

Narratives and Counter-Narratives: A Comparative Study Based on ‘Oru Desathinte Katha’ and ‘The Kashmir Files’

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Abstract: This paper examines how narratives and counter-narratives function, drawing on two artistic works created against the backdrop of ethnic riots that occurred in India in the last century. The novel ‘Oru Desathinte Katha’, set against the backdrop of the Mappila rebellion in Tirur, Kerala, in 1991, and the film ‘The Kashmir Files’, set against the backdrop of the ethnic violence in Kashmir in 1990, are compared here. The study investigates whether the fundamental historical consciousness required while analysing historical events is reflected in narratives and counter-narratives.

Keywords – Narrative, Counter-narrative, Post-truth era, Mappila rebellion, Kashmir ethnic violence, Literature, Cinema and History.

Introduction

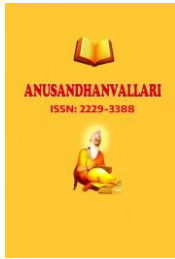
Narratives play a major role in determining world history. Therefore, power politics controls narratives. The narratives created by power have clear intentions. Often, society takes time to recognise the true intentions behind such narratives. Counter-narratives bring out the realities hidden within narratives. By analysing two artistic works created in the background of two ethnic riots in India, let us examine how narratives and counter-narratives function.

Novel: Narrative and History

The Mappila rebellion, centred in Tirur, Kerala, broke out in 1991. S. K. Pottekkatt, a renowned writer in Kerala, wrote the novel ‘Oru Desathinte Katha’ in 1971, set against the backdrop of this rebellion, in Malayalam. The novel received the Jnanpith Award in 1980. Most of the events in the first part of the novel, consisting of twenty-two chapters, take place against the backdrop of the Mappila rebellion. ‘Oru Desathinte Katha’ is an autobiographical novel of S. K. Pottekkatt, who was born in Kozhikode in 1913. Pottekkatt was eight years old when the rebellion took place. He had the opportunity to hear about the events of the rebellion and to directly see refugees who fled to Kozhikode as part of it. The protagonist of the novel, Sreedharan, hears about the rebellion from his father, Krishnan Master. Later, when he reaches his maternal home in Elanjipoyil, he also sees refugees who have arrived there. Chandukunjhan, a member of that refugee group, becomes Sreedharan’s friend. Detailed accounts of the rebellion are provided in the novel at various points.

There are different narratives about the 1921 rebellion. Those who witnessed it first-hand say it was a one-sided communal riot. Others later argued that it was an anti-British peasant uprising as part of the freedom struggle. Still others say that although it began as a peasant uprising, it later turned communal. Numerous records exist, from the memoirs of eyewitness K. Madhavan Nair during 1923–24 to the article by M. G. S. Narayanan in 2016. In ‘Oru Desathinte Katha’, S. K. Pottekkatt presents the rebellion through stories heard and witnessed. History books remind us that these stories are not mere fiction. Therefore, the novel becomes a literary file of the Mappila rebellion.

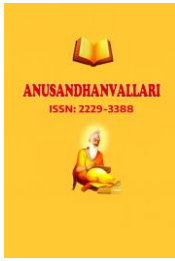
The news of the rebellion first reaches Athiranippadam, Sreedaran’s village, through Kittan Writer in the novel’s twelfth chapter. Kittan Writer describes the nature of the rebellion to Krishnan Master as follows: “*The first ritual of converting kafirs is said to be ‘Kulippichu kettal’—then they are fed beef, their heads are shaved, they are circumcised, made to wear caps. If they resist, they are killed. They are not killed quickly. It is said to be a pastime for them to skin a person alive and leave him standing.*” (78, 79) From the novel, it is understood that ‘Kulippichu



kettal' is the initial step of conversion. However, in K. Madhavan Nair's book, it is stated that the term "Kulippikkal" was used to refer to beheading Hindus. He writes: "The rebels used the term 'Kulippikkuka' to refer to taking someone to the riverside and cutting their throat. Namboodiris and others were killed in this manner." (215) Thus, it becomes clear that those willing to convert were 'Kulippichu kettal', while those unwilling were 'Kulippikkal' (killed). Elsewhere, Madhavan Nair writes: "The entire country came under their control. The police fled and hid. Officials were nowhere to be seen. Government power had completely collapsed. The Mappilas became certain they could do anything. With the establishment of Islamic authority, the fanatic Mappilas of Pookkottur conceived an idea: there should no longer be two religions—Hindu and Islam... Conversion had already begun in Pookkottur before Friday. From August 23 onwards, they began forcing Hindus to convert." (166) K. Madhavan Nair, who was an executive member of the Indian National Congress, was an eyewitness to these events. K. P. Kesava Menon also testified that Madhavan Nair, being from Eranad and involved in peace efforts during the rebellion, directly witnessed many incidents. His book 'Malabar Rebellion' became a primary reference for all subsequent studies on the rebellion.

In 'Oru Desathinte Katha,' the intensity of the rebellion becomes clearer in the chapter 'Jagala.' While earlier we understood the events through Kittan Writer's words, here the novelist himself describes it: "The violence is growing. The people of Athiranippadam, young and old alike, live in fear of when the rebels will march into the town. They may arrive at any moment. All villages in the southern and eastern corners of the district are said to be under their control. They have seized offices, looted treasuries, burned records, attacked and captured police stations, and taken possession of guns and weapons, establishing their rule everywhere. They have taken over Namboodiri (Brahmins) houses and Hindu homes, looted grain and money, forcibly converted Hindus, and killed those who resisted, moving forward with loud proclamations. They have installed their own kings, governors, and commanders. British rule has collapsed. People are fleeing rural areas in groups to towns, taking their belongings with them. If the rebellion spreads here, where will the townspeople go?" (84, 85) Historical studies indicate that these events actually occurred after August 21. Dr M. Gangadharan, quoting R. H. Hitchcock, writes: "Soon after, a group of rebels attacked all government offices in Tirurangadi. The police station, sub-magistrate court, and sub-registrar's office were set on fire... On that day, Ali Musliyar was declared king and began overseeing administration in the absence of other authorities." (185) K. Madhavan Nair recalls the same incident: "The police fled into the bushes and forests. All weapons in the police station fell into rebel hands. Officials were nowhere to be found. All signs of anarchy appeared... Around midnight, the sound of countless people loudly chanting 'Allahu Akbar' began to echo. Having heard this chant in many assemblies, hearing it now mixed with the sound of doors and locks being broken in the night gave it an indescribable terror." (143)

Dr B. R. Ambedkar did not see the Malabar rebellion as an isolated incident. In "Pakistan Allenkil India Vighajanam," he records that similar one-sided riots occurred in several places in India with large Muslim populations. He writes that for any Muslim in the world, there are only two lands: one under Islamic rule and another under non-Islamic rule. The duty of Muslims in Islamic lands is to preserve that rule, and in non-Islamic lands to bring them under Islamic rule. He further states that Indian Muslims were under non-Islamic rule, governed by the British who had removed the Caliph of Turkey. Naturally, they harboured hatred toward the British. Mahatma Gandhi believed this hatred could be used to involve Muslims in the national movement, but Ambedkar considered this a grave mistake. Analysing the Mappila rebellion, he writes: "The rebels propagated through sermons that India under British rule was Dar-ul-Harb (land of war), and Muslims must wage war against it, or adopt Hijrat... Their goal was to overthrow British rule and establish Islamic governance. Knives, swords, and spears were secretly manufactured... Roads were blocked, telegraph lines cut, and railway tracks destroyed. Administration collapsed. The Mappilas declared Swaraj had been established. Ali Musliyar was declared king. Khilafat flags were raised. Eranad and Valluvanad were proclaimed Khilafat states." (226–27) The key point here is that the rebellion against the British was not for India's independence, but to establish an Islamic state.

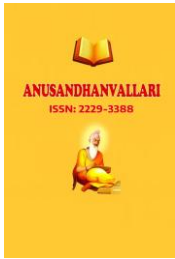


As a result, Gandhi's two objectives—non-violence and national unity—failed. More importantly, the rebellion was directed against Hindus. Ambedkar clearly recognised this and writes: *“Rebellion against the British is understandable. But what is shocking is the attitude of the Mappilas toward the Hindus of Malabar. The Hindus suffered terribly at their hands—massacres, forced conversions, destruction of temples, brutal atrocities against women, including ripping open pregnant women's bellies, looting, arson, and destruction—in short, a savage and unrestrained tyranny was imposed upon Hindus... This was not a Hindu-Muslim riot. The exact number of Hindus killed, injured, or converted is unknown, but it must have been enormous.”* (227) From this, it is evident that the massacres in Malabar reached national attention. It should also be remembered that Ambedkar himself later embraced Buddhism in protest against caste discrimination in Hinduism.

E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the first chief minister of Kerala and thinker, viewed the hostility of Malabar Muslims toward the British not as a result of events in Turkey, but as rooted in history dating back to Tipu Sultan's campaigns. Under Tipu's rule, Muslims had special privileges, which were lost after the British took control following the Treaty of Srirangapatna. This led to repeated rebellions, culminating in the 1921 uprising. He writes: *“The awareness spread that it was the duty of every Muslim to become a martyr in the 'jihad' to protect their religion and culture and regain lost authority... Efforts by Muslim elites and clergy to restore their dominance, and British measures to suppress them, formed the core of the Mappila problem.”* (274) Even while acknowledging socio-economic factors, E. M. S. admits that religious intolerance was central to the rebellion.

In Pottekkatt's novel, the people of Athiranippadam take steps to resist if the rebels arrive. Local leaders organise defence measures, and pamphlets and songs spread awareness. It is understood that some rebels disguise themselves and enter villages and towns to spread the rebellion. Such disguised agents are identified and caught. In the chapter 'Ayisha', an old Mappila man selling herbal medicine is suspected to be a rebel agent and is threatened and sent away. In the chapter “Ellinkoodum Elanjipoomaalayum,” further descriptions are given: *“The rebels hiding in forests would come down to villages for food. At midnight, they would enter landlords' houses, demanding rice and cattle. If refused, they would massacre entire families. If given, the police would later accuse the household of aiding rebels and arrest them. There was no escape for villagers. Most rebels were ignorant and superstitious. Leaders convinced them that the British aimed to destroy Islam and mosques. Clerics told them that killing kafirs would earn them heaven... Thus, they fought to the end in the name of religion, becoming a kind of suicide squad.”* (116) K. Madhavan Nair's writings confirm this mindset: *“The belief that killing kafirs leads to heaven exists among many Mappilas in Eranad. This superstition is reinforced by uneducated clerics... At the slightest religious provocation, without verifying truth, they erupt into violence like madmen.”* (26)

In the novel, when rumours spread that rebels are approaching, Krishnan Master sends his son Sreedharan to Elanjipoyil. There, he witnesses a tragic sight—refugees who fled in fear: *“Hundreds of families who barely escaped brutal attacks or fled in fear had arrived from south-eastern villages. Many had lost family members; some died on the way without medical care; women who lost honour committed suicide; many were wounded.”* (118) Acts of extreme brutality similar to those of rioters are also described in the book of K. Madhavan Nair. See: *“More than a hundred houses there were set on fire and destroyed. The house of Thiruthikkalathil Nampi, who was both an official and a landlord, was burned to ashes. Women and children were captured even as they tried to escape. The men were separated, cut down, and thrown into the river. A reliable person told the editor of Kerala Patrika that he personally counted the bodies of 40 Hindus who died in this incident, and this was reported in the newspaper. Among them was the body of a woman who was seven months pregnant. Because her abdomen had been brutally cut open, the fetus had come out and lay dead. This terrible incident took place on the 9th of November. After that, all the remaining Hindus in that area fled for safety.”* (227, 28) At that time, such brutal acts committed by rioters in the name of religion were widely reported everywhere. Perhaps it was upon hearing this that the great poet Kumaran Asan, in 'Duravastha', asked the rioters:



“Do you not have mothers? Do you not have mothers and sisters? Do these cruel people have no thought of God?” (748) Even a starving wild animal would not attack a pregnant victim.

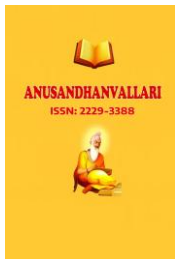
In the novel, among those who came as refugees to Ilanjippoyil, the one most deeply wounded was a man named Rarukkutty. Pottakkad describes how Rarukkutty escaped from the rioters: “A group of about thirty rioters suddenly stormed into Rarukkutty’s village at midnight, shouting battle cries. A few days earlier, the police had taken away two Mappilas from that village on suspicion. The rioters had come to take revenge, believing that the villagers had informed the police about their men. What followed was a frenzy of destruction by the enraged mob. They had no time to ‘Kulippichu kettal’ or prepare meat. All the ‘kafirs’ they found in the village were hacked to pieces and thrown into an abandoned well. The well was filled with corpses. It was then that they saw Rarukkutty hiding near a banana plant. They stabbed him and threw him into the well as well... When Rarukkutty slowly regained consciousness, he couldn’t understand anything at first. It was raining. Where was he lying in the rain? He could feel groans and movements beneath him—gradually, he realised he was lying on a heap of corpses. It was the rain that saved him—he regained consciousness when the cold rainwater touched him. His body was covered with deep wounds. Slowly, as he raised his hand and felt around, he touched the edge of the well. Using the corpses for support, he struggled and managed to climb out and reach the ground above. Everywhere was silent.” (119) This refers to the infamous Thuvvur massacre during the Mappila rebellion. Regarding this massacre that took place on September 24, K. Madhavan Nair’s book describes it as follows: “There is a rock on the eastern side of a plot on the slope of a hill there. Near that rock, each person (Hindus) was brought and interrogated. People say that this interrogation was conducted either by Variyamkunnath Kunhahammed Haji or by Chembrasserri Thangal... In any case, a few months after the riots, I had the opportunity to visit that well along with Srinivasa Sastri. At that time, we counted around 20 skulls. I also remember reading in a newspaper that some visitors had written that one skull appeared to have been split with a saw.” (201, 202)

Cinema: Narrative and History

The atmosphere in Malabar in 1921 was similar to that in Kashmir in 1990. In a one-sided ethnic riot, more than a thousand people were killed in Kashmir. Even more people fled as refugees to Jammu, Delhi, and elsewhere. This is the background of the 2022 film ‘The Kashmir Files’, directed by Vivek Agnihotri. In the violence that broke out in the Kashmir Valley in 1990, hundreds of Pandits were killed, and thousands fled. Convert, flee, or die—these were the three options that Islamic extremists placed before the Pandits. The Pandits were forced to accept all three. The government, the media, and the Pandits themselves hold the records of all this. Yet, for three decades, the Pandits wandered as refugees on the streets of Jammu and Delhi. Until Article 370 was revoked, they received no justice. Even now, Pandits are living as refugees.

Krishna Pandit, the student in the film, belongs to such a Pandit refugee family. When his father, mother, and elder brother were brutally killed during the violence, Krishna was a child. It is his grandfather, who fled from there to Delhi, who raises him. Krishna grows up, studies, and gets admitted to a prestigious university in Delhi. There, he becomes part of a student organisation activity led by Professor Radhika Menon. The professor’s view is that Kashmir is not part of India and should be independent. Though Krishna Pandit initially could not agree with this, under the professor’s continuous brainwashing, he, too, begins to raise slogans of ‘Azadi’ (freedom). However, his grandfather, who learns of this, strongly opposes him. The grandfather knows that the slogan ‘Azadi’ echoing in the university is the same slogan that terrorists raised in Kashmir in the 1990s. The grandfather had only told Krishna that his parents and brother had died in an accident. Later, Krishna learns the truth. From a file kept by his grandfather’s friend, an IAS officer, Krishna understands the facts. Along with that, he realises that his professor is an agent of terrorists.

When the film begins, against the background commentary of an India–Pakistan cricket match, Shiva is playing cricket with his friend Abdul. He happily chants “Sachin, Sachin.” At that moment, some men arrive and begin



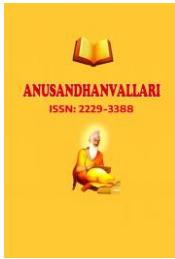
to beat him. With eyes filled with hatred, those men call him an “Indian dog.” Shiva is the elder of Karan’s two sons. His younger brother Krishna is an infant. Pushkar Nath Pandit, a teacher, feared for the safety of his son Karan, whom the terrorists had accused of being an Indian spy. Pushkar’s fear was justified. Farooq Malik Bitta, a militant commander and also Pushkar’s former student, forcibly enters Pushkar Nath’s house and shoots Karan. At that time, Pushkar and his daughter-in-law, Sharada, begged for their lives. Bitta forces Sharada to eat rice soaked in Karan’s blood. After Bitta and his group leave the house, Pushkar pleads with his doctor friend, Mahesh Kumar, to bring an ambulance and save Karan’s life. But the terrorists had taken control of the hospital. They had forbidden the staff from treating non-Muslims. Karan then dies.

Pushkar and Sharada, along with their two children, reach Jammu as refugees from the Kashmir Valley along with others. One day, a group of terrorists led by Bitta arrives at the camp disguised as members of the Indian army. When the terrorists capture his elder son, Shiva, Sharada resists them. Enraged, Farooq strips her clothes and cuts her in half with a saw. He lines up Shiva and the remaining Pandits and shoots them dead. He spares Pushkar, leaving him alive to spread what happened. After this incident, Pushkar Pandit takes the infant Krishna and comes to Delhi. For nearly 32 years, he has lived remembering the traumatic experiences that happened to him and his family in Kashmir. Throughout the film, he is seen walking around with a placard that says ‘Repeal Article 370.’ This was a silent protest. He aimed to inform the world about the horrific events his community faced in 1990. But before his wish is fulfilled, Pushkar dies. To fulfil his grandfather’s last wish, Krishna Pandit goes to Kashmir.

The Jammu and Kashmir issue has always been a headache for India. This problem began with the immature decisions made by the political leadership at the time of the India–Pakistan partition. Many books have been written on this subject. Therefore, there are different narratives regarding this issue. However, many who have approached this topic academically say that Jawaharlal Nehru’s unilateral stance worsened the Kashmir issue. When Nehru attempted to conduct a plebiscite in Kashmir and take the issue to the United Nations, Sardar Patel warned that this would lead to far-reaching problems. This is mentioned in Navnita Chadha Behera’s book *‘Demystifying Kashmir’*- “*In a radio broadcast on November 2, 1947, Nehru promised the Kashmir’s future would be decided in accordance with the wishes of the people, though “a referendum held under international auspices like the United Nations” Only a few weeks earlier, Nehru had affirmed that “accession dependent upon the will of people should be the general principle.” Even though his home minister, Sardar Patel, was opposed to the idea as an “unnecessary complication” (31) The author goes on to say that a major mistake made by Nehru is the cause of all this “Referring the Kashmir issue to the United Nations proved to be Nehru’s biggest blunder. It was no longer just Jinnah and Pakistan-backed raiders that India had to face, but the diplomatic might of the British and later the Americans, who wholeheartedly backed Pakistan.” (33)*

The mistake Nehru made regarding the Kashmir issue is also mentioned in Hari Jaisingh’s book *‘Kashmir: A Tale of Shame’*- “*Our politicians have made many mistakes while dealing with Kashmir. One was Nehru’s delayed decision on Kashmir’s accession. This delay enabled Pakistan to mount the aggression, which subsequently resulted in the Kashmir problem.*” (11) The second blunder committed by Nehru proved even more disastrous in the context of Kashmir. It was related to granting special status to Kashmir. Hari Jaisingh points out that Nehru was influenced in this matter by his Communist friends. However, Sardar Patel did not agree to this under any circumstances. After Patel’s death, the issue resurfaced with even greater force. The author says, “*The death of Sardar Patel on 15 December 1950 was a great setback to India. He would have been a source not only of strength but also of sound advice. After his death, Kashmir affairs came under Nehru’s control in every respect, and no interference from any quarter was permitted. The death of Sardar also emboldened the sheikh to place before Nehru the demand for Article 370- the first separatist demand of Kashmir Muslims.*” (80)

By internationalising the Kashmir issue and granting special status to Kashmir, it became easier for Pakistan-backed militants to carry out anti-India activities. This also helped them draw Muslim youth in Kashmir into militant activities. The aftermath of this was seen in 1990. The ethnic violence that took place in Kashmir in

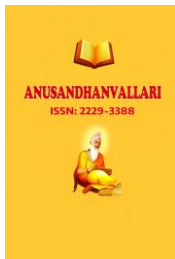


1990 is discussed in Hari Jaisingh's book *'Kashmir: A Tale of Shame'* - "From December 1989 onwards, Kashmiri Pandits started receiving threatening letters, asking them to quit the valley. But Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah did nothing to back the terror tactics. The attacks on Pandits in Anantnag and later the indiscriminate killing of members of this community at Habba Kadal in Srinagar forced them to migrate. Panic gripped them, and they left in haste, leaving everything behind... On 14 April 1990, the terrorists issued a warning that the Pandits should leave the Valley within 48 hours. If they dared to return, the punishment would be death, they threatened. Today, Farooq says that he is ashamed of the entire episode. Too late for comfort!" (114)

The suffering endured by the Pandits in the aftermath of the violence is beyond words. He further says, "Mass exodus of Pandits started from the Valley. The House of Pandits were burnt, and property was looted. There was utter chaos as the state government could do little to control it. The Central Government watched silently and did nothing to strengthen the administration." (115) The book *'The Dying Terrorism: Ballot Defeated Bullet in Jammu and Kashmir'*, co-authored by Jaleel Ahmad Khan and Sudhir S. Bloeria, provides factual details of the ethnic violence that took place in 1990. Both of these authors are IAS officers. The book states as follows, "The first quarter of 1990, particularly the month of March, saw a euphoria in favour of 'Azadi' in support of which large processions were taken out in Srinagar and elsewhere in the Valley... It was around this period that mosques and shrines were used by terrorists and their supporters for raising anti-India and pro-Independence slogans." (60) This book discusses the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits during the period of violence. "During 1990-93, 126 temples, 2050 houses and 183 shops of Kashmiri Pandits were set ablaze, and the number of Pandits killed reached a figure of 116. Till the middle of 1990, 29,529 Kashmiri Pandit families migrated from the Valley and by 1992, this number rose to over fifty-five thousand." (61) In the memoir *'Our Moon Has Blood Clots: The Exodus of the Kashmiri Pandits'*, Rahul Pandita describes the depth of the suffering they endured. He speaks about the issue that troubled them on the day they arrived in Jammu as refugees, "Once we were in Jammu, the other worries took over. Where were we going to live? Where would the money come from? Was everyone else safe- our friends, relatives? Suddenly, the premise that everything was going to be all right in a few months didn't seem plausible at all- it would take much longer to return. But the thought that we might never return still did not cross our minds." (100)

Counter-Narratives: In the Novel and the Film

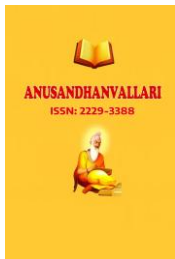
The novel *'Oru Desathinte Katha'* and the film *'The Kashmir Files'* can be seen as two similar 'files' that we must examine seriously. The file prepared by S.K. Pottekkatt in 1971 was not examined with the seriousness it deserved by Malayalis. The reason is that, in later years, there were organised attempts to suppress and distort the facts contained in that file. During the Mappila Rebellion, newspapers and periodicals carried reports of the events. Moreover, official British records also contain factual details of the rebellion. In addition, there are eyewitness accounts such as those of K. Madhavan Nair. Even the national leaders of the Indian National Congress recognised the true nature of the Mappila Rebellion. It is worth recalling what B.R. Ambedkar wrote about it in this context. He says: "The blood-curdling atrocities committed by the Mappila of Malabar against the Hindus are indescribable. The wave of fear that spread among Hindus of different opinions across South India gained strength also from the resolutions passed by certain misguided Khilafat leaders praising the Mappila as 'brave warriors fighting for religion.'" (218) Let us also look at what K. Madhavan Nair, who held positions such as member of the All-India Congress Committee, Secretary of the Kerala State Congress Committee, and President of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, wrote based on his personal experiences: "If religious fanaticism, anarchy, and moral degradation were not the main causes of the looting, then what else could it be? If this were a struggle between the poor and the rich, how were the wealthy Mappila spared from the looting? A careful analysis leaves no doubt that this looting was a direct manifestation of communal rivalry." (90) All these are clear historical 'files' available regarding the Mappila Rebellion.



However, these authentic files were suppressed, and in their place, a new file of fabricated narratives was established. These fabricated narratives first emerged from academic circles. They exhibit all the characteristics of a post-truth era. The research conducted after the 1980s by Dr K.M. Panikkar, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, can be viewed in this light. His writings are filled with quotations from various narratives collected about the rebellion. It becomes difficult to distinguish which ideas are Panikkar's and which belong to the quoted sources. In research, quotations are usually used to support or refute an argument, or to show similarities and differences in viewpoints. However, the quotations in Panikkar's work do not serve such purposes. Events and ideas are described, and in between, numbers appear indicating quotations, which readers must check at the end of the chapter. It is unclear why these quotations are used or what Panikkar's stance toward them is. This appears to be an academic strategy to confuse readers. Panikkar's intention seems to be to distance the new generation from the facts of the Mappila Rebellion. By indiscriminately adding numerous quotations, he attempts to lend his agenda authority. This was part of a larger agenda centred on universities. What conclusions does Panikkar draw using all these quotations? They are essentially the same as those earlier presented by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, with the political intent that the Mappila Rebellion was also an anti-feudal struggle.

Following E.M.S., Panikkar traces the origins of the rebellion back to the nineteenth century, but in reality, he tries to evade the truth by presenting statistical data. While E.M.S. was aware of the communal aspects of the rebellion, in Panikkar's interpretation, it is reduced to merely an anti-upper-caste struggle. Thus, the real 'file' of the Mappila Rebellion begins to be suppressed at this point. Moving forward, the narrative takes an opposite direction. This is evident in Dr K.T. Jaleel's research work, *'Malabar Rebellion: A Re-reading.'* Jaleel relies entirely on Panikkar for references. Inspired by Panikkar, he goes a step further and glorifies leaders of the rebellion, such as Variyamkunnath Kunhahammed Haji and Ali Musliyar, as great figures. Seen in this way, we can understand how a 'file' is systematically subverted through careful planning. Dr M.G.S. Narayanan alleges that this subversion began with E.M.S. and that many fell into the trap of historical distortion orchestrated under his leadership. He further states: "*A group that, without ever raising even a single agrarian slogan, shouted 'Allahu Akbar' and set out to destroy the lives and property of peace-loving people created a mixture of religious fanaticism and anti-British sentiment. They may be forgiven, but they should not be glorified.*" (128) It is now understood that K.M. Panikkar had an even greater role in this distortion than E.M.S. The film *'The Kashmir Files'* points us in that direction.

Why is it that the victims of the massacres, migrations, and refugee crises that occurred in Kashmir in the 1990s did not receive justice for so long, despite successive governments being aware of the situation? The reason lies in the public consciousness shaped by systematically developed, fabricated narratives in academic institutions. Terrorists were presented before the media as freedom fighters, and the media cooperated in this portrayal. Thus, an intellectual climate favourable to terrorists was created, and it has influenced governance in recent times. Some media outlets supported the insurgents in Kashmir. Those media were controlled by extremists and intellectuals who received money from them. This is mentioned in Hari Jaisingh's book *'Kashmir: A Tale of Shame'* - "*The Indian media has played a major role in promoting the wayward nature of Kashmiri politics. It chose to lionise local leaders and treated the Valleys as something 'special' from the very beginning. By overlooking the growth of corruption and want of principles in various state administrations of J&K, the media has tolerated violation of democracy; in short, the media has had a hand in creating areas of distortions which only helped the militants.*" (159) Major General Arjun Roy, in his book *'Kashmir Diary'*, examines in detail the psychological relationship between the media and insurgents. He also points out the reasons why both local and national media report news in ways that assist the insurgents. He says, "*What is the role of media in a militant situation? The media, as the Fourth Estate, plays a proactive role in addressing militancy. The national media is required to do a lot of soul-searching, as the perception of its role and obligations in Kashmir appears ill-defined and hazy.*" (87)



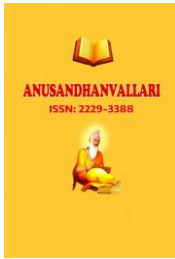
Leftist writers like Arundhati Roy viewed the Kashmir issue similarly. Such writers and thinkers were described as ‘urban Naxals’ by Vivek Agnihotri. They do not believe in the unity of India. They believe that India is a conglomeration of many mutually contradictory nationalities. Arundhati Roy, in her book *‘Azadi: Freedom. Fascism. Fiction’*, says, *“India is not really a country. It is a continent. More complex and diverse, with more languages- 780 at last count, excluding dialects- more nationalities and sub-nationalities, more indigenous tribes and religions than all Europe.”* (110) Roy questions India’s greatest characteristic—unity in diversity. For this very reason, she adopted a stance that supports the separatists in Kashmir. Her position is that the present central government also has a role in the radicalisation of youth in Kashmir. When the Narendra Modi government revoked Kashmir’s special status, Roy wrote an article in protest, in which she says, *“On 6 August, a bill was passed in parliament stripping the state of Jammu and Kashmir of its autonomy and special status enshrined in the Indian constitution. It was divested of statehood and downgraded into two union territories: Ladakh and Jammu and Kashmir. Ladakh would have no legislature and would be governed directly by New Delhi... The problem of Kashmir, we were told, had been solved once and for all. In other words, Kashmir’s decades-long struggle for self-determination, which has cost tens of thousands of lives of soldiers, militants and civilians, thousands of enforced ‘disappearances’ and cruelly tortured bodies- was over.”* (253-54)

When the film *‘The Kashmir Files’* was released, it received widespread attention. Consequently, ‘urban Naxals’ came forward criticising the film. In an article by Sanjay Kak in Al Jazeera Online (13-4-2022), the film is criticised for presenting factual statistics, using the same approach that K. M. Panikkar used in assessing the Mappila Rebellion. He says, *“Eventually, The Kashmir Files is not about setting straight a historical record of Kashmir in the 1990s, or creating an environment that might ease the return home of a community in exile. Its narrative is instead powered by a visceral demonisation of the Kashmiri Muslim, one that renders reconciliation ever more difficult. And by connecting the return of the Kashmiri Pandits to the dream of a glorious ancient past, a political project that elides Kashmir’s 700-year history, it seeds the idea of a return to a Hindu homeland. This is an idea redolent with the implications of dispossession and settlement. That is what makes its ‘truth’ dangerous”.*

This same mindset has also shaped modern narratives of the Mappila Rebellion. Here too, religious fanatics who led the rebellion are transformed into freedom fighters. That is why K.M. Panikkar, a professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, played a greater role than E.M.S. in constructing these false narratives. By presenting the Kashmir issue—one that might have otherwise remained unknown to the world due to being deliberately diverted by ‘urban Naxals’—through his film, director Vivek Agnihotri exposed the hypocrisy of the prevailing academic consciousness in India. Similarly, there is a need to investigate how the true ‘file’ of the Mappila Rebellion was subverted. In such an inquiry, S.K. Pottekkatt’s *‘Oru Desathinte Katha’* can provide further evidence.

Findings:

1. Narratives shape the general public's perspectives. Therefore, those in power tend to shape narratives in ways favourable to them. In the Indian democratic process, narratives that sustain power hold great importance. Hence, authorities closely follow and manage narratives.
2. Religious vote banks are strong enough to influence electoral processes in the Indian democracy. Therefore, power-seeking politicians attempt to align Hindu–Muslim vote banks in their favour. They use narratives for this purpose.
3. In Kerala and Jammu & Kashmir, two states located in the south and north of India, politicians have long used religious vote banks to gain power. Therefore, the narratives constructed here are not connected to reality but to power politics. Compared to the Hindu community, the Muslim community is more organised both religiously and politically. Hindus remain divided into caste groups. Hence, the Muslim



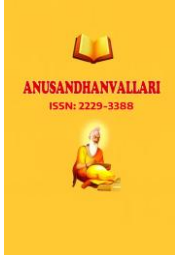
vote bank becomes a decisive force in both these states. According to the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute about 25% of the population in Kerala, while in Jammu & Kashmir, it exceeds 60%.

4. On religious matters, the Left in Kerala maintained a neutral stance until the 1990s. Until then, the Ezhava vote bank, a dominant Hindu community in Kerala, supported the Left. The Muslim vote bank stood with the Right. Later, however, the Left attempted to bring the Muslim vote bank to its side. Recognising this, Jamaat-e-Islami aligned with the Left and encouraged it to construct favourable narratives. This becomes clear when comparing E. M. S.'s early and later positions on the Mappila Rebellion. The thesis on the Mappila Rebellion by left thinker Dr K. M. Panikkar was prepared for Jamaat-e-Islami.
5. Poets like Kumaran Asan and eyewitnesses like K. Madhavan Nair have honestly recorded that what happened in Malabar was an ethnic massacre carried out as part of jihad. It was these realities that S. K. Pottekkatt followed. Since the Left maintained neutrality on religious matters at that time, it welcomed Pottekkatt. However, later, when Jamaat-e-Islami began influencing the Left, new narratives emerged. Writers, thinkers, and media persons aligned with the Left collectively produced narratives favourable to Jamaat-e-Islami. If it had been in this later period, S. K. Pottekkatt would not have been able to write '*Oru Desathinte Katha*.'
6. In Kashmir, right-wing politicians had already begun relying on Muslim vote banks even before the 1980s. Consequently, Jamaat-e-Islami began constructing favourable narratives. They created these narratives through left-leaning academicians in universities like JNU and Aligarh. As a result, ethnic violence carried out by Muslim extremists against the Hindu minority in Kashmir did not reach the general public. The suffering experienced by Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990s is one such issue that did not receive adequate discussion.
7. After the formation of the government in India under Narendra Modi in 2014, a Hindu vote bank emerged parallel to the Muslim vote bank. Until then, the Hindu community, divided along caste lines, began to think in religious terms. Subsequently, the Bharatiya Janata Party used the Hindu community as a vote bank. With this, the duplicity of Jamaat-e-Islami's narratives began to be exposed. The anti-India protests led by students at JNU are evidence of this. It is in this context that Vivek Agnihotri made '*The Kashmir Files*'. Such a film could not have been made before the Narendra Modi government.
8. This analysis shows that, in Indian democracy, narratives are constructed as part of votebank politics. Artistic creations take shape according to these narratives. Therefore, when trying to understand an art form in India, one must understand the narrative of the time in which it was created and the politics behind it.
9. As two different art forms, '*Oru Desathinte Katha*' and '*The Kashmir Files*' share the common possibility of counter-narratives.

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