

Stagnated Animalscapes in Selected Malayalam Movie

Revathy S Mohan

Movies are proclaimed as the representative art of twenty first century. With moving images, sound effects and even animated figures, films reign as the easily accessible and relatable for people hailing from all the stratas of society. From the outskirts of remotest villages to metropolitan cities, unlettered to literate, indigent to affluent, there is an extensive manifold that enjoys movies. Cinema's propinquity with the people is remarkable and it is the widest. Thus, movies are supposed to be socially relevant and enriching.

Malayalam cinema has always been applauded for its unique content, emotional richness, perspicuity in narration and paucity in extravaganza. It has been growing verdantly over the decades encountering all the trials and tribulations. The transitions in the themes propounded by Mollywood currently, is applaudable. Mollywood is reviving from its respite where the monopoly thrashed it entirely. Undoubtedly, we can say that Mollywood is in the post-deteriorated phase.

The so-called 'inferiors', women, dalits, disabled, transgenders, homosexuals are voiced in the films, nowadays. Not all, but some sincere attempts were made to pause the misrepresentations and misconceptions regarding the 'others'. In this world of monopoly, especially cinema field which exemplifies patriarchy, what is the significance of animals?

Relevance of this query lies in the fact that animals played irreplaceable roles in several superstar blockbusters recently. The animals are portrayed either as aggressive or in a utilitarian manner. This paper is an attempt to identify the proper image of animals in recent trends pervading in our movies through an eco-critical analysis of Vysakh's *PuliMurugan* (2016), Raafi Mecartin's *Ring Master* (2014) and Ramesh Pisharady's 2018 film *Panchavarnathatha*.

Ecocriticism, demands an ecological approach to literature. The study of the environmental issues, cultural aspects concerning nature and the ways human beings behaves and reacts to the nature and ecology. It challenges the notion of considering non-human nature subordinate to the human nature. Our mentality is to

use, ignore or obliterate the nature. We denigrate the non-human forms and consider ourselves to be the sole owners of the Earth. Nature is often presented as a metaphor for the self and not a tribute to the biotic world.

There is a basic interconnectedness between all lifeforms, underpinning our existence. We should cultivate a symbiotic, holistic view of nature rather than an anthropocentric and utilitarian one. As the Marxism claims, the production has to be done for the real needs of the people and not for relentless accumulation of wealth. We are at the centre and the rest of the world are treated as peripherals or left-overs. Nature has become a commodity with capitalist production, a source of profits.

Cinema epitomises capitalism in all sense. So no wonder is there in the man-centric, egoistical portrayal of non-humans in movies. Nothing novel or thoughtful is presented in our movies in regard to the animals. These misconceptions are welcomed and celebrated from the bygone ages, be it *Mrigaya* or *Pattabhishekam*, be it a classic or a commercial, animals continue to be either vicious or a patron or a senseless creature born to entertain the “logical” human beings.

PuliMurugan, the massive hit of the recent times is subtitled as the “The Wild Hunter”, who is the saviour of mankind from the wrath of ruthless man-eaters ie, tigers. Movie commences with the heartrending incident of the murder of a little girl in the forest. The visual grammar, background score, dialogues and it’s rendering tone picturises the tiger as callous brute and Murugan as benevolent and heroic.

It has been reiterated that Murugan avenges the tiger which enters the human world and disturbs the normalcy of human life. But, the concealed reality is contrasting to this picture. The question arises here is, who is the real invader? It is the human folk who has trespassed the wild and petrifies the tigers. Ironically, we are the gluttonous encroachers who ruffled their normal life and at the end, we are given the halo of innocuous lifeforms.

We are sensible and animals are senseless is the permeating idea in the human world. Young Murugan firstly avenges the tiger for the sanguinary slaughter of his father who has been chased by the forest guards for chopping the forest bamboos illegally. A child succoured by his grown-up maternal uncle, avenges a

carnivorous animal who eats flesh biologically. Here, the illegal activities of Murugan's father and the invasion to the tiger's territory is lawful in accordance with the script.

Murugan has two faces, he is protector of people in Puliyoor whereas he is the wild hunter for the tigers. He was introduced in the light of valour and grace, aggravated by the background song which lauds Murugan as an invincible hero who participates in the duel with 'tiger' by even jeopardising his life. The film conveys that Murugan is self-contented for his righteous act of killing tigers.

Here the real victim (tiger) is presented as merciless and the true culprit (mankind) as the helpless souls. Applauses for Murugan are endless and he is hailed as saviour, benediction, God's incarnation, priceless gift and the infallible hero. The dialogues are delivered in such a tone that glorifies Murugan in all propitious moments. He is even acclaimed by his then enemy, a reprobate forest officer who misbehaves with Myna (Murugan's wife), for his dexterity in tiger hunting. The death of Muthumani (Chief Kadutha's granddaughter) and the police constable augments the audience agony for humans and loathe for tiger.

The irony is in the fact that the movie even contains dialogues which profounds that we are the encroachers, let the animals live calmly in their world, (snake scene of Balaraman and city-dwellers). But this is inapplicable in the issue of tiger. Tiger attacks them as we perturb their peaceful life for our incessant greed. The indefatigable supremo, Murugan's vengeance to tigers is implausible. Murugan even does the illegitimate transmitting of sandal woods from the forests. All these are enacted as a commendable job, through its manner of presentation.

Pulimurugan is exemplary to the anthropocentric nature of human beings ie, we are supposed to be the crux and the rest of the world is residue or non-existing entities. Tigers should be marred as they disturb our life. It's oft-repeated that the tiger encroaches into the human world but the query is - who decides and defines the margins for these lands? Human beings or the animals. They are unaware of such regulations of populous and senseless human world. Such a movie which valorises the slaughter of one of the endangered species, Tiger is celebrated. It has the largest monetary collection in the history of Malayalam cinema and became a landmark, which is irony at its best.

The comedy entertainer *Ringmaster* presents a mild approach, ie, a utilitarian attitude towards animals. The film shares the indomitable bond of dog and his ringmaster. But it's not so innocent a portrayal as it appears. Prince, the ring master detests the animals initially but later he embraced the dog when it becomes his patron, the cause for his survival. He only had the dog by his side when he was left alone and in return for the dog's gratitude, he commenced to caress the dog. He became the caretaker of the dog, initially for a Visa to UK and later for his vengeance and livelihood. He named the dog as Diana to avenge and traduce his former love for her betrayal.

Everyone in the movie has a reason to love the animal. For some it's a hobby, some a means of livelihood, some a saviour or a guide and some other uses the animal for their professional accomplishments. The term 'dog' is used as derogatory in several scenes. Dogs are presented as leading a grand life but whether the dog demands it. Such enslavement in an enclosed kennel is lauded in the movie. Feigned pet lovers and pet thieves are also exposed in the film.

The movie presents the utilitarian attitude of human beings towards animals. We are egoistic and we deliberately use animals for our personal benefits. *Ringmaster* is mere exhibition of different breeds of dogs. The hero as well as the villain needs the dogs for their solace and triumphs and not for the dog's betterment. The dog is just a weapon for them to play around. It is self-centered nature of human beings unveiled through the movie and not the true affection Prince for his dog.

Pisharady's *Panchavarnathatha* is nothing more than a menagerie. The animals ranging from camel and elephant to macaw and parrot are there in the movie which makes it colourful. Here, the animals are used the puppets. The incident of taming a violent elephant is portrayed comically. The reality behind the musth of the elephant is brilliantly ignored. The truism that our exploitation of elephants is by taming it, domesticating it and enslaving it, is left unrecognised.

Jayaram's character, Vijayan Joseph, says that his animals are his life. But the film portrays the opposite; it focuses on human beings and their selfishness. Some reproaches animals as it perturbs the sanity of their life. Some others allure the animals as it is their benefactor. Vijayan's love for animals is a torment for them as they are entrapped by him. Animals thrive for liberty. This was restricted to them and human beings claim it as affection. These endangered species are used as performing animals. Kunchako Boban's character also accepts the animal-stay in his home to win the impending election by hook or by crook. His detest for animals vanishes when it eventually resolves the problems in his life. Camel is used to traverse during a hartal day in the movie and these episodes with animals are captured with a tinge of humour.

In reality, all these animals belong to distinct habitat and they are brought to Kerala for the entertainment and betterment of our life. They are removed from their natural milieu, highlighting as the love for animals. This film also presents the utilitarian aspect of human beings, when we cuddle the non-human life forms for our selfish desires.

From yesteryear to this day, animals are depicted in the same manner in Malayalam cinema. There is no remarkable transition in it, either the animals are the antagonist or are supposed to smoothen the life of human beings. Their portrayal is stagnated, no progressive changes have been reflected in it. The three movies discussed here presents the animals in an improper manner, ie, in *PuliMurugan*, as a foe who is the man-eater, in *RingMaster* and *Panchavarnathatha*, animals as puppets to mollify the life of mankind. Ecocentric or biocentric portrayal of nature and animals in Malayalam commercial cinema is unimaginable in such an era where all these films glorify egoistical sensibility of mankind are huge hits. These victories reflect our mind-set towards animals.

Filmography

Panchavarnathatha. Dir. Ramesh Pisharady. Perf. Jayaram, Kunchako Boban, Anusree. Maniyanpillai Raju Productions, 2018. Film.

PuliMurugan. Dir. Vysakh. Perf. Mohanlal, kamlini Mukherjee, Lal. Mulakuppadam, 2016. Film.

Ringmaster. Dir. Raafi. Perf. Dileep, Honey Rose, Kalabhavan Shajon. Vysakh, 2014. Film.

Bibliography

Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Structuralism and Ecocriticism*. Delhi: Pearson, 2010. Print.