember how our fathers fared in those times” (ibid: 47).

Yachan then start remembering particular instances in this history of oppression when an opportunity to revolt and struggle for their freedom was cast aside by Tamburan- how Tamburan created different castes in them, thereby creating divisions among them; how he created the fear of the goddess who was all powerful, punishing them for not working for the Tamburan and catching them when they tried to run away; how their efforts to run away from the Tamburan’s region failed every time, with their own lot being used to catch the run-away; how Tamburan stole from them even their hopes of a happy life after death by making them believe that the world of the dead replicates the system of the living world. Thus they have lost all hopes of the life here and after death. From here the ‘history’ is unmasked- the history of the alliance between the Tamburan and the colonizers whereby they were forced to be traitors of Pazhassi and his army; how at the

³² *Payikkinto* literally means ‘I am feeling hungry’. This cry runs through the play as a background more like the cry of hunger in *Nabanna*.

time of independence Tamburan was working against the nationalists, yet once independence is achieved comes with the tri colour flag, now narrating a history of his services in the offer of the nation. Once the first communist ministry is formed in the state, the Tamburan creates the myth of the evil communists and along with the church and other agencies get the *adivasis* on to the streets in the 'liberation struggle' against this ministry. It is at this point of remembering by the people of their history that a realization dawns. It brings about the crisis needed for action. Inspired by *gaddikakaran* they start to move in a new direction- to challenge the Tamburan and demand that he provide their wages in the established legal measure of litre. I would take this moment of the play for a closer analysis:

Once Yachan finishes remembering the events leading to the downfall of the communist ministry and the *Gaddikakaran* commenting on the same- "even the faltering attempts of a people's Government to bring about well-meant land reforms never reached us. Not even the shreds of the Land Reform Act. Even the idea of an elected government and what the people could expect of it, remained alien to us. In this world and the next, we smouldered in dreamless darkness, in burnt up tears", the cry of Velli, "*Payikkinto...Appa Payikkinto...*" Yachan remembers the day of the *pela*, the annual ritual conducted for dead ancestors.

Gaddikakaran: "We have neither fowls nor rice to offer thee beloved ancestors.

So here we do offer ourselves.

We bow to thee, ancestors,

Seeking thy forgiveness.

We bow to the sky,

Asking for forgiveness.

.....

We seek the way

which way are we to go on?

On this side it's the Tamburan's wall

That side, the migrant's fence.

On every side,

wall or fence, hedge or bands,

Block our way.

.....
We, the offspring of Maveli,
your very children,
What remains, what remains for us?
May be this *tudi*, this *cheeni*
And a few strains left by you our ancestors...
Now guide us ancestors, guide us.

.....
Which way shall we proceed/
Tell us, which way? (ibid: 64-65)

This is the crisis they have come to and they need to escape this and what they have with them is the *tudi* and the *cheeni*. *Tudi* and *cheeni* are the instruments that belong to them, belong to their culture. These are the instruments that they play in their rituals such as the *nadugaddika*. Yet the point when it is realized that these are the only things that are remaining to them puts them in a different light. These are the same instruments that they play for the Tamburan for his songs and rituals too. But from now on these become the symbols of their own possessions, the beginning from which they can piece together their history and take it forward. And what is most important is that these possess the materiality that defies any logic of the dominant- they give them their songs, their rhythm dance and music. And all they have to do is start to listen to them and move to their sound and rhythm, creating new songs and dreams that would take them forward.

The slaves take up the song of the *gaddikakkaran* and voice what has happened to the terrain that has been for long at the centre of their way of life- the hill has been made into a plantation, the valley has now been changed into fields, their own nature with no boundaries has now been cut off and separated by walls and fences put up by the Tamburan, the planters and the migrants. How can they escape? Where are they to escape to? *Gaddikakkaran* takes it forward by saying that this is indeed the way - the way is to start asking questions to Tamburan and the lords reigning in the world about their lost way of life. And the beginning of this change is marked with the issue of asking the Tamburan to change the measure in which he pays wages.

As they stand still, Tamburan enters. He at first mistakes the group for one standing for his reception.

Tamburan: Look at this *Tamrapathra*, bestowed on me in honour of my valiant services during the freedom struggle.

Hail Pazhassi the Warrior!

Hail Gandhi the Great!

Hail my holy motherland!

Oh, I was held up all the way with receptions, speeches meetings- all held in my honour!

Now how dare you stand gaping like that! Go get your drums and your pipes. Lets celebrate, lets rejoice. Rejoice in this honour.” (ibid: 66-67)

As the slaves beat the drums and play the pipes and dance in a circle holding hand in hand, *gaddikakaran* tell the Tamburan of their demand for being paid in litre.

Tamburan: I am the one who decides how and what to pay

Gadhkakaran: That won't do again.

Tamburan: Who are you to say so?

Gadhkakaran: Ask these people

Tamburan: Who is he?

They: He is our Gaddikakaran

Tamburan: What! Haven't I authorized *Channakkan* to conduct *pela* and Gadhika?

They: This is a different Gadhika, Tambura...

They surround Tamburan.

Tamburan: You ought to do this to me. To me you should do this. If your fathers were alive, they wouldn't let this take place.

One of them: If our fathers had done this earlier, we wouldn't be in this plight.

Tamburan: So you do this!

All thought out, aren't you?

They: Yes, Tambura.

Tamburan: I'll consider your request

I will give reply after considering all the aspects

Gadhkakaran: Consider, consider now and give a reply. Then you can leave.

Tamburan: What!

Gadhkakaran: Consider, consider properly, give a reply and then you can leave. Why hurry? The *Tamrapathra* is safe in your hands, ain't it?

They: That will do, reply now” (ibid: 67-68)

Seeing himself surrounded by the people and that things are not in his favour, he gives in to the demand. As the Tamburan leaves in the fury, a dance around Gaddikakkaran breaks out, where the reluctant are teased, the bold being congratulated.

Gadhkakkaran: This won't do. We need to tell everyone. Let's tell it over hills, lets tell it around the fields. Let's tell our friends and our folks. (68)

One of them: Let's play *kolkali*...

The first step taken towards their freedom itself gives them back their culture. And it is this culture of singing, dancing and playing that would take them forward, that lies at the core of their life.

As they go around dancing and playing *kolkali*, Tamburan enters flaunting a red flag, while the tri-coloured flag of his has been now converted into a loincloth.

Tamburan: Farmer's Union Zindabad,
Inquilab Zindabad...

In this transformation he moves on to a speech:

Tamburan: Dear comrades, you have rendered me a communist. You have opened my eyes and my heart. Comrades come on, let us unite. Not class struggles, but class co-operation, that is the need of the hour. Let's sing together

The fields that we reap are ours, the fields that we sow are ours...." (68-69. Song sung by Tamburan in the *adivasi* language)

He continues to explain that all the movements and all the organizations in the place are after him. He has just been elected the Panchayat President; he bears the post of co-operative Bank President, Dewaswom Board Manager, elected to the committee to maintain secularism, Ladies club patron, milk society president etc. And ends with saying: "What can I do? Even now you are all at me, compelling me to stand for the next election. What can I do? How can I say no?"

Then he proceeds to play hide and seek behind the red flag even as he is being surrounded by the people. Gaddikakkaran after telling Tamburan that these flags have survived "notorious attempts to betray them" and "survived prison cells" and "so much mud-slinging against them", along with the people take away the flags violently from Tamburan.

From here on the play moves on to create an allegorical reconstruction of the emergency.

Tamburan: (While struggling to escape the flags). Help! Help! Extremism! Terrorism!

Taking law into hands! Threat for life and property!

(As he runs off) Sathyam Ki Jai; D harmam Ki Jai; Sahodaryam Ki Jai

.....

Gaddikakkaran: These flags are imbued with the colours of blood, sweat and tears-spilled for good causes. They symbolize the characteristics of the different stages of history, their unique aspirations. Let us hold them with humble hearts and vow to fulfill those aspirations. Let our *tudis* and our *cheenis* bear witness to it.

The flag is then passed on to the *moopan* and then hand-to-hand to everybody in a rhythmic movement, as if it is a ritual.

Gaddikakkaran:Ye famished beings, march on to their dining table in this stark day light.

Ye roofless waifs, march on to their citadels in this stark daylight.

An armed guard enters the stage

Guard: Attention!

Attention ye people!

From now on, until further orders,

Not one shall meet another.

Not one shall talk to another.

Attention! Attention! (69-70)

The guard uses his staff to move the people and take away the *gaddikakkaran* who was trying to block it. He is taken off stage to trial for the crime of "taking away the flags of power". Only the sounds of the trial come through

Sounds: Oh yes, is this the guy?

Move to this side.

.....

What did you say you have been doing?

Teaching history?

Phew! Conveying good Malayalam words.

What! Let them know they have a right to live here! Ha! Ha! (71)

As the people run around for help, "Sounds: Your eyes look really cute". A cry of utter pain saying my eyes...

In his agony the *gaddikakkaran* calls out aloud to his dead ancestors in ritual form.

The guard comes back with the red waistband on the stave and pouts it on the centre

stage. He pounds it with the stave and then brandishes the stave at them, shouting

“Talk less. Work more,

We two, we have two.” (72)

The first transformation of the people into a class happens when a realization occurs as to their status as nothing but slaves and a crisis point is reached where it is realized that there is no way that is left to them to proceed. And this point is reached through the ritual of the *pela*, where the ancestors are worshipped. They by invoking their own ancestors, singing the old songs, start to improvise and sing about their own self and come to realize that some of the ways of the ancestors have not been the best ones and they have shake themselves out of their state of hopelessness. Therefore this moment is arrived at by a dialectics- dialectics of carrying forward their traditional ways, simultaneously negating some of these in their progress forward. As in *Kuratti* one sees the process of a revolutionary redefinition of the ritual space and their own culture and a consequent political action. But once this victory is achieved through political action, the state comes into the array against their claiming of their rightful flags. And this moment, the moment of emergency, is theatrical in its suddenness. Like the declaration changing the entire culture of the nation, the coming in of the guards with the declaration brings into existence a new culture. And here the events of the play become historical and real. In the manner, comrade Varghese was taken into the police jeep in front of the *adivasi* population, their *gaddikakkaran* is taken away for the trial. And it is a trial that cannot be seen but only heard and experienced captures the events during the emergency. The people taken into the custody and the torture could not be seen, but only heard of and experienced. This is very similar to the events recorded in the state brought out by different agencies during and after the emergency.

As in *Kuratti*, here the theatricality of a ritual having a social force is redefined in revolutionary terms by embedding it with the political theatricality. And this enmeshing gets the specific effect because of the materiality of the production. It is one thing to create an image and folk rhythm via poetry; *Nadugaddika* takes it to an extreme in the visualization of these bodies and re-enactment of the oppression and revolutionary liberation. This must have been for the first time in Kerala's history where a revolutionary play about the state of tribal population is done not merely using the

imagery, music of the population, but using the bodies of the tribal population itself. Therefore when the oppression is re-enacted, it becomes a real enactment of the state of these people. And their war-cry for liberation, a real event. The play has been done before two kinds of audiences. The first is the one I dealt with earlier- production in the Wayanad hills, among the *adivasi* population. The second audience is the 'malayalee' audience, to whom the tribals are speaking in their own language, asserting their own culture through *cheeni*, *tudi* and rhythm and dance. The only people in the play speaking in Malayalam are the Tamburan and the *gaddikakkaran*. And K.J.Baby highlights this aspect. He settled in Wayanad as a teacher in Malayalam to the tribal population and after some time realized that Malayalam, for the *adivasi* population, is indeed is the language of those in power. *Gaddikakkaran*, like the educator is prompting them to break out of their own trapped state and to assert their existence and rights in their own language and culture. It is in this context the *gaddika* and the transformation that leads to the class consciousness becomes extremely relevant.

To shake off this defeat and to organize again, a new theatricality comes to their aid- the theatricality of trance. Here the rational, logical is left behind and the basic revolutionary spirit, belief and trance comes to aid.

As the red waistband belonging to the *gaddikakkaran* is lying in the middle and people watching it, the voice of the *gaddikakkaran* seems to come from it.

G's voice: Ye children of the land, we did belong here once. In the good old times,
in the Maveli times.

When everyone loved everyone else, when each lived for the sake of others
Those who stole us from our times enslaved us with their swords and gods
For them did we feel forests, for them did we make farms, for them did we
turn marshes into fields

(A Pause)

Ye mothers of our tribe,
Let our dormant tongue stir awake in your lullabies.
Feed your little ones on it, along with breast milk.

(A Pause)

Ye old folk, keep the last links of our love. Keep the last links of our tribe.
Pass on our legends, our songs, our *tudi* and our *cheeni*. (72)

As people surround the waist band, attracted to it, one of the young men picks up the waist band amidst others trying to dissuade him saying *pei, pei*, dead man's spirit. The young man as if possessed by the spirit, his whole body quivering as in a possession ritual, picks it up and ties it around his waist. He has become the *gaddikakkaran*, even his voice from now on resembling the dead man. The play moves on in the form of *adivasis* once again organizing and facing the Tamburan. There have been two versions of the text. The first one, the one that was banned ends in the people slaying the Tamburan. The later version involves the *adivasis* organizing and defeating the Tamburan and marching together to take possession of their land and way of life that has been stolen from them.

In *Chaverppada* we noted the critique of political theatricality with the thrust being placed on the specific space and its non-rational aspect and the skill of the performer who is closer to a magician being the reason for the loss of 'sanity' of the people. In *Nadugaddika* one gets a clear explication of the revolutionary logic of this space and transformation. The transformation is in fact aided by 'trance' and magic, yet this performance logic is arrived at because of the revolutionary redefinition of the ritual space and the contextualisation in the cultural milieu of the revolutionaries. The realisation of the class character and the present moment allows the people to move into a revolutionary time. But for this what is required is not the distanced public, but a participant public, who at the death of their heroes can occupy that space, making the position of the revolutionary not one of the particular but that of the social.

Chapter 2

Aesthetics of Authoritarianism: The State of Exception as a Cultural Condition

Introduction

In the previous chapter we looked at how theatricality both as a mode of expression as well as a mode of perception of the world was central in the period under our investigation, in giving force and effect for authoritarian agencies as well as a critique of authoritarianism. With this broad perspective of theatre of politics in the background, in this chapter, we will go on to do a close analysis of the event of the emergency and its impact on aesthetics. In precise terms, our objective in this chapter is to explore whether we can delineate what can be called as 'aesthetics of authoritarian period'. The reason for us to proceed in this direction is because of the need to historically contextualize the 'political theatre' we saw dominating in the period of our investigation. The 'theatre' of 'theatricality' needs to be historically and culturally located. Only once we do this, can we get a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of authoritarianism and counter authoritarianism. It is from this historical positioning that we could go on to ask whether there is a universal aesthetics of authoritarianism and resistance to it. Within the limits of the present thesis, it would be difficult to arrive at an answer to the question of the universal aesthetic, but by historically pinning down the aesthetics of an authoritarian period, it will open out this much broader territory of investigation.

Before moving into the analysis of the works of the period, let us lay down the reference point in which the aesthetics of the period needs to be seen. It is the context of debates surrounding modernity and the reception of the international modernist movement in India. In the political domain, the period of the late 1960s and 70s was one that saw wide ranging debates over the impact of modernity and the direction of modernity that needs to be pursued by the nation in its advancement. All the key political organizations of the time, whether it is the Congress Party and its various groups, the communist parties, the nationalist forces had a perception and were developing a critique of the way the modernizing process of nation state has been followed. We noted that there was

recognition of a crisis in the society by almost all the groups. This crisis was interpreted by the organizations in relation to the crisis of modern nation. The event of the emergency was seen as the best symptom/moment that captures this crisis of modernity. From the perspective of the state we noted in the previous chapter that the paradigm articulated was that of the need to get out of the crisis by bringing in a new “discipline” and to shake off the “cynicism” that has “sapped the national self confidence”. This new work ethic would lead to the development and advancement of the nation and provide it with a new “spirit of adventure”³³. On the other hand, the opposition had varied perspectives on the crisis, ranging from the perspective that it is the Nehruvian vision of modernity that has led to the present crisis and a need to chalk out a new direction for modernity to the critique and eschewing of the modernity process itself. With the experience of the emergency and the manner in which the nation state assumed unprecedented authoritarian character, it was also a period when serious probing surrounding the issue of nationalism was made³⁴.

In the domain of cultural practices too, this perspective of the critique of modernity had its impact. But what further complicated the cultural scenario was the reception and response/adaptation of the international modernist movement in arts. It is to this we need to pay special attention, as this is what determined many a time the experimentations in the field of culture. The genealogy of modernism as a movement in India has been drawn out by scholars in various ways. In Kerala too, the moment of arrival of modernism and its movement has been a contested one. While some scholars maintained a position that there was a radical break in the 1960s, others saw it the 1960s in continuum with earlier breaks achieved in the field of literature and theatre. Rather than following the debates around the genealogy of modernism in this manner, what we can pursue is our own consideration in this project - the fusion of modernism and politics. We could see clearly two trends in modernism, what could be termed as the progressive modernism and the formal modernism. It is the former that we would be tracing the history and complexity of. In the late 1940s and 50s, the cultural field was made dynamic with the work started by the Progressive Artists Association and later by IPTA (KPAC and other theatre groups

³³ These terms are ones that have been used by Indira Gandhi in her broadcast to the nation and speeches after the declaration of the emergency. See Chapter 1 for a detailed analysis of her speeches.

³⁴ A special issue of social scientist with the theme ‘nationalism’ came out in 1976.

in Kerala). With a political vision of fighting imperialism and fascism, and building a world for workers and peasants, the movement called for new aesthetics that would take art into the hitherto untouched spaces of the wide masses. This movement, due to many reasons went into a decline by the late 1950s, even though many break away groups worked in new directions (for example, the group theatre in Bengal). In the 1960s, the cultural turn in Kerala was one of turning attention back to the self and a probing into the creation of a 'rooted' art. Satchidanandan notes that the seventies inaugurated a "parallel modernism" that went on to do creative explorations in the field of theatre, poetry, cinema etc (Satchidanandan 2007: 22). He notes that the works that first recorded the coming of this parallel modernism that could put forward a social critique, along with new formal experimentations includes the following in the field of poetry: *Bengal: Indian Condition one: Dhritarshtr, Ayodhya, Nissabdata, Kashandi, Anandan* by K.G Sankarapillai, *Sankramanam, Piravi, Cancer* etc by Attoor, *Yatrappattu* by D. Vinayachandran, *Kuratti, Kattalan* etc by Kadamanitta Ramakrishnan, *Satyavangmoolam, Pani*, etc by Satchidanandan, *Mappusakshi, Kaikal* etc Balachandran, *Kabani* by Civic Chandran etc (ibid: 22). The emergence and popularity of numerous little magazines and exploration of new public in the form of reciting of these poems, hundreds of times by the writers and others on stage, in colleges, working class colonies, and streets gave dynamism to the movement. This was also the period when the first translations of Brecht, Neruda, Latin American literature, Black poetry, etc were done. These translations were also recited and performed. This engagement with a new revolutionary spirit mainly derived its inspiration from the Cultural Revolution of Mao Tsetung, *naxalbari*, Srikakulam peasant risings, the railway port worker strikes, the resurgence of dalit and *adivasi* identities etc in the country. Therefore the cultural turn of the 1970s was one of a complex fusion - that of modernism and that of revolutionary spirit. With this overall cultural context in mind, let us start looking at the specific works of the period in two broad oppositional categories - the aesthetics of the authoritarian regime and the counter authoritarian aesthetics.

Aesthetics of the authoritarian regime

We could start this analysis by looking at a cartoon titled *The 'Saga' of a Sapling* made by Bhusan and published in the January 24, 1976 volume of *Socialist India*, the weekly of Indian National Congress (*Socialist India* Vol. XII No. 8 Jan 24, 1976 p C-13). This particular volume was brought out in the middle of the emergency rule, as a celebration of ten years of Indira Gandhi's rule, who became Prime Minister for the first time in 1966. The cartoon with, no frames in between the scenes is as follows:

A sapling is growing in a pot with the caption "socialism" and the text says, "The sapling was nodding and dancing at ease in a lady's lawn in morning breeze". Then the "dark clouds of war" comes in and we see the sapling being eaten up by bull captioned "fascism", a goat captioned "communalism" and a rodent named "economic crime". The text reads, "And together they played a havoc indeed! **Till the Lady stood up to fend and feed it**". Now, the sapling has grown to become a tree. It has a fence around it with the caption "Emergency" and the last panel shows Indira Gandhi pouring water from a vessel titled "20 point programme"³⁵ to the tree.

³⁵ On July 1st 1975, the Prime Minister in a broadcast to the nation announced the following 20-Point programme:

1. Continuance of steps to bring down prices of essential commodities. Streamlined production, procurement and distribution of essential commodities. Strict economy in government expenditure.
2. Implementation of agricultural land ceilings and speedier distribution of surplus land and compilation of land records.
3. Stepping up of provision of house sites for landless and weaker sections.
4. Bonded labour, wherever exists, will be declared illegal.
5. Plan for liquidation of rural indebtedness. Legislation for moratorium on recovery of debt from landless labourers, small farmers and artisans.
6. Review of laws on minimum agricultural wages.
7. Five million more hectares to be brought under irrigation. National programme for use of underground water.
8. An accelerated power programme. Super thermal stations under Central control.
9. New developmental plan for development of handloom sector.
10. Improvement in quality and supply of people's cloth.
11. Socialisation of urban and urbanisable land. Ceiling on ownership and possession of vacant land and on plinth area of new dwelling units.
12. Special squads for valuation of conspicuous construction and prevention of tax evasion. Summary trials and deterrent punishment of economic offenders.
13. Special legislation for confiscation of smuggler's properties.
14. Liberalisation of investment procedures. Action against misuse of import licenses.
15. New schemes for workers' association in industry.
16. National permit scheme for road transport.
17. Income Tax relief to middle class; exemption limit placed at Rs 8,000.

This apparent simple cartoon telling the story of the emergency or interpreting the story of the emergency as propaganda from the side of the state, on a closer analysis reveals its complex nature. It condenses in itself the entire logic of the emergency and the mode of perception brought in from the perspective of the state. The most important question is that of the nation and the relationship between the nation and the people. The division that the cartoon creates between people and the nation is significant- the nation is separate entity from the people and as such has to be groomed, protected and saved from attacks from different elements. And emergency is an act of protecting the nation from elements of destruction such as the fascism, communalism and corruption. What the great, caring, mother figure Indira Gandhi does is to create a fence around the sapling, saving it from trespassers and then grooming the sapling by pouring water of the twenty-point programme. The sapling with this care grows to become a strong healthy tree. This lays down in a very simple visual manner the argument of Indira Gandhi on the institution of the state of exception and the announcement of the twenty-point programme for development. The state of exception was a temporary step that could create an "atmosphere" in which the progressive measures for the development of the nation could be implemented. This particular deployment lays down clearly the principles of ordering brought about and by the authoritarian regime.

The reason for this cartoon even in its simplicity capturing and highlighting the way of ordering, cannot be attributed to the brilliance of the creation. In fact the cartoon and its formal properties give to us a clue of the phenomenon it tried to represent, as it condenses in itself the aesthetics of governance. What one can see as the simplicity of the cartoon was the simplicity of the ordering mechanism of the state - it is the simplicity of the slogans, "Work More, Talk Less", "The Nation is on the Move" etc popularized by the state during the emergency and that have become markers of the period. What transforms

18. Essential commodities at controlled prices to students in hostels.

19. Books and stationery at controlled prices.

20. New apprenticeship scheme to enlarge employment and training, especially of weaker sections. (INDIA: A Reference Manual 1976, pub. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1976, p 446.)

In addition to this, Indira Gandhi's son, Sanjay Gandhi (under whose leadership the Youth Congress was working) announced a five-point programme that influenced the period in a major way. This called for increased family planning, more tree planting, better sanitation, higher literacy and the abolition of dowries. (ibid: 450)

this simple aesthetic order into one of a mythic status is the force of the authority that the state could invoke in doing so.

Developmental Aesthetic

Madhava Prasad, in the context of studying the ideology of Hindi Films, looks at the period under our study with the perspective of how a new aesthetic was charted out and promoted by the State as a “national aesthetic programme” with respect to films (Madhava Prasad 2006:188-216). This new aesthetic, termed by him as the “developmental aesthetic”, was based on realism³⁶. Looking at the realist turn in films in this period across the country, in Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka etc, he goes on to argue how under the aegis of the Film Finance Corporation, “realism became a national political project” (ibid: 190. Realism as a form with tremendous potential was first explored in India by Satyajit Ray, in his movies such as *Pather Panchali*, *Apu Trilogy* etc, where a possible national territory with its contradictions produced by modernity was charted out. Yet he notes that it is not in fact the works of Ray, which had strong resonances of the ‘author’ and his creation, that brought in a transformation of visualizing the nation as one that could be developed into a national aesthetic programme. The latter needed a charting out of the national territory that the nation state has to take control of, and bring in a passive revolution. It is the works of the later directors funded by the Film Finance Corporation, particularly that of Mrinal Sen’s *Bhuvan Shome* and Shyam Benegal’s series of films that transformed a realist aesthetic into a developmental aesthetic. Madhava Prasad undertakes a close study of three films of Benegal - *Ankur*, *Nishant* and *Manthan*, and notes how through generating a new middle class spectatorship, these were efforts by which the national political project was developing a “realism devoted to the mapping of the land, producing the nation for the state, capturing the substance of the state’s boundaries”(ibid: 190). *Manthan* stands out as ideal for our

³⁶ He notes that the success of the realist aesthetic was not a foregone conclusion. For instance he notes how the film *Bhuvan Shome*, directed by Mrinal Sen working around the realist aesthetic, by the end of the film critiques and subverts it. But when representing the nation for the state as an aesthetic programme comes up under the aegis of FFCs, this critique is no longer taken up. (Madhava Prasad 2006: 191-196).

purpose, as it was an emergency film, with all the major slogans of the Emergency coming in and the central narrative producing the passive revolution for which the agent is the new-inspired bureaucracy.

The developmental aesthetic of realism performed some very important functions. It brought in a new middle class public that through its viewing of these films could play a crucial role in the advancement of the progressive measures of the state in bringing about a socialist transformation of the nation. The films due to its special narratorial and cinematic technique, could place the spectator in such a manner so that they become the ideal public who could now visualize the break down of the feudal order and the entry of the modern state, its machinery and paradigm of ordering the world, with an indifference and distanciation from the crumbling feudal order that they themselves are in reality very close to. For this purpose a national geography was charted out that could represent the 'nation' and its central agendas as determined by the state - the crumbling of the feudal order, the entry of bureaucracy as agents bringing about a passive revolution, bringing in the social hierarchies and social disparities of the feudal order, but laying down a clear project of overcoming them via the intervention of the state through progressive measures, which is then taken up by the people at the grassroots. In his analysis, he takes up regional films also and posits that even though these films were able to provide the effects such as distanciation for the middle class audience, these efforts were in the context of the formation of a national aesthetic, a limited one. Looking at M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Nirmalyam* in Malayalam and Girish Karnad's *Kaadu* in Kannada, he notes that these films produced for the spectator a feeling of the "distant" feudal order for the voyeuristic gaze of the urban spectator, thereby the gaze coinciding with that of the state; but still these efforts were limited in a national perspective as their "regional-ness became a hindrance to their national effectivity" (ibid: 194). These films because of the realist form they were using, were still grounded in the culture and the locale in which they were produced and could not go beyond these limits to produce a national territory. And regional-ness was seen in that era as feudalism by the state. Therefore Madhava Prasad argues that these regional language films were relegated to a secondary position and Hindi became the meta-language "in relation to which the regions, their cultures would automatically fall into place as the objective *substance*" (ibid: 195).

While taking into consideration the idea of the nation as charted out geographical territory, with bureaucracy as the agents bringing about a passive revolution, one also needs to problematise further, the question of the aesthetics of the regime that was involved in such a project. I would be doing this in two ways. First, contextualizing and problematising the 'national aesthetic' by looking at the notion of the geographical space of the nation as conceived by the forces in opposition to which the emergency was imposed. Second, it was not merely by the geographical mapping of the boundary of the nation that various groups tried to bring in a cultural transformation. What was at the heart of such a geographical mapping was the idea of and contestation over the notion of 'time'. Madhava Prasad in his study of the films of Benegal does enter into this terrain. In relation to the film *Nishant*, he comments on the strategy of historically pinning down the events of the film into the past, *Nishant* being dated as happening in 1945. This dating back of the action is for him a strategy by which the contemporaneity of feudalism is masked for the spectator. Therefore the citizen-subject addressee of realism is "not at the hypothetical end of a still ongoing revolution, to admit in other words that the nation-state is not yet governed by contract" (ibid: 196-197). Though the events in these films could be ones that may be happening in contemporary society, and the narrative does not require or justify these precise datings in the past, these historicisations become the "device of distanciation that enables the spectator to gain access to the fascination and power of the spectacle of feudal oppression and rebellion without being reminded of its proximity in time and space, without undermining the realist spectatorial position" (197). While taking into account that the motive of this new aesthetic project was to tackle the then contemporary peasant uprisings against the landlords, particularly with the rise of *naxalism*, if one goes through a range of works that were produced during this period, where the spectatorial position is designed to meet that of the state, this sort of a distanciation would be seen only as *one of the strategic modes employed among a diverse variety*. In *Chaverppada*, for example the 'history' of independence and post-independence is narrated through a personal history of the central character, who then becomes the object of identification for a middle class audience. Yet the question of uprisings, particularly that of *naxalism* is not evaded by using a strategy of distanciation and removal of feudalism into a past. On the contrary in the early narration of the

'history', one sees the disintegration of the feudal order, particularly due to the bringing in of land reforms, and how this landlord class is being converted into that of a new bourgeoisie. And rather than the rebellion being transferred into a past, what one sees is a foregrounding of *naxalism* and the threat of violence, though here it is interpreted not as popular rebellion, but one driven by the cult of the leader and the ideology of martyrdom. This sort of a foregrounding technique was crucial during the period of the emergency for the justification of the state of exception. What I am highlighting here is not that one can find exceptions for the national developmental aesthetic, but the 'national' aesthetic was working in very different ways in various regions and often what contributed to the state ideology was the regional specification of the national aesthetic. And this specification depended on the spatio-temporal aesthetic and the framework of the nation put forth by the opposition during the period before the emergency.

Even in Madhava Prasad's analysis, one can see the stark difference in the notion of 'time', as he moves from his analysis of *Ankur* and *Nishant*, to his analysis of the emergency film *Manthan*. In the latter the distanciation is eschewed as the bureaucracy is mobilized to bring about a 'radical' transformation in society. With the movie having the emergency slogans in the background, Madhava Prasad notes one important aspect about the notion of time in the movie - in the first scene itself a train carrying the bureaucrat arrives at the village on time, and the bureaucrats reach earlier than the villagers. Madhava Prasad notes what this difference means, "With the bureaucracy taking on the mantle of leadership, the film suggests that there is a reversal, with the state representative arriving before the village has had time to prepare for his visit. The state is ahead of the nation: the condition of passive revolution" (211). Here the issue of confrontation between the feudal and that of the state becomes contemporary, with no distanciation technique used for telling a tale of an ideal present world. What is important to note is that the 'developmental aesthetic' recognizes this contemporary crisis; the only thing is that, it now has a solution or a way out. With the declaration of the emergency, an "atmosphere" has been generated for bringing about the progressive reforms as well as it now has a government who may not be able to immediately solve all issues, but is working with purpose and if the people who are victims to the old vices of the people in

power, including the bureaucrats, the government will be ruthless in ending this oppression and bringing justice.

The Landscape of History

They are not nests for those who have no place of their own, nor are they coffins opened by earth for the defeated, instead they give out voices of history to the dark boys who are putting their ears to these cracks..." K. G. Sankarapillai in *Bengal: Indian condition-one: Dhritarashtra*³⁷.

V. Rajakrishnan in his analysis of the emergency in India and the response to the event by artists, thinks of a possible aesthetics to capture the authoritarian moment in contemporary history. Commenting on the works of Asturias and Marquez and how these writers derived imagery from nature while writing about the dictators of Latin America, he notes that they see the dictatorships in their countries existing for centuries as something closely related to nature - the earthquakes, harsh summer and other peculiarities of their landscape. The dictatorships and the brutal repression and ritual cruelty these regimes produced was for them an eternal phenomena that bore an organic link with the Latin American living atmosphere. Rajakrishnan notes he has wondered whether there is a possibility of viewing the events of 1975-77 in the context of the north Indian weather conditions and landscape/terrain. Seeing Indira as a continuation of dictators who have ruled over this terrain for centuries, he wonders whether the terrors and excesses of the emergency was not one that was a *familiar* experience for people who are trained to take crimes of history and political mechanism with the same attitude as towards the adjusting to cyclical terrors of nature such as earthquakes and sweltering heat that take the lives of thousands (Rajakrishnan, 2006: 267-268). What the materials thrown up in this study in fact suggest that the landscape including the weather, the terrain became a strong material for registering social and political situation and aspirations. It is interesting to note that the landscape has been used in a multifarious manner - as something that has the potential and impending revolutionary character, one that is captured in a realist manner for the state to intervene and chart out a national

³⁷ Sankarapillai, K. G. K. G. *Sankarapillaiyute Kavithakal (1969-'96)*. Kottaym: D C Books, 1997, p 28. Translation mine.

geography and an image of the nation and of the people who are modernizing themselves in this exercise etc. Yet rather than Rajakrishnan's proposition of one of submission and the idea of fate as the central determinant, the interpretation of the landscape offered new potential for imagining transformation. While this imagined transformation was a revolutionary one in the pre-emergency period, once the emergency was declared, the character of this landscape changed.

As emergency is the exception to the normal, and as we would see later provided a unique complexity, the artists started to work around the notion of exception and abnormality in the landscape and time. It is through excesses and abnormality that the truth of the state of exception can be captured. As we would see in detail, the very landscape that symbolized and captured in itself the historical force of the revolutionary becomes the site that could capture the excesses of the authoritarian regime, as well as providing a possible space of resistance.

For looking at the spatio-temporal imagination articulated by the forces that had an objective of bringing about a cultural transformation as different from that of the state in the pre-emergency period, we could study one of the poems of K. G. Sankarapillai published in 1972, titled *Bengal: Indian condition- one: Dhritarashtra*. The poem starts with a quote, almost capturing the framework of the poem and declaring it to the audience in advance - "The pre-revolutionary times fills the veins of upper class with the poison of self-destruction. It makes them blind faster and faster- Lu Hsun". This long poem is written in the context of the *naxalbari* movement and the quasi-fascists terror that was unleashed by the state machinery against the revolutionaries in West Bengal. Sankarapillai, inspired by Maoism and *naxalbari* was part of the political organization CPI(ML) and writing poetry for him was linked to the belief of the coming of a revolution in the 1970s - the belief of the seventies as the decade of revolution. He notes, "We believed that revolution is arriving...we have to speed up its arrival. There should be a cultural atmosphere that will facilitate this. All the cultural forms such as the press, cinema, story, poetry, painting, sculpture, music, poster, street play, philosophy, civil rights activism...dialogue of various regional languages were getting ready for that. Language, by dropping adornments was making sound..." (Sanakarapillai 1997: 241-

242)³⁸. This was the context in which he got together with some friends and started the little magazine *Prasakti* and wrote the poem *Bengal*. As the quote at the start of the poem suggests, the main thrust of the poem is the 'fear' of the upper class that makes them blind to reality. The fear here is the fear of the other, fear of rise and retaliation of the other, in the famous words of Marx, the fear of the specter. Even when the truth is revealed to them of their own acts of oppression, they cannot see it, for they are masked to reality. The poem brings into fore the upper class as a category through the mythical figure of Dhritarashtra in Mahabharata. Dhritarashtra is blind according to the myth and when the war of Kurukshetra is happening, his aide Sanjayan sits beside him narrating the day-to-day events. In the poem, Dhritarashtra is involved in a monologue, telling Sanjayan and the audience, of his fears of what is happening in Bengal where his children, grandchildren and relatives are. Sanjayan at one point of the Dhritarashtra's lamentation tells him about the actions of their own class and the reason of the violent responses by the underclass. It is the truth about the oppression:

Sanjayan, I do not have sight to see beyond that.

As you say -

The chains in the hands of hunger,

....

Empty aluminium vessel.

The burnt marks of my grandfathers name

on those backs.

Protruding chests- my feet

you curse as struck on them

Tears sitting on the cheeks and looking back at the eyes.

- Nothing, no no, its truth, I am not

seeing anything. (ibid: 32. Translation mine.)

³⁸ This quotation is from the interview of Sankarapillai done by N. Sasidharan. It was first published in the magazine *Sukrtam* in 1994, June-September volume. It has been reprinted in *K. G. Sankarapillaiyute Kavithakal (1969-'96)*, D C Books, Kottayam, 1997, p 240-247.

He then goes on to lay down in the words of Dhritarashtra what the upper class sees

When I see them from far away

A fear grips my heart,

They are fallen leaves

The devils would create terrible storm.

They will hang my sons on the thorny trees. (ibid: 32. Translation mine.)

The role of arts, poetry as announcing an impending revolution, thereby intensifying the ongoing class struggle is taken up by this poem by using a situation in the Mahabharata. And the moment Dhritarashtra becomes the representative of the upper class, not able to *see* the real world, literally as well as symbolically, the result of the climax of class struggle is set up in advance. Dhritarashtra's sons Kauravas, lost the war against the Pandavas, and here the poem without going into any real climax or ending, that is the revolution, produces the impending revolution and victory of oppressed classes as the primary assumption spread throughout the poem. Instead of going into the revolutionary process, what it does is to bring to fore the movement of self-destruction that the upper class does in the wake of the revolution. For our own project here, one aspect to analyse is the way in which the poem imagines geographical space and time that is ripe for the revolution. As different from the developmental realism, here one can see the geographical space of the nation joined with the landscape, and it is in this merging of the landscape with that of the geographical space that the revolutionary moment comes up.

The poem lays down the present moment in very clear terms: the present moment is the moment of crisis and is different from the older times where there was complete hegemony of Dhritarashtra's class - when the infightings of his relatives, their capture of different lands, celebrations and victory marches filled the news. The present time is hot summer when the land has become arid, with big cleavages on the ground filled with fallen leaves. It is a "cruel time" such as described by Eliot in his poem 'Wasteland'. The times have changed and new configurations have come about that the upper class cannot understand and digest:

"It is not the old times

There is no compromise.

Blood for blood, gun for gun

Courage for courage.

It is not the old times. Its hot summer, its *kali*.

May be this is what

The poet spoke as the cruel time.” (ibid: 26)

This time generates fear in the in the minds of this class, for they are not sure of what is happening. There could be “snakes and broken glasses under the leaves that one may not always see”. But what is terrifying is the nature of these “fallen leaves”- they are the “mother devil of hunger that gives birth to disasters” and they are lying there “waiting”:

“If a light breeze comes, they rise up

None will be vigilant, they will organise fast.

Will create terrible storm.

Will destroy everything. (27-28)

Even though they are lying frozen, one should not trust them. The “extreme secret dream” of this summer is this storm. They will rise when no one is expecting and they will bring down huge mountains that stand in their way. The fear that the storm generates in the mind of Dhritarashtra is that of the spectre that cannot be seen other than in its impact- “like you say, it progresses secretly through underground, under the feet and pathways that we see, under our order and estimations, as a new and strong realization/consciousness it secretly progresses”. (29)

What gives the fear of Dhritarashtra such intensity is that it is based on some ‘real’ events in history. Dhritarashtra remembers the last storm that unleashed on a group of lords who were returning from pilgrimage. While they were moving in the streets laughing, a storm came up suddenly. Starting from the drainage canal, it went on to destroy everything in the city – the streets, hospitals, water reservoirs, radio centre and it kidnapped the emperor Virata along with his throne. And once the storm ended the entire country had changed - its rule, laws, manners, days and nights - everything was new.

Therefore, he believes that in this cruel time, one cannot trust anything - one tends to believe in hearsay. All he can see now is the rising storm in the sky over villages, blowing terror. They are for him *Vrikshasuran* who cause destruction; they disobey laws, destroy clocks of government, break-in and open the prisons, they twist and break the old staircases, rivers, pathways, railway lines- everything breaks up. The press, radio, television - nobody is telling the truth and ever since the times have changed, one cannot trust, something is happening in Bengal.

When analyzing *Chaverppada* in the previous chapter, we highlighted the function of the political theatre of the state to bring forth into the public domain those spaces, actions that are otherwise hidden from the public domain. These spaces and actions are in a sense non-theatrical and therefore the political theatre of the state has no control over them. It is by bringing them in to the space of theatre and being subjected to the gaze of the ideal public that state can represent the forces standing in opposition to it. Here we have taken a work in the pre-emergency period that works around the notion of the paranoia of the upper class, about the secrecy and therefore uncontrollability and ruthlessness of the actions of the under-classes. Without going into detail about the perspective from the revolutionaries, let us look at how the state picks up the ideas of its opposition and by intensification and interpretation of the same, achieves to bring about a logic of 'necessity' for the invocation of the state of exception.

James Scott in his study on the relationship between domination and different forms of resistance, has dealt with rumour a powerful form of resistance that thrives particularly well in times of "life threatening events such as war, epidemic, famine, and riot" and notes, that even today wherever news in the public media is disbelieved, "rumour might be the only source of news about the extralocal world" (James Scott 1990: 144). He notes that the power of rumour, particularly that of politically charged ones even to spark violent events, had been one of the sites that authorities had tried to repress and take control of (ibid: 144). He highlights some of the central properties that make rumours powerful: its autonomy, the rapid transmission, the embellishment and exaggeration that brings it more closely into line of hopes, fears and world-view of those who hear it and retell it etc. One of the central ideas elaborated by him, with examples from different parts of the world, is the often seen phenomena in history where the oppressed classes

“often read in rumours promises of their imminent liberation” and infuse in them their “utopian hopes” and “collective desires” (p145-148).

It would be a valuable exercise here, to do a comparison of the notions of violent ‘blood for blood’ perspective and rumors and the fear in the poem, with that of the speeches and campaigns used by Indira Gandhi and the government immediately after the declaration of the emergency. Though emergency was almost three years after the poem under discussion, one can note that they both share a common field of ideas. Indira Gandhi in her address to the nation on 27 June says, “the rumour-mongers and anti-social elements have had a field-day and have spread stories of all kinds... some wild conjectures are circulating about impending nationalization of industries, etc, and drastic new controls. We have no such plans...” (Era of Discipline: 16-17). Her speech in the Lok Sabha on July 22nd raises the issue of rumours. In reply to the question on the previous day by a member of opposition as what constituted fascism, she says, fascism does not simply mean use of violence or repression “Fascism is the use of falsehood. Over and above everything, it is the propagation of the big lie. It is the use of whispering campaigns, the search for scapegoats... what falsehood have they left and not propagated? What insinuation have they not made for four whole years, day in and day out? Even today there is a massive whispering campaign; somebody is supposed to be under house arrest, somebody is supposed to be on fast, somebody is supposed to have died... I should like to know from the Opposition whether they can name to me one Head of State who has tolerated this falsehood, this calumny, this violence for so many years. Which country in the world do you think would have tolerated it?” (ibid: 22-23).

What these arguments and a direct confrontation of the rumours and “whisper campaigns” try to do, is to bring the uncontrollable and invisible, and in a sense non-theatrical from the perspective of the state into the public space in which the performative of emergency has an effect. The effort is to break down and address the channel of communication that the government cannot control - for they are not illegal and more importantly as James Scott rightly notes, rumours will succeed only when there are takers for it. For the political theatricality, rumours and whisper campaigns are outside their performative space. Yet it is important to control them, for their effect is quite dramatic and unpredictable. The fear of Dhritarashtra of the sudden rise of storms, was something

that has been problematised by the government in the wake of such sudden storms that arose in different parts of the country with the spread of *naxalbari* movement. The argument of the role of rumours, resulting in violent incidents and rebellion of peasants is seen in the reasons given for the banning of important organizations in the wake of emergency³⁹. I would look closely at the one put forward in relation to the *naxalites*. One of the issues that had to be explained by the government before banning the organization was the participation of under-classes in many of these incidents and the question of whether they were not incidents originating from the economic distress faced by the peasants and their rightful claim to lands. I would look at a text provided by the state, charting out the reasons for banning CPIML published in the *Era of discipline*. Looking at the history of the Communist movements and the break away of the rebel group from CPIM to form the CPIML, the text goes on to analyse the functioning of *naxalites*, particularly during the time when CPIM was in government in Bengal. This, the text notes, posed the problem for the *naxalites*, of fighting “their own people, now branded as neo-revisionists. But the conditions were still favourable as their friends in political power would not be harsh on them. In fact, the late Charu Majumdar... and his associates carried on propaganda among the agitated farmers, their deeds such as forceful occupation of lands would go unpunished and land would be distributed among those who were bona-fide members of Kisan Sabhas. They were told that the left front government would abolish the land-holding rights of all kulaks for the purpose of acquiring their lands and distributing them among Kisan Sabha members. These inducements were clearly meant to enthuse the poor farmers. They easily came under the spell of the revolutionary leaders who had sworn to take them along the bloody path of insurrection on the lines of Mao Tse Tung’s ideology, that “Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun”. Like the description by James Scott of innumerable number of instances of oppressed people putting utopian hopes and interpretation in rumours, the text highlights how the ‘poor farmers’ were trapped by the *naxalites* into believing the possibility of liberation. Like Dhritarashtra who is having visions of his sons hanged on the thorny trees, the text highlights the “savage and brutal” annihilation ideology of the *naxalites* with the images of violence against landlords and others such as “The people’s

³⁹ After the declaration of the emergency, 26 organisations were banned by the government.

hatred and anger found expression when they painted slogans with his blood and hung his head from the roof of his house..." (245)⁴⁰.

Writing about the revolutionary turn of the cultural field of the 1970s, K.G Sankarapillai says that by the end of the sixties, modern Malayalam poetry came to rest in the private space of the individual, and the move of the poetry in the period was like wild animals who have moved back into the shade of their cave from the mid noon sun. He describes his own effort as arising out of the desire to liberate poetry and human essence from such a narrow space, to the vast landscape of history (Sankarapillai, p240). One of the techniques by which poetry is thrown into the vast landscape of history is by a literal and dynamic reconfiguration of the landscape by which it is now linked with the processes of history. One can pause here for a moment and try to set down the exact nature of the landscape charted out by this modernism. The extreme summer, the vast arid land with cracks on the ground - how does one relate this terrain with that of Kerala? While the narrative is about Bengal, a landscape away from Kerala and that could therefore possess these conditions, one realizes that what modernism provided to the aesthetic imagination was the generation of a universal aesthetic imagery that could capture and be adapted to any region. In Bengal, the imagery of the terrible summer and arid time is derived from, and explicitly linked in the poem itself, to Eliot's *Wasteland*. It is this universal imagery, landscape and aesthetic imagination provided by modernism, that in the event of the emergency became one of the best weapons of resistance. While the developmental aesthetic had to 'realistically' chart out a 'nation on move', the modernist poet could create a landscape that was at once local, national and universal and that could allegorically capture both the experience of the emergency and stand in its own.

⁴⁰ These lines are quoted from the monthly journal, *Liberation*, the mouth piece of CPIML, August 1969. What is interesting to note is that the description of violence are taken out of the source of CPIML as propaganda material against them. The descriptions are many, for instance, "Here on the walls of the landlord's house were written with his blood 'Blood for blood', 'You murdered P.K, so we annihilate you all'" (July 1969) or "I hit the agent on the head and killed him with one stroke. But it did not seem enough, so the peasants cut him into three pieces and one of them even drove his knife deep into the belly of the dead landlord" (September 1969). Describing the *naxalite* activities in Calcutta, the text highlights the 'shock effect' that these incidents produced as they were done "before scores of spectators".

The Event

Once the event of the emergency came about the aesthetics of both the regime of power as well as the forces in opposition to authoritarianism got transformed⁴¹. In the case of the regime of power, some of the tendencies visible in the earlier period got absorbed and now acquired new meanings because of their definition in particular manner by the state and intensification. In the resistance to authoritarianism, while one can see some continuation in the aesthetic imagination, what marks this period is the distinct emergence of a new aesthetics that had its base in the new experience of authoritarianism. Therefore one sees a new aesthetic imagination and experience, and the rise of a wide range of new forms of such as the allegory, parable, grotesque, tragic-comedy etc across different cultural practices such as theatre, poetry, literature, etc. I would not be analyzing these in terms of the new forms that arose in the period, but more in terms of the broad tendencies they took across genres. Whether it is humourous, tragic or grotesque, they had the same key reference points and perspective of the new world in the time of an authoritarian regime, and the effort here is to lay down these reference points.

The Moment

In the previous chapter we had looked at the emergency declaration as a performative. And in *Nadugaddika*, one saw an allegorical reconstruction of the event of emergency.

⁴¹ While taking the binary opposition of the regime of power and the forces in opposition to authoritarianism, it is in no way being suggested that these entities consisted of the same set of people across the period of time, before and after the emergency or that the forces of opposition all shared the same platform and ideology. In fact what the emergency as an event did was to bring in a regime of power that had incorporated many otherwise known figures who one related to as belonging to the side of the 'people'. The reasons were numerous, say the political coalition of one of the important left political organisations in the country, the Communist Party of India with that of Congress and many artists and writers and cultural organisations attached to the same supporting or at least keeping silence about the new regime of power, or the argument of 'opportunism' of intellectuals who aligned with the government. In the context of Kerala some names stand out in their support for the government, such as the poets N. V. Krishna Warriar, O. N. V. Kurup and Sugata Kumari who had written poems in support of the twenty point programme or were part of the efforts by Indira Gandhi in creating a national writers forum in support of her. An important theatre group had very radical precedents, particularly in the 1950s communist movement yet that was silent to the new authoritarianism was the theatre group of CPI, the KPAC.

Here we will look into detail at the moment of the declaration of emergency, from the perspective of allegorical reconstructions and imaginations of the event. As highlighted in the context of *Nadugaddika*, the main idea explored is the moment becoming a theatrical moment because of the ‘suddenness’ of the declaration and how in a moment, a transformation in the entire cultural landscape of a population is made possible by the declaration. J.L. Austin while laying down his concept of performative utterances also mentions exceptional situations when the performatives do not have force and effect. Theatre is one such exception. In this section what we are analyzing is how the performative of declaration is dealt within the field of its exception - that of imagination. What is pertinent to note is how the performative in a real life context is brought into the field of imagination.

The ‘Saga’ of Sapling and Nadugaddika while doing a reconstruction of the event, stand as polar opposites in relation to the logic and effect brought by the emergency. The first one is outwardly in support of the government logic of the emergency - emergency is declared for saving the nation from forces of destruction and chaos, the second gives a counter logic - the political rise of the oppressed and the state of exception as a device used to control people in the process saving the upper classes. Let us look at three works that critique the emergency and problematise the question of political theatre of the state. They open up questions about the nature of this theatricality, the regime of power and the question of the role of the ‘subjects’ or ‘people’ in the institution and continuation of the authoritarian regime.

The first work is a short story by C.V. Sriraman titled, “*Meesha*” (Moustache), written in 1977⁴². It reconstructs the emergency in a humorous note by eschewing the grand landscape of the nation or the outdoors, to the insides of an *illam*⁴³. Here the entire history of the nation and events preceding the emergency declaration and the emergency is represented through events happening in an *illam*, in the tone of satirical mimicking of real persons and events. The highlight is the event of the declaration being represented by a transformation, in fact a theatrical transformation in the form of a masquerade. The

⁴² The version used here is the reprint of the story in *Adiyantaravasthayude Ormapustakam*, Edited by Shanawas, A, Pranatha Books, Kochi, 2006, p 236-240. The translations are my own.

⁴³ *Illam* refers to the traditional home of the Namobothiris, the upper caste in Kerala.

masquerade of wearing a half moustache announces the emergency and the central issue it raises is that of the nature of theatricality involved in a performative of emergency. Does a performative of emergency fundamentally alter anything? Isn't it as superficial as the *Ittichiri* wearing the half moustache and announcing the state of emergency. Yet the story also foregrounds the idea of how such a performative derives force and effect, thereby having huge implications.

The story is a simple one that at every juncture parodies historical events, notions and important political personalities. There is an *illam* that was at one point of time very prosperous and famous. But at some point it lost its exalted status and was given away. Then a boy is born in the family who is a great scholar and who spends his life in regaining the *illam*. During his son's (who is a dwarf, and therefore called the Dwarf Namboothiri) time, the *illam* is regained. One day the widow *Ittichiri*, the daughter of the great scholar, comes back to the *illam* with her two sons. When the insiders start grumbling about this, the dwarf namboothiri reminds them of how it is because of her father that they are all now living so well. He takes her in and allows her to sit in front platform of the *illam*, assigning her the duty of telling outsiders the news of the *illam*. When the grumbling of the insiders increased, he said that let her sit for six months and then they will rethink about it. At that time a disaster happened. A fight broke out between *illam* and another landlord family with whom they were having property disputes for a long time. People went out with sticks and other weapons, but before it got worse, a compromise was reached at by the mediation of another important family. Once the settlement was arrived at, dwarf namboothiri sat down for eating *pan* and died. As the members of the *illam* were getting ready for a fight over property and power, somebody said, "Till the lunch and other death rituals get over, let *Ittichiri* look after the affairs of the *illam*..." Everybody agreed that as a compromise. *Ittichiri* sat on the easy chair of dwarf Namboothiri. "Not that she just sat, she sat firmly...and slowly one foot over the other, shaking her feet, she sat there oozing arrogance". In the meantime the insiders started questioning her about the money she has siphoned off for her son to make carts. As the noises grew louder she claimed, "It is because I am trying to help the weaker sections in the *illam* that they are shouting". And she called her trusted aid to think of ways to defend her power. He gave her the idea - "You should put on a moustache..."

But what reason could she give for putting on the moustache. Aid tells her the way to defend her action, "You should say this. I have put on a moustache. No one has the right to ask the reason or the necessity of it. If you ask..." When the family that helped them to arrive at the comprise earlier was consulted they also suggested that she should put on a moustache. While the family talked about a full moustache, what Ittichiri put on was a half-moustache. She said to the members, "The old anarchy is not possible now. I have put on a moustache. If you talk..." "Whoever saw, whoever heard was shocked. They shivered. There was fear, widespread fear". They exclaimed, "Oh! Moustache..." Only the children surrounded Ittichiri and started shouting in excitement about the moustache. She was happy and gave them sweets. When they realized they were getting sweets for surrounding Ittichiri and ... about the moustache, their voices and antics increased. Hearing all this noise, the old Namboothiri came out and asked Ittichiri what was happening. No one in the family has put on moustache before. How could she do it? Why has she done it? Ittichiri summons the guards and the old man is taken away to be chained in the cellar of the *illam*.

The story with its cartoon style imagery, trivializes the events and political logic leading up to the emergency by parodying the events and personalities and displacing them to the interiors of an *illam*. The story is written more in the theatrical mode, with all the crucial moments of the story coming forth as theatrical moments, whether it be the sitting on the *platform* or later on the easy chair and showing the arrogance of the ruler or the moment of declaration that is represented through the wearing of a half-moustache. What is striking to note is the representation of the performative of emergency declaration by a comical masquerade that scares everyone, though in the normal logic it would seem far away from a real change. What the story highlights humorously is the theatricality of the performative and how it is at one level, 'empty' theatricality (with no real change coming into being other than a declaration). Yet at the same time this comical masquerade has a tremendous force and effect and the comic takes the tone of the terrible with the imprisonment of the stalwart of *illam*. Like in *Nadugaddika*, here also it is the suddenness that makes it theatrical - both the suddenness of the transformation by masquerade, as well as the suddenness of the violent cultural transformation by the imprisonment of the old man.

Authoritarianism as a condition of existence

From the humourous allegorical reconstruction of the event of the emergency, let us move to look at a work that combines allegorical reconstruction with that of the aesthetics of excess. Through the excess the allegorical slowly starts losing its historical binding to move into a delineation of the structure of authoritarianism. What comes out at the end is the highlighting of authoritarianism as a condition of existence for the people involved in this structure.

Dharmapuram by O. V. Vijayan, a novel written during the time of emergency and published in a sequel form in the Malayalam Magazine, *Malayala Nadu* after the lifting of emergency⁴⁴, has been hailed by many as the one of the most scathing critiques of the 'Indira raj' and the Indian politics. Yet it has been a controversial point of argument as to how much one can call it a representation of the period of emergency in the Indian context, with the writer himself and critics fuelling different arguments. In fact the debate did not arise on the 'reading' of the text. Ever since its publication, it was seen as and used by many critics of the emergency as the work that presented the ugly reality of the period. But the debate started with the author himself moving away from this perspective, in a sense disowning many of the traits of the work as representing Indian history. He writes, "Some thought that *Dharmapuram* was the story of emergency and what was represented in it was the Indian state" (O. V. Vijayan 2007: 13). He feels it is a misunderstanding and from the fourth edition of the work onwards, he rewrote the work several times, starting from the names of personalities and moments, for instance Rashtrapati changed into Prajapati, the fifth chapter titled 'Emergency' changed into 'Crisis' etc, so much so that V. C. Sreejan notes that rather than the historical context being removed, these efforts have converted one novel into several novels (Sreejan, V.C, 2007: 6)⁴⁵. While one may not disregard the 'universal' questions that *Dharmapuram*

⁴⁴ Sreejan, V.C, *Ativadangalude Puranam*, in *Dharmapuram*, Vijayan, O.V, Pub. D.C. Books, Kottayam, 1985, p5

⁴⁵ While Vijayan notes that his work has been misread by people and that *Dharmapuram* should not be read as a mirroring of Indian state and emergency period, he does not lay down this as the precise reason for the many rewritings he has undertaken on the work. Therefore what exactly is the reason for the rewriting and what impact has these reworking had on the text is also something that has been debated. V.C Sreejan suggests what he considers as some of the reasons that led to the reworking. First, the changing philosophical interest of Vijayan, his acquaintance with the Karunakara Guru and that the perspective of the latter manifested in the changes. Second, Vijayan may have felt later that the reaction to emergency,

addresses, one would have to agree with critics who maintain that the context of the Indian emergency is just so embedded in the work that one has to look at it as a product and a response to the Indian political context. We would look at the work here in this framework. Moreover what comes out of a close study of aesthetics of the works opposing the emergency in the period is that this so called 'universal' appeal or context of *Dharmapuranam* was a product of the new aesthetic field produced by authoritarianism. The aesthetics with the political context of emergency and the aesthetic turn taken by modernism, produced this 'universal' effect whereby the local while being local is at the same time national and universal.

As highlighted by various critics, *Dharmapuranam* shocked the audience for its attack on established aesthetic parameters by its 'excess' representation of images of excretion and sexual violence. It was, as V. C. Sreejan notes, an experimentation of how it would be if one replaced the beautiful and tender/soft imagination with that of ugliness, grotesque and rage (p5). This excess has been problematised by critics in different ways. What stands out is the excess of these images that at some level draws the attention of readers to the materiality and sensuality of these images itself. V. Rajakrishnan in his analysis notes that these excesses while critiquing the establishment yet stand over and above the injustice, corruption, terror etc in rule. The signifier, for him assumes a status of independence as it starts standing on its own logic, drawing the attention away from the readers from the signified (205-206). Our project here does not entail laying down reasons for the same or making judgments on the success of this grotesque exaggeration. Instead what is pertinent to note is the very fact of the exaggeration, and how the new aesthetics of allegory functioned and materialized with the new sense of experience offered by authoritarianism. The point that Rajakrishnan makes of the signifier not leading to the 'obvious' signifier and assuming a status of its own, is the precise effect that has been created by the aesthetics of allegory.

which was only a small paragraph in the history of India, was an overreaction. While during the period when emergency was in effect, many thought it would be something permanent, the later elections and coming back to democratic path may have forced Vijayan to erase the markers of history and make it more universal. Third, the changes and the complexity that the international political situation took after the publication, has made the representation of the relationships between India, US and Soviet Union redundant. (V. C. Sreejan: 6)

In this overall context of *Dharmapuranam*, its critique of authoritarianism in general and Indira raj in particular, and the debates on aesthetics that it provoked, we will analyse the fifth chapter titled the “Emergency”, where an allegorical reconstruction of the declaration is done. The President thinking about his sons and grand children, who are eating shit⁴⁶ and making money in foreign lands, is disconcerted. In one of his ‘congresses’, wearing only the national flag to cover his nudity, he asks his subordinates what would happen to his children and grandchildren if he loses election. Speaking with everyday rhetoric they tell him the terrible consequences of the same -

Sankuntalam will be in danger...

Dharmapuri will not be in a position to lead world peace...

World will destroyed in disastrous nuclear war” (47-48).

But Rashtrapati is not moved. This time it is not a question to establish his own position and authority, but is a question for which the ‘true’ answer was needed. Hearing this, he instantly jumped several times and gave out a strong howl and shouted- “Tell it straight...”

The followers terrified explains the “meaning of what they just said in metaphorical manner”-

The *samyukta nadan pandika sala* owners will seize young *Thirumenis* vehicles, stop giving them sweets and call back the white women” (p48).

Rashtrapati wailed for his grandchildren and along with him the entire group of ministers wailed. He did a small excretion and got ready for a big one.

Through the radio and press, the news spread across Dharmapuri. The enemy has surrounded the country! trying to endanger *Sakuntalam*. Till this great threat is over, there will be no elections. Till then press cannot write anything other than what is said by the state. The state can imprison anyone for any long, or kill. The courts will not interfere. *Tartarikutiyarassu* welcomed this declaration. On the first day itself the police vehicles took rounds making noises, picking up thousands of residents.....

⁴⁶ Eating shit is one of the prominent imageries used in the novel to critique the authoritarian structure. In fact the novel starts with the words, “Rashtrapati felt like shitting...”. Vijayan himself writes that this recurring image represents the “historical garbage”. (‘Dharmapuratanattekurichu’, in *Dharmapuranam*, D C Books, 2007, p12.)

rashtrapati spoke to the people. Dears, you surrender your freedom to me. From today onwards let those remain hidden in me. For, the enemy has sneaked in to deprive you of that freedom...

This reconstruction of the event and many similar scenes in the novel, work around the notion of placing real events in a context of the excess. It is this excess and a certain irrational logic of power that brings out the structure of authoritarianism. In the end, through the repetitions of performative acts, a regime of power is constructed where not has a precise logic. The critique placed by Vijayan in this manner moves beyond the 'villain' Rashtrapati, to a whole range of his aides who submit to and become part of the mechanism of the regime of power and puts the question as to the role of people in the existence of an authoritarian structure.

U. P. Jayarajan's *Manju* (Snow)⁴⁷ written in 1975, takes the argument of authoritarianism as a condition of human existence further by eschewing the 'villain' in the event of the emergency - the figure of the ruler, for the figures of the 'people' in whom authoritarianism and regime of power, offers unlimited power and through the development of whose potential cruelty, the authoritarian regime can exist. The story recreates the event of emergency and here the modernist universal landscape is used exemplarily as this landscape becomes the central motif in representing the effect of the declaration. Through the perspective of a group of people sharing a room in a lodge and who become both characters who live through a sudden cultural transformation as well as observers of the terrors and excesses of the regime of terror, being witnesses to the event⁴⁸. The story addresses the question of authoritarianism and the experience of the same and possibility of destruction of authoritarianism. The thrust of the story is the allegorical reconstruction of the event of emergency and its effects through a series of transformations - the sudden total transformation of the lives of the characters due to the sudden change in the weather and landscape, the coming of snow that freezes everything, even their lives. This transformation, the coming of snow is not an experience that is 'normal' or 'logical'. Of the group of people living together and sharing the lodge, except

⁴⁷ in Jayarajan, U.P., *U. P. Jayarajinte Kadhakal (Complete)*, D C Books, Kottayam, 2005, p77-83
The translation used here is my own.

⁴⁸ This is a significant position that the characters assume. I would be going in length on this position while studying the notion of the 'hero' in Chapter 3. See specifically the section on resistance hero.

the narrator who had been disconcerted for some time of the possibility of snow conquering this part, this sudden snow generates shock and fear. They had not expected, nor can they comprehend this sudden change. The discussion between the narrator and his friend John, a student of natural history before the event of snow conquering the land is pertinent here. The narrator had been worried for some time of the possibility that snow will conquer the plains and when he was explaining the terrors of this snow that had conquered mountains his friends had not taken it seriously. John had rejected the possibility by saying that the narrator does not know anything about the earth and how snow works. The narrator says, "I did not oppose him. For, my subject was not natural science, but history." It is this historical sense of the narrator, which gives us an inroad to the nature of the snow and the "white terror" it unleashes. He explains the nature of this snow,

How will I describe this white terror that freezes the entire warmth in your mind, the white terror that destroys every matter of life in you... It is the same snow that appeared in terrible winter period long ago in Petrograd and Moscow. The snow that froze the lives by converting the mornings and evenings of Berlin into a terrible painful dream...(78)

After describing other places such as China and Asian countries where the snow has created havoc and destroyed lives of people, he concludes,

...whether it be east or west, snow was always snow. It always involved strict orders and extreme terror. From the huge trees challenging the mountain ...the grass that is going to bloom, everything at all times has shaken in the terror of this deadly snow." (78)

The transformation divides the spatial territories into two - the outsides and the insides. The outside is where the snow is conquering, the snow becoming an object that is seen by its audience through the window of the lodge. From this window they see the streets and people vanish under the hard curtain of snow. Then the snow started to come near them, as drops of snow on the windowpane and slowly the whiteness of it spread to the faces of the friends. The reign and terror of authoritarianism, is not restricted to the fear it generates in the people seeing its capacity for destruction. It also enters the domain of the mundane activities and perception. It is this aspect that makes the transformation even more terrible in its experience. This aspect is dramatically brought out in the story when

the performative of emergency in its rhetoric of development starts impacting their everyday material existence. The group had a relief from the fear and shock of the snow when the supplier in the restaurant of the lodge, Kanari, came up with hot tea. Yet they were stunned when they had the first gulp of their tea and realized that there is no sugar in the tea. When asked about it, Kanari replied with a “strange seriousness”- “From the time that snow has spread through the city, the owner is informing that the price of tea has been reduced to half”. The ‘strangeness’ now becomes a “cruel seriousness”- “Since new winter has arrived the owner has informed that tea without sugar is the best one.”(79-80)

The material dimension and the idea of false theatricality of order and prosperity is set up and experience of the condition of authoritarianism is heightened by the transformation of the outdoor space now conquered by snow. From the abstract notion of the ‘regime’ ‘state’, it also brings into foreground very real agents through whom this structure in all its brutality works. While an initial analysis captures this in the figure of the dictator - whether it is Hitler or Indira Gandhi or the abstract figure of Rashtrapati in *Dharmapuram*, the story goes on to look at the ‘agents’ of authoritarian regime. This in the story is captured by the figure of the “detentus” birds that have the feathers of a dove and the face of an eagle. They come in hoards to every place conquered by snow and start feeding on the corpses. But, the story ends on a positive note, where a space of resistance is imagined. It comes from the realization of the fact that these detentus birds are doomed to die. The snow that conquers a place because of some specific reasons is bound to melt away. The detentus birds totally involved in feeding in on the corpses do not realize the sun breaking in the horizon and the snow melting away behind them. These birds, which can survive only in the snow, therefore have a terrible immanent death.

The Regime of Power

The event of emergency presented the need for the opposition to define it as different from the developmental logic offered by the state. Though it was an event that was ‘unique’ in its performativity, one of the most important strategies of the forces of opposition was to set down the nature of the national emergency in terms of its effect in

relation to other authoritarian regimes in history. In the context of the emergency, two regimes seem to have given the parameters in relation to which the nature of the present regime could be compared and a critique of the government apparatus could be placed before the public - first, the colonial rule over the nation by the British and second, the Fascist regime in Germany led and symbolized by the figure of Hitler. These two regimes were in the popular parlance extremely negative and regarded as authoritarian, and once a similarity is established of the present regime to these, the critique emerges automatically. Yet as we would see later, particularly in the context of the Fascist regime, once a parallel with them is established, a new set of problems arise. It raises the question of the role of people in the establishment and continuation of this regime and as in the case of Fascism, a problematisation needs to be done about the people who are being passive to a Fascist regime. This new problematisation of the people or 'mass' that in its passiveness is aiding the regime became one central thematic, around which new explorations was done.

The idea of comparison with the British rule and the paradigm that after two and half decades of freedom, the country, like many other newly independent countries had given away again to a dictatorship has given the name to the resistance to the Indira *raj* as the second freedom struggle. The presence of leaders who had themselves been part of the freedom struggle⁴⁹ and could claim as witnesses to the similarity, and in some respects the more oppressive nature of the emergency provisions, only accentuated this comparison.

In one of the cartoon poems of Vylloppilli titled *As in the times of the British rule* also the basic thrust is the humorous foregrounding of all 'claims' of the emergency coming up in a conversation between passengers, and exclaiming how everything is now absolutely fine - there are no *bandhs* or *gheraoes*, the newspapers are purged of all bad news, very less number of cases in the courts, trains are running on time, and what more, spirituality is also increasing and hoarding has also stopped. Law is alert to catch anyone moving

⁴⁹ The important leaders opposing the emergency regime such as Jayaprakash, Morarji Desai, A.K. Gopalan etc were all part of the freedom struggle. In Kerala too the parliamentary debates of the time is full of arguments by the opposition of how the present scenario was worse than the British period.

away from the right norms and in the end, the *tahsiladar* exclaims 'now everything is safe, as in the times of the British rule'.

Yet, rather than the British regime, what offered a more striking parallel to the Indira regime had been the fascist regime in Germany under Hitler. The reasons are many. One can see that the actions and the terror created by the police machinery was termed as semi-fascistic even before the declaration of the emergency⁵⁰. And once the emergency was declared, this became the definition of state functioning across the country. More than mere categorizing the government machinery as fascist, there had been works from the political class itself that were circulated widely during the emergency period through underground channels, looking at the rise of fascism in Germany and a comparative study of the Indira Gandhi's policies, and setting down the similarities of the same.⁵¹

Once the regime is defined as fascistic, then one of the most important critiques of the regime comes in the form of making parallels between the figure symbolizing fascism in both the cases - Hitler in Germany and Indira Gandhi in the Indian case. This concentration of the critique of one figure who encompasses in himself/herself the range of excesses of the regime is central to the aesthetics of a fascistic era. The reason for the same is the projection or over projection of the same figures by the state machinery to maintain their hold over power. In India one saw in the period of the emergency an intensification of the tendency of bringing together the representation entire regime on figure, that of the Indira Gandhi epitomized by the slogan, "India is Indira, Indira is India" and the paintings by eminent artists such as M. F. Hussain and Vivan Sundaram.

A great number of political cartoons have taken up the theme of Indira Gandhi and her demolition of democracy in the country, whether it is in the form of press censorship or the arrest of the important leaders of opposition. And here the most important aspect is the unmasking of the claims of Indira and her government, of the upholding the cause of democracy, saving the poor and bringing in peace in the nation. The image of Indira, in these creative brush strokes gets transformed into the evil looking one ordering a group of people in uniforms holding a stick, "Lock him up", pointing towards Mahatma Gandhi

⁵⁰ One of the main reasons was the terror unleashed by state in Bengal in the pre-emergency period.

⁵¹ Article by L. K. Advani written in a different name, later revealed to be by him. The work has been reproduced in *Smugglers of Truth*

sitting and reading in a room with the caption “Democracy” on his body⁵²; the narcissist Indira looking at mirror pleased at herself, while she holds a club in her left hand and one can see two legs of a person fallen dead on the ground with the caption saying civil liberties⁵³ etc. Another set of cartons that are most interesting in this unmasking of Indira are the ones where she is placed in relation to Hitler, sometimes drawing parallels between them and in some circumstances showing how she is in fact much more cruel than Hitler was. For instance, in one of the cartoons by O. V. Vijayan, he shows an interaction between Indira Gandhi and Hitler. The cartoon consisting of five frames without borders, reveals only the body of the two from their waist to below. Indira Gandhi while standing near Hitler takes him in her arms for a dance while making statements to him such as, “Adolf, You made such bad mistakes.... Why didn’t you organize a Seminar for the protection of Jews ... Why couldn’t you organize an anti-fascist Congress like we called in Patna?... Why didn’t you say that Bukhanwald, Auschwitz and Treblinga were only means to alleviate poverty? You are a mere honest man...” and by this Hitler collapses (Vijayan, 1999: 56).

What makes the parallel of fascism much more complex in its analysis of the event of the emergency is that from the parallels between Indira Gandhi and Hitler, the analysis then moves on to the question of how such a fascist/semi-fascist dictatorship could come to power through public consent. The central question is who is responsible for such a fascist regime to come to power and the excesses of emergency? There are widely contested positions on the reasons of this interim dictatorship in India. In some of the extreme positions like the one maintained by K. P. Appan, the entire onus is placed on the individual who led the dictatorship, Indira Gandhi and her personality. Such an analysis would do a detailed study on the personal traits of ruler and her/his reasons to become what she/he became in the end. For instance, K.P. Appan maintaining a position that in reality, politics is extremely personal, and therefore Indira Gandhi’s actions need to be seen in the context of law of her psychology, goes on to give the reason for emergency and the excesses as the response of the ruler who has been the prisoner of loneliness and solitude in her whole life.

⁵² Shanawas, p24

⁵³ (Shanawaz, M. A. p115)

When one looks critically at such positions, the central question that needs to be addressed is what then is the psychology of the public that is supporting a government terrorising the very same subject through the unlimited power that it has derived from the people? Balraj Puri in his analysis of the emergency regime raises the issue of analyzing the psychological makeup of the people who are subjected to the regime of power. While he analyses the personality of Indira Gandhi and fascist elements in her personality he comes to the conclusion that if one goes to the extent of explaining the entire phenomenon of emergency "in terms of the role of a single person", it "would be tantamount to a belief in a sort of "personality cult"- in reverse" (Puri, Balraj, 1978, p93). He notes, "When- fear- of external threat or internal chaos- grips a people, insecurity caused by economic or political factors haunts them, the gap between expectations and achievements widens and the democratic forces fail to channel the resultant frustration, cynicism and impatience of the people, and chauvinistic fervour atomises group and individual identities, a psychological atmosphere is created for the search of a *strong leader*" (ibid: 94).

The paradigm of authoritarianism as a structure that includes people as agents was a strong symbol in the works during the period of the emergency. One of the works that captures this in strong terms, highlighting the 'inevitability' of this structure is O. V. Vijayan's short story *Oil* written during the time of emergency. The story tells the tale of a village that is a closed one with few links with the outside world. Ayyan Chettiyar and his family is one of the most important people of the village and symbolize goodness. They provide oil for the entire village, Chettiyar's wife provides medical treatment, and above all this they are people who are there for anyone in need of money or any other help. Starting with this setting down of 'peaceful', "fearless" nature of the village, the story slowly breaks every myth existing about the village. The first pause comes with the information of a paralysis for one of the boys in the village. The Chettiyars come to their aid, give treatment and also money. But slowly this disease of paralysis assumes an epidemic nature. As the people are worried about the disease, a government servant starts investigation and gets a hitch that the oil of Chettiyar's is causing the disease. But his investigation does not go further as on his way back to the city to inform the government about this, he is beaten up after which he back tracks from his decision. From this

moment onwards the story slowly reveals the Chettiars assuming total control over the people of the village. The entire youth of the village get paralysed and the control of Chettiyar family is economic as well as psychological. The thrust is on the passivity and the resistance of the people of the village to believe that Chettiyar's might be responsible. In the end a break comes in the form of an external agency. The ex-wife of Chettiyar's closest aid, a woman who resides in the city but visits the village often, registers a complaint in the government. But when the much-awaited intervention from the state comes about, one realizes that it is also a part of the authoritarian structure. The government officials are bribed with money, food and sexual pleasure. The story ends with the lone figure of resistance - a paralysed boy who believes that Chettiyar may be responsible for his plight and does whatever is possible of him, hugs his new bride, also paralyzed, and decides to remain in his own world of pleasure than to put up any further challenges.

We will analyse in detail the figure of this 'passive people' in the next chapter. What is important to note here, is the aesthetics of the period of authoritarianism trying to delineate the structure of authoritarianism. As different from the developmental aesthetic of realism, here it is the excess, the abnormal landscape and overall structure that assumes significance. Rather than working with a dramatic build up and action, these works work around the continuous repetitions of certain authoritarian acts by the regime of power, in the process the emptying it of any active role that has implications in the future. Even in the powerful resistance literature, this resistance comes up only with the unfolding of the repetitive authoritarian performatives that realizes authoritarianism as a condition of existence.

Chapter 3

The Figure and the Model of the 'Hero': A Critique of Theatrical Reason

Introduction

In the previous two chapters we looked at the intricate relationship between authoritarianism and political theatre and proceeded to lay down what one may call 'the aesthetics of authoritarian periods'. We saw in detail, how in the time span of our study, there was the recognition of an immediate crisis in society. It is the varied interpretation of this crisis by groups that provided them with distinct, yet related visions of transformations to be brought about in society. In the present chapter, we will go on to examine one central element of political theatre, around which the idea of cultural transformation is centred - the figure of the *hero*. *Nadugaddika*, *Chaverppada*, *Dharmapuram*, and numerous other short stories, poems and works that present an opposition to the emergency have at their core, and also endeavour to create a notion of a hero. Works centred around the figure of a hero, and that articulate an emergence of a new hero can be found in most regions, across time spans. What makes *this* study pertinent and unavoidable is the importance that the constructs of hero assumed in the period under investigation. Not only were the constructs living and passionate realities for people who dealt with them, but more importantly, they were also concepts that were at the centre of major contestations- social, political and cultural. It was the concept of the hero that was at the heart of both struggles against authoritarianism, as well as the efforts to produce the mechanisms of control of the authoritarian regime. What this period offers us is an orifice into wide-ranging notions of the hero, each gaining its structure by interacting, engaging and in some way counter-posing itself to other ideals.

Any study about Emergency in India, or for that matter any authoritarian regime cannot underestimate or bypass the *heroes* thrown up during the period. These are the figures who, through their actions, voices or even silences have made a tremendous impact on the era. All efforts to document the 'excesses' of emergency regime (whether these be in the form of memoirs, political speeches, academic works etc) try to reconstruct the heroic

interventions in the period. These figures are usually seen as 'martyrs' - both in the sense of martyrs whose lives were taken away by the regime, as well as the greater number of living martyrs who suffered under the repressive state apparatus. In the context of the Indian emergency, the number of such figures is considerable. Jayaprakash Narayan, George Fernandes, Snehalata Reddy, Rajan etc all stand out even if one takes a cursory glance at the period. Apart from so-called national figures, each region has its own heroes and the experience of emergency has at its center these regional figures. Regional resistances and their repression was what determined to a great extent, the popular perception about the nature of the regime. M. A. Shanawas in his edited work on the emergency, records twenty-six people in Kerala who were murdered by the state machinery or the *goondas* of the ruling party (Shanawas, M. A: 2006: 310-311). Apart from those who were murdered, through memoirs and articles the work also highlights numerous figures who were tortured in the police camps. Alongside them were the cultural workers, who through their creative practices in the form of singing, writing, acting, participating in movements of resistance etc, also performed much needed heroic interventions during the period. Although Kerala is not a space that immediately comes to mind when trying to record resistances to the authoritarian regime of 1975, these interventions have been crucial, with some events and mobilizations based around these figures having assumed great relevance even at the national level. The present chapter without being an effort to document and historicize these actions and events, would look at the notion of the hero as a phenomenon that is at the heart of political theatre.

The hero as an idea while having very often, direct relationship with historical personalities and their actions is at the same time a part of a wider social imagination. Like in the case of the *gaddikakkaran* who can be interpreted as the historical personality comrade Varghese, hero as an idea is involved in a dialectical relationship with historical personalities and events. In *Nadugaddika*, the *gaddikakkaran* when interpreted and perceived as Varghese is recognized in its particularity. Yet the space and the structure of the play, at the same time, take him beyond the characterizations of an 'individual' character to become a 'model' construct that can be roughly termed as a type. The efforts in this chapter are oriented towards understanding the problematics of the 'type' of the hero and its dialectical relationship with the individual character and historical

personalities - a process by which the type assimilates into itself the wider tendencies of the age, opening out new possibilities of thinking about and imagining an ideal hero. The hero in the sense that we have laid out here is not merely tied to the notion of hero as an individual. As we would see in detail later, the period had thrown up not only the notion of a hero as an 'individual' with her/his particularity, there was a greater thrust on a class, group of people owing to their nature, rising to the abstract level of that of a model hero. In *Nadugaddika*, for instance, the *gaddikakkaran* is a particular individual who has his own individuality. But, in the events preceding his murder another hero figure emerges - the *adivasis*, who gain class consciousness, thereby transforming themselves into model heroes. This transformation is brought about by the realization of the death of the individual hero and transformation of this hero into a social one- the *gaddikakkaran* as an individual is dead, but the drums, rhythm and the words from the blood-soaked cloth of the *gaddikakkaran* creates a new *gaddikakkaran*.

What makes the figure, and the contestations and philosophical probing around the figure of the hero in the period, is the complexity brought in by real instances of interventions in the period that defy easy categorization. For instance, previously we had highlighted the significance of the interventions made by historical personalities in the wake of authoritarianism, whom we identified as martyrs. Yet when one moves into a deeper analysis, we realize that in many instances we may not be able to categorise events and the 'heroes' making the interventions as martyrs. For instance, the case of Rajan an engineering college student who was picked up by the police and subsequently murdered in the Kakkayam police camp. The case assumed tremendous significance as his aged father, Ichara Warriar, went on to wage a prolonged battle to find whereabouts of his 'missing' son. After the lifting of the emergency, this struggle transformed into a public legal battle, at the end of which it was revealed that Rajan was in fact tortured to death, and that many people including those in very high public posts were involved in the crime⁵⁴. The critical question to ask is what was Rajan? Was he a martyr? Was he a *hero*? Or was he a victim? The complexity at hand is that authoritarianism, particularly in the

⁵⁴ For a detailed understanding of the events, see the section on Rajan case in *Adiyantaravasthayude Ormapustakam*, Edited by Shanawas, M. A, Pub. Pranatha Books, Kochi, 2006, (p 149-191) that brings together articles and memoirs of Ichara Warriar, policemen, advocates etc.

invocation of the state of exception, produces a great complexity where the role of heroes as 'actors' assumes multiple layers. The dynamic presented by the figure of constable Ramachandran, gives us an idea of this problem of the hero as an 'actor'. Constable Ramachandran came into the limelight when in the post-emergency period, he publicly revealed that he had shot and killed comrade Varghese in what was so far had been declared by the state as an encounter killing. He narrated in detail the series of events that culminated in the actual shooting and his role in the entire process. He explained how after comrade Varghese was picked up by the police, the then DYSP announced to the four constables present the decision to kill him and asked those who are ready to do it to raise their hands. The only one to dissent and not raise his hand was constable Ramachandran, who asked whether it is not prudent to produce Varghese before the court. As a consequence to this defiance, the 'duty' of shooting Varghese was assigned to constable Ramachandran, with the threat of his own death if he failed to perform. He committed the act, but once the emergency was lifted he decided to reveal the truth to the public, all the while maintaining that along with his supervisors he was also guilty of the crime⁵⁵. Is constable Ramachandran a martyr or a victim? How would one categorise the position of the hero as an actor? These immediate questions thrown up by the real events and experience of the emergency, break down the broad contours of what could be defined as the general characteristics of the hero as an actor. The present chapter is oriented towards opening out this territory of the complexity of the *heroes* of the era.

In this chapter we will look at three distinct models of the hero produced during the period under our study - the revolutionary hero, the citizen hero and the resistance hero. In section 1, we will look at the framing of the revolutionary hero and the debates surrounding the same with the objective of laying down the nature of the 'revolutionary' as imagined during the period, with particular emphasis on a dominant historical framing of the period - the naxalite. The second and third sections move on to examine closely the new notions arising in the conception of the hero following the institution of the state of exception. From this moment onwards, one can note a shift in the thrust on the revolutionary hero and the concept of total transformation that dominated the earlier period. In the second section we will closely look at the framing of what could be called

⁵⁵ See 'Ramachandran Nair Enna Itihasam' by K. Venu in *Mathrubhumi*, 2006, December 10, p 75-77.

the 'citizen hero'. This is the conception of a hero becoming the agent of transformation of society from the perspective of the state apparatus. The third section will analyse the space created by the opposition in the wake of the institution of the state of exception. This is a unique position of resistance and the central element of aesthetics of resistance and a critical perspective on the existing conditions is provided by a new way of perception, that of the resistance hero. These three are not isolated images; but in fact are being produced by defining themselves in opposition to the others.

Revolutionary Hero

... The ones with red stars on the centre of their foreheads- they will come

K.G. Sankarapillai⁵⁶

Those who cannot see beyond the present

are not human beings:

The seeds once sown and the words once spoken

never cease to work.

Satchidanandan⁵⁷

The first model of hero that one has to take into account while studying the phenomenon of authoritarianism is the framing of the image of the *revolutionary*. This image has been one of the most passionately conceived one in the period preceding the emergency, and as we will look into in detail later, was emerging in with direct confrontation with the authoritarian agencies⁵⁸. The idea of revolutionary hero and the imagination and contestations surrounding what would be a revolutionary hero is not something unique that began in this period. Yet in the period under our study, particularly in the pre-

⁵⁶ Sankarapillai, K. G, 'Anandan (Indian Karamasovukalkku)', in *K.G. Sankarapillaiyute Kavithakal (1969- '96)*, D C Books. Kottayam, 1997, p 39. Translation mine

⁵⁷ Satchidanandan K, from 'The Night of Martyrs', Translation Poet, in *Summer Rain: Three Decades of Poetry*, ed. Yuyutsu, Pub. Nirala, New Delhi, 1995, p109

⁵⁸ This is more so because of our study being located in the regional context of Kerala. The image of the revolutionary and debates surrounding the same had assumed a central role after the rise of the communist movement in the 1940s.

emergency period, these debates assumed a contemporary/special significance. It was a period when a vibrant redefinition of the existing category of the revolutionary hero was undertaken both at the level of revolutionary political praxis as well as that of revolutionary hero as an idea. The starting point of this re-definition was a critique of the existing models of revolutionary hero and the theatricality his/her praxis is located in. The new revolutionary hero in a sense had to emerge by bringing in a new theatricality, thereby a new spirit of the revolutionary. The historical reasons of the emergence of this new perspective are the changing scenario in the international, national as well as regional politics, the event of *naxalbari* starting in Bengal being one of the dominant articulations of this perspective. For our purpose in this chapter, we would be looking in detail at the emergence of the revolutionary hero, primarily from the perspective of the *naxalite* movement. This section without going into details of debates and actual events, will attempt to draw the broad contours of the framing of the *naxalite* hero. This framing is complex because of the thrust placed both by *naxalites* and state apparatus on this hero and his/her acts as radically different from the existing models. To arrive at this figure therefore, we need to see the conception of the figure from both the perspective of authoritarianism as well as the revolutionaries themselves.

The Revolutionary

The central critique of the existing models of revolutionary hero on the basis of which the new hero had to break free and emerge was what was regarded as the 'false theatricality' of the ongoing theatre of politics. One of the best works that tries to capture this false and empty theatricality of politics, where the political leader as performer survives by giving new performances that 'affect' people in a sensuous manner, is Kadammanitta's poem "*Rashtriya Netavu*" (1974)⁵⁹. In the poem that brings to fore a political leader trying to 'survive' the dark forces standing against him, Kadammanitta in a humorous manner places the space of politics alongside the space of 'performance'. The poem starts with

⁵⁹ Ramakrishnan, Kadammanitta, 'Rashtriya Netavu', in *Kadammanittayute Kavithakal*, D C Books, Kottayam 1992, p 160-163. *Rashtriya Netavu* literally means political leader. The translations used here are mine.

the description - the political leader prayed with his whole heart (an empty one), to the goddesses of the land and abroad, to save him and his rise from nature's wrath. Starting with the chanting of the main *mantra* through the mike, the political leader moves into the space of the ritual. After doing everything, including visiting temples, feeding Brahmins, doing *ganapati homam*, *bhagavati seva* and putting lamps in Siva's temple, the leader realizes that it is not working. And the only way out is sorcery; for it has been revealed that the evil goddesses who have no position in contemporary society are furious and are after his life. The poem then goes on to meticulously describe the *mantra* and *tantra* that he invokes and the actions he performs to ward off these evil goddesses. In this space of exorcism, as the initial ones fail, in a natural progression he moves onto more violent acts, where in the light of the soaring fire from the torch, he moves on to burn the fingers of the possessed who were not speaking and pierce loose cane into the flesh of their bodies. The possessed who agreed to leave, were made to leave; the ones that were doubtful were tied; the ones who did not bend to the speech and orders were exorcised and sacrificed. At the height of rituals, as everything was burning in the sacrificial pyre, and everything trembling, the vampires resurrected; the evil spirits that were sacrificed came out bursting the sacrificial pyre. They then created havoc, destroyed the ritual space and captured the magicians. And now from the space of ritual performance, Kadammanitta moves to describe the space of theatrical performance. The political leader unperturbed played a trick for his survival- he performed the play of Oedipus. "Wet with the blood pouring out of his burst eyes, with the tired hands lifted up to the sky", he said the dialogue:

"Oh cursed Thebes, my dear people,

For you oh! ... You, who are destined to burn and perish like the blue worms, like seeds in the sacrificial pyre of endless suffering.... No... I am a sinner...

Forget me... Here I am leaving...

Lifting the weight of sins in some desert...

Not able to distinguish day and night, with no-one, neither loved ones nor relatives to for help I will perish... Who is crying for me... no- none should cry. I have given up

my eyes for the cruel sins... I am leaving.... Forget me, oh cursed Thebes...My dear people, for you, oh...You...You... dear you”

(Kadammanitta 1992: 162-163. Translation mine.)

The performance created the required effect. The people who are the evil spirits roaming about Thebes with no salvation, the people who are the vampires falling down in the sweltering desert are transformed by this performance. They get their catharsis. Moved by the performance, they sigh and weep at the ‘tragedy of their hero’. Kadammanitta ends the poem with a description of the post-performance scenario. As the stage darkens, the hero goes backstage and while he is walking restlessly, for, the fuse has gone off in the air-conditioned room “that ideology has marked for him”, the streets of Thebes was filled with evil spirits again and again roaming about; the vampires were lying down tired waiting for liberation. (ibid: 163)

While analyzing *Chaverppada* in the first chapter, we saw how an ideal public was produced by a critique of the theatricality of political spaces and how this ideal public had access to the ‘truth’ because of its gaze from outside of the performance space. In *Rashtriya Netavu* too, one comes across a critique of the direct, material affect of political spaces as also similarities being drawn between the political leader with that of a skilled performer. Yet on a closer analysis we can see that the critique developed by Kadammanitta of political theatricality is distinct from that of *Chaverppada*. The above work, if taken independently can be easily assimilated into the whole corpus of works that scholars working around the methodological framework of theatricality categorise as works revealing perspective of ‘anti-theatricality’⁶⁰. In such an analysis, often a binary is invoked by which works categorized as revealing anti-theatrical attitude are placed against those works that reveal a pro-theatricality perspective. But on a closer analysis of the work itself and the range of works produced by Kadammanitta, one notes that instead

⁶⁰ See Gran Anne-Britt; Diane Oatley, ‘The Fall of Theatricality in the Age of Modernity’ in *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality. (2002), pp. 251-264; Marvin Carlson ‘The Resistance to Theatricality’, *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality. (2002), pp. 238-250; Jean-Pierre Sarrazac; Virginie Magnat, The Invention of “Theatricality”: Rereading Bernard Dort and Roland Barthes, *SubStance*, Vol. 31, No. 2/3, Issue 98/99: Special Issue: Theatricality. (2002), pp. 57-72.

of an anti-theatricality perspective, what it in fact envisages and calls for is an alternate theatricality that could replace the existing worn out, empty, ritualistic political theatricality. In the period under our study, this call or imagination of a new theatricality assumed a central position in bringing about the required, envisaged transformation of the society as a whole. In *Rashtriya Netavu*, it was an existing 'hero' of the people who was unmasked before us by revealing the emptiness of the theatricality of his performance—both the ritualistic one and the theatrical one. It is against this background and in opposition to this false, ritualistic, empty theatricality that the new revolutionary hero had been imagined.

From the false hero, let us now move to delineate the new revolutionary hero by looking at some works of K. G. Sankarapillai. As discussed in the last chapter, the works of Sankarapillai, from his own perspective were oriented towards the objective of the declaration of the impending revolution and geared towards the speeding up of the same⁶¹. We saw how his work *Bengal: The Indian Condition* dealt with these ideas and its relationship with authoritarianism. One of the most important aspects of the same is the bringing into light the hero who is going to lead this impending revolution. While most of his works of the period deal with bringing into forefront this revolutionary hero, one of the works that best represents this process is his poem, *Anandan (Indian Karamasovukalkku)* written in 1973⁶². As different from the monologue of Dhritarashtra in *Bengal: The Indian condition*, here it is a declaration by an invisible speaker, the author himself, who is also the representative of the oppressed, to Anandan as well as all Anandans⁶³. It is the declaration about the changed world, a world that does not take oppression and treachery as in the past. Here, he sets down the history of oppression and its manifestations in real life as well as in myths and art works. He announces to Anandan, "This is not the old country side" that the tales and lore talk about -

Nee tedi vanna vazhakkula ee muttattilla

⁶¹ See chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of Sankarapillai's work.

⁶² Sankarapillai, K. G. in *K. G. Sankarapillaiyute Kavithakal (1969-'96)*, D C Books, Kottayam, 1997, p 36-39. Translation mine.

⁶³ Anandan here refers to Krishna. In the context of the use of the term all Anandans, it simultaneously brings together all the kings as well as simultaneously invokes another meaning of the term as referring to the people who are seekers of *Anandam*, i.e. pleasure.

Elavum kundirikkavum ee valappililla

Nayadi vanna peda man ee adivarattililla

...

Manja pattinu niram koottan majjayilla

Maala chaartan talayottikalilla

Tandavattini ee nenchukalilla (Sankarapillai 1997: 37)

“There are no plantains that you came in search of. No cardamom and frankincense that you could take. There is no young deer you came hunting. No skeletons for you to make necklaces from. No chests for you to do *tandava* on”⁶⁴. These stories of the oppression by the upper class are now history. It is a changed countryside where a “loose fighter bull and a mad, dangerous dog that has forgotten servitude” is roaming freely. “A wild bull holding swords in both hands is coming at you” while a “madman is throwing stones at those who do not work”. And thus he arrives at the new spirit of the hero- storm in the body and their feet grounded in this soil and therefore not able to be chained by your Vedas (ibid: 37).

The appearance of the revolutionary hero has the quality of ‘revelation’ for the upper classes. For, they do not see the logic of the development of the hero or the reason of the wrath of the oppressed. In *Bengal*, while the upper class Dhritarashtra sees the spirit of the revolutionary in the dark boys and the sudden rise of storms, he still does not *see* the logic or the development of the same. In *Anandan* on the other hand, the very objective is to show/reveal the hero in its full development. Therefore, the poem after the initial declaration of the transformation of the countryside moves to reveal the hero. This in fact is a mystery unearthed for *Anandan*. And for this to be revealed he has to go on an exploration of the world he outwardly knows- he has to literally start digging the earth. And as he goes on and on removing soil, at each phase the ‘reality’ of his class’

⁶⁴ These are very specific references of the instances and interpretations of events in myths and art works of the past. The bananas that oppressor have come in search for, is a suggestion of the famous Malayalam poem *Vazhakkula* by Changampuzha that narrated a story of a lower caste person who in his land planted a banana plant. It was the centre of hope for the family; but once it is ripe the Tamburan’s people come and take it away forcefully. ‘Young deer’ reference is that of *Sakuntalam*.

oppression is revealed. And in the end, where one could see the depth and history of oppression, there dramatically appears the hero-

In the wombs of the ugly here

There are commanders/warriors

The ones who cannot be trapped by your *paramaviracakra*

Ones with red stars on their foreheads,

They will come. (ibid: 39. Translation mine)

For K.G. S, while the hero emerges from the depths of the land, with the entire history of oppression in the background, it is not a hero who is tied down to the past. On the contrary the hero is a living, dynamic force of the present. It is interesting at this point to enter into the debate surrounding the representation of the hero and its relationship with the 'real'. EMS Namboothiripad in the context of a landmark play, *You Made Me a Communist*, makes an analysis centred on the characterizations in the play and how they mirrored and captured the real contradictions of the period. While, recognizing that the play reveals a correct understanding of the contradictions of society, EMS, himself a political worker, questions the characterization of the central figure in the play who is immersed in this political struggle. He finds the representation of this character as flawed as opposed to all the other characters- while the others are alive and dynamic, the hero, he feels is a stereo type leaving the play unable to capture the contradictions that would be characteristic of a political worker of the period. He feels that while other characters possess contradictions that these individuals are made of, in a period of great change, the central character stands out as an ideal. EMS asks the playwright to correct this dead characterization of the hero, and proceeds to give a reason for this non-real representation, which brings us to the problematic of hero as a real person and that of hero as an ideal. He notes that even though the playwright is a politically conscious individual, who is part of the movement, the reason why the characterization of the hero is idealistic is that he may have modelled the character on the actions of political workers in what we have seen as the performative spaces. The hero is modelled and constructed out of the experience of individuals in public meetings, processions and other performative contexts where we have seen the framing of a certain theatricality. It is this

theatrical representation of the activist that when used as a model in the play, fails to arrive at the real contradictions of a political activist of the period - his process of 'becoming' the class-conscious individual being missed out. What is striking in the poetic construction of the hero of Sankarapillai is the absence of the so-called contradictions. While there is the entire history of oppression behind her/him where the hero is rooted, he/she is at the same time cut off from it, or in a momentous manner springs apart from it. This a-historical emergence of the hero is possible because of the ethical and moral rightness of her/his position and the idea of the present moment as pregnant with revolution⁶⁵. One can say that this emergence from the depths of earth of the hero is in a sense similar to the effect of the poetic moment. It is in fact the intensified hero of the space of political theatre who assumes the character of the general.

The relationship between this hero and the actual turn of events in the 1970s is as different from this poetic emergence of the hero, a much more complex one. Though the period of the 1970s was regarded as the moment pregnant with revolution, the real events and mobilisation of people did not attest to this belief. In a sense this hero with no contradictions who could lead the revolution did not have existence outside the poetic moment. For this to happen, people had to attain a certain consciousness. The works of this period had the objective of critiquing 'silences' of the era and to rouse people to wake up and act⁶⁶

In Baldness,

Friend,

In the muddy water

in our skull

Eating us,

⁶⁵ The notion of the present as a moment pregnant with revolution can be seen in his poems *Ayodhya* (1972) and *Bengal: Indian Condition one: Dhritarashtra* (1972).

⁶⁶ The poems *Njan* (1971) offers a critique of the middle class from which the poet himself emerges, while the poem titled *Nissabdata* (literally meaning silence) written in 1973 takes up the issue of the silence in the society. In the latter the poet goes on an investigation of the meaning of silence and establishes that the silence is the reality of oppression as well as the will power to fight. The poem ends with the call to "give the key to the watches that have stopped because of your loss of will at the square of despair". For, this silence has the lightning/thunder of the spring with the depth of hours". "Be quick; let the drums sound, correct the time in the watches that have stopped" (Sankarapillai 1997: 44-47)

A crocodile is growing.

Friend, due to cowardice

Never has a dog not barked

Here *kaalan* here thief

Here *jaaran* here postman

Here fund collectors

....

Friend, without saying what needs to be said

Even without being a dog

Even without having a tail

Even without going to hell

We stink lying in these palaces. (ibid: 42-43. Translation mine)

The distancing between the hero and the people, who needed to awaken, is central to the major works of the period. In chapter 1, we saw this aspect coming into the fore in *Nadugaddika*, where the *gaddikakkaran* was the hero who was involved in the process of triggering the painful memories of the oppressed and giving them the direction towards resurgence. As in *Nadugaddika* what complicated the issue was the experience of the state of exception (not just the 1975 one, but also the ones preceding them) and the terror unleashed by the state against the heroes. The real contradictions brought about by these state terrors find their detailing more in plays than in poetry. Yet in the plays too, once the hero is murdered by the state apparatus, there is a resurgence of the people, whereby the people now move into the role of heroes. And this moment, as in the case of the poetic moment, is one infused with a special theatricality, that of revolutionary redefinition of the ritual and performance space.

The Revolutionary alias the Terrorist

What makes the idea of this new alternate theatricality, in which the revolutionary hero is positioned, more complex is that due to its own new spatio-temporal framing and the real events on which many of them were based, it became a site that was equally forcefully taken up by the state apparatus. When one looks at *The 'Saga' of the Sapling* and the image of the bull, goat and rodent eating the sapling; defined as fascism, communalism and economic crime, one does not quite get a glimpse of the huge investment that was made on the image construction of the 'forces of destruction' by the state apparatus⁶⁷. In fact the figure of this reactionary force was so crucial in the setting up of the agendas of 'security', 'discipline', 'progress' and 'democracy' that one may, if one is not careful in the study of the period, be tempted to reach the conclusion that it is in fact the actions of these forces - of communalism and *naxalism*, that called for the immediate declaration of the emergency in 1975. In the present study we are looking at only one of these 'forces of destruction', that of the *naxalism*.

The state of exception justified itself, on the notion of necessity of it as a step that would provide security and order for society against the forces of destruction. For instance, an advertisement in the INDIA: A Reference Manual 1976, compiled by the Research and Reference Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, gives us an idea of the 'fear' of the 'revolutionary' alias the 'terrorist', and the control and order that has been achieved by the present state apparatus. The advertisement, for the Export Credit and Guarantee Corporation Limited (A Government of India concern), has the photograph of a 'macho' young man standing in profile, with his face turned towards the viewer. His right hand is raised; with his index finger pointing towards the viewer and around his waists are guns and bullets. He is the 'modern' terrorist, and a bold caption reads - "*When he takes over his country, who pays you? Revolution isn't good for an export business. A coup that gets a two-line mention in the Indian newspapers might get an exporter into serious trouble in that particular country... The new government might pay. Or may not...*" The advertisement goes on to explain the offers provided by the corporation in securing the investment of exporters. While one can note the fusing of

⁶⁷ See chapter 2 for a detailed analysis of the this cartoon by Bhusan

the categories of the revolutionaries and that of people who conduct coups, what is even more striking is the basic assumption of the security and order that has been attained in *this* country. There is 'danger' everywhere outside barring this country, where security and order has been established. But for continuous necessitation of the idea of this security and order to be brought about and maintained by a state of exception, there is the need to show/reveal the figure of the terrorist in public in its most extreme manner. In the last chapter, while discussing the special geography produced by the works of resistance to the regime, we dealt with the notion of bringing out to the public space, the spaces that are marked off and rendered invisible by the regime. The strategy of bringing into the open the invisible and hidden has also been used extensively by the state apparatuses in relation to the functioning of the *naxalites*. The state of exception asked for two things simultaneously- the revealing of the terrorist, yet under the control of the state.

In framing of the image of the terrorist, the role of media has been critical. The purview of this section does not allow us to go into a detailed analysis of the same, but we can highlight the function of sensational reporting of *naxal* activities, and specifically the role of newspaper photographs in constructing the 'image' of the revolutionary. For understanding the 'revealing' of the terrorist within the overarching control of the state machinery, we will look closely at some of the photographs taken and published in the newspaper *Malayala Manorama* of Ajitha and her group after their capture. Our focus will be on the figure of Ajitha - as she was the only woman who participated in the action. Ajitha and her group were involved in the famous Talassery-Pulppally police station attack case. After the attack, even as they went into hiding in the nearby forests, a singular powerful 'symbol' of the attack flooded the public domain. It was a photograph of a handprint made of blood on the wall of the Pulpally police station. The police used this image to highlight the 'blood thirsty' nature of the terrorists. The actual origin of the image is controversial as though the police have claimed that this was made by Ajitha, she herself has denied it. Without entering into the truth factor of the claim of the police, we still can note the impact that such an image can generate in the public domain. The photographs we are going to study, were taken after the capture of Ajitha and her group in a village. These were published in newspapers and what comes across in these images, is the 'revealing' of the terrorists for the public, by the police. The photographs are

numerous, but they all follow a general pattern. Ajitha standing in the midst of the policemen holding guns, even as onlookers watch Ajitha. Every stage of the capture is being recorded- Ajitha presented before the villagers, Ajitha inside the police van, being taken to Mananthavadi police station, in the lock up facing the viewer who sees her through the prison bars. Let us closely look at one of the images that show the policemen 'presenting' Ajitha to the villagers in front of the Mananthavadi police station. Her *saree* and sweater were taken off and she was in this state made to stand on a stool higher than everybody. As she stands like this on the platform of the police station, the policemen stand on both sides while a big group of people sit in front and stand packed on all three sides. The photograph captures the moment in action- Ajitha standing up straight and still on the stool gazing above everyone, while the restless crowd is hooting and gesturing towards her. Controlling and taking the action forward is a senior policemen standing right in the front of Ajitha and in the centre of the crowd raising their hands controlling the restless and excited crowd. In her memoirs, Ajitha herself does not highlight this theatricality. What she does highlight is certain interventions that her group could make among the villagers even after they were caught. It was the villagers who gave information about them to the police and even after they were caught, when they got some time with the villagers without policemen watching, they could explain their real status as revolutionaries and among this sympathetic crowd managed to distribute all the leaflets they had at their disposal. What is striking in the workings of the state apparatus is the production of 'terrorists' as not just agents of violence, but as images that stand on its own. Ajitha in them epitomizes the blood thirsty one, but she is also the exotic other, with her sexuality also being the most targeted aspect. It is against this anarchy that the greater moral order of the state is established⁶⁸. It is to this conception that we now need to pay attention.

⁶⁸ The discipline and order of the state also includes in itself a claim to a greater moral order, with the control of sexuality and morality being central. It is pertinent to note that one of the works that was banned during the emergency period was the autobiography of Kamal Das titled *My Story* that challenged the established norms of sexuality in society. We may not be able to go into this aspect in depth in this thesis; but the issue of the working of state theatricality and the question of gender and sexuality assumes a central role and deeper analysis of this aspect is required.

Citizen Hero

An advertisement by the Public Relations Department, Kerala Government in the *Mathrubhumi* magazine in 1976 was as follows:

Dharmakshetre,

Kurukshetre.....

In India

Five Thousand Years Ago

Against injustice and *Adharma*,

The First Kurukshetra war

Was staged

In that soil

Against the revisionary forces

Here, another war of Dharma

- ◆ Destroy the anti-social forces
- ◆ End the difficulties of the weaker sections and small earners
- ◆ To purify social life
- ◆ To annihilate the dark forces of violence and anarchy

Be a part in this war of dharma

While analyzing the speeches of Indira Gandhi we noted the particular emphasis she placed on the category of the 'citizen', and how the emergency will not hamper in any way the life of a "law abiding citizen"⁶⁹. At the same time as one moves into the emergency period, one also noted the rhetoric of the emergency moving from a mere defense against the 'reactionary' forces, in the direction of a 'new spirit' of the nation that made a call for the emergence of a new 'citizen subject' who would now lead the nation

⁶⁹ In her first address to the nation after the declaration of the emergency, Indira Gandhi ends by saying, "I should like to assure you that the new Emergency proclamation will in no way affect the rights of law-abiding citizens." (in *Era of Discipline (Documents on Contemporary Reality)*, ed. D. V Gandhi, Pub. Samachar Bharati, New Delhi, 1976, p14)

towards resurgence⁷⁰. What is crucial in this invocation and a call for a bringing forth of a citizen subject is, as noted elsewhere, the fluidity of the category of the citizen. The citizen is no longer a juridical concept that is well-defined in a legal technical sense. It is instead a construction, where by the category 'citizen' forms itself by framing of certain values. This as we would see in detail in this section, stands in relation to, absorbs some elements from and at some level stands distinct and contrary to the imagination of the revolutionary hero. The present section makes an effort to lay down this fluid, but powerful category of the citizen.

In the last chapter, we looked at the notion of the developmental aesthetic of the state at the national level as laid down by Madhava Prasad. It would be a good exercise to start our own analysis into the nature of the citizen-subject from Madhava Prasad's study of Shyam Benegal's 1976 film, *Manthan*. *Manthan* according to Madhava Prasad is an "Emergency film"⁷¹ - that is, "a film about the transformative power of the mobilized bureaucracy"- and is "something of a state project, meant to serve as propaganda for the developmentalist efforts of the Congress government"⁷² (Prasad 2000: 216). The film deals with the starting of milk co-operative in a village, and highlights the tensions that arise between the older structures of power and the militant bureaucrat who has come to initiate it. In the climax of the film, as the bureaucrat leaves the place due to his transfer, the work of the co-operative is restarted by an untouchable, who initially had opposed the bureaucrat only to become a staunch supporter of the program later.

Without going into details of the film, we could keep in mind three points that are relevant to our project in relation to the framing of the bureaucrat as the ideal citizen. The first is the nature and the role of 'radical' intervention by the hero. The reformist state

⁷⁰In Indira Gandhi's broadcast to the nation on 1st July, she says, "What is most urgent is that collectively we should shake off any sense of helplessness. The worst feature of the crisis which was building over the last few months was that it spread cynicism and sapped national self-confidence. There is a chance now to regain the nation's spirit of adventure. Let us get on with the job."(*Era of Discipline*: 21) See chapter 1 for a detailed study of these speeches.

⁷¹ With regard to the question of the developmental aesthetic, Prasad looks closely at three films of Shyam Benegal- *Ankur*, *Nishant* and *Mandhan* and for him the "movement through the three films in question is a movement towards the consolidation of a developmental aesthetic allied to the contemporaneous stage of the passive revolution" (p 196). *Mandhan* for him represents the quintessential emergency film, where the intervention is in the form of the mobilized bureaucracy.

⁷² Along with Benegal, V. Kurien who is often regarded as the architect of the white revolution in India is also credited with the idea of the story (p216).

intervention, in the case of *Manthan* happens in the form of the arrival of the *pardesi*, and his effort to break the existing feudal order and hierarchy. In the initial part of the film, that Madhava Prasad calls the exposition, the film reveals existing hierarchies and opinions of the people vis-à-vis the milk co-operative. Against widespread objection to the project, the breakthrough for the bureaucrat arrives in the form of an intervention that he is capable of making in the normal life of the villagers. It is a 'radical intervention' that defies the limits of the commonly approved professional ethics of the bureaucrat. And this radical intervention gets its authentication because the demand for the same comes from the field itself. In the film, a child of the village falls sick and the father of the child pleads to the veterinarian, to treat his child. As a result of this demand of a situation from the field, the veterinarian bypasses his professional ethics as he goes on to treat the child and save it. This stands in opposition to the other doctor who reminds him of the unethical nature of what he is going to do. Madhava Prasad notes that this moment "is crucial as it establishes the need for radical measures in a situation where a scrupulous adherence to professional ethics is shown to be counter-productive" (ibid: 213).

The second point highlighted by Madhava Prasad is the conflict of the personal life vis-à-vis her/his duty, that the bureaucrat encounters while undertaking his militant intervention. Prasad highlights the scene in the film, where, when the huts of the villagers are burning, he pleads with his sick wife to sleep and allow him to go and perform his duty. Prasad notes that at this juncture the personal life of the bureaucrat is clearly coded as a hindrance to his greater objective. "The bureaucrat-as-militant...is constructed as a free-roaming figure who is lonely in his idealism and has to break his world up into two incommensurable segments" (Prasad, Madhava, 1998, p 215-216).

The third is the removal of the bureaucrat from the scene at the end of the film. This, according to Madhava Prasad is crucial - for, if there is a greater involvement of his than the initiating of a class struggle, then his identity of being a bureaucrat would change to that of being a revolutionary (ibid: 216). "The reformist bureaucracy whose world-view is represented in the film was committed to the passive revolution and not to a radical challenge to the political order itself" (ibid: 216). And the spectators of the film are assured that the efforts of the mobilized bureaucracy has been not in vain, the seed for change has been sown with an organic intellectual in the form of the character Bhola,

who takes the lead in the carrying on the struggle once the bureaucrat leaves due to his transfer.

With these characteristics highlighted by Madhava Prasad, let us now move on to look at some of the works from Kerala that work with the idea of construction of a citizen-subject as the central agent of transformation. The first work that we could look closely is the play *Dharmasupatri* by Cheri⁷³ published in 1979, which was performed over five hundred times across Kerala⁷⁴. Cheri describes his work as a satire on the corruption and rivalry that happen within a government hospital. Noting that one may not see any “theatrical techniques or moments” in the play, he says that the significance of the play lies in the fact that a government hospital is a space that everybody has to go either as a patient or as a visitor at some point of their life. India is a land where medical treatment has been organized to be free of cost, and it is in this sense that one can call the government hospital a *dharmasupatri* (Cheri, ‘About the play’ in *Dharmasupatri*, 1979). And the play for him works with the irony of the situation where the same space in reality, has become the site of exploitation and rivalries.

One of the points to be highlighted in relation to *Dharmasupatri*, is its link or perspective with authoritarianism and the event of emergency in particular. In case of *Manthan*, as Madhava Prasad notes, one can establish a direct relationship with the emergency. But in the case of *Dharmasupatri*, except on a closer analysis, one cannot define the work easily as an Emergency play. *Dharmasupatri* was published in 1979 after the lifting of the emergency, yet what stands out is its invocation right from the start of the play of a “change in the government” that has altered the scenario. If one looks at this historically, by looking at the change of governments at the centre and in Kerala, one cannot see an immediate parallel in the sense of change attested by the play. In fact at the centre by 1977, Indira Gandhi was thrown out of office. In Kerala, on the other hand, in 1977 the people who were at the helm during the emergency were brought back in elections with huge margin. If one considers this repeated allusion to change in the government, in this

⁷³ Cheri’s other works include plays such as *Police*, *Pasupatastram*, *Penal Code*, *Kutirapantayam* etc as also novels such as *Ladies hostel* and many screenplays.

⁷⁴ Cheri notes that the play was mainly performed by two groups- by Kayamkulam People’s Theatres led by C.G. Gopinathan in the name *Dharmasupatri* and by Jaya Theatres owned by Adoor Pankajam in the name *Paritranaya*. (‘About the Play’ in *Dharmasupatri* by Cheri)

context rather than referring to a literal change of the ministry to a change in the *regime* of governance, a change brought about by the state of exception, then, the work very well becomes a good representative of the emergency work.

One of the basic differences between the play and *Manthan* is the locale and the notion of basic contradictions defining the present moment from the perspective of the nation. *Manthan* tells the tale of the modern state machinery bringing in a transformation in the countryside, with the basic contradiction being the modern progressive state as pitted against the feudal order. *Dharmasupatri* on the other hand shows the struggle of the militant bureaucracy and the people within a modern institution - a government hospital. In charting out the 'national' aesthetic, Madhava Prasad probably puts in a greater emphasis on the contestation between the modern state and that of the feudal order, as the single 'national' concern of the state. But the idea of contestations within modern institutions is an equally significant aspect of the articulation of change. A place like Kerala, with its emphasis and to a great extent success, even before the emergency in the efforts to take modern primary health facilities and education, to all regions and sections of the people, would be one reason why this space of the modern state institution assumes such importance as to be the site capturing the transformation championed by the mobilized bureaucracy. Without understanding these regional historical positioning, one may not be able to grasp the 'popularity' of the interventions by the state. Apart from this distinct regional logic, the site of the government hospital and the struggles in this space, also point to something more fundamental about the 'conflict' that the bureaucracy is involved in. In the public relations advertisements we looked at earlier, one could see that, along with the objectives of defeating revisionary forces, there was a lot of importance placed on the idea of internal purification. This comes from the understanding that the elements of destruction, as existing within the structure itself. Therefore, in the case of the bureaucracy, the case is not that it is one unit that is now mobilized and fighting external forces. As the play highlights, what was being stressed was the conflict and struggle involved in bringing about a 'progressive' transformation within this bureaucracy. And as we will see in detail, the bureaucrat as the citizen hero is engaged in this process of internal purification of the bureaucracy. It is this hero's limitation to challenge and face the bureaucracy in the same manner as he/she would challenge the

external forces that makes the figure steeped in contradiction. Further it has to be kept in mind that the idea of the state being a contested site, with its own institutions and people assuming the nature of 'revisionary' forces is central for the maintenance of the state of exception. For if this contradiction is not there, or has been overcome, then, the state of exception has lost its logic of 'necessity'.

Even with this difference in the site of intervention, the play still presents a very familiar structure of the developmental aesthetic. The play starts with the setting down of the nature and the ambience of the hospital- a patient singing the *kirtana* "*ee narakateenenne karakettidene tiruvaikkom vazhum sivasambho...*"⁷⁵ and the song broken by the sounds of wailing and heavy breathing of the patients. In the conversations in this part, the context of the new regime is set by invoking one of the most popular emergency campaigns- that of punctuality. What comes through is the position of the state as the agency continuously vigilant in maintaining order - order, referring to as maintenance of rules and regulations as well as a 'greater' moral order, and in the process ensuring 'work'. Through the conversations between the nurses - Lissi and Savitri, and the attendant - Vasu Pillai, the space of the hospital is set. On Lissi's query about his time of arrival in the morning, Vasu Pillai notes that with the change in the government, he now comes on time. New orders have come - the gate has to be shut five minutes after the allotted time. But this image of the government in control is immediately broken with Vasu Pillai's comment that though Savitri is twenty minutes late everyday, nothing can be done about it. For, she has contacts in higher bureaucratic circles. This inaugurates one of the most frequently used dialogues in the play- that of 'reporting' to a higher authority. It is pertinent to note that almost every major character at some point of the play, invokes this action of reporting against others to a higher governmental authority, whether it be the Resident Medical Officer (R.M.O) or the D.M.O or the ministerial level. This opens up the site of conflict within the modern state institution, where corruption and exploitation is rampant. Yet one of the central weapons of contestation of all the parties involve the belief in and use of channels of state machinery to bring about the victory of their side. It is this chaotic atmosphere that makes the works during emergency very complex. Like Indira Gandhi's call for a change from within, like the state making the

⁷⁵ "Oh Lord Siva, relieve me from this hell..."

call for purification, the institution is regarded as being involved in this tussle in the moment of transformation. And the 'heroes' of the era are the ones who can engage in this struggle, breaking the limits and boundaries prescribed by the 'traditional' and the 'established'. Along with the notion of punctuality, the other problems of the institutional space are highlighted- the rampant corruption, sexual anarchy and moral degradation.

Briefly, the storyline of the play is as follows: Dr. Thambi is the R.M.O of a government hospital that is the site of corruption, exploitation and moral perversion. These are spread at all levels of the functioning of the hospital and are led by Dr. Thambi himself. As the play develops, one realizes that Dr. Thambi, whose only objective in life is to make money, which he does by selling medicines of the hospital in black market, taking bribes from patients, striking deals with the rich and powerful. He also has an illicit affair and a child with Lissi, above everything else he is insensitive towards the suffering of patients. The nurses Savitri and Lissi, though rivals, are also part of these activities. While Savitri siphons off the milk and other facilities meant for the patients, Lissi is involved in the sale of medicines. The attendant Vasu Pillai is also part of all this at a personal level, he has takes the medicines from the hospital and treats patients at his home. The agent, through whom medicines are transferred and replaced by cheap medicines, is Swamy, who is illegally admitted in the hospital. In opposition to these stand Dr. James and Dr. Sukumaran who are fighting against these issues these at many levels. At a personal level, there is Sobha, Dr. Thambi's daughter, who is in romantic relationship with Dr. James. The play revolves around these conflicts and dynamics, in the end there is the triumph of the 'just government' and 'goodness'. Savitri and Vasu Pillai are caught and suspended. There is a charge of murder against Lissi because of the death of a patient who was injected with the cheap medicine, and unknown assailants stab Dr. James to death. When the news of his death reaches Sobha, she collapses and her father (Dr. Thambi) rushes and takes out a medicine and gives her an injection, only to realize in shock that the medicine was the cheap medicines that he had transferred to his home. As Sobha lies dying, Lissi betrayed by Dr. Thambi walks in with a tumbler of acid, which she throws on his face.

Once the reference points of the emergency are set, the heroes of the emergency enter the scene. Here, there are two heroes, representing two segments of society. First is the new

mobilized bureaucracy that is making efforts to 'purify' the system, represented by Dr. James and second, the people who suffer under the corrupt system, represented by Sukumaran, a terminally ill blood cancer patient who may not live much longer. The former has the government, ethics of the profession and more importantly a human sensibility, which at crucial moments determines the other two as the pedestal to fight from. Sukumaran on the other hand represents the people, and it is by starting the association of patients that they organize and begin a struggle against corruption and exploitation within the hospital. The relationship between these two figures, and the manner in which they wage their struggle against the forces of corruption is critical for understanding the nature of the intervention of the state. In his analysis of *Manthan*, Madhava Prasad highlights two kinds of struggle highlighted by the Indira regime - one, which is waged by the mobilized intellectual and the other that is led by the 'youth' who are not part of any power structure. Madhava Prasad while noting the presence of the first one in *Manthan*, relates them to the internal struggle within the Congress, whereby Indira was engaged in a struggle against traditionalists in the promotion of a socialist programme and an effort to "change the social base of the political order". In *Dharmasupatri* one encounters the mobilized bureaucracy represented by Dr. James and a feel of the force of the change led by the youth. The study of the citizen hero has to start with analyzing the nature of the varied interventions that the two allied, and complimentary models of the mobilized intellectual represented by Dr. James, and the youth represented by Sukumaran undertake through the play. And with this combination, the establishment of a just government, the emergency regime is brought about. Let us look at these heroes one by one.

The character of Dr. James develops through the nature of the interventions that he makes. Starting right from the first scene, these interventions are dramatic moments that play around with the notion of established norms and boundaries. Each time these boundaries are drawn out for the audience, only to be broken and reinvented by the hero. As this process of 'radical' interventions gets repeated, the precise framing of the citizen hero comes to light. The first scene ends with one such intervention. Dr. James makes an entry on stage with the announcement (to Dr. Thambi) that he needs to voice a complaint. In the ensuing conversation, as accusations and responses are exchanged, the audience

gets to know Dr. James as the ideal doctor of the people - he has an M.S degree from America (well qualified), he works overtime and also his position in the conflict is laid down - according to Dr. Thambi, he is collaborating with Sukumaran in trying to organise the patients against him. Dr. James denies this allegation, and says that Dr. Thambi has reached this conclusion based on the mere fact that the patients like him. The first direct conflict between the two comes in the form of Dr. Thambi's decision of not allowing relatives to be with the patients for reasons of hygiene. And Dr. James gives the people-centric logic that marks the citizen-subject. The hospital has four times the number of patients than its capacity and the work ethic of the staff is pathetic. Therefore, it is not hygiene that is the most important for the hospital, but the condition of the patients who will be relieved if there is someone to take care of them. This new people-sensitive professional ethic presentation is followed by an unsuccessful intervention whereby he breaks the established hierarchy in the hospital. The immediate problem is that the condition of one of the patients, who has a heart condition, has worsened and the doctor in charge is on leave, while no one else has come on duty. When Dr. James volunteers to treat the patient, Dr. Thambi stops him. All his instructions for administering treatment are snubbed by nurse Lissi on the grounds that she will take orders only from the duty doctor, and a claim that the stock of the medicine he asked for have gone missing. Dr. Thambi orders him not to interfere in a case belonging to his ward, but Dr. James maintains that when it is a matter is about a 'life', the ward does not matter. Despite his best efforts the intervention is too late and the patient dies.

This unsuccessful intervention presents before the audience the boundaries set by professional ethics and institutional hierarchy. And Dr. James becomes the militant intellectual, because of the manner in which he could break these barriers for a greater cause - that of 'humanism'. It is this newly defined people-centric humanism that is the base of the category of citizen. What it entails is at the same time a breakdown and rebuilding of the occupational and other categorizations generally regarded to be the social identity of the individual. In the case of James, this entails the breakdown of established norms of being a doctor or in a much broader sense a bureaucrat, and a construction of a new category of the same. The second and third intervention, one following the other in scene three of *Dharmasupatri* brings this essential aspect of the

hero into the forefront. The entry of Dr. James in this scene is critical as he controls the other citizen-hero - Sukumaran, while the latter is engaged in an articulation with Dr. Thambi. Sukumaran, who is used to a forceful negotiation with institutional agencies, loses his temper and resorts to physically challenging Dr. Thambi. But Dr. James who enters the scene of confrontation holds him back. A verbal duel ensues between Dr. James and Dr. Thambi, the climax of which is the second intervention made by Dr. James. This intervention clearly produces the principle of the construction of the hero. To the accusation that he is trying to develop groupism in the hospital, and also trying to organize people against Dr. Thambi, Dr. James retorts –

James: Sorry sir, I don't need to do it, I am not ready to do it and I don't have the time for it ...From the day I stepped in here, I have been trying to make you a human. Trying to rescue this institution...

Thambi: Mind your own business

James: I love you more than myself. Love this institution. Respect my profession.
(*Dharmasupatri* 1979: 89. Translation mine.)

To the accusation that he has made the patients stand up against Dr. Thambi, he says, "I am trying to avoid that". The ensuing conversation between the two, establishes the contours of the objective of interventions of the citizen subject and his relationship with the bureaucratic class of which he is part:

Thambi: I don't want to stay here at your mercy

James: I respect your family

Thambi: Say that you love my daughter

James: It is not an issue that has to be discussed here.

.....

Thambi: By influencing my daughter and the patients, you are trying to defeat me

James: By defeating you like that, what do I have to gain?

Thambi: Maybe snatching a promotion.

James: I have all the qualifications for that. It is not for nothing that I went to do M.S.

Thambi: For that, it is not enough to have the vote of the patients

James: I don't need that

Thambi: The patients don't pay my salary

James: Isn't it true that we are getting our salaries in the name of the patients?

Thambi: You created such a feeling in the minds of the patients

James: Aren't the patients also human beings? It is only their bodies that are affected by disease. Their minds and intellect are healthy. It is not right to undervalue their personality and civility/status.

.....

Thambi: You have destroyed the stature and status of this profession.

James: The status of this profession is not merely something that can be destroyed by any individual. (89-92. Translation mine)

The discussion continues in the direction of the analysis of the corruption that is rampant in the hospital, with Dr. James questioning/informing Dr. Thambi about the adulteration of the medicines, which has led to several deaths. At that point a patient covered in bandages enters the scene. He has been mercilessly stabbed and Dr. Thambi has struck a deal with the criminals who committed the crime, he therefore decides to discharge the patient so that the case loses its significance. Dr. James intervenes and declares that to discharge a patient in this condition will lead to his death, and therefore should not be done.

Thambi: There is no space available here

James: (to the patient) you go and lie down in the verandah

Thambi: No... I have already discharged him

James: When the patient is in this condition, no one will discharge him.

Thambi: I am the Resident Medical Officer

James: Doctor, I am a human being

Thambi: This is my prestige issue

James: This is the matter of a life

Thambi: (to the patient) Get out!

James: No doctor, I will treat him. (ibid: 93. Translation mine)

This time his intervention is successful as he takes the patient and leaves the room. The third intervention comes in the fourth scene, immediately after another incident that showcases the 'goodness' and humanity of Dr. James. The third intervention is catching nurse Savitri red-handed as she is siphoning off goods from the hospital. Although she is caught in the act, with the entry of Dr. Thambi, Savitri gains confidence and alleges that Dr. James has been harassing her, and that he is accusing her because she did not submit to his overtures. In this moment of dilemma, Dr. James takes the decision that even if he loses his job he is not going to let go. He stands alone with the strong decision to hand over Savitri to the police. Sukumaran and some patients, who declare their support for him, then join him.

In these interventions what is critical from our perspective, is the breaking down and rebuilding of existing categories through a new definition based on a notion of humanism. This humanism that is different from professional ethics is people centric and is what wins the hearts of the people. One cannot ignore a parallel that can be made with the wider positioning of Indira Gandhi in the debates of the period vis-à-vis the existing structures including the constitutional and judicial institutional mechanisms. It is the 'popularity' revealed by the support of her followers, in the form of demonstrations that Indira Gandhi used to counter in the period following the Allahabad court verdict and demands for her resignation. And the state of exception invoked by her was not a mere 'preserving' of the existing constitution, but was a redefinition of the same through amendments that she claimed even the opposition had asked for in the period preceding the emergency declaration.

Yet, the steps that this transformation asked for from the hero, places the mobilized intellectual in a glaring contradiction. This becomes clear if one places him in relation to the other hero - Sukumaran who represents the people. Sukumaran who is a representative of the 'youth', makes forceful interventions like - hunger strikes, *gheraoes* as well other physical and verbal challenges. The bureaucrat on the other hand makes certain transgressions, but is at the same time conscious and pained at the 'violence' these

transgressions bring about. While interacting with Dr. Thambi, note how Dr. James he maintains that he “respects” him, even going to the extent of saying that “he loves him more than himself”. Even as the people are standing up against Dr. Thambi, Dr. James contrary to what Dr. Thambi holds true, Dr. James contrary to Dr. Thambi’s belief, maintains that he has been precisely trying to avoid such a situation. This becomes even starker when in the last scene, Sobha takes a position against her father, citing how the adulteration in the medicines has led to so many deaths, but Dr. James stops her saying that “a daughter should never criticize her father’s actions, particularly in such difficult circumstances”. And one also notices a clear sense of class bias of this hero when he accuses Savitri of stealing medicines, and maintaining that “people like them should be inside jails”, while such a tone is notably absent in his interactions with Dr. Thambi who is equally if not more guilty. It is this contradictory position that the intellectual assumes that makes him a figure of a free roaming intellectual, who also brings into himself a certain tragedy. Yet ‘justice’ demands a certain violence and punitive action. This is what government of the state of exception brings about in the end. As Sobha gets to know from her father that Vasu Pillai’s house was raided and Savitri has been arrested, she says that there are more people to be caught and that, “It has been proven that there is a government here. It has been proven that rules and regulations have force and benefit/use.” (109). The militant intellectual is one who in this contradictory position facilitates the government to produce this justice.

C.L. Jose’s one act plays, published in 1976⁷⁶ are striking for their construction of the various categories of citizens and defining their ideal frame through some dramatic moments and responses of the characters to these situations. Devoid of the space of contestation and complexity as in *Dharmasupatri*, these plays in a simple manner create situations that bring out the ‘best’ in the characters, they are in the process becoming the ideal citizen-subjects. Each play deals with a different role and spheres of life, such as a doctor, a housewife, a brother the becoming of the ideal citizen hero.

Bheeti (Terror) is a play that tells the story of a housewife and her courageous action in a situation of terror. The play begins with the establishment of the fact that Nirmala and her

⁷⁶ Published by author himself and distributed by National Book Stall.

infant child are alone in their home as her husband is away on a business trip. And the bank peon from her husband's office who stays with them has gone out for a late night film. The scenario quickly transforms into a scene of terror as she realizes that a thief has broken into the house. The masked thief takes out a revolver and asks Nirmala to hand over the money and other valuables in the house. But before the thief could finish his job, two of Nirmala's friends - the couple Sati and Nandan come visiting. While the thief hides in a room with the child as hostage, Nirmala meets her friends, and as directed she tries to get rid of them fast. She tries to be normal in front of them and gives them the magazine that they had come for. The last part is the resolution of the situation as her friends return to the house, this time with the police officer. In the final scene the terror is relieved as the thief is caught. To the 'shock' of the characters, the thief turns out to be the bank peon who lives in the house. And it is also revealed to the audience that, the resolution occurred because Nirmala had written a note in the magazine she handed to her friends, explaining the situation to them.

Dharmasankatam (Dilemma, 1976), on the other hand tells the story of an ideal doctor, who when faced with a situation where his sense of duty and personal interests clash, he opts to follow the call of duty, which leads to a happy resolution of his personal issue as well. The situation arises when the doctor is about to leave the hospital as he gets the news that his wife has been admitted for delivery. But, as he is about to leave an accident case comes in and people plead with him to treat the patient. In the situation of dilemma, the doctor keeping aside his personal life, the doctor decides to stay back and treat the patient. Once he finishes the operation, he gets the news that his wife has safely given birth. And thus, the citizen-subject who placed 'work'/nation above the "I", has successfully become the social "I".

The Resistance Hero

The turn in the political sphere after the declaration of the emergency has been one of assuming a new position - the space of resistance- as different from that of the hitherto discussed political positions. This position taken by the groups in the opposition that was

unique for the Indian democracy had a tremendous impact in all spheres, particularly that of culture. Therefore, studying the counter-authoritarian tendency in the extreme period of authoritarianism, that of a state of exception, involves the study of the new problematic of aesthetic of resistance. Therefore, for the purpose of this chapter, it means a study of the central element in this aesthetic - the emergence of a third model of imagination - what one could call *resistance hero*. While this generalization can be done about the move away from the pre-dominant political model/concern of the 'revolutionary' in the earlier period, one would have to note that in no way is this writer suggesting that the imagination of a revolutionary process of change was totally replaced. In fact after the lifting of the emergency, a strengthened revolutionary imagination once again regained some part of its earlier significance. For instance, some of the works analysed within this project- *Kuratti* (1978)), *Nadugaddika* (1979), *Kanalattam* (1978) - stand out as excellent examples of this tendency. Yet, when one looks at the overall cultural and artistic activity of the period, one does find that 'revolutionary' as the predominant mode of political imagination has been displaced by works placed in the new aesthetic of resistance. The sheer quantum of works in this new mode, and the new impetus and the problems that it raised have from then on occupied a central role in cultural praxis.

In our analysis of the revolutionary hero and citizen hero models, though we looked at works spanning over a decade, one could more or less isolate a single frame for the revolutionary and citizen hero. One of the central differences between the nature of phenomenon of revolutionary hero and citizen hero to that of the framing of the resistance hero is the impossibility of isolating one type of resistance hero. Before moving on to look at the actual works, it would be helpful to keep in mind the following basic issues involved in the study of resistance hero:

1. The position of resistance was something that in the wake of the emergency brought together groups, organizations and individuals belonging to or believing in varied ideological standpoints. Despite the accusation of Indira Gandhi at the time of declaring the emergency, that there was forming a coalition of forces of various ideologies was being formed of forces of varied ideological bases with the objective of ousting her, destroying the democratic culture and creating a state of

anarchy⁷⁷, one can see that a real coalition of most of the opposition happened once the emergency conditions had set in. In the cultural imagination of resistance for instance, this meant a position that includes perspectives ranging from U.P. Jayarajan's belief in the revolutionary human capability and inevitable revolutionary upsurge demolishing the prisons and chains⁷⁸, to the notion of people's passivity towards oppressive structures and becoming slaves, in the works of O.V. Vijayan⁷⁹.

2. In the case of the revolutionary hero and citizen hero, there was a basic binary of the opposing forces, with the oppressed, exploited or what one could call the 'people' assuming a third space, engaging with the transformative tendencies. In the case of the resistance hero, one cannot in many cases arrive at this way of categorizing. While there is the 'villain'- the autocrat, the state machinery, the aides of authoritarianism- well charted out and visible, the figures of the resistance hero and that of the 'people' have been subjected to a hitherto complex philosophical probing. As we will see later, the most important figure is that of the 'anti-hero' that the 'people' assumes in these philosophical probing.

The ideal entry point into the problematic of the resistance hero would be those works that are though lesser in number celebrating and visualizing the sudden and dramatic emergence of resistance out of depths of despair and defeat. The structure of these works

⁷⁷ This theme is running in all the addresses of the Prime Minister to the Nation and her speeches in the Parliament. For instance, in her speech in the Lok Sabha on July 22, 1975, in the context of explaining the Gujarat agitation and how the opposition has engendered democracy, she says, "The so-called leaders of the destructive agitation had no qualms about handing over the management of their campaign to the RSS in spite of the known record of RSS in fomenting communal riots and communal hatred. Was the call for a *gherao* of the Parliament during the Winter session and the appeal to the Naxalite leaders to devote their revolutionary zeal to the cause of the total revolution an exercise in democratic process". From these acts she comes to the conclusion, "It was obvious that certain political elements who do not have anything in common had chosen to come together for the sole purpose of paralysing and removing a duly elected government. Groups and parties whose ideologies were poles apart joined together." (*Era of Discipline (Documents on Contemporary Reality)*, Edited by D. V Gandhi, Pub. Samachar Bharati, New Delhi, 1976, p25).

⁷⁸ We will see the work of U.P. Jayarajan in detail. The specific idea of breaking of prisons is from his short story *Dhirayauvanam* written in 1976.

⁷⁹ All three short stories of Vijayan- *Examination*, *Oil* and *Arimbara*- written during the emergency, deal with this theme. We will analyzing closely the story *Arimabara* in detail later. For the analysis of the story *Oil* see Chapter 2.

follows a simple pattern - the repeated oppression by authoritarian agencies rising to the peak, and the dramatic come back of the people at the end. As different from the revolutionary framing, what takes the drama forward is the repetition of oppression that has now become the normal, and sudden break in this with the emergence of the mysterious force of resistance. In the end it comes as a shock when the resistance forces continue to come up dramatically, defying all logic and rationality and self-belief of the authoritarian forces about their power. One of the most direct rendering of this comeback of the resistance forces, the impact of which leads to the destruction of the authoritarian structure is the humorous short story *Rajni (The Queen)* (1975)⁸⁰ written by V. V. Rukmini during the time of the emergency. In this satirical allegory, the story reconstructs the events leading up to the emergency by narrating the life of the queen, the autocrat. The story is as follows: there was a king who grappled with the difficulties of raising his motherless child, who grew up show an interest in state matters and was also sensitive to problems of the poor. But she had a great weakness - her craze for all things foreign. She went on to study abroad, cut her hair short and also built for herself a gallery of foreign objects including curios, clothes, pens, perfumes and other modern objects. She travelled extensively and developed a huge foreign friends circle. The King was concerned as she was breaking his rules, but he could not get himself say anything to her about her excesses or her huge collection of foreign objects, that were brought without paying duty. One day, the king died of a heart attack and in his will, he left his country in the name of his shrewd daughter. As she began her reign, she brought into action three reforms one by one. Firstly, she proclaimed that no subject would be allowed to travel abroad for study. The people vehemently opposed this edict, and in protest they assembled outside her palace and carried out *satyagrahas* and hunger strikes. But she was not moved or threatened, as she had the royal army protecting her. The second proclamation she made was that all private enterprises were to be nationalized. The people appreciated this edict enormously, and in no time she became more popular than her father was. As her third reform, she started levying taxes on day-to-day utilities. This lead to scarcity because very quickly, hoarding and black marketeering became rampant.

⁸⁰ In *Adiyantaravasthayude Ormapustakam*, ed. Shanawas A, Pub. Pranatha Books, Kochi, 2006, p 247-248.

This further led to inflation and a crash in the value of coins, she then replaced the old coins, which had her father's face, with new coins that bore her image. The people revolted and huge processions were organized in front of the palace. Despite such large scale dissent the queen remained unshaken. But one day, her entire collection of foreign objects was stolen from the palace, and on the wall of the palace was written in bold red letters - "If you investigate ...". The watchmen were found lying in an unconscious state, and seeing this, the queen also fainted.

This narrative that highlights the highpoint of the resistance, is striking in the nature of the mystery of the heroes who are leading the resistance. As one looks through other works of the period, one realizes that this is not an exception. Their vantage point of showing the crumbling authoritarianism has at its heart this mysterious force of resistance. Like the revolutionary hero, the heroes of the resistance here are more than individuals - they represent the spirits of resistance. This mystery and a clear move away from any individuality gives them the power that threatens authoritarian agencies - neither can their faces be identified nor can their origin, the multitude is a mystery to the forces of oppression. This gives the forces of resistance their limitless power. In the case of the revolutionary hero, the history of oppression and the class background was what stood as the base for the emergence of the heroes. In the case of the resistance heroes on the other hand, it is a much broader base and the works tend to take some of the particular excesses of the regime as the source of resistance. We would look at two more examples of the development of this model critiquing two different aspects of authoritarianism.

Chitalputtu (lit: Termite hill) (1975) written by C. Usman (ibid: 243) works around the space of the police station. One morning Achyutan wakes up and finds a small termite hill in one corner of the police station. With irritation, he demolishes the termite hill with his *lathi* and crushes the termites. But the next day, he is astonished to find another, bigger termite hill in the same place. He once again demolishes it with his *lathi*, but this time the hill does not get fully demolished. He hits it several times, which makes the termites spread all over the room, some climb on to his feet and start biting him. In pain, he crushes them, but their 'red heads with round eyes' remain. In the night he dreams of termite hills rising up and going down. Termites biting him and hanging off of his brain. And even after his best efforts, their red heads with round eyes remain. On the third day

he woke up and went to the same place. This time he finds an even bigger termite mound in the same place. He hesitatingly raises his *lathi*. His hands tremble. And as he looks on, the termites become smaller and smaller, little legs come out of his spine, his body becomes pale. Becoming a termite himself, he moves into the mound.

Satchidanandan's *Tree of Tongues* (1976), playfully works on the dissection of a name of a place and foregrounds one of the significant experiences of the emergency- the metaphor of cutting off the tongue by the State, to stop the truth from being revealed to the public. The poem starts with the declaration by the "mother of all, the good goddess"-

Let all the tongues within the fold

Be bundled up and sacrificed

(Satchidanandan, Translated by Ayyappa Panicker and John Oliver Perry: 111)

The goddess cut off the tongue of all including the one of "the great uncle", "the nephew", "the enemy", "the boy that shouts the news", "the drinker of smoke and sower of gold". Yet when the mother of all good goddess finished cutting off all the tongues, one tongue mysteriously sprouts-

One of the tongues put out a sprout;

it grew long, and long it grew.

From the bottom rock

A tap root did sprout. (ibid: 112)

This starts the process of the growth of a tree with leaves of tongues of all kinds. The nature of these leaves, like the revolutionary tradition, invokes from history the 'revolutionaries'- leaves "like Unniyarcha's rolled up sword", "like the shield of Kannappan", "like the hand of Karimpandi", "like the hood of the serpent King", "like the heart of the sun god" and -

"Fold after fold of crimson leaves

Like tongues dripping with blood". (ibid: 112)

The mother of all is aghast with rage and searches for the origin of these tongues. Whose tongues are these?

I am the tongue of Thiruvarangan:

It was my word that woke up the world

From darkness unto light. (ibid: 112)

Another tongue asks her how it is possible for the bards to not have their tongue. If they do not have tongues to sing, then how will people know the truth? And if everyone does not know the truth, then “how will the land wake up to light?”. This statement brings into focus the role of artists as a class in periods of the repression. While all the tongues are cut off, yet some tongues do sprout to sing the truth. The poem ends with the dramatic rising of this spirit of resistance and the declaration of truth. The mother of all, decides to cut off the tree from its roots and this action, like that of Achyutan, ends in the downfall of authoritarianism-

Where she cut there spurted blood

A thousand leaves of tongues unfurled.

The buried truths gleamed on each leaf

And the tree of tongues spread out wide (ibid: 113)

The question that haunted the critics of the emergency is the declaration of the ‘truth’ about the emergency conditions. Yet this was not something that was to be easily realized and spoken of as in the earlier period. For what was absent in the time of the state of exception was the ability to ‘see’ the ‘truth’ in the state structured public domain. For the critics, the central problem was that it was only a few incidents and events, which were marked off from the public domain that could reveal the truth of the era. What was their position on arriving at this truth? When one looks at the corpus of work during the emergency, one realizes that the position from which this truth could be experienced and narrated is the position of the *witness*. It is the remembering of the course of events and narration of the same for the people outside that experience that gives the identity to the hero. The hero in that sense is ‘born’ in his realization of being a witness to the event.

The idea of being a witness has been theorized by many philosophers and scholars and has assumed particular significance in relation to the understanding of traumatic events⁸¹. If one looks at the literature surrounding the emergency, one can see a whole gamut of works that are in the form of memoirs speak of the trauma of the period, narrating the incidents that were otherwise hidden from the public⁸². In a way one can say that the whole resistance to authoritarianism, particularly once the emergency was lifted was based primarily on these testimonies. In the context of Kerala too, the stories of the police torture in the Kakkayam camps along with the struggle of Ichara Warriar all follow the structure of a testimony. In the works we are going to look at, there is a similar articulation of the *witness* that makes them relevant as works that shed light on the truth of the state of exception.

What is the position of the witness in an event? To be a witness could either be a 'neutral' third party or, a "person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to the end and can therefore bear witness to it" (Agamben 2002: 17). Being a witness to the era of authoritarianism is not one of being a neutral third party.

In O.V. Vijayan's *Arimbara* the central character begins telling his story to readers, with the following words:

"Here in the estrangement of this garden that was once mine, I happen to remember many things. That decision was a mistake. It took a long time to realize the mistake. Now I realize everything. Here, in the fear of the wind, in the fear of spiders, sitting in the midst of these fallen leaves, I shall pass on to you that knowledge. The wind is once again rising. Among the fallen leaves the I don't have much time left. Therefore you keep in mind what I am saying now..." (2000: 506. Translation mine.)

This remembering, and narration of the events produces the individuality of the narrator and the hero, it also sets up the relationship between the speaker and the reader as that of a witness narrating the events to an audience. Presently we will not explore the idea of

⁸¹ The idea of being a witness has assumed particular significance in the context of the philosophical exploration around the event of Auschwitz. See Giorgio Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* by for further study.

⁸² See the memoirs of Ichara Warriar *Orachante Orakkurippukal*, Pub. Current Books, Thrissur, 2003, and memoirs of various individuals provided in *Adiyantaravasthayude Ormapustakam*, Edited by Shanawas, M. A. Pub. Pranatha Books, Kochi, 2006.

mistakes made by witnesses in recollecting and also the guilt in the words above, as we will look at this aspect in detail later. Let us move forward simply by noting the establishment of the relationship and its effects. What is pertinent to note is the placement of the narrator - "I", in his/her particular context. This individuality would then run through the entire narration of the events, the event unfolding before the audience from the very individual perspective of the narrator. This perception and narration of the events from a subjective position is crucial in the establishment of the position of the witness and the position of the insight into the truth claim. But the position of the witness in reality has a contradiction at its heart. "The witness usually testifies in the name of justice and truth and as such his or her speech draws consistency and fullness. Yet here the value of testimony lies essentially in what it lacks; at its center contains something that cannot be borne witness to and that discharges the survivors of authority. The "true" witnesses, the "complete" witnesses", are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness" (Agamben 1999: 34). In the works produced during the emergency, what one encounters is a construction of the particular hero who is a 'survivor' who could take, if not the position of the 'complete witness', but a position that is edging towards this unreal position. Therefore, interestingly it is this production of an unreal position as compared to the real heroes, which makes the works closer to the reality of the experience of authoritarianism.

However, being a witness of an event and 'living' an event is different. It is this difference, which makes the hero a witness edging towards a complete witness rather than a true and complete witness. What one needs to demarcate is the consciousness of the hero as witnessing the event rather than being completely immersed in the event, in other words - living an event. This consciousness of being a witness to an event is an ambiguous position. It comes only if one is immersed in an event and at some point realizing that one is at the same time bearing witness, being able to distanciate oneself and see a broader perspective. This consciousness created by an awareness of the self as witness, varies in its own positioning vis-à-vis the involvement in the event. It is in that sense, not a finite position. On the contrary it is a position that could lead to either a movement towards resistance or a movement towards what one calls 'passivity' of the people.

A work that exemplifies the position of being witness to an event, and that in turn leading towards a resistance could be O.V Vijayan's short story, *Chengannur Vandi*⁸³. The story at a general level takes the "efficient", "punctual" behaviour of the masses to a grotesque level, critiquing the alienation and passivity that the event of authoritarianism has generated in the masses. At the end of the grotesque tale, where people having lost all sense of emotion and humanism, start cutting off their body parts for "crimes" such as not being on time, a man announces his intention to crucify himself for society, to purge it off its crimes. So far the story has moved through a 'citizen hero', who is immersed in the 'time' of the authoritarian structure and he along with others reaches the venue of the crucifixion. The voluntary scapegoat, parodying Christ's crucifixion, in the end when the time has arrived and spectators are watching, he breaks the big mechanical clock of time by not crucifying himself. Instead he comes down from the crucifix and with his arms spread, announces to the world that "your" time has been destroyed. It is now a moment of liberation and freedom from alienation. Society is purged not by following time, but by breaking it and entering into a new world of freedom, purged of all historical crimes. The movement of the hero in the story is that of a man living the event to that of a man, who could witness and in his own subjective manner see through the event.

The liberation in *Chengannur Vandi* was not merely an individual liberation. It was liberation for everyone participating in the witnessing. Witnessing, therefore while being an 'individual' perception, can also bring together and unite the people who are witnessing a common event. This is critical, for it is this aspect that produces a space of resistance that though located in the particular, at the same time can assume the character of the social. U. P. Jayarajan's *Manju* (1975)⁸⁴ looks precisely at this development of the space of resistance. Starting from the positioning of the witnessing of the event by an individual, the space of resistance moves on to assume the position of the social and therefore a force, at the end of the story when everyone is united in the act of witnessing.

In the previous chapter, while analyzing *Manju* we noted the distinction between the public and the private that the snow outside brings in. Here, we will look in detail at the transformations that the snow outside brings about, and the possible space that the

⁸³ In *O. V. Vijayante Kathakal*, Ed. Asha Menon, D C Books, Kottayam, 2000, p 389-399.

⁸⁴ Jayarajan, U.P., *U. P. Jayarajinte Kadhakal (Complete)*, D C Books, Kottayam. 2005, p 77-83

resistance hero charts out for himself. We have discussed in detail the positioning of the narrator vis-à-vis his friends - the narrator has an inclination of the snow about to come for some time, while his friends are completely ignorant of something as preposterous as snow in the plains. Yet it snows. We come to know about the nature of this snow in the perspective of the narrator- this is the same snow that once conquered Moscow, Berlin, China and Asian countries and froze the lives of people. The event becomes more grotesque with the narration of the effects of snow in the everyday lives of the people- it enters as scarcity of food, isolation and above all the nature of the state of exception where all this is now regarded as for the betterment of people. Then the narrator along with his friends witnesses the entry of the “detentus” birds that have the feathers of dove and the head of vultures preying on people. What is striking in these developments, is the dramatic entry of the state of exception and its slow entry into every aspect of the lives of the people. Except in the narrator, what it generates is a feeling ‘shock’ and a series of these shocks builds the air of fear that slowly engrosses everyone, making their lives frozen. Yet the story is not one of tragedy. The power of the resistance here, comes from the particular space that the snow cannot capture - the self-belief of the narrator in the human capacity to overcome all the difficulties. Narrating the ruthlessness of snow, he goes on to say that when one is looking at this terrible snow, there is only one thought that comforts, “human beings, like anything else, has not surrendered to snow, and that with strong resistance he has always conquered every extremes of nature.” (ibid: 78) Then he invokes the figure that epitomizes this resistance - the smiling Santiago dreaming of hunting lions in the African forests even as he sleeps exhausted and hungry after his tragic day of fishing at sea. In the end of the story, it is this human spirit of resistance that unites the narrator with his friends. Even as hunger is rising in their stomachs, and they can see the snow and the detentus birds feeding on human corpses, it is the “courageous smile of Santiago that is bursting in their hearts” (ibid: 83)

The Anti-Hero

One of the most striking aspects of a phenomenon such as the emergency is the complexity that it brought into idea of the role of people in the establishment of the

authoritarian regime. In the case of the emergency, it no longer is possible to divide the actors of events into two opposing camps - that of villains comprising of Indira Gandhi and her aides; and the resistance camp consisting of the people led by the resistance heroes. The notion of 'consent' to the regime, and reading of the psychological need of the people due to insecurities and the consequent search for a strong leader⁸⁵ or the responsibility of the passivity of people in not trying to avert the situation, has in many cases altered the framing of the resistance heroes - the ones who are the survivors - to that of a tragic one. In a sense the resistance hero here becomes the *anti-hero*. The complexity of the time as C. R. Parameswaran notes is the understanding that in every story of dictatorship, mass is the anti-hero⁸⁶.

The most direct manner of critiquing the attitude of passivity of the people can be seen in Satchidanandan's poem, *Who is the Enemy?* (1976) written during the emergency⁸⁷. The poem by following a method of negation, brings to the forefront a whole range of people whom one would normally regard as 'enemies', only to delve deeper into the question of ascertaining the responsibility of the present authoritarian conditions. Despite the fact that there are people around us who at many levels are functioning as the aides of the regime of order, the question that the poem throws up is the space that U. P. Jayarajan marked off as the space where authoritarianism cannot breach and conquer, without a voluntary giving up by the individual self.

The teacher who teaches your children untruths
is not your enemy.

He curses the lessons he teaches

And feels sad for his wife

Drudging away in the kitchen. (Satchidanandan: 113-114)

⁸⁵ Balraj Puri notes about emergency, "When fear of external threat or internal chaos grips a people, insecurity caused by economic or political factors haunts them, gap between expectations and achievements widens and the democratic forces fail to channel the resultant frustration, cynicism and impatience of the people, and chauvinistic fervour atomises group and individual identities, a psychological atmosphere is created for the search of a "strong leader" (Puri, Balraj, 1978, p94). See chapter 2 for a detailed analysis.

⁸⁶ Parameswaran, C. R, *Prakrutiniyamam*, D C Books, Kottayam, 2004, p 90. He further notes in the context of his analysis of the cultural revolution that when a populace after concentrated revolutionary.

⁸⁷ Satchidanandan, K, in *Summer Rain: Three Decades of Poetry*, Tr. Poornima Kumar and John Oliver Perry, p 113-115

Starting from this day to day, yet a distant impact of the authoritarian structure, he moves to negate the so called symbols of the structure and more closer brutal acts of the people who are part of authoritarian structure - your supervisor who is inconsiderate, “the dancer wildly shedding her clothes”, the writer earning his daily bread “speaking of meaninglessness in life”, the “priest who sermonizes on patience”, the “jailor who breaks your bones in the prison because of the questions you asked” or the “judge who sentences you to death” (ibid: 114). Negating these apparent real enemies, he arrives at the cruel issue of the passivity of the people that puts to question the entire logic of negations.

The devotion of the pet dog that wags its tail

While you beat and stamp on it-

That is your enemy.

The dumb acquiescence of those

Who created everything and have nothing left-

That is your enemy.” (ibid: 114-115)

From this declaration of the truth of the present condition, he moves on to the *present* moment, where there is a possibility of defying this structure. But for that the readers have to move through a process of self-investigation and take the action-

You who stand and see this

And don't know what to do-

You are your enemy. (ibid: 115)

This notion of the anti-hero - the passive people- runs through the works around the emergency, making it a basis for a ‘soul searching’ to explain the reasons of ‘consent’ to the authoritarian regime. In the works of O. V. Vijayan, particularly the short stories *Arimbara* and *Oil*, it is the explication of this phenomenon that is at their centre. Let us look at *Arimbara* for a deeper analysis of the notion of the anti-hero. *Arimbara* tells the story of the narrator and his submission to an alien body that totally shatters his life, making him a survivor remembering the incidents leading up to his present state. What changed his life was a small mole that one day showed up under his lower lip. The mole was initially for him and his wife a plaything during sexual intercourse. But as days went

by the mole started growing in size and his wife disconcerted by the same and perturbed whether it will spread, asked him to visit a doctor and have it removed. The idea of crossing the hill and the fields and meeting the doctor for removing it, did not sound a good idea to him. Further, the narrator, believing in ascetic traditions, felt that it could be treated using medicinal plants and traditional methods. At one point as an added reason of not removing the mole he promises to his sick son who is afraid of surgery that he will not put knife on his face. The story starting from this simple contradiction in the hero takes one through a time when the relationships between him and his wife and son get strained, with the mole growing bigger and bigger, puss and blood coming out of it, and the strange fear of the same filling the surroundings. Slowly the visibility of this mole on his face and the fear that it generated in the minds of everyone, he becomes more and more alienated and cuts himself off from the world by moving into the *machu* of his house to live. It is in this space where he is completely cut off from the rest of the world that in a moment of despair triggered by the interaction with his wife, that he decides to act. The ascetic takes the way of a warrior and with the knife belonging to one of his warrior uncles, he cuts through the mole. About this act, the hero remembers that what he performed after taking the knife in his hand was not his acts. And once he performed this act, he became unconscious and it took him months to come out of it and regain his senses. We come to know that the mole is still there in regal stature, his wife has left him for his doctor, and the only help he has left for him is his aid and his young wife. The second part of the story reveals the growing control of the 'alien' body over the thoughts and actions of the hero, the latter slowly becoming a slave of the former. Here one sees a move away from the mole as a personal tragedy to one assuming a greater significance as the hero in the control of the mole starts becoming almost a vampire revealed by his rape and murder and feeding on the corpse of the wife of his aid. But more importantly these gruesome acts reveal a more intricate and complex relationship between the alien body and its slave. While the mole raping the woman had an erection, at the very moment the narrator too had one. And he says,

That was my sin. My erection proved that my belief that the mole was an external garbage. The mole is my body. With the nutrition from my body, with the fallacy of my justice, I produced it in my body. (528)

Slowly we are taken through the processes where the narrator becomes a complete slave and the story ends with the mole freeing itself from the narrator to become a live elephant by using the manuscripts lying in the house. The narrator is transformed into a worm. In the end the narrator, the witness to the events notes, "...I have earned the freedom of a remnant. I may die any moment. But among this grass I am now free. It is my prison guard, my mole that gave me my freedom..." (535).

The move from the revolutionary hero and citizen hero to that of bearing witness to an event of authoritarianism is a problem that needs to be explored in greater detail. The central question is its relationship with what has been developed in this thesis as theatricality. Contrary to the notion of the heroes as actors in an event, or a new mode of perception based on alterity, the position of a resistance hero as bearing witness to an event is immersed in an event but is not the 'actor' in a manner we looked at other models. The actions as for the narrator in *Arimbara* are beyond his/her control. There are 'reasons' for the same provided by psychology or are simply unanswerable. The central element of guilt arises in the notion of a non-action on the part of the witnesses at the right time when the action could have averted the situation that they have themselves created and the immersing in certain private pleasures that gives one the feeling of liberation. But the construction of this non-theatrical position, a privilege of non-real productions such as fiction and theatre is the basic position that could reveal the structures of authoritarianism. It could then move either in the direction of resistance or that of passivity. But the assumption of that position based on subjective experience is at the heart of the glimpse of a 'truth' that is universal.

Conclusion

The present thesis, which is a preliminary study of the relationship between authoritarianism and culture, is a part historical and part theoretical work. As noted earlier there is a dearth of academic works that locate the event of emergency and its relationship with culture either historically or theoretically. By taking the case study of Kerala and providing a basic historical documentation of the works in Malayalam of this complex period, this thesis takes a preliminary step in this direction. But this does not mean that the work is complete in historical documentation. In fact there has been many works that I have not taken for analysis for many reasons. For instance the thesis does not bring into its ambit the practices in the medium of films, radio plays or what can be called popular culture in a broad sense. While developing the phenomenon of 'developmental aesthetic', one can take into consideration the numerous documentaries and radio plays made by the state as promotional campaigns or the films of the period critiquing the mechanisms of authoritarianism such as *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* by P. A. Backar or that of *Amma Ariyan* by John Abraham. The question of popular culture, particularly that of the form *Kathaprasangam* which attracted huge crowds or those of performances in spaces such as party conferences etc also is an important area that can be studied in much detail⁸⁸. Even to poetry, literature and plays that this thesis has primarily dealt with, one

⁸⁸ In the period preceding the emergency declaration, in the sphere of the popular performances, there was a dominant 'revolutionary spirit'. Sambasivan, with his "*katha prasangam*" form was narrating for people Shakespeare as well as revolutionary works from different parts of the country for instance the Bengali novel "*The Song of Rice*". It has to be noted that Sambasivan's influence was so strong that he was one of the people who were arrested after the emergency declaration. In a sense one can say that the mood of the time was captured by the plays such as *Che Guera* or *Vietnam* that were performed for huge crowds after conferences of the organised left. An advertisement in the newspaper (January 15, 1975, *Deshabhimani*) for *kathaprasangam* would highlight the popular appeal that was there for the revolutionary themes. The advertisement goes as follows:

Narrator- Cherthala Sugunan
P.O Cherthala

The story that encapsulates the political emotion of the era

Itu Poloru Nariya Bharanam (Such a stinking Rule)

By Ezhacheri Ramachandran

For festival occasions, another story

Satabdam"

Or the advertisement for a commercial movie titled

can supplement a lot more works of resistance, for instance the poems of Civik Chandran, Vishnu Narayanan Namboothiri, etc published in *Tadavara Kavitalakal* and *Amarshattinte Kavitalakal* and novels such as *Syndicate* by V. K. N, *Karal Pilarum Kaalam* by C. Radhakrishnan⁸⁹ or plays such as *Savaghoshayatra* by Anand⁹⁰. But this part historical account does not prevent us from delineating the intricate relationship of authoritarianism and culture and to lay down the dominant tendencies of the period. In this sense it gives us an opening into asking significant theoretical questions on the relationship between authoritarianism and culture.

We started the present enquiry with the understanding that one needs to view an event such as the emergency not merely as a political event that influences culture externally, but at least partly as a *cultural event*. The question of the nation state's presentation of its subjects and itself can be studied in detail only with this paradigm. In short it gives us an insight of the theatre of politics of the state. But by the end of our investigation of the relationship between authoritarianism and political theatre, we have reached a point where we could lay down the precise/strong connection between them as well as state the understanding that the relationship between authoritarianism and culture has also another trajectory that takes us beyond what we have seen as political theatre. Let us look at them one by one.

Political theatre

In relation to the use of the term political theatre, we have followed a trajectory that is different than what is usually followed in the theatre studies. This new way of enquiry, critical for the broadening of the concept of the term as it draws from various disciplines

SwarnaMmatsyam (Golden Fish) (January 3rd, Deshabhimani)

"When the belief structures get shaken, the worker becomes strong. It is the story of the revenge of those iron fists.

-- Manappuram movies presents

Swarna Matsyam

Directed by – B. K Pottakkadu"

The photograph shows the heroine, the popular actress Jaya Bharathi, in close up, as a working class girl.

⁸⁹ Radhakrishnan, C, *Karal Pilarum Kaalam*, Hi-Tech Books, Kochi, 2003. This novel was first published in April 1994.

⁹⁰ In Anand, *Randu Natakangal*, Prabhat book House, Thiruvananthapuram, 1998.

apart from theatre studies, is what facilitates us in the understanding of the deeper link between authoritarianism and culture. It is this concept that that gives us an entry into the problematics of what Agamben notes as the “fiction” in which the state of exception is inscribed in.

The entry point to the phenomenon of the political theatre is the concept of theatricality. We started with the explanation of the term by Josette Feral, for whom it is a relational concept. It is instead of being an attribute, a process whereby a space of fiction is produced either by a conscious performance or by a framing by the spectators. In our analysis of state theatricality we saw how through such a production of space, a new perception of reality is produced, for instance the gaze of the ‘ideal public’ (See *Chaverppada*). In a similar manner we saw the production of the other categories such as the ‘terrorist’, the ‘citizen hero’ etc. It is through these framings that the state represented its subjects, in the process bringing forth itself as an entity with a recognisable form before these very subjects. The revolutionary imagination of transformation opposed to authoritarianism was, on the other hand, based on a critique of this political theatre of the state and was engaged in the production of a new alternate theatricality. Here as different from the ‘rational’ position assumed by the ideal public spectator, the relationship between the people and performance space is redefined. This revolutionary imagination was performing two things at the same time- 1. re-defining the ‘theatre’ and its contours and moving on to give a political redefinition of the performance space and 2. bringing in the elements in these performances into revolutionary political transformation. As in the case of *Kuratti* or *Nadugaddika*, the theatre in the first step was extended to include varied performance practices that are culturally significant. This performance space is not taken as it simply exists in society. Instead, this performance space is redefined politically. It is a politically charged performance space. It is this redefined performance space that produces a counter theatricality whereby the ‘people’ do not occupy merely the position of spectators; but through the performance transforms from being spectator/participants to assume the role of actors.

The perspective that theatricality has to be seen in its historical and cultural context led us to lay down the aesthetic principles in which they are inscribed in. This enquiry showed us how at a particular moment of the experience of modernity and a cross cultural

exchange and reformulation of the international modernist movement, the authoritarian agencies as well as counter authoritarian agencies developed different aesthetic principles that could create a new public and a new perception of reality. For the state this was what has been termed by Madhava Prasad as “developmental aesthetic”. As our enquiry was focussed in one regional context, it opens up the issues of the relationship between the regional context and the national aesthetic project developed by the state. As different from Madhava Prasad’s position, we arrived at a position that one needs to look at the specific regional context in which the works are placed in if the objective is to understand the notion of ‘consent’ or popular appeal for the state’s project. As different from Madhava Prasad’s position of the dominant national aesthetics, we observed that this aesthetic formulation was only one strategy adopted by the state apparatus. For instance, in relation to the question of construction of a middle class public whom the national aesthetic ‘distanciates’ from the contemporary feudal order and peasant uprisings, we noted how the state was also simultaneously foregrounding contemporariness of the ‘violence’ and threat of the *naxalites* activities. This foregrounding if one follows the rhetoric of the state was critical in providing it the legitimacy for the institution of the state of exception. The development/movement of the state’s developmental aesthetics across the time span was not one of radical change. During the state of exception, the state’s aesthetics took on the some of the popular elements in the society and interpreted it and intensified it to make it seem as the ‘truth’ of the present moment.

The movement of counter-authoritarian forces has been different from this state’s deployment of aesthetics. In the pre-emergency period, the dominant mode of countering the authoritarian present was a hope of a revolutionary transformation. It was this aspiration that manifested in creative practices and led the cultural workers in new directions. The experimentations, as we saw in the case of poetry and theatre, were oriented towards the creation of a new revolutionary aesthetics as well as a new public. The institution of the state of exception altered the orientation that Kerala public sphere was taking. Though the experimentation in the pre-emergency period gave strength to record resistance to authoritarianism, one also sees a major shift in the aesthetics of the period of the state of exception. What was felt as the immediate need of the time for artists was the declaration of ‘truth’ of the authoritarian regime. And for this purpose they

had to bring into the forefront spaces and events that have been marked off from the public domain by the state apparatuses. The important forms that came up in the period- the parable, grotesque, tragic, tragic-comic etc- came up as the consequence of the experience of the state of exception. The strategy employed here is one of capturing the 'real' by a movement towards the exceptional. It is through the imagination of the exceptional landscapes, excess actions that are in the first glance removed from the everyday reality that the works of resistance could get closer to the experience of reality and life in the condition of state of exception.

Theatricality and its state of exception: the non-theatrical

The enquiry of the relationship between culture and authoritarianism at different points makes us follow a trajectory that is different from the idea of the political theatre. One of the functions of the political theatre was to bring to the public domain, those events and spaces that are marked off from the wider public sphere. For instance, in *Chaverppada* or in the events after the capture of Ajitha, the function performed by the political theatre is to construct before the audience a space they do not have access to. It is through the interpretation of this space and channels of communication and placing them in the public domain which state's political theatre has control of, that a production of categories such as the 'terrorist' is made possible. But this simultaneously alludes to the non-theatrical aspect of counter-authoritarian forces. Authoritarianism has also a non-theatrical part to it whereby it hides, masks its actions from the public domain. It is this aspect that the resistance forces had to unveil before the public so as to critique the real nature of the regime.

The issue of the non-theatrical presented itself as a striking phenomenon to take into consideration when we did the analysis of one of the central elements of political theatre- the construction of the figure of the hero. Here we took three models of hero- the revolutionary hero, the citizen hero and the resistance hero. In the first two models we could delineate the central characteristics of hero as the actor in the theatre of politics. In the case of the resistance hero, on the other hand, what constitutes the hero, in a sense, the moment when the hero is born is the assumption of the position of the *witness*. This is

the basic position that the hero has to assume to realise the truth of the present moment. And from this basic position, we saw two broad tendencies whereby the hero could move into an action of resistance or could move into passivity, becoming what has been called the 'anti-hero' in this thesis.

It is only by a linking of the political theatre and the non-theatrical can we move on to understand the nature of subjectifications that an authoritarian era produces. Raymond Williams in the context of dramatisation of our everyday life says, "Beyond what many people can see as the theatricality of our image-conscious public world, there is a more serious, more effective, more deeply rooted drama: the dramatization of consciousness itself." (2005: 57). In this world of representations, typifications, people are playing active parts or are refusing to play them. "The specific conventions of this particular dramatisation- a country, a society, a period of history, a crisis of civilisation; these conventions are not abstract. They are profoundly worked and reworked in our actual living relationships"(ibid: 57). To arrive at this dramatisation of consciousness and the subjectifications it produces in 'actual living relationships' one needs to explore the interrelationship between political theatre and its limits and the experience of authoritarianism.

Limits

Though the present thesis opens up these questions, I feel one need to do a much more detailed analysis of the event of the emergency for greater understanding and problematisation of authoritarianism and culture.

First, there is a need to study in detail the cultural politics of the state, specifically in relation to the question of funding provided by the state. The force of Madhava Prasad's analysis of the developmental aesthetic derives from his methodological framework of viewing the works in their economic context. The films *Ankur*, *Nishant*, and *Manthan* analysed by him are viewed in their relationship with state patronage through the funding by Film Finance Corporations. When he invokes the national aesthetic project, it is in the context of this direct state funding. In the present thesis, we did not go in detail linking the state patronage with the new aesthetic practices, though we have noted that many

works representing political theatre of state have been produced by the either state machinery or ruling party while some works have been in receipt of the state's recognition in the form of awards. But it is important to study this aspect in detail.

Second, the present study while looking at the national phenomenon of the state of exception has taken the case study of Kerala. As noted elsewhere this creates its own problematics. The stress on the notion of 'consent' to the regime as well as a stress on the category of the 'revolutionary' arises because of this precise location of the study. But one cannot deny the significance of the resistance movement that gained force in the north India and elsewhere as well as the comeback of the 'revolutionaries' after the lifting of the emergency, for instance in West Bengal. Many a time the real events of resistance and actions of personalities have provided a huge impetus to the works coming out of the emergency. These events, particularly that of the J.P. movement has provided a vision of transformation of the society that is different from the perspective of the dominant 'revolutionary' that we have subjected to analysis. Moreover this movement has been regarded by scholars as presenting an "Indian" perspective that have impacted the cultural field also⁹¹. To get a wider perspective on the event of authoritarianism and its relationship with culture, it would be important to study these different tendencies.

⁹¹ For instance V. Rajakrishnan in his analysis of characterisations in Dharmapuranam, argues that the central character, Sidharthan has been developed out of an Indian perspective on the hero model, whereby the western models of 'development of hero' is eschewed, where the relationship between the hero and his action is particularly linked with the notion of *karma* and destiny. (Rajakrishnan 2007: 209-211).

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