

Portrayal of Journalism as a Profession in Malayalam Cinema: An Analysis of Four Malayalam Movies

¹Niya Joy, ²Dr. S. Dinesh Babu

¹Niya Joy, MPhil VMC, Department of Visual Media & Communication,
Amrita School of Arts & Sciences, Amrita VishwaVidyapeetham, Kochi, India

²Dr. S. Dinesh Babu, Assistant Professor (Sr.Gr) and Head, Department of Visual Media & Communication, Amrita School of Arts & Sciences, Kochi, Amrita VishwaVidyapeetham, Kochi India

ABSTRACT:

Malayalam Film Industry has always tried to bring out the full-fledged picture by not only exposing the character alone but also by giving them extra veracity by portraying the profession but when we retrospect on the Malayalam Film Industry it has shifted from the exaggeration of facts to the reality. The objective of this qualitative research study is to explore whether Malayalam Films delineate the profession of Journalism legitimately. An analysis of a few popular Malayalam movies (produced between 1995 to 2015) that thematically depicts the topic is attempted here focusing on four major films namely New Delhi, Pathram, Love 24x7 & Swale. This research is based on content analysis and thematic interpretation, and it assesses both knowledge and attitudes regarding such films among journalists who are not predisposed to factual information.

Key Words: Journalism, Malayalam Films, Profession.

INTRODUCTION:

The history of the Malayalam film industry dates back to 1928 starting from Vigathakumaran. The 1970s saw the rise of a new wave in Malayalam cinema, while the 1980s witnessed the further blossoming of the Malayalam film industry earning national and international accolades. In the late 1970s, a new genre of film known as "middle stream cinema" gained popularity. This genre of film was recognized for effortlessly blending the seriousness of parallel cinema with the mainstream's popularity. The subject of commercial films in the 1980s was remarkable, with social, political, and cultural themes interspersed with action and witty wit. Over the years, it has brought new visual experiences to the audience and influencing the audience at a different level but how much this influence has changed the audience is a valid question. According to some studies, the media dramatizes and misleads by creating an impression of truth by incorrect representations of character. However, a changing trend seems to be transpiring which tries to depict the plot in a more realistic way rather than sensationalising the subject matter. Even when the recent movies have tried to explore the real situations and present them before the audience along with the entertainment factor still an interrogation whether Malayalam film exhibits justice in representing the profession by comparing it with reality. Cinema influences the huge population watching it and these reasons have persuaded me to present research on the depiction of journalism as a profession in popular Malayalam films, to access the representation and their effects.

If journalists are one of our society's primary cultural overseers, then films and filmmakers are parts of the machinery of inspection that the journalists employ. The filmmakers must embrace the audience's expectations in terms of cinematic norms and personification. In a sense, the movies are never realistic or authentic in any way. Cinema, like all art, can be considered as a venue for the mediation of societal complexity, as well as a vessel for its distillation down to its essential strands and characteristics. Inevitably draws on the dominant models of that kind that exist in a given culture, contributing to their consolidation and reinforcement. In the case of journalism, a few of these kinds are founded on traditional conceptions of the journalist's function, such as gatekeeper,

eyewitness, and knowledge builder. Films act as a prism reflecting journalism to the society which seeks to convey to the public as a language that entertains and presents the ethics at the same time in the profession and how much effort a journalist takes to make news even though it is not cent per cent depicted.

While referring to New Delhi and Pathram Vs Swale and Love 24x 7 as far the technicality of filmmaking is considered we can see a major change in the use of technology which should be appreciated since Malayalam cinema had a very limited marketing place when compared to other film industries. Also, the way of storytelling has been considerably changed as in New Delhi and Pathram we can see an exaggeration of the subject with powerful dialogues and thrilling movements to enhance the audience visual experience but Love 24 x 7 and Swale have a more realistic approach to the subject. The present generation prefers to have a realistic filmmaking approach than an exaggeration of subject matter which we can see in most of the recent blockbusters.

Eventhough the films try to portray a hard, colourful life of a journalist today's media world has changed after the electronic media took over. Nowadays Film and Media Industry is becoming more competitive since the technological developments call for live news's which forces the industry to generate more revenue which in turn calls for more sensationalised news putting Journalists under pressure. The political, social, and economic power of audio-visuals has been demonstrated and utilised throughout history. As technology advances, economic and political masters have used film and multimedia to change and shape people's perspectives for their own or the people's advantage.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

This study analyzes how realistically the profession of Journalism and its representation in movies has created an impact, and how much we could justify the role of the journalist in real life. Its goal is to understand how much impact it has created in portraying the profession and what changes it has created over time. World cinema has created many movies based on the thrilling and adventurous lives of Journalists and their everyday challenging profession. The movies based on a journalist's life has always created a spectacular cinematic experience for the audience of all time. In Malayalam cinema also, we can find many movies which made media the central subject of the storyline and have successfully catered an amazing visual experience for the audience with the thrilling and challenging life of the journalists. The approaches were strictly commercial and to an extent, it has affected the representations negatively. To satisfy the social, cultural and psychological aspects of the society, manipulations were made in the representations. But in today's scenario, with a society which is ready to accept changes in all aspect has helped the filmmakers to show justice to the representations of the journalists on screen and we can see that change in today's movies.

The media logic theory ("2.2 Media Effects Theories", 2016) states that "common media formats and styles serve as a means of perceiving the world. Today, the deep rooting of media in the cultural consciousness means that media consumers need to engage for only a few moments with a particular television program to understand that it is a news show, a comedy, or a reality show. The pervasiveness of these formats means that our culture uses the style and content of these shows as ways to interpret reality. Media logic affects institutions as well as individuals."

Journalists in Films

Earlier the journalists and their profession was an exaggeration of reality but still, it tried to justify the need of the period these movies were released. These movies entertained and made the audience think and created an impact that journalism as heroism and sometimes villains. In the journal *Journalists in Film: Heroes and villains*, by Brian McNair (2010), he says that throughout the time he was fascinated by feature films in which journalism is the subject or is a central element of the narrative. Journalists Ethics, political bias, the effects of commercialisation. "Films reflect the agenda of public debate at any given time and may help set it if they have sufficient impact. Film-makers, to the degree, that their works are well received, construct an arena for debate, often very

high profile, and inform the public and the media – or remind them, if they think they know already – of what is expected of journalists, and ask if those expectations are being met.” (McNair, "Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains", 2010, P. 19).

A significant question that has to be answered is what it is about journalism that inspires the world's most gifted filmmakers to write, produce, direct, and star in films about it. “As Ness, Ehrlich and others have noted, Journalism is highly functional for cinema in that its nature as a professional practice generates the incidents and narratives which make a good movie. Movies tell stories and therefore require scenarios in which good stories can be credibly and efficiently told. Storytelling often involves a protagonist confronted with an obstacle to reaching a goal and journalists are all too often obstructed in their profession. Resistance and conflict generate drama, Suspense, Violence and tragedy”(McNair, "Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains", 2010, P. 25-26).

The cultivation analysis theory ("2.2 Media Effects Theories", 2016) states that “heavy exposure to media causes individuals to develop an illusory perception of reality based on the most repetitive and consistent messages of a particular medium. This theory most commonly applies to analyses of television because of that medium’s uniquely pervasive, repetitive nature.” According to this theory, someone who continuously watches television incessantly may build a perception of things that differs from reality. Televised acts of violence, either reported on news programmes or depicted on soap operas, may influence a person's perception of the world as more dangerous and violent than it is.

“Cultivation analysis projects involve a number of different areas for research, such as the differences in perception between heavy and light users of media. To apply this theory, the media content that an individual normally watches must be analysed for various types of messages. Then, researchers must consider the given media consumer’s cultural background of individuals to correctly determine other factors that are involved in his or her perception of reality” ("2.2 Media Effects Theories", 2016).

In a report published by News Minute, according to Geethika ("From 'Pathram' to 'Trance': Portrayal of journalists in Malayalam cinema", 2020), Malayalam cinema has largely shown journalists in a positive light. They are usually whistle-blowers, standing on the proper side of the law maybe because they have such a robust ethical journalism background and newspaper reading culture. It's after the intervention of TV journalism that sensationalism seeped into the journalism narrative.

The character of Sreenivasan, Umar Abdullah in Sreebala K Menon's Love 24x7 is a more realistic version of Murali's Shekharan, who stood within the system and tries to supply wisdom to the young journalists and isn't under any delusions of change. Dileep's character in Swale who is accused of being the mastermind within the abduction and sexual abuse of a prominent woman actor, is a representation based in the '90s about a struggling vernacular print journalist, who tries to stick to his morality but ends up getting sucked into the planet of sensational TV journalism. But it is a precursor to the journalism that exists today and it is considered to be the most sensible portrayal of the profession. Geethika also agrees by adding, “In the film, a gaggle of reporters are awaiting the death of a star . It shows that journalism isn't exciting all the time, you await things to happen, sitting round the story.” ("From 'Pathram' to 'Trance': Portrayal of journalists in Malayalam cinema", 2020).

Love 24x7 perhaps had the foremost accurate representation of life inside the television newsrooms. The hero plays a well-liked news anchor and the heroine is a newly recruited trainee reporter who gradually evolves into a confident, ambitious TV journalist. There are interesting nuances within the narrative about the workings of a TV news studio, the daily grind, the ragging, competition, rivalry, and the way corporatisation takes over the tv news industry. According to director Sreebala K Menon, it came from the thought that female journalists in Malayalam cinema remained largely unrepresented. “We have mostly seen an all-powerful male journalist in cinema with nobody below or under him, which I felt it had been mostly avoided any research. Love 24X7 is Kabani's journey and for that, I met tons of female journalists from newscast media and spoke to them intimately. I took many real-life incidents and fictionalised them with research, without distorting the facts." she

adds ("From 'Pathram' to 'Trance': Portrayal of journalists in Malayalam cinema", 2020). But nothing prepared her for the reactions from the media after watching the film. Though many called her privately to applaud her for presenting broadcast journalism so accurately, none spoke about it publicly. They were reluctant to acknowledge their powerless position in their organisations. "So, they simply picked on the sweetness of the elderly romance within the film. That is when I realised that the media loved their glorified versions that were shown in the cinema. This was an excessive amount of a reality check for them," Sreebalasays ("From 'Pathram' to 'Trance': Portrayal of journalists in Malayalam cinema", 2020).

The movie *Swale* was based on real-life incidents which he was involved in while working for a small daily. It is about the chaotic happenings in the lives of pressmen as they fight to get the best exclusives and stories, risking their lives which have a satirical touch that took inspiration from real life. According to Kalavoor Ravikumar, the script writer of the movie "The movie is all about the chaotic happenings in the lives of pressmen as they fight to get the best exclusives and stories, risking their lives. I have added one incident that I really experienced. I have given the movie a satirical touch, but the first reports are that it is well received by Kerala audience, who always love good films made with a heart." (NewIndianXpress, "'Swa Le' inspired by real life", 2012).

Thus when we scrutinize each movie and how it has portrayed the profession of journalism it can be analysed that earlier even though the movies tried to portray the life of journalists, it exaggerated the storyline to explain the life of journalists and when compared to the real-life situation it is a mere myth. But when years passed movie makers have tried to bring out the changes to a great extent by portraying real-life situations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

AIM, OBJECTIVE & HYPOTHESIS: The objective of this paper was to analyse the impact formed by Malayalam filmmakers in portraying Journalism as a profession from 1995 to 2015. It aims to look for any discrepancies in cinematic portrayal and the impression that the filmmakers have created about the Journalists in the movies and how fair was the representation according to real journalists.

The paper aimed to observe the impression created by the ignorant writers about the Journalists and their characterisation with special emphasis on the four most popular Malayalam movies that portray Journalism. This paper hypothesises that there is a disparity between old and new movies in portraying journalism as a profession.

RESEARCH METHOD: Qualitative research was conducted to meet the objectives. The major characteristic of qualitative research is that it works best with small samples and produces results that aren't measurable or quantitative. A structured interview was created by the researcher to assess the sample's impression. The interview was done following rules that included a set of broad questions examining the interviewee's perspective on journalism as a career. These were accompanied by a series of questions that were related to the film in discussion and once again, a broad pattern of questions formed.

This consisted of the depiction of the movies, major developments that have taken place over the years, exaggeration of the content etc. The list consisted of a mixed distribution of correct and incorrect occurrences associated with the field of journalism. To evaluate the correctness, specific questions about the films themselves were required. Questions on overall attitude were developed with the understanding that a structured one-on-one interview will be conducted and that, though many scales and questionnaires indicating thoughts on the issue exist, they all have limitations.

The tool is based in part on the interviewee's memories of the film in question. In order to understand the representation of journalism by the Malayalam film industry and the reality that is existing in the field of journalism, only the most popular film of each era was picked. More aspects may have been included in this spectrum.

CHOICE OF MOVIE: Selection of the movies was based upon their plot and the different periods they were released. The plot of all four movies depicts how journalism has portrayed, the profession of journalists during the period of 1995 to 2015 and chosen movies are New Delhi, Pathram, Love 24x7 and Swale. All the movies taken up have different plots which helped to analyse different aspects of journalism and understand whether it tries to showcase journalism in its real form.

STATISTICAL TOOLS: Qualitative evaluations are used to compare the various opinions that made up the impression of the people who were sampled.

SAMPLE SELECTION: The Media Industry was used to choose respondents who had seen the films in question and could recollect all of the pertinent elements. After interviewees were told of the study's goal and consent was obtained, they were asked the developed questions in the order listed above, with the general questions coming before the specialised ones. Interviews were conducted in person, over the phone, and, in some circumstances, over email and instant messaging platforms.

DATA ANALYSIS: Content analysis was used to analyse the data which was gathered from personal interviews. The data acquired in this type of study is organised into themes and sub-themes so that it may be compared. The fundamental benefit of content analysis is that it aids in the reduction and simplification of data while also producing outcomes that can be measured using quantitative methodologies. Furthermore, content analysis allows researchers to organise qualitative data in a way that satisfies the achievement of objectives. Thematic analysis was opted for processing the data and 10 respondents have marked their responses. Human error, on the other hand, is heavily engaged in content analysis, as there is a possibility that researchers would misinterpret the data acquired, leading to inaccurate and incorrect conclusions.

According to the analysis movies, Pathram and New Delhi was an exaggeration of the subject matter when compared to Swale and Love 24x7. Swale and Love 24x7 was found more relatable and realistic when portraying on-screen journalism and the other two movies even though was an exaggeration has inspired the individuals to take up the profession pursuing them to become an influential journalist.

Over the years Malayalam Film has developed in many aspects including the onscreen portrayal of subject matter. The audience also welcomed the changes in a positive manner where they are also interested in watching more realistic movies rather than hyperbole. According to the respondents, the movie New Delhi showed the difficulties of publishing a newspaper but Swale and Love 24x7 showed the real difficulties of journalists in collecting and publishing a piece of news.

According to the literature review and the discussion made with the respondents, it is clearly understood that more realistic movies are more welcoming but the competition and the expenses for telecasting the movies have made the industry more viable for creating sensationalised news rather than sensitising the news in turn filmmakers view this as a baseline for creating a storyline but real portrayal of journalism is a bit difficult since it touches the most sensitive areas of the society which acts as a major limitation for the filmmakers. But still, movies like Swale and Love 24x7 tried to bring up the major issues faced by the journalists and their feelings and effort in the best possible manner.

Active journalism changed within the media houses where marketing and circulation departments grew more powerful than the editorial. These two departments have the final word while it comes to reporting sensational issues. Editorial has, sometimes, to compromise while it comes to the news stories that may affect the advertisement revenue generation and Advertorials became normal. These developments have pushed the journalists to come up with sensational news's putting them under pressure as in Swale. All the emotions and humanity have to be sold to withstand the competitive market. When taking into consideration the movie Love 24x7 it touches the emotional side of the journalists.

As discussed, all these movies have shown the different aspects of journalism excluding whether it is exaggeration or realism with relation to real journalism. These films seek to portray characters in the lives of journalists. Instead of cliché topics like journalists revolving around politics or depicting media struggles new topics like investigative journalism, freelancing etc can be made a storyline by

filmmakers.

CONCLUSION:

The review of various works of literature and interviews suggests that the Malayalam film industry and profession of journalism are directly proportional. But due to the Malayalam film's commercial requirement in some of the cases, it has been shown that the career of journalism has been exaggerated in the old movies and new generation movie making has depicted more realism. Emphasis has to be given in justifying the real character, and filmmakers should try to explore different perspectives related to journalism so that it can be portrayed in a more realistic manner showing the efforts of a journalist. Filmmakers should be more conscious, and homework should be done so that a more realistic visualisation can be portrayed to the audience. Rather than exaggerating journalism as a more sad thrilling, stressed profession it can be still shown as a happy and a condemned profession.

REFERENCES:

1. 2.2 Media Effects Theories. (2016, March 22). Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://open.lib.umn.edu/mediaandculture/chapter/2-2-media-effects-theories/>
2. McNair, B. (2010). *Journalists in Film: Heroes and Villains* [PDF]. Edinburgh University Press. Retrieved April 23, 2021
3. From 'Pathram' to 'Trance': Portrayal of journalists in Malayalam cinema. (2020, August 22). Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/pathram-trance-portrayal-journalists-malayalam-cinema-131334>
4. Motion picture on DVD. (1987). India: Jubilee Productions. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McMsia1xC0I>
5. Motion picture on DVD. (1999). India: Seven Arts Films. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAhtG43v2iI>
6. Tnn. (2018, June 12). 'Pathram' - Best of Malayalam movies based on journalism. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/malayalam/movies/photo-features/best-of-malayalam-movies-based-on-journalism/pathram/photostory/64555260.cms>
7. Motion picture on DVD. (2009). India: Vaishaka Release. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhfMltQcI0s>
8. NewIndianXpress. (2012, May 15). 'Swa Le' inspired by real life. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.newindianexpress.com/entertainment/malayalam/2009/nov/07/swa-le-inspired-by-real-life-101878.html>
9. Motion picture on DVD. (2015). India: E4Entertainments. Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UoDMEEjRMbw>
10. Love 24 X 7 Movie Review {3/5}: Critic Review of Love 24 X 7 by Times of India. (2015, July 20). Retrieved April 23, 2021, from <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/malayalam/movie-reviews/love-24-x-7/movie-review/48173722.cms>