

Narivetta: An uneasy tale of a historic protest traced through a personal reckoning

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Power often asserts itself through the erasure of memory. By opening with Kundera's words on memory and forgetting, *Narivetta* declares its intent to preserve what history risks losing.

Directed by Anuraj Manohar and written by Abin Joseph, based on the 2003 Muthanga Incident, *Narivetta* assembles a potent cast, including Tovino Thomas, Suraj Venjaramoodu, Cheran, Arya Salim, and Priyamvada Krishnan, to bring about a narrative on buried histories. Set against the charged backdrop of protected forest land, the film follows a reluctant police constable whose journey into the heart of a tribal protest forces him to confront his own morals and the systemic brutality.

Despite being rooted in the 2003 Muthanga Adivasi land struggle, *Narivetta* frames its narrative largely through the moral awakening of a conflicted constable—a choice perhaps made for understandable cinematic reasons—while sidelining the lived realities of the oppressed community it claims to honour. Yet, even as it privileges the perspective of power, the film does not shy away from exposing the state's role as the true antagonist. Through a series of chillingly plausible details—officers cutting off water supplies, denying basic dignity, dehumanising protestors with animalistic slurs, and ultimately

unleashing lethal violence, the movie lays bare the cold machinery of systemic cruelty. Its portrayal of the police is neither heroic nor neutral. Instead, it subtly indicts the institution for its calculated efforts to break the will of a



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The first act overstays its welcome in the backwaters of Kuttanad, exploring Varghese’s domestic woes and romance. When the narrative finally shifts to Wayanad, it sprints through the emotional core with little breathing space. The camera consistently lingers on the margins of tribal life, choosing to observe from the other side. The indigenous protestors, more often than not, become aestheticized background rather than individualized agents of resistance. Adivasi characters—barring two activists—are stripped of names, backstories, and voice. Their identities remain indistinct.

Varghese Peter’s transformation from an easygoing, unemployed youth to a morally resolute rebel unfolds in a way that leaves the viewer—despite their full attention—feeling as though a pivotal emotional beat has been missed. Yet, Tovino Thomas’s committed performance lends the arc a surprising degree of credibility, grounding the character’s evolution with conviction and emotional weight. Pranav Theophine brings depth to the role of Thaami, a young Adivasi whose quiet strength is laced with vulnerability, making his presence both moving and memorable. Veterans Suraj Venjaramoodu and Cheran deliver performances that elevate the roles that might otherwise have felt predictable in their narrative trajectories. Arya Salim offers a fiery and commanding turn in a role inspired by CK Janu, leader of the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha. Jakes Bejoy’s score is aptly tailored, enriching the mood of each scene without overwhelming it. It is worth noting that the movie allows the characters to speak in their native dialects, with subtitles provided to help viewers follow along..



While the film embraces a restrained and modest visual style that lends authenticity, its occasional reliance on familiar cinematic tropes softens the impact of its otherwise provocative intent. It also stands as a reminder that the strength of any governance lies in the integrity of its word. Though it is not the tribal cause that ultimately triumphs, but rather the conscience of a lone constable, the film still manages to confront the rot within the system—not through a simplistic good cop/bad cop dichotomy, but by exposing its moral ambiguity in all its unsettling complexity.