

Muslim Culture In Malayalam Movies (1990-2024)

Mrs. Nafia C.T* & Muhsin C.T

PG Department of Islamic History, MES Kalladi College, Mannarkkad,
University Of Calicut, Pin:678583, Kerala

*Corresponding author: Mrs. Nafia C.T

Email: afiact19@gmail.com

Abstract

We live in a very transparent age. The present is largely out of bounds as far as the previous past. The role played by mass media in building and destroying human values in a transparent world is immense. Although cinema is only a form of entertainment among the public in Kerala, cinema is a universal medium. Cinema plays a huge role in establishing the vision of the society and giving direction to the audience. Cinema is a great art form that makes the audience aware of different peoples, scientific disciplines, different levels of cultures and perspectives. But cinema, which opens different avenues of knowledge to its viewers, is also a dangerous platform capable of poisoning people's minds. Hollywood movies often portray Asians in a very primitive way. We can see the presence of Asians in Hollywood films as characters who are very different from the western society such as bad accent, primitive culture. There is constant criticism of Hollywood for sharing such negative messages through movies. Movies like Ghost in the Shell (2017) and Memoir of a Gheisha (2005) are examples of bad orientalism in Hollywood movies. Malayalam cinema has propagated the untrue notion that Kerala Muslims are a culturally backward and anti-modern people. If there is at least one Muslim character (by race, language or dress) in the film, they tend to be the ones who rant about the victim and perpetrator of terrorism, or who are irrationally angry and resentful of the Western way of life.

Key Words: Cinema, Kerala Muslims, Hollywood, Terrorism

Introduction

Malayalam cinema introduces Kerala Muslims as a society rich in such people. If the character is male, he is a misogynist. There are many examples of stereo type images that have been portrayed in this way. Sajan's 1991 film *Amina Tylers* reinforces the Muslim stereotype. The screenwriter has filled the film with characters like uneducated Muslims, misogynist men and oppressed women. We see Umma as a symbol of helplessness as she bears mute witness to her father's misogynistic behavior. In Malayalam films, the filmmakers usually presented helpless female characters enslaved in a male-centered society, and films such as *Paadam onnu Oru Vilapam* (2003), *Perumazhakalam* (2004), *Thattathinmarayathu* (2012), *Vilapangalkkappuram* (2009) all portray Islam's position on women in a bad way. Islam's stances on aspects such as triple talaq, nikah, polygamy, child marriage, violent attitude of Muslims, obsession with food etc. are mainly mocked by Muslims.

There are many boxes office hit films in the Malayalam industry where Muslims are portrayed as backward and stereotypical. Today, the changes made by filmmakers from the Muslim community in the film industry have resulted in the release of films that break the stereotypes of the Muslim community. After 2010, in the Malayalam cinema scene, which has been openly anti-Islamic, some film lovers have come forward to portray Islamic values and the social life of Muslims in a way that is in line with reality. *Adaminte makan Abu* (2011), directed by Salim Ahmed, was the first to succeed in portraying Islamic precepts and the real life of Muslims before the audience. After Films like *KL 10 pathu*(2015), *Sudani from Nigeria* (2018), *Tallumala* (2022), *Sulaikha Manzil* (2023) and *Kadina Katorami Andakataham* (2023) broke Muslim stereotyping. These films were successful in introducing the Muslim culture of Malappuram to the general public of Kerala.

Growth and development of cinema

Who invented cinema? From the point of view of the French, cinema is the contribution of the Lumière brothers. If you ask Americans, they will say that Thomas Alva Edison invented film. But film is not the result of the efforts of one person. It is a cumulative effort of various scientists. It has evolved over time. In 1891, Thomas Alva Edison and

William Dixon invented the first motion picture viewing device, the Kinetoscope 1894, the Maguire & Baucus Company acquired the foreign rights to the Kinetoscope, and as a result the machines became widespread throughout Europe. A Kinetoscope exhibition in Paris inspired the Lumière brothers (Auguste Lumière Louis Lumiere) to enter the field of motion picture direction. The birth of cinema itself is considered to be the public screening of the motion picture in 1895 by the Lumière brothers, who had made many popular short films, to about 200 members of a private company. It was with this event that beyond being an art form, the huge commercial potential behind cinema was realized and cinema began to be promoted worldwide.

By 1914, several film production companies had been established. As more people were willing and willing to pay to see movies, cinema became more popular, large movie studios and theaters were established, and cinema evolved into what it is today. Cinema was greatly promoted by the invention of television in 1927 and its proliferation in the following years. During these periods, motion pictures began to be telecasted after theatrical release. Cinema was the dominant form of popular entertainment in the 1930s–1940s. Watched twice a week, it has become an indispensable part of everyday life. The home viewing experience improved further with the advent of cable television in the 1980s. c. with the advent of r (video cassette recorder), movie companies started releasing old and new movies in the form of video cassettes. As the audience started watching movies by renting or buying such cassettes, the audience could watch the movies they wanted at the time of their choice with the ease of choosing a book. With the introduction of DVD (Digital Video Disc) in the 1990s, film became more transparent. DVD became more popular as a medium for recording, storing and playing back films with more data than the video case. New technologies introduced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries further expanded the television possibilities of motion pictures. Different systems have emerged these days that guarantee hundreds of channels through satellite and digital cable. Most of them were playing movies continuously. At this time O. d (Video on Demand) also came into the picture. Through this, viewers can watch movies directly to their television or computer screen on demand with the help of internet. Over

the past two decades many platforms like HBO Disney plus Amazon Prime Netflix Original have been active in the field of movies and web series. Popular platforms with huge popular support have been continuously securing many series due to commercial reasons.

As of January 2024, Netflix Original has over 260 million subscribers in over 190 countries. This can understand the modern society's obsession with movies and serials.

Role of cinema in society

Acting as a mirror reflecting the joys, struggles and complexities of society, cinema has been an important part of modern culture for over a century. Through films, audiences witness stories that resonate with their own experiences. By portraying diverse cultures, lifestyles and issues, the film builds empathy in the audience and makes them aware of their own quality of life. Studies indicate that a large part of the world's population regularly relies on movies to escape from the tedium of daily life and relax for a while. The acceptance of the film in the society is huge. There are many audiences who are obsessed with the lead role and approach the film with practical intelligence. However, many scientific studies have found that watching movies regularly has a lasting effect on the brain of the audience. Different types of movies have different effects on the brain of the audience. Scary and intense movies can increase adrenaline and cortisol levels. It may evoke memories of traumatic events experienced by the audience. Comedy and romantic movies can lower the blood pressure of the audience. A large audience perceives movies as mere time-pass or short-term entertainment. But studies suggest otherwise. Cinema is more than just entertainment. Cinema, which exposes the audience to the precious expanses of knowledge and technology, is also a dangerous platform for poisoning people's minds. Films can also create a generation rich in harmful mindsets by portraying them in a negative light. 13 The latest trend is to show alcohol, drugs, murder, etc. in movies. Such violence is actively seen in most of the new web series on OTT platforms such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. But popular platforms are often not interested in making films that create social awareness or promote morality in areas like education, family planning, financial security, etc. Many psychiatrists believe that a child

today may see more violence in 30 minutes of TV or movies than the average child experiences in a lifetime. Each of the films attempts to interact, at least indirectly, with the psychological levels of each viewer. Therefore, the innate potential of cinema to evoke human emotions has been misused for ages. Many film companies and directors use film to inject their personal, political or ideological views into the audience. The penetration of such trends into the film industries will lead to an influx of stereotyped images and stereotypical images that create negative impacts on the society and hurt individual roots. All these scenes are seemingly harmless. But the impact it will have on the viewers will be terrible. So the audience has a heavy responsibility to reject bad movies and accept good movies.

Propaganda movies and Stereo type movies

The word propaganda is used to spread false propaganda against a group with religious or political enmity. In the past, it had the meaning of just propaganda, but this term began to be used in the sense of hate propaganda and propaganda during the Hitler's German dictatorship. He himself established the Ministry of Propaganda to inflame the minds of the German people with anti-Semitism. There are many propaganda films released during this time to protect their religious and political interests. A lot of propaganda is part of Islamophobia in India. The pictures have been released. Cinematic chronology is only used as a tool for propaganda through films released with such a tainted agenda.

The stereo type cinema role played by establishing the vision of the society is indispensable. Good or bad, movies have the ability to last forever. Hence, cinema is often misused to paint any matter, even if it is baseless, in the social media. For this purpose, stereotype means the continuous display of meaningless objects. There are different types of stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are constructed perceptions based on one's gender or sexuality. Racist stereotypes that racialize characters as black, white, or Asian. Through movies we can see various forms of stereotypes such as social-class stereotypes, nationalism stereotypes that show the working but economically backward population as violent and uneducated. Stereotypes can generate huge misconceptions in the minds of the audience. Many stereotypes may have lifelong effects on

viewers. Such misconceptions can be changed to some extent by making stereotype-breaking movies, making the younger generation aware of the media agenda, and ensuring media literacy education for children.

Islamophobia in Global Cinema

Islamophobia is a new term that refers to prejudice and discrimination against Islam or Muslims. In the Middle Ages, the Christian government spread propaganda by making the Muslims uncivilized and violent. The thinking behind this was that they would benefit from the Crusades. Later in the modern era, Islamophobia became active. The term was coined in the late 1980s. After the September 11, 2001 trade center attacks, Islamophobia gained global notoriety. In addition to Asian hatred, overt Islamophobia also contributes to the influx of stereotypical characters in Hollywood films. We can see a lot of parallel Arab Muslim characters in Hollywood films who dress traditionally, talk about violence, and engage in terrorism. Jack George Shaheen, who researched Arab stereotypes in Hollywood, says: "Between the 1930s and 1950s there were many English films that portrayed Arabs badly." From this, it can be understood that Islamophobia has arisen in the film industry in its infancy. "In over 900 films, the main villains are Egypt, the characters will be from Palestine." Over a hundred movies have come out of Hollywood depicting Egyptians. Ninety-five percent of them ridicule or dehumanize Egyptians." The common features of these films are negative, violent, sexual and anti-democratic Muslim characters. They will be adept at planning and executing bombings. Muslim women will be deprived of even freedom of speech and doomed to live a helpless life at the whims of their husbands. The Islamophobic stereotype in a movie/TV show is identified by undergoing the Riz test.

Indian Cinema

Hindi film scene known as Bollywood is the first film industry of Indian cinema. Hari Chandra Sakha ram known as Savedad was produced a film know the wrestlers (1899) is considered the first Indian film. Dadhasaheb Phalka is known as the father of Indian cinema. His film Raja Harichandra released in 1913 was the first full-length film in India. With

the development of cinema over time. Around 328 films were produced in 1931. After independence many films were made based on different themes. 19 Filmmakers like Satyajit Ray and Bimal Roy released films focusing on social issues. In the 1960s, films made by directors such as Ritzyak Ghattak and Mrinal Sen gained worldwide attention, and this is considered the golden age of Bollywood. Many legends emerged during this time. There was great progress in the field of music too.

Islamophobia In Bollywood

There was a time when Bollywood was famous for producing films that promoted Hindu Muslim brotherhood and communal friendship. The golden age of Bollywood was the period when the government canceled the film genre to promote India's constitutional values. But all that situation has changed. Today, movies injected with Islamophobia get a screening certificate and are shown in theaters with ease. Earlier, the Censor Board did not allow screening of such anti-communal films. But now under the BJP rule, Islamophobia is being spread transparently through the film industry. A movie titled Kashmir Files was released In March 2022. Produced by Vivek Agnihotri, who blindly supports the BJP, the film discusses the plight of Kashmiri Pandits during the exodus of the 1990s. The film is full of baseless developments. All Muslims are portrayed badly in the film. One is a deviant, the other a despicable Kashmiri Pandit family's hideout to a terrorist group, and even Muslim children are seen threatening Hindus and being cruel to them. Another Islamophobic product is The Kerala Story (2023), which was released as part of the national advocacy campaign. Directed by Sudepto Sen, the film's theme reinforces the myth of love jihad. Malappuram district people are portrayed as communal terrorists who have brainwashed around 32,000 non-religious young women into Islam and sent them for jihad activities in Iraq and Syria. As part of the election campaign in Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken promoting the Kerala story. At a rally in Bellary, Karnataka, he told the 20 crowd that "Kerala Story is based on a terrorist conspiracy. This film exposes the ugly face of terrorism". He appealed to the people that everyone should watch this movie. After this, many BJP political activists came forward in support of the movie and released the movie in many

places and as a result the movie made millions. Movies like *Lipstick Under My Burqa* (2017), *72 Hoorain* (2019) and *Tanhaji* (2022) are agenda movies filled with Islamophobia.

Conclusion

From 1990 to 2022, there has been a significant transformation in the representation of Muslims in Malayalam cinema, primarily driven by young filmmakers from the Malabar region. Earlier portrayals often depicted Muslims in a negative light, emphasizing stereotypes and cultural misrepresentations. Director Ashraf Hamza highlighted the linguistic discrepancies in films, where Muslim characters often spoke in a degraded dialect compared to their Hindu counterparts, reinforcing existing stereotypes. The film "Naran" is cited as an example where only one Muslim character deviated linguistically from the standard Malayalam spoken by others.

Zakaria Mohammed, director of "Sudani from Nigeria," pointed out that past films like "Aaram Tampuran" unfairly represented Malappuram with bomb-related narratives, which do not reflect reality. He emphasized the need to showcase the true essence of Malappuram and its people. In contrast to the 1990s, where Muslim characters had to exemplify good moral values and oppose the abuse of their religion, contemporary films allow Muslim characters to exist without the burden of proving their faith or being labeled negatively.

While Malayalam cinema has made strides in breaking stereotypes and presenting more nuanced portrayals, issues like Islamophobia still persist, rooted in historical misrepresentations. Despite these challenges, cinema remains a powerful medium for initiating social change, capable of challenging and transforming audiences' perceptions and fostering a more inclusive narrative in contemporary Malayalam film.

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