

Muslim Women in Malayalam Cinema; Within and Beyond Stereotypes

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study the perspective 21st century Malayalam cinema set forth towards Muslim women. The significance of the study lies in the verity that Muslim women are doubly oppressed, first through their gender and secondly through religion. The importance of the reading increases when considered the recent comments made by the clergy men regarding the issue of *Talaq*, polygamy and women's rights. The time and space of the current century has tremendously brought changes in the language, attire, freedom and education of Muslim women. Even then there are a lot of movies which present Muslim women in a stereotypical manner and have become huge success in box office. The way these movies have reinforced the stereotypes and visualized Muslim community as a stagnant one is analyzed. There are movies which address the changes and advancements made by Muslim community and portray Muslim women against the stereotypes. They present bold, independent and educated women who cross the boundaries of confinement. How such movies broke the age-old conventions and established a more dynamic side of Muslim community is investigated with more emphasis.

Keywords: Malayalam, cinema, Muslim, women, stereotypes

It was from 1950s, movies which talked about Muslim life became part of Malayalam mainstream cinema. Polygamy, superstition, *Talaq* (divorce), child marriage, lack of education, and patriarchy were the most repeated themes when it comes to the portrayal of Muslim women. *Umma* (Mother) (1960) is the first Malayalam movie to integrate the fabric of Muslim community to the mainstream movie format. The movie was based on a novel by the same name by Moidu Padiyath. The story revolves around the theme of marital evils prevailed in Muslim

community especially in Malabar region. Ayisha (B S Saroja), the heroine of the movie becomes the victim of polygamy. She is the fourth wife of Aboobacker Haji (Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair), a rich landlord. Unlike the Muslim women of the time, Ayisha despite her status of a divorcee stands strong against the interests of her community and sends her daughter Zainaba (Rajakumari) to school. A woman who thinks of education at a time when they were married off at a young age really brought a change in the representation of Muslim women.

In an online article titled “Polygamy, Not My Problem”, a Muslim woman substantiates her views on polygamy by saying that the co-wife is her sister in Islam, and she can’t violate her sister’s rights. “And when a man marries another woman,” she says, “he must understand that his first wife will naturally be hurt and upset. But this comes with the package. And if he can’t handle this natural hurt and upset without blaming his wife or asking her to change, then he’s the one at fault. Women will be women, and if a man doesn’t fully accept what that means in reality, then he’s not ready for polygamy.” (“Polygamy, Not My Problem- A Muslim Woman”. *The Telegraph*. 9 Oct 2015).

Polygamy became a recurrent theme in most of the Malayalam movies which talked about Muslim community. *Ponmuttayidunna Tharavu* (The Duck That Lays Golden Eggs) (1988), a much-celebrated movie of late twentieth century depicts Khalmayi (Parvathi) as Hajjiyar’s (Karamana Janardhanan Nair) third wife. She does not make her presence till the last scene of the movie. She is addressed as Hajjiyar’s wife rather than her name. When she makes her presence in the last scene amidst a feud, the whole villagers happen to see her, the young wife of Hajjiyar, a tea shop owner. With her traditional attire and the dialect, she symbolizes the typical Muslim women stereotype. *Ghazal* (1993), a movie which explicitly talks about the Malabar Muslim life too portrays polygamy among the Muslim men. Saara (Sreevidya), wife of Burhanudeen Thangal (Nassar), is a helpless victim of his illicit relationships and patriarchal character. Sareena (Mohini), heroine of the movie is an orphan girl born and brought up in Bombay. When she comes to the village, she wears churidar and the whole men in the village is carried away by her beauty. Later we see her wearing traditional Muslim attire and conforming to the norms of the society. Burhanudeen Thangal marries her as his second wife to which she could not resist as she was powerless. She believes it as the fate of Allah as she was raped by him when she was in Bombay. In the end she kills him and commits suicide on their marriage night.

Muslim women are always portrayed as powerless victims of the evil practices in the community. *Ummachu* (1971) is a film adaptation of the novel by Uroob with the same title. *Ummachu* (Sheela) is portrayed as a Muslim woman who is forced to marry Beeran (Nellikode Baskaran), friend of her love Mayan (Madhu). Her powerless state is conveyed in her dialogue “What can I do, a hapless girl?”. The theme of forced marriage is seen in *Yatheem* (1977) in which Kunjubiraachi (Sheela), a widow is forced to marry Mammali Sahib (Thikkurissi Sukumaran Nair). Despite her efforts to be independent, her brother deliberately defames her and force her to marry rich Mammali Sahib as a way to get rid of his debt to him. Kunjubirachi’s daughter too is portrayed as a powerless young girl who is forced to marry an old man as her family was not financially sound enough to give dowry.

Statistics have shown that a larger majority of victims of forced marriages are Muslims. However, it is clearly mentioned in Islam that the consent of both man and woman is required for marriage. The Qur'an states "O you who have believed, it is not lawful for you to inherit women by compulsion ..." (4:19). Sahih-al-Bukhari, one of the most reliable sources of Hadith (Islamic teachings) reports "The widow and the divorced woman shall not be married until her order is obtained, and the virgin girl shall not be married until her permission is obtained." (Bukhari, 67:42). The next chapter of the Sahih al-Bukhari states: "When a man gives his daughter in marriage and she dislikes it, the marriage shall be repudiated" (Bukhari, 67:43). There are more such occurrences in Hadith which reports that Prophet Muhammed had called off many such marriages which were held without the consent of man and woman. When both the Quran and Hadith unequivocally stands against forced marriages, it is not the religion but the cultural practice that violates your right as a woman which is to be questioned.

Gayatri Spivak identifies a tendency to generalize the third world women in terms of western female subject constitution. This clearly ignores the differences in culture, language and social class. Women may be the wounded section in every society, but their experiences vary according to the community they belong to. Wounded Muslim women became a recurrent theme in the 20th century Malayalam cinema. The powerless women saga continues in movies like *Amina Tailors* (1991) in which the entire Muslim community as shown as illiterate, rude and scrupulous. Hydrose (Rajan P Dev) is known as "Moori" (Ox) due to his rude behavior. His daughter Amina (Parvathy) and wife Pathumma (Shubha) are silent, suffering women who could not find voice in the family. Their powerlessness is associated with the lack of education as the whole family is illiterate. Azeez (Asokan) gives Amina a letter which she could not read as she was illiterate. She learns to write and read without the consent of her father. When women of other communities are portrayed as educated and employed, Amina is still in the traditional attire totally ignorant of the changes happening around her. Men of the community is also portrayed as uneducated and regressive. When asked by the villagers about the physical ailment of his wife, Kunjalavi (Pappu) says "Who's going to take her to doctor? I am planning to marry another woman, I am a man and I can". He says quite blatantly about his plan to marry Amina who has the age of his daughter. *Vietnam Colony* (1994) too depicts a powerless woman, Suhra Bai (Philomina) who is portrayed as a mad, abandoned, old woman subjected to the cruelty of her own son.

Another series of movies which portrayed Muslim women belonged to the category which talked about inter-religious love relationship. *Moodupadam* (1963) depicts the love story of Appukuttan (Sathyan) and Amina (Sheela) which ends in a tragic note. Appukuttan sacrifices his love as Alikutty (Nellikode Baskaran), the deceased brother of Amina wished to marry off her sister to a man of the same community. Amina becomes a voiceless character who lives according to the whims and fancies of her brother and ex-lover. The latter half of the twentieth century also saw movies which talked about inter – religious relationships.

Pranayanilavu (1999) was a movie which showed the love story of Nabeesa (Mohini) and Kannan (Dileep). Unlike the other heroines, Nabeesa stands for her love and marries him. She is an educated girl and is not seen in the traditional Muslim attire. Nabeesa's family talks about her marriage rather than her education and expects her to marry a man of same community. Kunjahammed (Jagathy) quite blatantly says how he married four women as per the wish of

Allah and divorced them when he learnt that they cannot produce children. *Achanum Bappayum* (1972), *Thurakkatha Vathil* (1970) are other movies which talked about Hindu – Muslim relationships.

Religious authorities seem to support the patriarchal attitude by favoring Arabi *Kalyanam*, Mysore *Kalyanam* and other evil practices. They even go to the extent of supporting polygamy considering the sexual deprivation men had to suffer while wife is menstruating. They even support child marriages on the ground that it would prevent young girls from moral degradation.

Twenty first century Malayalam cinema showed no much difference from what it has been portraying about Muslim community and Muslim women except a few movies which showed protesting and independent women. The recurrent themes of Triple *Talaq*, *Nikkah Halala*, polygamy, child marriage and the whole suffering women appeared in mainstream movies as well as parallel cinema. Some of the movies showed how these laws were misinterpreted to suit the needs and interests of the male section of the society. For example, the practice of *Nikah Halala* has been the theme of twenty first century movies like *Alif*, *Kilichundan Mambazham* and *Mosayile Kuthirameenukal*.

The word *Halala* is originated from the Arabic word Halal which means lawful. It is the process by which a divorced lady again becomes ‘halal’ (lawful) for her husband. A man is allowed to remarry his wife only twice and if he divorces her for the third time it becomes irreversible unless the wife gets married to another man and the man dies or divorces her. The term *halala* is used when a man intentionally arranges another man to marry his wife and divorce her so that he can remarry her. Though it is not a common custom in Kerala, Malayalam movies have made it a theme to show how people outwit this law for their needs and interests. Women are denied freedom to speak for them and are trafficked like cattle.

In the movie *Kilichundan Mambazham*, a commercial movie made by Priyadarsan starring Mohanlal, Sreenivasan and Soundarya, a sheer instance of *Nikah halala* is shown along with polygamy and other evil practices. Moidutty Haji (Sreenivasan) is a rich landlord of the village who practices polygamy. The movie begins with his third marriage to Aamina (Soundarya) despite the disapproval of his two wives which is against the Islamic law. His mother Beeyathumma (Sukumari) scolds her daughters-in-law by saying that a man can marry as many women as he wishes if he is financially affluent as said in Holy Quran. She explains how she lived with her husband and his eight wives peacefully. No one in his house or village find it unusual as they are all seen happily participating in the marriage ceremony except his wives. It clearly shows how women are silenced amidst the enjoyment of men. It is his first wife who helps him in getting ready for his first night with Aamina. While he tries to pacify the anger of his wives by telling how Quran permits to have four wives for a man, Maimoona, his second wife reminds him of the real context in which Quran says so. She says it was during the battle of Badr when many women became widows, Prophet married and protected them.

Aamina who is in love with Abdu (Mohan Lal) deliberately avoids sleeping with Moidutty Haji as per their plan. In a scene in which Moidutty Haji finds it impossible to satisfy his sexual desire towards Aamina, goes to his first wife Fathima. It shows how men justify polygamy by saying that it prevents them from sexual deprivation when one wife is menstruating or not

willing to have intercourse with her husband. Moidutty haji's second wife Maimoona was married to Kalandhar (Kochin Haneefa) and was divorced for the reason that the biriyani made by her was too hot and spicy. It shows how men distort laws for their needs and consider women as mere commodity. Islam does not approve of *talaq* said in anger. When Kalandhar realizes his mistake, he tries to get his wife back. As per Nikkah *Halala*, it is only permissible if she is married off to another man and is divorced or becomes a widow. Therefore, Kalandhar seeks help of his friend Moidutty by Nikkah *halala* hoping that he will soon divorce her after the marriage. But Moidutty being attracted to her refuses to do so. Even though the entire scenario is shown in a humorous way, it sheds light on the custom of nikkah *halala*.

In the movie Alif, the heroine Fathima is divorced by her husband Abu for not giving her property to him. Later when he comes to know that she has got a government job, he tries to get her back by marrying her off to his cousin on the agreement that he will divorce her after marriage. Fathima says prophet had prohibited such marriages and questions the validity of it. In the movie Mosayile Kuthirameenukal, heroine Iza demands Akbar Ali to marry and divorce her to make her halal to her husband Hashim who later proves to be a rogue. Unlike the other movies there is no religious implication over the issue.

Thattathin Marayathu (2012) is yet another celebrated movie which talked about inter religious love affair between a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl. The title itself means in the cover of 'thattam' (a piece of cloth used to cover the head of Muslim girls). The identity of the heroine is pushed behind the piece of cloth she wears and rendered voiceless. Despite all the progress that the community witnessed in the twenty first century in terms of education, employment, marriage and other basic aspects of life, the movie still shows the barbarous and scrupulous nature of a male dominant rich Muslim family. As the title itself mentions the Muslim dress code, any discussion on that matter requires an in depth understanding of the role of power and agency in a community or in a society.

"While the classical position maintains a vertical view of power, in which one can stand outside the purview of power and challenge it, more nuanced and critical approach avers that power is pervasive and immanent. This position rejects any possibility of transcending the power structure, for one is always already situated in a power discourse." (Foucault, Michel. *The Subject and Power*.1982). The only possibility to engage with the existing structure is through negotiations and in the context of dress also one has to take this into consideration. It is not only the purdah but other dress codes like saree, salwar, jeans are also formed as a result of this power structure. But purdah being a symbol of patriarchal power expression opens up possibilities of negotiation and engagement with it.

There is a scene in the movie in which the heroine Aysha (Isha Talwar) comes to inaugurate the purdah shop started by the hero Vinod (Nivin Pauly). She comes to the shop wearing a purdah and what enables her to attend the function is her appropriation of purdah for her own purposes in an otherwise restrictive society. Here purdah emerges as a tool with which Muslim women negotiate with the patriarchal structure by exercising their agency. There is a scene which got larger applause in theatres where Aysha says it is not the dreams of a girl which should be reserved under purdah but her chastity. Though it talks about the freedom of a girl to

dream despite her community and religion, it gives another notion that chastity and purity is something that should be attributed to women and that too through the dress code she chooses. In a scene Abdu (Aju Varghese) says to his friend Vinod that to get a glance from a Muslim girl is not easy as you think which again depicts the subjugated women presence in Muslim community. Despite all the potentials she has as an individual, Aysha is projected as a mere piece of physical attraction as the hero goes on praising her beauty throughout the movie.

The representation of *purdah* or *niqab* in the movie *Ustad Hotel* is totally contradictory compared to *Thattathin Marayathu*. The only time Shahana (Nithya Menon) wears it is when she goes to the night club for singing. Despite all the negative representations of *purdah*, here it acts as something that enables mobility though in a limited sense in an otherwise constrictive society. Shahana uses *purdah* as a tool to engage and negotiate with the existing patriarchal system. *Purdah* here is a medium through which Shahana engages with the public sphere. In his famous work *Malabar Rebellion* (2008), M Gangadharan argues that *purdah* is a dress code imposed on women by men. As an alternative to this he endorses women to adopt saree like Indian women or salwars like Pakistani women.

The 21st century Malayalam cinema which is the focus of the thesis portrays Muslim women who are independent both financially and emotionally. Women who showed their presence on screen through solid statements and decisions began to be appreciated. It was indeed the result of a change that happened in the Muslim community through education and awareness. The hues and cries heard in the north against the practice of triple *talaq*, polygamy and *nikah halala* made significant impact on the Muslim women in south, especially in Kerala.

Hearing a batch of pleas regarding divorce using triple *talaq*, Justice Mohammed Mushtaq of the Kerala High Court came out with a strong repudiation of the triple *talaq* practice and stressed the need for law makers to make sure Muslim women are treated justly. He concludes his statement by quoting verses from Holy Quran which reads (Chapter 47:2) "And those who believe and do good works and believe in that which is revealed unto Muhammad - and it is the truth from their Lord-He riddeth them of their ill deeds and improveth their state." "Thus, we display the revelations for people who have sense" (Chapter 30:28).

Another major aspect in which Muslim women have made significant advancement is in the field of education. The changing scenario of education among the Muslim women in the Malabar region has become a hot topic of research for the National Commission for Women (NCW). Shamina Shafiq, NCW member, who visited Malappuram and Kozhikode districts as part of a sample study undertaken in 2012 by the Research and Studies Cell of the Commission said that it was quite amazing to notice that the Muslim girls get clear orientation from their own families to opt for the best professional courses and careers. Ms. Shafiq said she took up the study just to find out the major factors that paved the way for the fast and covetable educational growth in the region. "We were very much curious about the swift educational developments taking place in the region which was once labelled as academically backward, especially in the case of women from the minority communities," she said.

Ms. Shafiq said the Muslim girls' increasing passion for engineering and medical courses was setting a new trend in the educational empowerment of the Malabar region. "The minority

education institutions have played a crucial role in setting this trend, which can bring sweeping changes to the community,” she observed. She said she could find several “bold faces” during her interactions with girl students who were determined to pursue higher education and secure a good career for self-reliance. “I could also notice the changes taking place in the mindset of parents to give their children the best education and help them to choose the best career.” (*The Hindu*.18 June 2012)

Educated Muslim women have been a presence in 21st century Malayalam cinema often destroying some of the prejudices surrounding Muslim women. *Innathe Chinthavishayam* (2008) directed by Sathyan Anthikkad should be discussed in this regard. The film focuses on the life of three couples who are facing marital discord and are on the verge of splitting up. The Muslim couple among the three, Rehna (Muthumani) and Nassar (Ashokan) was living separately as the orthodox family of Nassar did not allow Rehna to work after marriage. Rehna, unlike the other Muslim characters created by the same director in his previous movies, is a strong and independent woman who is an advocate. Apart from the Muslim name, there is no single trait which shows the “muslim-ness” in Rehna. Neither her dress code nor her language shows her belongingness to the Muslim community. The style of background music used while showing Muslims in popular cinema is not used while showing Rehna on screen. The usual Arabian music used while portraying Muslims and Middle East nations is carefully avoided while showing Rehna and her family.

Rehna has a voice of her own in her own personal life and the life of her close friends Tressa (Sukanya) and Premila (Mohini). She rebels against her husband and family when asked to sit inside home. She boldly expresses her desire to work as an advocate and gracefully leaves the familial bonds to live independently. At no point in her life does she express regret in her decision, and it is only when her husband agrees with her demand that she returns to him. Unlike the other movies which give only a background presence to Muslim women characters often expressing their emotions through facial expressions, silence and cries, Rehna makes a bold statement about her life and attitude.

Working Muslim women have made appearances in Malayalam movies like *Anwar* (2010), *Bus conductor* (2005), *Tiger* (2005). Noorjahan (Nikita Thukral) in *Bus Conductor* is a school teacher who falls in love with Kunjakka (Mammooty) and boldly speaks her heart out to her family. Aysha (Mamta) in *Anwar* is a chemical engineer who is an orphan girl earning money for herself. Haafiza Sayed, an artist from UAE says, “My Muslim woman is amongst the millions of unsung and often ignored Muslim women in global societies. These are women that are strong, liberated, awakened in all senses, exercising their rights, voicing their opinions, they are the leaders, educators, doctors, writers, artist, and activists and so on.”

Suhara Ahamed (Gopika) in *Tiger* is a journalist who shows extra ordinary courage at times when her profession demands. Her costumes and attire are not of the usual Muslim girl on silver screen. She along with her friend and colleague Kishore (Vineeth Kumar) is shown traveling even in late night without being questioned by her family. Her family including her grandfather and sister believes in liberal social values and supports her beyond doubts. No religious symbols, customs or rituals is shown at any point of the narration to denote the community she belongs to.

Moreover, a Muslim woman journalist especially from Kerala was not a much seen silver screen presence as much as it is in the reality.

Following the patterns in Bollywood, Malayalam cinema too portrayed issues like terrorism and Islamophobia in movies like *Anwar* (2010), *Daivanamathil* (2005), *Keralotsavam 2009* (2009), *Baba Kalyani* (2006) and the very recent movie *Take Off* (2017). All these movies portrayed Muslim youth getting attracted to terrorism and extremism when there existed a basic belief that terrorism is not in vogue in south India. Among the films which talked about Islam and terrorism, *Daivanamathil* and *Take Off* placed Muslim women in the central role and clearly demarcated between Islam and terrorism. *Daivanamathil* is a movie that implores the youth to denounce fundamentalism. The movie is a product of the national award winning director Jayaraj and producer Aryadan Shoukat whose film *Paadam Onnu Oru Vilapam* directed by T.V.Chandran won the best actress award for Meera Jasmine in 2004. Movie weaves a tale describing the rapid communalization of society, especially in Kerala.

"The film argues that the best remedy for the communal problem is going back to the ethos of the freedom movement. I wanted to tell the Muslim youth that violence is not the way to raise their voice in opposition," says Jayaraj. "Being a Hindu, I had to study the subject in depth. But after I went through the details, I was desperate to make the film. I wanted to tell the world that Islam is the only religion that has peace in its name itself," he said. (Kurian, Sangeeth."Daivanamathil". *The Hindu*.19 April 2005). The movie talked about the aftermath of Babri Masjid demolition and Gujarat riots.

Set during the tumultuous time of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, *Daivanamathil*, starring Malayalam stars Prithviraj and Bhavana, is the story of a vivacious young girl Samira, who belongs to an orthodox Muslim family from the Malabar belt of Kerala. Her marriage to Anwar (Prithviraj) turns into a disaster when he leaves for Uttar Pradesh for higher studies in Aligarh Muslim University. He is brainwashed by his peers to become a Muslim fanatic. The romantic expectations of Samira fade away when she receives a letter from Anwar asking her and her sister to wear Hijab and his decision to join Jihad to seek revenge on others. Soon she realizes that Anwar has been sucked into the terrorist torrent.

It is Samira who becomes instrumental in getting Anwar arrested. She uses the same religion which ruined Anwar to get him back. With Holy Quran in her hand, she teaches the community how Islam hates killing others in the name of religion. Samira is shown as a young Muslim college going girl who loves to have happy moments with her sister. The second half of the movie shows a transformation in her from a young vibrant girl to a mature wife whose only wish is to get her husband back. She teaches him the real meaning of Islam with the help of her grandfather-in-law.

Sameera is portrayed as an educated, strong and independent women who in her ways and manners reflect the quality of education she received. Despite the fact that she was married off to a person whom she doesn't know but loves as she sees him for the first time, Sameera fights for a peaceful life with him. Her hues and cries are not of a helpless woman but a well determined individual. In a scene we see her reading the book *Second Sex* of Simone de Beauvoir. A Muslim woman, especially married, to read a book which talked about the treatment of women

throughout the history was a revolutionary act. We see her educating Anwar by giving him books to read and thus her character is a true example of how education gives women the courage to act.

Another movie which should be discussed in this regard is *Take Off* which is inspired by the real-life rescue of Indian nurses who were stranded in Tikrit, Iraq, during the country's civil war in 2014. The movie opens with Sameera applying for a job interview in Iraq. Sameera is a nurse coming from a family bound with financial liabilities. Being a Muslim divorcee Sameera finds it hard to convince her family the necessity of her going abroad. The pretext of Sameera's first marriage is not shot in the film. Sameera was married to a rich, but Orthodox family. Sameera disregards the customs and rituals of the household and follows her secular way of living. She does not participate in the *salah*, avoids *burqua* and eats at the same table when men dine. Sameera's decision to work throws the family into a great turmoil and eventually leads to Sameera divorcing Faizal. Sameera leaves her son behind to support her family in Kerala. The job opportunity in Iraq becomes difficult to be overlooked as it offers better salary. But her relatives do not cooperate to sell the family property as they find her journey as something their community can't even imagine of. The only solution she finds is to marry Shaheed, a colleague who has been showing romantic interest in her. Sameera marries Shaheed at a registrar office without any religious ceremony.

Sameera is presented as an independent working woman who manages herself and supports her family despite having the attacks of depression at times. In one of the initial frames, Sameera is seen fixing a leakage discarding her mother's opinion to seek help from the neighbour boy. To live as a single woman in an economically backward household is one of the biggest battles a woman fights in India. The workplace harassments have no limits and being a divorcee, Sameera is the one who always has to wrestle with it.

When the medical camp is attacked by the rebels and Shaheed goes missing, Sameera heads towards the embassy and requests them to find him. In the time of great political unrest, when an attack from the rebels can be expected anytime Sameera with her will power and optimism leads her fellow nurses. When rebels occupy the hospital and make them captives, Sameera communicates with them as the only person who knows to speak Arabic. She questions their faith in Islam and their knowledge in Quran when they slam the bathroom door to get mobile phone from a girl who bathes.

As the only Muslim in the group, the embassy officer trusts Sameera as he hands her over with the responsibility of the rescue mission. Throughout the operation Sameera is shown firm and hopeful until she learns the alleged death of Shaheed. The director also ensures that in between the taut screenplay, the movie addresses the plight of nurses who travel abroad seeking employment to pay off loans and to take care of their family. The last few scenes of the movie though fall short of being edge-of-the-seat moments. Sanu Varghese's shots keep the audience engaged and thrust them into the warzone in the second half. Apart from the strong Muslim heroine, the movie attempts to make a clear distinction between Islam and terrorism in the name of Islam.

Among this series of movies which made or tried to make political statement through the portrayal of Muslim community, *KL10 Pathu* stands out as a movie which subtly weaves in a number of socio-political and cultural contexts. The movie moves in and around Malappuram as the title suggest the vehicle registration number of the district. In the past what brought disrepute to the district was its disproportionate socio-economic backwardness and the charges of fostering Islamic fundamentalism. Today the district has a completely different profile with some examples of participatory development and democratic governance. In the popular imagination, Malappuram is still considered as a stereotypical black hole where women are kept at home behind veils and youth are engaged in bomb making and bigotry manufacturing.

KL10 Patthu discovers a totally new terrain which was completely unknown to the audience of mainstream cinema with the portrayal of a beautiful place, simple people and their delightful lives. As a debutant Muhsin Parari doesn't sermonize even once. Instead he tells an ordinary love story of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who drive away to get married while the former's brother chases them in another vehicle with a group of local friends. There is nothing thrilling about the elopement as the couple talk, reflect and relax and the chasing team indulge in fun, friendly fights and a lot of conversations about food and football, two inevitable obsessions of the people in the district. Parari uses their journey to get the audience closer to the soul of Malappuram.

Although the movie is based on the much-discussed multiculturalism and the Hindu-Muslim conflict, and teaches the lessons of secularism, we are hardly surprised that 90 per cent of the characters portrayed are Muslims. Perhaps this is how life looks in a district that is 70 per cent Muslims. The movie intelligently brings out different stereotypes about the Muslim social life in the district. Many women in the movie are seen wearing hijab and traditional Muslim dress but it does not imply that they are domesticated and are prevented from involving in public life including politics. In fact, the heroine who is always seen in hijab is also a modern, progressive, fun-loving and quite demanding professionally and personally. The men in the movie are not chauvinistic patriachs but easy, funny and romantic.

The Islam that Parari portrays in his film is mystical and something that strikes a chord with everyone. To deepen the mysticism the narrator Parari chooses to narrate the story of a kohl eyed Jinn. There are many other Sufi elements – the architecture, colours, music and poetry that contextualize religion and social life in KL Pathu. Parari partially wins in breaking the stereotype surrounding Malappuram created by popular media and right-wing bigots. It's not just the unique dialect that the characters in the movie speak, the depiction of their love for food and football, the shades of altered realism, the beautiful hills, forests and rivers, or the Djinn that makes the film work, but the way the director strings them all together.

KL Pathu, the title, is also metaphorical. It's the Road Transport Office's registration number for vehicles in Malappuram. A KL 10 vehicle in another district can arouse suspicion. *KL Pathu* is one of the most significant movies of recent times in Malayalam. The director has almost nearly found a breakthrough in placing a political idea in a mainstream entertainer.

All the movies analyzed in this paper were made in the 21st century. We saw the stereotype representations which has remained within the dominant discourse as well as movies which

showed Muslim community to a great extent closer to reality. A few exceptional movies like *Take Off* (2017) and *KL10 Pathu* (2015) which tried to portray strong and independent Muslim women make us understand that Muslim women differ from one another in these attributes just as much as any women anywhere in the world. The generalized view propagated by media has made it difficult to engage in a genuine discourse regarding the same.

The thesis analyzed multiple verses from Quran and Hadith which proclaimed equal rights and duties to men and women which clearly showed us that in fact, many of the rights granted to women at the advent of Islam—the right to education; the right to earn, keep, and inherit their own money; the right to take part in politics, economic affairs, and even the military; and the right to choose their spouses and to divorce them—were not acquired by women in Western countries until the 19th and 20th centuries.

Contrary to what it has been shown and perceived, Islam guarantees women all the right to choose her husband and her consent is a pre-requisite for the marriage. But in movies like *Kilichundan Mambazham* and *Paadam Onnu Oru Vilaapam* we see Muslim women deprived of all these rights. Islamic teachings give women every right to get separated from her husband just the way it gives the right to men. It is some cultures which make it complicated for women and easier for men. The situation of Muslim women in some societies and cultures today is a far cry from these ideals often resulting from the misinterpretations of Islamic texts. The process of understanding scripture can be impacted more by cultural influences than by the text.

It is important to know that like any other religion, there is no uniform practice of Islam. Various factors such as culture, education, politics, economics and upbringing affect the way women see their life and themselves. Therefore, any uniform depiction cannot address the diversity of Muslim women worldwide. Since the medium of cinema is a popular one with worldwide reach, it is important to be cautious while using it to address the minority and their life.

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