

# Between Ambition and Amorality: Examining Narcissistic Traits and Professional Ethics in Mukundan Unni Associates

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## Abstract

Historically, South Indian films worked as mere entertainers with a similar plot and began to change over a period. New writers and directors in the industry started breaking the usual cliches and traditions. One of which is the moral values that are inherited by the leading characters. These heroes are typically portrayed as divinely good, selfless, courageous, muscular, humble, empathetic, and morally upright. However, there is a shift in story telling, where contemporary filmmakers challenge the typical hero archetype and introduce complex, flawed and morally ambiguous characters. This shift prompts questions about the very nature of heroism, the role of morality in storytelling, and the interplay between political correctness and artistic expression. The contemporary filmmakers proved that the morally ambiguous characters in films won't affect the film's ideology or politics. In this context, this study aims to examine the portrayal of a morally ambiguous hero in the Malayalam film, Mukundan Unni Associates (2022), highlighting how the complex characters in the film challenge traditional norms of heroism in contemporary cinema. The study analyses the protagonist of the film to look into how characters personify moral ambiguity and bring down conventional heroic archetypes. Additionally, the study explores the interplay between political correctness and heroism. Further, the research seeks to understand how the film reflects and critiques contemporary cultural and political attitudes towards heroism. The study aims at contributing to the ongoing conversation regarding the transformation of heroism in South Indian cinema by analysing the ethically ambiguous lead characters in "Mukundan Unni Associates."

**Keywords:** *Hero; Malayalam Cinema; Mukundan Unni Associates; Morally Ambiguous; Narcissist*

## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, the protagonists of most films come in different shades of white. They tend to be morally upright, and the films are almost always on the 'right' side of morality. The established template is "the good people live happily ever after", the corollary being that the 'bad people' will meet a bad end — if they do not die by the end of the film, they will at least suffer. For decades, storytellers have stuck to this template and fed it to the conscience of the viewing public. This has resulted in countless films in which the hero is the 'good guy', who does everything by the rules and lives happily in the end. The villain is the 'bad guy' who breaks rules and ends up in jail, or worse, gets killed. Historically, mythological heroes were seen as models of virtue, showcasing traits such as kindness, divine goodness, selflessness, bravery, physical strength, humility, empathy, and moral uprightness. These figures served as ideals for audiences, encouraging them to aspire to similar qualities.

From the classic era (1970s and 80s) of Indian cinema, the heroes in Hindi films were depicted as tough, strong men full of anger, resilience, and a role as society's protector. Later, during the 80s and 90s, heroes were portrayed as romantic figures through family dramas. Throughout the 90s and 2000s, romantic chocolate boys created a trend. This

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Romantic hero portrayal continued to 2009, but a great dimension got added with movies embracing the insecurities of men like *Wake Up Sid*, *Rang De Basanti*, *3 Idiots*, and *Luck by Chance*.

In contrast, when we look into the world cinema, there are many films now and then, tweaking the template to feature heroes in different shades of gray. Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather* (1972), Martin Scorsese's *Goodfellas* (1990), Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007), and Todd Phillips' *Joker* (2019) break the very notion of hero and challenge this stereotype by introducing complex, flawed, and morally ambiguous characters that mirror the complexities of real-life humanity.

When one looks into the Malayalam cinema, the development of heroes in Malayalam films reveals the social transformation of Kerala. In the 1950s and 1960s, Sathyan, Prem Nazir, among others, played idealistic, moral heroes in films such as *Chemmeen* and *Neelakuyil*, which brought to the fore social issues and family values. Heroes, for example, Sathyan in *Ningalenne Communist Aakki*, brought issues such as caste and poverty in the 1970s, and became even more realistic. Mohanlal in *Rajavinte Makan* and Mammooty in *New Delhi* brought the "angry young man" trend in the heroes of the 1980s, who fought against injustice and corruption. In the 1990s, with people such as Jayaram in *Ayalathe Adheham* and Dileep in *Meesa Madhavan*, more human characters emerged, with humour and romance complementing their larger-than-life personas. In the 2000s, Mammooty in *Paleri Manikyam: Oru Pathirakolapathakathinte Katha* (2009) played dual roles, one as protagonist and the other as a villain. In *Classmates*, Prithviraj played a multi-layered character who is bearing guilt from his past. In the 2010s, Malayalam cinema celebrated anti-heroes and experimental characters, with Vineeth Srinivasan and Fahadh Faasil in *Chaapa Kurishu* as grey characters and Fahadh Faasil in *Maheshinte Prathikaram*, who played an ordinary photographer who was waiting for his vengeance. Dulquer Salmaan in *Charlie*, and Nivin Pauly in *Moothon* breaking traditional stereotypes and exploring complex narratives.

The 2020s extended heroism by integrating local issues with international appeal. Tovino Thomas's role in *Minnal Murali*, Joju George in *Joseph*, and Soubin Shahir in *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25* each of them presents a unique way of heroism that is more related to real life. From the idealistic figures of the past to the flawed and relatable heroes of today, Malayalam cinema's heroes mirror society's evolving aspirations and challenges.

Recently, a few Malayalam films also walked away from these established conventions. Abhinav Sunder Nayak's *Mukundan Unni Associates*, which hit the theatres in December 2022, warns you right at the outset to keep your moral compass aside. It opens with a title card that says, "Human beings are mostly grey. Except in some cases. In some cases, they are just black." And Joji 2021 Dileesh Pothan's film, written by Shyam Pushkara, which is an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, tells a story that emphasises the very notion of karma, which states that punishment is indeed.

Over the years, Malayalam cinema has produced many such films that came under the 'anti-hero' category. I.V. Sasi's *Uyarangalil* (1984), Bharathan's *Thazhvaram* (1990), Adoor Gopakrisnan's *Vidheyam* (1994), and Jeethu Joseph's *Drishyam* (2015) are some of the finest examples of these. Rather than following the conventional hero archetypes, these films feature characters that reflect the moral conflicts and the grey, black and white of life and bringing in the complexity of humans through films. This is in accordance with worldwide storytelling patterns, which are portraying the heroes increasingly in shades of grey, black and white.

## 2. Methodology

The study aims to analyse the portrayal of a morally ambiguous hero in the movie "*Mukundan Unni Associates*." This research examines the character traits of the protagonist Mukundan Unni to look into how the film challenges traditional heroic archetypes. Further, the study focuses on the Narcissism and Work Ethics in *Mukundan Unni Associates* and how it fosters unethical ambition.

The study used a qualitative research method employing thematic analysis to understand and study the complexity of the character and its grey shade in the selected film, along with the theme of the movie, cinematic brilliance, and portrayal of morally ambiguous hero. A detailed analysis of film is conducted, focusing on character development,

narrative technique, and visual style. The study tried to break down the character traits of the protagonist and its rawness to examine how cinematic components contribute to the overall thematic and character development.

### **2.1 Plot**

Mukundan Unni Associates released in 2022 is a Malayalam movie written and directed by Abhinav Sundar Nayak, starring Vineeth Srinivasan, Suraj Venjaramood, and Arsha Chandini Baiju. It is a dark comedy crime film that was successful at the box office and got critical acclaim. Director Abhinav Sundar Nayak subverts the traditional hero archetype in the film by telling the story from the perspective of a black character. Mukundan Unni Associates is the most relevant movie to study morally ambiguous heroes. The director challenges the concept of karma through the movie. His narrative style brings a new way of storytelling by brilliantly portraying the complexity of human life exploitation. The traditional notion of heroism in Malayalam cinema is being challenged by contemporary filmmakers through the portrayal of morally ambiguous heroes. However, there is a lack of understanding of how these complex characters impact the conventional heroic archetypes and the interplay between political correctness and artistic expression. This study seeks to fill the gap by exploring the complexities of the morally ambiguous hero in contemporary Malayalam cinema.

## **3. Analysis and Discussion**

Mukundan Unni Associates features a complex protagonist, Mukundan Unni, who is portrayed as an unapologetically evil and narcissistic Advocate. The film delves into his psyche, exposing his dark thoughts and actions. The characters like Adv. Venu, Insurance Manager Annie, Dr. Sebatti, Meenakshi, Adv Robin, Manikandan, Suresh, and ASI Chandrababu are also shown as grey in the movie. The characters and the world of Mukundan Unni Associates are designed to be morally ambiguous and challenge the audience to confront the nature of good and evil. The director uses the character of Mukundan and his actions to explore a darker side of human nature without trying to justify or provide a backstory for his actions.

### **3.1 Character Breakdown of Mukundan Unni**

The titular character Mukundan Unni is not merely a morally ambiguous character who operates in a grey zone, but a distinctly black character in terms of ethics and morals. All his actions throughout the movie support the first statement in the film, "Human beings are mostly grey except in some cases, in some cases they are just black." By his ruthless actions, selfishness, and opportunism, he stands for this statement. Unlike a morally grey character who occasionally does awful things, Mukundan displays no hesitation or guilt in his actions. His ambition blinds him in all ways; he forgets what empathy or justice is. He does whatever it takes to achieve his goal, regardless of the harm that he causes. Unni not only executes his unethical plans with precision but also exhibits pride in his ability to manipulate and treat others as just mere tools for his success. Mukundan meticulously plans each step manipulating people's situations. His actions are not spontaneous decisions but deliberate choices to maximize his personal growth, regardless of moral values or ethical norms.

When he faces a problem or a situation, he takes the darker path to solve it. Grey characters often show some moments of emotional depth or personal vulnerability that make them more human. Mukundan, in contrast, is emotionally detached from everything, treating relationships as transactions. For climbing the ladder of success, he does not hesitate to trample over others, whether friends, colleagues, clients, family, or anyone who comes to his path. His grey shade changes to black when he completely lacks loyalty or consideration for others. He doesn't even like Advocacy from others, which makes him more vulnerable and prompts him to take the darker path. He admires himself and also tries to impress others through his Manipulative technique and blackmailing skills. He is very judgmental, and he becomes more cautious when his judgment goes wrong.

As the repeated phrase in the movie, "There are only two types of people: those who exploit and those who get exploited." Unni always chooses to be the first kind of people who exploit others. He always tries to gain control over the people he chooses. Mukundan Unni thinks that it is better to die and rot than to fail. He is not a flawed character struggling with ethical dilemmas but a man who has fully embraced his darker instincts. By portraying him without

the shades of grey, the film paints a stark picture of a truly black character. When we look deeper into the character Mukundan Unni, we can come up with a few character traits that complement his black shade character.

**3.1.1 Narcissistic:** He displays self-importance in several scenes, constantly seeking admiration and viewing himself as superior and dominant, as evidenced by his self-comparison to a "classic cobra, charismatic, elegant, and dangerous."

**3.1.2 Unapologetically Evil:** he is portrayed as a black character. He shows no remorse or guilt for the unethical actions he commits throughout the films.

**3.1.3 Ruthlessly Ambitious:** He is shown as a person who goes to any extent to achieve the success, power and recognition he wanted. It includes committing murders or betraying in a relationship.

**3.1.4 Manipulative:** He meticulously plans and executes his actions, where he exploits others for his benefits. That includes false claiming of insurance, manipulating legal loopholes and taking people for granted by using them as a tool for his success.

**3.1.5 Emotionally Detached:** He shows no emotional connection with others and treats every relationship as transactional.

**3.1.6 Opportunistic:** He makes use of every opportunity to advance in his personal and professional life. He doesn't think of the harm it causes.

**3.1.7 Self-Centered and Sadistic:** All his acts are centered around his own success and he feels proud in manipulating and harming the people around. He doesn't hesitate to commit heinous actions.

**3.1.8 Judgmental:** He quickly assesses the people and underestimates them based on their appearance, which leads to his rare setbacks.

**3.1.9 Fearless of Consequences:** He shows no fear about the consequences of his acts. This action is enabled by a corrupt system that tolerates his unethical behavior.

### **3.2 Narcissism and Work Ethics in Mukundan Unni Associates: Critiquing Societal Values**

While portraying the narcissistic behavior of Mukundan, the film also highlights the cultural and professional pressures that foster unethical ambition in one's life. The film states his behavior within a competitive legal profession and a success-obsessed society, where winning is equated with worth. In this materialistic society, societal pressures, including the desire for wealth, status, and power, motivate Mukundan to prioritise his personal development over his work ethic, reflecting a larger criticism of ambition-driven principles. Societal pressures shape Mukundan's behaviour and undermine his professional integrity, which is conveyed effectively in the film with various cinematic tools and techniques.

Many instances in cinema show that his actions are the outcome of social pressure to dominate others for success, power, and status. Adv. Venu's death is one of the prime examples of that. Adv. Venu is a prominent lawyer whom Unni thinks of as a barrier to his growth and success. The societal pressure that demands to be the best drives him to act crazily and ruthlessly. Similarly, the death of Adv. Robin was a planned action where he scripted a car accident, which could never lead to him being considered a murderer by any chance. He orchestrates Venu's death in a staged car accident, securing his dominance: The competitive nature of society made him believe "There are only two types of people: those who exploit and those who get exploited," and act accordingly. The legal profession's competitive nature, where success is measured by outshining rivals, pressures Mukundan to eliminate threats like Venu. Societal values that glorify winners, as critiqued in The Hindu's review of Mukundan's "obsession with material success" (The Hindu, 2022), drive his narcissistic behavior, as failure is equated with worthlessness. The societal pressure is the reason for the Mukundan's triumphant expression and confidence. This instance illustrates how it Mukundan's narcissism, as he sacrifices ethics to meet expectations of professional success.

Mukundan plans to follow Venu's Advocacy and values to seize power. Pressure to dominate and get rooted in a competitive legal environment pushes Mukundan Unni to prioritize personal growth over ethics. The film uses different cinematic techniques to immerse viewers in Mukundan's self-centered psyche, exposing the systemic flaws that enable his narcissistic behavior. Mukundan's "meticulous planning" and rejection of Venu's values reflect his narcissistic ambition. We witness that Unni also tries to frame he death as a necessary step to stay ahead and to win in life. His mantra that "it's better to die and rot than to fail," where losing equates to worthlessness, pushes him to unethical extremes to win. Because the world celebrate and glorify only the winners and considers others as losers.

The corrupt legal system, which allows Mukundan to manipulate circumstances without immediate consequences, enables his narcissistic behavior. The societal acceptance of such loopholes, as seen in his ability to stage the accident, reflects a culture that tolerates unethical means in a competitive world. Society also normalised unethical success as well. The film exposes how these societal pressures consume people and make them work for an unrealistic standard of living. It normalizes the personal growth over moral values. As Mukundan dont get any consequence immediately, it helps to normalize such unethical narcissistic practice. Mukundan's narcissism destroys lives to satisfy external expectations, which shows how human cost is valued in competitive world.

Mukundan prioritizes personal development over work ethic due to competitive pressures fueled by social expectations to dominate and win. This is part of a larger critique of professional environments that promote narcissistic ambition. Betraying Adv Robin to maintain his control can be taken as the best example for that Adv Robin, whom he calls his "slave" but when Robin demands a share of profits, competitive pressure to maintain control drives Mukundan to kill Robin in his car by voluntarily getting himself into an accident with his car, which only has one airbag (driver only). exploiting and eliminating people displays his competitive, narcissistic nature. The legal workplace's competitive hierarchy, where sharing power threatens one's status, pressures him to continue his action with no regret or guilt. This instance shows how competitive pressure to maintain control fosters Mukundan's narcissistic betrayal, critiquing a workplace that prioritizes individual dominance over ethical collaboration and exposing the human cost of such values. This showcases how monopolies work and their cost.

Another instance is that of the marriage of Meenakshi and also about buying a flat of his own. Mukundan proposes to Meenakshi, viewing that she will be an asset in this competitive field of medical cases and insurance, and also as competition with Dr. Vincent George. In a monologue, he justifies the marriage as a strategic move to enhance his career, seeking audience validation. Mukundan exhibits Manipulativeness in exploiting Meenakshi's attitude, which is a bonus for his success. This instance illustrates how competitive pressure to project success fosters Mukundan's narcissistic Manipulation of relationships, critiquing competitive pressure for its transactional nature and unethical pathway.

### 3.3 The societal values and the erosion of work ethics

The film offers a scathing critique of societal values that prioritize success, wealth, and status, leading to the erosion of work ethics throughout many professions. Centered on Advocate Mukundan Unni (Vineeth Sreenivasan), a narcissistic lawyer driven by ambition, the film portrays a corrupt legal ecosystem where competitive pressures and societal expectations transform professionals into enablers of unethical practices. Societal values glorifying personal gain over collective good pressure professionals to adopt unethical practices, as seen in Mukundan's narcissistic ambition, and also mock on professionals who practice ethical acts. Each profession, like police, ambulance driver, lawyer, politician, insurance journalist, and clerk, practices unique ethical violations in their respective fields, due to systemic pressures, reflecting a critique of societal decay. There are many situations where characters compromise their professional ethics, driven by competitive pressures and societal values.

ASI Chandrababu is supposed to uphold public safety, enforce the law and act with integrity as a police officer. At a time when he should be acting in an objective and unbiased way, be fair and honest with the public, opposition to freedom, to the best of the people, he is doing the opposite. Chandra Babu, on the other hand, is a common fraud. In an attempt to make a fake insurance claim, Chandrababu arranges a fake traffic accident, takes bribes and tampering the evidence, by setting up fake witnesses and wrecking a car. His actions undermine public confidence and show institutional corruption in the police, giving them a protective role that promotes crime. His casual taking of bribes,

his justification of his actions as needed for his survival, show the amount of decay in the system that is supposed to be ethical. The officers, such as Chandrababu, who are facing pressure from the society to pursue their own interests instead of their duty. This eagerness to speak to Mukundan reveals that bribery is a part of this economy in which wealth equals promotion and recognition. Hence Chandrababu can misuse his power without any consequences because of this social pressure. The fact that Chandrababu is involved with Mukundan's case in order to make his mother's wounds an accident case is testimony to his corruption.

As an ambulance driver, Suresh is supposed to keep the first priority of patient safety, be on time to provide medical attention, and be compassionate. To serve as an ambulance driver, one must have neutrality and commitment in life to save lives. But here Suresh takes advantage of his position to support fraudulent insurance schemes by fabricating accident scenes, which supports fake. He turns a life saving position into a tool for corruption. By prioritizing financial gain over patient welfare, Suresh exemplifies the erosion of ethics in a ground level labours. Societal pressure to achieve economic survival in a low-paying job drives Suresh to accept Mukundan's bribes, as financial stability over ethical practice.

Lawyers are expected to uphold justice, represent clients fairly and follow the legal ethics with honesty and confidentiality, but in contrast, we see Mukundan and Adv Venu in film doing unethical practices to succeed in life and become financially stable.

Ethical governance requires accountability, public welfare and to maintain transparency. In the film MLA Reshma George and George Illikkal are expected to serve the public and enact fair politics, but they involve in a political backing for fraudulent cases, and George Illikkal's support in manipulating legal processes demonstrates their corruption, driven by the pursuit of power and wealth. Their deeds forfeit public trust, and make government a play for power and profit. Normalizing corruption in a competitive political arena where status is linked to control and resources. It demonstrates that in the real world, there are political scandals where nobody is held accountable, so Reshma and George can exploit their positions without having to worry about consequences.

Annie Kurian, an insurance officer, who is expected to uphold service to society, also forgot the ethical boundaries of work culture and chose to practice unethical acts for her personal growth and financial benefits.

Clerk Satheeshan should be efficient in serving the public, maintain administrative integrity and process legal documents accurately. Ethical clerkship requires impartiality and honesty and resistance to bribery. Satheesan acts materialistically by falsifying documents or expediting processes for bribes, enabling corruption within the legal system to get financial benefits from that.

All these characters who were there to serve the society in one or the other way, were part of corruption. And it was continued as if it was normal in the society. And these characters took those actions just to get financial stability, power and recognition in the society.

### 3.4 Discussion

The movie attacks the system that undermines job integrity and ethics. The values of society are coming under a change and the loss of work ethics is changing administration job into a vehicle for earning profit. The lapse in ethics in all the characters, like ASI Chandrababu, Suresh, Mukundan Unni, Adv Venu, Reshma George, George Illikkal, Annie Kurian, and Satheeshan are seen as the result of competitive pressures, economic survival, and systemic flaws, which shows that personal gain overshadows professional integrity. The movie reveals the mechanisms of corruption and how it has become a vicious cycle due to societal expectations, and how ethical roles become profit-driven. These depictions also represent actual issues like police misconduct, legal malfeasance, political scandals and bureaucratic inefficiencies. Because by exposing the system and regular people, they both pose a threat to society as a whole. Venu's eventual corruption serves as an example of how the constraints of competition undermine legal ethics and turn justice into a means of achieving personal objectives. The ability of Mukundan and Adv Venu to fabricate statements without suffering immediate consequences serves as evidence that the systemic acceptance of legal loopholes erodes integrity and is consistent with real criticisms of legal malpractice. The lawyers' misconduct serves as an example of how cultural norms that place a higher priority on competitive achievement undermine legal ethics

and turn justice into a means of achieving individual goals. The movie raises issues regarding judicial integrity by criticizing a legal system that encourages egotistical drive.

The film offers a moving reflection on the decline of professional ethics in productive, success-driven society by bringing those violations to light and challenging viewers to consider the cultural norms that legitimize unethical ambition. One of the main causes of Mukundan Unni Associates' narcissistic work ethic is systematic corruption. By highlighting these issues the film tries to pose a question in the minds of audience about the professional ethics and success oriented cultures.

The main cause of the narcissistic work ethics in Mukundan Unni Associates is the systematic corruption which is integrated into the structures and processes of an organization or society. Worrisome factor is that it normalises the unethical practices in the organisation. In the era of competition one prioritises money, power and status. In such environment narcissists exploit systemic vulnerabilities to Advance their agendas. In the selected film the legal system, alongside police, political, and bureaucratic institutions, is depicted as corrupt, which enables corruption as a surviving tool narcissistic work ethics. The movie condemns the values of society that glorify wealth, status and the winner's success, encouraging a culture that promotes narcissistic traits and values over morality. The systemic corruption that is inculcated in many professions is normalised by the characters like ASI Chandrababu, Suresh, Adv Venu, Reshma George, George Illikkal, Annie Kurian and Satheeshan in the movie which reflect the actual concerns about unethical practices in the offices of cutthroats. Systemic corruption creates and reinforces an environment which rationalizes immoral actions, which then cascade into narcissistic traits such as Manipulation or self-aggrandizement. In corrupt systems, there is no moral restraint so that narcissists can indulge in corrupt actions without feeling a shred of guilt and justify their actions by blaming the competitive world.

The main reason is that there are many examples that explain how systematic corruption helps to normalize the unethical behavior, thus enabling Mukundan to manipulate systems for his own benefit, and his narcissistic work ethics. A police and court system that condones such acts is targeted in the film. Narcissistic attributes such as charisma, self-promotion and domination are often the means by which people obtain authority within a corrupt system, and hence, are rewarded for their contribution to it. As a result, a vicious circle is formed in which narcissistic work ethics are condoned and perpetuated as they turn out to be successful. This is because there will be no immediate repercussions of his behaviour and Venu's death is referred to as an accident. He justifies his actions as saying, "It's better to die and rot than to fail. Systemic corruption allows for narcissistic individuals to act without fear of repercussions: the lack of accountability is a characteristic of systemic corruption. Because of the corrupt judicial system, there are those who are complicit like Satheeshan (a clerk) who help in faking documents, and Mukundan can act without consequences. But since they can manipulate systems with no implications, narcissistic leaders thrive in environments with lax accountability. This is a case in point of how systemic corruption is accountable-free and allows Mukundan to do whatever he wants to do, including wrecking his rivals and doing it with a sense of regret. In corrupt systems, there is a way to spread unethical norms, and the narcissists of the system do this, leading to the behavioural norms of other people in the system. Narcissistic leaders can also impact the culture of an organization through their tendency to make people less honest, less inclined to work together, and in turn, negatively affect others. In a system, if it is corrupt, it is full of loopholes and inefficiencies, which are used by narcissistic people for their gain.

In collaboration with Dr. Sebatti, Mukundan participated in the Medical Fraud scheme in order to secure Advantage for the loopholes in the medical system and create medical reports for fake insurance claims. Systemic corruption is reflected in Sebatti's readiness to violate medical ethics in order to make money. Through normalizing unethical behaviour, rewarding narcissistic qualities, lowering accountability, promoting it as a culture, taking Advantage of weaknesses, and opposing ethical change, Mukundan Unni Associates demonstrates how systemic corruption facilitates narcissistic work ethics.

## 5. Conclusion

This research has explored the portrayal of morally ambiguous characters in the 2022 Malayalam film Mukundan Unni Associates, with a specific focus on the main character Mukundan Unni. The study shows that Mukundan Unni is an unethical and narcissistic character who lacks empathy, guilt, or any morality. Unlike traditional heroes who

face consequences for their actions in conventional movies, Mukundan stays safe without immediate response or reaction for his action. This challenges the cinematic narration "bad people" must suffer or the very notion of "karma". Mukundan Unni portrayed in his morally black character. Whereas supporting characters, such as Adv Venu, Dr. Sebatti, Adv Robin, Meenakshi, Manikandan, and ASI Chandrababu, work in grey areas. These depiction show the intricacies of human nature in corrupt systems where ambition and manipulation pay off without repercussions or consequences.

The film also employs numerous narrative and other craft elements, including breaking the fourth wall with narration, non-linear time sequences, close-ups, symbolism (the snake as a metaphor), and dark humor, to enhance the film experience and to immerse the audience in Mukundan's self-centered point of view. The film made use of monologues from the main character to get to know him more. These methods will reveal his narcissistic characteristics, as well as criticize the obsessions of society. The narrative structure aids in conveying different careers such as law, medicine, police, and politics as a field where professional values are corroded by competition. The characters such as Mukundan Unni are the result of a culture that is more concerned with personal success than moral values.

The film shows a shift in the South Indian film industry, particularly Malayalam cinema, by introducing a morally black hero which is not a conventional style or which is an experiment. especially by introducing morally complex characters, moving beyond traditional hero-villain binaries. Aligns with global cinematic trends favoring realistic, flawed protagonists, as seen in films like *The Godfather* Malayalam industry also tried to experiment with such morally ambiguous characters. Mukundan Unni Associates' is a satire film which portrays morally ambiguous characters and shows a reflection on society. cinema is a reflection of society, in this movie it illustrates how humans are black and what are the possible lead to become such.

Mukundan Unni Associates stands out from the archetypal hero narrative with its character, Mukundan Unni, showing him as a "black" moral rather than the grey of typical anti-heroes. His deliberate choice of darker paths, shows his pride in manipulation, challenges the audience's expectation of a hero. Unlike morally grey characters who exhibit vulnerability or ethical dilemmas, Mukundan's emotional detachment and transactional view of relationships and emotion stand out in the whole movie. This representation is not only an anti-ideal hero but also a criticism of the values that are being championed in society too, ones that see success as a virtue, rather than one that is achieved only after doing the right thing. The film present Mukundan as a person who revels in exploitation and its reaffirmed with his philosophy "those who exploit and those who get exploited". "Where" the film is from the point of view of the protagonist.

Some of the characters who support the main story, such as Dr. Sebatti, a senior doctor, demonstrate morally murky behavior through the violation of medical ethics for personal gain, and Adv. In fact, characters like George Illikkal, ASI Chandrababu Meenakshi, Annie, Clerk Satheesh, Driver Suresh, Manikandan, Reshma George and Prabha Madaathil who were initially diplomatic, more or less developed these traits. This outfit breaks the archetype of the hero.

This film turns the idea of the good guy who comes out on top in a fight with the bad guy on its head; it takes the concept of the movies and asks, "What would you do if you were a bad guy? This film comes back at the concept of the movies with the protagonist being a morally dubious character who does good things in a struggle with the bad guy, "What would you do if you were a bad guy? The movie shows a group of imperfect people doing imperfect things, thus embodying the complexity of humanity. As the film is non-linear, in the same way that Mukundan's mind is self-centred, the audience is also placed in the distorted worldview. The technique also subverts traditional storytelling and highlights the themes of the film and the epistemological uncertainty of the main character as well as the social institutions that facilitated his actions.

The study also brings to light the conflict between political correctness and artistic expression in the Malayalam films of today's era. Mukundan Unni Associates does not attempt to soften its morally ambiguous lead by providing him with a redemption arc, which would suit societal expectations better, but isn't justified. This artistic decision focuses on the story rather than political correctness, giving the film the opportunity to delve into the untouched aspects of human nature. The director has decided to keep the audience of the film from getting a redemption story or a backstory

of Mukundan, and hence has kept us to confront uncomfortable truths about Mukundan's morality and heroism, for his personal growth and success.

In terms of society, it reflects the moral values of culture that focus on success and competitiveness over moral integrity. In the characters such as Mukundan and Sebatti, we can see the effects of such values and feel the urge to think about how systemic corruption and a lack of professional ethics are affecting the lives of the people. This reflective process invites viewers to consider what makes the character a hero in today's society and if the traditional definition of a hero still applies in a world where there is uncertainty over morality.

The findings of this study have far-reaching implications and can be used to gain insight into the influence of narratives on cultural and ethical discourses. Mukundan Unni Associates aims to enrich and diversify the film landscape by fostering artistic expression over political correctness, thereby driving the film industry to explore new frontiers. The characters in the movie are morally flawed, a refreshing exercise in redefining what a hero is and helping to spark discussion on complicity within society to allow narcissistic and exploitative behaviors to occur. The development of Malayalam cinema is part of a larger trend in South Indian cinema, where the characters are complex, and they are used to explore ideas of introspection and change.

Some Malayalam films such as Mukundan Unni Associates still make us think, question our notions and provoke us to ponder upon the multi-faceted nature of people and society, as Malayalam movies keep evolving and transforming with their own evolution.

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*Mukundan Unni Associates* review: Abhinav Sunder Nayak's 'Mukundan Unni Associates', with a superbly cast Vineeth Sreenivasan, is a delicious, deadpan, dark comedy. (2022, November 11). *Galatta*.

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