



CINEMATIC DEPICTIONS OF HEGEMONY AND MASCULINITY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POWER, GENDER, AND CLASS IN INDIAN NEW WAVE CINEMA.

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History:</p> <p>Received 15.08.2024 Accepted 15.10.2024 Published 15.12.2024</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>Isolation, Debasement of Power, Hegemonic Masculinity, Indian New Wave Cinema</i></p>	<p><i>The Theoretical Model of Hegemony. underpinning the concept of hegemonic masculinity owes much to critical structuralism in Antonio Gramsci's Marxist analysis of class relations. Thus, the idea assumes power as fundamentally a contested entity between social groups, women, and men. The critical structural entities such as the state, education, religion, media, political institutions, and business are structurally and historically dominated by men. Indian New Wave filmmakers often considered Hegemonic Masculinity the most influential theoretical concept in gender history. Filmmakers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, and Girish Kasaravalli not only widely attributed the term "hegemonic masculinity" through their cinematic lens, but they also depicted how hegemonic masculinity legitimates and reproduces the socio-economic and cultural relationships in terms of power and dominance. By describing the conflicts between power and powerlessness or depicting the debasement of power, Indian New Wave filmmakers depicted how 'Hegemony' refers to a historical situation or circumstances while power is won and held. In this part, I will discuss how social relations regarding hegemonic masculinity are inextricably linked to the gendered psyche and power domination, where the concept of hegemonic masculinity should explore both socio-hierarchical and psychological domains. Here, Shyam Benegal's 'Ankur' (1974) and Adoor Gopalakrishnan's 'Elippathayam' (1984), 'Vidheyan' (1994) will be discussed, exploring how Masculinities are constructed in ways that realise the class and caste dividend. It will also depict how marginalised masculinities are dependent on hegemonic masculinity for authorisation</i></p>
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1. Introduction:

The theoretical model of hegemonyⁱ underpinning the concept of hegemonic masculinity owes much too critical structuralism, to Antonio Gramsci’s neo –Marxist analysis of class relations. Thus, the concept assumes power as fundamentally, a contested entity between social groups, women, and men. The key structural entities such as the state, education, religion,

media, political institutions, and business, being structurally and historically dominated by men, all serve the project of male dominance through their capacity to promote and validate the ideologies underpinning hegemonic masculinity.ⁱⁱ In "Masculinities," Connell (1995) provides a comprehensive examination of hegemonic masculinity, elucidating its connections to Gramsci's analysis of economic class relations through cultural dynamics. Connell posits that hegemonic masculinity is susceptible to challenge and transformation. Hegemonic masculinity is defined as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (p. 77).

Furthermore, hegemonic masculinity serves as a critical component within the theoretical framework of multiple masculinities, also referred to as masculinities theory, which is situated within the critical studies of men. Within this theoretical framework, an internal hierarchical system is evident in relation to various forms of masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity establishes criteria for the formation of other masculinities, specifically complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities, all of which are predicated upon the dynamic relationships that exist among them.

The Indian New Wave represents a critical transition within the domain of art cinema, situating its significance within the broader context of film history. Despite often being overlooked, this cinematic movement played a pivotal role in the evolution of new aesthetic and syntactical approaches to filmmaking. Influenced by various cinematic traditions—including realism, German expressionism, French New Wave, and Brazilian Cinema Novo—the Indian New Wave emerged as a reflection of the diverse components of modernity that developed in disparate cultural contexts.

Central to the New Wave was a pronounced emphasis on aesthetics, characterized by a seriousness of purpose and a commitment to addressing pressing social issues. The filmmakers actively sought to illuminate the complexities, contradictions, and ambiguities inherent, particularly as they pertain to the socio-political landscape of India. They cast a critical eye towards the lacunae in Indian society, including pervasive poverty, social injustice, the entrenched violence of socio-economic structures, and the oppressive nature of traditional orthodoxy, particularly as it relates to the subjugation and exploitation of marginalized communities, including lower castes and women. The proponents of the Indian New Wave perceived their cinematic endeavors as possessing a vital political dimension at a crucial juncture in national history.

Historically, the Indian New Wave can be traced back to seminal works such as *Bhuvan Shome* (1969) directed by Mrinal Sen, *Uski Roti* (1969) by Mani Kaul, and *Sara Akash* (1969) by Basu Chatterjee. Subsequent films, including *Kolkata 71* (1970), *Interview* (1972), *Padatik* (1973), *Ashad Ka Ek Din* (1971), *Mayadarpan* (1972), *Swayamvaram* (1972), *Duvidha* (1973), *Ankur* (1974), *Uttaraayanam* (1974), *Jukti Takko Aar Gappo* (1976), *Manthan* (1976), *Agrahaṭṭhil Kazhuthai* (1977), *Kanchanasita* (1977), *Albert Pinto Ko Gussa Kyon Ata Hai* (1980), *Bhavni Bhawai* (1980), *Ellipathayam* (1981), *Mukhamukham* (1982), *Amma Ariyan* (1981), *Mohan Joshi Hazir Ho* (1981), *Salim Langre Pe Maat Ro* (1982), *Mirch Masala* (1985), etc exemplified the movement's engagement with socio-political issues. These films often sought to reflect the urban landscapes and socio-political conflicts that permeated localities,

employing a spatial texture that encompassed both performative and discursive elements of urban and rural geographies.

The key features of the Indian New Wave—including its innovative narrative techniques, subjective concerns, and experimental modes of storytelling—collectively encapsulate the essence of this transformative period in Indian art cinema.

Indian New Wave filmmakers often considered Hegemonic Masculinity the most influential theoretical concept in gender history. Filmmakers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Shyam Benegal, and Girish Kasaravalli not only widely attributed the term “hegemonic masculinity” through their cinematic lens, but they also depicted how hegemonic masculinity legitimates and reproduces the socio-economic and cultural relationships in terms of power and dominance. By describing the conflicts between power and powerlessness or depicting the debasement of power, Indian New Wave filmmakers depicted how ‘Hegemony’ refers to a historical situation or circumstances while power is won and held. By their cinematic narration they mentioned how social relations regarding hegemonic masculinity are inextricably linked to the gendered psyche and power domination, where the concept of hegemonic masculinity should explore both socio-hierarchical and psychological domains. The concept of hegemonic masculinity presents a complex framework encompassing behaviors, discourses, and practices traditionally attributed to males, reflecting societal and cultural expectations rather than biological imperatives. An examination of films such as "*Vidhyeyan*" and "*Ankur*" reveals filmmakers’ assertion that men's identities are validated through dominant discursive practices, illustrating the interconnection between identity formation and gender power dynamics, as well as acts of resistance. Notably, the New Wave Cinema of the 1970s provided a profound critique of power relations inherent in social interactions and identity processes. These films exemplify how localized and culturally specific signifying practices enable males to forge associations with one another while simultaneously distinguishing themselves not only from women but also from marginalized male groups. It is essential to recognize that domination transcends mere biological sex differences; it encompasses various forms of embodiment, ethnic identities, and cultural expressions of masculinity.

2. Methodology: -

The conceptual framework of hegemonic masculinity has encountered extensive critique from multiple academic perspectives, including conceptual, empirical, and theoretical dimensions. Among the critiques are ongoing debates regarding the status and implications of patriarchy, the nuanced interpretation of hegemony, and the complexities surrounding legitimacy, domination, consent, coercion, and violence. This study's methodology involves a critical analysis of hegemonic masculinities as portrayed in Indian New Wave cinema. Drawing on Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, we explore how these films reflect and challenge the dominant narratives surrounding masculinity in contemporary Indian society. The analysis will focus on how hegemonic masculinity is depicted, emphasizing its role in legitimating patriarchal structures while being simultaneously open to critique and transformation. By examining the representations of various masculinities, particularly complicit, subordinate, and marginalized forms—we will investigate the internal hierarchies and cultural dynamics within the narratives. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding

of how Indian New Wave cinema acts as both a mirror and a challenger of the conventional male archetypes, revealing the complexities and contradictions of masculinities in a rapidly changing socio-cultural landscape.

Here, an interpretive analysis has been employed to deconstruct the socio-cultural consciousness of Indian new-wave filmmakers who manifested rage against the socioeconomic and gender disparity in their creative outputs. The proposed research will explore how these filmmakers liberated the visual from its poetic grace, used the camera to negotiate with reality, and ruptured the traditional (and dominant) aesthetics of filmmaking. The paper will delve into how social relations in terms of hegemonic masculinity are inextricably linked to the gendered psyche and power domination, where the concept of hegemonic masculinity should explore both socio-hierarchical and psychological domains. Here, an interdisciplinary framework has been used to explain sociological and gender-centric observations and understand the portrayal of the power of masculinity in the Indian patriarchal structure. Here, Shyam Benegal's '*Ankur*' (1974) and Adoor Gopalakrishnan's '*Elippathayam*' (1984), '*Vidheyan*' (1994) will be discussed, exploring how Masculinities are constructed in ways that realize the class and caste dividend. It will also depict how marginalized masculinities are dependent on hegemonic masculinity for authorization. Here the term 'depiction' is used from two discourses. i) Depiction as 'Speaking of' as in politics and 'Depiction' as in art or philosophy.

1.1: Isolation and Debasing of Power in Indian New Wave Cinema

"The of "hegemonic masculinity" serves as a foundational premise for the discourse surrounding the autonomy of gender structures, as it crucially connects broader historical dynamics to the lived experiences of individuals. In essence, if the gender system possesses an independent structuration, movement, and determinant factors, it should be possible to identify counter-hegemonic forces operating within that system. Conversely, the absence of such identifiable counterforces necessitates a reevaluation of both the autonomy of the gender system and the specificity of hegemonic masculinity within it. Moreover, should gender systems lack autonomy, the inquiry into why certain masculinities dominate within particular social formations and why specific types of men attain positions of power becomes imperative. Equally important is the need to acknowledge the resistances that arise against such configurations of power." (Gopalakrishnan: 2023)ⁱⁱⁱ

In the cinematic landscape of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's '*Vidheyan*', the exploration of hegemonic masculinity unfolds with piercing clarity, intertwining narrative and visual storytelling. The film delves into the intricate layers of masculinity, portraying male characters who embody its rigid structures and the potential for transformative resistance. Gopalakrishnan challenges conventional masculine archetypes through its protagonist, revealing how these identities are constructed and maintained within societal frameworks. The narrative mirrors the political implications of masculinity, highlighting the urgency for men to engage in counter-hegemonic movements that disrupt the status quo. As scenes unfold, the audience is confronted with the stark realities of masculinist narratives, evoking a critical introspection on men's roles in reimagining a more equitable world. However, the film also poses a sobering reminder: without autonomous structures or a dynamic approach to counter-hegemony, the fight against

entrenched masculinities may flounder, leaving the inherent complexities of male identity unresolved amidst a landscape that often marginalizes its diverse inhabitants.

In the film *'Vidheyan'* (1994), director Adoor Gopalakrishnan criticised the subordinate relationship between Master and Slaves. Depicting the debasement of power by Pateler, he mentions how hegemonic masculinity signifies a particular configuration of gender practice related to patriarchal authority that constitutes the social order. Pateler, an upper-caste alcoholic landlord, used to show his hegemony either in front of poor villagers or subordinate sections of society and women. He savagely beats up Yusuf, a wealthy Merchant, because Yusuf protests and interrupts Pateler's drinking. He is habitual in raping village women or molesting newly married women to get some fun to get rid of the chronic boredom. Pateler is depicted as the icon of hegemonic masculinity, who does not have any ethical values. He also debased the power by insulting subordinate supplicants who came for justice and approached him with folded palms. Here, filmmaker Adoor Gopalakrishnan depicted the hegemonic masculinities by emphasising the social constructiveness of race, caste, and class. In an interview, Adoor mentioned that in a feudal social structure, it was difficult to pin down gender discrimination. While some scholars consider the vagueness and expansiveness of masculinity. In post-independence India, the entire village remains Colonised by a defunct system. Supplicants were accustomed to being ruled and liked to be abused by their feudal chiefs. By metaphoric use of Gun, Chair, he had shown how Patelar debased his power from their flattery and fully exploited their fear and dependence. (Gopalakrishnan: 2024)

In the film *Vidheyan* (1994), Adoor Gopalakrishnan depicted the one-person legal system, while subordinate men and women didn't have voices. For Patelar, women were none beyond commodities, and supplicants were victims of a reign of terror. Patelar's sexism confirms the patriarchal bias of this exploitative culture, where the unauthorised law determines the punishment, which has been carried out in only form the form of violence. In this film, the character Patelar symbolises the debasement of power, evil, fascinating and problematic. He is patronised by the corrupted flattery of villagers who are ready to supply booze and women by any terms. The complexities of his powerful impulses inherited from his class and upbringing determined his aggressiveness, vulnerabilities, and isolation from social realities. He is the male aggressor who believes in proclaiming his right to rule. In a sense, all his displays of power are isolated performances because they have no basis in any political reality.

Shyam Benegal's *'Ankur'* (1974) is an iconoclast film depicting biting social criticism, inequity, power domination and a benchmark for cinematic social consciousness. By describing the conflicts between tradition and modernity, the director mentioned the hegemony of power as a socio-cultural construction where power or authority becomes a tool of body politics, which reinforces the biological function of maleness and loss of self-esteem. The film is set in a rural village in Maharashtra. The opening line of Lakshmi, the central female character, is a prayer to the goddess to grant her a child- a particularly significant opening line that Bengal is careful to impress on his audience by isolating it for a time from any further dialogue. Though the landlord's son Surya claimed himself modern, and he didn't believe in caste discrimination, nonetheless he didn't get rid of the social and structural masculinity which reinforced his authority not only on his maid Lakhsmi, it perpetuated towards Lakhsmi's deaf husband Kishtaya, which constructs dominant caste and class identity which rests on unequal gender roles and power relations. When Surya found Kishtaya stealing toddy from a

Palm tree, Surya ordered that Kishtaya's head be shaved before he was placed backwards on a donkey and led through the village as an object of ridicule. Such cruel treatment hardly matches the offence but is simply another crude assertion of Surya's power. In the light of his denial of irrigation to Pratap and of his well to the local women, Surya's desire for power would seem to be an ego gratification rather than a means of gaining any profit.

In this film, director Benegal has depicted the fallacious presupposition about the sexual availability of Dalit women because of their labouring outdoors. It is nothing but an upper-class and upper-caste unscrupulous dynamism, which, in turn, positions the failure of lower-caste men about their inability to control the sexuality of their women and underlines this as a justification for their impurity. Director Shyam Benegal mentioned in his interaction that "...the historical assessment of patriarchy in the Indian subcontinent justified the upper caste men's occasional or more regular relationships with lower caste women; the caste structure did not even envisage the reverse. Sexual assault on Dalit women is used as a common practice for undermining the manhood of the caste'. Therefore, in the Brahmanical social structure regulated by caste, Dalit women are regarded as 'easy prey' for exploitation at the hands of savanna men and never otherwise. This gets explicit in the next instance. Here, Lakshmi's body is defined instead as a social body, structured by several ideologies." (Benegal:2023)

In the concluding segment of the narrative, the character Kishtaya is subjected to a brutal verbal assault by Surya, characterised by a vicious tirade that transcends mere verbal altercation. In a moment of profound moral clarity, Lakshmi articulates a scathing condemnation of Surya's cowardice, which compels him to retreat, visibly overwhelmed by a mixture of sweat and tears, indicative of his fear. This sequence is punctuated by shots capturing the disdainful silence of the men outside and the wife inside, collectively directing their contempt towards Surya. The narrative then shifts to a panoramic view of Pratap, who, despite being marginalized, observes his half-brother with a chilling detachment. As Kishtaya, with Lakshmi's support, makes his way home, the film reaches its climactic moment with a paradigmatic scene wherein a subaltern boy defiantly throws a stone through the window of Surya's residence. The shattering of glass and the cries of birds symbolize a poignant moment of rebellion as the youth hastily departs. The film culminates with the screen transitioning to a red hue, signifying the director's Leftist Vision. This artistic choice serves as a potent critique of societal structures, explicitly addressing themes of class, caste, and gender oppression while advocating for a socialist framework as the foundation of an egalitarian society.

Both Addor Gopalakrishnan's '*Vidheyan*' and Shyam Benegal's '*Ankur*' engage in a critical exploration of the intricate dynamics of power and masculinity as reflected in their narratives and character characterizations. Each film situates its themes within unique contextual frameworks; in '*Vidheyan*,' the character of Pateler, portrayed by Mammooty, embodies a specific manifestation of masculinity through his interactions with the oppressive figure of the landlord, the "Karanavar." Thomy's initial subjugation gradually transforms as he navigates questions of identity and power, illustrating the internal struggles linked to hegemonic masculinity. His eventual act of rebellion not only signifies personal empowerment but also serves as a critique of the societal structures that perpetuate male dominance and violence. Conversely, '*Ankur*' examines the character of the feudal landlord, who epitomizes patriarchal authority within a post-colonial setting. The film elucidates the power relations

between the landlord and his marginalized villagers, particularly as evidenced in his interactions with the village woman, represented by the film's leading lady. Here, masculinity is intimately connected to property rights and authority, and the landlord's veneer of control deteriorates in the face of impending social transformation. The tension between individual desires and societal expectations yields a nuanced portrayal of masculinity, culminating in the erosion of established power structures. Both films highlight the inherent weaknesses and vulnerabilities concomitant with authoritative masculinity. In *'Vidheyan,'* Patelar dominance begins to diminish as Thommy's character progresses. Initially, the Patelar exercises control through fear and violence, yet as the narrative unfolds, his predatory nature becomes increasingly apparent, exposing the dependency of his power on an anachronistic system of oppression. The climactic sequence reinforces the Karanavar's downfall, suggesting that hegemonic power is fundamentally unstable and susceptible to disintegration when confronted. Similarly, *'Ankur'* illustrates the degradation of power through the lens of social upheaval, culminating in a confrontation that symbolizes the decline of patriarchal structures—a potent commentary on the frailty of male dominance within evolving socio-political landscapes. In conclusion, both *'Vidheyan'* and *'Ankur'* provide profound insights into the nature of power, masculinity, and societal change. They dismantle conventional understandings of hegemonic masculinity, revealing that the very frameworks that sustain male authority are vulnerable to erosion and collapse. While Gopalakrishnan's film offers a more personal narrative of transformation and rebellion, Benegal's work situates masculinity within broader societal shifts, emphasizing the collective struggle against oppression. Collectively, these films significantly contribute to the discourse on masculinity, power, and resistance, challenging audiences to reevaluate the complexities of gender roles in contemporary society.

1.2: A Lieu of Conclusion: The power within Powerlessness: Depicting Inertia and Isolation in Adoor's *Elippathayam* (1984)

Historically and culturally, a body is a tangential point of contact from the power relation between social control and resistance (Foucault, 1997; Brown & Gershon, 2017). It is because the body becomes an important area where construction begins, for it contains contestation as its breath and conflict as its pulse. In the film, Lakshmi's body or Kishtaya's injured body is not just depicted as a pile of flesh and bones but as a symbol of fighting for influence. Lakshmi's pregnancy not only represents the polygamous nature of Surya or debasement of power, but their bodies are socio-politically constructed, arranged, monitored, controlled, and formed by the hegemonic masculinity. In this film, *'Ankur'* director Benegal has shown how the power and privileges of dominant caste communities rest on an aggressive masculinity that seeks to control both women of all castes and men of oppressed castes. In conclusion, inhumanly, Kishtaya is beaten by Surya with venomous invective. She curses with candid truth the cowardly Surya, who runs inside, his face bathed in sweat and tears of fear. Shots of the men outside and the wife within looking in silent contempt toward Surya precede a high shot of the bullied Pratap looking coldly in the direction of his half-brother as Kishtaya limps home supported by Lakshmi. The film ends with the ironic scene where a little boy ironically picks up a stone and hurls it through Surya's window; thus, it has just attacked the upper-class hegemony.

The role of a head of the family in mainstream movies has usually been that of an extremist who strictly adheres to the 'hegemonic' ideals of manhood and is emotionally distanced from the members of the family to provide for them. By contrast, the Indian New Wave filmmakers portrayed the image of the man of the house, an acute feeling of personal powerlessness and marginality rather than simply reflecting a more disconnected air of abstract moral passing of the judgement. From personal powerlessness, they compelled inertia or a sense of marginality, which forced them to show the pseudo power in the private domain. In the film, '*Elippathayam*' (1984), director Adoor Gopalakrishnan depicted how the protagonist Unni, an unemployed, lazy, self-obsessed brother (the head of the family), enjoyed power within powerlessness. The film portrayed how, within the private domain, the feudal power determines control and domination over vulnerable family members, especially his widowed sister Rajamma. His put-down only renders him even more pathetic. He treated Rajamma as unpaid labour. He empowers himself at Rajamma's sacrifice. Unni and Rajamma's relationship established the unrecognition of women labour in domestic chores and stereotypes of 'Owner-slave' relation. This underlying ideology strengthens the feudal mend that once sanctioned the abuse of power and reconfigured itself in a domestic space. In this film, Adoor depicted Unni as morally alienated from the rest, exposed as a nurturer of pre-existing feudal values and domination, who could live up to the ruthless prospects of the narcissism of the flesh and repressed desire and its sublimation.

Adoor Gopalakrishnan depicted that Unni's manifestations of power, which are confined only within four walls of a home, and his pretentious domination screwed up Rajamma's life. Nonetheless, such displays only authorise the reality of his powerlessness. By nature, weak and fainthearted Unni surrendered to the hypocrisy of patriarchal society, which was driven by the dehumanising, oppressive ideology. Nonetheless, he was depicted as a lonely, helpless creature who was socially rejected by either the younger members of the family (Unni's nephew) or "employed" migrated youth. His sense of inertia or fear of powerlessness was checked by the reality of the formative years of land reforms in post-independence India. Here, Unni's masculinity was traditionally based on supposedly reserved, serene aloofness and inertia. According to Foucault (1980: 139), the body is everywhere and becomes. The body is an axis of the socio-political or personal mechanism, whether obedient or sexual, wild, or evil, productive, or weak, personal or political. Unni's fastidiousness of his own body is projected in an erotic and neurotic manner. Sitting on the porch and plucking white hair from his moustache determines his self-attention to reveal self-narcissism.

Unni's voluntary withdrawal from society is engulfed with self-alienation. This displacement was the socio-psychological fork, which had built up as the self-torment for expressing disapproval against inertia and powerlessness. For Gopalakrishna, outside the four walls of home, neither neurotic Unni nor Rajamma experienced certain terms of freedom. Rajamma passed her life as a domestic enslaved person in her brother's house, and Unni's inferiority and internal series of the depraved clan made him a self-obsessed neurotic. When the villagers enter the house, they carry Rajamma down the path to the pond. Only on her deathbed was she freed from the suffocating trap (her paternal ancestral house), where she spent most of her life. Unni's passive-mute reaction suddenly turns into remorseful guilt when it rains. Later, his eyes seem to fill with tears. According to the director's statement, "...in this final section of *Elippathayam*, I have turned the film ends an allegory of salvation through

guilt. We find Unni gradually coming apart in the solitude he now embraces as he moves into the inner recesses of the house and eventually loses the ability to live in his room. The equivalence with the rat in its trap is complete." (Gopalakrishnan:2023)

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ⁱ Hegemony, a pivotal concept in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks and his most significant contribution to Marxist thinking, is about the winning and holding of power and the formation (and destruction) of social groups in that process. In this sense, it is importantly about the ways in which the ruling class establishes and maintains its domination. The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality is an essential part of this process. Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organization of social institutions in ways that appear "natural" "ordinary," "normal." The state, through punishment for non-conformity, is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement

Connell R (1987), 'Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics', 107; published by: Allen and Unwin, Sydney p-95.

ⁱⁱ Whitehead Stephen M. (2002), 'Power and Resistance' in the book of Men and Masculinities, published by Oxford, UK, p-91

ⁱⁱⁱ Adoor Gopalakrishnan's interview was taken on 30th December 2023