

THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION
Vincent as an Auteur

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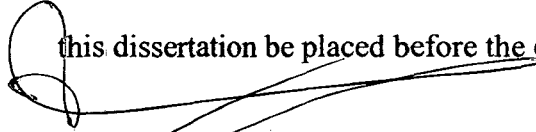
DECLARATION


I declare that this dissertation titled **THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION: VINCENT AS AN AUTEUR** submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies, is an original 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 or institution.



M. Shankar


CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that dissertation titled **THE PERSISTENCE OF VISION: VINCENT AS AN AUTEUR** submitted by M. Shankar at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for award the degree of Master of Philosophy is his, and has not been submitted so far, in part or in full, for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


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Introduction

VINCENT'S POSITION AS AN *AUTEUR* AND THE SHIFTING CONTOURS OF AUTHORSHIP IN THEORIES

This dissertation is an attempt to look at the film oeuvre of the renowned Malayalam film director A.Vincent (1928-) and to evaluate and situate him as a distinct auteur-director in the history of Malayalam cinema. I will focus on not only the films that Vincent directed, but will try and locate his distinct aesthetics in the body of work he did as a cinematographer in the years before he became film director in the year 1964.

Vincent as a film personality began his career in 1948 as a cinematographer and trained with the prestigious Gemini Studio, Chennai. His early stint as a cinematographer was totally immersed in the Tamil and Telugu film fields and he did cinematography for a bunch of critically noted and commercially successful Tamil films in the 1950s and 60s. Along with the versatile Tamil director/script writer C.V.Sridhar, he formed a highly creative team which was active behind a number of Tamil blockbusters of the period. The production company named Chithralaya initiated in 1961 by Vincent and Sridhar along with other interested personalities was a landmark in the powerful Tamil film industry of the 1960s.

By the mid-sixties Vincent had become a noted cinematographer in the Tamil cinema field and was highly respected for his stature as a master technician. As a cinematographer Vincent was a person who realised the immense possibilities of the camera, and was certainly well aware that it can be used not only to positively accent the meaning and beauty of a film but also for formal explorations and innovations. Vincent's association with the Malayalam film world begins in 1954, when he was assigned to do the cinematography for the film *Neelakkuyil*, directed by P.Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat. The production of *Neelakkuyil* was an event in the history of Malayalam cinema, as the film marks a new beginning in the style and execution of commercial films in Kerala. The film also denotes a point in the history of Kerala when the early film industry which

was fractured in various princely states have come forward to form an industry on the basis of a common language and exceeding the geo-political boundaries.¹ In this aspect, it was quite evident that Vincent was historically associated with the growth of Malayalam cinema, in more ways than one. This historical role is further enlarged through his participation as a cinematographer and director in a number of noted films till 1986 when he retired from active film making.

The presence of Vincent in the Malayalam film industry from 1954 onwards accelerated the growth of the cinema in Kerala which was trying to create a distinct niche for itself in the Indian film world. Along with other directors of the period like Ramu Kariat, P.Bhaskaran, M.Krishnan Nair, K.S.Sethumadhavan and P.N.Menon, Vincent instilled a new and vigorous energy into the mainstream Malayalam film industry of that period. These directors were not only stabilising Malayalam cinema as a site of aesthetical articulations, but were also transforming it as a major cultural site where sociological, psychological, political, philosophical and even existential issues were registered. And their attempt was to foreground many of these relevant issues for public discourse through the powerful medium of cinema. In spite of the fact that they were well aware that they were working within the constraints of mainstream film production, which expected films to fulfill the entertainment demands of the public, they explored the formal and thematic variations which critical and historiographical discourse has ascribed only to "New Wave" film making which was active in the 1970s. Even though traditional historiography and film criticism in Kerala has not been willing to give authorial status to these directors their creative contribution to Malayalam cinema is undisputable and commands serious critical attention and historical assessment. And this will also counter the established wisdom that creative and authorial intervention in Malayalam cinema is something that appears only with the so called "New Wave" directors.

¹ The early Malayalam film industry was concentrated mostly in the southern princely state of Travancore. J.C.Daniel, who made the first feature film in 1928 also had began a studio in Trivandrum named 'Travancore National Pictures', which could not survive.(Karassery: 1986, Vijayakrishnan: 1987) In the princely state of Cochin, noted writer Appan Thampuran had a plan to make a film around 1940, based on his novel *Bhootharayar*, which, however, couldn't take shape. (Ramavarma:1982) Interestingly Malabar, the only British district in Kerala has not witnessed any major attempt to make films during this period. This point will be discussed later.

I will start with the premise that a critical and careful analysis of the films directed by filmmakers like Vincent reveals a different kind of history and aesthetics in Malayalam cinema. This is especially true of the difference that Vincent brought about through an introduction of a new stylistics in cinematography that was quite refreshing and that redefined the visual aesthetic that was practiced in that period. Exploring the visual aspect to the full extent was his preoccupation even after he took the profession of a director late in the 1960s. I argue that it is Vincent's persistent vision as a director with a cinematographer's eye for unique visuals that defines his place in the history of Malayalam cinema; and hence I title my dissertation "The Persistence of Vision: Vincent as an Auteur." Furthermore this dissertation will make a case to consider A.Vincent as a distinctive film auteur with a unique cinematographic eye that constituted his cinema and gave it a visual force very distinct from the work of the other directors of his time. This study will concentrate on the visual style of Vincent, and how he contributed to creating a different aesthetical dimension to the films which he cinematographed and directed. Apart from such an investigation, this dissertation will deal with the thematic nature of Vincent's film and how within the constraints of working in mainstream Malayalam cinema and following an artistic vision where the narrative elements are important, Vincent addressed some of the important issues with which the new Malayalam cinema's modernity was inclined to deal with. To put it simply my quest is to seek how Vincent has created an aesthetic and thematic difference in the Malayalam cinema of his period, how his work is different from other directors who were his contemporaries, and what are the historical, philosophical and aesthetic connotations of making such a difference?

II

It is very important to ask the question why Vincent should be treated as an auteur. Or why should he be treated as an auteur when it is quite evident that he was working within the constraints of the mainstream Malayalam film industry, which is not in any way celebrated as a stream with high artistic ambitions. It is an industry that always has a collective nature, and no particular prominence was attached in the past to the director as distinguished from actors, writers or music composers. And many of its

aesthetic explorations were interpreted only as attempts to "reform" the formal growth of the Malayalam film industry. We can remember here, for example, that Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willeman termed Vincent as a reformist director in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* (Rajadhyaksha&Willeman: 2004:235). This approach is derived from a conceptual response a different stream of artistic film making brought a definite aesthetic rupture and represented Malayalam cinema's artistic face. But a close analysis of the history of Malayalam cinema gives a different theoretical perspective on its evaluation on aesthetical terms. As the project of a history of Malayalam cinema is a wider one in its magnitude and scope, this will not come under the purview of this dissertation, as it concentrates only on the works of Vincent in the historical context of Malayalam and to a extent that of Tamil cinema. This dissertation is have a part of the broader attempt to redefine the aesthetic aspects of Malayalam cinema and concentrates on Vincent as his films offer a site where the possibilities of visual aesthetics are clearly visible. A closer look at the various films directed by Vincent would reveal not only different formal devices in creating visual structure, but also a sort of repetition of certain semiotic codes that can be interpreted as the expression of an independent visual language of the author.

I interpret this strictly as the contribution of the director as there is ample evidence that Vincent's experience as a cinematographer is the principal force behind a difference in his visual style and that his distinctive visual style itself prompts him to choose particular stories or a particular approach to a theme. So there arise a number of issues in defining the authorship of a director like Vincent, which I would like to summarise by posing a number of questions: Can a person working in the mainstream mode of film making which has to comply with a number of industrial/market demands in the production field of cinemas, be considered an author? Is the authorship of a film defined only in terms of the directorial style of a particular film? Or is the business of defining authorship and exploring it in the context of a particular person an attempt fraught with retrogressive ideological connotations? Or can it be addressed as an exploration of knowledge and an attempt to excavate the determining energies that mobilise the history of cinema and a force that can define sovereign aesthetical concepts

and standards? In the next section I will address these questions regarding the concept of authorship and the influence that it can exert upon the knowledge formation and definitions of film art.

III

Every summary of auteur theories or autuerism in the history of cinema points out that, it is after the intervention of the French film journal *Cahiers du Cinema* that the concept of authorship in film making got wide acceptance as a theoretical tool, especially articulated by the theoretical position put forth by Francois Truffaut in 1954. As Barry Keith Grant in the introduction to the anthology, *Auteurs and Authorship a Film Reader* writes:

It all began with Françoise Truffaut's manifesto, "A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema", which appeared in the January 1954 issue (no.31) of *Cahiers du Cinema*, a major French film journal founded in 1951....In the article Truffaut attacked French cinema's "Tradition of Quality", a cycle of literate films that were considered among the nation's best cinema, and called for an alternative "cinema des auteurs" of more personal directors who also write their own scripts. The idea began to characterize the writings and reviews of the magazine through the 1950s and developed into a critical practice for such critics and soon-to-be New Wave directors as Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, Erich Rohmer and Claude Chabrol who discussed movies as an expression of directors. (2008: 2)

The traditional film streams in French that Truffaut attacked were films that were literary adaptations that Truffaut and others opposed for their "psychological realism" and whose characters were "nothing but vile beings" (Grant: 2008: 16). Truffaut asserted that directors like Jean Renoir, Robert Bresson, Jean Cocteau, Jacques Becker, Abel Gance, Max Ophuls, Jacques Tati and Roger Leenhardt were as important as the directors of the "Tradition of Quality", and emphatically added that "they are all auteurs who often write their dialogues and some of them themselves invent their stories they direct" (Ibid 2008 :16).

In a retrospective analysis it becomes clear that Truffaut's position is more in tandem with the modernist position on the formal coherence of film as an artistic creation, for he repeatedly points out the flaws of directors while adapting certain literary works. There is then an insistence in his work on the cinematic over the literary. "Talent,

to be sure is not a function of fidelity, but I consider an adaptation of value only when written by a man of cinema. Aurenche and Bost are essentially literary men and I reproach them here for being contemptuous of the cinema by underestimating it." (Ibid 2008: 13). However this approach is primarily confined to the perspective that the authorial aspect of film is located in its cinematic nature, apart from its literariness. But historically authorial positions are established more on the basis of a personal style and the individual marks of filmic creativity. Even long before the French New Wave started asserting the role of authors in film production, film was seen as an art form by Russian directors like Sergei Eisenstein, German Expressionists, like Fritz Lang and G.W. Pabst, or Spanish masters like Louis Bunuel who had a surrealist background.

But historically it was not the *Cahiers* group that came up with the concept of auteur. A clear definition of the auteur film was put forward by Alexander Astruc in 1948, which was more comprehensive and specific. Astruc's text, whose full title was "The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: The Camera Pen", appeared in the French journal *L'Ecran francais*, in March 1948. Commenting on Astruc's observations on the concept of auteur, Michel Marie observed:

Astruc suggests that up until 1948 the cinema had been primarily a spectacle. Previously during the silent era, cinema was too much a prisoner to the visual, while with the advent of sound, it became merely filmed theater. He affirms that there are several sorts of cinema, just as there are several sorts of literature, since, "before being an art, the cinema just like literature, is a language that can express any aspect of thought." For him the expression of thoughts was the fundamental challenge for the cinema, and he refers to Jacques Feyder's proposed project to adapt Montesquieu's *Spirit of Laws* and to Sergie Eisenstein's notion of adapting Karl Marx's *Capital* for the screen. These two projects also be cited often in the wake of Astruc. (2003: 31)

A very interesting aspect of Astruc's position is that he stresses on the expression of the director as an individual artist and realised that cinema is becoming a language and one can use the camera to write that language, like a writer uses a pen to write a poem or a novel. One can not miss the fundamental point in Astruc's observation which wants to "elevate" the status of cinema to that of literature. That is, according to his vision the person who can "express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in the contemporary essay or novel" is the real auteur in the

field of cinema. But Truffaut's position is not as simple as that and his concern is not on the "expression of thoughts" or "obsessions", but creating a different cinema, which distinguishes itself by deriding all kind of "literariness" and achieving a cinematic independence in the mode of expression. That is, Truffaut emphasises more formal aspects of film making while he talks about authorship than seeing it as way of expressing oneself. These divergent positions indicate that from its early formations the concept of auteur was a site where different viewpoints and definitions intersected and contested.

There is also another issue that makes Truffaut's approach distinct and interesting, which is the attitude towards popular culture in films. Unlike Astruc's strictly authorial approach in which only the expression of the director matters, Truffaut and others worshipped Hollywood directors like Howard Hawks and Alfred Hitchcock, who considered the interests of popular culture in their creative work. For example Jacques Rivette's article on Howard Hawks clearly indicates the reverence the *Cahiers* critiques had for Hollywood:

[...] Hawks epitomises the highest qualities of the American cinema: He is the only American director who knows how to draw a moral. His marvelous blend of action and morality is probably the secret of his genius. It is not an idea that is fascinating in a Hawks film, but its effectiveness. A deed holds our attention not so much for its intrinsic beauty as for its effects on the inner work of his universe....There seems to be a law behind Hawks action and editing, but it is like a biological law like that is governing any human being: each shot has a functional beauty, like a neck or an ankle. The smooth orderly succession of shots has the rhythm like the pulsating of blood, and the whole film is like a beautiful body, kept alive by deep, resilient breathing. (Rivette in Tredell : 2002 : 105)

This position clearly indicates the *Cahiers* attempt to include the films of Hollywood with their popular elements in the purview of a group of films which were given auteur status. As Nicolas Tredell citing Frank Kermode points out, one of the functions of the auteur approach, it could be said, was to encourage critics and cinema goers to bestow on films by directors designated as *auteurs* the form of attention more traditionally bestowed upon the 'art film', or on traditional cultural forms such as painting and the novel (Tredell, 2002:109). David Bordwell, a strong critic of auteur theory and its

reading of Hollywood film makers as auteurs says that the whole business of locating the authorship has derived from the tradition of focusing attention of the art film makers. According to him the rereading of Hollywood, a central concern of recent film theory, has its roots in the European "artistic" film making and he sarcastically observed that V.F.Perkins could interpret a shot in *Carmen Jones* as if it were by Antonioni (Bordwell in Wexman:2003, 48). However this approach of determining the authorship only on the basis of an individual creative force was countered in the 1950s by Andre Bazin, an active participant of the *Cahiers* collective itself. Bazin attributed the specific stylistic marks and formal grace of Hollywood films to the particular American mode of film making practice rather than the signature of a particular creative person. As he wrote:

If you will excuse yet another commonplace, the cinema is an art which is both popular and industrial. These conditions, which are necessary to its existence, in no way constitute a collection of hindrances – no more than in architecture – they rather represent a group of positive and negative circumstances which have to be reckoned with. And this is especially true of the American cinema, which the theoreticians of the *politique des auteurs* admire so much. What makes Hollywood so much better than anything else in the world is not only the quality of certain directors, but also the vitality and, in a certain sense, the excellence of a tradition. Hollywood's superiority is only incidentally technical; it lies much more in what might one call the American cinematic genius, something which should be analyzed, then defined, by a sociological approach to its production. (Bazin in Grant 2008:22)

Three decades later Thomas Schatz made a detailed inquiry into the American cinematic genius, concentrating mainly on the way in which the studio system featured in Hollywood came to the conclusion that it is the producers who have a major say in the creative production of a film. Discounting the concept of individual genius in creating the formal rhythm and thematic trajectory of Hollywood films and emphasising the "genius" of the production system as a whole, Schatz wrote:

The quality and artistry of all these films were the product not simply of individual human expression but of a melding of institutional forces. In each case the "style" of a writer, director, star – or even in a cinematographer, art director or costume designer – fused with the studio's production operations and management structure, its resources and talent pool, its narrative traditions and market strategy. And ultimately any individual's style was no more than an inflection on an established studio style. (Schatz in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 654)

Schatz position thus echoes David Bordwell's foregrounding of the institutional process in defining the author's signature. Bordwell also observe that the consistency of an authorial signature across an oeuvre constructed an economically exploitable trademark. "The signature depends partly on institutional processes (eg.advertising a film as "Fellini's Orchestra Rehearsal") and partly upon recognisably recurring devices from one film to another. One could distinguish film makers by motifs (Bunuel's cripples, Fellini's parades, Bergman's theater performances) and by camera technique (Truffaut's pan, Ophuls's sinuous tracks, Chabrol's high angles, Antonioni's long shots)...." (Bordwell in Wexman: 2003, 46)

All these divergent positions regarding the determination of authorship clearly indicate that the classic concept of auteur and theories of authorship historically evolved through a concerned debate on the subject. One should consider these different positions articulated by classic auteur theorists in the 1950s and 60s before using it as a theoretical frame and employing it to produce current knowledge on the work of a film personality or on contemporary film theory. Historically there are three streams of auteur theory which argued that though cinema was a collective art, its real value as an art production consisted in its essential nature as the expression of a director. Apart from the distinguished *Cahiers du Cinema* journal in France and *Movie* in Britain, the renowned film critic Andrew Sarris in USA all argued that it was the director who was the real artist in film production. As John Caughie in his introduction to the book *Theories of Authorship* says, film criticism became a sort of discovery, a discovery of the auteur as he is expressed in the cinematic course of the film, 'a process which while it remained firmly within the hermeneutics of romantic criticism, forced a more precise attention to what was actually happening within the film.'(Caughie: 12) The auteur critics focus their attention mainly on the *mise-en-scene* as the stylistic signature of the auteur. So according to this theory the *mise-en-scene* reveals how the auteur transforms the material given to him by other participants in the collective work of film production, and it is in this transformative process that the real genius of the director as an auteur is concretely expressed. It would be interesting to quote Barry Keith Grant here:

In *Cahiers*, writing on Nicholas Ray's *Party Girl* (1958), Fereydoun Hoveyda admitted that the film's subject is "idiotic", but nevertheless followed it with the challenge "So what?" Hoveyda's rhetorical question assumes that content is only minimally related to style, and that the true meaning of an auteur's film lies below the surface content. Chabrol went so far as to offer the outrageous proposition in *Cahiers* that the more trivial the narrative (surface level) of a film the more room there is for the director to express his vision through style. Such a concept was opposite to the traditional concept of unity in art, where ideally artists use all the elements of their medium harmoniously for an expressive purpose. (Grant: 3)

One of the basic contributions of auteur criticism polemics was that it helped to promote a kind of detailed and precise film criticism engaging more with the visual discourse of the film while rejecting the traditional way of analysing films only on the basis of their thematics. As John Caughie observes, the attention to *mise-en-scene* is probably the most important positive contribution of auteurism to the development of a detailed film criticism, engaging with the specific mechanisms of visual discourse, freeing it from literary models and from liberal commitments which were prepared to validate films on the basis of their themes alone (Caughie:13). "More than that", Caughie wrote: "the attention to *mise-en-scene* gives criticism a way of accounting for the text as pleasurable, pointing to its fascination as well as its meaning. An almost hedonistic pleasure in visual delights is a feature of much of the writing in *Cahiers* in the mid-1950s and it frequently lapses into mere formalism..."(Caughie: 13).

The same stress on the stylistic aspect of the film was also highlighted by Andrew Sarris who was the major proponent of the theory in America. As Keith Grant points out, in his 1962 essay, Sarris offered a questionable but nonetheless theoretical framework (Grant: 3). One of the important premises of auteur theory according to Sarris is the distinguishable personality of the director as a criterion of value (Ibid: 43):

Over a group of films, the director must exhibit certain recurring characteristics of style, which serves as his signature. The way a film looks and moves should have some relationship to the way a director thinks and feels. This is an area where American directors are generally superior to foreign directors. Because so much of the American cinema is commissioned, a director is forced to express his personality through the visual treatment of material rather than through the literary content of the material. A Cukor, who works with all sorts of projects, has a more developed abstract style than a Bergman, who is free to develop his own scripts. (Sarris in Grant: 43)

V.F.Perkins, a major proponent of the theory in Britain through his writings in the journal *Movie*, on the other hand, put forward a specific argument that it is the director's role that is important to decide the authorship of a film.(Grant: 74). Perkins investigated in detail the various aspects of film production, and it is after an analysis of this that he arrived at the importance of the director's role in defining the authorship of the film:

The director is the only member of the production team who can see (whose job is to see) the whole film rather than the particular aspects, the interrelationship of the parts rather than parts as separate tasks. As Max Ophuls expressed it: "There are as many creators to a film as there are people who work on it. My job as director consists of making out of this choir of people a creator of films". The director takes charge at the point where the components of the film have been assembled and they await their organization into synthesis. From this point those components are going willy-nilly to enter into relationship. Their interaction can be mutually enriching, controlled and coherent. Since it will exist, it is best that it exists to positive effect. Correlation occurs within the image, between images and across the film's complete time-span. Change must take place. But organized, significant change is development. Actors, designers, writers, photographers contribute major components of this development; the director is best placed to design the development itself. Being in charge of relationships, of synthesis, he is in charge of what makes a film a *film* (Perkins in Grant: 74)

However this position of elevating the status of the director as the person who has complete control over the entire production was completely rejected by writers like Graham Petrie. His main contention against auteurism is that auteur critics continue to rely only on the recurring themes, characters and situations that reappear throughout the work of the director. According to Petrie the continuity may be the result of working within a certain genre, or for a particular studio, or in habitual collaboration with a particular scriptwriter or actor(Petrie in Grant:113) Petrie even goes to the extent of arguing that,

The complexities of this type of approach are evident when one considers that it is perfectly possible that in a given film the balance of light and shadow, the visual effect of the close-ups and the movement of the camera may be totally the work of the director of photography; the pattern, order and type of shot may have been laid down in the script; the costumes and set may have been chosen by the studio; and the editor and producer may create the final shape of the film between them without even consulting the director(Ibid: 111).

Thus there are a number of problems in viewing the auteur theory as a coherent theoretical tool. Cahie himself says that for the *Cahiers* group it was more of a policy and for Sarris it was an attitude. Edward Buscombe for example in his article, "Ideas of Authorship", says that the tendency in *Cahiers* to make a totem of the personality of the

auteur went to such extremes in cases that Andre Bazin had to make serious editorial interventions to strike a balance (Caughie:25). Bazin in one article written in the journal argued that even though the individualisation of art can be considered as a major advance it should not be allowed to define culture (Bazin in Caughie:25). He also stressed the significance of social forces that played a major role in defining the individual positions of the artist. Arguing in line with Raymond Williams, Buscombe accuses Sarris of viewing the artist as opposed to society, achieving personal expression in the face of a hostile environment and valuing it all the more for this (Grant: 80). However Buscombe agrees that the theory, whatever its faults, was a tool for producing the map of a cinema and "has been extremely productive, as a map should be, in opening up unexplored territory" (Ibid: 79).

It is very important to consider these dynamic forces in the formation of an auteur as it helps to locate the auteur in a more comprehensive background. The authority and creative dominance that the auteur can exert over various other forces that operate within the production system, works as an *overdetermining* factor that defines the auteur's position. In his study on Hollywood film, *The Genius of the System*, Thomas Schatz states that the key issue in assessing an author is his style and authority. He stresses creative expression and creative control as the key elements for locating authorship. According to him Hollywood directors like John Ford, Howard Hawks, Frank Capra and Alfred Hitchcock were directors who expressed authority, had a certain style and had key control over production (Schatz in Braudy, L. and Cohen, M.: 653). While the early critics of auteur theory favoured on the director as author, Thomas Schatz had a different position. He argues that the authorial status of directors is connected to their position not only as directors, but as producers too. This argument is further developed in Mathew Bernstein who cited the examples of the Hollywood producers like Merian C.Cooper, David O.Selznick, Val Lewton and Walt Disney who "provided a strong personal vision that informed the film's conception, scripting, direction and editing" (Grant:181). Bernstein cites the case of King Kong, a twentieth century icon of American popular culture and public imagination as a brainchild of Cooper, who not only developed the idea and supervised the script but co-directed the film with Ernest Schoedsack (Ibid:

181). Similarly Bernstein also cites the case of Selznick, the celebrated producer of *Gone with the Wind*, who "believed in supervising every detail of production or substituting his own writing and visualisation of ideas for those of the directors he hired" (Ibid: 182). Elaborating his contribution to the final outcome of *Gone with the Wind*, Bernstein wrote about Selznick:

On *Gone with the Wind*, he launched an infamous talent search for the actress to play Scarlet O'Hara, a brilliant publicity stunt. He centrally contributed to the many, many script drafts for the film secured from different writers, rewriting the efforts as he saw fit. He fired George Cukor and hired Victor Fleming weeks into shooting. He closely supervised the editing and post production of the film. He was intimately involved in planning the film's marketing via distributor MGM and even had directions for projectionists for the film's showing. Selznick went so far as to crystallize a new type of creative Hollywood technician, the Production Designer, to account for William Cameron Menzies' contribution to the look of the Civil War epic.(Ibid: 182)

The perspective of viewing authorship as a product of individual intervention like that of a director or producer or as a result of a particular industrial structure and the mode of production was further complicated by the viewpoint that it was the corporate companies which effectively controlled the studios with a highly professionalised managerial system, that ultimately decided the authorship of the cinema. It was a departure from the widely accepted viewpoint raised by David Bordwell, Jane Staiger and Kristin Thompson in their landmark work *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production*, which approaches Hollywood film as a sort of industrial commodity. According to Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson, by the mid-1920s, the classical Hollywood cinema outgrew its nature as an individualistic enterprise to an industrial system organised on the principles of new managerial thinking (Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson: 1985). But Jerome Christensen raises certain issues with this concept of viewing Hollywood as a generic industry "erasing the strategies of individual studios, each of which – Oligopolistic agreements notwithstanding – had a distinctive corporate intention that informed the meanings its films communicated to their various audiences" (Christensen in Grant: 168). Christensen views the corporate studio as "a person who is not actual but who by warrantable assertion, nonetheless qualifies for the status of the intending author"(Ibid: 173).

In the 1960s however the challenge raised by structuralist reading of the text and reader centered criticism has destabilised the foundations of classical auteur theory propounded by *Cahiers, Movie* and Sarris. The declaration of Roland Barthes that "the author is dead" was especially and widely seen as a liberating enterprise in criticism as it asserted that the text does not contain a singular meaning as intended by the author, but it is a field of potential meanings, that may be taken up by readers. As Barry Keith Grant points out thus, Barthes was "dethroning the auteur of any privileged status in interpretation" (Grant: 97). Barthes' position was seen as a revolutionary one as it removed all theological conceptions about the meaning of the text:

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered*; the structure can be followed, 'run'(like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. In precisely this way literature (it would be better from now on to say *writing*), by refusing to assign a 'secret', an ultimate meaning to the text (and to the world as text), liberates what may be called an anti-theological activity, an activity that is truly revolutionary since to refuse to fix meaning is, in the end, to refuse God and his hypostases-reason, science, law. (Ibid: 99)

But Barthes' attack and the dethroning of author as a biographical person from the text does not totally invalidate author centered criticism. At the end of the 1960s itself a group of auteur-structuralists like Peter Wollen and Geoffrey Novell-Smith argued that the combination of auteurism and structuralism has founded a materialist basis for the concept of authorship which by posing structures, even unconscious structures, would avoid the idealism of the concept of the auteur as creating subject with intentions who was the source of all value in the text (Caughie: 124). In his noted work *Signs and Meanings in Cinema*, Peter Wollen talks about auteur theories' insistence on reading the text by the critic. "With some films this work is wasted, unproductive, but with others it is not. In these cases, in a certain sense the film changes, it becomes another film, as far as experience of it is concerned."(Caughie: 148). These patterns demand further semiotic or ideological readings. This kind of reading will help to locate the recurrent patterns and structural interlinks between different films. In this context it is also relevant to consider the structural approach of Geoffrey Novell Smith who says that it is the pattern formed

by certain recurring motifs that gives a particular author's work a structural quality. In the introduction of his work on Visconti, Novell-Smith wrote:

...one essential corollary of the theory as it has been developed is the discovery that the defining characteristics of an authors work are not always those that are most readily apparent. The purpose of criticism becomes therefore to uncover behind the superficial contrasts of subject and treatment of structural hardcore of basic and often recondite motifs. The pattern formed by these motifs, which may be stylistic or thematic, is what gives the authors' work its particular structure, both defining it internally and distinguishing one body of work from another.(Novell-Smith: 1968:10)

Auteur-structuralism came under heavy attack from Charles Eckert and Brian Henderson, who argued that though auteur-structuralism was theoretically grounded, "it was always too busy 'in the field', discovering structures and meanings, to take time out to explain precisely what its theoretical relationships were to the structuralism which it invoked or t the auteurism which it said it pursued."(Caughie: 124). As Caughie says "what structuralism offered as a critical practice was a way of objectively analysing a body of films, and of uncovering the thematic patterns which informed them and what it seemed to offer in theory was a way of accounting for the consistencies which it discovered, in terms of underlying unconscious structures (Ibid:126). Peter Wollen saw the author as an 'unconscious catalyst', an agent introduced into the "ingredient mixture of industry, commerce, script, caste etc". As Caughie says clearly: "The appeal to the 'unconscious catalyst' was a way of saying that the consistencies around which the film could be shown to be structured were the result of a particular and active set of relationships of which the author was one element – the principal of consistency which gave the compound its name – but which also included relations and conditions of production, ideology, technology, genre etc." (Caughie: 126).

The author thus becomes a principal consistency, a site where various forces are seen as actively involved or intersecting to constitute the unity of the text. As Pierre Macherey points out:

A totality: a certain relation links the parts and thus makes them into a whole. The work succeeds in so far as it realises this convergence; otherwise it is merely a shadow of a work, a failure. This is how the privileges of form are represented: the form

is that which gives body, which endows the work with its organic existence. (Macherey in Caughie: 191)

The recent developments in defining the female authorship and authorship and new queer cinema in fact follows this logic of locating authorship as way of defining the consistencies and reading radical possibilities in the text through foregrounding the figure of auteur and the aspects of his or her vision. The radical positions of feminism and queer theory in fact assert the need of elaborating authorship as it has been repressed in favour of the new monolith of anonymous textuality. Judith Mayne says: "The notion of female authorship is not simply a useful political strategy; it is crucial to the reinvention of the cinema that has been undertaken by women film makers and feminist spectators"(Mayne in Grant: 268). A very interesting observation that Mayne makes about auteur theory is that talking of film as the work of an individual auteur has posed a major challenge to the corporate industrial model by a liberal humanist one. Mayne quotes Clair Johnson who argues for the importance of auteurism for feminism: "the development of auteur theory marked an important intervention in film criticism: its polemics challenged the entrenched view of Hollywood as monolithic and stripped of its normative aspects the classification of films by director has proved an extremely productive way of ordering our experience of the cinema" (Mayne in Grant: 268).

This is also the feeling that Robert Stam in his introduction to the section of "Authorship" in the *Film Theory an Anthology* (Stam and Miller: 2000) generates. According to him auteur studies "now tend to see a director's work not as the expression of individual genius, but as a site of encounter of a biography, an intertext, an institutional context and a historical moment" (Ibid: 2000:3). He realises the hard truth that what most auteurs are doing is not just to create, but to "orchestrate, preexisting voices, ideologies and discourses without losing an overall shaping role" (Ibid: 2000:3). The truth is that most of the romantically individualistic baggage of auteurism is not visible in the contemporary practitioners of it and what is emphasised is that the "director's work can be both personal and mediated by extra-personal elements like "genre, technology, studios and the linguistic procedures of the medium" (Ibid: 2000: 3).

Perhaps the new directions in auteur criticisms points to the fact that the criticism is developed not only on the basis of the authorial intentions but also through the consistencies located in the film text through an active reading of it and particularly through the determinate absences, as Macherey puts it. Especially the particular traces of the style that the author uses in the film and the compromises that the author has to make in the narrative strategies are quite important not only to define or structure the author but also to bring about knowledge of the text in its historical and political contexts. Even as a constant that can be traced from the text, a valuable aspect of the author is that it relates the text with various historical forces. That is when Barthes and others remove the biological persona of author from the text and make isolate it from history, auteurism reinstate the biological person of author into the text and thus increases the possibility of historical interpretation of the text. In this respect the argument raised by Robert C. Allen and Douglas Gomery against auteurism that it deflates attention away from the actual production process and other historical issues is contestable (Allen and Gomery: 1985: 88). In an interesting article on Griffith, Tom Gunning says that "the idea of author can be valuable in so far as it opens texts to historical forces and pernicious in so far as it insulates films in an ahistorical cult of personality" (Gunning in Wexman: 2003:189). In the context of these various transformations and regenerations around the concept of auteur, we are forced to ask the question that Michel Foucault has posed: What is an author?

One major aspect that Foucault assigns to the author's name is that it is functional and serves as a means of classification. And apart from establishing relationships of homogeneity, filiation, reciprocal explanation, and authentication or of common utilisation, the author's name characterises a particular manner of existence of a discourse. It characterises the existence, circulation and operation of certain discourses within a society. Foucault says that the author-function, as he calls it, is "not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a text to its creator, but through a series of precise and complex procedures; it does not refer, purely and simply to an actual individual in so far as it gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that individuals of any class may come to occupy..."(Foucault in Caughie:289). Here Foucault clearly

maps the complex processes through which an author-function is established as a discourse and as he indicates establishing such an author function is not a simple process but a result of intense struggles to occupy the subjective position of the auteur. This insight helps us to understand how Aloysius Vincent as an individual person came to occupy the subjective position of the auteur of a number of films and what kind of procedures he had to pass through to occupy such a position and how these complex procedures have inscribed their mark in the collective work which is linked to his name.

IV

In the background of these discussion on defining the authorship in the realm of film industry how do we approach the films of Vincent and situate him in the context of the authorial debate? It is important to be aware of certain factors when the filmic work of Vincent is situated in the context of authorship, because he was working within the constraints of commercial film industry which exerted a lot of pressure on him, and in turn moulded his creative talent. The first thing is that Vincent who trained as a cinematographer, during the early years of the career, at one of the big studios in the south Indian film industry was closely associated with the studio system and he was very well acquainted with the mode of production followed by these studios. However, his later career with the Malayalam industry was dominantly that of a non-studio nature. Especially in *Murappennu*, outdoor locations were extensively used along with scenes set in studios. The Malayalam film industry of the period in which Vincent was active as a cinematographer/director was not a strictly structured one and was flexible enough to accommodate various discourses as long as its commercial interests were not affected. It is therefore quite evident that Vincent was a product of the social, historical and ideological pressure that were quite dominant during the period in which he was formed as an artist working in the field of Malayalam cinema.

In this dissertation, I will approach and consider the films of Vincent in the broader context of the theoretical premises of classical auteur theory and also incorporate the critical insight to it supplied by author structuralists like Peter Wollen or Geoffrey Novell-Smith. And even the most recent developments in feminist auteur debates and

theoretical position put forward by queer theory in the context of spectatorship will be also utilised to locate the authorial position of Vincent. My argument is located specifically in a kind of auteurism that I see developing, mainly around the directors position as an auteur, in Malayalam cinema in the 1950s, and in this context, Vincent's assertion of this space of the director. Even as a cinematographer in the 1950s in both Tamil and Malayalam films Vincent was assertive about his creative contribution as a cinematographer. He had a special command on the sets and in one interview said that when there was a disagreement with the directors of *Neelakkuyil* about certain camera positions, he decided to leave the sets.²

From His first film as a director, *Bhargaveenilayam* onwards, Vincent clearly building the image as a director with a highly distinctive and individualistic style and interestingly this style and his individual authorial signature are very much related to the distinctiveness he had shown as a cinematographer. And in the films he directed after 1964 these authorial marks are quite prominent and in the subsequent films they become a part of the authorial assertion and the stylistic distinctiveness even spills over into handling themes. That is, his themes are not only different from one another but also variant from those of other mainstream films, what stand out as special and marked about his treatment is the manner in which he negotiate and often subvert the dominant moral position of society. At the same time, they also provide Vincent with opportunities and open avenues for stylistic explorations.

On the one hand Vincent's work reveal its evident features which can easily subjected for an authorial analysis like his preoccupation with darkness- either in the *mise-en-scene* or in the theme; a subtle treatment of eroticism; the exploitation of objects to convey meaning, exploring visually autonomous image creations. Then there is the pressure of subjecting this stylistic distinctiveness to the constraints of the narrative which has to negotiate the demands of the mainstream film circuit as a commercial product. There is a dynamic tension in Vincent's work between these aesthetic or stylistic

² Interview with Vincent A. Vincent, November 18, 2008. John Paul, noted script writer and historian of Malayalam cinema has said that in the production of *Neelakkuyil*, Vincent's contribution exceeds that of a cinematographer.(interview with John Paul, June 9, 2009)

explorations of the film and the conflict with its narrative trajectory. That is a careful analysis of Vincent's films reveals the fact that somewhere this stylistic or formal movement of the filmic creation is curtailed by narrative demands. To understand this tension and contextualise Vincent's work in the debates around authorial creation, an active reading into certain absences is imperative. For example sometimes a very interesting shot which has distinctive aesthetical and semantic connotations are abruptly edited to accommodate narrative continuity. I will attempt to employ an active reading of these absence or deletions to explain the tension between authorial desire and narrative compulsion.

Vincent is one of the few Malayalam film makers of the 1960s and 70s who energised the Malayalam film industry through their committed work and helped it to gain individuality. They proved not only their talent, but acquired power and authority because of their ability to give box-office hits to the industry. Even though Vincent was not engaged with the film industry as a producer, (except for the 1973 film *Chenda* which he produced for himself), he exercised a lot of control and authority on the sets. The exercise of such authority over the aspects of production like camera positions and compositions by Vincent was evident even from the period when he was working as a cinematographer before becoming a director. Since the films he worked on were generally successful, the authority he displayed in his early career as cinematographer came to be respected and accepted by the directors he worked with. Even though this dissertation will concentrate mostly on the aesthetic or visual aspects of Vincent's cinema and the kind of difference it has created in the history of Malayalam cinema during the 1960s, it can not avoid the various historical or social factors that were ruling Malayalam film industry during the period in which Vincent was active in the field. My attempt here will be to explore how Vincent's individual style as a director was mediated through these various social factors which he had to face as an issue of the narrative and as an effect of his position as a film technician.

In the October 1951 issue of the Malayalam film magazine *Shadow*, (edited by Paravur R.M.Nair) published from Ernakulam, a very interesting article appeared with the title "Will the Malayali art lovers wake up and think?" The article written by one G.Karuvakkatt was a serious assessment of the Malayalam film industry till that date and made some interesting observations on the then prevailing practices and procedures of the industry. One of the pertinent issues that Karuvakkatt raised was about how Malayalam film producers can make a change in the quality of the artistic and thematic production of the film. Talking about the film *Jeevithanauka* (1951), directed by K.Vembu, Karuvakkatt says that even though the film was a great success in its commercial aspects, one finds it very difficult to explain the artistic and technical drawbacks of the film. One of the main drawbacks that Karuvakkatt finds with Malayalam films of those times was that, those films were directed by somebody who does not have even a basic idea about "Kerala's culture". Karuvakkatt writes:

One of the main reasons for the failure of our films is the deficiency of efficient technicians. Those who work in scenario, direction and editing should be Malayali professionals with their own individuality. The success and failure of the films will depend on the variations in their talents. In fact only a few Malayali people are there in this field now. (Karuvakkatt: 1951: 12-13)

Karuvakkatt also makes some interesting comments on the Malayalam film industry comparing it with the system followed by what he calls "western countries". "In the western countries, the entire responsibility of selecting the actors and technicians rest with the director, while in our system we go for a director only after all the preliminary work of the film is completed. In their system they take four to six years to find the appropriate actors, in our system we would have completed four to six films by that time" (Karuvakkatt 1951:13). Even though Karuvakkatt makes the comparison with the western mode of film making, in one place in the article he warns against following in the steps of Hollywood which is "deteriorating under the weight of the dollar". A very interesting suggestion put forward by Karuvakkatt to improve the condition of Malayalam cinema and thus save "Kerala culture" is that art lovers come forward to form production



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companies as co-operative ventures. According to him this can resist the whims and fancies of "the profit-seeking capital investor" and create a new culture in the film Malayalam film industry.

The article written by Karuvakkatt penetratingly analyses the problems faced by a growing film industry. At the time when he is writing this article, only very few films were made in produced Malayalam language. The first silent film made in Malayalam *Vigathakumaran* (The Lost Child) released in 1928 and was directed by J.C.Daniel who was a dentist by profession. As Nagavalli R.S.Kurup, script writer and actor and a pioneer in the Malayalam film industry wrote:

Vigathakumaran was an action film made in the mode of the prevailing action genre in other languages....Actually many of the silent films in those days were satisfied with depicting thrilling actions and spectacles that astonished the viewers....Whatever that may be the spectators received the film with much enthusiasm. (Kurup: 1975: 20)

Three years later, when Sundarraj made the second silent film in Malayalam, named *Marthandavarma* (1931), based on the historical novel of C.V.Raman Pillai, he also focused on the action genre that began with *Vigathakumaran*. As an action film filled with emotional and dramatic moments, *Marthandavarma* also began the trend of adapting literary works to the cinematic form, a trend which flourished in the 1960s.

However no Malayalam film appeared for the next seven years, till *Balan* the first talkie in Malayalam breaches the silence in the year 1938. Noted for its melodramatic moments, *Balan* caused the entry of a group of actors and a new scriptwriter (Muthukulam Raghavan Pillai who himself was a versatile actor too) and the film belonged to the "genuine Malayali culture" (Ibid: 1975:22). But as R.S.Kurup wrote the expectation that more and more films would follow *Balan* was not proved right. Only two films were made immediately after that and after *Gnanambika* in 1940 and *Prahlada* in 1941. Malayalam cinema had to wait till 1948 to produce another talkie *Nirmala* produced by artist P.J.Chcrian and directed by P.V.Krishna Iyer (Ibid: 1975: 22). The film furthered the quest of *Keraleeyatha*, which can be translated as cultural

distinctiveness of Kerala, by incorporating the dialogues written by the writer Puthenzhathu Raman Menon and poems composed by the poet (later Gnanpeeth Award winner) G.Sankara Kurup. In the same year Udaya studio was established by M.Kunchacko, a noted producer/director in Alappuzha, which indicated that film production in Kerala was becoming a serious business. The first film produced by Udaya studio in 1949, *Vellinakshatram*, was a commercial flop, but that did not deter Kunchacko from continuing with his ventures. And in 1950, the second film produced by Udaya, *Nallathanka* was a great commercial success and that catapulted the entire Malayalam film industry to new heights.³

This is the context in which Karuvakkatt put forward his criticism that Malayalam films lack good technicians and that film production in general was handled in a messy way. Three interesting criticisms that he had against the prevailing practices of Malayalam cinema are worth noting: One, the prevailing system of the producer controlling the entire system of production must be done away with. And two that the director should be given full freedom to select the technicians and only experienced persons who are familiar with the local culture should be allowed to handle the technical side of film production. And three, that the films lack what he calls the individual cultural identity of Kerala. Karuvakkatt's article clearly signals the process by which the director of a film is emerging from the periphery of the production system – as a mere manager of the technical production of the film – to a figure who can control the creative aspects of the film and who should be able to fulfill the cultural needs of the Malayali spectators. As the article was published in 1951, long before auteur criticism developed in France, it is quite evident that Karuvakkatt was putting forward the issue of director as the author of the film without knowing that he was proposing authorship and the direction as auteur as an important field of film criticism category.

It was this transformation of the role of the director from a person who controls the managerial aspect of film production to someone who has creative control and can

³ For a detailed account of the development of cinema as an industry in Malayalam language see M.A.Oommen and K.V.Joseph, *Economics of Indian Cinema*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta: Oxford and IBH, 1991. For a detailed account of historical facts and figures see T.M.Ramachandran ed. *70 years of Indian Cinema (1913-1983)*, Bombay: Cinema-India International, 1985.

formulate a vision of cinema that defines the role of the director in the 1950s of the Malayalam film industry. 1950 was considered a major break year, and a total of six films were produced in that year and Malayalam cinema then onwards never looked back. A very interesting development during this period was the emergence of more and more cinema halls, an elaborate distribution system and a growing audience that enjoyed cinema as entertainment. Films like *Jeevithanauka* were a huge success and encouraged wealthy financiers to invest in films. But even then the films were directed by people from outside the state, who did not have much “cultural affinity with the region”.

It was in this context that *Neelakkuyil* was directed in the year 1954 by P.Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat. The cameraman for the film was A.Vincent, who was developing his career in the Tamil film industry during that time. There is a very interesting aspect that links *Neelakkuyil* with the growing *Eikya Kerala Prasthanam* (Unified Kerala Movement), which wanted a unified state of Kerala on the basis of language. Before that Kerala was divided as Travancore, Cochin and Malabar and the industry was scattered between these states. If we look at the cast and crew of *Neelakkuyil* we notice that it represents the three parts of divided Kerala. The directors Ramu and Bhaskaran were from Trichur, a part of the Cochin state, leading actors Satyan and Miss Kumari were from Travancore and the writer P.C.Kuttykrishnan and cameraman A.Vincent were from Calicut, a part of Malabar.

The Malayalam film industry during the 1960s was not an industry that was pre-occupied with box-office competition. The market was only developing and there were almost a dozen of A-class cinema halls in the entire state of Kerala, where an average of fifteen to twenty films produced in a year were shown. Unlike the highly commercialised Tamil or Hindi film industry, Malayalam films never had a market outside the state. At the end of the sixties, the studio system became coherent and there was also a kind of modernisation of cinema halls (big screen, air-conditioned interiors) which increased spectatorship, and gradually made suitable conditions for competition.⁴ As a film director

⁴ For a detailed account of the growth of Malayalam Cinema industry look M.A.Oommen and K.V.Joseph, *Economics of Indian Cinema*, New Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta: Oxford and IBH, 1991.pp 29-43

starting his career in the sixties, Vincent was quite comfortable with such a non-competitive atmosphere. This helped him to associate with a group of people who wanted to make good films—who were not highly exposed to the new trends in world cinema, but who had a feeling that the things were changing. And the kind of discourse that prevailed at that time to make good cinema was quite different from the "art cinema" movement of the 1970s. It was not institutional and never believed in readymade formulas.

But the historical knowledge about the films of the 1960s which was largely created after the 1970s was very much influenced by the perspective of the art cinema movement. For example Adoor Gopalakrishnan, one of the most widely discussed Indian film makers and a true representative of "New Wave" film making in Kerala has written an article on the films of the 1960s in which he describes as the "spring of the world cinema". In this article he claims that the entire world was witnessing a revolution in film making in the 1960s and a number of examples from the French New Wave to American Underground cinema movement are cited. He also highlighted how cinema has come under the creative genius of a single person, as the spiritual expression of the film maker (Gopalakrishnan: 1985:31). Furthermore, he compares the situation with what prevailed in India in the 1960s and emphatically says that "nothing happened here"(Ibid: 34). "There was no such renaissance in Indian cinema during the 1960s" he asserts. And he categorically says that the only thing that the 1960s taught us is that only when a new generation who could approach cinema as a "sacred religion", as an "intense faith" and above all as "the only means of one's self-expression", that there would be room for some optimism in Indian cinema (Ibid 40). In Gopalakrishnan's view only those who can approach film as religion can be true authors. This clearly echoes the theoretical concept of authorship with the author-God determining the entire ways of a concept that Barthes raises. Here Gopalakrishnan is not bothering to critically assess the concept of auteurism that had developed in France and elsewhere and tries to transplant it, without questioning its ideological contours, to Indian conditions. Equally he does not try to understand the historical and political contexts in which Indian cinema developed and its issues of authorship are addressed.

In short while Gopalakrishnan rightly understands the aesthetic breakthroughs that characterised the authorial interventions of the various New Waves in the world cinema of that moment, he was completely oblivious of the kind of aesthetic interventions that were taking place in the cinema of his own milieu. On the other hand he totally rejects the development the Malayalam films of the 1960s in a sharp and sarcastic tone:

Even our better films were no more than photo-plays. In each scene the characters stand as if they are posing for a group photo. The only difference is that they may be standing either in the artificial sets or in an outlandish landscape. When the characters finish their dialogues the scene is also completed. The continuity in the film is created through dialogues. The first half of the film is devoted for the narration of the story background and in the second half we see the dramatic events unfolding in the story. Meanwhile space should be found for at least half dozen songs, some dance scenes and a number of fighting scenes. Special comedy tracks are unavoidable. All these satisfy the spectator and he is not bothered to think about the film as an art form anymore. (Gopalakrishnan: 1985: 39)

However Ravindran, a Marxist cultural critic and filmmaker has a different opinion about the films made in the 1960s and the political connotations they had. Broadly these films, including that of Vincent, advanced certain political positions apart from the various aesthetical and formal renovations they had advanced. Ravindran also criticizing the "traditional influences", but he could not deny the fact that these films in many sense challenged the dominant ideologies:

The Malayalam films of the 1960s, even though were reluctant to discard the traditional features of sentimentalism, dramatics and comedy tracks, started showing a realistic sense and propriety. It asserted its distinctiveness and developed local identity during this period. Many films of this period took the real situations in Kerala and the experiences of its social life as their major themes... Even certain ideological issues raised by these films like, eradication of untouchability, promoting caste unity and rational thinking, which can be treated only as bourgeois reformist positions, were in general highly progressive. *If Malayalam cinema had ever engaged in an effective class struggle against the hegemonic ideology in its history, it was only during the 1960s.* (Ravindran: 1990: 2)

However Ravindran's reading of the 1960s films in which ideological analysis is limited to the Althusserian positions does not go deep into the complexities of the formal and thematic issues, that these films foregrounded. There was a sense in the 1960s that art should be reconciled with moral uprightness and those films which could satisfy the

moral demands of the spectators were considered "good". But we notice a certain kind of difference in the films directed by A.Vincent from that of the others. This has to do with the visual formation of the films directed by Vincent, in which he uses a cinematic language to narrate the film. The script was very important for Vincent but it was his distinctive style that decided the narrative for the film. Secondly, and more importantly he tried to destabilise certain moral notions of the Malayali spectator. Especially if we look at films like *Triveni*, *Gandharvakshetram*, and *Vayanadan Thampan*, we notice that we have a certain destabilisation of traditional moral codes. Of course such an attempt to unsettle traditional family mores were also visible in the films of another stalwart P.N.Menon, but in the themes selected by Vincent this feature can be located as a recurring pattern.

What makes Vincent such an important name in the context of these aesthetic debates and thematic challenges is the fact that he was not a person schooled out of any specific film movement which had certain pre-conceived notions about the formal and narrative aspects of cinema. Generally the formal changes in Malayalam cinema are attributed to the art cinema makers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G.Aravindan, P.A.Baker, Pavithran, G.S.Panikkar, K.R.Mohanan, K.P.Kumaran and John Abraham who contributed to a strong "art cinema" movement in the 1970s. And the willingness to take off-beat themes that were treated to cater to popular film audiences is attributed to "parallel" directors like I.V.Sasi, Bharathan, P.Padmarajan and K.G.George. So apart from the strictly commercialised cinema which ideologically tried to reproduce the status-quo-ist thinking, these two streams engaged the film industry in a challenging manner. Interestingly, the art film makers of the 1970s became "cultural icons" of the subsequent period and the "parallel film makers" achieved spectacular success at the box office, especially in the 1980s. A careful analysis of Vincent's films show that while he introduced formal level changes in the 1960s, many of his films made in the 1960s and the 1970s (like the films of P.N.Menon) were thematically close to the parallel cinema of the seventies.

We will understand the importance of this only when we consider the development of a new film culture, both in production and consumption through the film society movements and the increasing debates on film aesthetics in the 1970s. The film society movement made its presence well in Kerala at the end of the 1960s through the initiatives of personalities like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Kulathoor Bhaskaran Nair who established the Chithralekha Film Society, which later entered into production with films like *Swayamvaram*. It should be noted that by that time, Vincent was already an established director and it seems that his insights into the possibilities of the medium came largely from his experience as a cinematographer from the end of the 1940s, when he joined Gemini Studio to learn the art.

An analysis of Vincent's films—those for which he did camera work and those which he directed—clearly shows that there are certain features Vincent followed from his early works onwards. First, he does not look at the camera as just an equipment to record the dramatic events enacted before it. While the camera does record what is happening before it, he uses it to frame the scene in such a way that the spectator gets a particular perspective on the enactment. Secondly, the camera can alter the proportioned perspectives he created to evoke a particular mood for the enacted scene. Thirdly, the camera person should utilise the mobility of the camera – both internal and external to create a complete cinematic narrative. Vincent was also aware of the potential of lighting and used that to highlight and explore aesthetic possibilities. These distinctive features of his films which will be dealt with in detail in the following chapters were something that one misses in the contemporaries of his times. And it is even more intriguing how critics or film historians failed to note down these aspects of his film making. Perhaps this has to do with the way in which the "style" in a film was approached in terms of defining its aesthetics. It is relevant to quote Richard Koszarski in this context:

Occasionally the more daring among them will try to relate the "style" of a particular movement to the content of that movement, but seldom will you find any admission that the style is the movement, and the way a story is told *is* the story. Our conditioned vocabularies resist any defining of a movement in terms of juxtaposition or special relationships, and consequently, the only film movements that get generally discussed as movements are those who have a strong and unifying thematic core susceptible to analysis in literary fashion. (Koszarski in Grant: 2008: 135)

Koszarski's position in fact enables us to view the films, in terms of the "style" in which it is made instead of defining the films narrative as the dominant one. Some of the recurring structural patterns that are traceable in Vincent's work are an engagement with darkness and evil (in black and white films), eroticism expressed through the usage of colours (in colour films), and expressing emotions through visual objects (apart from the live characters). These recurring structures, which are repeated consistently and persistently, raise a number of psychological, ideological and semiotic issues and help to locate the structural quality of Vincent's films and position his status as an author. These issues may at times foreground certain contradictions but it should be noted that these contradictions are not irrelevant in the analysis of Vincent's oeuvre as an auteur-director.

VI

The directorial works of Vincent are generally acknowledged by the historians and critics of Malayalam cinema in terms of their historical value and the unique "technical" intervention he made in 1964 through a film named *Bhargaveenilayam*. No historian of Malayalam cinema has attempted to write a genuine record of it without referring to that film. But the assessment of historians and even critics hardly goes beyond the consideration of the film just for its historical value. The film was neither studied nor analysed in depth to locate it in the context of film making practices and the dominant aesthetical devices that were ruling the Malayalam film industry during the 1960s. But the critics unanimously agreed that what they saw was something different on the screen. Reviewing the film in *Mathrubhumi Weekly*, their staff film critic Cynic wrote that "...by mixing real and unreal incidents with appreciable artistic talent and blending the fantastic with reality, the way Vincent narrates the story is a real sign of his craftsmanship" (Cynic 1964: 79). And Vijayakrishnan opined that "*Bhargaveenilayam* has practiced an entirely new style of expression that was different from the films that had appeared till then" (Vijayakrishnan 2008: 24). According to Salam Karassery, when "*Neelavelicham*", a story of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, was made into a film by Chndrathara and directed by Vincent, it was an entirely new experience for the spectators (Karassery: 1986: 23).

Likewise many film personalities (actors and cinematographers) have personally acknowledged that the film *Bhargaveenilayam* had astonished them for its sheer technical brilliance and unique cinematic nature. There were a lot of debates in Kerala whether the real break in the history of Malayalam cinema, in terms of a modern aesthetic sense, occurred in 1972, when Adoor Gopalakrishnan, a Film Institute product made his debut film *Swayamvaram* or when P.N.Menon, a self-taught director came up with a unique venture in 1969 named *Olavum Theeravum*. And yet despite the fact that *Bhargaveenilayam* was considered in its own way a unique film with a distinctive cinematic quality, nobody described it as a major intervention in the history of Malayalam cinema, in its style.

If the first film of Vincent was appreciated by historians and critics only for its technical quality, the predicament of his subsequent films was more interesting. After directing *Bhargaveenilayam* Vincent directed a number of films like *Murappennu* (1965), *Nagaram Nandi* (1967), *Aswamedham* (1967), *Thulabharam* (1968), and *Nadi* (1969). Many of these films have won national or state awards and some films were great commercial successes. But how these films have been historically situated through a certain kind of discourse is an interesting matter. Films like *Murappennu*, *Nagaram Nandi*, *Asuravithu*, were scripted by the renowned Malayalam writer M.T. Vasudevan Nair. MT, as he was popularly known, was a highly successful writer and was very popular with a section of enlightened young readers. So the films scripted by him were considered by historians or critics as MT's scripts and the role of the director to give it a unique visual language was highly ignored. On the other hand, films like *Aswamedham* and *Thulabharam* were scripted by Thoppil Bhasi, a dramatist/politician associated with the Communist Party of India. Both these films were popular social-melodramas and huge commercial successes. Interestingly, they were seen as some sort of socially committed works of Thoppil Bhasi rather than as the creation of a director who gave a distinctive visual translation to them. But the power of the distinctive visual style that Vincent offered to the script of *Aswamedham* written by Thoppil Bhasi is very evident to anybody who has watched the film. Any student of Malayalam cinema who compares

Aswamedham directed by Vincent and *Sarasayya*, directed by Thoppil Bhasi in 1970 can notice the stark difference of the visualisation of both these films. Whereas *Aswamedham* is visualised in a unique cinematic way, *Sarasayya* is of a limited cinematic quality and is visualised mostly as a stage drama. This affected the quality of the entire film both visually and performatively. While they were both commercially successful in their own way in their own times, the aesthetic differences between the two and the unique cinematic quality of Vincent's film is obvious to a film viewer and critic today.

So in the following chapters I will concentrate on the works of A. Vincent in this context and will attempt to evaluate his work as a director of a number of different Malayalam films which were thematically connected to the general trends of his times, but stylistically followed a different track. The thesis will also look into various aspects like the historical context in which Vincent enters the Malayalam film industry, his contribution as a cinematographer in the early part of his career, and his transformation later as a director.

VII

I have relied mostly on primary materials like the films of Vincent, the reviews of those films published in the press at the time of their release, direct interviews with the director and others associated with his films like actors, assistant directors, producers and technicians. As Vincent had worked with the Tamil film industry as well as in Malayalam cinema, persons who had associated with Tamil films were also interviewed to collect primary level material. The work also involved referring to extensive archival material to evaluate the contemporary response to the films of Vincent. I have also located various films with which Vincent was associated without his name appearing in the credits.

My primary aim in this project is to make an evaluation of the works of Vincent as an auteur paying specific attention to his visual language which created a marked distinction in the history of Malayalam cinema. Vincent is located as an auteur not just through an analysis of his visual language or the visual narrative, but also importantly

through an assessment of how his films engage with the ideological, psycho-sociological issues of his times. This is important because there is a recurring pattern of certain issues that are constantly addressed in many of his films. And many of those films are either pioneering or unique in addressing those issues and they have a distinctive freshness in dealing with them. For example his debut film *Bhargaveenilayam* foregrounds certain dichotomies like good/evil, dark/light and real/unreal which were quite evident and fresh at the time of its release. These dichotomies are repeated in films like *Gandharvakshetram*, *Nakhangal*, *Chenda* and *Vayanadan Thampan*. Films like *Nagaram Nandi*, *Murappennu*, *Aswamedham*, *Thulabhram* and *Nadi* address certain psycho-social issues which were quite important for a society like Kerala. His films also foreground the expression of eroticism as in films like *Triveni*, *Achani*, *Priyamulla Sophiya*, *Anavaranam* or *Sree Krishna Parunthu*. Some issues overlap in various films and there is a link between various films through the distinctive visual style used by Vincent as a director. All these demand the employment of auteur criticism, textual analysis, semiotic and structural analysis and also certain ideological studies to evaluate the work of Vincent. As Vincent is one of the pioneers of the Malayalam film industry, it is also important to consider a number of historical methods to locate his work as cinematographer/director.

So my methodology involves auteur criticism and other kinds of textual, ideological and historical analysis. Even though my methodological approach primarily draws from the premises of classical auteur theory or auteur criticism, it has to critically engage with certain of its premises like considering and evaluating the auteur just as an individual product. The concept of the auteur and many policies of auteur criticism propounded by groups like *Cahiers* are used here as a binding principle which enables me to consider the works of Vincent in a comprehensive and total perspective. I would like to stress here that apart from evaluating Vincent's position in the history of Malayalam cinema, this study will attempt to put the history of the narrative cinema of the 1960s and 70s in Malayalam in perspective.

VIII

The first chapter will consider the work of Vincent as a cinematographer and will try to evaluate his work within the prevailing styles of cinematography which were dominant during that period. Vincent started his career as an apprentice in Gemini studio from where he learned his art. Gemini studio was famous for introducing some of the spectacular changes in film technology during the late 1940s and its films like *Chandralekha* made a tremendous impact on spectators during that time. It is possible that Vincent's stint with Gemini helped him learn a lot about the art. The fact that both P.Bhaskaran and Ramu Kariat invited him to do the camera work for *Neelakkuyil* also points to the fact that he was the only person in Kerala at that time to have an authority in cinematography.

As a cameraman, Vincent was not very keen to work for Malayalam films. In fact, he worked only a couple of films after doing *Neelakkuyil* and both of them were for Ramu Kariat; *Mudiyanya Puthran* (1961) and *Moodupadam* (1963). However during this period that is from 1955 to 1963, he was active as a cinematographer, especially with Tamil directors like C.V.Sridhar with whom he had established a very good rapport. The films he did for Sridhar like *Kalayanparisu* and *Kathalikka Neramillai* were huge box office hits of the times. So it seems that during the 1960s he was one of the best established cinematographers of the flourishing Tamil film industry. His roots in Madras also helped him to do films in Hindi; especially when directors like Sridhar and Bhimsingh made Hindi films (in Madras studios), they asked Vincent to do camera for them.

What distinguishes the camera work of Vincent is a unique sense of space and a disciplined approach to keep the coherence of the frames. Especially in a film like *Neelakkuyil* there are moments when his camera work deftly utilises the opportunities to record the village space through a very mobile cinematographic approach. The other films that he has done in Malayalam also show his mastery over the medium, especially the film *Mudiyanya Puthran*, in which he uses the possibilities of light and shade to express the moods of the rebellious protagonist.

There is enough scope to compare his style with that of the other cameramen during the times. During the 1960s there was a growing feeling among the directors that a film's quality was not only dependent upon the story, acting or songs but also on a very important aspect of the film, cinematography. At least a few directors realised that camera was not just a tool to record what was happening before it, but could be used to sharpen the aesthetic quality of the film. Even as a tool its position was more important than anything else in the cinema. Vincent had this awareness about the camera's possibilities and his great commitment to do cinematography in a more aesthetic way also inspired other cinematographers like U.Rajagopal and P.Bhaskar Rao to develop a unique cinematographic culture in the southern film industry long before the young generation from FTII started their more adventurous journey. All these aspects will be discussed at length in this chapter and a complete analysis of Vincent's cinematographic work, in Tamil, Hindi and Malayalam films will be made. This chapter will also look at the impact that Vincent's cinematographic style made in the Malayalam film industry and how it helped to evolve new styles in the field.

In the second chapter, I will discuss Vincent's entry as a film director and also the particular style he evolved as a film director from his career starting from 1964. As a director, Vincent concentrated only on Malayalam films and perhaps these films are the only ones he considered as his true work. He directed one or two Tamil films, but preferred to work mostly with the Malayalam film industry. One of the reasons for this was his cultural affinity with Kerala and its literary world. It should be noted here that for most of his films he depended on literary creations in Malayalam. Almost all the films that he directed during the 1960s were taken from the works of well known writers like Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Thoppil Bhasi and others.

This chapter will discuss a number of films directed by Vincent which are thematically different. His first film *Bhargaveenilayam* not only announces him as a director, but also expresses his control over the cinematic language and his willingness for experimentation. In fact, many of the features of Vincent's cinematic style or what

can be said as the unique signature of his cinematic style can be traced in his first film itself. Subsequent films like *Asuravithu*, *Murappennu*, *Aswamedham*, *Nagaram Nandi*, *Thulabharam* and *Nadi*, in the sixties only elaborate these particular features of his films. But we have to discuss the thematic variations of these films and how as a director Vincent could negotiate with such a variety of themes which dealt with a number of varied issues in a society like Kerala.

A major contribution that Vincent made while making *Bhargaveenilayam* was that he simply shattered the notion that a film should in some way or another consider certain socio-political questions of the contemporary times. The script of *Bhargaveenilayam* was subjective and many of its scenes contain just the monologues of the protagonist, which was something unusual for a film made for commercial circuits. The film *Bhargaveenilayam* uses the confined atmosphere of deserted house to deal with the interior space of the protagonist. There are a number of marked features in that film like the correlation of real time with cinematic time, discontinuities of the narrative (the film unfolded through flash back) and the techniques of murder mystery resolved through the explorations of the protagonist (the mystery is resolved in the end but not revealed to the "public" in the film) that distinguished the film from the dominant pattern of Malayalam cinema then. In fact, the spectator engages with the subjectivity of the protagonist rather than peeping into a drama unfolding in front of him. It is this identification with the subjective element of the dominant character through both the narrative and the treatment that makes *Bhargaveenilayam* a creation with *authorial* touches.

After three years, Vincent directed *Aswamedham* based on a play written by Thoppil Bhasi. The story of the film raised a number of social issues like the intellectuals' commitment to society. What did Vincent do in this film? To put it simply, he *spatialized* the whole question of social reality and positioned these issues in a different cinematic narration. The film deals with the dislocation of the leading character in the film Saroja, who has to move away from her house to a sanatorium after she tests positive for leprosy disease. The inner anguish of Saroja is expressed through the wasteland-like topography

of the sanatorium and its premises. There is also a parallel narrative of Doctor Thomas who fights against the marginalisation of leprosy patients by society. Both Saroja and Doctor Thomas are isolated personalities from their surroundings in their own way. The script was based on a play written by Thoppil Bhasi and the dialogues are very eloquent with a lot of rhetoric. But if we look at this film, we notice Vincent's attention to creating a haunting sense of the space, which conveys the inner anguish of the isolated leprosy patient. Whereas the play was noted for its socio political dimensions, the film was successful in evoking a haunted sense of space through which individual's positions were determined.

As a director Vincent was not a person who interfered with the flow of the script and his inner discipline prompted him to confine himself always within the limits of the script. But he was quite sure that the essence of the film was contained in how one visualises it, and he always did that job by supplying multiple levels of meaning to the narration. For example in a film like *Murappennu* based on the script of MT, there are a number of strong creative elements like music composed by B.A.Chidambaranath and lyrics written by P.Bhaskaran. But one can not miss the strong visuals of the River Nila which Vincent brilliantly incorporates into the emotional tone of the narrative. These visuals contribute strongly to the narrative, independent of the literary structure of the film. (Vincent is perhaps the first Malayalam director to capture the experience of the Nila River on celluloid, which became a visual cliché in the subsequent period.) In *Nadi*, which literally means river, the entire location of the film is the river bed of Periyar. (This reminds one of Ritwik Ghatak's famous rivers Subarnarekha and Titash in this context.) In the world of the collective effort of creating entertainment films for popular audiences, Vincent's distinctive approach which had the power to provide an ulterior meaning through the visuals is clearly evident.

Vincent could utilise even a simple visual object in the frame for effective compositions highlighting the cinematic narrative in a distinctive way and this is the unique quality that made him different from many contemporary directors of his times. Vincent's metaphoric use of objects like country boats (*Nadi* and *Triveni*), lamps

(*Bhargaveenilayam*, *Gandharvakshetram* and *Vayanadan Thampan*) and Chinese fishing nets (*Thulabharam*) carries not only connotative levels of meaning but also acts like authorial signatures.

The third chapter will address the question as to why Vincent should be treated as an auteur-director and why his films demand a closer attention in the historical context of Malayalam cinema. Another way of considering this question would be to see whether his position in the history of Malayalam cinema is that of a "technician" or that of an "auteur" of authority and expression. Traditionally, auteur criticism faces a lot of opposition for its orientation towards making value judgments. This creates a hierarchy of artistes according to their creative talent. It also runs counter to the revolutionary position put forward by reader-centered criticism, which denounces the romantic idealisation of "auteurs". My intention is not to put forward an argument about Vincent by projecting him as an artistically "superior" director of his times. In fact, many of his contemporaries have produced works that also demand much close attention and analysis. But I have selected Vincent's work for discussion for the kind of difference of his work from that of his contemporaries and from that of the dominant Malayalam film making practices of his times.

I attribute this difference to Vincent's distinctive cinematographer's eye combined with a number of themes that varied from the normative pattern of issues that dominated the Malayalam film industry during the period. However, Vincent's approach to cinema was primarily that of a professional technician. He never saw himself as a creator of classic films with a distinctive vision or thought that he was playing an important role in the history of Malayalam cinema. From his early intervention with the cinema Vincent saw the medium as something people watch for entertainment. At the same time, Vincent's unique combination of diverse themes and his distinctive visual language to narrate them marks him out as an exceptionally significant filmmaker of his time and one who has not been acknowledged enough. Along with his characteristic visual style in films like *Gandharvakshetram*, Vincent engaged with the dichotomy of the real/unreal situating them in the matrix of social contradictions. The anguish of the individual

alienated from the society is yet again repeated in *Vayanadan Thampan*, in which the protagonist is a devil-worshipper who regains his youth through ages by offering virgin girls to his deity. The film was an attempt to visualise a "necromancer", but the individual/social conflict is quite evident.

Vincent realised perhaps better than anybody else, that formal or visual pleasure does play an important role in enriching the value of the cinematic experience. So he was very keen on offering a polished visual language for the spectator. But the uniqueness of his visual language is not just its polished quality. It is a language that asserts its autonomy from the literary script of the film. This autonomy is expressed not only in terms of conveying meanings, but also at the level of aesthetic experience. The visual plays not only a semantic or hermeneutic role but an aesthetic role by asserting its autonomy as a concrete reality that can offer a unique experience for the spectator. Vincent's compulsion to create such autonomy comes from his realisation that he is working within a system in which multiple creative forces are operating.

It is obvious that a number of factors like the script, lyrics and music contributed to the excellence and the success of Vincent's films. But in the interplay of that collectivity, sometimes the director's influence gained dominance over other factors and in such moments we can say that the film expresses more the aesthetic preferences and arguments of the concerned director. My research points to the fact that a retro-assessment of the films of Vincent gives us a feeling that most of the films Vincent directed display the unique influence of his directorship and certain consistent continuities can be traced from them in spite of their thematic discontinuity. This is the fact that, I think, establishes Vincent as a distinctive auteur in the history of Malayalam cinema.

The conclusive point of the dissertation is that Vincent's contribution to the history of Malayalam cinema both as a cinematographer and director have played a major role in building the visual aesthetics of the Malayalam film industry from 1955 to the early 1980s. Working within the limiting constraints of the studio-based commercial film

industry, Vincent contributed to building a strong foundation for the Malayalam film industry of this period. Generally the aesthetic questions of Malayalam films are considered and evaluated only in the context of the art film movement which acquired international appreciation during the 1970s. But the contribution of Vincent underlines the fact that even though his films have not commanded such an aesthetic appreciation, they demand serious attention as they attempted to redefine the aesthetic trajectory of Malayalam cinema. It will also be noted that the development of the commercial film industry of Kerala during the 1980s and 1990s was indebted to him by adopting some of the visual skills and thematic concerns of his films.

CINEMATOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE

Walter Benjamin in his noted work named "Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction" says that with photography, in the process of pictorial reproduction, the hand was for the first time relieved of the principal artistic responsibilities, which henceforth lay with the eye alone as it peered into the lens. "Since the eye perceives faster than the hand can draw, the process of pictorial reproduction was so enormously speeded up that it was able to keep pace with speech", he wrote (Benjamin: 2008:4). Benjamin's text was mostly conceived as an engaging work on the aspects of mechanical reproduction attained through revolutionary changes in technology and the impact it has created in the mass consumption of cultural products. But the essay is also a serious analysis of the emergence of cinematographic art and the impact it has created in the creative and perceptual faculties of the people and the way in which the mass can find itself in a work of art.

One of the interesting aspects that Benjamin finds in the development of cinematography is the way in which it accented the faculty of vision in the mode of artistic production. The cinematographer's approach to reality, Benjamin compares with that of a painter. And he comes to the conclusion that the painter is someone like a magician and the cinematographer is like a surgeon:

Magician and surgeon behave like a painter and cameraman. The painter, while working, observes a natural distance from the subject; the cameraman on the other hand, penetrates deep into the subject's tissue. The images they both come with are enormously different. The painter's is an entity the cameraman's chopped up into the large number of pieces, which find their way back together by following a new law. (Ibid: 25)

According to Benjamin what adds importance to the new art of cinematography is its technological ability to conceive an artistic creation through the chopping up of the

reality into various pieces and the ability of the cinematographic vision to penetrate deep into reality. The responsibility for creating the aesthetics of the visual in a cinematographic art falls primarily on the eye and not on the hand like in the case of painting. It is the function of the eye to penetrate deeply into reality through the technological apparatus of the camera and formulate the aesthetic structure. So both photography and cinematography mark a different realm of artistic creation which differentiates itself from painting through its emphasis on the visual faculty which conceives and formulates the aesthetic structure.

Aloysius Vincent, born into a family of artists/craftsmen was, as a technician, well aware of this aspect of photography where scientific principles, technological expertise and aesthetic perception converge in the formation of a distinct aesthetic. His father George Vincent was a lithographer and type maker and was one of the pioneers of photography in Malabar, the erstwhile British province of Kerala. Vincent in a personal interview said that his father had contributed to the letter type setting of the *Mathrubhumi* Daily, publishing from Calicut since 1923. George Vincent later established his own still photography studio in Calicut (Vincent, Interview: 2008). Vincent as a young boy learned the first lessons of photography in his father's studio which included the lessons in emulsion making, processing and bromide printing.

Interestingly, Vincent was himself a painter during his freetime, working in the mediums of oil and water colour, and was quite aware of the aesthetic principles like composition and colour tones. An interesting aspect of Vincent's work as a painter is the way in which, in his art work, he handles the light and its different tonal textures and impacts. This aspect defines the cinematographic works that Vincent did in his later years. In fact it is this aspect that inspired Vincent to look upon cinematography as something more than a technological medium. So as a young artist who practiced oil and water colour pictorial works, Vincent was aware of the basic elements of a visual creation- like colour, composition and the use of light to add dimension and texture to the art work.

Vincent's exposure to the technological aspects and scientific principles of still photography, through his father's studio, enriched his already developed aesthetic outlook. What appealed to Vincent in the realm of still photography was the in which it could be used to create an artwork in which a painter's interest in composition and light tones could be extracted to the full extent, through a technological medium in which the *eye* has the principal function. Vincent also remembers that his father George Vincent was an expert in making lantern slides that were used in cinema halls as a medium of advertising. So Vincent's interest in learning the art of cinematography has a root not only in his early exposure to photography but also to this technology of "slide making" which was used as an instrument for the projection of images on to the screen.

After completing his education from Malabar Christian College in 1947, Vincent decided to join Gemini Studio in Madras, which was the metropolitan capital of the British province of districts including Malabar. He sought an appointment to meet the studio cameraman/director in Gemini, K.Ramnath and carried a port folio of still photographs with him. Vincent remembers:

I took these photographs during a visit to Mahe (the French colonial province in northern Kerala), where my sister was staying at that time. I brought the family members to the beach and took a number of photographs with silhouette effects. The light of the slanting sunrays fell on the figures in the picture and created thick black silhouettes against the setting sun. Seeing the pictures Ramnath appointed me as an apprentice in the studio without asking even a single question. (Vincent- Interview: 2008)

In fact silhouette photography might have given Vincent the first lessons in backlighting which he later utilised in a number of films to create peculiar effects in the shot.

Gemini studio during the 1940s and the 50s was one of the prominent studios in India and was the most active in Chennai where the south Indian film industry was mostly concentrated. Its films like *Chandralekha* made tremendous impact on film production and also made a breakthrough into the Hindi film industry which was controlled by the Bombay studios. *Chandralekha*, one of the spectacular productions of Gemini studio was a huge commercial success and P.Neelakantan wrote that "S.S.Vasan

and *Chandralekha* raised the prestige of the Tamil Film Industry sky high. Vasan and *Chandralekha* transformed the entire concept of entertainment in Indian films. His was the first real assault on the Hindi film market and he captured it with masterly ease" (Neelakantan in Ramachandran: 1981:146). Vincent worked as an assistant cinematographer for the Hindi version of *Chandralekha*, which was first made in Tamil in 1948. Though Vincent did not work on the Tamil version, an analysis of the visual schemes of the film can reveal the nature of cinematographic style which was predominant in the productions of those times.

Chandralekha was a film well known for its enormously built sets, spectacular dance scenes and an epic mode of narration. But one of the prominent factors that made the film impressive is the highly mobile camera work of Kamal Ghosh which had an aesthetic uniqueness in its times. An interesting shot in the film is the movement of a bunch of horsemen through a village landscape. The scene first comes to the viewer through an extreme long shot in which we see the horsemen's upward movement through a hill. They are moving from left to right, one by one in a row creating a very interesting horizontal textural pattern. The camera then moves parallel to the movement of the horsemen and then turns rightward to shoot the horsemen from the rear. This opening scene is divided into eight various shots within the duration of approximately 90 seconds. There is a brief tracking shot, frontal shots, high angle shots and an extreme close-up shot in such a short span. The increased number of shots within such a short duration was unusual in that period and was a major factor in creating the fast pace of the film. It became clear then that it is not only narrative elements like intrigue, suspense and action that determine the pace of the film, but also cinematic strategies like increased number of shots and unconventional angles, to which can be attributed to the uniqueness of *Chandralekha* as a film of artistic merit and tremendous spectator appeal. Many scenes in those times, and even later, shot using frontal shooting techniques were done away with in *Chandralekha* and a maximum number of shots were used to extract the advantages of multiple perspectives. This was a break from the dominant pattern of shooting the scenes only through a theatrical frontal perspective. In many of those early films, the camera

style used was more or less static, and pace was created through chopping up the scenes through editing and thus avoiding the boredom of continuity.

Another interesting aspect of the film *Chandralekha* is was its insistence on the architectural dimensions of mise-en-scene. The camera concentrated more on architectural marvels or the set designs which were intended to create a sense of the spectacular. Rhythm and textures were considered important elements to make an impact on the spectator. Vasana as the director of the film was very well aware of the ingredients which are needed for a creation which he termed as "composite entertainment". He wrote:

If the elements of a successful picture are analyzed, we find that its attraction lies not merely in its story, nor solely in its songs, though one particular aspect of entertainment might have been given more prominence than another. In 'Tansen', the chief attraction was music and in 'Jhanak Jhanak', the classical dances. In my own pictures—'Avvaiyar' and 'Chandralekha', for instance—gorgeous spectacles were the attractive features.(Vasana in Ramachandran :1981: 68)

Even though Vasana did speak of the role that cinematography played in the uniqueness of his films and their power to create spectator appeal, it was quite evident that the camera work of Gemini films, as mentioned earlier, was decisive in creating a niche audience for those films. This unique style of cinematography truly influenced the cinematographic vision of Vincent which he deftly employed in a number of films later in his career. We should also note that this was a period in which tremendous changes were taking place not only in the technology and techniques of the cinematography but also a revolutionary change in aesthetic perspectives was being formed. Neelakantan writes about the way technicians like K.Ramnath, Marcus Bartley, Srinivasa Raghavan and A.Krishnan achieved a technical finesse and in turn created an indelible impact on Tamil films.(Neelakantan in Ramachandran: 1981:152) We can sense this from an observation made by the master cameraman Bartley himself:

Now, obviously, any cinematographer who has mastered his medium sufficiently to obtain a predictable result has developed a particular style of his own, very much in the manner of a painter or writer. This style is, however rather on a broad scale, and should be adaptable to a variety of subject matter. For example the average light comedy would be treated in what is known as a high key, or in other words, scenes will be composed of fairly large areas of light tone, giving a general impression of brightness. In a story in which somber mood is prevalent, a style of photography featuring large areas

of shadows or dark tones would be more appropriate. The romance forms another subdivision as far as stories go, and the treatment should favour softening or diffusion of visual detail, the mood of romance deciding whether a high key or low key be employed. Recent years being notable chiefly for human conflict, have started a trend towards pictures with themes purporting to be 'realistic'. The photographic treatment of these stories, aided, no doubt, by advances in lenses and film-making technique, reveal a pitiless attention to detail, however sordid.....These few basic approaches to photographic treatment are, of course, subject to infinite variations, depending on individual taste. (Bartley: 1955: 132)

What Bartley was talking about was the fundamental change that was occurring in the visual culture of the South Indian film industry. As Neelakantan points out, the early Tamil talkies were mainly filmed versions of stage plays. Neelakantan writes:

The theatre, for its part, drew from the vast storehouse of mythological subjects and legends. Such plays were marked by an abundance of songs and a particularly bombastic and flamboyant theatrical prose. The early Tamil talkies were widely advertised as 'Hundred percent singing, talking and dancing pictures'-some of them containing no less than 60 to 70 songs! (Neelakantan in Ramachandran: 146)

Many of the early film stars have emerged from Tamil theatre and the basic style was theatrical rather than cinematic. If we look at early Tamil movies what is striking is not only their indebtedness to the theatrical mode but also their lack of cinematic nature in terms of visual language and cinematographic inventiveness. The Tamil cinema world, which was one of the most organised and active industry, was in its early period, was very influenced by the traditional Tamil theatre groups. It is a well known fact that the icons of the Tamil film industry like M.K.Tyagaraja Bhagavathar, P.S.Bhagavathy, T.U.Chinnappa, T.S.Balaiah, T.K.Shanmugham, N.S.Krishnan, M.G.Ramachandran and "Sivaji" Ganesan were came from a theatre background. The early scenarists of Tamil films like Papanasam Sivan and Kothamangalam Subbu were dramatists in their early phase, and wrote for various theatre troupes like T.K.S.Brothers, Madurai Original Boys Company, Rajamanickam Pillai and Devi Nataka Sabha.(Ibid: 146). The Tamil dramas, notable for their heavily ornate stage props and rhetorically accented dialogues were quite popular even in the Malayalam speaking provinces of Kerala. Thus it is evident that Tamil film as an entertainment industry was very indebted to the early Tamil theatre groups both in form and content. It was this situation that new generation of technicians like Vincent were trying to overcome.

Vincent's first independent venture as a cinematographer was a Telugu film named *Brathuku Terugu* in 1953. This was followed by cinematography for a number of Tamil and Telugu films during this period and the noted ones among them are *Amaradeepam*, *Thennilavu* and *Uthamaputhran*. The last one, *Uthamaputhran* which follows the typical Gemini style cinematography is an interesting example of the basic cinematographic grammar that Vincent followed in the films of his early career. *Uthamaputhran* is a good example of the usage of tracking shots, low angle/high angle shots and also shooting a scene by paying particular attention to the material objects, and *mise-en-scene* of the film. And this aspect is one of the key elements in the basic style of cinematography that Vincent used, and continued to use ever in the films he directed after 1964.

This aspect of the cinematographic vision of Vincent needs serious attention in order to understand the theoretical nature of his work. As mentioned earlier, Vincent was very influenced by the work of Kamal Ghosh who did a number of films for Gemini studio. Ghosh's work for *Chandralekha* was unique in its concentration on structural perfection, pattern like frames, material objects, architectural materiality and the mobile camera. These aspects were cleverly employed in films like *Chandralekha* for which the formal aspect of filming was very important. *Chandralekha's* huge success and the prominence that Gemini studio attained during the 1940-50s in a pan Indian cinema world was due not only to the hugely invested production and spectacular film sets; the cinematography has also played an important role in constituting the basic formal pattern of the film, which was quite distinct from the films of the times. That is now onwards cinema is becoming more susceptible to various scientific analyses like semiotics as there develops a "cinematographic language", as Christian Metz puts it (Metz in Braudy and Cohen: 2004:69).

An interesting aspect of the films of Gemini was that they were more inclined to a cinematic formation than to the theatrical influences of the early Tamil film industry. Even though there was a script with stress on dialogues, the films were mainly cinematic in their formal nature. Even a person without an understanding of the language could easily follow one of their films as its articulation through cinematic images was more

pronounced. I have already mentioned the non-conventional angles, mobile camera and unique perspectives of *Chandrakha*, which were in correlation with the epic character of the film. The theme was a modern day romance against a backdrop of a power struggle between two warring brothers (traces of the Nala-Damyanti story can be located in the film). There was every possibility for the film to fall into the trap of rhetorical dialogue presentation and gaudy props. However interestingly, the restraint of the film in connection with dialogue presentation is noticeable, and the camera work contributes to this restraint through its brilliant aesthetic which occupies the dominant role in the articulation of the film's narration.

This dominance gained by the cinematographic act in the entire formal articulation of the film was a specific feature of Gemini films, compared with some other films of the same period like *Pathalabhairavi*. For example *Pathalabhairavi* a film with a magical story with moments of romance, comedy and action also involves spectacular sets of architectural attraction. And its cinematography done by one of the best cinematographers in India in those times named Marcus Bartley. However Bartley's camera work could not match up to that of Kamal Ghosh's work for *Chandrakha*. The main drawback of Bartley's work was its rigid classical nature that could not provide an epic perspective for the film which wanted to narrate a story of epic scope and an extraordinary dimension of magical nature. What we feel watching every frame is a sense of condensation of the images within the frame and the space within the frame does not provide an expanded feeling. The expanded sense of space and the deft utilization of mise-en-scene is something that makes the films of Gemini for which Kamal Ghosh and his assistants did camera stand apart.

How can we differentiate between the experiences provided by these two different kinds of style which approached the filming of the artwork differently? Does one need to deploy only subjective judgment or there is some kind of objective differentiation between the ontological substances of the frame in these two different kinds of styles? One such objective factor that has shaped the specific nature of the films of the Gemini studio is their thrust on the objective world within the frame more than the theatrical act with its dramatic action. Leo Braudy in his work *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* considers the role objects play in the film:

In films every object has four dimensions-the realities of length and height, the suggestion of depth, and the potentiality of significance. Objects in film gather significance the way snowballs grow when they roll down hills, by the repetition, accumulation and mere persistence in our eyes. (Braudy: 1976: 37)

This aspect is very relevant when we consider the films of Gemini in which the significance of objects plays a very interesting role. Their presence forms the textural pattern of the film in which architectural formations also have a significant presence in the mise-en-scene to convey multilevel meanings and enriched the narrative essence of the film. We have to just consider the famous drum dance, the climatic scene of *Chandralekha* where huge drums are displayed in a very interesting geometrical pattern. Of course there is a justification in the film for using these huge drums as they Trojan like vehicles for carrying in the soldiers for a coup. But in the dance scene these drums act more like objects employed to accent the visual appeal. The camera, deftly utilise their presence to capture the essence of the mise-en-scene to enrich the cinematic nature of the film. Braudy adds more:

No film is without such an attitude toward objects, their manipulability their existence before the camera and away from it, their usefulness in creating not a real, but a believable, plausible, compelling world. It is part of the magic of the film experience. It can also be a way to tell the qualitative differences between films, as well as a critical tool for investigating why some fail. (Ibid: 38)

Braudy explains how films create their own world through the deployment of such objects. It is in fact the power of cinematography to notice the position of such objects and deftly adopt them in the visual continuity of the film. This is the fact that differentiates films according to their power to utilise such objects by cinematographic attention. This can be defined as the cinematic attitude towards objects available for the cinematographer as a technician in the film. This cinematic attitude was what defined the qualitative nature of the films of Gemini compared to the films of other major studios of the period. This attitude provided a visual coherence and flow for those films which effectively commanded spectators' attention in two ways. One, they had a technical brilliance of visual continuity through the coherence of the well framed images and two, through their narrated specific utilisation of the mise-en-scene apart from the dramatic

narrative. Perhaps this development can be compared to what Tom Gunning terms "evolutionary assumption". Gunning writes:

In this assumption, the development of film came from a discovery and exploration of its true cinematic essence. This development usually takes the dramatic form of liberation of film from a false homology that restricted it to the technological reproduction of theatre. In this assumption editing usually plays the key role, but other inherently "cinematic" devices of camera mobility and freedom of shooting angle also keep defining a unique cinematic essence. Within this scenario, early cinema makes the initial error of simple reproduction and theatricality and then dramatically discovers its own nature. (Gunning in Grierson and Kraemer: 2004:41)

Gunning criticises the theorists of this "evolutionary assumption"-like Lewis Jacobs, Georges Sadoul and Jean Mitry- for their foregrounding only the narrative aspect of cinema and he stresses the issue of displaying. He underlines the fact that even though narrative integration plays a dominant role in classical cinema, attractions also play a major role. In his own words:

In classical cinema, narrative integration functions as a dominant, but attraction still play a role (moments of spectacle, performance, or visual pyrotechnics) with their subordination to narrative functions varying from film to film. Similarly, I do not want to identify narrativity exclusively with the classical paradigm. There are many ways of telling a story in film and some of them (particularly in cinema before the 1920s or, obviously, in avant-garde work) are clearly non-classical....By describing narrative as a dominant in the classical film, I wish to indicate a potentially dynamic relation to non-narrative material. Attractions are not abolished by the classical paradigm; they simply find their place within it. (Ibid: 43)

Gemini films were basically made in the classical mode and brilliantly incorporated elements of visual spectacle or what Gunning terms "attractions". It must be noted that the cinematographic style that was visible in many Gemini films have this spectacular or performative element that contributed to their basic nature of attractions and thus appealed to the spectator's interest. This aspect also had an important role in the development of Vincent as a cinematographer of his own distinctive style. What we see further is how these factors that Vincent learned from his stint with Gemini and through his apprenticeship under Kamal Ghosh enlarged further in his career as a cinematographer and director of films. I will first consider certain Tamil films of the 1950s and 1960s for which Vincent worked as cinematographer and then go deep into for an analysis of two Malayalam films for which he worked as a cameraman. Vincent did

cinematography for a number of Tamil films during the 1950s and the 1960s and many of these films like *Uthamaputhran*, *Thennilavu*, *Amaradeepam*, *Kalyanaparisu*, *Kathalikka Neramillai* and *Enka Veetu Pillai* are notable ones. The fundamental features of Vincent's cinematographic art can be traced from these films.

Uthamaputhran was made in 1958 by Venus Pictures and the script of the film was written by C.V.Sridhar, who would later become a director himself. Sridhar and Vincent along with some other friends initiated their own production unit, 'Chithralaya' and formed a strong team to produce some noted Tamil films. *Uthamaputhran* was a film based on Alexander Dumas' "The Man with an Iron Mask", a story of intrigue, action and violence that happens in a kingdom where some members in the palace plan to crown their own crony as the king and plan to control power. There were similarities between the storyline of *Chandrakleha* and *Uthamaputhran*. However, the large scale investment and grand production sets of the former is missing in *Uthamaputhran*, as the film was made on a comparatively low budget and the studio sets and their architectural presence is less spectacular than that of *Chandrakleha*. But the unique cinematic approach of the camera is quite visible throughout the film. For example, there is a very interesting shot at the beginning of the film when two women travel on a horse carriage singing a song. The movement of the carriage is recorded in long medium and close-up shots. The close up is used many times to record the faces of the singing women, accenting their beauty. A very interesting technique used in this sequence is the tracking shot to record the expanse of the open landscape and low angle shots of the canopy of trees that shade the road. This blending of nature (landscapes, trees), the moving objects (chariot) and the human bodies (close up shots of women, their faces). This shot can be compared with the shot of horsemen at the beginning of *Chandrakleha* for which Kamal Ghosh did the camera. Tracking and high angle and frontal shots are used in the scene in *Chandrakleha*. But a notable difference in *Uthamaputhran* is the rich close-up shots in which the individual face attains an extraordinary presence for the spectator. It is as if the spectator can savour the facial harmony and beauty of the faces that are visible in the frame. One may remember here the observation made by Jean Mitry in connection with facial close-ups, whose purpose he read as expression rather than signification. Mitry writes: "In effect

facial close-up *does not signify*; it *expresses* and almost never acquires the quality as a sign which the isolated object assumes" (Mitry: 2000: 71). Also noticeable in the frame is the low angle shots of the canopy of shading trees above the road through which the horse carriage is passing. This shot is purely an intervention of the cinematographer in the narrative as the gaze of the two women is oriented towards the road and nowhere do we get the idea that they are looking above watch the trees. By breaking the grammatical flow of the narrative, the camera for some moments looks at the top to watch the canopy of trees for the mere pleasure of watching.

But when it comes to the interior shots, Vincent follows a cinematographic position of an eye-level point of view. Here the camera captures of the figures from their knee upwards, and the figures are normally composed in the centre of the space with objects and architectural details positioned in a balanced way around them. The three dimensional materiality of the huge interior of the building is deftly utilised in the formation of the textures. The candelabra, chandeliers, furniture, neatly patterned floor tiles, huge columns, weaving door curtains, framed painting, all these are vitally absorbed by the movement of the camera in 45 or 90 degree angles.

A very interesting shot in the film is in the 98th minute when the heroine (Padmini) leaves her palace to meet her lover (Sivaji Ganesan) in the garden. The meeting is secretly arranged, but the villain (M.N.Nambiar) has the prior information about the meeting. So when the heroine leaves the palace, the villain and his crony follow her. This sequence continues for about 100 seconds and is shot mainly at the night using artificial lights. There are various medium close up shots, high angle shots and some pan and tracking movements of the camera to depict this sequence. Lacking any major sound intervention, this sequence is one of the master creations of Tamil cinema of the times with its brilliant use of lighting and dark forms. We can see the beautiful figure of the heroine leaving the interiors of the palace and walk through the garden to meet her lover. The light given to the set is to accent its architectural dimensionalities and its dark interior recesses. The fountains and plants in the garden are immersed in the contrasting light and shades of the night. The walk of the heroine through the garden immersed in a

misty light is shot through long and medium shots and certain tracking shots from behind the garden plants. In the scene, the two men who follow the heroine are also recorded through their shadow like movements. The mood of the entire scene is that of secrecy, silence and shady darkness. The intriguing nature of the story line is pronounced through the cautious movement of the camera. The camera moves as if it itself is watching the entire secret game which is playing out in front of it. The point of view of the camera is not that of the pursuing men but a different one which watches the movements of both the heroine and the men. The position of the camera conveys the feeling that there is a third person watching the entire scheme of things, and it is nothing but the autonomous, all viewing objectivity of the recording camera. As James Monaco points out tracking shots increase the spectator's involvement in the entire sequence. Monaco's observation is very interesting:

F.W.Murnau and Max Ophuls loom large in the history of the moving camera. Their use of it was essentially humanistic-to create a lyrical celebration of their subjects and to involve their audience more deeply. Stanley Kubrick, a contemporary film maker closely identified with tracking shots, also uses camera movement to involve his audience, but in a colder more intellectual way.(Monaco: 200; 203)

The camera in these shots never assumes the position of the subjectivity of characters. Or the camera never tries to isolate the individuals from their surroundings and always tries to establish their relation to the material surroundings and keeps the necessary distance to frame that relation. When discussing Jean-Luc Godard's camera style, Brian Henderson points out how Godard's camera style, devoid of any subjective nature always tries to keep a position of detachment in relation to its objects. Henderson writes:

[...] There is a different camera dialectic in each: Fellini's camera interacts with reality, touches and is touched, causes as well as registers effects; Godard's camera assumes a position over against reality, outside, detached. Secondly Fellini's tracks are frequently subjective-in the sense that the camera eye is a character's eye. In *8 and 1/2* the reactions of characters to the camera are their reaction to Guido; the pain we feel when we see them is Guido's pain. Because subjective, Fellini's tracks are most often in medium close or close-up range, sometimes with only faces coming into view; Godard's tracks, which are never subjective, are usually in long shot, taking in as much of an event and its context as possible.(Henderson in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 55)

In *Chandralekha* too this detachment of camera with regard to the characters and mise-en-scene is very noticeable but when it comes to the camera style used by Vincent

in films like *Uthamaputhran*, we notice the camera assuming a detached and objective position to document the relational nature of characters, objects and surroundings. At the same time, the camera also has an attached position of aesthetical savoring and detailed exploration. It is this dialectical relation between detachment and objective shots through distancing and attachment and subjective shots through detailing that defines an important feature of Vincent's camera style that is noticeable throughout his career as a cinematographer and film director. Some detailed analysis of Vincent's work also reveals that this dialectic is also similar to the relation between two important approaches of visualisation named *mise-en-scene* and *montage* in the history of cinematic grammar.

What we see in *Kalyanaparisu* another film directed by C.V.Sridhar in 1959 is a different kind of camera work. The film deals with the theme of two sisters in love with the same man. This conflicting romance is visualised through a camera work, where interior scenes dominate. Each shot maintains an eye-level position, and the characters are depicted in a relational way to each other. In each tightly closed frame, the camera focuses mainly on the interaction of the characters and the invisible chemical relation between the bodies are subtly articulated. In fact it is the human figure that forms the particular textures and patterns of the scenes.

Kalyanaparisu is one of the master works of Vincent as a cinematographer. The film, except for some dull moments in the early sequences is worth watching for its sheer poetical camera style. What is meant here by poetical can be explained by considering the differentiation made by the Russian Formalist critic Viktor Shklovsky between the cinema of prose and the cinema of poetry. Shklovski writes:

I have more than once heard that film professionals express the curious view that, as far as literature is concerned, verse is closer to film than is prose. All sort of people say this and large numbers of films strive towards a resolution which, by distant analogy we may call poetic....I repeat once more: there exist both prose and poetry in cinema, and this is the basic division between the genres: they are distinguished from one another not by rhythm alone, but by the prevalence in poetic cinema of technical and formal over semantic features, where formal features displace semantic and resolve the composition.(Shklovski quoted in Hill and Gibson: 63-64)

In the film *Kalyanaparisu* there are moments of technical experiments, poetical explorations using light and shade, and the sheer brilliance of camera style through black

and white texturing. The song sequences in the film can be described as master creations and they can also be termed as autonomous episodes where cinematographic poetry is being explored. As the film is fundamentally a family melodrama, the storyline unwinds in the background of family interiors. But the camera style used in the film is quite objective in depicting the surroundings and figures and sheer poetry when it comes to certain unique moments.

Vincent's camera work for *Kalyanaparisu* can be broadly divided into two categories, exterior camera and interior camera. This dichotomy is derived out of the different nature of the two love affairs that the protagonist of the film experiences. He is loved by the sisters and the younger one, an extrovert by nature is also his colleague. He reciprocates her love and their romantic relationship is narrated through some song sequences and some unique open air shots. The song sequences are vibrant and quite refreshing in their cinematographic charm. Wide landscapes, trees and foliage and clouds create an atmosphere of amorous intermingling. On the other hand, the interiors are always depicted in eye-level shots with low key light and limited movements of the camera. However the objects, furniture and other interior props are deftly utilised by the camera for the enrichment of each shot. For example, whenever a shot begins, it first focuses on some objects in the room like kitchen utensils or furniture and then only moves over the figures. The low key light and limited movements are very evident whenever the camera records the interactions between the protagonists and the elder sister. Even a song scene in the interior is shot with a limited movement of the camera. This low key light and subtle shade of darkness underline the lack of vibrancy and sheen in the love life of the sister who was forced to live an interior life of limited colours. In fact, Vincent's giving due attention to the interior of the house is something that brings into our memory the view of Gaston Bachelard who sees it as an entity of spatial configuration where our thoughts memories and dreams are integrated. "Now my aim is clear", Bachelard wrote in his *Poetics of Space*: "I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind... In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing."(Bachelard: 1994:6)

The house is the central image that develops throughout the second half of *Kalyanaparisu*. There is also a variation in the amount of light during the second half and as the film progresses to the tragic situations through the end, the light is continuously lessened and darkness dominates the screen. Some of the sequences which are dominantly conflicting and emotional are recorded with weird positions of the camera and an unbalanced amount of light and darkness. The usage of darkness is not in such an expressionist manner that darkness dominates the screen and the surroundings merge into darkness and only the figures get an attention through specific lighting. Certain sequences where high emotions are circulated are worth considering understanding the nature of Vincent's camera style in *Kalyanaparisu*, which acquires an independent character with autonomy of cinematographic performance.

I will look at the following sequence to analyse how cinematographic performance is unraveled in the film *Kalyanaparisu*, and how the performance gains autonomy in the entire narrative of the film (like a song sequence which is also a cinematographic performance). The sequence begins in the 66th minute of the film when the younger sister Vasanti tells her lover, Bhaskar that her elder sister Geeta loves him and he should marry her. The scene begins in a sober mood, in a balance appearance put forward by Vasanti, but suddenly slips into pathos and high emotional outbursts. How the camera alternates its position, excludes and includes the surrounding and varies the light textures is quite interesting. Following is the shot analysis:

Shot 1:

Bhaskar is walking inside his room; light falls from the left side of the room sometimes making his face dark. Suddenly, Vasanti enters the room. Both look at each other. Bhaskar starts talking. Vasanti stands for a frontal shot of the camera and Bhaskar's profile. Eye-level, medium close up shot. Key-light is falling on the figures from the left side.

Shot 2:

Close-up shot of Vasanti. Light falls from the right side, lighting the left half of Vasanti's face. She is sober.

Shot 3:

Close-up shot of Bhaskar. He is sitting on a coat. Light falls from right side. He is happy.

Shot 4:

Medium shot. Both are visible. Light falls from left the side. Vasanti's face is sad.

Shot 5:

Bust level close up of both. Light falls from the right. Vasanti starts sobbing. Pathos begins.

Shot 6:

Low angle shot of Vasanti. She is leaning on a table. Camera positioned from a weird low angle to include portions of the table in the foreground indicating the helplessness of Vasanti. Bhaskar is standing closely but immersed in darkness. Vasanti is breaking down.

Shot 7:

Close-up shot from left side of the screen. Both the figures are in sharp focus. Light falls from the left side.

Shot 8:

Vasanti is falling onto a wooden screen in the room. The geometrical pattern of the screen is sharply focused.

Shot 9:

Medium shot of Vasanti with the wooden screen in the background. Light falls on her face and the rear of the wooden screen. Vasanti is in an extremely emotional situation. Bhaskar enters the frame slowly. His body is under light and shade textures.

Shot 10:

Medium Close-up shot from behind the rear of the wooden screen. Light falls on the face of Bhaskar. Textures of the wooden screen are foregrounded.

Shot 11:

MCU of both the figures. Light falls from the left. Wooden frame in the background. Vasanti moves away from the screen. Profile of Bhaskar.

Shot 12:

Medium Shot of Vasanti with a plant (a symbol of the growing love between the two) in the background. Light falls from the right of the frame. The camera is gradually zooming into Vasanti's face. In the zooming process we get a clear view of the plant.

Shot 13:

Close-up shot of Bhaskar, with the wooden frame in the rear. Light falls only on his face.

Shot 14:

Low angle long shot with Bhaskar's feet foregrounded. We can see Vasanti in full length. Plant is shown in the background. Key light on the plant. Shadow of the wooden frame can be seen behind Bhaskar. The visual is a highly expressionistic image.

Shot 15:

MCU. Light falls only on Bhaskar's image. He moves towards Vasanti. Both near the plant. Camera zooms out to frame Vasanti, plant and Bhaskar in an eye-level frontal shot.

Shot 16:

MCU. of Bhaskar. Light falls from the right side of the frame.

Shot 17:

Extreme close up of Vasanti. The peak moment of pathos begin.

Shot 18:

Extreme close up of Bhaskar. The image is highly expressionistic.

Shot 19:

MCU of Vasanti. She regains her sobriety.

Shot 20:

MCU of Bhaskar. The lighting is highly expressionistic.

Shot 21:

MCU. Vasanti. Light is coming from right side. Camera pans. Both the figures in the frame.

Shot 22:

MCU of Bhaskar. Expressionistic lighting.

Shot 23:

MCU of Vasanti. Frontal shot. She is completely relaxed.

Shot 24:

CU of Bhaskar. Highly expressionistic.

Shot 25:

MCU. Vasanti. Relaxed. The wooden column with a rope around it.

Shot 26:

Medium shot of Bhaskar. Shadow of the wooden frame forms a weird pattern behind him.

Shot 27:

Medium Close shot of the composed figure of Vasanti. Camera zooms out and Bhaskar's figure in the foreground. Vasanti moves forward and touches the feet of Bhaskar. Camera comes down. He lifts her up and both the figures in the frame in an eye-level frontal shot. Culmination of the sequence. Vasanti suddenly leaves the scene. Camera pans to get a last glimpse of her. Now the only images in the frame are the dressing table with a mirror and table lamp on it. A reduced reflection of Bhaskar in the mirror.

Shot 28:

High angle shot. A ceiling lamp hangs in the fore ground. Camera zooms in to the figure of Bhaskar, who is in a highly distressed position. Light only on his figure. He gradually looks down and now the camera tilts down to focus on the fallen leaves from the plant. Camera then slowly moves upward to the pot of plant and freezes there.

These 28 shots are recorded for a sequence of around seven minutes. That means an average four shots are recorded per minute, which indicates that the average length of each shot is 15 seconds. There are variations in the duration of shots-some shots are lengthy and others are short-but there is a recurring pattern of the average duration which points to the fact that there is a periodical rhythm for the entire sequence and this gives it a unique episodic character with relative autonomy within the entire film. There are many such sequences which can be analysed as autonomous units where directorial and cinematographic creativity is truly performed. Song sequences in the film can also be

interpreted as autonomous units where both directorial and cinematographic (and of course musical and choreographic) creativity performs. But when we watch units like the sequence described above, what is being foregrounded is the performative talents of both the director and the cinematographer. It is quite important that the creative contribution of the director of the film C.V.Sreedhar has to be taken into consideration, the sequences also marks distinctively the cinematographic style of Vincent.

A very interesting aspect of this sequence is *syntagmatic consciousness* of it as the semiotician like Roland Barthes would put it. Barthes explains syntagmatic consciousness in this manner, "The syntagmatic consciousness is a consciousness of the relations which unite signs on the level of discourse itself, i.e. essentially a consciousness of the constraints, tolerances and liberties of the sign's associations...it is more a structural consciousness than a semantic one, which is why it comes closest to practice"(Barthes: 2000: 215). In this sequence the narrative content and the cinematographic style employ a relationship which may be termed the relationship between *fabula* and *syuzhet* in Formalist poetics. Or as I have mentioned earlier, the rhythmic and formal features of the cinematography gain prominence over the narrative direction of the film. Even though the narrative can be quite ordinary as in this case, as compared with any other film, it is the particular style, which can be attributed to the director or the cinematographer that makes the difference here. Kristin Thompson terms this specific nature of the style element, an excess that is something that escapes the directorial intentions of the film. Thompson writes:

Style is the use of repeated techniques which becomes characteristic of the work; these techniques are foregrounded so that the spectator will notice them and create connections between their individual uses. Excess does not equal style, but the two are closely linked because they both involve material aspects of the film. Excess forms no specific patterns which we could say are characteristic of the work. But the formal organization provided by style does not exhaust the material of the filmic techniques, and a spectator's attention to style might well lead to a noticing of the excess as well. (Thompson in Braudy and Cohen: 2004:515)

Here one may ask the question that to what extent the cinematographic autonomy of this particular style be defined as the contribution of A.Vincent? Is it not the director of the film who is solely responsible for this kind of creative element in the sequence? It

is true that up to a large extent the creative role of director is important even in this case and it is also well known that Sridhar was a master of melodramatic moments. But Vincent's contribution in this case as a cinematographer would be understood more clearly if we look at some other films for which he had done cinematography whose directors were different people. I will now look at two Malayalam films, whose aesthetic project rests on a different plane to get a clear idea of Vincent's style. The first film *Neelakkuyil* was made in 1954 and the second one *Mudiyanaya Puthran* in 1960. The first was made before *Kalyanaparisu* and the second after that.

Neelakkuyil, a film made in 1954 was directed by two young men who had an ambitious plan to venture into the developing Malayalam film industry of the 1950s. P.Bhaskaran was a well known progressive poet also associated with the left political movement of Kerala, and Ramu Kariat was associated with amateur theatre groups. *Neelakkuyil* in a sense personifies the ethos of the unified Kerala Movement of the 1950s, which aspired to unite the divided state of Kerala into a single state on the basis of language.

AS *Neelakkuyil* was made in 1954, the camera work for it was done by Vincent three years before *Uthamaputhran* (1958) and four years before *Kalayanaparisu* (1959). I have mentioned earlier that there are some marked features that Vincent used like the emphasis given to objects, space and natural surroundings in the first film, and the cinematographic performance in autonomous unit the second one. I have also mentioned that the contributions of directors could not be ruled out for the particular character of cinematography in these films. It is with this background I would like to approach the cinematographic style of *Neelakkuyil*.

The story of *Neelakkuyil* is quite simple: On a rainy day Neeli, a dalit girl working as agriculture labour in a village, goes to the house of Shreedharan Nair, the village school teacher and they become intimate. Their relation grows even more intimate and Neeli becomes pregnant. However in spite of her parent's toriture, Neeli did not reveal Nair's name. But Nair himself does not come forward to own her and marry another

woman of same cast. Neeli is rejected by her parents as well as the community and later dies soon after giving birth to a baby boy. The village postman, a socially committed and progressive person (the character played by director P.Bhaskaran himself) adopts the child and rears him up. An inner conflict develops in Nair, and finally he confesses the secret to the postman. Hearing this, the postman is not willing to give up the child initially, but later hand over the child to Nair and leaves for an unknown destination.

Neelakkuyil is not an exemplary cinematographic work of Vincent. He was barely 28 when he did the cinematography for the film and on many an occasion his craft shows the inexperience of unseasoned camera style. But in spite of all this limitation, the camera demonstrates on certain occasions a unique vision and stylistic distinctiveness. As I have earlier mentioned in the analysis of the two Tamil films, *Neelakkuyil* also contains certain autonomous sequences where the cinematographic work attains the level of independent performance. And there is also the specific treatment of visual objects through the isolation of objects or the treatment of bodies as isolated objects of fetishism.

First, I will take up the issue of objects gaining considerable space in the frame and sharing the spectator's attention with that generated by the human bodies or figures. The sequence I want to analyse appears in the 12th minute of the film and is connected with the meeting of Neeli and Shreedharan Nair in his house. Neeli is returning to her house and suddenly there is a heavy down pour, and she seeks shelter on the verandah of Shreedharan Nair's house. He asks her to move inside the house to escape from the rain and she obeys. She goes inside and goes into one of the rooms, and Shreedharan Nair goes back to bed and continues his reading. But he cannot concentrate on his book. There is some inner conflict in him and he is tempted to go inside the room where Neeli is. The conflict lingers and he tries to resist the temptation but finally succumbs. The sequence is around four minutes in length and contains little dialogue scenes. It can be analysed as follows:

Shot 1

Neeli enters Shreedharan Nair's house and he closes the door against the strong wind that is blowing in. Shreedharan Nair stands in the left foreground and Neeli in the background in the same axis. There is a bench between them where Nair's pet monkey is

tied up. Nair asks Neeli to go inside the room and sit there. Key light from the right is putting Nair's face and body in partial light. Low light falls on the figures of Neeli and monkey. Camera pans to right and we can see Neeli going into the room. A hanging lamp is swinging in the right foreground.

Shot 2

Lightning outside.

Shot 3

Rain lashes on the vegetation.

Shot 4

Nair goes back to his cot, lies down and continues reading. Key light falls from the right side. In the background there is a table lamp on a wooden stand and a pot can be seen placed on a window sill. Camera zooms to a close-up shot of Nair. Lamp in the foreground attains exaggerated attention. Nair can not concentrate on reading.

Shot 5

MCU. Nair is in a distracted mood.

Shot 6

A towel on a hanging stand in the room where Neeli is sitting is swinging in the wind blowing through the window. Frontal view shot of the room. But not from Nair's point of view. Key light is entering from the right side. Backlight through the window.

Shot 7

Nair gets up from the cot. Light falls from the right side of the scene. Calendar on the wall and pot on the window sill are clearly visible in the lighting.

Shot 8

He is walking in the room. Objects like the hanging lamp and pot in the window sill are clearly visible. He stops walking. Camera zooms in to a tight close-up shot of Nair. His body glitters in the sensuous light. High moments of conflict for him.

Shot 9

Swinging towel in the room.

Shot 10

CU of Nair.

Shot 11

Swinging towel...

Shot 12

CU of Nair. He becomes aware of an open window, through which rain water is pouring in. Goes there to close the windows.

Shot 13

CU Of Nair who is closing the windows. The pot on the window sill and clothes hanging in a wall stand is clearly visible in the lighting. He wipes the water from his body. Lighting from the left side his body is sensuous.

Shot 13

Swinging towel...

Shot of 14

CU OF Nair, light only on his body. Conflicting mood.

Shot 15

Lightning outside. Rain.

Shot 16

He turns to the room. Camera pans. CU OF Nair with the room in the rear. We can see a brass lamp on the top of a cupboard inside the room. He is hesitating and turns back, but still tempted and suddenly goes inside the room and closes the doors. Camera pans.

Shot 17

Movement of dark clouds. Lightning.

Shot 18

Panned camera now focuses on another window which is still open and beneath which the monkey was tied to a bench. Monkey is trying to escape from the rain water which is pouring in. The monkey's violent movement can be seen in the frame. The shot freezes into darkness.

In an earlier analysis of one sequence from *Kalyanaparisu*, I mentioned that the scene contained an average shot of the duration of 15 seconds. The total duration of the above mentioned sequence is four minutes. There are a total of 18 shots and this indicates

an average of four shots per minute which can be further divided and we get once again an average duration of 15 seconds. I am stressing this similarity not only to say that there are commonalities in the stylistic approaches in both these sequences, but I also want to stress that there is something about the particular approach of Vincent as a cameraman which I have earlier termed as cinematographic performance. In this case it is more pronounced, because there is hardly any dialogue in this sequence except one or two sentences that Nair utters in the beginning. Even though there is a strongly emotive background score, the scenes are very communicative even without it. Watching this sequence, one may arrive at the conclusion that the camera can communicate even without any usage of words or even music. This particular feature of the cinematographic act foregrounds the impressionistic/sur-realistic approach where the concept *photogenie* is found to be more important than the semantic aspect of the narrative. I am not saying that Vincent's cinematography entirely rejects the semantic aspects of the narrative cinema in which he worked throughout his career. But Vincent's cinematographic approach mainly focused on the image's autonomy within the syntagmatic structure of the cinematographic visualisation. That is, the image resists any semantic formation and resists developing any linguistic code in the sense that the image functions in a filmic structure formed through montage. It is relevant to quote Robert Ray: "Both the impressionists and the Sur-realists, in fact, often regarded narrative as an obstacle to overcome. ('The telephone rings', Epstein complained, pointing to the event that so often initiates a plot. 'All is lost';) Surrealist film watching tactics, for example were designed to re-assert the autonomy and ambiguity of images...."(Ray in Hill and Gibson: 2003: 67)

The sequence described from *Kalayanaparisu* is more poetical and takes place within a singular space, but the one from *Neelakkuyil* is more intellectual. There is a strong directorial intervention to bend the visuals towards narrative intentions: through montage. The alternative cuts between the interior shots of the room and the exterior shots of lightning and rain occur in different spaces. The relation between them is established through montage which further offers more meanings for the shot continuation. This difference between the two sequences is not only because of the

linguistic or cultural diversity of the two films. Rather it is attributable to the two different directorial styles behind these films.

However, if we analyse the particular sequence in *Neelakkuyil* we may see that the incorporation of certain objects in a frame is not accidental but quite and intentional and deliberate. For example in shot number 4, the camera which is positioned in a medium shot to capture the image of Nair who is lying down on the cot and reading a book, slowly zooms in to a close-up shot of Nair. But Vincent takes particular care that the lantern on the wooden stand is clearly included in the final close-up shot. It is quite clear that in the tight medium close-up shot, the lantern not only occupies a considerable portion of the frame but is also foregrounded thus making Nair's image comparatively smaller. This attention given to the lantern does have a particular semantic intention. The lantern as an image does not command any particular meaning which is of symbolic value in the sequence or of montage value in the shot. But its incorporation has an aesthetic significance that is to add value to the visual beauty of the scene. Here also we may recollect the impressionist/surrealist concept of the visual image's role in the cinematographic form. Andre Bazin in the "Ontology of The Photographic Image" speaks of the particular power of photography that can even surpass art. Bazin notes how the surrealists who viewed every object as an image tended to undermine the distinction between the imaginary and the real. Bazin writes:

[T]he surrealist does not consider his aesthetic purpose and the mechanical effect of the image on our imaginations as things apart. For him, the logical distinction between what is imaginary and what is real tend to disappear. Every image is to be seen as an object and every object as an image. Hence photography ranks high in the order of surrealist creativity because it produces an image that is reality in nature, namely a hallucination that is also a fact. (Bazin: 1967: 16)

Vincent's attention when cinematographing the sequence is concentrated on enhancing the beauty of the scene and the objects that are a part of the *mise-en-scene* have brilliantly incorporated into this project. He acknowledges not only the presence of such and such objects in the scene, but also asserts that its aesthetic prominence also has to be considered. The aesthetic of the shot is determined with respect to this consideration given to the object in the *mise-en-scene*. There occurs a reversal and the figure loses

prominence with respect to the object, or we can say that the figure gets its aesthetic uniqueness with respect to the particular perspective in which the object has a prominent aesthetic presence.

An interesting aspect of such utilisation of the objects in the shot is that their relevance is primarily aesthetic, and there is not a usage of the object as a particular signifier. For example in the above said sequence, the lamp is an object which does not have any signifying value in the entire sequence or does not create any kind of montage in the particular shot. Jean Mitry in his *Semiotics and the Analysis of Film* says that the close-up shot acquires a signifying function in relation to other shots in the sequence. He also stresses the tactile characteristic of the close-up shot. Mitry says:

As with every other kind of shot, although in a much more meaningful way, the close-up assumes a specific character only in the context which determines it. Yet if it becomes eclipsed by what it reveals, it proves nothing. If it signifies anything, it is immediately the idea suggested by the associations which the gun [object] has with events described in the sequence of which it is a part. (Mitry: 2000: 67)

But in the particular style used by Vincent the object attains a specific position which does not contain any signifying role, but only an aesthetic value due to its contribution to the formal structure of each and every frame. Mitry clearly notes that the image has the semantic autonomy in the continuity of a sequence. Even though its meaning is constituted only in the continuity of the sequence (Ibid: 73). Likewise, the image also attains an aesthetic autonomy within the represented space by not becoming an element of semantic continuity. In the case of Vincent's camera style, the object attains more a place of aesthetic autonomy than a semantic autonomy within the syntagmatic sequence.

That is the reason why the basic elements of Vincent's cinematographic approach cater not to a hermeneutics but a poetics, or what is termed by Gregory Ulmer as the *heuristics* of the film (Quoted in Ray in Hill and Gibson: 2003: 72). But the relevant question at this moment is whether the isolation of objects and the image resisting the semantic continuity of the narrative amount to any sort of fetishism of the image? My inquiry in this investigation is: what are the decisive marks that create an authorial

dimension in the cinematographic work of Vincent without considering any ideological analysis of his films. It is true that the fetishistic approach in which images or objects get an isolated prominence led to the incorporation of attractive components like faces, clothes and furniture in continuity cinema, as Robert Ray points out (Ibid: 68). But Ray also underscores the fact that an analysis or criticism based on isolated images can bring interesting results in Film Studies. It is relevant to quote Ray here:

A heuristic film studies might begin where photogenic, third meanings and fetishism intersect: with the cinematic detail whose insistent appeal eludes precise explanation. Barthes maintained that third meanings, while resisting obvious connotations, compel an 'interrogative reading'. In doing so, he was implicitly suggesting how Impressionist reverie could prompt an actual research method resembling the Surrealists 'Irrational Enlargement', a game in which players generate chains of associations from a given object. (Ibid: 72)

As I have mentioned earlier, it is the syntagmatic structure of shots that determines the cinematographic performance that Vincent attempts in a film like *Kalyanaparisu*, and the isolation of objects and their autonomous place in the continuities of montage in *Neelakkuyil* that forms the particular poetics of his cinematographic explorations. What are the other elements that create such a poetics in Vincent's cinematographic style? One of the basic elements that give a poetic substance to the cinematographic of Vincent is the extraordinary play of light and darkness within the cinematographic space. If performativity in his cinematographic is determined by the positioning of the shot and the rhythm created by that positioning in the temporal terrain of the narrative, the poetic dimension of his visual metaphors is created through the deft absorption of the object-image and their textures offered through the subtle employment of lighting and darkness. So there are three factors that play a major role in determining the poetics of the cinematographic work of Vincent: one, the shot created from a particular angle and frames scenes, figures or objects according to the narrative demands, while considering aesthetic possibilities. Two, the mise-en-scene like the materiality derives from the space and objects in the scene; and three, the particular lighting or textures created through obstructing light and using the darkness created through it.

Basically Vincent's mastery is expressed in two kinds of lighting. One is the deft use of natural lighting which he uses mostly in outdoor song sequences and two, the creative use of low-key lighting which is utilised to create textural patterns in interior shots and the enhancing of figures or objects to suit the cinematographic performance. The lighting patterns that Vincent uses in the above mentioned sequences are mostly in correlation with shots. We can notice a particular pattern in this correlation that the shot is dependent on the mise-en-scene and the lighting is dependent on the shots.

It can be represented through the following graphic representation:

[MISE-EN-SCENE/OBJECTS] <-- [SHOT/ANGLE] <--[LIGHT/DARK]

When Vincent did camera for the film *Mudiyanya Puthran*, a Malayalam film directed by Ramu Kariat in 1962, the poetical nature of his work was quite evident. The film contains some of his interesting studies using light and shade, shots with impressionistic and expressionistic character, some experimental shots using superimpositions and multiple exposures. As the film deals with a rebel protagonist who always detests any attempt of social forces to contain him, the lighting used in the film is in one way linked to the nature of the subject. The name of the film refers to the biblical story of prodigal son who finally succumbs to divine forces. In some shots Vincent uses kind of chiaroscuro lighting which can be noticed in the works of great Renaissance painters like Rembrandt, who often picturised biblical stories including the parable of the prodigal son.

The first shot of the film itself shows the protagonist sitting on a village bridge, in the darkening twilight. The character is sitting on the side wall of the bridge and lighting a beedi. We can see his face in the sudden lighting of the match stick. Vincent uses back lights to give dark shades to the figure of the protagonist. An interesting aspect of the cinematographic style used in this film is the way in which Vincent tries to darken the shot rather than give it pure light patches. As I have mentioned earlier what Vincent is doing in the films likes *Kalayanaparisu*, *Uthamaputhran* and *Neelakkuyil*, is the using of

light to give a particular texturing to the shots and which in turn forms poetry of geometrical formations. On the other hand in *Mudiyanaaya Puthran*, the geometrical formations are abandoned and the texturing attains a lucid flowing of light. The reason for this change could be that the space of *Mudiyanaaya Puthran* is primarily village based and Vincent tries to capture the dark and shady village light in most of the sequences. One of the major challenges for the cameraman is how to capture the twilight of the dusk and the lowing moonlight of the nights. *Mudiyanaaya Puthran* is a black and white film, and, in at least few shots Vincent tried to capture the colours of the light filled horizons. In *Neelakkuyil* the camera contemplated mainly the space of earth and in *Mudiyanaaya Puthran* on the other hand, it concentrated mainly on the sky. Or what we may call ephemeral elements like the sky, moonlight and twilight dominated the camera space of *Mudiyanaaya Puthran*.

In *Mudiyanaaya Puthran* we also notice a kind of fetishisation of the actor Satyan, who plays the lead role of the rebellious protagonist. Satyan was famous for his dark skin, but in the film the camera never attempts to give whiteness and thus fetishise his face through extra lighting techniques. What is foregrounded on the other hand is the rough machismo of the actor through a deliberate darkening of his body. Following the observations of Richard Dyer in his book *White* (1997), Susan Hayward says that the history of light technology is one that has always privileged the white face.

It has also been a device of gender differentiation. For the woman, light reveals her glowing whiteness and boldness (in all her purity). Differently marked by light, the dark-haired, dark-suited white male finds his face illuminated by a source of light (sidelight for example), that exposes his intelligence, virility or whatever-indeed at times his own white face will be illuminated in a reflective way by the woman whose face is the source of light.(Hayward: 2006: 234-35)

Perhaps such lighting technique and the fetishisation of the actors' machismo has something to do with Satyan's ascension in the 1960s as star of extraordinary machismo, which was even correlated with the left oriented cultural politics of Kerala in the 1960s. In one sense *Mudiyanaaya Puthran* took up the issue of taming the rebellious youth into the socially committed structures of politics. The script of the film was written by Thoppil Bhasi who was a left politician and an organiser of the Kerala People's Arts

Club (KPAC), the Kerala version of IPTA. In spite of all the socially conscious precautions of the script writer, the film was a celebration of individualism and machismo thanks partially to the directorial perspective of Ramu Kariat and partially to the distinct lighting techniques Vincent used in this film.

The poetic effect in *Mudiyanya Puthran* is attained not only through the deft usage of lighting and natural landscapes; there is also an interesting usage of still like impressionist images of village life. The slowness and flow of life in the village is captured using the stillness of the images. Even when the camera is trying to record movements in the frame, the perspective and impression is similar to that of a still photograph. There is one sequence in which one of the leading characters is singing a poem written by the famous Malayalam poet G.Sankara Kurup. The poem is visualised through a collection of images, which though moving, have a still life like impression. What Vincent is doing is not just to translate the literal images in the poem to visuals, but to create another poetic narrative through the selection and assimilation of a number of still like cinematographic images.

Thus Malayalam cinema was experiencing through the cinematographic works of Vincent, the immense possibilities of camera which not only improved the quality of visual images but also developed a new way of looking at cinematic images. The very fact that Vincent changed the way the cinematic image was created and the way it looked was not considered or debated at length by the early film critics, as this aspect was evaluated just as a technical competence or as a part of technological evolution. The most charitable critical consideration was limited to a casual comment like "Vincent's photography of the film was a notable feature of the movie...." And this put him into a precarious position in the history of Malayalam cinema, as a "good technician", in spite of the fact that he was one of the prominent figures who was responsible for transforming quite fundamentally the film watching sensibility, or what we might say was a way of familiarising audiences with "cinematic grammar". It is this radical evolution of cinematic form and visual style that Vincent's cinema embodies for the Malayalam film industry that I have tried to explicate in this chapter.

DIRECTOR'S PERSISTENCE

The late 1950s and the early 1960s were a busy period for Vincent as a cinematographer, and he worked with the most important directors of Malayalam and Tamil cinema of that period, enriching his experience of the medium and developing wide friendships in the film and literary world. As I have mentioned in chapter 1, Vincent's association with Chithralaya and directors like C.V.Sridhar was a great preparing ground for him to understand the depths of film aesthetics and technology. Even as he worked with such a committed and dedicated collective in the Tamil cinema field, his association with a developing Malayalam film industry provided him with opportunities to know more about the emerging trends of the Malayalam film industry during that period. During the early 1960s he was associated with a number of Malayalam films as a cinematographer. Films like *Mudiyanya Puthran* and *Moodupadam* (both directed by the maverick Ramu Kariat) were notable for their innovative approach to the medium taking up unconventional social themes.

It was with this background that Vincent entered the Malayalam film industry as a new director by directing a new film named *Bhargaveenilayam* in 1964. "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair, one of the leading film producers of that period played an important role in bringing out this film under the banner of Chandrathara productions. Nair speaks of about the background of the making of *Bhargaveenilayam*:

In the 1960s the office of Chandrathara Productions in Madras was a meeting place for many film personalities. I used to stay there whenever I visited Madras and Vincent was also a regular visitor there. One day Vincent Master told me that Guru's⁵ short story *Neelavelicham* (Blue Light) had a potential to be made into a film. I was also surprised as the story was not a very long one with some 10 pages and if it should be made into a film more work was needed. But Vincent Master was confident, and told me that if I could get Vaikom Muhammed Basheer to write the screen play we could proceed.(Parameswaran Nair-Interview: 2008)

⁵Eminent writer Vaikom Muhammed Basheer was affectionately called by his friends as "Guru"

"The first draft of the script of *Bhargaveenilayam* was around 500 foolscap pages", says Vincent, "It was very difficult to make a film on the entire script. So I sat with Basheer and the entire script was pruned into the most necessary parts" (Vincent-Interview: 2008). Even though Basheer was said to be very interested in films, *Bhargaveenilayam* was the only script he had written in the span of his 50-year long literary career. The script for other films based on his novels like *Balyakala Sakhi*, *Premalekhanam*, *Mucheettukalikkaranthe Makal* and *Mathilukal* were not written by Basheer.

Bhargaveenilayam is a study in darkness and the spirit of its aesthetics is more formal and experimental than creating a product for the consumer audience or for mass consumption. But interestingly it revolutionised spectatorship and set new rules of mass culture in the Malayalam cinema industry. The same stubbornness that Vincent and Parameswaran Nair have shown about direct for the script of *Murappennu* is visible in *Bhargaveenilayam* in matters of its visual treatment. Noted actor Madhu who did the lead role of the writer in the film acknowledges the uncompromising attitude of Vincent as a creator:

Vincent Master never thought that he was making films for a mass audience and their likes and dislikes should be considered during the period of production. He viewed the act of film making as an act of creation and always tried to involve the entire crew for such a creative work. The stress was on the act of creative satisfaction and not on implementing a particular format or formula of success. So even some failures did not deter him from the path he was pursuing. Whether the film succeed in the box-office is a different matter, once the film was made he had achieved the creative satisfaction. (Madhu-Interview: 2009)

Thus Vincent's visionary approach regarding visual aesthetics and formal strategies can be traced in *Bhargaveenilayam*. These formal principles are in fact a culmination of the entire experience he had earned as a cinematographer working in various Tamil and Telugu films. In one sense *Bhargaveenilayam* is a proclamation by Vincent on the issues and concerns would undertake in the subsequent period of his film making. The only difference is that we can read these concerns and issues not only in the fictional or narrative content of the film, but in the formal or visual strategies Vincent is employing in *Bhargaveenilayam*. Or in other words these visual strategies do not only

reveal certain aesthetic principles or narrative devices but foreground certain philosophical positions and perspectives of the director and which can be broadly termed his vision.

The narrative of *Bhargaveenilayam* operates on multiple levels. On the one hand, it is just a simple story of a writer who happened to occupy a haunted house to pursue his literary attempts. The writer unheeded the warning given to him by his well-wishers and continues to live in the haunted house. He develops a kind of illusory relationship with Bhargavi, a beautiful girl, who lived in that house and then later committed suicide after jumping into the well on the compound. One day the writer finds a photograph of Bhargavi from the haunted house and from then his relationship with the ghost is becoming more intimate and romantic. A few days later he finds a box from a locked room and it contains some letters and an old newspaper. These materials provide him with some evidential clues to reconstruct a love relationship between Bhargavi and a man named, Sashi Kumar, and the writer explores more information on the couple with the sole intention to write a story. In fact he starts to write the story but his investigations unfolds the mystery behind the death of Bhargavi, that both Bhargavi and Sashi Kumar were actually murdered by Bhargavi's cousin M.N.Nair who wanted to marry her.

The narrative reveals the following levels in the story.

-The protagonist, here the writer, mobilises materials that he gets hold of from the haunted house and conducts further investigations to write a story of Bhargavi with whom he develops a romantic relationship.

-His explorations and investigations reveal the real reason of Bhargavi's death and the facts that the writer unearths for writing the story in fact act as the material evidence of Bhargavi's death and ultimately it is revealed that she did not commit but was murdered by her cousin.

-In the last scene, Bhargavi's cousin who wanted to oust the writer from the house has a fight with the writer in front of the house, and in the end he accidentally falls into the same well into which Bhargavi had also been dumped. But the writer never informs the police about the incidents and ultimately it turns out that the entire story is actually

happening outside the law and society. The only people who witness the events and know the secret are the writer and the spectators of the film.

The philosophical plane of *Bhargaveenilayam* is that it was not only a film about the murder mystery, but created a sense of film watching as an act of having a mysterious relationship with the subjectivity of the protagonist. That is the spectator has a feeling that he shares a secret with the protagonist with whom he identifies and the entire act of film watching became a sort of exploring the secret and ultimately possessing it. This change was very important in the history of Malayalam film making and the traditions of aesthetics it practiced. That is the film became very personal and subjective in the sense that watching the film became a process of subjective contemplation instead of experiencing or witnessing a dramatic or spectacular event. Or, in another sense we can say that the spectator of the film is not just watch a spectacular performance on the screen, rather he also engages in an intellectual game with the cinematic art. These factors were very much considered when *Bhargaveenilayam* was conceived as a filmic art.

Bhargaveenilayam is a script based film. As mentioned earlier, the script of *Bhargaveenilayam* was written after detailed discussion between the writer Basheer and director Vincent. Facilitators like "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair also contributed in the writing the script but many accounts of the history of the film make clear that the script of *Bhargaveenilayam* is fundamentally a product of Basheer's and Vincent's. In fact, Basheer was very particular that Vincent should direct the film himself. V. Abdulla, another producer who participated in the paper work of the project wrote:

The story base of *Bhargaveenilayam* was selected after long discussion and serious considerations. It was based on Basheer's short story "*Neelavelicham*" (Blue Light). The story was a very straight one. Basheer was in search of a convenient house and finds an isolated one on the city limits for his creative writing. He was happy that the rent of the house was affordable for him. However he later came to know that the house was a haunted one and a female ghost was believed to be living there. According to public perception, a girl named Bhargavi had committed suicide by jumping into the well in front of the house because she was deceived by her lover. The story was among the beautiful ones written by Basheer and was also an excellent short piece published in Malayalam. When Vincent translated it onto celluloid it became one of the brilliant black and white films in the history of Malayalam cinema. Basheer's concern for the artistic

values of film was evident from his insistence that Vincent himself should direct the film. Even though Vincent was famous as a photographer, he had directed no films till that date. (Abdullah in Basheer: 2008:11)

Almost every recounts of the history/memory of the early Malayalam cinema industry recollects the fact that Vincent as a technical member of the film making collective was very keen on intervening in the creative formation of cinematic projects. For example John Paul, a noted script writer and historian of Malayalam cinema wrote at length about Vincent's contribution to the making of *Neelakkuyil*. Actor Madhu, who worked with Vincent from the film *Moodupadam* onwards, acknowledges that Vincent used to intervene in the various aspects of film production that is not only the technical aspects of cinematography but also the creative aspects of script preparation and direction. Writes John Paul:

Vincent Master's creative commitment was evident from the film *Neelakkuyil* for which he did cinematography in the year 1954. In that film there is a shot in which a water barrage near a paddy field is being broken in the rain and actor Satyan, along with other actors trying to prevent it. The crew was returning from the days work and on the way they saw the barrage being broken and people running to save it. Without losing even a moment Vincent Master shot the scene using the head light of the jeep and his skill and commitment was highly appreciated.(Paul:2009)

According to John Paul, Vincent's early association in the Tamil cinema with Sreedhar was distinct and with the creative bond that he shared with Sreedhar, he contributed technical assistance to almost all of his films under the banner of Chitralaya.

But as he turned a director in 1964, his creative intervention clearly surpassed that of the technical aspects of film-making, and he had to participate in the entire act of pre-production work including the script writing. This is one of the important aspects of the creative strategy of Vincent in terms of an authorial analysis. This and participatory intervention in the core activity of writing the script for the films is a typical strategy that Vincent adopts later in his work, and that which defines the nature of the films in which he has worked as a director. That is Vincent did not see his job limited just to the interpretation of the script written by somebody else for which he functioned as a director, but he actively engaged in the act of writing the script and thus intervened to define the content and tempo of the film as a final product. That is the authorial intervention of the films which Vincent directed can be defined not just in terms of their

formal difference or the way in which they were structured formally, but also in terms of their content or the treatment of the narrative and conceptual ideas of the concerned films.

In a personal interview conducted at Chennai, Vincent said that he used to make corrections and edit almost all the scripts with which he worked in the various periods of his directorial work. And one of interesting features of his filmography is that Vincent always depended on a well written script to make his films. And he had worked with eminent writers like Basheer, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Thoppil Bhasi, Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair, V.T.Nandakumar and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. But what is the nature of interventions he made while working on a script with these writers? Richard Corliss in his article "Notes on a Screenwriters Theory, 1973" writes that "after all, film is (as Andrew Sarris has observed) essentially a dramatic medium; and the screen writers are the mediums dramatists" (Corliss in Grant: 2008:144). Corliss discusses the relation between a fine director and a fine writer in this article and says that such a fine collaboration can bring interesting artistic results. It should also be noted here Corliss is critical of the traditional position of the auteur critic who, while stressing the creative aspect of the auteur, reinforces the false dichotomy of art and entertainment. Corliss writes:

William Wyler was absolutely right to hold the director is responsible for a "picture's quality"-just as a conductor is responsible for the composer's symphony, or a contractor for the architect's plans. But he must also be responsible to something: the screenplay. With it he can do one of three things: ruin it, shoot it or improve it [...] Realizing a screenplay is the director's job: transcending it is his glory. Despite the Writer's Guild's gripes, directing is a fine art not a lead- pipe cinch (as too many script writers have proved when they tried to direct a picture. (Ibid: 142))

Vincent was well aware that the importance of the script can not be underrated and intervened effectively in the making of all the scripts he directed. But his intervention in the script was limited to reinforcing the dramatic aspect of the story or the conceptual basis of its cinematic realisation. So we must look carefully at the scripts he directed to know more about his vision as a director and understand the formal difference that he created in the history of Malayalam cinema. We can understand this aspect if we look closely at the metamorphosis of two stories into well written screenplays on which he

directed his first two films. The first one is the screenplay of *Bhargaveenilayam* based on Basheer's story and the second one is *Murappennu*, a script based on his own story written by MT. I will look closely at the transformation of these two stories into screenplays before I look into the visual aesthetics of these two films along with others.

The story "Neelavelicham" written by Basheer is almost a mystical experience of the protagonist's while living in a haunted house. The protagonist in the story lives in a lonely bungalow named *Bhargaveenilayam* and does not heed his friend's advice that the house is possessed by the dreaded ghost of a girl who committed suicide there. The writer continues to live in the house, but tries to overcome his fears by developing a kind of romantic relationship with the ghost named *Bhargavi*. Gradually he forgets her presence and continues with his literary activities. But suddenly one day he has a mysterious experience which he can not explain logically. He was writing a story late one night when the level of kerosene oil in his hurricane lamp was low and the lamp was on the verge of extinguishing. He goes to his friends' house to borrow some oil. He has to stay on there for two hours due to heavy down pour and returns to his rented house by midnight. To his surprise, he sees a lit hurricane lamp in his room and a glowing blue light emanating from it.

There's blue light!

The white walls and the entire room are drowned in blue light...! The light is emanating from the lamp. A blue flame can be seen on top of the lamp at a two inch length...I stood there astonished and surprised.

Who lit the lamp, which was, without oil in it, on the verge of extinguishing? Where from does this blue light come to *Bhargaveenilayam*? (Basheer: 2009:20)

That is how Basheer ends the story. On the beginning of the story Basheer says that the experience of the blue light in the story was one of the wonderful experiences of his life. He terms it metaphorically a "bubble of wonder". He writes: "I have tried to blow this bubble using the needle of science. But I could not. Perhaps you could blow it; and interpret it and explain it (Ibid: 7)."

Basheer's story appeared in his short story collection *Pavappettavarude Vesya* (Whore of the Poor) in 1952. When Vincent and others opted for this story to make it into a film 12 years later there were not many dramatic moments in the story to make it into a

film for the public. Everything that gives flesh and blood to the screenplay had to be added to the skeletal one line of the story. In the story there's only one lead character, the writer, apart from sundry other characters like his friends, people he meets in the tea shop and others. But in the screen play the story is enhanced with more characters, a highly romanticised love story and an investigation into a murder mystery. That is the mysterious element in the experience of blue light is translated onto the screen as a detailed narration and visualisation of a murder mystery. Thus the mystery operates in the film on a multiple levels, the mystery of the ghost, that is whether there is a ghost or is she a hallucination of the writer/protagonist; the mystery of the death of Bhargavi, that is whether she committed suicide or was killed by somebody else, and if so who killed Bhargavi, and for what?

All these elements of mystery give an otherworldly character to the whole film. If the entire narrative in the short story is realistic, except the portion of the blue light, the realistic part of the film itself looks highly fantastic, and the element of distorted unbelief reverberates throughout the film. Even though this atmosphere of unbelief is created through strictly formal visual strategies, one can not deny that the screen play is also written with an intention of creating this sense of mystery throughout the narrative. So where is the clue in the story that is developed into a lengthy narrative in the film? The spatial locus of the story is the haunted building and its mysterious architecture which is kept unchanged in the film. But in the story Basheer talks about a room in the house which is locked and but which does not play any significant role in the narrative of the story. It is out of this locked room that the entire narrative of *Bhargaveenilayam* develops.

In the story, Basheer's narration about this room is confined to just one line. It is like this:

I have cleaned all the rooms, on both the floors, including kitchen and bath room, myself and purified it by pouring water. There was a lot of rubbish and a lot of dust. I have once again cleaned all the rooms using water. There was a locked room. I have not opened it then. (Ibid: 8)

But this room is opened in the screenplay and the writer finds a box from which he collects a number of letters, diary notes and old newspapers from which he reconstructs the life of Bhargavi. This reconstruction is explained as a story written by the protagonist that is narrated as the flash back in the film. In the fourteenth scene in the screenplay we see the writer open the locked room using his knife. He finds a box on which the letter "B" is written on the top. The box is locked with an old Miller pad lock. "Where is the Key? Where is the key of your life, Bhargavikkutty?" he asks. In scene 33, the writer in a mysterious moment find that the box is lying on the floor and opened with some letters and an old newspaper is strewn about. It is from these materials that the story of Bhargaviis reconstructed by the writer, and the act of reconstruction, in turns, becomes an investigation into the mystery of Bhargavi's death.

So in this story the protagonist, not only acts as a writer who writes the story of the heroine Bhargavi, but also acts as an investigator who inquires into her mysterious death and finally resolves the puzzle. So what is revealed in flash back is a romantic and tragic love story, a subtle and thrilling investigation into the murder mystery and an act of a struggling writer to cope with the unsettling experience he has encountered. So it is the additions that are made to the story to build the final script, and the elements of mystery extended from a single idea to the whole tempo of the film that explains the intervention of Vincent in the script and defines his authorial presence apart from the formal devices he employs to accent the same elements in the story.

The same is evident in the script of *Murappennu* written by M.T.Vasudevan Nair based on a story of his own named "*Snehathinte Mukhangal*" (Faces of Love). The story was quite straight and simple and dealt with some nostalgic impressions of the narrator on village life and the innocence of its people. But when the screen play was written, a lot of new additions were made. All these elements like the split in an old joint family, the division of properties, an unrequited love story and the influence of money in changing the value system were added in order to create a dramatic atmosphere. The domination of dialogue and the over dependence on dramatic sequences weakens the film form of *Murappennu* compared with *Bhargaveenilayam*. The narrative strategy of *Murappennu* is

overtly dramatic and confined mainly to medium level shots. But the sense of tragedy that is quite evident in *Bhargaveenilayam* is evident in *Murappennu* as well. If the story of MT is limited with some impressions, in the film it is totally transformed into a collection of a number of dramatic moments and in the end out rightly rejects the possibility for a happy ending. After various twists and turns, the film narrative finally seems to be coming to a well rounded end, but rejecting our expectations, one of the lead characters commits suicide spreading a pall of gloom not only in the narrative but also among the audience. This tragic sense is not good marketing strategy, but it went well with the distinct vision Vincent upheld as a director in *Bhargaveenilayam* and later in his various films.

This vision can be interpreted as one that employed the devices of mass culture, in a disordered and not so well closed ways. The closure of the various films that Vincent directed and their interesting ideological nature can be discussed elsewhere. But the closures of the first two films Vincent directed says something about the vision he had as a director of films where he used mass culture devices. Tania Modelski's article "The Terror of Pleasure: The Contemporary Horror Film and Post Modern Theory", provides some interesting insights to analysing films with such a disordered structure. Modelski writes:

What is always at stake in discussions of "Narrative pleasure" is what many think of as the ultimate "spurious harmony", the supreme ideological construct –the "bourgeois ego". Contemporary film theorists insists that the pleasure is "ego-reinforcing" and that narrative is the primary means which mass culture supplies and regulates this pleasure. For Stephen Heath, Hollywood narratives are versions of the nineteenth-century "novelistic", or "family romance", and their function is to "remember the history of the individual subject" through processes of identification, through narrative continuity, and through the mechanism of closure...But just as the individual and the family are *dismembered* in the most gruesomely literal way in many of these films, the novelistic as family romance is also in the process of being dismantled.(Modelski in Braudy and Cohen:2004:768-69)

If the end of *Bhargaveenilayam* was open ended and susceptible to multiple interpretation and conforms to popular demands, the closure of *Murappennu* was quite unexpected and destabilising to the expectations of the contemporary public at the time of the release time of the film. Both these films were different from the conventional stream of entertainment movies of the times, in the sense of their destabilised structure.

"Shobana" Parameswaran Nair, the producer of the film, pointed out that one of the comments made by the distributors of *Murappennu* before its release was that nothing is happening in the film for a long time (Parameswaran Nair-Interview:2008). *Murappennu* did not just use the unfamiliar south Malabar dialect for the history of Malayalam cinema; it also visualised the attractive landscape of that region and especially the enchanting natural scenes off the shore of the famous and beautiful Nila River. The scenes in the film were at one level a documentation of the life of the declining Nair joint families, and at another level a poetical trip through the mesmerising landscape of the Nila river bed and its surroundings. "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair has indicated that the one of the inspirations for selecting MT's story was that it provided an opportunity to picture the beautiful landscape of Nila and its surroundings. In 1972, M.T.Vasudevan Nair wrote a script for the director P.N.Menon named *Olavum Theeravum* in which the river played an important role in the story. In the script of the film MT says that the river is a major character in the story. But in *Murappennu* there is no indication that the river is given an important role in the narrative. In the script, there is only one scene in which the script writer MT makes certain observations on the river, linking it with the emotional situation of one of the characters. But Vincent brilliantly incorporates the visual dimensions of the river in various scenes of the film, not only in a metaphorical or semantic sense but also in a purely aesthetic sense. Especially a deep focus long shot of the river and its panoramic surroundings and the village boat moving across it is one of the outstanding shots in the history of Malayalam cinema. It is not only a unique study in the long panoramic shot, but also an excellent example of using natural textures to accent the visual attraction of cinema.

The destabilised nature of the films directed by A.Vincent can be explained not just in terms of the narrative or in terms of the instability of the script and its lack of coherence. It can be equally experienced in the cinematic or formal structuring of the film in that visual depiction of the film itself is rich with brilliant moments and equally impoverished with some shabby visual translations. But a close analysis of the different films directed by Vincent reveals the fact that this instability of the narratives is a distinct mark is noticeable throughout the filmography of Vincent. So consciously or

unconsciously, Vincent's films reveal three unique features, which can be termed the distinct mark of Vincent as one of the director, and which gives a specific authorial character to his films.

The first is the loose nature of the narrative, which lacks harmonious coherence and classical perfection even until the culmination of the narration, that is the narrative does not have a perfectly developing and culminating structure. It contains many gaps and cleavages which, in fact, offer the possibilities to enjoy the pleasure of the text as Roland Barthes explains it. Second, the formal structure of the films is rich with brilliant and distinct cinematic moments and equally shabby and not-well-attended moments of visualisation. Or the formal brilliance of the director is not revealed in each and every moment, but develops with ruptures and with a discontinuous nature. Sometimes, the film's narrative becomes simple and matter-of-fact and suddenly erupts with some brilliant moments of visual poetry. This mixture of plain and matter of fact visual strategy and poetical explosions of visual brilliance is repeated in almost all the films Vincent has directed. Thirdly, there is no thematic connection or ideological link between the themes of the various films he has directed. The theme of each film is different and clearly indicates a sense of unconcern about the nature of each and every theme he has handled.

However, even though there is no thematic unity between different films, there is a unique philosophic obsession with certain attitudes in certain stories, which can be termed as an aesthetic interest for the demonic, the mysterious and the unsettling nature of certain narrative patterns. This lack of coherence in the films directed by Vincent can be explained in terms of the concept of cinematic excess put forward by Kristin Thompson. Taking a cue from Stephen Heath's idea that homogeneity in a film is not part of the filmic system but merely an effect of the film, Thompson suggests that there is a tension between coherent elements in a filmic structure and the excesses in the film. Thompson explains this excess as rough parts that disturb the neat flow of the narrative. In Thompson's words:

The idea that the critic's job might include the pointing out of this excess may startle some. But we have been looking at the neat aspects of artworks so long that we

may forget their disturbing, rough parts. As Barthes say, "The *present* problem is not to destroy the narrative, but to subvert it." For the critic, this means the realization that he/she needs to talk about the aspects of the work that are usually ignored because they don't fit into the tight analyses.(Thompson in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 515)

In *Bhargaveenilayam* this excess operates at the level of dialogues which in fact are the monologues of the protagonist. Because there is no one in the film to respond to his talk and ultimately his dialogue turns out to be a schizophrenic talk to his own self. This talk sometimes turn to be sheer reciting of poetry and was received by the audience then not as poetic utterance but as a particular usage of sound in order to create an atmosphere of horror throughout the film. This poetic utterance is a particular style of writing that Basheer practices in many of his stories and novels and it always borders on irony. That is they create not only an atmosphere of terror, but also provide a sense of irony to the whole narrative. Thus the dialogues which are not the normal dialogues used by the lay public act as a kind of secret language that disturb the normal motivation of the narrative flow. There is an ambiguous edge that can be received in a highly ironical way in the sense that this tonal ambiguity in one sense relaxes the tensions of suspense in the film. There is this contradiction in the sense that the dialogues demonstrate a two way function of creating a tension of horror and relaxing the sense of suspense. Richard Allen analyzes in detail this ironical tone in Hitchcock's films which he describes quoting Schlegel as "artfully ordered confusion" and a "charming symmetry of contradictions"(Allen: 2007:6). Allen writes:

Hitchcock's tonal ambiguity not only relieves us in moments of suspense or solicits identification with the villain, it often drives a wedge between the emotions that a scene ought to solicit and the way in which we are actually invited to respond, in a way that leaves the spectator anxious or uneasy.(Ibid: 18)

There are a number of objects in *Bhargaveenilayam* which command excessive attention more than the normal devices to push the narrative structure. For example objects like lamp, knife, chair and bicycle all these catch the excessive attention of the camera to create a playful narrative break or an excessive aesthetic attention. For example, a hurricane lamp used by the writer is used in many places to accent the visual beauty of the frame (remember a similar lamp occupying excessive space in a frame in the film *Neelakkuyil*, where the hero appears.) The same lamp later appears as a

metaphorical sign for Bhargavi, indicating her bright beauty and fragile nature, which is compared to a spark by the writer, throughout the film. An animation of a knife is used in a scene, where one of the characters has a hallucinatory feeling that the knife is hanging above him and is moving automatically to pierce his stomach. The chair at first is indicated as a metaphor of Bhargavi, but later expanded to the idea of pervasive horror in the film. Later in the history of Malayalam cinema, the rocking chair in a lonely house is used as a metaphorical device to exemplify the ghost. The excessive attention these objects command can be compared with the understated manner in which certain other important objects which are inevitable for narrative motivation are treated. For example, the box that the writer gets from the locked room and the documents it contains commands least attention and consequently adds further mystery to the narrative. In fact, by giving this excessive attention to certain objects Vincent was certainly revolutionising an idle mass audience which was always trained to identify with the human heroes on celluloid. If *Neelakkuyil* was an attempt to depict the invisible bodies in the history of Malayalam cinema, *Bhargaveenilayam* was an attempt to register onto the screen objects that usually remain invisible, and was thus an assault on the anthropocentric positions of its vision. It is interesting to quote Kristin Thompson here:

[...] most viewers are determined to find a necessary function for any element the critics single out. For some reason, the claim that a device has no function beyond offering itself for perceptual play is disturbing to many people. Perhaps this tendency is cultural; stemming from the fact that art is so often spoken of as unified and as creating perfect order, beyond that possible in nature".(Thompson in Braudy and Cohen: 2004:516)

I have already mentioned that *Bhargaveenilayam* is a study in darkness. It was the first film-and perhaps the last one-which explored extensively the power and possibilities of black and white cinematography. If, on the one hand, it provided an opening for Vincent as a director, at another level it became a pinnacle of cinematographic excellence for him. One may also read the film as an ironic treatment of certain fundamental concepts of Indian cinema where the good/evil dichotomy is treated through a bipolar opposition of white/black. The dichotomy is depicted through various visual forms in the film and especially in the make-up and costumes. For example, the villain in the film P.J.Antony is shown by darkening his face extraordinarily, and Madhu and Prem Nazir,

the two heroes are depicted with giving a white make up on their face, accenting their whiteness or good character. The villain usually wears black or dark costumes and heroes are provided with white or light coloured costumes. The heroine of the film Bhargavi wears black costume till her love for Shashi Kumar begins, and wears only white clothes after her love develops and throughout the scenes in which she is seen as a ghost the costume is pure white, enhancing the purity and innocence of her self. In one scene when her lover Sashi Kumar appears in a black shirt and seeing it Bhargavi becomes violent and tears the shirt. The dialogue in this scene develops into a discussion on the association of white with uprightness:

Bhargavi: (crying) I have given all my colourful saris to others!
Sashi Kumar: Why?
Bhargavi: I thought you would like it!
Sashi Kumar: (wondering) Princess! I don't understand anything?
Bhargavi: (nagging Sashi Kumar) I thought you wear only white dress.
Sashi Kumar: Then?
Bhargavi: (crying) I too shifted to white dress like you. And...now (Basheer: 2008: 127)

This dialogue provides an insight into the deliberate use of black (darkness) and white in the film to connote good and evil.

If we stretch this analysis further we get another dichotomy that in the film the present represents darkness (black) and the past which is shown in flash back is represented by lightness (white). The black also signifies gravity and white lightness and romantic love. This interplay of black/white and dark/light dichotomy reverberates throughout the film through its distinctively handled black and white photography. But an interesting aspect of the film is that an undue importance is given to the role of the villain. The villain's character in the film named M.N.Nair is played by one of the excellent artist in the history of Malayalam cinema, P.J.Antony. Antony who proved his unique acting talent through a number of films like *Mudiyanyaya Puthran* and *Moodupadam* was not an actor who played traditional villain roles. One of the pioneers of the non-communist progressive theatre in Kerala, Antony was well known for the dramas written and directed by him. From the early 1960s onwards Antony was a noted presence in Malayalam cinema for his brilliant character roles. In 1973 he won the National award

for best actor for his performance in M.T.Vasudevan Nair's national award winner *Nirmalyam*. Antony's performance as the villain in *Bhargaveenilayam* stood out from the two good heroes played by Madhu (writer) and Prem Nazir (Sashi Kumar). In fact, the villain played by Antony is the only character who lives in the two different planes of the film that is in the present and the past (flash back). He is the only character who confronts two heroes. These factors point to the truth that *Bhargaveenilayam* is not only a study at the darkness in its formal level but also at the level of its content or narrative. The film deals with darkness through its distinct camera style which concentrates more on darkness than light and also on a character whose dark nature prompts him to possess not only the woman he desired but also her ghost.

Equally important is the distinctive nature of the love triangle and the consequent sexual connotations of the film. The operation of desire takes place not at a single level but at multiple levels in the film. The lead character in the film, the writer is attracted to the ghost because she is a beautiful woman and she inspires his romantic desire. His desire grows to such a level that he experiences the presence of Bhargavi through certain hallucinatory situations. The love between Sashi Kumar and Bhargavi is strictly romantic, and there is an eager desire on the part of Bhargavi towards Sashi Kumar which borders on a strong sexual urge. This is evident in the scene in which Bhargavi physically assaults Sashi Kumar, when she sees him wearing a black shirt. For the writer, Bhargavi is one who seduces him with her enchanting beauty and singing. The orphan Cheriya Pareekkanni who lives with the writer in the house as his servant for sometime thinks that Bhargavi is his wife and always talks about her with reverence. The villain in the story M.N.Nair's attraction for Bhargavi is of a perverted nature of obsessive possession. The reason why he wants to kill the writer is not only because of the fear that he may find out the mystery behind Bhargavi's death, but because he suspects that there is some kind of a relation between the writer and Bhargavi's ghost. MN does not only want to possess the real "Bhargavi" but also the ghost of "Bhargavi". Thus there are two kinds of triangles in *Bhargaveenilayam*. The first is the Bhargavi-Sashi Kumar-M.N.Nair triangle in which Sashi Kumar is eliminated by MN. The second is Bhargavi's ghost-the writer-M.N.Nair

triangle, in which M.N. is trying to eliminate the writer but is ultimately himself killed by an accident.

In his lengthy study of romantic irony in Alfred Hitchcock's films, Richard Allen says that in Hitchcock's work, human sexuality, deemed by definition perverse, is self-consciously displaced into style in the manner of a Freudian joke that at once disguises and reveals its sexual content (Allen:2007: xv). MN's sexual desire towards Bhargavi is of a perverse nature and this urge is expressed through murder and a kind of fetishisation of the sexual object. After MN murders Bhargavi, he fetishises her body in the building of her house, and he is very vigilant to keep its possession under his control. It is also the place where the secret of his two murders are hidden. In this sense, when the writer occupies the house he sees it as an encroachment not only on his fetish but also on his secret. The terror, fetish and secrets all define the perverse character of sexuality which MN as the villain of the story possesses and the writer wants to challenge which defines the entire aesthetic of *Bhargaveenilayam*. It should be noted that the terror in the film is developed not through the fear of the ghost of the murdered Bhargavi, but through a peculiar visualisation of the villain's body. It is the desire of MN and the threat posed by his body around which develops a kind of terror in the film. There is a metaphorical similitude between MN's body and the body of a black cat that appears in the house repeatedly. The eyes of MN are similar to the eyes of the cat, and thus MN's body is given a bestial character. And even his gruff voice and laughter is portrayed and presented in such a way as to evoke a sense of bestial terror.

Bhargaveenilayam is more than anything else an articulation of such a Frankenstein/Nesferatu like body of the villain MN/P.J. Antony, to create a new sense of excessive performance and body perception. What the audience was watching in such a new body was a new kind of body spectacle, to borrow a term from Linda Williams, in star dominated filmdom. I think it would be relevant to quote Williams at length to understand such a new body spectacle and the dimensions of the sensations/sensibility that it creates:

The body spectacle is featured more sensationally in pornography's portrayal of orgasm, in horror's portrayal of violence and terror, and in melodrama's portrayal of weeping. I propose that an investigation of the visual and narrative pleasures found in the portrayal of these three types of excess could be important to a new direction in genre criticism that would take as its point of departure--rather than as an unexamined assumption--questions of gender construction, and gender addresses in relation to basic sexual fantasies.

Another pertinent feature shared by these body genres is the focus on what could probably best be called a form of ecstasy. While the classical meaning of the original Greek word is insanity and bewilderment, more contemporary meanings suggest components of direct or indirect sexual excitement and rapture, a rapture which informs even the pathos of melodrama.

Visually, each of these ecstatic excesses could be said to share a quality of uncontrollable convulsion or spasm-of the body "beside itself" with sexual pleasure, fear and terror, or overpowering sadness. Aurally, excess is marked by recourse not to the coded articulations of language but to inarticulate cries of pleasures in porn, screams of fear in horror, sobs of anguish in melodrama (Williams in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 729).

Of course Williams is talking here in the context of the feminist criticism of body genres. But such an observation is relevant in the case of the villainous character, which is also a monstrous character. Williams write further: "In the classic horror film the terror of the female victim shares the spectacle along with the monster "(Ibid: 731).

In *Bhargaveenilayam* the ghost Bhargavi is portrayed not as a body of horror or as a victim of the terrorising male subject. Her figure is projected more as a figure of sublime and pure innocence. But the bestiality and monstrosity of the character MN is more pronounced. In fact the difference between the story "Neelavelicham" and the screen play of *Bhargaveenilayam* is the character MN who is a totally new creation in the film. As a dark embodiment of socially an unacceptable character and an "other" pushed to the extremes of moral codes the villainous character of MN was an entirely new creation in the history of Malayalam cinema.

Even though Bhargavi is projected as the metaphor of horror at the discourses developing in the film's public space, the real cause of horror in the film is the specific architectural features of the house and the darkness enveloping it. This horror is articulated through the mise-en-scene, formal devices and space in the film. In fact all the characters in the film including the writer are victims of the horror emanating from such a space and architecture. The only person who is not concerned is the character of the villain, who it seems virtually hide himself in this terrifying darkness. Or to put it in a

different way, he is the darkness and the consequent horror emanating from its specific articulations. His desires, anxieties and fears are displaced onto the spatial composition and object displays of the film.

Or one can confidently say that the character of MN, the villain in the film is the pure creation of Vincent as a director, not only in the sense of a character developing inside the narrative, but also through each and every formal articulation in the film. The nature of such a character and its various aspects can be located in the subsequent filmography of Vincent in many other forms. Marginalised figures or the "other" in the dominant social system of the filmic narrative always threaten the filmic discourse as figures perpetuating terror, desire or a kind of disturbance. Further analysis of films directed by Vincent in the subsequent years after the release of *Bhargaveenilayam* will explain much about these aspects. Considering those analyses we can confidently say that these specific attitudes and the registers act as a kind of authorial imprints in the various films he had directed in the following years.

Two important films directed by Vincent that came out in the 1960s with black and white photography were *Aswamedham* (1967) and *Thulabharam* (1968). Both these films were quite different from the early ones that we discussed in this chapter in the sense that both *Bhargaveenilayam* and *Murappennu* were not films with any social connotations for their themes. The theme of *Murappennu* has indications of the collapse of the Nair joint family system in the south Malabar region, especially after the new legislation introduced in 1939 in the Madras Assembly. This legislation repelled the traditional property relations of the Nair community of Malabar, which was followed a kind of matrilineal system until then. *Murappennu* (which means maternal uncle's daughter who is the life mate of the Nair man according to the traditional custom) was in a sense a documentary about the traditions, customs, rituals and conflicts in the Malabar Nair community. In that sense we can say that it has some socio-historical connotations, but there are hardly any political implications in the film apart from the issues of personal politics which are expressed through the psychodramas of the characters in the film.

But the issues rose by both *Aswamedham* and *Thulabharam* were quite different. They deal with a particular left wing political stream of Kerala society and the kind of criticism it put forward against traditional reactionary values. These films taken on a reevaluation of values that were dominant in Kerala society and looks at how such backward and retrogressive values can be challenged and a set of new values to be built up. The spirit of this value of reevaluation was put forward by the Communist Party in general and a group of left wing intellectuals in particular. Thoppil Bhasi, was one of the leading left wing intellectual, in Kerala who used his plays to create and propagate a new set of values in Kerala society during the 1950s and the 1960s. His prominent plays like "Ningalenne Communistakki", "Mooladhanam" and "Mudiyanya Puthran" were a perfect blend of popular elements and left wing progressive ideas. These plays were widely staged in Kerala and outside by Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC), a theatre group supported by the Communist Party of India (CPI). In his plays, Bhasi carefully selected some of the issues that were socially relevant and demanded immediate political attention from various social groups. While the writings of early progressive writers reflected certain social issues, Bhasi's plays consciously selected and brought social issues to the theatre to generate a wide social debate about them.

"Aswamedham" (1964) and "Thulabharam" (1967) were two such plays that Bhasi wrote and KPAC staged and commanded popular and public attention of the Malayali mass audience. Regarding the writing and staging of "Aswamedham", Bhasi wrote:

As a politician I used to visit the Noornad Leprosy Sanatorium and was always concerned about the leprosy patients there. When the Communist Party formed the ministry in 1957, Dr.A.R.Menon was the Health Minister. He wanted to conduct a holy war against the leprosy disease. An eminent physician himself, Dr.Menon introduced a bill in the state legislature assembly, in this regard. The dominant provision in the bill was that if any leprosy patient was found in the public space he would be arrested and confined to imprisonment. Nobody opposed the bill in the legislature assembly. When the assembly was in meeting, I got a telegram from Dr.Sankaranarayanan Unnithan, the superintendent of the sanatorium....I went to Noornad immediately. Dr.Uniithan, who is normally a cool guy, was very angry on that day and he asked me: Is disease a crime?

"How can a disease be a crime?" I replied.

"If disease is not a crime why are you enacting a law to arrest and confine leprosy patients who appear in public places? Why is there is no such legislation to arrest tuberculosis patients who pose more a threat than the leprosy patients."

When returning to Trivandrum to attend the assembly session my mind was repeating the questions raised by Dr. Unnithan. He had already informed me about the inhuman attitude of society towards leprosy patients, just because of lack of knowledge.(Bhasi: 1993: 212-13)

Bhasi's interest to write a play about leprosy patients was motivated by this personal experience. In fact he saw the act of writing a play and staging it as a kind of political activity in order to raise public awareness about it. This was also the reason for writing his next play "Thulabharam" in 1967. On writing "Thulabharam" Bhasi said:

I have completed "*Thulabhram*" by the end of 1967. The sudden provocation for writing this play was the news that a worker was reprieved by the court, from the murder of another worker, who was the only earning member in a family. I have already experienced that the legal system is more an obstacle in finding out the truth. In the Sooranad case⁶ the communists who were convicted were either murdered inside the lock up or got rigorous imprisonment. This was because the communists who were underground could not get proper legal assistance (Ibid: 213-14)

Interestingly both these plays attempted to raise two important issues that had not commanded much attention by other writers or dramatists. The first dealt with the issue of medical apartheid and the second one with that of the insensitivities of the legal or disciplinary mechanisms of society. Both these plays were made into films with Vincent as its director and both *Aswamedham* (1967), and *Thualabharam* (1968) were huge box-office successes and brought great recognition to Vincent as a director. These two films tripped him into a new arena where he is considered one of the great directors of the Malayalam cinema and one who blends the elements of popular culture and the issues of social concern with highly valued artistic merits.

If *Bhargaveenilayam* was a study in darkness *Aswamedham* is a study in anguish, the anguish created through the fear of disease from which society wants to turn its eyes. In the story, the heroine Saroja is gradually being ostracized by her family, lover and the society around her. The gradual distancing of her near and dear make her withdraw into the lonely recesses of the leprosy sanatorium. In the sanatorium, Dr. Thomas is a person who understands the pathetic situation of his patients and devotes his life not only to treat

⁶ A peasant struggle occurred in southern Kerala, as part of the communist's 1948 Calcutta thesis, which the then Travancore-Cochin Congress government wanted to repress by using police force. The angry peasants attacked the police team and one policeman was killed in the incident. Thoppil Bhasi and others were convicted in this case.

their diseases but also to change society's attitude towards it. However, Thomas is not able to bring about a complete change in society; nevertheless he wants to continue with his committed activities without heeding the critical attitudes of society. Propounded as a realistic and progressive work, *Aswamedham* has traces of Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen's famous naturalist/realist drama, *An Enemy of the People*, in which Dr. Thomas Stockman, the lonely physician fights against society's insensitive attitudes towards the pollution of the water bodies of the city. Dr. Thomas, like Dr. Stockman fights against a lazy society which continues to live with its complacent attitudes and does not want to change its redundant values. In *Aswamedham*, the specific and personal rejection of Saroja develops into a full awareness of the political position that has to be taken towards the ostracization of the diseased by society.

In 1970, in an interview given to a magazine, A. Vincent said that there was for him a great attraction to work in the Malayalam film industry, where a particular type of realism was very dominant and he enjoyed working with such an atmosphere (Vincent: 1970). Actually Vincent was talking about the good cinema movement in Kerala in which he had a major role along with other directors like K.S. Sethumadhavan, M. Krishnan Nair, Ramu Kariat and P. Bhaskaran. All these directors took major literary creations and converted them into films with their own vision. For example, if Sethumadhavan explored the possibilities of actors' performance in the films and Kariat experimented with strange landscapes of peoples', Vincent's interest was creating a world of emotional "extremeness" through cinematographic innovativeness and emotional build up. We can say that as a director he locates a particular emotion which works as a core element in the film's story content, and then employs his whole energy to develop it into the entire body of the film. The actors are not allowed to perform at an undesirable level. Only what is necessary for the emotional building up of the film is taken from them. This is because Vincent knows how to substantiate this emotional build up through the visualisation of mise-en-scene, spatial formations and the deft use of angles, lighting and non-figurative objects. Later when he started directing colour films, the intelligent usage of colour was also brought into this directorial principle to reap the specific results.

It is the same directorial principle that was operational in a film like *Aswamedham* to attain a particular emotion being built up through the incorporation of the above mentioned elements. As I have said earlier, the fundamental emotion that was dominant in the film *Aswamedham* was the anguish experienced by Saroja, the heroine in the film, after it is confirmed that she is infected with leprosy. The disease is a cause of her isolation not only among family members but also from her lover and the members of society. This isolation creates a particular anguish in the character and she gradually realises that she belongs to a particular creed of people who are rejected by society and who have to live totally outside its social system. As the film develops we also realise that this kind of isolation is experienced not only by Saroja but also by Dr. Thomas who stands by his position that leprosy is not an incurable disease and it is for society to change its attitude of isolating leprosy patients. This alternative value system upheld by Dr. Thomas makes him a lonely person in his own family.

As a progressive play *Aswamedham* written by Thoppil Bhasi and staged by the KPAC was concentrated more on experiencing the sociological change that is needed through progressive social action. But the film directed by Vincent was different in that it was a distinct representation of the anguish experienced by individual who is rejected or alienated by society. This issue of alienation of the individual because of the tyrannical attitude of society can not be explained or resolved just by any progressive ideological position. That is, if the realism in the play was an issue of sociological analysis, in the film, it becomes an issue of existential or psychological angst. In the film the disease takes a backseat and the individual's alienation from society in its various aspects is foregrounded.

It was the anguish caused by such an alienation that converted the film into an entirely distinct artistic experience and still makes the film one of the best ever made films in the history of Malayalam cinema. Vincent created an intense atmosphere of anguish and incorporated it throughout the body of the film through his deft handling of cinematic space and a concentrated building up of imagery to reinforce the highly disturbing emotion of anguish. An interesting scene is the barren landscape near the sanatorium where Saroja and the old leprosy patient whom she calls uncle meet and

exchange their sorrows. In these moments the camera is very focused on the surrounding landscape and the cactus plants growing in the barren earth. That is the anguish and sorrow of the characters is expressed not just through their highly emotive acting or body language, but through the surrounding space and building up of the imagery of anguish that includes and saturates the mise-en-scene in which they are placed.

The space where the leprosy sanatorium is located is projected as a hunted space with its wide expanse and fenced compound. The fence in the sanatorium compound is a strong metaphor of the segregation and the consequent alienation of the inmates. The vast space of the sanatorium compound and the lonely human beings inside it are concrete expression of the loneliness and anguish experienced by the patients confined in that space. In the play *Aswamedham* the thrust is on the advance of the science and its enlightening values. But in the film this spirit of the advancing scientific values is not that is precipitated at the end. At the end, it is the anguish experienced by the alienated leprosy patients or speaking in general that of the alienated individual in a barren space of insensitiveness to their predicament that remains. It is very interesting to think about a story in which the values of social commitment are transformed into the contradictions that the individual face in a tyrannical society. Ibsen in his play *The Enemy of the People* says that the individual who stands alone is the strongest in the world. In a sense *Aswamedham*, the film directed by Vincent was a subtle critique of Kerala society where social positions gained prominence over individual positions or aspirations. The same challenge that individual poses before a society, which wants to suppress and alienate him, is repeated in many subsequent films directed by Vincent. This approach, I think is derived from the particular vision that Vincent as a director and which in turn laid the foundation for his directorial principles.

These directorial principles have contributed to make *Thulabharam* one of the most widely watched and recognised Malayalam film at the end of 1960s. Vincent received the first Kerala State Award for the best director in 1968, for directing *Thulabharam*. In the same year the film earned national award for the second best film, and the heroine in the film Sharada earned the national award for the best actress. The

film was widely discussed as a perfect melodrama in which the leading role is handled by a female character.

I have already mentioned what Thoppil Bhasi said about the inspiration behind the writing of "Thulabharam". According to him the play deals with the issue of the limitations and the inability of the legal system to provide justice for the needy. The insensitivity of the judiciary to the grievances of the downtrodden is foregrounded in the play and this also like *Aswamedham*, uses a personal and specific experience to explain general sociological questions. The spirit in the play is to raise a specific sociological problem in public space and develop a kind of social discourse on it. But the film on the other hand deals only with the experience of tragedy at its deepest level. At one level, the film can be interpreted as a realist narration of the life of Vijaya, daughter of a righteous widower, who fights many legal cases to get his rightful property from the family, but ultimately become a destitute and dies. As the widower's only daughter, Vijaya becomes an orphan and hopes that her lover will help her. But he deceives her and Vijaya's life becomes quite hopeless. At this juncture, a trade union leader, a family friend of her father's, comes to her rescue and consequently she becomes his wife. After this marriage she leads a difficult working class, but happy life with her husband Ramu. One day Ramu is killed by his political rivals and Vijaya and her children are fall into a poverty ridden life. Unable to see her children becoming beggars she decides to commit suicide along with them and takes poison. Her children die but she is survives and is prosecuted for murdering her children and it is her old college-mate Vatsala who as a public prosecutor appears in court against her. In the court Vijaya narrates her story and requests the court to announce a death sentence to save her from this hell of a life.

The film begins with the court scene and ends with the same scene and between these two scenes the story of Vijaya is narrated as a flash back. At the beginning camera is positioned from the Vijaya's point of view and when the judge turns to Vijaya, he is actually turning into the camera or, we can say, to the spectator. The confrontation between Vijaya and the judge is thus transformed into a confrontation between the spectator and the court. One may read in this peculiar camera position an element of

involving the spectators/audience in the play. But *Thulabharam* is not a film which offers for its audience a space for self-awareness. The film is a building up of emotions which can be termed as an episodic creation. The tragic destruction of Vijaya is gradual and it unwinds to the narrative step by step. We can explain these narrative developments in the following way:

1. Vijaya is developing love affair with Madhu--her father's legal fight fails, he becomes a pauper and dies of a sudden stroke.
2. Vijaya becomes homeless and her lover abandons her in favour of a better proposal.
3. Trade Unionist leader Ramu offers residence to Vijaya, both marry. Vijaya starts to live a working class life, with her husband and three children.
4. Lock-out declared in the factory where Ramu is working. The family passes through the bitter experience of poverty.
5. Worker's struggle succeeds and factory reopens but on the victory day Ramu is murdered by political rivals.
6. Vijaya is again faces loneliness with her children. Intense poverty forces the children to beg and steal. Apart from poverty Vijaya has to face the challenge of keeping her honour. Ultimately she decides to commit suicide by mixing poison in the food.
7. While attempting suicide, the children died but Vijaya survives and convicted for murder.
8. Now completely alone, without parents, husband or children, Vijaya in the court pleads for capital punishment from the judge.

The emotional tone from the beginning to the end in the film is a change from moments of happiness to moments of deep sorrow. The film ends with a high tragic moment when Vijaya tells her friend Vatsala that she would prefer to get a death sentence than an escape from the clutches of law. The changing emotional moods in the film are articulated through incorporating different visual elements which conveyed those emotions quite powerfully. The most striking visual element is the Chinese fishing nets which are used in multiple times as strong metaphors to convey the emotional variations

of the film. No other Malayalam film has exploited objects and landscapes for their beauty and metaphoric possibilities. Many outdoor locations in the film, like the vast landscape near the backwaters and imposing architectures are brilliantly incorporated to the emotional building up of the film. In this sense *Thulabharam* exemplifies Vincent's keen eye for recording the material reality of the cinematic space and thus stresses Siegfried Kracauer's observation that life "as captured by the camera, is a predominantly a material continuum" (Kracauer: 1997: xlix). What Kracauer writes about the true artist is very much relevant to the particular directorial style that Vincent pursued in his film career:

The true film artist may be imagined a man who sets out to tell a story but, in shooting it, is so overwhelmed by his innate desire to cover all physical reality-and also by a feeling that he must cover it in order to tell the story, any story in cinematic terms, - that he ventures ever deeper into the jungle of material phenomena in which he risks becoming irretrievably lost if he does not, by virtue of great efforts, get back to the highways he has left. (Ibid: 1997:255)

Vincent as a true artist risked his going deeper into the jungle of material phenomena, but he never got lost there. As a director who was well aware of the spectator who wants to see, or hear the story he is about to tell, he again and again returns to the highway of that story track.

During the end of the 1960s Vincent directed two colour films *Nadi* (1969) and *Triveni* (1970). In fact the possibilities that colour offered were immense for a director like Vincent who wants to use different visual aspects to communicate experiences and meaning. The colour film helped him to visualise the mise-en-scene more profoundly and enhance the emotional content of the film, like eroticism, tranquility and violence in an exemplary way. For Vincent, who has a background of painting in oil and water colours, the colour film offered, much possibilities. In the black and white film, the ways to create a parallel language were confined to mis-en-scene or objects. But the possibilities that colours offered were profound in their nature. As a painter Vincent knew that colours can attract more attention than objects. It is interesting to quote certain observations made by Erich Rohmer in this regard:

[...].Modern painting's great idea is to have given colour a life of its own or at least to have made it the absolute ruler of the canvas, the supreme value. For van Gogh, Cezanne or Matisse, the sky is blue before it is sky. The green of a fruit spills on to a table or to a space, if harmony so demands. The painter has intentionally overthrown the barriers separating the three natural kingdoms: animal, vegetable and mineral. Only the greatest have been able to resuscitate them by an artifice that is no longer academic, to express the "substance" without using the "relief", like depth without using the perspective.

What was a paradox in Manet's time is merely a commonplace today. The modern schools and perhaps one hundred years of black-and-white photography, have taught us to distinguish "value" from "nuance". We know, as Gauguin, I think, said: those oranges are brighter more "orange" when the weather is gray. We have learned to see like painters. (Rohmer: *Vacche and Price*: 2006: 124)

There is a scene in the film *Nadi* (River) where a basketful of oranges fall into the river from the orange seller's basket. The scene subtly indicates the drowning of a little girl in the river, but for Vincent it was the beauty of those oranges falling into the green water in the river and its colourful contrasts that mattered. The scene is not developed like the one in Andrei Tarkovsky's famous image in *Ivan's Childhood*, where the horses on a road eat apples fallen from an apple cart. But no other director in the Malayalam cinema of those times would have brooded upon those fallen oranges which comments upon a tragic death.

Nadi is a strange film in the history of Malayalam cinema, as the entire story of the film takes place in two house boats. Two neighboring Christian families are staying in two boats which are anchored on the Periyar River to offer their payers in a church on the river side. The families have a quarrel between them and are not on talking terms. However, there develops a love affair between Johnny and Stella who belong to the rival families. The families are unable to reconcile in spite of the intervention of the priest. There is a sudden change when Baby, the young daughter of Stella's elder sister drowns in the river while they are about to return to their homes. The story of the film is discontinuous and does not offer a very coherent narrative. But the film was quite a success for its beautiful songs which still continues to be evergreen hits. And the unique story and the aesthetic and formal challenges of the film stand out.

The entire location of the film is the Periyar River and its beautiful surroundings. The interior of the huge country boats are attractively decorated and their structure and design are carefully recorded by the camera for their sheer architectural beauty. Vincent

said that parts of the interiors of the boats were shot in the studio where a section of them were artificially created (Vincent-Interview, 2008). There were a number of aerial view points of the boats lying on the river, which were shot after making a miniature of those boats. Directing was for Vincent a sort of architectural experience and he mobilised every new kinds of materials to achieve a particular visual effect. It was this kind of architectural materiality that distinguished Vincent's films from that of the other directors of his times. For example, Madhu comparing Vincent with K.S.Sethumadhavan and in an interview said that while Sethumadhavan was an engineer, Vincent was an architect (Madhu-Interview: 2009). An engineer conceptualises the plan in his mind and gives instructions to his subordinates to get it realised. An architect on the other hand, participates in the realisation process using each and every material available to him. While the former can be termed as a kind of scientific work, the latter is in every sense an artist's endeavor. It would be interesting to quote Angela Dalle Vacche's observations on Michelangelo Antonioni's *Red Desert*, a master work where elements of painting and architecture intersect:

There the rusty cables of the ship and its round boilers, its coloured pipes and metallic loopholes, repeat the internal décor of the factory. While all these elements could function as practical objects, with their outlines and bulky shapes repeating the themes of measurement and sturdiness already encountered in the opening architectural outdoor shots, the components of the ship, to our surprise, transfigure themselves into elegant design. It is as if heavy mundane technology had become subordinate to a light aesthetic exercise. (Vickie in Vacche and Price: 2006: 185)

I am not saying here that Vincent's concentration on architecture and colour are very similar to Antonioni's "intention to indulge in purely pictorial effects the way an abstract modernist artist wants to paint about painting itself" (Ibid:184). But Vincent's films clearly utilise those moments where the architectural and colourful elements of images can dominate the simple figurative elements of the narrative. For example, the huge country boats, their interior and exterior, their architectural materiality, surface textures and nuances of the colours are either brilliantly incorporated into the narrative or highlighted for their sheer beauty. In spite of the fact it was Kodak Eastman colour stock that was used, in which colour differentiations is not as sharp as new colour stocks, we can see particular colours competing for the attention of the spectator. Even in the scenes

where the heroine Stella wears pure white sari and blouse, Vincent makes sure that the costume is a well embroidered one.

Film historian John Paul says that shooting a film with only two country boats, the river and the river bed as its location was really a challenge and it is only his willingness to undertake such challenges that distinguishes Vincent from other directors. He says, "The script of the film was written by P.J. Antony on the basis of his childhood memories. The practice of visiting a far away church in a boat and staying in it for days to offer prayers was a very old custom. When Vincent was making the film *Nadi* in the year 1968, that custom was already obsolete. In spite of that Vincent was able to recreate the entire atmosphere and create an entirely different filmic experience" (Paul-Interview: 2009). *Nadi* has all the systemic building up of emotions that are visible in a Vincent film. But the film stands out for the distinct eye of the director who watches the material richness and colourful pattern around his space and records it carefully to create a different world of materiality. The huge country boats in the film always maintain a stoic presence, keeping their strength and gravity against all the tragedies of life. Vincent never misses their material presence and their rough beauty. They become a part of the metaphorical counter language that flows parallel to the filmic narrative.

In *Triveni*, the presence of colours is used carefully with an intention of activating the entire atmosphere of eroticism in the narrative. The costumes used by the characters have strong colours like red or blue to emphasize their sexual desire and strong passion. Vincent utilised all the available sources of colour like lamps, fruits and even mud pots to create an atmosphere of electric passion. For example, in the village tea shop scene in which Sivaraman and Thankam flirt with each other, their costumes are carefully selected in order to create an atmosphere of eroticism. A ripened banana bunch hanged above them with its glowing yellow colour and indication of fertility and fleshiness. The big copper samovar in the shop glows in the fire and spitting hot steam. In another scene, Thankamma is taking two mud pots which are a bright mud colour and they seem brighter in the background of the black colour of the country boat. In the scene when Sivaraman and Thankamma secretly meet near the shore of the backwaters, the scene has a full

erotic charge with multiple uses of colours. Apart from the costumes with exotic colours, there are multiple colour sources like the yellow coloured coconuts on the small coconut tree, red flowers, and the glittering water in which the glowing moon is reflected. Even the rhythmic movements of a small country boat on the backwaters emanate dark blue colour through specific lighting.

Vincent never exploited colour every where just because the colour film allowed him to do that. In this sense *Triveni* can be compared with Ramu Kariat's *Chemmeen* in which colour costumes are given to almost every character, just to exploit the possibilities that the colour film stock offers. On the other hand in many scenes in *Triveni* the stark exploitation of colour is done away with. In this sense Vincent's position can be compared with the philosophy of colour put forward by Hitchcock:

I should never want to fill the screen with colour; it ought to be used economically –to put new words into the screen's visual language when there's a need for them. You could start to colour film with a board room scene: somber paneling and furniture, the directors all in dark clothes and white collars. Then the chairman's wife comes in wearing a red hat. She takes the attention of audience at once, just because of that one not of colour. (Hitchcock quoted in Allen: 2007: 221)

It is also relevant here to quote Richard Allen's insight into Hitchcock's colour practice: "...conveying mood and emotion is central to Hitchcock's colour practice, he is more interested as we shall see, in using colour to use a system of meaning or signification that supervenes upon the everyday world." *Triveni* was a film which unsettled the dominant moral code of modern Kerala society where family values are excessively worshipped. The film with its strong erotic format and a story of triangular a relationship raised some critical question about the traditional moral code and its sexual politics. Vincent's usage of colour in that sense acted as a strong meaning system to raise some serious and contemporarily relevant questions.

Summing up this chapter, I will say that Vincent graduation as a director with the film *Bhargaveenilayam* was not just a growth or transformation of a director who had a clear command over the visualization of the film. Vincent in fact had clear opinions about selecting the story, casting the star and utilizing the non figurative components of the

mise-en-scene and outdoor locations. Noted producer Ravindranathan Nair, popularly known among the film field as General Pictures Ravi, has said in a recent interview that when he approached Vincent with an intention of making a film based on a novel written by noted writer Parappurathu, he did not show any interest (Neelan:2009). His 1967 film *Nagarame Nandi* for which M.T.Vasudevan Nair wrote the script is said to have documented Madras city, but unfortunately no print of the film survives. Vincent's discreet sense of selecting outdoor locations can be noted in the film *Murappennu* (1965), for which MT wrote the script. One of the attractive features in the film is a deep focus shot from a high angle which shows the village, River Nila and the people crossing the river in a boat. Using the same location for various films has become a cliché in later years. But the beauty of this marvelous shot stands on its own.

Vincent as a director has worked with different script writers like M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Thoppil Bhasi, V.T.Nandakumar and Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair. But what differentiate his various visualization for these different script writers are the different visual metaphors he is using for these films. The river bed in *Murappennu* or fishing nets in *Thulabahram* are very appropriate for the dominant mood that is created for the film. That is apart from the specific aesthetic advantage that these metaphors have in the particular films, they form a distinct language of the director's. They form the specific Vincent mark that is registered in these films and that gives them a particular individual dimension or what we call auteurial signature. We will look into the distinctive signature style and how these formal features go hand in hand with thematic characteristics and their differences from the work of others.

THE AUTHORIAL INSCRIPTIONS

Can Vincent be termed an *auteur* in the aesthetic sense of the term as used by the French critics and later used to define the filmic project of various directors like Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, John Ford or Akira Kurosawa? The term is a loaded one and is generally deployed to denote a set of authors who leave their definite marks on the creative format of the film and whose stylistic or philosophic positions can be traced through certain repeated usage of images, style or thematic consciousness. My attempt here is not to make an evaluation of the films of Vincent by comparing him with the directors or prominent aesthetic streams of his times or evaluate his work in terms of the accepted canonical aesthetic concepts and to state that his works are superior or inferior. On the other hand, I will look into the environment in which Vincent as a leading technician and director emerges in the arena of Malayalam film history and how he attempts to attain a space of his own by gradually developing a filmography that includes a highly divergent thematic and a definitive style.

Film making for Vincent was a part of a deep creative activity and he attached ritualistic importance to it. For example he was very obsessive about the purity of manual cinematic technology and was critical of the new digital techniques of film making. Shibu Chakravarty, a noted scriptwriter and lyricist, who worked with Vincent on a number of films and who made a documentary film about him talks about the reverence with which Vincent valued celluloid film stock. "Vincent Master never liked the new digital editing system. He told me that only when you take the film in your hand and mark it manually you get a real feeling about the work you have created." (Chakravarty-Interview: 2009). The materiality of the film and its physical sensation were very important for him, thus clearly indicating the reverence he had for the creation of a film. This aspect defines the total immersion of his personality in the act of cinema making. Perhaps this reverence

can be understood in the context of the phenomenological importance that photography has always had, according to Vivian Sobchack:

Until very recently, the photographic has been popularly and phenomenologically perceived as existing in a state of testimonial verisimilitude-its film emulsions analogically marked with (and objectively 'capturing') material traces of the world's concrete and "real" existence. Photography produced images of the world with a perfection previously rivalled only by the human eye. Thus, as Commolli suggests, with the advent of photography, the human eye loses its immemorial privilege and is devalued in relation to the "mechanical eye of the photographic machine", which "now sees in its place". This replacement of human with mechanical vision had its compensations however-among them, the material control, containment, and actual possession of time and experience. Abstracting visual experience from a temporal flow, the photographic chemically and metaphorically "fixes" its ostensible subject as an *object* for vision, and concretely reproduces it in a material form that can be possessed, circulated and saved, in a form that can over time accrue an increasing rate of interest, become more valuable in a variety of ways. Thus, identifying the photograph as a fetish object, Commolli links it with gold, and aptly calls it "the money of the real"-of "life"-the photographs materiality assuring the possibility of its "convenient circulation and appropriation. (Sobchack in Utterson: 2005: 131)

Vincent always had the ken for learning different features of film making and utilising it to achieve the best possible creative results. "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair also talks about the commitment Vincent showed during the shooting of the film: "He was very sure about what he wants to shoot and the result he wants to get. For example while shooting *Bhargaveenilayam* the lighting was a major challenge. There were moments when the entire scene is filled with darkness and only some of the portion has to be lit. But Vincent Master was quite confident and there was not even an iota of doubt that we would get the exact result. In fact he was right. When we finally watched the rushes we were astonished about the precision he had shown in lighting certain shots" (Parameswaran Nair-Interview: 2008).

But one can not define authorship just on terms of the involvement or dedication that one shows to the creative process. In fact, this is true of almost all the creative persons working in the field of cinema as the medium itself demands careful attention and unwavering commitment to achieve better results, from the person who conceives the idea to make a film from a particular theme⁷ to the script writer, producer,

⁷ For instance "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair, the well known producer, has acted as a facilitator to produce many films like *Bhargaveenilayam* Even the term producer was also quite problematic as he may not be the

cinematographer, editor, music director, lyricist or director. In some cases the particular studio in which the production was conducted itself can be termed an auteurial institution, as there can be traced certain features in the films produced in a particular studio. All these indicate that the business of deciding authorship in a film is quite complex and demands careful analysis. The words of Graham Petrie aptly explain the intricacies involved in the business of deciding the authorship of a film:

Granted that the cinema can be a "personal art", how do we set about defining this? It is certainly possible to identify recurring themes, characters and situations that reappear throughout the work of many directors, but to rely on these alone as *auteurists* tend to do is to court disaster. The continuity may be the result of working within a certain genre, or for a particular studio, or in habitual collaboration with a favourite script writer or actor, just as much as it may spring from a deeply felt need of the director's temperament (and even here the recurrence of a particular theme may indicate a shallow or obsessive vision rather than a fruitful one.) To try to isolate a "personal style" based on visual qualities is even more dangerous: there are not more than a handful of American directors to whom one can safely attribute a distinctive visual (or aural, or editing) style that persists no matter with whom they are collaborating for whom they are making the film. (Petrie in Grant: 2008: 113)

An interesting feature of Vincent's oeuvre is that he had worked with a wide variety of producers, writers and studios, not to speak of actors. There is a stark difference between various genres in which he worked. For example the particular genre with which he had worked during his early association with Gemini studio is quite different from the family or romantic melodramas and slapstick comedies directed by Sridhar for Chithralaya Productions. Vincent's association with Sridhar and Chithralaya is a very interesting chapter not only in the history of Tamil cinema, but also in the career of both Sridhar and Vincent. When Tamil cinema was mostly limited within the realm of rhetorical dialogues or pure stage dramatics, Sridhar and Chithralaya have brought about a very interesting difference. As a director V. Shantaram and Vsvevold Pudovkin were Sridhar's role models (Ramesh: 1969). Especially Pudovkin's theoretical observations about the importance of mise-en-scene and the method of creating emotional peaks

person, who finances the film. For example "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair who produced many films was not in fact the strict financier of his films. He finalised the story, gets the script written, decides on the cast and crew and finally finds a producer. The producer here is acting more as a creative coordinator than the real producer of the film.

through the particular usage of editing have extensively influenced Sridhar.⁸ As I have mentioned in chapter 1, the films in which Sridhar and Vincent (as a cinematographer) worked together really contained elements of cinematic prose and visual poetry. This fact was missed by noted critics only because those films were appreciated for their pithy story content. Perhaps this blend of prose and poetical elements in the films directed by Sridhar can be traced to the work of Pudovkin. Viktor Shklovski writes:

When we examine Vsevolod Pudovkin's film *The Mother* (USSR, 1926), in which the director has taken great pains to create a rhythmical construction, we observe a gradual displacement of everyday situations by purely formal elements. The parallelism of the nature scenes at the beginning prepares us for the acceleration of movements, the montage, and the departure from everyday life that intensifies towards the end. The ambiguity of the poetic image and its characteristically indistinct aura, together with the capacity for simultaneous generation of meaning by different methods, are achieved by a rapid change of frames that never manage to become real. (Shklovski in Hill and Gibson: 2000: 63-64)

This element of the prose/poetry content is noticeable in the works of Vincent also. But there is a notable difference between the work of Sridhar and the work of Vincent, especially the Malayalam films which the latter had directed. In one interview given to a magazine, Vincent said that what attracted him to the Malayalam film audience is the interest in a particular kind of realism that was prevalent in Malayalam films (Aruna: 1970:4). In fact what Vincent is talking about is the particular variety of naturalism that was prevalent in Malayalam cinema of his times, one that was dominant in Malayalam cinema from its early history onwards. And Malayalam cinema's history was also the success story of this naturalism. Nagavalli.R.S. Kurup, one of the great forces in early Malayalam cinema, as a script writer, wrote how a bunch of naturalistic films made in the year 1950 accelerated the history of Malayalam cinema: "During the 12 years from 1938 to 1949 only five films were produced in Malayalam but it was the six films produced in the single year of 1950 that changed the course of Malayalam film history (Kurup: 1975:23).

Kurup says that many films produced before 1950 followed the structure of Tamil films in which actors not only performed their roles, but also sang their songs. The

⁸ For knowing more about Pudovkin's theoretical observations see, Vsevolod Pudovkin, *Film Acting and Film Technique*.

early Malayalam films like *Gnanambika*, *Prahlada*, or *Balan* failed to create a definite naturalistic or realistic trend in Malayalam cinema industry. The first silent films like *Vigathakumaran* and *Marthandavarma* attracted audiences due to their over dependence on action and stunt. A notable difference during that period was the film *Nirmala* which treated a realistic story of a female fish vendor. Nagavalli wrote about this film: "*Nirmala* made by Artist P.J.Chcrian was a better film in many aspects. The story was entirely a Kerala based one and the lead character was a girl selling fish. The flow of the story was quite naturalistic and there was not any unnatural element in the narrative. Another interesting ingredient was the dialogue written by Puthezhathu Raman Menon and songs written by noted poet G.Sankara Kurup. In spite of all this the film failed at the Box office" (Ibid). Kurup adds that it was the five Malayalam films made in 1950, *Nallathanka*, *Sthree*, *Sasidharan*, *Prasanna*, *Chandrika* and *Chechi* that brought a fresh air of realism into Malayalam cinema. All these films were notably successful and paved the way for the development of a new spectator. This spectator preferred the new kind of realism/naturalism that surpassed the Tamil films' linguistic ornamentation and performative paraphernalia. It would be interesting to note what film historian Vijaykrishnan has written about the social dimensions of early Malayalam cinema:

The social connection of Malayalam cinema was quite evident like its early literary connection from these early films. In many Indian languages the early films were mythological. The films that followed also distanced themselves from the evident social issues. But in Malayalam even the first silent film itself was dealing with a social subject. Even the first talkie was a social theme. Only after the first four films were made a mythological was produced in the Malayalam language. Even that was an isolated attempt. Even the artificial social situations in the early Malayalam films were adopted by the films in the other languages only after a long time. By that time Malayalam cinema had become a site where intense social issues were debated. (Vijaykrishnan: 1987: 50-51)

This realism was in fact parallel to the literary realism developing through the novels and short stories written during that period and especially propounded by noted writers like Vaikom Muhammed Basheer, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, P.Kesavadev, P.C.Kuttykrishnan and Ponkunnam Varkey. But the early films were not thematically coherent in their articulation of story and or in the case of cinematic structure (Vijaykrishnan: 2008: 15). As Vijaykrishnan points out "the storyline of the films of those times used to contain various elements to attract different sects of people" (Ibid)

According to him these films wanted to cater to an audience who want to be satisfied for their differing entertainment needs. "And these spectators reminded us of the huge mass who gather at a festival ground to enjoy a diverging set of performances" (Ibid).

When the directors and technicians decide to follow the realism/naturalism of the writers there developed a new way of story telling in which the visual elements have gathered an equal strength as of the diverging studio performances in the film body. For example in *Neelakkuyil*, these naturalist scenes are very noticeable and form the core body of the film. The narrative of the story unfolds like the prose in a realistic novel, but the realism in the straight prose is unsettled through poetic expressions attained through the innovative methods adopted in the form. Here the images of reality are deftly utilised to create poetry in the filmic narrative. Or the narrative becomes a perfect mix of images taken from artificially created studio images and naturally shot images from outdoor or other real sets. This process can be explained through a very interesting observation made by Maya Deren:

The invented event which is then introduced, though itself an artifice, borrows reality from the reality of the scene—from the natural blowing of the hair, the irregularity of the waves, the very texture of the stones and sand—in short from all the uncontrolled, spontaneous elements which are the property of actuality itself. Only in photography—by the delicate manipulation which I called controlled accident—can natural phenomena be incorporated into our own creativity, to yield an image where the reality of a tree confers its truth upon the events we cause to transpire beneath it. (Deren in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 192)

The analysis of the various shots in the film *Neelakkuyil* for which Vincent did cinematography clearly indicates how "natural phenomena" are incorporated into the creativity of the artist. That is they are not just part of a particular kind of visual imaging which offers a reality effect to the film, but they provide a kind of poetic character to the narrative. This specific character adds a distinctive or authorial signature to the films of various directors like Vincent and others. But Vincent's films do not just wear this formal or poetic signature; they carry with them also the distinctive thematic character that gives them a special position in the history of Malayalam cinema. This thematic diversity and various dimensions of its socio-political connotations have to be examined in detail. I will

examine this by considering some of the films that Vincent has directed in various periods of his directorial career.

Vayanadan Thampan, released in 1978 was a film directed by Vincent with noted actor Kamal Haasan in the lead role. Kamal was then concentrating mainly on Malayalam films which offered him a number of noted roles that helped him to launch his career. About making this film Vincent Master wrote: "I was traveling from Kochi to Chennai by train and incidentally Kamal happened to be on the same train. And I told him I was making a film out of a story based on an English pulp novel. He was very interested as the film offered him multiple roles to play. I then asked noted Malayalam novelist V.T.Nandakumar to write a script on the basis of that story and he wrote the script by transforming the entire scenario to 19th century Kerala" (Vincent-Interview, 2008).

Vayanadan Thampan was an episodic collection of different incidents but one character participated all the incidents but in different roles. The story begins with Vayanadan Thampan, who begins magical worship to please Karimurthy, the Black God of devilish character, to bless him with eternal youthfulness. At the end of the fiery ritual, the Karimurthy appears before Thampan and assures him eternal youth, but there is a contract between Karimurthy and Thampan that Karimurthy wants Thampan to submit *Saptakanyas*, seven virgin girls, to Karimurthy. The Black God also gives him a pot full of magical drink which will help Thampan retain his age, till he completes his venture. Thampan set on this project and had starts hunting virgins to offer to the Black God.

In fact Thampan find his virgins from different communities and adopts different roles so that he can attract girls from those different communities. So he becomes a provincial lord named Vayanadan Thampan to seduce the girl Kochammini from the local martial chieftain Tharayil Gurukkal. Then one day Thampan takes Kochammini away when she returns from the temple and offers to the Black God. This process of taking away girls from various other communities also occurs. All these kidnapping of girls and offering them to the Black God occurs in the 19th century and the film visualises the period with a carefully selected mise-en-scene. An interesting turning point in the

film occurs when Thampan decides to kidnap the daughter of a Christian family named Annamma. He tells her that his name is Thomas and tries to seduce her by acting like a lover and tells her that he would like to marry her. One day he brings her to the temple of Karimurthy by convincing her that, it is an old church and they can conduct their marriage there. But seeing the idol of Karimurthy and the occultist's equipment there, Annamma becomes doubtful and suddenly escapes from the scene.

Thomas meets her another day and again tells her that she should believe him and goes to her house to ask her parents that they should marry Annamma to him. But the parents refuse, and the couple decides themselves to enter the nuptial knot and continue to live in the house, as husband and wife. Annamma becomes pregnant and Thomas one day feels that he is losing his youthfulness and becomes an aged man. Annamma is afraid to see him as a very old man and he returns to the temple of Karimurthy and continues with his project. After a long period he meets Annamma's daughter Elsie without knowing that she is his own daughter and tries to seduce her to offer to Karimurthy. But Annamma sees his photograph among the books of Elsie and alerts the people who are frantically searching for this strange man. And the people from different communities arrive at Karimurthy's temple, to trace Thampan, who escapes with Elsie to offer her to the Black God. His attempt is finally thwarted and he is forced to merge with the Black God.

Vayandan Thampan was a strange film with the complex and unbelievable narrative upon which it is structured. Interestingly, it was the first film in the career of Kamal Haasan in which he attempted diverse roles in the same movie. In his noted films like *Apoorva Sahodararkal*, *Michael Madana Kama Rajan*, *Avvai Shanmukhi* and *Dasavatharam* Kamal uses a particular performance style in which the same person enacts different kinds of roles or within the narrative the actor transforms his persona into different screen personas. For example, in *Avvai Shanmukhi* the actor enacts role of a simple family man in the film, but inside the narrative he takes on a different role of an old lady just to keep in touch with his estranged wife and daughter. Here, inside the narrative the lead character transcends his role and becomes another person and the other

person in turn becomes the lead role in the narrative. This role transformation is utilised in the films of Kamal Haasan as an element of popular cinematic culture and to market the performative assets of Kamal as a superstar.

. But way back in 1978, Kamal was not a superstar either in Tamil or in Malayalam films. One may not even say that there was a tendency to market his particular performing persona. On the other hand, the film cleverly utilised this transformation into various roles and the distinctive effects it created through special make-up and costumes as new elements of popular culture. Their popular appeal is very closer to the traditional narratives which as Philip Lutgendorf indicates "express a decidedly more worldly, sensual and entertainment oriented ethos." Lutgendorf's analysis of Indian popular cinema by setting them in the background of the traditional Indian narratives like *Kathasaritsagara* is interesting:

These tales often feature heroes who are wily merchants, disenfranchised princes, or poor (but not necessarily pious) Brahmanas and whose aim is less the pursuit of dharma than the acquisition wealth and worldly power; they also enjoy love affairs with glamorous women along the way. To accomplish their ends, the heroes often undertake impersonations, commit thefts, and commit adulterous seductions and though they are occasionally assisted by supernatural forces, they just as frequently skewer both pious pomposity and folk superstition. (Lutgendorf: 2006: 244)

Vayanadan Thampan surely contains many of these essential ingredients like impersonation, seduction and treachery which can be termed as the essential feature of what Lutgendorf calls the traditional Indian narrative form. But, as Vincent points out the narrative of *Vayanadan Thampan* contains only the outer structure of a traditional Indian narrative. Its concept of a Black God and the person who worships that God is taken from a western pulp novel which deals with the story of a "necromancer". The narrative also contains elements of Bram Stoker's horror fiction *Dracula*. For example, Annamma keeps a journal of her memories of Thampan that is very similar to the journal of Jonathan Harker which is the foundation of the narrative in *Dracula*. There are indications that it is her religiosity and the beads with a cross hanging on it that saves Annamma from the horrors inflicted by Thampan. Even though Thampan the worshipper of the Black God Karimurthy is conceived as a medieval magician, there are strong elements of the western concept of devilish character like Nosferatu or Frankenstein. John Orr in an

interesting observation talks about how such characters metamorphose into a human figure, the romantic image of an alienated other. Orr writes:

In the writings of Hoffman, Hogg and Dostoevsky, the other had been the ineffable of the romantic consciousness, the phantom which can not finally be accommodated in the romantic utopia of an organic and pantheistic world. Instead the other becomes an outcast in the competitive bourgeois world which tries to match evolution to moral progress. The other is a hallucination of romantic disorder an effigy of disintegration. (Orr: 1993: 37)

A dominant feature of Thampan is that he is a man without any family roots or social background and remains in a world that is outside society and law. This gives to his life an unrealistic character but he negotiates with a world that is real and rooted in historical actuality. His relation with the real world is that of seduction and sexuality, and he deals with a lot of patriarchal regimes that are dominant in almost all the communities. The fear in Thampan of the real or social congregation is derived from the fact that he is a stranger, a man without established identity or tradition and an alien to their established moral codes and conventions. In short, he is *real* only in the sense that he has masculine power and authority which the patriarchal regime generally worships, but no the clear cut identity or rooted ness. So society's attitude becomes ambiguous towards him and they admire but fear him and ultimately they hate him because he challenges their machismo and patriarchal authority by kidnapping a woman from their community. In short for them he is an uncanny figure as Freud defines the term. Carsten Strathausen explains: "Modernity's oscillation between exposure and repression, between location and displacement, is strikingly captured by Freud's notion of the "uncanny", defined as "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Strathausen in Shiel and Fitzmaurice: 2003: 15). Strathausen also quotes Mladen Dolar who views the uncanny as a kind of structural disturbance that emerges with modernity and constantly haunts it from inside. (Ibid: 16)

In the film *Vayanadan Thampan*, the character Thampan thus represents one who is quite displaced and continues to live in the space outside the law. Even time does not affect him as he is dealing with different generations. However, there is clear evidence in

the film that the film documents the progressive changes that are brought by the modernity. When one character, who was shown as belonging to the Muslim community in the film tells the police about the treachery of Thampan and that he had magical powers, he adds that Thampan is a *jinn*. To this, the reply of the police officer is interesting: "No", He says: "He is not a *jinn*. No *jinn* can survive under the British Empire." The conflict is clearly between the ever widening systems of law and the seductive power of sexuality and desire which was forced to be displaced to the invisible borders of social regulation. The film offers an interesting reading of the life of Thampan who adopts different reincarnations to continue with his adventures of seduction. He assumes the role of a heroic warrior, magical sorcerer, daring youth and also the discreet artist. As an artist he wants to photograph a beautiful girl, because he "is a devoted admirer of *beauty*." Art here becomes a mode of seduction and also a particular relation between the person and his victim. Thampan's hunting of girls is very reminiscent of the erotic trips of Marquis de Sade which are analysed in detail by Georges Bataille in his work *Eroticism*:

De Sade's morality", says Maurice Blanchot 'is founded on absolute solitude as a first given fact. De Sade said over and over again in different ways that we are born alone, there are no links between one man and another. The only rule of conduct then is that I prefer those things which affect me pleasurably and set at naught the undesirable effects of my preferences on other people. The greatest suffering of others always counts for less than my own pleasure. What matter if I must purchase my most trivial satisfaction through a fantastic accumulation of wrong doing? For my satisfaction gives me pleasure, it exists in myself, but the consequences of crime do not touch me, they are outside me. (Bataille: 2001: 167-68)

As an individualistic and lonely character what Thampan seeks is not only eternal youth in an erotic sense but a kind of sovereignty for his self and a counter morality in the social milieu in which he lives. It would be interesting to locate the social situation in which a film like *Vayanadan Thampan* is made in Kerala. When *Vayanadan Thampan* was made in 1978, in a post-Emergency political atmosphere, there was a wide spread permissiveness in the Malayalam film arena especially in matters of sexual explicitness. It was also period when a number of directors like I.V.Sasi, P.Bharathan and P.Padmarajan emerge in the centre stage of Malayalam film industry daringly depicting the sensuous bodily relations between man and woman.

However *Vayanadan Thampan*, as a film, did not follow such a path of the daring exposition of bodies. But there was a charged atmosphere in the film of the sadistic streak of the lead character Thampan, and the powerful erotic atmosphere that he created through his morally challenging presence. The taboo that is broken here is not the visual block of depicting a sensuous body—say of the woman— or the act of sexual performance. Rather it is some of the core moral issues that a society always fears confronting, like the power of the alien and aggressive male energy that poses a threat to society's well preserved moral regulations or the violation of social norms through incestuous sexuality. In *Vayanadan Thampan* one woman that Thampan wants to seduce is his own daughter and perhaps this fact was not noticed by the general audience just because of the complex nature of the narrative which unravels not as a unified format but as a discontinuous and episodic structure. In 1973, P.N.Menon directed a film named *Chayam*, which depicted the life of a young painter who rapes an older female model without knowing that she is his own mother. One prominent film magazine, Nana published an interesting report on the film at the time of its release:

The new film presented by New India Films named *Chayam* is one with a lot of novelties: new story, new presentation and new ideas. But do not these novelties of the film lead into dangerous situations? In the Bible there is a story in which two girls get their father intoxicated by giving wine and having sexual intercourse with him. Some time back the noted writer K.T.Muhammed also wrote a story of a son raping his own mother. There is also an English movie named *Damn* in which such a scene is depicted. It seems that both P.N.Menon and S.K.Nair (producer) are thinking that they can create a novelty in 1973 by introducing certain trends which were prevalent in western films during the 1960s. But it has to be seen up to what extent the value concepts and moral conscience of the Malayali would welcome such a move. (Nana: 1973: January: 19)

In fact the moral conscience of Malayali did not welcome such a move to create novelty through such a different theme. The film *Chayam* was not a great success in the screening theatres and at least in some places invited resistance. The reason why *Vayanadan Thampan* did not created such a controversy is not because it fired the imagination of the audience in anyway. But its depiction of incestuous love was more or less ironic and in the total complex and discontinuous structure of the film that was not noticed starkly. And there is another reason too for this distancing.

The film in its major part parodied the period movies that were prevalent in Malayalam based on the *Vadakkkan Pattu* ballad stories. It was a particular genre in which the heroic martial powers of the heroes from the north Malabar region were idealised. Many of these films do have a unique blend of martial fighting, romantic scenes, songs and emotional dramas. Vincent in an interview says that he also worked as a cinematographer on one such film, *Othenante Makan*, but did not put his credit in the film. In *Vayanadan Thampan* he subtly parodies the *Vadakkkan Pattu* genre that *Vayanadan Thampan* was received by a section of the audience as a historical film. Only a close reading of the film can interpret it as the subversive critique of the existing moral concepts of the Malayali spectator. Even now watching this film remains as a strange experience and one can not notice that the fundamental issues that it addresses is the contradictions between the society and the unrelenting individual.

The formal structure of *Vayanadan Thampan* is quite lucid and discontinuous. Separate episodes which Thampan's liaisons with girls from different communities are shot in different locations. The space and mise-en-scene of each of these episodes is different from the other one. In spite of the dark character of the story, Vincent never adopts the style of a *noir* film or the fast pace of a thriller. The lighting in the film except for some scenes is plane and the strong use of colours, like that is used in the film *Triveni*, have also done away with. So what emerges as the story is unraveled is the quality of a magically realistic narrative which is unbounded in a strange and unfamiliar spatial location. The noted popular elements of songs or performances do not save the film from its strangeness. Its narrative is ironic at every moment and looks more like a narrative that unsettles the normal reasoning of social and individual perceptions, than a story which has to be convincing to the spectator. No doubt the film did not appeal to the morally self-conscious Malayali middle class spectators and attracted only the lumpen proletariat who found its dark shades as liberative.

All these clearly indicate that the "realism" which Vincent wants to engage with his films not connected to the depiction of real social relations, but a strategy which utilises "the uncontrolled, spontaneous elements which are the property of actuality

itself", as Maya Deren points out. The images which are a property of actuality are cleverly blended with artificial or poetic images that are carefully woven in to create an atmosphere which by its very nature seems an uncanny space to articulate the ambiguous nature of the issues that are being dealt with. It is this ambiguity that unsettles socially accepted perceptions without making any frontal attack on them. That is, we can say that Vincent utilises the realistic images—mainly taken from outdoor locations—only up to the extent that they can serve the particular ambiguous aesthetic vision that he is following in his films. That is why in spite of the fact that, he was one of the first cinematographers working in the field of Malayalam films to extensively shoot the outdoor or even spontaneous reality scenes, he never shot a film with complete outdoor locations. For example P.N.Menon, a contemporary of Vincent always boasted that his films were entirely shot on outdoor locations and even recorded in the title of his film *Chemparathy* that "this film is shot entirely in Kollam and nearby places". On the other hand, Vincent's film *Nadi*, which many believe was entirely shot on the banks of the Periyar river in central Kerala, contains so many shots that he took in studios, which were deceptively realistic.

Ironic, ambiguous and a blend of the real and artificial, the narrative and formal structures of the films of Vincent really stand out from the films of his contemporaries. This is the basic ontological difference that defines the authorial voice in the films of Vincent. This can be located more or less in almost all of his films. This is not just a repetition of certain images or formal strategies but a persistent vision of cinema making which influences not only the formal devices of the film but the flow of the narrative itself. That is, many lead characters in the films of Vincent are those living in an ambiguous space where the real and the unreal converge.

Gandharvakshetram, the only film Vincent directed for the prominent Udaya Studios, is a good example of such a narrative where the narrative inhabits the spaces which are real and uncanny. Udaya Studio was the first studio established in Kerala (1948), which concentrated mainly on the historic/legendry *Vadakkan Pattu* stories. Its proprietor, M.Kunchacko, himself directed a number of films which included a number

of social melodramas and popular thrillers. Kunchacko was a person who set a very interesting popular format in the history of Malayalam cinema, and his films were quite successful at the box-office. Interestingly, he also used to hire directors to direct films produced by his studio. *Gandharvakshetram* was one such film that was outsourced to Vincent by Udaya Studio in 1973. About the production of this film Vincent Master said: "Kunchacko offered me full freedom to direct the film. And he told me that he would never interfere with the production. The plan was to make a film on the concept of *gandharvas* who are a kind of imaginary figures. Thoppil Bhasi was assigned to write the script based on a story of Thakazhy Sivasankara Pillai" (Vincent-Interview: 2008). The concept of a *gandharva* as a handsome and imaginary extraterrestrial being was very prevalent in Kerala especially till the early part of the twentieth century. The noted dramatist N.N.Pillai for example in his autobiography *Njan*, says that his mother used to tell him that he was born out of her relationship with a *gandharva* named *poomkrithikaman*. An interesting feature of *gandharva*, according to the mythical narratives is that they are supposed to live in the interstices between earth and heaven (Pillai: 1926: 760). I am not saying that Vincent selected the theme deliberately to suit his vision of depicting a space which is both real and unreal. But the *gandharva* as a character perfectly fit, into this world which was born out of a distinct vision where uncanny spaces and characters rule.

If *Vayanadan Thampan* was made in the context of the free atmosphere of post-Emergency national condition where the strictness of regulation and presence of law was relatively loosened, *Gandharvakshetram* is made in the pre-Emergency era when some sort social or legal legitimacy was active. This difference in the political atmosphere has influences the particular texturing of the narrative of the film. Unlike Thampan who is totally outside the system, and whose existence is beyond time and space and outside all kinds of rational structures, a *gandharva* is only relatively outside the system. Or we can say that he is only outside the dominant or legitimate spaces where his identity as a member of a subaltern class is not recognized. The *gandharva* is an imaginary being only in the mind of the woman who has an affair with him and in all other senses he is a real human being, but outside the "normal" structures of human relations.

The structure of *Gandharvakshetram* is very similar to that of *Triveni*, and both the films deal with the relationship of two men with a single woman. The child from an extra-marital affair complicates the relationship in both the films and unsettles the normative function of the family in these films. Of course the traditional family system is not challenged but the film strongly indicates that the system is founded on a shady grounds and its foundation can be challenged or destroyed at anytime.

Lakshmi, the heroine in *Gandharvakshetram* is the only surviving girl offspring of a traditional Nair family in central Kerala and is brought up by her grandmother. As a young child she grows up by hearing the fairy tales of *yakshis* and *gandharvas* told by her grandmother. These tales create an imaginary world in the mind of Lakshmi, where enchanting *yakshis* and handsome *gandharvas* enact magical dramas. In these stories Lakshmi herself becomes a character and she imagines it is for her that the *gandharva* with his enchanting voice sings beautiful songs and it is for her that he performs unbelievable and magical acts that are beyond human capacity. The film makes a dig at the traditional *namboothiri sambandham* which was prevalent in Kerala till the necessary regulations were made after the social reform movements. Namboothiri Brahmins who used to have physical relations with the Nair girls refused to accept the girls as their legitimate wife and though it was proclaimed as women's freedom, in reality it was a patriarchal agreement between the Nair family head and the Namboothiri Brahmin man. It was the children born out of the wedlock of Nair girls and Namboothiri Brahmins who suffered as they did not have any legitimate claim on their father and not even over the property which was controlled by the maternal uncle, who would normally be the family patriarch. This tragic predicament of the Nair community which they gambled with all their dignity just to claim that their offspring are of Brahmin lineage, forced a number of Nair youth at the end of the 19th century to organise a reform movement within the community, and Mannathu Padmanabhan, a prominent leader among them wrote:

The *sambandam* (relation) between the Nair community and the Brahmin men who thought that even touching their children from a Nair woman will pollute them, did not provide any improvement or progress to the community. But there was a strong and blind belief in the community that such a relation brings prestige and consequently there was no betterment or security that should be got from a proper marriage. This only

created many wives without husbands and children without fathers in the community.
(Padmanabhan: 2003: 29)

In *Gandharvakshetram*, both Lakshmi and her elder brother are presented as the children of a Namboothiri Brahmin who abandons the children without even giving them their proper share of property. But the grandmother in her mind is still living in a time when Brahmin superiority was worshipped, and wants Lakshmi to be married to an old Namboothiri Brahmin. Accordingly she arranges that the old Namboothiri comes to her house to begin a *sambandham* with Lakshmi. Lakshmi is averse to the idea of having a relation with the Brahmin who stays in the house during the night. Interestingly the *gandharva* appears before him in the night and scares him off from the house. So unlike the *gandharva* in the old mythologies, this modern day *gandharva* deeply understands the feelings of his beloved and acts accordingly. That is the *gandharva* myth does not just create an object of desire for Lakshmi, but it also facilitate her deep wish fulfillment. The *gandharva's* intervention is such that it accelerates the progressive movement of society. Or we can say that here the *gandharva* was formulated as a fulfillment of female desire and the changing social landscape of the Kerala villages. Though the film deals mainly with the crisis of female sexuality, and the problem Lakshmi faces in overcoming the oedipal block, *Gandharvakshetram* is equally a film about objectifying the male body and male sexuality. Interestingly, this is counter to the celebrated stance of Laura Mulvey that a male movie star's characteristics do not make him an erotic object of female gaze (Mulvey in Braudy and Cohen: 2004: 842). In many moments, in the film, the body of the male actor Prem Nazir, who did the role of the *gandharva*, is eroticised and presented as an object of female desire. Interestingly, this fetishisation of the male body can be seen also in the highly eroticised scenes in the film *Triveni* which I had discussed earlier. I do not intend to probe further into the issue of male sexuality in the films of Vincent, but only to mention here that his films deal with male bodies in a conscious way and male bodies are fetishised and made objects of the erotic gaze, quite consciously. This can be interpreted at least in three ways: that is one, as a reversal of the conscious objectification of the female body and sexuality. Second, it can be interpreted as the technique of building up the erotic atmosphere of the film. And thirdly, it is an extension of the aestheticisation of the film by depicting human bodies as highly aestheticised erotic

objects. I consider this as a major indicator of the authorial presence in the films directed by Vincent.

The objectification of the male body at the moments of eroticism happens in many films on which Vincent has worked like, for example the scene in *Neelakkayil*, in which Neeli meets Shridharan Nair in his house on the rainy evening. In that scene, the body of Shridharan Nair becomes the object of the erotic gaze of the camera in a manner that catches the attention of the spectator very sharply. The body of actor Satyan is displayed before the spectator with the carefully arranged light falling in such a manner as to highlight his masculine features so that the spectator can savour the perfect features of Satyan's body. This reminds us of the observation made by Steave Neale:

The presentation of Rock Hudson in the melodramas of Douglas Sirk is a particularly interesting case. There are constantly moments in these films...in which Hudson is presented quite explicitly as the object of an erotic look. The look is usually marked as female. But Hudson's body is *feminised* in those moments, an indication of the strength of those conventions which dictate that only women can function as the objects of an explicitly erotic gaze. (Neill quoted in Tredell: 2002: 181)

In *Gandharvakshetram*, the body of the actor Prem Nazir is objectified, if in a feminised way. Here the question is not whether this depiction is according to the conventions of existing spectatorship, but the erotic objectification of the male body is incorporated into the film as a strategy of creating an aesthetical impact. In an interview with "Sobhana" Parameswaran Nair about casting Prem Nazir in the prominent roles of the films produced by him, many of which are directed by Vincent, he said that Prem Nazir has an appeal among woman spectators. "Satyan or Madhu are better actors comparing with Prem Nazir, but Nazir was more handsome than others and we thought that to pull the female audience it would be a good strategy to cast him" (Parameswarn Nair-Interview: 2008). In this strategy there is a convergence of utilising popular elements with the principles of aesthetics which also creates new perceptions of spectatorship.

The progressive manipulation of the content of the film *Gandharvakshetram* is reflected at the end in the narrative twist where the character of *gandharva* turns out to be

Gopalan, a man who belongs to a subaltern caste. He could not have declared his love for Lakshmi as he was not allowed to enter the premises of Lakshmi's house. That is why he always moved around the *sarpakkavu* (temple of snakes), where Lakshmi would come to every evening to light the divine lamp. As a marginalised person he could not openly approach Lakshmi or declare his love but continue to express his romantic love through exquisite songs. Lakshmi is enchanted by these songs and in a somnambulist mood meets *gandharva*/Gopalan every night and develops a sexual relationship with him. She still believes that the *gandharva* is an unreal figure and lives as an extraterrestrial being, but who loves her and has given her some beautiful moments and then disappeared into oblivion like every other *gandharvas*, which she knew of from the stories that her grandmother used to tell her. Meanwhile her brother Vasu comes to their home to spend a vacation with his friend and he opposes the opinion of their grandmother that Lakshmi should marry a Namboothiri Brahmin; instead he wants her sister to be married to his friend Satheesan, who belongs to a different caste. The brother's decision shocks the grandmother and she dies on the same day that Lakshmi marries her brother's friend.

If the film's first half is located entirely in a village where ancient ancestral homes with their snake temples and dark landscapes dominate, the second half is entirely located in a city home and modern recreation centres where Lakshmi finds a new materialist value system. Here her husband forces her to leave all the old village habits and acquire a new identity that would be suited to her new city life. She changes accordingly, but still remembers the good moments shared with the *gandharva* and when it is known that she is pregnant, she confesses to her husband that the child's father is the *gandharva*. There begins a conflict within the family and there is no way that her husband will accept the child as their son. Their relation becomes sore and Lakshmi's husband wants her to abandon the baby boy if she wants to continue the relationship. But she resists and leaves her husband and returns to her native place, which is changed a lot and there is a factory in the spot where there was the temple of snakes. In the village she finds some of her old friends and stays with them. Suddenly her son develops a fever and dies after a day. When she returns after the funeral of her son, she finds a boy who looks very similar to her son and embraces the child. The boy is scared and runs into his house and one man

comes out from the house and Lakshmi is shocked to find that he is none other than her *gandharva*. Now the *gandharva* tells her that he was not a *gandharva* but Gopalan, who belongs to a subaltern caste. At the same moment Lakshmi's husband also returns to take back the child and Lakshmi but finds out the entire truth. The film ends when Lakshmi and her husband rejoin and Gopalan and his child are left alone.

Ideologically the film never disturbs the traditional set up of the family and the death of the child who was born out of an extramarital relation and in that sense the narrative is careful to keep the conformity of the social morals. But the high melodramatic articulation of the film and the complexities it foregrounds create scars in the free flowing narrative and it resists any final closure that conforms to the prevailing moral codes. I am not saying that the film subverts family morals or that the repressive character it reveals is critiqued. But the complexities of the repressive characters and the impact that makes on various characters are depicted quite vividly. It is relevant to quote Barbara Klinger here:

Melodrama's foregrounding of the oedipal basis of family problems provides one such instance of defiance of closure. The preoccupation with the family provides "the locus of contradiction and of potential subversion and disruption of dominant ideology", since it parades the characters' traumas as a direct result of their family's neurotic attitude toward sexuality....The characters' psycho-sexual dilemmas are so dire, that the conventional happy ending can not erase the indictment of the family aroused by them. (Klinger: 1989: 7-8)

The basic ambiguities that can be seen in many of Vincent's films are very noticeable in *Gandharvakshetram*. The first half of the film completely concentrates on Lakshmi's romantic affair with the *gandharva* and has the beauty and charm of a fairy tale film. The film's main tone is dark and there are many night scenes with subtle lighting portrayed with a distinctive aesthetic sense. If the first half deals with the imaginary landscape of Lakshmi, where her desire is fulfilled in every sense, the second half shows how she wants to accommodate herself into the symbolic role assigned by the family system. Her husband Satheesan wants her to learn the modern values of a city life which she conforms to but keeps her memories about her past village life and the moments that she spent with her *gandharva* in her mind. Whereas the location in the

early part is the exotic village and its lush landscape, the second part is takes place entirely in the claustrophobic interiors of city buildings. The contrast between the imaginary and real is in essence a contrast between the poetic and prosaic that creates a dichotomy in the film.

An interesting feature of the first half is that it is an intensification of the fantastic and the second half intensification of the melodramatic. Stylistically in the first half Vincent parodies the traditional historical/ballad films produced by Udaya Studio. The grandmother's narration of the myth of *gandharva* and the consequent image formed in the mind of Lakshmi is depicted through a number of scenes in which the *gandharva* is portrayed as a figure very similar to the hero of the historical/ballad film. Interestingly, Prem Nazir, the person who acts as the *gandharva* in the film, is the same person who acted in a number of historical films as their hero. Here, whether it is intended or not, there is a subtle indication that the *gandharva* is in fact a hero created out of a celluloid imagination. The stage props used in the historical films of Udaya studios are used cleverly, both to create the imaginary world of the *gandharva* and at the same time to parody the films which used such an imagination to deceive audiences who believed that the imaginary beings of celluloid to be real. On the other hand, the second half is full of high melodrama which is equally stylised and intensified. It is this stylisation and intensification that gives an element of irony to a film that tries to critique the system, using elements of the popular and the melodramatic. While assessing the works of Douglas Sirk, Paul Willemen wrote:

Although the notion of parody can not be applied to the entire oeuvre of Sirk, some of the films have strong parodic elements in them. This becomes most evident in Sirk's use of *cliché*. What was referred to earlier as the deliberate use of symbols for emotional effect could, in Sirk's case, also be read as the deliberate use of *cliché*. Sirk's melodramas abound with *cliché* images....Here we are confronted with a deliberate and systematic use (ie.mechanisation) of a stylistic procedure which characterizes the stories in women's weeklies. It is extremely difficult to make any clear-cut and precise distinction between stylization and parody, but Tynyanov's remark about Dostoyevsky could easily be applied to Sirk: ' It may very well be that this delicate interweaving of stylization and parody, covering the development of a tragic subject, constitutes the originality of the sense of the grotesque in Dostoevsky. (Willeman:1971; 66)

In 1983 Vincent directed *Sri Krishnaparunthu*, a mythological thriller casting Mohanlal in the lead role. It was based on a novel written by P.V.Thampi and tells the story of the family of a magician who lived in medieval Kerala and who resorted to black magic to gain fame and money. Thampi's novel was a popular fictional work published in a pulp weekly and set a new genre in popular Malayalam writing. The major genres in the Malayalam popular writing were sentimental novels, detective fiction and humorous novels, till this work appeared. Thampi's work inaugurated a new genre in the popular fiction named *Manthrika Novel* which can be roughly translated as magical novel. In practice, this kind of writing is not magic realism as practiced by Spanish authors like Gabriel Garcia Marquez or Mario Vargas Llosa. It dealt with the stories of medieval magicians in Kerala who practiced various magical practices and used them for the medical purposes like curing snake poisoning or mental diseases like hysteria. There were a number of families who traditionally practiced such kinds of magical practices and knowledge in their families have traditionally handed over from generation to generation. Thampi's novel deals with such a family story and connected with it is the tragic predicament of Kumaran Thampi, who practices the undesirable black magic and is finally doomed to death.

Sri Krishnaparunthu was an attempt to bring the grotesque to the screen. Like in *Vayandan Thampan*, the real and the uncanny are mixed up in *Sri Krishnaparunthu*, but at a deeper level it deals with the issue of desire and the guilt that the character feels after its fulfillment. The conflict between desire and guilt is articulated through the conflict between the celibacy that must be kept to retain the magical powers and the desire which forces Kumaran to violate it. Kumaran Thampi is the heir of the Puthur Family, who practice magic and traditional medicine. But Thampi leads a wayward life and spends most of his time with his friends and a number of local concubines. His mother is worried about the life of Thampi, but his maternal uncle, who is the magician of the family want to teach the traditional mantras to Thampi. Thampi's mother opposes this idea but the uncle insists as he feels that his death is imminent and the knowledge he possessed should pass to the next generation. He teaches all the mantras to Thampi and asks him to take all the ancient *Taliyola* (palm leaves) texts to learn all the texts on magical practice.

Thampi thus keeps a life of celibacy and learns all the ancient texts including that on black magic. As he turns powerful and famous through his magical practices, his opponent Choorakkattu Bhattathiri practices black magic to kill Kumaran Thampi. To counter Bhattathiri, he also practices black magic and after some time loses his celibacy as his desire for women is stoked again. This time it happens because the girl he wanted to marry is possessed with some spirit and her father brings the girl to Thampi's house to cure her illness. The desire for Bhanumathy is stoked in the mind of Thampi and his celibacy is lost and now he is after other women also.

Desire operates on Thampi at two levels: that is the desire to attain fame and money, and the desire to satisfy his erotic impulses. The various setbacks he faces in his magical career arise mainly from the guilt that haunts him due to the tragic death of a girl with whom he had a sexual affair. According to the narrative, the girl turns out to be a Yakshi and *disturbs* Thampi and the effect of that disturbance is reflected in their home. Unlike the narrative of *Vayanadan Thampan* in which the desire of Thampan is a remorseless motivation to remain youthful for ever, Thampi in *Krishnaparunthu* is not concerned with his youthfulness. He is quite sure that doom is awaiting him, and that he will have to pay the price for the transgressions he commits like practicing black magic. Like *Vayanadan Thampan*, *Sri Krishnaparunthu* is also an attempt to portray a man who transgresses law and the limits reality imposes on him. Both the films in that way foreground the issue of the conflict between desire and law in their essence. But the imagery that Vincent employs is more grotesque than that he employed in his early films. However, the ease with which Vincent handled such a film which deals with the medieval age of Kerala is quite noticeable. Though careful about the costumes and mis-en-scene of the age, Vincent makes sure that the film does not academically and scrupulously concentrate on the period alone. One of the interesting features that Vincent uses in this film is the sharp lighting and particular colour tones which remind us of the colour scheme that Ravi Varma used in many of his paintings. Instead of the impressionist lighting and colour tones that Vincent used in many of his earlier films, here the lighting is mostly "realistic", and it is through this realism that period is mostly

represented. The particular lighting also goes well with the grotesque character of the film and its dark erotic overtones.

Sri Krishnaparunthu is not a structurally beautiful film. However, Vincent's unique style of cinematographic performance—that is creating a particular tempo through the step by step unraveling of camera positions and duration—is the evidence here as well. As a film made in the early 1980s *Sri Krishnaparunthu* was an attempt to accommodate emerging popular trends like the prominence given to the dominant male hero of the narrative. It was the only film of Vincent in which Mohanlal, the emerging superstar then, acted in the lead role and the film was a great boost for his career, thanks to his controlled performance. A retrospective assessment of Vincent's films reveals that he never gave prominence to a particular actor in his films. Even an actor like Prem Nazir who had a great influence in the Malayalam cinema industry of the 1960s and 70s was willing to act in not so important roles in Vincent's films. Madhu, who was quite a new comer in the film field, was given the leading role of the writer in *Bhargaveenilayam* while Prem Nazir was given a minor role in the film. Madhu had said in an interview that he considers his role in *Bhargaveenilayam* as the best role he has doing his entire film career (Madhu: 1967: 23). In films like *Aswamedham* and *Thulabharam* the lead roles are done by Sheela and Sharda, the leading actresses of the time. In *Dharmayudham* (1973) the lead role was played by Adoor Bhasi, an all time versatile actor in Malayalam cinema, who was more popular for his comedy roles. In the 1978 film *Anavaranam* the entire cast was new faces and most of them became established actors of later day Malayalam films.

Even though the formal devices adopted by Vincent were quite distinct and the fundamental ingredients of popular cinema were lavishly used, many of Vincent's films in the 1970s deal with the individual angst faced by the lead characters of the films. I am not saying that he was trying to understand the art cinema movement. But he was aware of the alienation that the heroes of those films experienced. But negotiating with art cinema as a format which addressed the issues of cinematic form and the questions of authorship quite differently was beyond the perspective of Vincent. Perhaps he was

aware of one drawback of the art cinema movement that its preoccupation with the formal issues of film making only helped to discount the narrative or psychological dimensions of cinematic art. For the art cinema movement tried to address these issues not from an emotional or psychological plane, but with an intellectual perspective on these issues.

But what differentiates the lead character of the film *Sri Krishnaparunthu* from the rebellious heroes of the 1970s art cinema, is that he is, more an oedipal hero who is immersed in the playfield of desire than someone engaged in a rebellious struggle with society. That is more than a straight political engagement his struggle is carried out at psycho-sexual planes. An actor like Mohanlal represents such an oedipal character whose characters engaged at the level of desire. In his first released film in 1980, Mohanlal plays the role of an anti-hero, a man who had a sexual relation with his wife's foster mother. If the incest shown in a film like *Chayam* in 1972 was rejected by the Malayali audience, it was celebrated in 1980 paving the way for the superstardom of Mohanlal. It is this aspect of oedipal desire that is fully utilised in a film like *Sri Krishnaparunthu*. In the film Kumaran Thampi has sexual relation with at least three women and two of them are sisters and one is older than him, clearly denoting his mother. And there is a clear indication throughout the film that Kumaran Thampi's mother exerts a control over him (which at times is broken), which has sexual overtones. For example, when Bhanumathy, the girl whom Kumaran Thampi wants to marry is brought to his house for the treatment of her hysteria, he says that he would visit her house to give the magic talisman. This creates clear uneasiness on the mother's face. The narrative logic of this uneasiness is that the mother wants to warn her son against him visiting the patient's house (which is against rules of the family tradition and pride). But there is an ambiguity in the sequence that can be interpreted as her fear to lose her son to another woman.

Another interesting aspect of the film is the way in which it eroticised the body of Mohanlal and displays it as an object of erotic gaze. As the body of Prem Nazir is erotically objectified in films like *Triveni* or *Gandharvakshetram*, Vincent uses the body of Mohanlal simplify in the film *Krishnaparunthu*. This is counter to the logic that Laura

Mulvey uses in her analysis of visual pleasure. The male body is equally eroticised like the female body for the spectators who can be either male or female. But what is important here is the issue of masculine crisis which is strongly and articulated through the shifting positions that the lead male character takes in these films. The sexuality of Kumaran Thampi is not something that progress linearly or that which stabilises his male ego. From the beginning of the film it is shown that his sexuality is at odds with his ideology as the magician who has to fulfill the role provided by family and society. His power as a magician increases as long as he can keep off from the company of women and decreases once he begins to be sexually intimate with him. The women here act as a form of impurity which can affect the power of Kumaran Thampi which is entirely dependent on his celibacy.

But Kumaran Thampi can never completely control his sexuality and again and again he loses his concentration and ultimately he decides to marry the girl whom he loves and thus violates the rule that the male offspring in the family should be celibate till while he practices magic. And the girl she married is died and that is interpreted as his nemesis, a punishment for his wrong doings. I am not making any moral or political judgement of the crisis of masculinity in the films of Vincent like *Sri Krishnaparunthu*, *Gandharvakshetram* or *Vayanadan Thampan*. But only want to mention that such a crisis is repeatedly occurs in his films. That is, as a director Vincent persistently deals with the issue of the crisis of masculinity and the effect it has on society and the family. My thesis here is that these issues are repeatedly addressed in the films of Vincent even as his films dealt with highly varied themes in his career. Meanwhile, we can notice that every object in his films attains a status and meaning in the films' narrative structure, while every "body" becomes an object or fetish in a way that distinguishes the use of actors in the films of the other directors of his times. I think it is quite relevant to quote Annek Smelik's observations about the crisis of masculinity here:

The image of the male body as object of a look is fraught with ambivalences, repressions and denials. Like the masquerade, the notion of spectacle has such strong feminine connotations that for a male performer to be put on display or to don a mask threatens his very masculinity. Because the phallus is a symbol and a signifier no man can fully symbolizes it. Although the patriarchal male subject has a privileged relation to

the phallus, he will always fall short of the phallic ideal....Mark Simpson takes great pleasure in celebrating the deconstruction of 'masculinity's claim to authenticity, to naturalness to coherence-to dominate'. He hopes that the crisis of masculinity signifies a desegregation of homosexuality and heterosexuality in popular culture, transforming both in the process. (Smelik in Hill and Gibson: 2000: 138-39)

Closure in the films of Vincent is also an indicator of the ambiguities of his philosophical positions. Even though the films do have a kind of resolution of the narrative, many films do not have the kind of happy ending that one may expect from mainstream commercial cinema. The closure of *Bhargaveenilayam* is very ambiguous that even though the protagonist in the film unravels the mystery behind the murder and finds out who the culprit is, he is not brought under the law. Instead the culprit, MN falls into the well in which Bhargavi was dumped and the writer does not want to publicise this death. He wants the secret to remain within himself and of course in the mind of the spectator. Yet so many questions remain unanswered that, for example is not the writer answerable for the death of MN, which would be found out by somebody? Or is it the whole narrative an imaginary building up or creation of the writer who subconsciously wants to arrive at a logical explanation? The story of *Bhargaveenilayam* resists a definite closure and the narrative chain still continues to exist in the closure. The story "Neelavelicham" ends on a note of wonder as how the blue light comes to the house without a lamp, but the film ends the mystery behind the death of Bhargavi. That is, by not bringing the whole issue to the scrutiny of law or any other social institutions, the narrative resists any ideological attempt to give a definite social meaning to the film's closure. It is this ambiguity that makes Vincent's films quite different from the films of other directors of his times who would prefer a definite closure as demanded by the consumption pattern. In fact this ambiguous approach can be interpreted as also an attempt to create a new kind of film viewing habit and thus a new kind of sensibility. One of the shocking and distinctive closure shot in the oeuvre of Vincent is in the film *Nizhalattam*, which was not a commercial or critical success, but I think one of the different films in Malayalam. The film as I have early mentioned tell the story of a man who loses everything just for his wayward life. The film ends at a note when the man who lost everything is forced to leave his house and go into the streets. A poor man he invites him to his house and abruptly the film ends there, leaving a negative print image of the characters in the screen. I found this image more powerful than the bunch of

negative print images that Satyajit Ray used in the film *Pratidwanti* which was made in the same year.

It is these explorations of Vincent, working within the constraints of mainstream cinema itself and negotiating with different styles and narrative devices that distinguishes his works from other directors and form the auterial features and traces in his works. Vincent looks at divergent themes not because it offers some exotic possibilities or opportunity to underscore sociological differences. His interests in the themes are basically humanistic and he attempts to understand and foreground the deeper hidden complexities of men and women who are entangled in social or psychological conundrums. So even when he takes up themes with historical or folksy features, he does not not miss the opportunities they provide for exploring psycho-sexual dimensions and dramatics that attract a popular audience. Many of his films repeatedly handle the themes of female desire and privilege the interplay of the real and the fantastic. This interplay allows a space for the elements of the uncanny which constantly disturbs and destabilises the real. This interplay allows a space for the elements of uncanny. Even ambiguous situations that he creates and the resistance of the perfect closures all indicate the depth of this instability.

Conclusion

VINCENT AS AN AUTEUR

In the three decades of his active career as a cinematographer and director, Vincent has worked with various film studios, producers, directors, script writers and actors not to talk of music composers or technicians. In spite of all these variations his films in Malayalam have the clear signature of a film author. In the 1960s what Vincent and other directors did was to assert their role in the creative aspect of film-making and occupied the space of the author of the film through this assertion via a number of procedural processes. In fact if we look at most of the Malayalam films from its early period they were mainly a producers' film or an actor's film. *Jeevithanauka*, the first Malayalam film which made a box office record in 1951 by running continuously for more than 25 weeks in one theatre catapulted the talented Malayalam actor Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair into the first ever star of Malayalam cinema. In the 1950s there emerged a number of actors like Satyan (*Atmasakhi*, 1952) and Prem Nazir (*Marumakal*, 1952) who by the sixties had become real stars, who could pull in the crowds. But despite that by the 1960, the quality of a film began to be defined according to the name of its director. And films by Ramu Kariat, P.Bhaskaran, Vincent, K.S.Sethumadhavan, M.Krishanan Nair and P.N.Menon are considered as films in which the director's influence has made a qualitative difference. For example in 1974, Nana Film Weekly, when making an assessment of the previous year's production wrote that:

The only director who could claim all the four films that he had directed this year was Vincent. His films, *Chenda*, *Achani*, *Nakhangal* and *Dharmayudham* are artistically excellent and all these films have not faced any problem in the box-office collection. Reports indicate that both *Achani* and *Nakhangal* were financially a great success. *Dharmayudham* and *Chenda* are not failures, if not financially great successes. In a year which witnessed a series of financial failures in the Malayalam film industry, Vincent was able to assure success to his four films and this indeed was a matter of great pride. Film critics' general assumption that Vincent's films assure both artistic value and financial success, has proven right in the current year too. (Nana: 1974: January)

This was the general pattern of thinking that was prevalent in the film viewers and the general public. Even though this can not be interpreted as a valid ground for defining the films of Vincent as an authorial expressions, there was wide spread belief that Vincent's films were basically the director's films. Thus it is clear that in 1960s this was admitted by the industry and his credit as the true maker of the film was acknowledged along with that of the actors, who were the other considerable force. K.Ravindranathan Nair of General Pictures, a production company which produced films directed by noted directors like Adoor Gopalakrishnan and G.Aravindan has recently said in an interview that when he decided to direct a film in the year 1968, his plan was to opt for Vincent as its director.

I liked the film *Murappennu*, directed by Vincent and decided that he should direct my first film. You know back in the sixties they were considered as master directors, P.Bhaskaran, Ramu Kariat, Vincent....I approached him to make a film based on the novel *Anwashichu Kandethiyilla* written by Parappurathu. But Vincent was reluctant with that novel and I later approached P.Bhaskaran who directed the film.... (Neelan: 2009)

Ravindranathan Nair later produced a film with Vincent as its director, named *Achani* which was a huge financial success. The film which was produced with a capital of a meager sum of Rs 4 lakhs fetched a return of Rs 14 lakhs which was more than three fold of the total investment. Vincent was very careful about the selection of the story, and if the story did not satisfy him he did not proceed with it (Neelan: 2009:8). By the 1970s he had a clear command over the films that he directed, and even the presence of some of the leading actors was not a major factor in the success of the film. In the 1970s he had the courage to make two films with two of the least glamorous —but artistically superior —actors P.J.Antony (*Almaram*, 1970) and Adoor Bhasi (*Dharmayuddham*, 1973). Adoor Bhasi's role in *Dharmayudham* was a break from his usual image of a comedian. In 1972, Vincent directed the film *Theertha Yathra* in which the lead role was played by Sudheer, who was introduced by Vincent in his movie *Nizhalattam* in 1970. In 1976 in his film, *Anaavaranam*, almost all the actors were new faces. And I have already mentioned that Vincent's 1984 film *Sri Krishnaparunthu* was a great stepping stone for the career growth of Mohanlal as a superstar in Malayalam cinema.

All these indisputably prove that Vincent was an active force in the Malayalam cinema industry by the mid 1970s. And the 1970s can be seen as a decade in which he deviated many times from the normal track of film making. A prominent director in the Malayalam language during the 1970s who had attempted a number of deviations or what can be termed as experiments is P.N.Menon, who had an equal footing as an auteur film maker in Malayalam cinema. Menon's films like *Olavum Theeravum*, *Chayam*, *Chemaparathy*, *Darsanam*, *Gayathri* etc were distinct for his preference of outdoor locations and a total rejection of studio sets. Perhaps one reason for this can be that Menon was a set designer in the early phase of his career and this would have created a negative impact on him about the images created in a studio. Apart from his option for realistic locations, Menon had leaning towards odd and uncommon themes like incest which was a shock to the spectators in Kerala way back in the 1970s.

But the deviations that Vincent practiced were subtler and were not easily noticeable as they were wrapped in the manipulative format of popular culture. Vincent was aware that even though different themes can be negotiated, one can not largely ignore the larger rules or formal mechanisms of popular cinema. But here he made sure that his authorial signatures were clearly marked. For example, the normal protocols of popular narrative cinema like the comedy tracks are strictly followed by Vincent in every film. For example in *Bhargaveenilayam*, the actor Adoor Bhasi plays the role of Cheriya Pareekkanni, a vagabond-like character who lives with the writer as his servant. There are many occasions in the film that he goes through hallucinatory experiences which are both fantastic and comical. Vincent use many camera tricks to perform these scenes and these scenes fulfill both the functions of normal comedy scenes but also the director's familiarity with camera tricks to create a definite mark of his own. That is the comedy tracks are not just created by the comedians who are assigned for the particular scenes, according to their own imagination. And we see that in the film it is not just the comedians' performance that creates a scene of humour, but even inanimate objects like a knife or bicycle are also employed deftly for the purpose. So what is described in a line in the script is transformed into an elaborate performance of camera positions or deceptive tricks.

This is what gives a strong performative element to the films directed by Vincent from scripts written by various writers. When Basheer writes in his script or screenplay, that "the knife on the writers table raises itself and hovers in the air, just above Cheriya Pareekkani's abdomen", it is just a description. But the elaborate process through which, such a scene is depicted in the film clearly explains the performative intervention that Vincent makes as a director. Peter Lehman in one article says that this it is in this precise zone of creativity between the general description and the realization, that the authorship of the text takes place (Lehman in Grant: 2008:164). And I think the reason why Vincent did not show interest in certain literary works like the one mentioned by Ravindranathan Nair earlier was that such texts might not have given him much room for authorial performance.

Vincent's style in using music to accent the particular mood of certain scenes in the film was noted by many critics. Cynic, the renowned staff film critic in the weekly, *Mathrubhumi*, wrote while reviewing the film, *Murappennu* that the director had shown notable sensitivity in using music in the appropriate places. "When one character in the film, Balan, sings the song *karayunno puzha chirikkunno...* standing on the banks of the river Bharathapuzha, which cries through the rainy month of Karkadakam⁹ and smiles through the bright sunny days of Kanni, it was really a touching experience for us. And the director's usage of this song in appropriate places to create a particular mood, is very much sensible" (Cynic: 1968: 251). In the film *Nizhalattam*, in the opening title sequence Vincent uses the penetrating sound of machines in a timber factory, for the film deals with the story of a rich family who own a timber factory. The chilling creeks of saw mills are really quite haunting and convey a sense of haunting solitude. But later in the film the same music is used when the family property of the lead character in the film, Ravi, is confiscated by the creditors. Here the music conveys the sense of anguish and helplessness of the lead character. And the camera work in that shot is really excellent and is powerful in the sense that it creates a psychedelic atmosphere throughout the scenes. The repetitive usage of music to connote subtle emotional variations can be

⁹ Karkadakam and Kanni are two months in the Malayalam calendar.

noticed in the film *Nadi* as well, in which the highly aestheticised depiction of song sequences have a tremendous impact on the narrative.

These techniques were widely used by the mainstream film industry later. Vincent was one of the distinguished directors who not only influenced the subsequent generations of film makers, but was also able to rear a number of youngsters who would later become prominent icons in the Malayalam film industry. Melattor Ravi Varma, himself a product of Film and Television Institute of India in Pune, who assisted Vincent in many films, has said that he was proud to be disciple of Vincent's. "I am always proud that I could assist in many films directed by him. Working with him was a tremendous experience. You know he was a real disciplinarian on the sets and would not tolerate any errors from the entire crew. And on the set he had the complete control and command and not even the top stars would dare to utter a word against his direction." (Ravi Varma-Interview: 2008)

The renowned Malayalam director the late Enkakkattu Bharathan started his career working as an art director with Vincent master. As John Paul says, "Bharathan came to Madras to assist his uncle P.N.Menon in set designing. Then he started designing posters for films and was noticed by Vincent master. Vincent master, who was himself a painter, liked Bharathan's talent for painting and asked him to design some set for his film *Gandharvakshetram*. Later he assisted the master in films like *Achani* and *Chenda* and that was a new beginning" (Paul-Interview: 2009).

There were many others like Mohan who created a different stream of middle cinema in Malayalam, who got their apprenticeship from the school of film making led by A. Vincent. And the particular language followed by Vincent in designing and shooting song sequence has inspired a lot of young film makers like Priyadarsan who follow such a grammatical style. I mention all these to indicate the extension and scope of Vincent's influence in the Malayalam cinema of later years.

My dissertation is an attempt to enquire into the evolution of the particular visual style that Vincent employed in his career as a cinematographer and director. I have looked into the various films he has cinematographed and directed. I have noticed a stylistic coherence in these films and have also noticed certain specific features which can be interpreted as his signature style. What I want to say is that Vincent is a director who took a lot of interest in the stylistic aspects of cinema even though the preoccupations of the particular field of cinema he was working in were not concerned with the issues of style. It is this fact that defines his work in terms of the auteur theory.

At the same time, this does not mean that Vincent was a director concerned with the stylistic aspect above every thing else. His work followed the normal genre patterns of Malayalam cinema and its accepted protocols and conventions. Yet working within the constraints, he tried and succeeded in giving an individual style to his films. In that sense he was raising the issues of authorship in Malayalam cinema in terms of the director's role and contribution to cinema. The work of other directors whom I have bracketed along with him, like Ramu Kariat, P.Bhaskaran, K.S.Sethhumadhavan, M.Krishnana Nair and P.N.Menon also raises this issue of authorship of a film in terms of the director's role. They all have created their own style, if in varied degrees, and created a particular brand value for the films made by them which was very useful in the marketing of their film.

But the issues of authorship as creative value and aesthetical distinctiveness were raised by the directors who worked with the particular authorial concept defined by art cinemas of various other countries. Normally, in their perspective the above mentioned directors like Vincent were just film makers who worked for the entertainment cinema, or sometimes what the art film makers called "escapist cinema". But the new explorations made in Cinema Studies in general and authorship theories in particular engage with the problem from a totally different perspective, and this calls for a reevaluation of the existing concepts and formulations in Malayalam cinema as elsewhere. I hope that my intervention through this dissertation, in the ongoing debate on authorship and the way it is defined in the history of Malayalam cinema will further encourage others to critically engage with these issues.

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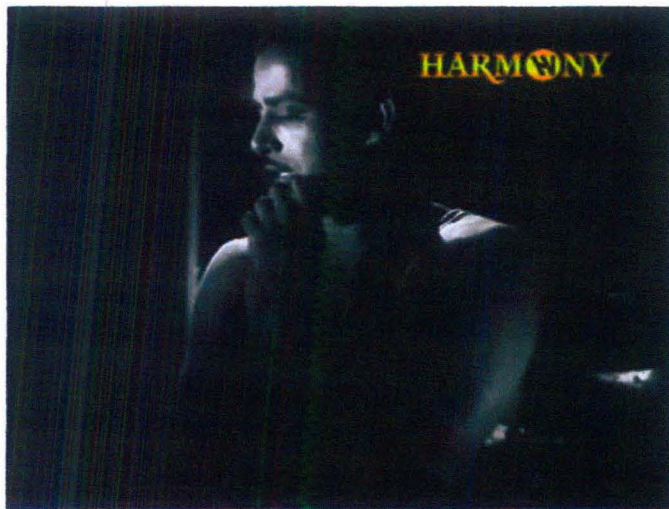
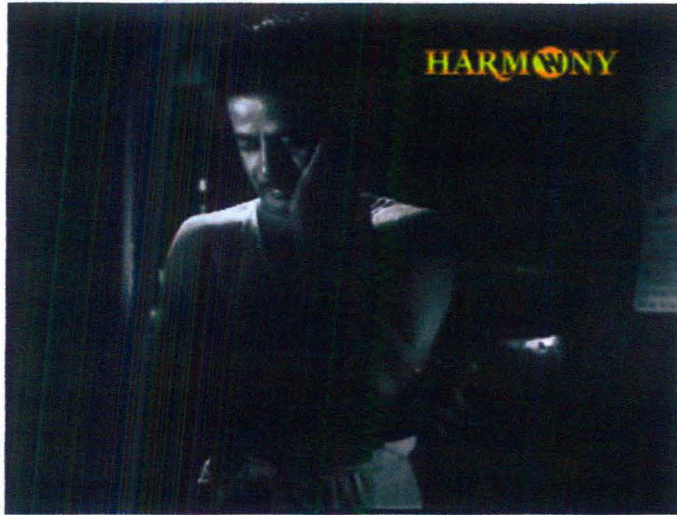
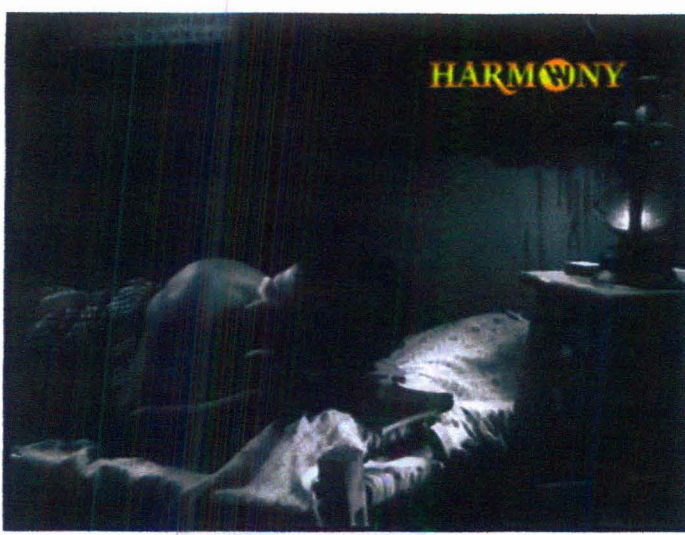
Madhu (June, 2009)

John Paul (June, 2009)

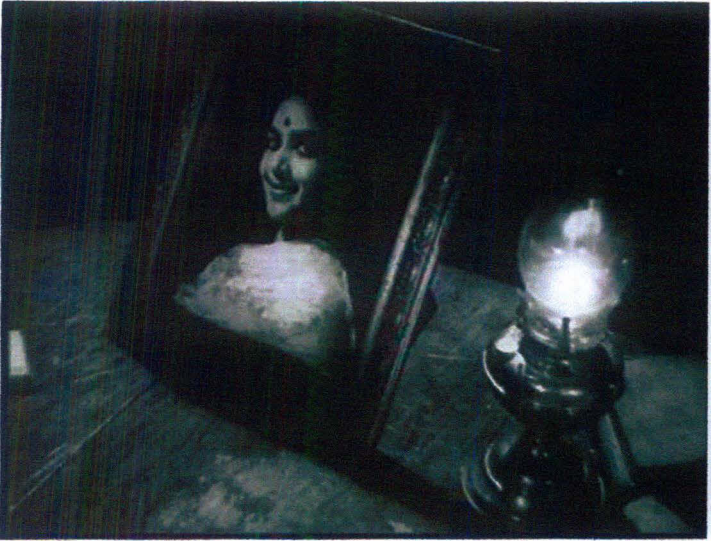
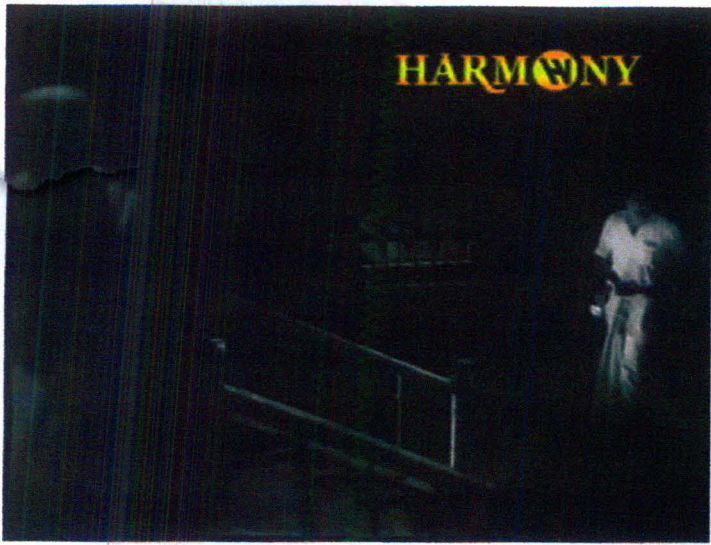
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23. *Shree Krishnaparanthu* (1984) –The Black Eagle
24. *Pournami Raavil* (1985) –In The Full Moon Night
25. *Kochu Themmedi* (1986) –Little Scoundrel



NEELAKKUYIL



BHARGAVI NILAYAM



NADI



TRIVENI