

Abusive Humour In Malayalam Movies

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ABSTRACT

Even in this technologically advanced twenty first century, women are ‘merely women’ for some ‘dark’ minds. They might be unaware of the developments and progress made by women in all walks of life; or sometimes they may be intentionally keeping aloof from knowing the reality. The paper discusses the representation of women in Malayalam film industry. How women are abused particularly to invoke humour– that is the focus point of this paper. Vulgar representations and cheap humours made out of women have to be discussed in detail. Puns and scenes with sexual flavouring are mostly a trend in the ‘New Generation Movies’ released during the decade after 2010. But its precursor decade is not too far away in this respect. Therefore, the paper is trying to analyse the abusive humour produced in Mollywood from the year 2000 upto 2020. Feminist film theory which always criticized the movies for their stereotypical representation deserves special mention here. It not only criticized the stereotypical representation but also advocated for the representation of female desire and subjectivity. It was feminist film theory which proved the fact that rather than reflecting social relations, films construct meanings. Sexuality and gender difference are deliberately created by cinema. Everywhere in cinema, the audience could find only the male gaze; there is no female gaze even for a nominal status. This theory was very influential in creating a parallel audience who observed the films in a feminist manner. Laura Mulvey’s name is an inevitable one while dealing with feminist film theory. Mulvey in one of her essays mentioned that films should not be considered as mere entertainment and text; but we should approach it in a multi-dimensional way emphasizing the questions like how it was made and how it was accepted and all. Even after five decades her essays are still relevant. Even in twentieth century Mulvey argued that cinema caters images of visual pleasure of men. In cinemas woman are always a victim for the male gaze, she added.

Keywords: Mollywood, abusive humour, Feminist Film Theory, Laura Mulvey, male gaze.

INTRODUCTION

Art forms are not only meant for mere entertainment, it also portrays the culture of the society from where the concerned work is produced. So, there is a two-way relationship between society and art forms; one reflects the other. It is no doubt that the most popular art form is movies, in this fast-moving world. Movies are generally divided into art movies and commercial movies. The intention behind the commercial movie makers is to make the people entertain, they venture to go on with any end, on the sole objective of their purpose. Laughter is the main fuel behind this purpose of entertainment. They make use of women verbally and physically in this derogatory business. Certain actions, some kind of pointed humour and derogatory statements are usually made to make people burst into laughter.

Malayalam movies received applause right from the beginning on account of its discussion of socio-political issues, life like characters and its portrayal of reality. History tells us the fact that Mollywood has changed its trends as and when the occasion demanded. But the only thing that hasn’t changed even today is the abuse of women representation in Malayalam films. Even while everyone advocate for equality and equal rights, society must acknowledge the fact that majority of the theatres in Kerala are being filled mostly by young boys rather than girls especially on release dates. The filmmakers are aware of this fact and this directly points the finger towards the female abuse in Malayalam movies. They target these young males and thus the creation of women in an abusive manner is made possible. They add the ingredients with sexual and vulgar flavours for the same.

Women's physical appearance along with sexuality are being ridiculed in these movies. In some cases, women are objectified to invoke the audience. Women are exploited to make humour by effectively employing the vulgar techniques of body shaming and dialogues with sexist savour.

In reviews, some films are termed to be open and realistic in the sense that they openly discuss sexuality and brings in the accounts of real portrayals. But if scrutinize such 'realistic' movies, we could find that they are not openly discussing female sexuality; but are discussing something other to create ripples in the society. On behalf of heroism, even superstars and megastars do the same. But the disastrous result that it creates on an average audience is very great; they are influenced by personalities like them very easily. No one can justify the use and exploitation of women in Malayalam movies to glorify a hero or to show a heroic content. These all could be done without a misogynistic connotation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are considered to be a second sex even in this century, irrespective of all the progress that mankind had attained through all these ages. This paper emphasizes the abuse of women not generally, but particularly on Mollywood. A good number of people have reacted and expressed their views on this issue in the form of books, articles and research papers. But most of them emphasized an actor or rather a director specifically. What is insufficient here is the point that it hasn't reflect the trends of an age or the changing aspects of societal relations.

Most of the research papers relating to this subject matter were dealt with the issue of misogyny. There was an article in *The Hindu* on 30th June 2018 titled *Misogyny rules the roost in Malayalam Cinema* now it clearly discusses the gender inequalities that prevail in Malayalam film industry. Meena T Pillai published a research article in *Academia* entitled '*Many Misogynies of Malayalam Cinema*', which focused on some recent actual incidents which were associated with Mollywood. An article named, '*Ridiculing the female gender in Malayalam Cinemas*' was published in the 7th volume of 2019 May edition in '*International Journal of English Language, Literature in Humanities*' by two B.Ed students. This article mentions the trend in Malayalam movies to vulgarise women in order to create humour.

This work focuses on a wide range of movies that released in the year span of 2000 – 2020. Scenes, dialogue deliveries, slapstick comedies, pun etc were observed minutely to produce this work. Ten movies are selected altogether to pinpoint the objective.

ANALYSIS

Women are being abused in Mollywood from the time immemorial. As the trend changes according to the ages, so as the pattern of abuse. So here, look more closely on Malayalam movies released among the years of two decade, ie, 2000-2020.

In *Praja* (2001), directed by Joshiy, Zakir Hussain (Mohanlal) abuses a female police officer by insulting her in the public to zip her pants –it obviously creates laughter among everyone; but it certainly points to the question of female abuse in Malayalam movies. A woman, especially a senior ranking Police Officer is physically and emotionally abused in this scene. The individuals who are responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the country too are not spared. This perfectly paints the picture of a society where women having power in their hands are not even protected and be safeguarded from abuses.

In Shafi's film *Kalyanaraman*, released in 2002, a character enquires about the noise while a coconut was broken to the character named *Pyari* starring Salimkumar; he replies funnily that it was

nothing but just a piece fell into water referring to a woman who fell into a large vessel as a result of this Pyari's mischievous act. It is a physical abuse where female body is subjected to be the cause of humour.

Another abusive humour can be traced back in a film directed by Siddique, released in 2003 – *Chronic Bachelor*, where kuruvila, the role played by Innocent bursts out towards a group of college girls and go to the extent of saying that if you are meddling with men, you would only have time to deliver babies. This type of dialogue deliveries can obviously be produced in a male chauvinistic society, where a woman's role is merely considered to be limited in household chores. Here women are abused neither sexually nor physically but the whole womanhood is ridiculed and portrayed as something which is under male control.

Inspector Garud is a movie released in the year 2007 and directed by Johnny Antony. In order to take revenge on a woman, an obnoxious Police Officer, Madhavan Kutty casting Dileep, decides to marry her and succeeded in his attempt. So, the film is obviously giving a wrong message that women can be tied up with a marriage knot. She is ridiculed in front of his and her colleagues, making irrelevant the fact that she is a sub collector. Here emotionally a woman is abused. Her official rank and social status are made nothing before the society. It clearly make us aware the fact that abuse can not only be limited to physical and sexual; but emotionally too, and the effects of emotional abuse are really penetrating. Women have to be respected and considered as social beings with individuality. They are not meant to be seen as an "other".

Vyshakh's 2011 movie *Seniors* too have elements of such abusive humour which is made out using women. There is a scene where *Lekshmi Priya*, an actress in the role of a Lecturer, talks about Aesthetics. Parallely, the actors in lead roles are shown enjoying the beauty of this teacher. There is also another scene in the same movie where a lady who is represented as a prostitute becomes the key element of humour in the movie. When female body is used to produce humour, it is the physical abuse that dominates there. Women are considered merely a sexual object for the pleasure of others.

In another movie named *Mayamohini* (2012) directed by Jose Thomas, Mohini the role played by Dileep invokes such kind of humours verbally and also through actions. What is glorified in this movie is nothing other than the female body and its mis representation. Mohini, the female role of the actor is portrayed as a woman in search of love and lust throughout the movie. Her way of dressing, speech and actions are indeed filled with double meaning. Women are not emotionally abused here, but through certain actions and dialogues they are abused sexually and physically. The filmmaker tried to establish a new meaning which affirms that this is what we call a woman. But such misrepresentations create deep issues in the society especially in little ones, who blindly consider movies as the reflection of society.

In a 2016 released Malayalam movie named *Kasaba*, directed by Nithin Ranji Panicker, Rajan Skaria (Mammootty), the hero abuses a female cop. The dialogue goes like "I can stop your menstrual cycle if I would like to". The controversy created by this scene was not meagre. That's why complaints were filed by actress Parvathy and also the then Women's Commission Chairman K.C Rosakutty Teacher on account of this scene. They opined the elision of this scene and also warned the filmmaker by suggesting that even for the sake of character, women cannot be portrayed in such a manner. The blind acceptance by the mass audience is a great threat to the society where the lead role is played by a megastar like Mammootty. Here the actress is abused emotionally, physically and sexually. Such actions and scenes have to be monitored by Censor Board and such authorities in India, where even a gaze with sexual savour is considered as a serious abuse over women.

Pavada is another film released in 2016 by G Marthandan. Prithviraj plays the role of a drunkard named Joy. His wife, who is a nurse by profession leaves him because of his behavior. But later in the movie, when they re-unite Joy says that he will teach his wife a lesson to ensure that she won't leave him again; he wouldn't be man otherwise, he adds. The next scene shows Sinimol, the actress coming out of a gynecology ward and it is obvious that she is pregnant. Joy then says that it will be the result if you mess with men. This apparently shows the deep-rooted male chauvinism in Kerala society. Abuse over women are sometimes considered to be a part of revenge against women.

Happy Wedding is yet another movie released in 2016 made by debutant director Omar Lulu. Women are abused extensively in this campus movie which is portrayed as a part of happenings in college life. Here a Head of the Department of the college refuses to approve the hero's record book. This HOD is represented as one who have a flirty nature and he signs the same record book just after a few minutes when it was brought to him by a female student. He even doesn't make any effort to look over the pages where the drawings were made. This tactic was played by hero and one of his friends to obtain the desired result and they became successful in their attempt. This points to the issue of using women in a wrong sense; it is not because of the perfection in the drawings that he gave his signature, but only because of the presence of this female student. Even though it is criticizing the ones who just only needs a nominal female gender form their sexual appetite, but it is giving a wrong lesson to the society in a sense that women can achieve any end with their physical presence. Physical abuse is what that have done here. Portrayal of physical abuse in educational institutions like schools and colleges must be strictly banned.

Omar Lulu directed a film named *Chunks* in 2017 which was infamous for its puns and slapstick comedies. Most of the scenes are set in an engineering college. Here a professor uses a lady lecturer to attract the students so as to make the students present in his class. Her physical body is well exposed in this scene to make the audience believe that the students are attracted to her in a great way. Her presence in the class makes the attendance full present and the very next moment the professor enters the class and says that it's the only available solution to make this happen. So, the presence of women is not portrayed in a good sense in this movie too. Female body is represented as a tempting tool, here in this movie. Women are represented as mere objects of

sexual pleasure. Here, the abuse is physical and sexual at the same time. This type of scenes must be deleted otherwise the budding generation too will think that this is the proper way to behave with the women.

CONCLUSION

Hegemonic masculinity is repeatedly constructed and portrayed in Malayalam films, whereas women are represented through their conjugal femininity. These, in a way or another become the mirror of Kerala's gender blindness and the state of cultural degeneration. So, if we analyse the Malayalam film industry, we could find such hundreds of examples. Women are ridiculed in its extremes so as to invoke humour. Vulgar descriptions of their body parts, dialogues with 'masala' flavours etc. are now a common element in Malayalam movies. Violence and sexual attack over bold women are represented in certain movies as something heroic in a sense to silence the voice of those bold women. It is a general notion and, upto an extent the fact that the commercial success of all the above listed films were based on the elements of sexual flavours, innuendos, slapstick humours and puns in these movies.

This issue can be tackled for an extent if more female directors and script writers venture to come forward. If we observe and analyse movies made by female directors and script writers, we can't find this issue much. They usually depict and represent powerful, bold and independent women, who can't be abused in any way. It may be similar if we observe it internationally too. This kind of abusive humour is a very powerful tool in the representation of masculine hegemony in patriarchal societies. Most of the filmmakers need only commercial success and want their movie to be a box-office hit movie. They are well aware of the fact that the actual societal representation or a kind of didacticism won't workout in movies, which have such an objective as we mentioned here. They find the images of women to be a perfect input to glorify the movies, to increase the popularity and to collect huge revenues. They constantly forget their duty of civilizing the society. It is the art form which acts as the mouthpiece of a society, and it also reflects the attitudes of a society in general. Women have to be considered equal to men. Equality and liberty of women are glorified only in documents, papers and speeches even now in certain societies. Art forms, especially cinemas which have a great command over the people have to be re structured. Filmmakers must make sure that allocation of enough space for women as an individual needs to be satisfactory. It is her innate abilities that has to be displayed in movies; she shouldn't be abused in anyways, even as to invoke humour. It is a derogatory stuff to our culture and society as well. Let the changing trends may plant fresh laurels as we wish in this beautiful hope.

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