Heritage

The Muslim-Women Question: Placing the Secular-Religious in Two Malayalam Films

Mohamed Shafeeq K.
Post Doctoral Fellow, Manipal Centre for Philosophy and Humanities, Manipal University

Abstract: The ideology of the communal self-regulation has been the logic of the Indian state, which is otherwise called the indirect rule. This ideology can be seen as operational in Indian films too which deal with the question of reforms. In this paper I read two Malayalam films which came out in the first half of the 2000s as examples of how this ideology works in films - Paadam Omu Oru Vilapam (2003, dir. T.V. Chandran) and Daivanamatil (2005, dir. Jayaraj). The former takes child marriage as its central concern, while the latter is concerned with Muslim extremism and terrorism. These films promote a version of secularism which is a standpoint within the religious rather than without - a standpoint that finds itself vulnerable today.

Keywords: Postcolony, Secularism, Muslim minority, Kerala, Women's Studies

The debates on the question of the treatment of women in Islam has once again emerged at the centre of an ongoing national debate in which the Muslim community in India is yet again characterized as the marginal community whose upliftment, specifically achieved through a targeted uplifting of that community's women from itself, is deemed as essential and may be even the last remaining stumbling block for the Republic to realize itself. One could see that the figure of the Muslim woman serves multiple purposes here: one, it allows the nation to carry out its historical mission of uplifting a community, because the Muslims are a minority community. The nation thus serves a communal upliftment here. Secondly, because the Muslim woman is always defined against Muslim women, it allows for a stark crystallization of the combination of communal upliftment with individual realization, again another facet of the Republican promise, and usually jettisoned for the greater common good. Thirdly, that the problem of Muslim women can be cast as a Muslim problem, it can echo with a version of history which sees the downfall of India as the contribution of a Muslim medieval past and the Muslim woman as its present pastness. And, by casting the solution to the problem of this minority within minority within the discourse of religion itself, that is by treating the question of personal law as a religious problem and seeking the 'correct' interpretations of religious injunctions, the state is at once able to allow itself the role of arbiter in religious disputes and therefore not alien to religious practice, and thereby keep alive a tradition of secularism that has been the cornerstone of the celebrated "idea of India" which is about accommodation rather than erasure of differences, an idea of secularism which is premised on religious reform.1

It is this last point that I wish to explore in this paper. The prevalence of the uncouth practices among Muslims, especially seen in practices like polygamy, triple Talaq, alimony, etc. is constantly characterized as the perverse practice of injunctions whose spirit are universal and democratic. For this purpose, the perversions are sought to be corrected from within. The state thus enjoys an enviable position here, as a body which intervenes but is also at a safe distance. The ideology of the communal self-regulation has been the logic of the Indian state, which is otherwise called the indirect rule. This ideology can be seen as operational in Indian films too which deal with the question of reforms.

In this paper I read two Malayalam films which came out in the first half of the 2000s as examples of how this ideology works in films - Paadam Omu Oru Vilapam (2003, dir. T.V. Chandran) and Daivanamatil (2005, dir. Jayaraj). The former takes child marriage as its central concern, while the latter is concerned with Muslim extremism and terrorism. Both of these movies cast in the role of the villain the hyper-masculinity of the purported Muslim who is enabled by his religious law or charged by his religious conviction. Another feature that connects these two films is that they were both produced by Aryadan Shoukath, the son of a prominent politician, who himself tried his popularity at the hustings at Nilambur in Malappuram district in Kerala, for the 2016 Kerala State Legislative Assembly elections and was defeated due to a compound of issues which prominently include the anti-incumbency factor directed against his father Aryadan Muhammed who represented the constituency undefeated since 1977 (and has

103
served as Minister in various ministries and with different portfolio), but to which can also be added the general apathetic relationship which the Muslim organizations in Kerala have towards Aryadhan Shoukath in the formation of which the movies under discussion as well as many of his public postures play no negligible role.

The Wail of the Muslim Girl

If a genre is about prolific repetition and piecemeal transformation over time and through numerous members of a genre, the Muslim social cannot be counted as the Malayalam cinema for the reason that these films are few and far between. Kutti Kappayum (1964), Manivara (1983), both of them by the same director-producer duo M. Krishnan Nair and T.E. Vasudevan Nair, Sumantharangal (1998, dir. Balachandra Menon) are some of the more known of this type, though each of the films are very different from each other in their concerns and styles. However, the Malayalam film has always had a strong presence of Muslim characters in them, usually in side roles but also, though rarely, as unmarked (by the religion, identifiable by name) protagonists. The number of films which could be said to belong to the impoverished genre of Muslim socials have maintained its slow pace, with Ustad Hotel (2012, dir. Anwar Rasheed) the most celebrated among the recent ones. There is another genre of movies which typically revolves around the family feud between a Hindu and a Muslim (aristocratic) families and usually is resolved through the bond of marriage between the protagonists who belong to these two warring houses.

In terms of chronology Ghazal (1993, dir. Kamal) was the immediate predecessor of T.V. Chandran’s Paadam Onnu Oru Vilapam. However, the latter represents a crucial move away from the Muslim social in that it functions well within the frame of the state and thereby rendering the state invisible, in its recourse to a discourse on law, albeit religious law, it moves away from the passed over invisibility of the state to an eerie invisibility of the same, leaving around traces of an attendant spirit of the all-seeing state. In Ghazal the narrative tension is wound around the struggle of a low-class Muslim boy who should fight to unite with his love against the might of the feudal Muslim landlord who is also a Thangal (a Syed in north India terms) and therefore also higher in the echelons of socially sanctioned religious power, whose marriage to the former’s love will be justified because polygamy is allowed. But it is to be noted that though the narrative plays out as a battle between the good Muslim and the bad Muslim, the good Muslim’s spiritual fount represented by the estranged heir to the Thangal title (played by the revered actor Thilakan whose role, one could argue, directly lends itself to a very similar narrative role he plays in his last movie Ustad Hotel almost two decades later) who is also heir to a Sufi detachment to worldly gains and whose actions in the world are characterized by its piety rather than social standing. The “correct Islam” is still anchored in a bodily living out in the world and its location is intelligible from the religious universe itself. When we move from Ghazal to Paadam Onnu... we also encounter a drastic substitution in terms of this alternate authority – we now have a school teacher, one who teaches his students Tagore’s poetry in Malayalam but compliant to its Bengali tune – how more aligned with the “idea of India” one could imagine oneself to be? - as the fount of the moral authority and the arbiter of the “correct interpretation” of the Islamic injunctions.

T.V. Chandran has experimented through a broad range of styles all of which can be broadly termed as a variation or an improvement on realism. In Paadam Onnu... he moves away from the magical realist tone of Dany (2001) to the occasional bursts of psychological realism which he would sustain even after Paadam Onnu... for Kathavasheshan (2004), a film that deals with the loneliness of a man overwhelmed by his experience of the aftermath of Gujarat riots. Paadam Onnu... a take on child marriage, polygamy, and what is known as “Mysore kalvanam” - a practice where girls are married off to rich outsiders whose credentials and intentions are suspect just for the money - plays out its narrative as the tension between two versions of masculinity, one which is the dominant hypermasculinity reveling in satisfaction of the flesh, and the other, a service-oriented masculinity which should now assert itself against the dominant. This section is an exploration into the narrative practices that constructs a particular masculinity, thereby engendering a masculine Islam, in opposition to masculinity, effaced as it is throughout, the masculinity of the liberal secular state, unmarked by any ‘primitive’ associations. The masculinity of Islam then implies a pathological condition, marked by an excess of sexuality, beyond the reach of the hegemonic.

Masculinity, as it occurs, is a pure relational concept, marked by a claim over other lives and ways of living. It is thus characterized by a possession of power, instituted by various formations that govern the everyday life. It is that which is dominant by virtue of the ruling, backed by institutional apparatus, purged of its bodily common-
Heritage

In relation to Paadam Onnu..., I wish to map out the two masculinities—of the religion of Islam lived out through institutions like Madrassa, edicts like the Qur’an, and the ethnic-clad men; and that of the liberal state, these masculinities act out a claim over the life of Shahina, the 15 year-old X std. girl, the claim being either coercive or consensual. I would also show how the two masculinities stage their conflict on the topos of the female body avoiding a face-to-face confrontation with each other until towards the end of the film, and the final exit of Qasim Mash, signifying departure on the part of the state, for reasons we shall shortly discuss.

Paadam Onnu... is the story of a high school Shahina, performed by Meera Jasmine, who won numerous awards for including Kerala State Film Award and Kerala Film Critics’ Award for her performance in the film. One could say that Meera Jasmine filled in the vacuum of the “strong female” vacated by Manju Warrier (who has now the strong self-willed and often tragic character with a broad spectrum of acting abilities ranging from the wity and Meera Jasmine rightfully inherited the mantle of ManjuWarrier’s versatility of Summer in Bethlehem (1998).

Shahina finds herself in an untenable position. The other member of the family is Naws, her younger brother. Shahina is interested in her studies and is intent on passing the class X (SSLC) exam, and going to college. It is then that her mother is approached by the latter’s brother, her uncle, asking her hand for marriage with Razack, a 20 year old who has already married once. In Razack’s own words, what drives him towards a second marriage is the dowry which he can then pay for going to Gulf and earning a living for his family. Shahina resists but finally gets married to him. But the very first night, through his futile attempt to sleep with Shahina, Razack makes it evident that his interest in her was not just monetary, but also bodily pleasure. She resists all his attempts to bed her, but finally he forces his first wife to give her sleeping pills and then rapes her. The very next day Razack takes her back to her place and divorces her claiming that she has never allowed him to even touch her body, and therefore he can then be (religious) lawfully relieved of her. Shahina resumes going to school from the very next day, and on seeking her studies, Qasim Mash comes to her house in the evenings to teach her. Meanwhile, Muthalali, the three-wived elder, epitome of feudal power, expresses his wish to marry her as his fourth wife. However, Shahina turns out to be pregnant. Her mother dies of heartbreak. Qasim Mash gets a transfer and leaves the place, but only after having a verbal duel with the religious elders. Shahina is all by herself, and finally delivers her baby, an addition to the crowded populace of children of widows, one more to the disturbing uninterruptedness of wails.

The Director makes it a point to depict that the conjugal practices shown in the film, deplorable as they are, as rooted in the interpretation of Qur’an and Hadith, the holy edicts of Islam. The ‘Mouliyar’, or the mulla, in the film serves this purpose. He quotes from the edicts, in Arabic, the narrative least concerned to translate any of those, suggestive of the consensual understanding between the auteur and the viewer, that the meanings of these are too outdated and irrelevant to be translated, and the thematic imperative of these verses can be nothing but repressive and ominous.

Quoting from the edicts, the mulla endorses marriage at an early age, nullifies Shahina’s unwillingness to be married to Razack, and ordains the three month confinement of the divorced. Dialogues in the film implicates Islam for the repressed state of women in the community. The other characters make up this community - HasanMoin, the lecherous marriage-broker probing potential brides among the highschool girls for the match-making, the lustful Muthalali, the hateful potbellied man from Mysore, Razack, et al. These men are then juxtaposed with Qasim Mash, Shahina’s Malayalam teacher.

Qasim Mash, in the first scene showing him, is taking attendance in the classroom, and is told that one of his students will not be attending classes from the day because it is her marriage. Qasim Mash’s response is, “But isn’t that a child?”, at which the girls-only classroom bursts into laughter. It is the marked innocence, the asceticism of this masculinity that the film projects throughout. While the film depicts the Muslim conjugal practices derogatively and comically, it is silent on the conjugal and marital status of Qasim Mash. His masculinity is in consensus with Shahina, similarly marked by an innocence ignorant of such sexual practices as that the husband will lie over his wife.

Qasim Mash’s masculinity is that of the state, its source of power is the institution of school, its manifestations include national literature like Rabindranath Tagore’s Gitanjali, which Shahina says, induces tears in her. The apparent consensus that Shahina shares with the modern institution serves to efface its coercive force and disguises its true role as that which structures her life as a recipient of disciplinary measures including that of the school which she longs for.

105

Scanned by CamScanner
There is a scene in which the Arabic teacher has an argument with Qasim Mash over the early marriage of the Muslim girls. The roughness and ethnic primitiveness depicted as marking the Arabic teacher functions as erasers of the much more violent state. It will be seen that during the argument while Qasim Mash, speaks about the Muslim girls as one outside of oneself, the Arabic teacher says "our girls", and the "our", by its tone, is marked by exclusivity. It is important to the narrative that Qasim Mash can speak with such neutrality. Qasim Mash is not marked by any ethnic markers. He is a teacher in the secular institution of High School, a bestowal of the benevolent state upon the ignorant masses. That he is not marked by Muslimness, or that Muslimness is not the sole definition of his being, is necessary as Tejaswini Niranjan notes, in the context of the subaltern protagonist in specific Tamil movies of the nineties, “the relationship of the secular nationalist with the ethicized male can only be contentious and combative. The ethicized male in the logic of these films, and indeed, in the dominant cultural logic of our times, cannot possibly be the hero of a narrative about the need for national integration.”

Shahina’s unwillingness to have conjugal relationship with her husband, and her subsequent rape, serves to proclaim her allegiance to the secular and the modern. The forced, non-consensual nature of rape vindicates Shahina of any pleasure derived out of the intercourse. Thus Shahina has no stake in her subordination, and therefore her resistance is still unadulterated; simultaneously it is an assertion of the Muslim masculinity as the disease to be cured, the primary victim of it being the Muslim woman, and then the nation, imagined as Mother India. The very first conversation Shahina has with her husband’s first wife is, “No, he cannot have two wives.” Thus, her position is made clear, as one who opposes the excess of sexuality that Islam facilitates.

However, unlike Roja (1992, dir. Mani Ratnam) or Bombay (1995, dir. Mani Ratnam), where the problem is more about the integration to nation of the minority public in the public sphere, where it interacts with the dominant public, and therefore about secessionism and communalism, in Paadam Onnu..., the movie deals with the exclusive Muslim public, to such an extent that excepting Janakikutty, Shahina’s friend, there is no considerable non-Muslim character in the film. The success of state dealing with such a public is contingent upon sharing a vocabulary and being able to communicate in their language. The initial tensions of not sharing a vocabulary is adequately shown, as when as a reply to the Arabic teacher’s logic in Muslim girls being married off early, and his subsequent rhetoric, “do you get it?”, Qasim Mash’s answer is simply, “No, I don’t get it.” To share a vocabulary and to wield it effectively puts pressure on the state to have a native subject, nominally marked by ethnicity, but whose views are that of the state. The native subject is therefore state’s implant in the exclusive public in its bid to integrate the exclusive public to its body politic. Hence, Qasim Mash’s Muslimness is marked by his being Qasim Mash, of holding a name identifiable with his community, while his actions, and in stark opposition to the ethicized figures, is of the liberated dominant masculinity of the state.

Thus we arrive at Qasim Mash as the sole narrative solution for this illness which overwhelms the narrative universe. Qasim Mash criticizes face-to-face the religious elders, who, he says, mistake the “prayers” to be the only form of Islam. He exhorts them to return to the Qur’an, to learn Qur’an and then speaks out the translation of the beginning verses of a chapter in Qur’an. This final confrontation is between two masculinities, that of Islam and of the liberal secular state who draws from the same religious sources. It becomes a face-to-face combat where the religion of the liberal state attains a claim over the obscurantist religious by virtue of its knowledge of the true Islam. The claims of the better and true knowledge by the liberal state, in its embodiment as Qasim Mash, deprives practiced Islam of its claims to this excess, for it seems, the elders were following what was not sanctioned, and now that the true knowledge has descended, the practices are no more valid – a theological closure in which modernity is played out as a fulfillment of a grand narrative prophesized at the setting up of the nation. However, Qasim Mash is doomed to failure, his defeat being an imperative of the government exigency and the self-sustaining drive of modernity itself which cannot afford to run out of populations yet to be modernized and therefore seeks to be always an incomplete mission. By depicting the masculine Islam, the film actually constructs a normative majoritarian masculinity.

The “primordial” opposition between the proselytizing, perfidious, and lustful (male) “Muslim” and the idalatrous, outraged (male) “Hindu” was the very core of the discourse of the nation’s origin, as Wakankar (1995) has pointed out. The strategic forcing together of body-as-self and nation-as-ascession was an indigenous idiom of self-subjection for the elicitation of consent and for the indictment of action. However, this ascetic was impossible without the imagining up of any enemy. The search for origin seemed to (Hindu) bourgeois nationalist writers as the best
guarantee of both the assertions of difference and confession of sameness. This was followed by the investment of requirements of post-enlightenment rationality. The nationalist self, fed with the mnemonics of such a lofty origin, against whom the Hindu nation has to be disciplined. The identity constructed through such an imagining of history and subject formations.

Qasim Mash’s transference away from our sight is the normative masculinity’s bid as it internalizes the oppositional categories enabling governmentality. The identitarian forms of subject formation will cease to function once the Muslim public has accepted the logic of the state. The prevalence of the hideous logic and repressive system that is the Islamic conjugal practices, the pathological excess masculinity of the Muslim male, was ultimately a process of the imagining of the normative ‘national masculinity’.

T.V. Chandran’s films are informed by history and its dynamics, take for example Ponthan Mada (1993), Ormakalundayirikkkann (1995) and Dany (2002). T.V. Chandran states that the film is an attempt to share with his viewers a community/story/tragedy, an insult that he was ignorant of earlier, in spite of being born in Malabar. This anthropological eye depletes the narrative of its claim to historical knowledge, and places the Muslim community in a historical stasis, strange it is when it comes from a director of T.V. Chandran’s stature whose ‘films should be judged as his attempts to constantly converse with history. A deep consciousness of history is the strength of all his films” (Chandran, 2002).

Contrary to such credentials Paadam Onnu... testifies to the conflating of the present day Muslim situation in Kerala to that of a bygone era, characterized by an aversion to modern education and unchanging centres of power, as in madrasa, and the breakaway from which since the late nineteenth century has been celebrated by its advocates as the “Muslim Renaissance”, a term now debated more than ever before.”The Muslim life of Kerala of the twenty-first century is not what it was in the sixties. It is saddening that these changes do not register themselves as botherations for a person like T.V. Chandran who had doggedly followed history”, writes G. P. Ramachandran (2003). Such a riveting to a frozen condition fails to address the specificity of the subjects, in this case, the Kerala Mappila Muslim, and their social and cultural milieu on the one hand; and similarly the novel forms of configurations that assert the right to outdoors for women, but is at the same time instruments in normalizing prevalent and oppressive family mechanisms and in otherisation of Islam solely predicated on a constructed tangible/physical/sexual masculinity that is pathological.

Religion, Reason, Revenge

If despondency is the prevalent mood of Paadam Onnu..., the second movie under discussion, Daivanamathil (Jayaraj, 2005) is a more colourful film, lively in the first half, with the film keeping level with the film aesthetics of some of the good commercial movies, pervaded as it is by songs, pleasing background scores, and well-groomed and mainstream actors and actresses (the actors in Paadam Onnu... were, with the exception of Meera Jasmine and Mamukkoya, not familiar faces of the big screen). Politically too, the film, in the first sight, appears very balanced, it denounces fanaticism, political Islam, does not pass blanket judgments on the community, provides reason for people getting into religious bigotry, and does try to say that a fanatic can be made to see things rationally, provided they are enlightened. However, after the smooth experience of the first time viewing, which even provides you, and they were enlightened. However, after the smooth experience of the first time viewing, which even provides you, and they are enlightened. However, after the smooth experience of the first time viewing, which even provides you, and they are enlightened. However, after the smooth experience of the first time viewing, which even provides you, and they are enlightened.
people for Jihad, kills a hotel owner for keeping his business open in the fasting month of Ramzan, and finally when he is in hiding in his home, is locked and handed over to the police by Sameera.

Whereas Saheb’s political influence could have easily secured a release for Anwar, Sameera decided to take the hard route of having a fresh-born husband, free of the baggage of extremism, purged as he will be, during his time in jail. Saheb explains to Sameera, and thereby to the viewers, about what true Islam is, and the need to study true Islam to get rid of extremism. Saheb’s thoughts are published as a book, In the Name of God, which Sameera sends to the jail for Anwar to read, through the girl who had lost her legs as Anwar bombed the hotel and killed its owner. The joy in seeing the girl alive (Anwar had remorse in the bombing incident because he thought the girl was killed) compels him to accept the book, and reading which he is enlightened, and is out to be released, freed of his demonology. The day turns out to be December 6, the anniversary of Babri Masjid demolition. The bus in which Sameera was traveling explodes, a subversion by the extremist elements (the narrative only implies it, the day is December 6, so the bombing would be by Muslim extremists!), and Anwar waits forever for Sameera who would never come.

A film of this kind even conforms to the progressive ideals, but a closer analysis brings out certain anomalies. Primary of them is the physical changes the narrative superimposes on Anwar, a clean-shaven, modern-dressed, romantic Anwar turns into a kurta and topi-clad, bearded and wild Anwar. He returns from Aligarh a night which brings out the familiar mental topography of anguish and pathology, the lightning effects against a dark background with silhouettes of actor’s face is a common filmic phrase in order to convey the disjunct of the situation, used amply with relation to escaped prisoners, inmates of mental asylum and such figures that evoke social anxiety but is also coded through referencing as a character who could be saved out of the situation through proper care of an estranged lover or a strong-willed and romantically inclined female medical practitioner. Similar is the aggressive sexuality that Anwar is shown to possess once he turns out an extremist. Such representations negate the cosmic “neutral” moorings of the film and situates itself within a well-established tradition of the otherization and demonization of Islam which began in the ’90s. The refrain of Saheb in the film is “religious Gandhi wanted a secular India, and the irreligious Jinnah asked for a religious country”. The connections are easily made, that the extremists are topi-clad, the topi-clad are extremists, that they are like Jinnah, that they are Jinnah, that they are Pakistan, and therefore the enemies of India - the topi-clad are enemies of the motherland.

The narrative is extremely misleading in its historical sense. Take for example the long queue of pardah-clad women waiting for zakat in the narrative part depicting Sameera’s childhood. This fails to see the specific historical factors of the introduction of pardah to Kerala, which simply do not date that early into history, installed as it was by the Arabisation of Muslim culture as a result of the large scale migration to Gulf for labour, and by the paranoia the Babri episode instilled in the Kerala Muslims. This also draws our attention to the meagerness of the fractions of time the narrative reserves to speak about the majoritarian extremism, shown by the narrative itself as the cause of minority extremism. In a crucial way, this historical confusion also lends us a crucial insight into the film in that it reveals many of its faultlines. On the one hand religiosity is associated with Gandhi, and on the other it is associated with pardah. The implication seem to be that one should be true to religion but be devoid of religious markers. However, such an implication has to imagine this particular identity marker equating it with a universal marker of the Muslim which casts its men as oppressive, its women as oppressed, and the community itself as non-integrated. This is not to say that identity markers did not exist in Kerala. Rather, each community was defined in its sartorial range “as a sort of natural extension and external manifestation.” But the recourse to a universal symbol of Muslim women is a ploy to invoke not just oppression but also the foreignness. This also is a refusal to acknowledge the crucial shifts that happened within the Indian polity itself both at the intra-communal and inter-communal level which eased the acceptance of this attire as against the older fashion choices.

Postscript

This paper discussed two Malayalam movies to read in them the resolution of the question of Muslim women in India as a minority within a minority who also in crucial ways stands for the minority and the other as whole. It showed that the question of Muslim women is treated as a special case because the oppression she faces is religiously ordained and is often represented by the hypermasculine Muslim man. The solution to this problem, however, is
located within the community itself, specifically in the praxis of the correct interpretation of religious injunctions. This narrative resolution affords the state the respectability of non-involvement even as it actively deploy the symbols of the state as strategic counterpoints on whom one can rely on. Qasim Mashi in Paadam Onnu... and Saheb in Daivanamathil are these counterpoints who has fully inculcated the values of the liberal state but is still placed within the universe of the religious commune.

In hindsight the commonsense of these movies may already be receding as a sentiment of the past as the calls for a stronger and interventionist state gains strength. In 2010 Anwar was released which while gained attention for the crisp editing techniques associated with Amal Neerad, played out yet again the dichotomy of the good and bad Muslim, the eponymous good one here played by Prithviraj who was already at the top among the younger actors, and the bad Muslim Babu Sait, played by Lali, resembled the figure of Abdul Nasar Maudany who was accused in Coimbatore blasts of 1998 who had spent nine and half years in jail prior to his acquittal. In Anwar, the good Muslim is yet again directed by the notion of “correct” Islam but is exorted to action not by a religious figure or even someone belonging to the community or rural economy but by the Police officer Stalin Manimaran (Prakash Raj).

Bibliography


Filmography


Endnotes


3. Udayapuram Sultan (1999, dir. Jose Thomas) and Mallanchi Monchulla Veedu (2014, dir. Benny Thomas) are two examples. His Highness Abdullah (1990, dir. Sibi Malayil) might be the first experiment of this sort the success of which prompted this to be a workable formula. But the latter does not have a Muslim family, but a Muslim loner whose aristocratic leaning is well-stressed throughout. Perumazhakkalam (2004, dir. Kamal), featuring Meera Jasmine in a Muslim role for a second time, is another story of reconciliation between a Hindu and a Muslim family, but this time tied around the incident of a death in the Arabian Gulf.

4. MajuWarrier’s first leg as an actress would end the following year with yet another spectacular performance in Kannezhuthi Potthu Thottu as Bhadra, a role that would exploit her expressions of the erotic and the furious, but not her mirth or self-containment.

5. Razack’s mother tells him, “You are lucky that you are born an Islam, while one wife scratches you face, the other one applies medicine to it.”

6. One proper point of reference of which would be the 1982 state violence killing three people as police fired protesters protesting against a ban on teaching Arabic in schools, in Kerala.

7. In Malayalam the inclusive “our” is nammal and the exclusive “our” is jnangal.


10. Incidentally, Saheb (Mammotty Shamiana) is given voice by T.V.Chandran, the other Director we have discussed here. My thanks to Nuaiman, University of Hyderabad, for pointing this out.

11. One may argue that Thangal, a moderate leader, is also shown as wearing topi. But there is a difference in the two topis. The one worn by Thangal is black and the ritualistic thangaltopi, one easily identifiable by any Malayali. On the other hand, though the other topi is ritualistic for a Muslim, the narrative attributes the topi only to the extremists. Mappilastan, a separate Muslim state of Muslims of Kerala.