

History of Malayalam Film

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Preamble

The Malayalam theatre practically gave birth to Malayalam cinema. The theatre personalities played a major role in the promotion of Malayalam film industry. The evergreen theatres of Kerala were founded by K.W.Joseph in Calicut (Davison) and Thrissur (Jose) Theatre. Malayalam film industry has grown in a remarkable way since its inception. There are several cultural, literary and intellectual personalities who have built Malayalam film industry over a period of time. A brief history of Malayalam films is presented in this article based on review of literature.

Early Malayalam Films

K.W.Joseph was the first person to show films in Kerala in 1913 through Jose electric Bioscope. Later J C Daniel a dentist by profession produced *Vigathakumaran* in 1928. It was a silent film produced by Travancore pictures, a temporary Malayalam studio. The second Malayalam film *Marthandavarma* was directed by Sunderraj on the basis of a novel written by C V Raman Pillai. In 1938, the first sound cinema was produced by T R Sundaram directed by M Sundaram of Nagercoil named *Balan* (Boy). Again in 1940 Nettoni directed a movie named *Jnanambika* which carried the screenplay and songs written by Muthukulam Raghavan Pillai. Before independence, in 1941 Madras United Artist Corporation produced *Prahlada* and no other films came until independence.

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Malayalam Films after Independence

Later in 1948 after the independence artist P.J.Cherian produced *Nirmala* on the banner of Kerala Talkies Limited. The dialogue was written by Puthezhath Raman Menon and lyrics by G Sankara Kurup. Immediately after the independence Udaya studio was established in 1948 and in 1949 he produced the next film titled *Vellinakshatram*. During 1938- 1949 there were totally five films produced in Malayalam language according to Aravindan Vallachira (1968). In 1950, films titled *Sthree* (Women), *Prassanna* (Name), *Sasidharan* (Name) and *Nalla Thanka* (A Good

Thanka) were produced in Kerala. Among them, *Sasidharan* and *Nalla Thanka* received public appreciation. Subrahmanian started the Meriland studio near Nemom and Appachan brought his studio Navodaya which were other next studios during this period. The first cinemascope Malayalam film was *Thacholi Ambu* and the first 70mm film was *Padayottam*. The first 3D film in Malayalam was *My dear Kuttichathan* which was produced by Appachan. About 70 films were produced in Kerala during 1950-60.

Prominent among them include - *Jeevitha Nauka* directed by K Vembu in 1951, *Navalokam* by V Krishnan in 1951, *Vishappinte Villi* by Mohan Rao in 1952, *Loka Neethi* by R Velappan in 1953, *Shariyo Thetto* by Thikkurushi in 1953, *Neelakuyil* in 1954, *Newspaper Boy* in 1955, *Randidangazhi* in 1958, *Naayaru Pidicha Pulivaalu* in 1958 and *Umma*. Especially, *Jeevitha Nauka* and *Vishappinte Vili* were the hit films of this period. In 1960, Kunchakko's *Umma* was the first Muslim social film which grabbed that year's record collection. *Navalokam*, *Loka Neethi* and *Shariyo Thetto* were also appreciated by the audience. The film *Randidangazhi* directed by Subrahmaniam and a comedy film *Naayaru Pidicha Pulivaalu* directed by P.Bhaskaran got huge applause. *Neelakuyil* in 1954 was directed by P.Bhaskaran and *Ramu Karyat* was produced by T.K. Pareekutty under the banner of Chandrathara received silver medal from the President. *News Paper Boy* was the first realistic film directed by Ramdas in 1955 in Malayalam film history.

Malayalam cinema earned national recognition in 1954 for *Neelakuyil* which got a gold medal. During 1960s, about 230 films were produced in Malayalam. Most of them were known for mass appeal. In 1966, Ramu Karyat directed the film *Chemmeen* which received appreciation of the critics for its cinematic excellence. Other films namely *Unniarcha* (Name) and *Bharya* (Wife) also received lot of appreciation from the audience since they were based on true stories. These films grabbed huge revenue to Navodaya productions. Another film *Kutti Kuppayam* (Small dress) directed by Krishnan Nair based on a story from Moidu Padiyathu

encompassed enthralling lyrics and music of P Bhaskaran and M S Baburaj created record in the box office.

Malayalam Cinema was enriched by the creative writings of M.T.Vasudevan Nair who provided scripts for famous films like. *Murapennu* (Cousin), *Nagaram Nanni* (Thank You City), *Eruttinte Aathmaavu* (Soul of the Darkness) etc. Another film *Bhargavi Nilayam* (Name of a House), directed by A.Vincent was a horror and fantasy experience to the viewers. Thoppil Bhasi also emerged as another creative writer and contributed stories for popular films like *Mudiyanaya Puthram* (A Spendthrift Son), *Ashwa Medham* (Sacred Horse) and *Tulabhaaram* (Weighing Balance). Thespian Sathyan also became a popular film personality through famous Films like *Kadal Palam* (Sea Bridge) and *Vaazhve Maayam* (Mysterious World).

During this period, Sethumadhavan emerged as another great director of Malayalam film industry. *Tulabhaaram* (Weighing Balance) directed by Vincent brought the Urvasi award for *Sharada* which bagged the national award for 2nd best film in India at that time. Famous novels like *Mudupadam* (Mask, S K Pottekadu), *Aadya Kiranangal* (Prime Rays), *Anweshichu Kandetheela* (Searched but not found) and *Ara Naazhika Neram* (For a Moment) authored by Parapurathu became the sources for films which attracted great appreciation. Other prominent novels *Odayil Ninnu* (From the garbage, Keshavadev), *Kallichellamma* (Name of a mischievous woman, Vivekanandan), *Adimakal* (Slaves, Padman) were also used by the film makers to produce popular films during 1960s. *Anweshichu Kandetheela* (Searched but not found) could reap the Silver Medal from the President in 1967. Some cinematic experiments were also done through films like *Rosy* (Name) directed by P.N.Menon and *Chitramala* (Festival of Pictures) by T.S.Mutthaiah. Subrahmaniam bagged the state award in 1969 for his movie *Kumara Sambhavam* (An Incident) and the award for the best director in that year was grabbed by Vincent for his film *Nadi* (River). Awards for national integration was given for *Janmabhumi* (Mother Land) directed by John Sankaramangalam and *Thurakkatha Vathil* (Closed Door) by P.Bhaskaran.

Golden era of Malayalam Cinema

The decade of 1970's witnessed the production of new wave films in Kerala. Films like - *Olavum Theeravum* (Waves and the Shore) directed by P.N.Menon, *Priya* (Name) directed by Madhu and *Ara Naazhika Neram* (For a Moment) directed by Sethumadhavan received the first, second and third prizes at the national level. S.L.Puram Sadanandan received the national award for screenplay *Agniputhri* (Fire Daughter) which was directed by M.Krishnan Nair and the actress Sheela was also appreciated for her performance. During this decade many talented film makers like Adoor Gopalakrishnan, K.P.Kumaran, M.T.Vasudevan Nair, Karyat,

Aravindan, Bekker, K.G.George, K.R.Mohan, John Abraham, Neelambur Balan and others enriched the Malayalam film industry through their creative cinematic experiments.

Prominent films of 1970s include – Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Swayamvaram* (One's Own Choice) and *Kodiyettam* (Ascent), K.P.Kumaran's *Panitheeratha Veedu* (Unfinished House), Sethumadhavan's *Kanyakumari*, (Famous Place) Karyat's *Nellu* (Grain), Bharathan's *Prayanam* (Journey), Aravindan's *Thakara* (Name of a Plant), *Utharayanam* (Climb), *Kaanchana Seetha* (Golden Seetha), *Thambu* (Name) and *Kummatti* (A Deity), Bekker's *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (River Kabani turns red), *Mani Muzhakkam* (Sound of Bell), *Chuvanna Vithukal* (Red Seeds) and *Sankha Gaanam* (Group Music), Panicker's *Ekakini* (Lone Women), K.G.George's *Swapnaadanam* (Dream Travel) and *Ulkadal* (Deep Sea) Padmarajan's *Peruvazhiyambalam* (Divine Street), K.R.Mohan's *Ashwadhamavu* (Name), John Abraham's *Cheriyachante Krurakrithyangal* (Misdeeds of Cheriyaachan) and Nilambur Balan *Anyarude Bhumi* (Strangers Earth) and so on. These films were rated as the most creative and meaningful new wave movies during 1970s. Some of these films also received regional and national awards for cinematic excellence. During this period, Malayalam cinema carved a niche for itself at the national level and Sethumadhavan's film *Achanum Baapayum* (Synonym for Father) bagged the best film for national integration in 1972. Adoor Gopala Krishnan's debut film *Swayamvaram* (One's Own Choice) also bagged the national award for best Indian director and *Sharada* received the 'Urvashi award' for best female actress. Later on in 1973 M.T.Vasudevan Nair received the national award for best film through *Nirmalyam* (Cleansing) followed by Aravindan for his film *Kanchana Seetha* (Golden Seetha) in 1977 and *Thambu* (Name) in 1978 respectively.

The decade of 1980s did not witness any remarkable progress in the Malayalam film industry which was commercialized in letter and spirit. The committed film makers could not achieve any progress financially and professionally due to the change of mindset of the audience who were won over by the market forces and formula films. Despite certain drawbacks and limitations, the film makers continued their venture confidently and produced some prominent films. They include – Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Elipathayam* (Rat Trap) and *Mukhamukham* (Face to Face), Aravindan's *Pooku Veyil* (Evening Sun) and *Chidambaram* (Name) Padmarajan's *Oridathoru Phayalvaan* (Champion in a Place) and *Thinkalazhcha Nalla Divasam* (Monday a Good Day), George's *Kolungal* (Symbols), *Yavanika* (Curtain) and *Erakal* (Preys), Bharathan's *Marmmaram* (Chirping), *Chamaram* (Sail) and *Ozhivukaalam* (Vacation), Lenin Rajendran's *Venal*, *Aalkuuttathil Thaniye* (Alone amidst a crowd), *Aksharangal* (Letters), Sasi's *Anubandham* (Attached), *Aarudam* (Mind) and *Kaana Marayathu* (Unseen), Hariharan's *Oppol* (Sister), Bekker's *Vellam* (Water) and *Chaappa*

(Head), Sashidharan's *Sree Narayana Guru* (Name of a Hindu Saint) and *Akkare Kaanathaya Penkutty* (Girl unseen across), Sivan's *Aalolam* (Rhyme) and *Mangalam Neerunnu* (Wishing you the Best), Ravi Varma's *Yaagam* (Mass Prayer) and so on.

Some popular commercial Malayalam films were also made during 1980s. Jeejo's *My Dear Kuttichathan* and *Padayottam* (Race in the Battle Field), Balachandra Menon's *Kelkkatha Shabdham* (Unheard Voice) and *Eenadu* (This Place), Shashi's *Angadi* (Market), Mohan's *Elakkangal* (Movements), *Edavela* (Interval) and *Vida Parayum Mumbhe* (Before Saying Bye), Balu Mahendra's *Oolangal* (Ripples) and *Yaathra* (Travel), Fasil's *Manjil Virinja Pookkal* (Flowers Bloomed on Mist), *Ente Mammatti Kuttiyammakku* (My Dear Most), and *Nokkethadoorathu Kannum Nattu* (Looking Deep Ahead), Joshi's *Ithihasam* (Legendary), *Aarambam* (Beginning), *Nirakoottu* (Colour Mix) and *Shyama* (Name), M.T.Vasudevan Nair's *Vaarikuzhi* (Deep Pit), Rasheed's *Veedu* (Home), Bharathan's *Oormakkayi* (To Remember) and *Ethiripoove Chuvanna Poove* (Little Red Flower), Chandrakumar's *Uyarum Njan Naadake* (I will Raise Above) and Sibi Malayil's *Oduvil Kittiya Vaartha* (Late News), Yatheendradas *Muthram Kunnu PO* (Name of a post office) and Sree Kumaran's *Gaanam* (Song) were the famous commercial films produced in the decade of 1980s.

Conclusion

In the age of globalization, Malayalam film industry faced challenges from other film industries and television industry. The people were also attracted by the forces of globalization which glorified unhealthy tendencies through film and television. The people of Kerala are known for commendable literacy development and concern for the people and environment. The film makers continued their innings in 1990s and produced both commercial and new wave films confidently. The audiences have also supported the healthy cinematic experiments of committed film makers. In the new millennium, the film makers have adopted certain creative and innovative measures to enrich the process of film making in Kerala. In particular, Adoor Gopalakrishnan emerged as the prominent new wave film maker who brought international recognition to Malayalam films through his constructive and creative cinematic contributions over a period of time.

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