

EPIDEMICS AND ENTERTAINMENTS: DECODING SELECT INDIAN FEATURE FILMS ON VIRAL OUTBREAKS IN THE CONTEXTUAL CONNECTION OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC PANDEMONIUM

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Abstract

Epidemics unfortunately are now recurring events. Human habits and life style has been changing ever since the beginning of epidemics. From H1N1 to corona virus, we are now part of a high risk society. The films are not merely for entertainment purpose but it always carries messages that can be co-related with the social and cultural expansion among the people. This paper studies the Tamil film *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014), the Tamil film *Miruthan* (2016) and the Malayalam film *Virus* (2019), in the contextual connection of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The paper unravels the dimensions to explore the connection between epidemics and entertainments.

Keywords: Epidemics, Human, Corona, Virus, Pandemic, Entertainments

1.0 Introduction

1.0.1 Epidemics and Entertainments

'Epidemics' have been gigantic proportion that get spread across the world and ravaged human kind from prehistoric (3000 BC) times to the present. Epidemic unfortunately is now recurring event. Human habits and life style have been changing ever since the beginning of epidemics. Movies identified with subjects of ailment, disease, and virus frequently can be categorized into three general classes associated with fantasy, sci-fi, or horror: apocalyptic destruction or the devastation of the entire mankind, rising worries over bio-terrorism, and the ascent of an un-dead or type of zombie presence. Despite the fact that films customarily bargain delicately or practically with the subject of HIV/AIDS, for example films like "*Dallas Buyers Club*", "*Philadelphia*", "*And the Band Played On*", "*Kids*"), regularly through acting, less movies have managed other pestilence illnesses, as either direct subject material or foundation

setting. Of these progressively some semi-realistic films about epidemics, have concentrated on the deficiency of catching the correct science behind sickness transmission, spread, and disease. Despite more extensive conversations of society–ailment connection in the media, the social reactions to different epidemics depicted in films or entertainments have been talked about less as often as possible. (Han: 2020).

1.0.2 The Need of Decoding Film as a Text

Films play an important role in shaping up the society; its audiences are afflicted with the changing paradigms of film. Films shape up the society and acts as a mirror that reflects all kinds of social disparities, commonalities and issues that are faced in the society. As an 'Entertainment' film can be seen as one kind of literature which means literature now has taken into a new form of transformation. The newer transformed form seems to be more adaptive and is visual. The films play a vital role in discussing the social problems and many times it has come out with a solution for the cause of the society. In the present situation, the films are not merely meant for entertainment purpose alone but it also carries messages that can be correlated with the socio-cultural factors. The need of decoding this newer form of literary text (here 'Film') is required.

1.0.3 Indian Cinema

Film is more prominent and well celebrated in India. The Hindi language film industry is known as 'Bollywood'. The South Indian film industry envelops five film societies: Telugu ('Tollywood'), Tamil ('Kollywood'), Malayalam (Mollywood), Kannada (Sandalwood) and Tulu. Another striking film culture is Bengali film which was to a great extent connected with the parallel film development; as opposed to the 'masala' films increasingly noticeable in Bollywood and Southern movies at the time. Indian film is a worldwide endeavour. Indian films have a huge following in Southern Asia and across Europe, North America, Asia, the Greater Middle East, Eastern Africa, China and also reaching out to more than ninety nations.

1.0.4 Indian Films and Viral Outbreaks

Numerous movies at the beginning that were dealing with the pandemics have in general been considered frenzy as an inescapable social reaction; their primary focus has been the authorities retaining information to make preparations for disarray or the flow of falsehood by the media. Different movies have gone further and attempted to inspect a portion of the reasons for this dread and frenzy; in numerous feature films, the roots lie in the people's response or reaction to witness decreases in social morality. Various films' that are concentrating on episodes of pandemic diseases actually concentrates on flare-ups of silly brutality demonstrative of a general public totally wild or in other words 'out of control'. A few feature films that got released on the theme of epidemics (virus outbreak) in India are *Dasavathaaram* (2008) Indian Tamil-language science fiction disaster film directed by K. S. Ravikumar, *Azaan* (2011) which is a Indian Hindi-language biological action thriller film directed by Prashant Chadha, *7aum arivu* (2011) Indian Tamil-language science fiction martial arts film written and directed by AR Murugadoss, *Rise of the Zombie* (2013) Indian Hindi-language film directed by Devaki Singh & Luke Kenny, *Go Goa Gone* (2013) Indian Hindi-

language zombie apocalypse action comedy film directed by Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D. K., *Dead 2: India* (2013) directed by Howard J. Ford Jon Ford is a zombie horror film which is a sequel to the events and follows up with *The Dead* (2010), *Krish 3* (2013) Indian Hindi-language superhero film directed by Rakesh Roshan, *I* (2015) Indian Tamil-language action thriller film written and directed by Shankar, *Miruthan* (2016) Indian Tamil-language Zombie film directed by Shakti Soundar Rajan, *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014) Tamil language satirical romantic comedy film directed by Balaji Mohan, and finally a realistic Indian Malayalam-language film *Virus* (2019) that is based on the real life based events on Nipah virus outbreak.

2.0 Objectives of the Paper

- To study the select films that portrays Epidemics.
- To understand the select films in the context of the on-going covid-19 pandemic.
- To examine the linkage between the current socio-political events and their representation with regard to the select films for the study.

3.0 A Study of Select Indian Feature Films on Viral Outbreaks

The research paper studies three feature films in the contextual connection of the covid-19 pandemic. The first film that's taken up for the study is Balaji Mohan's *Samsaaram Aarogyathinu Haanikaram/ Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014). *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (transl. Shut up your mouth and talk) is a 2014 Tamil language satirical rom-com movie directed by Balaji Mohan featuring Dulquer Salman (denoting his introduction in Tamil), Nazriya Nazim and Madhoo. The film was at the same time made in Malayalam with same actors and with a slight change in supporting on-screen characters list, under the title *Samsaaram Aarogyathinu Haanikaram* (transl. Speaking is injurious to health).

The second film that has been taken for the study is *Miruthan* (2016) (transl. Zombie), an Indian Tamil-language action Zombie movie directed by Shakti Soundar Rajan, featuring Jayam Ravi and Lakshmi Menon in the main leading roles. This film was shot in Ooty and Coimbatore within fifty four days. The film gets its title from a crossover of two words, Mirugam meaning creature and Manithan means man.

The third film that has been taken for the study is Malayalam language film *Virus* (2019). The film is all about the 2018 Nipah infection episode in Kerala. This film was shot widely in and around Government Medical College, Kozhikode. The recording wrapped on 26th February, 2019 following fifty two days shoot in a single schedule. The film's narrative has a remarkable semblance to the Hollywood medical thriller, *Contagion* (2011) directed by Steven Soderbergh.

3.0.1 Indian Feature Films on Viral Outbreaks: A Reading of Balaji Mohan's *Samsaaram Aarogyathinu Haanikaram/ Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014)

RJ Balaji comes to Panimalai as a guest of a live radio show and during the show; he suddenly generated a severe cough. Eventually, he loses his voice and got diagnosed with a

new type of virus named the “mute flu”. This virus causes him sudden muteness and sometimes even the fear of death.

The protagonist Aravind (Dulquer Salman) is a sales representative and his dream is to become a radio jockey. He attended interviews and tries for a job in FM station but as the mute flu spreads across the city. The state government asks Health Minister Sundaralingam (Pandiarajan) to visit Panimalai to handle the situation. There are instances in which people are asked to undergo a medical check-up. The medical check-up is to check whether they are affected by the virus or not. While the check-up in the hospital, Aravind meets Anjana (Nazriya Nazim), a junior doctor. While Anjana is testing Aravind, Anjana accidentally pokes a cotton bud into Aravind's nose. Aravind starts choking and feels like vomiting, but is comforted by Anjana. The movie's plot in the middle shifts its theme onto Aravind trying to sort out the love break up issue between Dr. Anjana and her lover. But finally Aravind and Anjana fall in love.

The final report by the health organisation says that the “mute flu” spreads only by the means of speaking. The health organisation orders a speaking ban in the city. Everyone in the town adapted to a new type of living with not speaking. At last, a cure for the prevention of illness got invented. The health organisation stated that if the virus has already infected a person and if he/ she has not lost their voice, the cure has a fifty percent probability of a side effect. The patients may lose their voice. The feature film ends with everyone getting cured. Only health minister Sundaralingam loses his voice for real because he has been acting the disease and on the stage for a photo op, the minister takes cure medicine.

3.0.2 Indian Feature Films on Viral Outbreaks: A Reading of Shakti Soundar Rajan's *Miruthan* (2016)

The film delineates a zombie apocalypse in Tamil Nadu that begins after a noxious fluid spills from a compartment outside a compound research facility in Ooty. Karthik (Jayam Ravi) is a traffic cop who learns of the episode when his sister disappears and he winds up assaulted by certain zombies. He collaborates with certain specialists and his sweetheart to escape from Ooty and discover a remedy for the flare-up, while zombies continue spreading from city to city.

The opening scene shows a holder of noxious fluid being spilled from a vehicle at a synthetic research facility in Ooty. A homeless canine devours it and turns vicious, which at that point chomps a security monitor. The security monitor transforms into a zombie inside hours and starts a chain of human diseases by means of chomps. While searching for his sister he was unexpectedly assaulted by Zombies. Simultaneously, the police of Ooty are educated regarding the flare-up and get requests to shoot any individual who has transformed into a zombie.

The group including Dharan, Renu, another specialist Kamal (Raghavan Durairaj), Renu's dad Minister Gurumoorthy (R. N. R. Manohar), Chinnamalai, and Vidhya, the gathering heads to Kovai otherwise known as (Coimbatore), where they are to utilize clinical or

medical tools to discern a fix to the catastrophe. However, Dharan was at that point scratched by a zombie, so he was not getting contaminated right away. He doesn't uncover this to anybody, dreading for his wellbeing. At the point when they close Mettupalyam, they were stunned to see that the contamination had just spread in Coimbatore. The zombies swarm around the police van, so Karthik is compelled to rash-drive the van to slaughter the zombies individually.

Following a couple of hours, Dharan transforms into a zombie and nibbles Vidhya. Karthik kills Dharan with his firearm, yet Vidhya does not transform into a zombie in spite of the way that she was assaulted just about an hour prior. Kamal says that she will have the option to help them in finding the immunization as she has the necessary antibodies and insusceptibility. Karthik needed to accompany them to the emergency clinic, which faces the shopping center. For this, he utilizes pressurized water from the shopping center's fire engine, realizing that they are susceptible to water.

In spite of the diminished time, Karthik figures out how to bring everybody securely to the medical clinic with the exception of Renu. He returns to the shopping center to bring Renu, yet he does that with no water source. So he drives Renu to the medical clinic however was chomped by the zombies while accompanying her. He himself gradually transforms into a zombie, however he securely accompanies her to the emergency clinic before his human sentiments lose and furthermore encourages Renu to shoot him. Be that as it may, she is too inflexible to even think about knowing the motivation behind why he had spared her, in spite of the heartless Naveen's endeavors and her childish dad, and understands his affection for her, yet Karthik transforms into a zombie, in this manner Renu shoots him.

The doctors find the necessary cure and begin managing the infection. Afterward, Karthik, presently totally a zombie, is seen on a transport which is going to Chennai, inferring that Renu did not shoot Karthik appropriately and consequently he has endured the assault. Crowd are said to hang tight for *Miruthan 2*.

3.0.3 Indian Feature Films on Viral Outbreaks: A Reading of Aashiq Abu's *Virus* (2019)

A year after Kerala saw the appalling outbreak, director Aashiq Abu thinks of a sensible story dependent on it. *Virus* is a well-made multi-starrer, anecdotal documentation of news investigates the Nipahvirus assault that stunned Kerala. A man named Zakariya Mohammed is contaminated and brought to the Government Medical College, Kozhikode where he experiences the indications of an obscure infection and following a couple of hours dies. He gives the virus to eighteen others out of which sixteen passes away. A progression of deaths in Kerala's Kozhikode and Malappuram regions stun clinical specialists. At that point, as the State affirms the episode of a lethal virus named Nipah, a gathering of clinical experts, wellbeing authorities and the individuals of the areas consolidate to handle it. It turns into a crisis

circumstance, and clinical experts and health care professionals, drove by Health Minister C K Prameela and District Collector Paul V Abraham, camp in Kozhikode to handle the emergency.

4.0 Reading the Select Films on Viral Outbreaks in the Context of Covid-19 Pandemic

In the Tamil film *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014) by Balaji Mohan is accurately a striving effort, at least by Indian cinema standards. The director Mohan succeeds in his attempt to portray an entirely different narrative that has been seen in our regular movies. For a good part, the flick runs without dialogues and uses a background score that shows the beautiful silence. "Corona virus" is also a virus that got spread from an unknown source like "mute-flu" in the film. Like today's real world corona crisis condition people did not follow protocols and the outcome was what the world has witnessed. In the movie *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014) the people of Panimalai did the same thing as the "mute-flu" got spread in the society and finally the health organization issues a speaking ban in the city.

As the current medical organisations claim that the vaccine for corona virus is on the way but with no only certain probability, the film *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014) also have similar opinions from the health organisation. The health organisation stated that if the virus has already infected a person and if he/ she has not muted his/ her voice, the cure has a fifty percent probability of a side effect. The patients may lose their voice in the film and similarly some of the corona patients who got cured were diagnosed with the same illness. The film showcased and discusses on "swab testing methods", an entire town/ city in lockdown, health labourers using "hazmat suits" and the government's insistence on social distancing. (NewIndianXpress). The similarities with the current corona crisis pandemic are unexpectedly, shockingly or may be surprisingly very many.

The Tamil language film *Miruthan* (2016) is an action Zombie film. Like the deadly corona virus that is believed to have come from Wuhan city in China, an unknown virus spreads out via a stray dog. The stray canine intakes the noxious fluid that mutates and the dog got changed into a 'Zombie'. Here in the movie the actual cause of the virus is a product of man-made chemical (not made purposefully) and the corona virus is also something of man-made product or a creation of the nature. Like the present scenario of corona, the people in the film *Miruthan* are also afraid about the disease and started alienating those who are affected with the illness. In the film the government went up to issue an order to shoot the zombies at sight. Similarly, the irony is that in America, President Donald Trump claims death of the people as a badge of honour. The real conditions are worse than that of the films.

A clear lack of potentiality or what to say, something like a crisis of leadership can be seen in the current world scenario as well as in the film. Even though the character Dharan in the film gets a bite from a Zombie, hides it and later transforms as a Zombie. An idea that one could or should have at the time of this kind of deadly pandemics is to not lose the humanity.

Here at the times of corona, the first priority should be our family but must be followed by the community or the society. The illness should not be hidden and must self-proclaim regarding the illness. This is for the betterment of the community in general.

The Malayalam language film *Virus* (2019) directed by Aashiq Abu is a real life story based movie. Out of all virus outbreak feature films in India, this is an only film that is portrayed in a very realistic manner and also depicts the true-incidents that happened in Kerala at the time of Nipah virus outbreak.

In an instance in the film, Nurse Akhila (Rima Kallingal), who took care of Zachariah, a youth who was admitted to her hospital for fever, headache and vomiting, is now wheeled into the causality at Kozhikode Medical College and she asks to be intubated: "I can't breathe anymore. My daughter, I breastfed her," (*Virus*: 2019) she whines. As this story is a real life incident based, Keralites will unquestionably remember the heroic, thirty two-year-old nurse, Lini Puthussery. Lini passed away by treating the first sufferer of the Nipah virus in Kerala. The film depicts the real-life experiences in Kozhikode and Malappuram through the news reports. The movie of Aashiq Abu pays tribute to "scientists", "medical professionals" and the people who stood in front to hold up the squad to decipher the virus attack. As the corona virus pandemic outbreak Nipah was also first reported in Kerala. *Virus* is a story that is hard and realistic. Similar to the current covid-19 condition, the situation during the Nipah outbreak was bit close to the bone, as the people were well aware about the illness. Similar to the current corona crisis, the film also shows the quarantine homes, social distancing, usage of masks and sanitizers and the need of medical equipments.

5.0 Conclusion

Summary and Findings

The selected films for the study *Virus*, *Miruthan* and *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* are evidence for situations similar to the on-going problems with Covid-19 virus outbreak in world today. Generally, the notion about 'Cinema' is that it is not real. Further, the notion is that the elements of fear which turns out to fright and turmoil are likely to continue in dramatic representations of disease, purely for entertainment value. Here, the paper questions the notion that the films are not only real but also claim that the films, as we studied in the paper, clearly reflected the truth. The select films, such as *Vaayai Moodi Pesavum* (2014) and *Miruthan* (2016), actually prophesied the out comings of a viral outbreak. The films envisioned the crisis in an accurate manner. Films dealing with social responses to viral outbreaks also throw a light on another side of how people respond to it.

Human habits and lifestyle have been changing ever since the beginning of epidemics. From H1N1 to corona virus, we are now part of a high risk society. Although on the one hand, fright and terror can be related to a supposed breakdown in social morality, the potentialities of

life have changed. A kind of recalibration of life occurred. People started investing on medical equipment, started taking health insurance and started using sanitizers/ wash hands, etcetera. Social distancing has become a code/ norm/ form of the social. The films are acting as one kind of visual literature through which it prophesizes and able to envision the future to come. The undercurrent desire and the inclination to depict the tragedy that may accompany human life have been visually narrated successfully in the films. The revisiting and rethinking about the portrayal of epidemics (mass diseases) in films (in) the context of the corona virus pandemic makes the viewers to feel the situation. Now irony is “Fact has become stranger than films”.

Scope for Further Research

Other Indian films related to the virus outbreak like *Krish 3* (2013), *I* (2015), *Dasavathaaram* (2008), *Go Goa Gone* (2013), and *Aazan* (2011) can be taken for study. A comparative study can be done with Indian films on virus outbreaks and Hollywood films like *Contagion* (2011), *12 Monkeys* (1995), *Blindness* (2008) and *Train to Busan* (2016). This will be an interesting study because it will decode the concerns of the people in the pandemic scenario. So the above recommended suggestions can be used to offer further research to fill in any possible gaps that might have taken place in my study.

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