

Paternal Dispossessions and the Problematic Apparatus of Anthropocene: A Critical Reading of the movie, Kishkinda Kandam

Jesto Thankachan
Assistant Professor
Department of English
St. Peter's College
Kolenchery
Ernakulam
Email: jestothankachan1993@gmail.com

Abstract

The narrative structure of the movie, *Kishkinda Kandam*, intricately elucidates the elusive ontological spectrum of presence evoked by the protagonist Appu Pillai and his son Ajayan. In the film nature appears as a secretive space with an alluring aura to hide intense psychic aberrations of the central characters. Potential discontinuity of memory traces the predicaments of Appu Pillai. Here, nature becomes a textual extension of Appu Pillai's victimhood. The present reading tries to locate the psychic disquiet of the protagonist in terms of his metaphorical closeness to the raw contextual frames of nature. The tale attempts to delineate the existentially expressive structures of Appu Pillai's sickness based on a gun, an apparatus of the anthropocene, which can be taken as a piercing symbol of authentic human intrusion towards nature. The gun as a paradigmatic tool connects the intrinsic precariousness of human existence to the figurative space of wilderness. The psychic disquiet of a vulnerable old man who lost his gun highlights the symbolic shades of paternal dispossession here. *Kishkinda Kandam* depicts many intensely broken codes of hegemonic masculinity. An old man who tries to discover his own selfhood repeatedly lives with his son who is lost in search of his missing child. The existential strand of dispossessions illuminated by masculine identity is attached to the textuality of nature's harmonious being which is deeply wounded by repeated human intrusions. Following the critical paradigms of Health Humanities, this study tries to mark the significant realms of the narrative where the silent ruptures of nature meet the multilayered angst of Appu Pillai.

Keywords: Apparatus, Anthropocene, Psychic Disquiet, Hegemonic Masculinity

Normative modalities of paternal identity can easily constitute repressive familial power structures within a Malayali milieu. Ethical predicaments of identification related to the subjective lives of individuals within such a social space inevitably evoke many political questions. The Malayalam movie, *Kishkinda Kandam*, maps the tropes of paternal identity configuring a metaphorical presence of a missing gun as a figurative tool of signification which embodies the authoritative human intrusion towards the ecological realms of life forms. The tale traces the intricate lives of Appu Pillai, an aging father figure, who struggles with his memory loss and Ajayan, the younger son of Appu Pillai whose psychic disquiet stays vivid with the painful absence of his lost son. The film places the lives of two mentally wounded men within the ground of an

antique house which is situated within the elusive domain of wilderness. Appu Pillai's gun goes missing, fixing the central quest of the narrative. Aparna, Ajayan's second wife, enters the story line with an inquisitive outlook to elucidate the complex existential spectrums of affective presence configured by Appu Pillai, Ajayan and his lost son.

The figurative absence of Appu Pillai's gun serves as a central thread to connect the dominant thematic drives of the narrative. The portrayal of an official drive to renew the gun licence of select individuals marks the beginning of the story. Appu Pillai's gun was not brought for verification. The dominant absence of the gun prepares the ground for Appu Pillai's entry. The recognition of gun's loss is attached to the context in which Ajayan marries Aparna. Ajayan's second marriage sets his identity in the shades of mysterious sufferings. Gradually the layers of Appu Pillai's identity as a former army officer and a strict father become revealed to Aparna, the bride whose character is determined by her natural curiosity. A thorough search for the missing gun happens in the forest area where trees also come under scrutiny. In this part the narrative introduces a crucial frame. Appu Pillai's antique dwelling is surrounded by a reserve forest which asserts the dominant presence of monkeys. When the search for the gun is carried out many toys of the lost child fall down. An abandoned old radio is also seen amidst the branches of a tree. These frames illuminate Appu Pillai's ecologically sensitive habitat. Monkeys are the invasive suspects here. The human quest for a gun opens the representational textuality of a dwelling which is set in a borderland where nature's untamed order of organic being meets the repressive cultural wounds and the psychic disquiet of human existence within a liminal space of being. The search for the missing gun brings the ecological ground inside a metaphorical gun point. The dwelling of the protagonist is situated noticeably in the threshold of ecological and cultural orders of being to make the monkeys the intruders and the enemy of the lost child, Chachu, who is not addressed adequately with his formal name, Chinmay, in the narrative. The lost boy and the monkeys mark their entangled strands of being in the enchantingly existential terrains of presence evoked by Ajayan and Appu Pillai.

Appu Pillai has a silent passion for the folk songs which emanate from North East parts of India. Especially when the trees are explored for the missing gun the background score evokes certain fragments of the mysteriously elegant folk rhymes. Here, Appu Pillai's closeness to nature's rhythmic orders of being unquestionably highlights his psychic orientation. Appu Pillai is related to Sumadathan, a temporary forest watcher. The closeness of these characters to Nature is critical. Sumadathan sells regionally made liquor. His dwelling/ work place is also precisely located in the forest. He was once attached to Maoist movement along with Appu Pillai. When Appu Pillai goes in search of Chachu he meets Sumadathan in a forest area to enquire details regarding his own past. Sumadathan is suspected for security reasons when a gunshot is heard in the forest. When Sumadathan's identity is drawn to analytical reading along with the psychic disquiet of his former companion, Appu Pillai, the political tropes of wilderness as a spatial backdrop for Maoist acts of resistance become projected. The unauthentic gunshot which creates echoes in the forest leaves certain marks upon the

name boards built by the Forest department. This becomes a complex thematic event in the narrative. The gunshot is always generated as an aloof and mysteriously distant experience to the public from the spatial interiority of wilderness. It evokes a faceless instance of terror especially for the circle of authority. The unclaimed gunshot suspends its own authentic being with an elusive lack of rational foundation. But it stays as an extensive expression of political menace within the figurative space of wilderness.

The missing gun and the unauthentic/unclaimed gunshot which produces faceless terror configure a politically symbolic apparatus of identification. To Giorgio Agamben, an apparatus is a heterogeneous set of signifiers which can include virtually anything, linguistic and non-linguistic, under the same heading: institutional structures, discourses, norms, regulatory measures, conceptual propositions etc. An apparatus is the schematic network which gets established between these representational units of signification. Agamben delineates apparatus again as an instrumental image which is always located within power structures to model concrete strategic functions. Apparatus functions at specific functional realms where intersection of power relations become dominant. Here the gun is often a potentially absent presence. As a political image the lost gun can generate the following significations. A missing firearm is always kept apart from the rational rootedness of human actions. A living being like an animal/ man/ child can misuse the weapon without any valid/ authentic motif. Even without apparent use the missing gun is always fearsome as an explosive point of human precariousness. Any time the integrity of human identity can be suspended within the authentic realms of representations. The functional core of authentic societal presence is always politically vulnerable. Wilderness stays as the other side of the authorized/ authentic presence of politically valid identity. In many noteworthy contexts of narrative, the missing gun and the unclaimed gunshot are drawn to the domain of power structures where expressive and conceptual domains of activism become problematic as a particular mode of political resistance. Appu Pillai and Sumadathan, the two old men who were once revolutionaries, abandoned their subversive grounds of aggressive activism years ago. But when a political instance of public menace appears they are taken easily as accessible suspects. Power structures of authority strategically attempt to overcome the mysterious menace produced by the missing gun and unclaimed gunshot by reintroducing the abandoned political faces of these two vulnerable men. The sense of societal insecurity can be taken as the central point of discursive significations here. On the one side, we see the old companions. Appu Pillai and Sumadathan years ago decided to be rebellious activists to support the precarious tribal/indigenous/marginalized sects of society adopting raw methodical structures of aggression as resistance within the frames of wilderness. On the other side, years later, when authentically protected wilderness addresses a faceless instance of unreadable terror these two old men are quickly drawn as suspects with the lack of reliable societal countenance and psycho-cultural credibility. Appu Pillai's suspected gun license is also a figurative tool for dismantling his political and psychological integrity. He was once an activist representing a specific side of societal insecurity. Then he becomes a soldier who supports the administrative systems of power to maintain justice on the other side

of societal insecurity. Sumadathan also has a similar past as he too led an activist's life once before becoming the part of authority as a forest watcher. Conspicuously these two men are thrown out of the authority to the symbolic wilderness of societal insecurity in two different ways with their attacked identities. When Appu Pillai was an army officer he misplaced his firearm. This emerging memory loss serves as the reason for that incident. Sumadathan as a forest guard accidentally was drawn to be the cause of an explosion. Two rejected companions return to the initial inwardness of the wilderness, a political habitat of lost/unauthentic/questionable identities. While Sumadathan is left politically as an outsider, Appu Pillai is excluded from the authentic circles of authority as a strange sick man with fading memories. Both are taken back to their cultural habitat which is extremely close to the wilderness. Appu Pillai consistently maintains his subtle apathy towards the authoritarian structures of institutional power in the narrative.

Appu Pillai's sickness is always attached to the distortion of his own selfhood. He recognizes his own illness with its existential layers of pain. Such a condition makes his reflective self intricately tormented. He keeps his own notes to maintain his subjective memory alive. Every fragment of Appu Pillai's rediscovered past develops an externalized textual structure. He fervently searches for his missing grandson compiling his own noted observations which enable him to assess the evolving contexts. Appu Pillai as a sick man knows his own crucial limitations. But every act of self-recognition is given a very short life span.

Appu Pillai's figurative condition can be examined in terms of Health Humanities, a branch of study which explores the psychic and cultural existence of sick people. Every patient portrays a distinct modality of existential autonomy. The sickness is not just labelled there to be categorized. An empathetic listener's presence can make considerable difference in the realm of diagnosis. In the narrative Appu Pillai has a therapist. The doctor appears in disguise as one of his old companions since Appu Pillai refuses to suspend his autonomy as a stable individual. The diagnosis becomes a critically dialogic act which gradually develops intense conflicts in the psychic realms of Appu Pillai's being making him realize the complexity of his illness repeatedly. Appu Pillai recognizes the deceptive apparatus of therapy and the strategic presence of a stranger/therapist. Diagnosis gives rise to a constructive role play which compels the fallen mind of the patient to regain its strength.

Appu Pillai is a reserved individual who does not wish to make his own hegemonic sense of masculine presence fragile and disoriented. He produces textual inscriptions to keep his sense of integrity sound as, to him, a masculine self is supposed to be rigid and authoritative. But like his subjective memories become erased his potential inscriptions about his own findings too are taken to be burnt. He burns his own findings in strange contexts when he is attacked by severe forms of silent psychic disquiet. His discoveries related to his missing grandson are poignantly documented. But such notes will be destroyed with intense existential pain when he realises that his son/daughter in law is the murderer of his grandson. Repeatedly he traces facts and circumstances to

make this conclusion. But with intricate existential pain he abandons his own findings. That tragic event is symbolically locked at the center of the narrative. Even Aparna is initially kept apart from this bitter core of reality. Appu Pillai does not preserve anything consistently in his reflective domain of self-recognition. The birth and demise of subjective memories happen cyclically in the psychic realm of Appu Pillai's being. This peculiar mobility of subjective memory is symbolically attached to his ecological habitat which is in a way moving away from the painful storages of the past produced by the acts of culture. Nature has to move ahead shedding leaves and flowers towards the next spring. Some skeletons can only remain as the elementary remnants of erased beings. Appu Pillai's psychic textuality of reminiscence indirectly seems to follow the wild orders of natural being with cyclical births and erasures of subjective memory. The instances of the incineration of documented memories are portrayed noticeably as mythological acts of symbolic sacrifices with which rediscovered parts of the selfhood and the psychic wounds are purposefully erased evoking the purifying force of fire for the eternal wellness of being. Appu Pillai reconstructs and leaves his own selfhood in a systemic way. He develops his own subjective ritual in that manner. The mythic presence of fire and the act of figurative incineration of memories along with the cyclical fall and rebirth of existential reflections make the ecological habitat of the old man completely distinct. The representational space of nature becomes an extension of Appu Pillai's existentially tormented selfhood, which can generate mythical shades of significations.

The paternal dispossessions represented by Appu Pillai's identity always carry an ecological and semi mythological backdrop. Foucault analyses the subjection of individuals when he traces the formulation of masculine self in his book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. To him, the man, who is supposed to be described and set free, is designed as an effect of subjection within his own self. This subjection can be a profound state of being to the person. Foucault locates the involvement of a soul in this context. The soul inhabits the masculine self and actualizes every significant layer of existence. This soul can be read as the effect and instrumental force of political anatomy. The soul gradually grows within the body. This thought-project can be placed beside the existential agony, the problematic instances of reminiscences and the potential erasures of fragmented self in the spectrum of being configured by Appu Pillai's identity. He seeks the missing gun and his lost grandson to pacify the intense cultural and psychic drives of the politically aggressive hegemonic soul which designs his own identity. Appu Pillai with his fading memories inscribes and erases his own unique elements of tormented existence as an imaginary prisoner of this figurative soul.

Appu Pillai's ecological habitat and the unauthentic gunshot can be effectively connected to the instrumental concerns of the Anthropocene when we reread our protagonist's existential ruptures in the contexts of self-recognition. The Anthropocene can be understood as the historical context in which cumulative human intrusion becomes a complex threat to nature. Erle Ellis in his book *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* demarcates the conceptual basis of the Anthropocene. From the prehistoric time to the present age the specific role of human beings evolved noticeably. Human

beings went through different subject positions. Progeny, partner, gardener and destroyer etc. can be read as the potential roles portrayed by human beings when they evolved naturally and culturally. Grand narratives made the origin of human beings potentially eminent. *Homo sapiens* were taken to the center of the divine project of creation. But as the rational perspectives of scientific quest developed, *homo sapiens* were taken back to the real spaces of nature with their unavoidable shades of organic being.

In the cultural domain of the Anthropocene the borderline between the space of culture and the ground of wilderness becomes blurred to generate a sense of threat to the organic spaces of living beings. The movie, *Kishkinda Kandam*, elevates this ruined face of nature and the invasive presence of human drives to a level of a political allegory. The unclaimed gun and the unauthentic gunshot produce a figurative space of public menace for the society. On the one side, Nature is wounded badly by the misplaced/misused weapon of human precariousness. On the other side, human agency also addresses deterioration. Appu Pillai's existentially elevated identity crisis signifies an internally destabilized hegemonic masculine self which struggles with the acts of pretension to preserve its sense of integrity. Appu Pillai's sense of presence is completely slippery in the realm of memories. With a contemporary face of Sisyphus, he attempts repeatedly to make his memories stable. But he inevitably fails to sustain his accomplishments. Following another fragment of observation made by Foucault in his book *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences*, the shades of this falling masculinity can be demonstrated critically. When someone tries to face the ontological structure of man recognizing his codes of reign and liberation, he/she has to address the essence of that identity. When the demystified anthropological image of man is rationally found such a moment inevitably generates a subtly philosophical smile in the face of the seeker. There the reflections demarcate the networks of existential quests which define the identity of man.

Appu Pillai is an existential explorer with a bleak future as his past is meant to be frail with a sense of rational and emotional incompleteness. Although Ajayan is always portrayed as someone who searches for his lost son continuously, Appu Pillai is the only man who can answer the salient questions related to the disappearance of his grandson completely. In the narrative the death of the lost child is revealed finally as the critical quest of Aparna reaches its conclusive stage. But there also the ecological spectrum of existence in the realm of Appu Pillai's identity stays relevant through his dead grandson. Ajayan's first wife who dies as a cancer patient accidentally kills her own son when she tries desperately to remove Appu Pillai's loaded gun from the child's hands. This incident tears apart Ajayan's familial space which was already ruined by the fatal disease of his wife. This tragic incident eventually evolves as a political metaphor when Appu Pillai enters the frame to dispose of the dead body. He takes the infant's body to the hidden spaces of his ecological habitat. In fact, this revelation of the child's death happens as an effect of the disclosure of a monkey's murder committed by Ajayan's child. The skeleton of the murdered animal was found accidentally from Appu Pillai's ecological habitat. The old man's lost gun serves as the common

instrument which causes these two murders. In an ecological space where fatal cultural forces of human intervention become embodied by a firearm, an animal is killed first. The infant murderer happens to be killed later by the same weapon. The remnants of the animal's corporeal existence are retrieved as textual indicators of the hidden ecological offence. But, the human body and the fatal weapon, a symbol of advanced form of human vulnerability, continue to be lost/missing. In the realm of ecological textuality, the animal body is rediscovered and read legibly. The human infant's body is thrown apart from the realms of cultural readability. Chachu, the lost child, initially makes a monkey the victim of fatal human precariousness in a highly volatile space of an ecologically ruined habitat. The same tragic vulnerability makes him the second victim. The human body and the animal body are erased similarly from the surface of earth. Amitav Ghosh in his book *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* draws an observation made by Pope Francis evaluating the delicacy of human conditions. To the Pope, a man cannot be read just as an effect of freedom which he constitutes for his own self. He is supposed to be the embodiment of a spirit and will which make him essentially a crucial strand of nature's existence. In the case of Appu Pillai's multifaceted cultural and psychic dispossessions this kind of synthetic vision about the existential spectrum of human precariousness becomes succinctly valid.

The film concisely develops a specific perceptual machinery of significations to artistically locate the psychic modalities of human precariousness delineating the crucial ruptures addressed by the ecological ground of being. Appu Pillai ardently embodies the existential wounds of paternity in distinct ways within his own performative spaces of existential seeking. To configure his psychic frames of self-recognition the ground of nature is taken in the movie as a textually reflective space of cultural consciousness. The narrative structure lets nature absorb the elusive existential wounds of the protagonist metaphorically. The conventional divide between the culturally conditioned human existence and the untamed ecological space of organic living is ontologically problematized in the film. Nature inevitably becomes an unchained existential organ of the culturally wounded paternal identity in the narrative to empower the evolving enunciations of the reflective being.

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