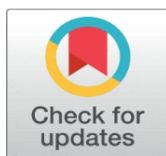


CULTURAL IMAGINARIES AND POLITICAL UNDERCURRENTS IN THE SONG “AALATHINU CENTRE” FROM THE MALAYALAM MOVIE LOKAH: CHAPTER 1(CHANDRA)

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1. INTRODUCTION

This work is very pertinent in the modern cultural and media environment since it covers the active involvement of popular cinema in the reformation of identity, power and representation in a globalized media flow. Using “Aalathinu Centre” as a location where gender politics, sonic experimentation and myth-making intersect, the paper has shown that film songs are no longer the fringe entertainments but the ideological tools at the centre. This analysis indicates how a local culture can without cultural dilution impose itself on international platforms, even at a time when regional cinemas are dealing to establish their presence. Female-centric sonic authority is also directly related to debates over gender representation and empowerment in the popular media. Further, by anticipating the digital circulation and the

ABSTRACT

“Aalathinu Centre”, a song from Malayalam movie Lokah, is one cultural text in which the various ideological strands, gender, postcolonial identity and resistance have converged in sound, image and performance. When the song is decoded in its stratified meanings, we get the sense that the song is more than a musical interlude: it is a statement of Malayali identity in a global media circuit. It contains a female narrative of power, mythic agency and political awakening that is open to a range of audience interpretations. The encoding / decoding theory by Stuart Hall, the gender performativity theory by Judith Butler and the concept of hybridity by Homi K. Bhabha, all present an effective means of deconstructing the ideological meaning of the song form and content.

Keywords: Cultural Text in Film Music, Sound and Performance Politics, Encoding/Decoding Malayali Identity and Resistance, Gender Performativity, Cultural Hybridity, Feminine Agency in Popular Culture

participatory audience practices, the research is in line with the modern changes of media consumption where meaning is constructed not only by filmmakers but also through the process of collaboration. Generally, the study provides a timely template in terms of comprehending how regional popular culture may serve as a dynamic field of political expression, cultural negotiation and feminist re-imagination in the current time.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research approach followed by this study is qualitative and interdisciplinary based on film studies, musicology, cultural studies, and gender theory. The main technique is considered to be textual analysis, which will work with the song "Thani Lokah Murakkaari.../ Aalathinu Centre" as the object of audio-visual text. The discussion of the lyrics, musical form, voice acting, choreography, visual framing, and the positioning of the narrative in the film Lokah aims at analyzing how meaning is generated by the interplay of sound and image and story.

To understand the ideological significance of the song, the research applies the proven theoretical paradigms of film-music studies, representation, performativity, and hybridity. It does not apply theory as an aid, but as an analytical tool to understand how popular cinema constructs gender, power, and identity. Contextual analysis is also part of the research and it places the song into the context of Malayalam cinema, the modern regional filmmaking and the international genre practices.

Further, a reception-based approach looks at digital circulation, audience feedback and social-media remixes to comprehend the way the song gains prolonged and extended cultural meaning and remakes itself through a participatory engagement outside the film. This approach to cultural contextualization of close reading makes it possible to understand film music as a site of ideological production in modern media culture in a new way.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key research questions are:

- 1) To discuss how the song "Aalathinu Centre" is used as a narrative and world-building tool in Lokah, it is possible to examine the functioning of the song in diegetic, extra-diegetic, and transmedia spaces and create a mythical meaning and ideological consistency.
- 2) In order to examine how the female agency is represented by sonic and performative practices, it is important to ask how voice, rhythm, visual framing and performance by the body remakes the gendered power structures in Malayalam popular cinema.
- 3) In order to examine the cultural making of Malayalam cinema in the context of global genres, it is possible to consider the way in which the film and its music engage with international aesthetics, without losing the regional language, mythology and postcolonial identity.
- 4) In order to re- evaluate the role of film songs in the current film-music studies, it will be necessary to prove that songs are multimodal, ideological and political texts not narrative interruptions or entertainment sequences.
- 5) In order to put the audience reception and digital circulation of the song into perspective, it is essential to examine the role of participatory cultures, social media performances, and transmedia engagement in the creation of meaning and cultural afterlife of the song.

4. ENCODING/DECODING: POWER AND AUDIENCE NEGOTIATION

The encoding/decoding model by Stuart Hall is a conceptualization of the media text as a location of power and polysemy in lieu of being a closed system of meaning. The meanings are never assured to come through clearly to the audience since media producers encode texts in overriding ideological structures. According to Hall, meaning is organized in a "framework of knowledge", "relation of production", and "technical infrastructure", all of which influence the ways in which ideology is entered into texts of media (Encoding/Decoding 136). Using this scheme in relation to "Aalathinu Centre", the song turns out to be a culture-infected text that imprints a desired understanding of female sovereignty, cultural rootedness, and resistance to historical peripherality.

The ideological work of "Aalathinu Centre" depends on placing it in the high point of narrative and affect. Through foregrounding of female body and voice as the centre of meaning, the empowerment is a powerful ideology within the

film: the woman as the centre of the world, the creator, and the renewal. This symbolism becomes even more important in the light of the changing gender politics of the Malayalam cinema where women are now being introduced not as a dependent in the story but as agents of action. The song, "Aalathinu centre" (I am the centre of the world) is a symbolic reversal of patriarchal and colonial cartographies in which authority is traditionally concentrated in masculine or Western centres. According to Hall, representation is produced in the context of a "structure of dominance" in which meaning is constantly made and argued out (Hall, Representation 4). The encoding of the song is therefore involved in a broader culture negotiation of gender, power and visibility.

Nevertheless, the model by Hall does not allow to believe in an absolute or universal meaning either. A hegemonic-dominant reading can also internalize the message of the song as the simple feminist affirmation, reading it as the symptom of some positive change in the popular cinema. An agreed reading, on the other hand, can be aware of the emotional force and aesthetic authority of the song without being fooled into believing in the commodification of feminist discourse--admitting to the empowerment, but doubting how it is contained within the commercial film narrative. A critical reception might reject the song as a formalized display of empowerment with no material effects on the lives of women. Hall reminds us that there is "no one, true meaning", and that we can only struggle over interpretation in representation (Hall, Representation 9).

In these terms, "Aalathinu Centre" can thus be viewed as a negotiated text that goes back and forth between resistance and accommodation. Although it romanticizes empowerment as spectacle, it also provides a discursive space of feminist as well as postcolonial critique in the mainstream. This tension already resonates with what bell hooks refers to as the "politics of representation" where visibility is both potentially disruptive and domestically disruptive (hooks 118). However, the distribution of the song in the popular culture allows the feminist imaginaries to be shared by a wider audience, proving that even the most hegemonic types of media can be redefined by other ones, instead of being disregarded.

5. GENDER AND PERFORMANCE: THE BODY AS POLITICS

The femininity of "Aalathinu Centre" is formed not in subordination but in the sovereignty by constructing the visual and sonic language to break the dominant codes in the field of cinema in which the female presence can be determined by vulnerability or support. The words, "sharp-eyed sword-woman" and "alone warrior", "mentor in crisis", are connected with archetypes of divine and mythic womanhood found deep in the South Asian cosmology where goddesses are both nurturing and destructive. Opposite to the passive icons of reverence, these figures have agency which is both destructive and protective. Through marshalling this lexicon, "Aalathinu Centre" engraves its female protagonist as a modern goddess of confrontation by crossing the temporal boundary between myth and modernity. The song is therefore working in what Stuart Hall refers to as a representational struggle meaning where meaning is created out of historically sedimented symbols that can be re-enacted to serve ideological purposes.

A theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler can provide a fruitful application of this change. Butler argues that gender is "an identity tenuously constituted in time through a stylized repetition of acts" (179). This corporeal vocabulary of the protagonist in "Aalathinu Centre", her erect posture, choreographed blows, and her protracted, offensive look at the camera, serves exactly as that kind of repetition. These movements are not simply articulations of already-existing identity; instead, they are processes or activities of a kind of femininity that is based on authority and control. More to the point, the song does not give in to the masculinity versus strength ratio. Rather, it carries out a different femininity that disrupts the gender norms internally. Gender, in this case is exposed not as biological necessity but as a repetitive and thus changeable play of power.

The musical form of the song also enhances this performative break. The percussion rhythmic patterns are reminiscent of a marching step, and the vocals of the lead character, switching between chants, rap and melodic chanting, form a stratified sound environment of affirmation. This sound approach follows what E. Ann Kaplan calls "aural agency", which is defined as "the reclaiming of sound as a site of feminist power" (87). The protagonist makes a statement of the space and meaning through the command of the auditory field, instead of using it in a decorative manner. Even the hybridization of genres per se is ideologically charged: the melody traditionally coded as soft or feminine collides with the aggressive rhythmic patterns traditionally linked with masculinity. This hybridity disrupts such binary oppositions like male/female and strong/soft, and it is through this that Butler applies that gender norms only exist via repetition and can therefore be disrupted via re-performance.

This performance of sovereignty is a change in ideology in the history of Malayalam cinema. Women have been traditionally relegated to the racial realms of domesticity, romantic plotlines, or martyrs of some sort, and their primary role was the emotional glue to male heroes. Contrary to this, the protagonist of Lokah is placed at the centre of the narrative and not at its periphery. She is not placed as the object of affection or right-mindedness of a male protagonist but as a person who builds her mythology. The song enables her to “speak herself into being” as bell hooks would say “to transgress traditional boundaries of femininity is to speak from the margin” (121). Yet “Aalathinu Centre” takes a step more and moves that marginal voice to the centre of the cinema changing even the visibility space itself.

Simultaneously, a critical analysis should not exclude the ambivalence of such representation. Although the song is an impressive re-scripting of femininity that uses mythic symbolism and performance power, its distribution at a commercial level of cinema runs the danger of aestheticizing opposition. Empowerment is made spectacular, which could work against its radical advantage. However, being a performative place where movement, rhythm, and sound overlap, Aalathinu Centre creates a counter-hegemonic space of popular culture. The female body gains no longer an object of gaze but a surface of ideological writing, redefining the meaning of being a woman in the modern visual culture through repetition, disturbance and re-enactment.

6. POSTCOLONIAL HYBRIDITY: NEGOTIATING THE THIRD SPACE

Within the postcolonial approach, “Aalathinu Centre” illustrates the aesthetics of hybridity as a form of resistance to culture and not as an overflow of style. The concept of the “third space” by Homi K. Bhabha is the space between the dominant consumer cultures, meaning, is not passed on wholesale, but rather created through the negotiation, translation, and displacement (56). The sonic and linguistic hybridity of the song, Malayalam and English blending, the indigenous percussion mixing with the electronic and electronic beats, the mythic symbolism and the global rap idioms meeting each other in a third place is exactly the creation of this. The song rejects binary classification of local tradition or global modernity and this is the performative present of cultural difference that Bhabha refers to as the “performative present” (59) in which identity is created through a process instead of a static nature.

More importantly, the hybridity of “Aalathinu Centre” is not an appearance but rather a political depth. It documents the experienced state of postcolonial subjectivity in a globalized community- both anchored on local histories and transnational scramble of culture, capital, and language. The inlay of the English protest language like “freedom” is not “free” into a Malayalam lyrical form, creates a negotiation between the global activist discourse and vernacular poetics. This code-switching of language makes visible what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak sees as the “translation of subaltern speech” (104): the uncomfortable project of expressing resistance in dominant languages, but not being entirely absorbed by those languages. The bilingual voice of the protagonist therefore is the movement of double claiming access to the global discourse but preserving epistemic autonomy based on the local cultural memory.

Simultaneously, such a mixed approach can be subject to serious questioning. Although implementation of English can serve as an instrument of global intelligibility, it may as well be employed to recreate hierarchies of linguistic worth in which English is still the language of protest. Nevertheless, “Aalathinu Centre” avoids this threat by giving English phrases a secondary position to Malayalam rhythmic and semantic patterns. The global idiom does not prevail but is re-accented by the local performance implying a kind of cultural agency as opposed to imitation. This is not “imitation” but rearticulation as it is translated and the meaning is transformed through translation and not reproduced as it is (71).

The main metaphor of the song, the centre, is yet another metaphor that makes the song more postcolonial. The colonial discourse has long organized the world by centres and periphery placing the centre of power, knowledge and authority in the metropolitan core and pushing the colonies to the periphery. The protagonist symbolically reverses this spatial logic by stating that she is the centre. The pronunciation of the word Aalathinu centre develops into a rebellion of the epistemic rebellion that recuperates the symbolic and geographic centrality. This act corresponds to the statement by Ngugi wa Thiong'o who claims that “to decolonize the mind is to restore the language of power to the oppressed” (87). The song, therefore, goes beyond the personal self-proclamation to declare a group decolonization project, that is, the entitlement to the marginalized subjects to determine the conditions of meaning, worth, and appearance.

In addition, the hybrid aesthetics of “Aalathinu Centre” are involved in what Bhabha refers to as “politics of translation” where the cultural meaning is continually being reinvented across difference as opposed to being fixed on origin (71). Both the English phrases and the Malayalam sonic and cultural registers receive strength through their placement in English and local idioms find new tones in global tinges. Such dialogic fusion creates what can be referred

to as a sort of a "glocal" articulation, transnational and regional at the same time. In this regard the song not only reflects the socio-cultural background of Kerala: cosmopolitan and on the other hand, indigenized, it was influenced both by the traditions of the indigenous population and by centuries of the world interchange. "Aalathinu Centre" makes the postcolonial marginality into a place of creative and political centrality, through hybridity.

7. POLITICAL READING: SOUND AS RESISTANCE

The aggressive tone of the words- Break that border / Take no orders / Freedom ain't free- places "Aalathinu Centre" squarely in an international tradition of resistance music, which uses sound, rhythm, and repetition as the means of political representation. Despite the explanation in the context of fantasy narration, the metaphor of the song as a border and freedom speak volumes in addressing the socio-political context of the modern times including gender inequality, cultural marginalization, and youth unrest. Borders in this case are not just meant to mark out physical boundaries but to be symbolic and control power, visibility and belonging. Such disobedience on the part of the heroine, therefore, can act at both the narrative and ideological level as she breaks the hierarchical traditions of cinematic narratives by taking the heroic centre that traditionally belongs to men and also attempts to challenge the traditional binaries of centre and margin which organize postcolonial and patriarchal discourse.

Politically-aesthetically, "Aalathinu Centre" shows how action may be turned into effect. Jacques Ranciere theorizes politics as a "redistribution of the sensible" as a process where novel subjects, voices and experiences are brought to the fore in a given order (13). In this regard, the song is involved in the active restructuring of cinematic space, with the feminine voice as the main location of the political. Her chant is not the background music or the emotional flair, but it usurps hearing authority. Her voice is no less than declaration. The diegetic insertion of the song into the film increases this effect, which functions as a narrative pivot and a commentary on the ideological investment in the film. The film claims that the change in politics starts with the rearrangement of the perception itself by foreshadowing the female voice at a time of transformation.

This rearrangement is also encouraged by what Stuart Hall refers to as the "articulation of identity" where identity is not seen as a static entity but rather as position within history, culture and power (Hall, *Cultural Identity* 226). The identity of the protagonist is not provided as natural and self-evident but is actively constructed in the form of performance: feminine, regional, and postcolonial. Every beat, word and action act as political expression tying the agency of the individual to the struggle of people. Her resistance is not an abstract concept of empowerment but concrete action making identity something of action not something hereditary. The hybrid musical sound system, which combines the native rhythms with global sound systems, reflects the hybrid subjectivity of the postcolonial youth who play in the world of modernity, but at the same time, they are not deprived of the local moral principles.

Noteworthy, the anthem-like form of the song transfers its political power outside of the screen. In contrast to introspective musical numbers which are used as private feelings, "Aalathinu Centre" welcomes the audience to be active. The rhythmically convenient, emotionally-charged, chorus helps to identify with the group, making spectators participants. This interactional aspect is similar to what Raymond Williams calls 'structures of feeling' which is defined as 'meanings and values as they are lived and felt' in the context of social change (134). The song embodies a new affective structure -emotional preparedness to change, which is not politically expressed yet. It turns diffuse social fears and desire into a common sensory experience by way of rhythm and repetition.

Simultaneously, such affective politics is bilateral and should be subjected to a critical assessment. Although the song expresses resistance with incredible efficacy by way of popular form, its placement in commercial cinema runs the risk of holding dissent in spectacle. Still, according to Williams, structures of feeling tend to work in the very direction of dominants of culture where change is already signalled, but not yet reduced to ideology. Lokah has proven successful, which means that audiences in the region are responsive to these emotional expressions of empowerment, and that people appear to be culturally ready to approach feminist and postcolonial stories in mass media. In this way, "Aalathinu Centre" will continue not only to be a song of resistance, but also a cultural barometer--reading and enhancing the ambitions of the political desires of a generation trying to negotiate identity, power and belonging.

8. IDEOLOGICAL SYNTHESIS: FEMINIST-POSTCOLONIAL DIALECTIC

Combining feminist, postcolonial, and performative theoretical approaches, "Aalathinu Centre" becomes a virtual location of the intersection and a clash of plural discourses. Its feminist politics are not carried wholesale and abstracted

into universal claims by the Western paradigms. Rather, the song elucidates what can be termed as indigenized feminism, i.e. one that appeals to the local mythological archetypes but still keeps in check with the international feminist idioms. Here, the statement by Chandra Talpade Mohanty that “feminism must be attentive to the heterogeneity of women’s experiences and the specificity of their histories” (71) comes in handy especially. The strength of the heroine is not based on the hypothetical idea of empowerment but on the culturally specific memories, symbolisms, and histories. She is not a parody of Western female icons of feminism; instead, it is a redefined version of South Asian womanhood that has been influenced by myth, subversion and modern aesthetics.

This feminism of the locale cannot be disentangled with a postcolonial politics of voice. The question that Spivak has posed as ever-present in the cultural display is the question of the “subaltern” speaking, or not, and it remains the question that lingers in the cultural display, more so the mainstream media (104). “Aalathinu Centre” does not react by a pure yes, no but changes the terminologies of the question. The subaltern sings, chants and makes sonic space in the song and turns the silence of history into the performative audibility. However, this change is not tension free. The subaltern voice is mediated here through commercial cinema and this throws critical questions on authenticity, co-optation and marketability. Resistance is stylized, choreographed and spread as spectacle. Nevertheless, to ignore such articulation as simply commodified would be simplistic. According to Stuart Hall, popular culture “one of the sites where socialism might be constituted” (Notes on Deconstructing” 239). Likewise, there is no vested feminism, or post colonialism in “Aalathinu Centre” but a form of negotiated formations which emanates through contradiction, compromise, and hybridity.

This negotiated quality is what, in fact, makes the song resonate with a political quality. Instead of promoting emancipation as an issue that has been solved, “Aalathinu Centre” visages empowerment as a continuous affair. The filmic space is turned into the space of articulation, in which the capitalist spectacle and emancipatory politics are opposing each other awkwardly. This stress does not remove the political impact of the song, but rather, it makes it. The voice of the heroine, enhanced by hybrid sound environments, mythical imagery and aggressive choreography, performs what Hall defines as the “politics of becoming” where identity is not regarded as stable, but rather as being created persistently through representation (Representation 12). Empowerment in this case is not a stature but an act of performance which requires a repetition, challenges and renegotiation.

The intersection of these theoretical approaches helps to see “Aalathinu Centre” as something more than a musical interlude: a discursive node of the intersection of gender, culture, and power. The encoding/decoding model by Hall highlights how the song encodes empowerment as a desirable reading and allows space of negotiation and resistance. The performativity theory by Butler sheds light on the performance of gendered power by means of repetitions of bodily and sonic performance. The concept of hybridity by Bhabha is the reason why new cultural meanings are created in interstices between local tradition and global modernity. Finally, postcolonial feminist theory is a prospective of voice, representation and difference stakes in these processes.

To this end the statement of the song that it is the centre has a tremendous symbolic significance. The heroine not only reclaims narrative agency by reinventing cultural geography by repositioning herself as the centre. The margin ceases to be a place of deficiency or exclusion, rather it is a place of creativity, opposition, and epistemic power. The female body formerly established as the object of the cinematic gaze is reorganised as language of power speaking, sounding and signifying itself. In a still-patriarchal and colonial media culture, “Aalathinu Centre” points to other modernities that may be local and not derivative, feminist and not hierarchal, and polyphonic and not singular.

Finally, the concept of “Aalathinu Centre” shows the possibilities and potentials of popular culture as an ideological contesting arena. It bridges empowerment, welcomes negotiation and pursues resistance by means of performance. In making the cinematic song a political utterance rather than an entertainment it provides a kind of aural connection that what has been pushed to the periphery has always had the capability of redesigning the centre- once it is listened to.

9. RECEPTION AND CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR MALAYALAM POPULAR CULTURE AND FILM-MUSIC STUDIES

1) Reception

Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra (2024) turned out to be a phenomenon in Malayalam cinema, not only as a business blockbuster, but as a cultural phenomenon that changed the perceptions of what should be done with regional genre films. Wikipedia states that the movie was a breakthrough at the box-office, as it was the highest-grossing Malayalam

movie in its era (Lokah: Chapter 1 - Chandra). Such a commercial achievement is notable as it represents a change in taste in the audience, one that is open to spectacle in large scale and yet still receptive to localized storylines and identities. The key to this achievement was the soundtrack of the film by Jakes Bejoy which was extremely important to enhance both the affective and ideological value of the film.

One of the songs that impressed most was "Thani Lokah Murakkaari / Aalathinu Centre" due to its mix soundscape and female-centric images. The combination of indigenous percussion, electronic orchestration, and aggressive vocal performance of the song was a breakthrough of the traditional Malayalam film music. Its spread in the social media made it a viral anthem, far beyond the movie screen. The song was highly praised by the industry leaders, one being actress Kalyani Priyadarshan, who commended Bejoy using the song to create a new Sonic language" in local films (The Times of India). These kinds of approvals emphasize the way in which the song was viewed not solely as entertainment but as an aesthetic creative work that could redefine the standards in the industry.

The reception analysis of Aalathinu Centre can be identified as having a multifaceted and contradictory discourse of the populace. On Reddit and YouTube comment boards and X (previously Twitter), viewers responded to Lokah not just as a literal image, but as a cultural message. The mythic agency of the female protagonist and the militant tone of the song were predetermined by the numerous fan interpretations, which interpreted it as the empowering intervention in the filmmaking tradition dominated by men. The track is often referred to as a "feminist battle-cry" and a local response to "Marvel soundtracks" by the online users (Reddit). Such readings place the song in a universal grammar of superhero and resistance stories and at the same time highlight the fact that it is rooted in local aesthetics.

But this triumphant welcome did not everywhere accompany them. In addition to the acclaim, there also appeared one vein of skepticism with critics and cinephiles wondering whether Lokah runs the risk of turning feminist rhetoric into spectacle to be consumed by the masses. To such audiences, stylized choreography, big orchestration, and viral spread of this song had a danger of disabling its political nature. This is an expression of what Stuart Hall hypothesizes into a "negotiated reading" in which the audiences are recognizing the validity of the "dominant definitions", but also challenging or redefining them (Encoding/Decoding" 136). The audience can accept the emotional impact and suggestive feminism of the song and be cautious about the integration of the song into a commercial blockbuster context.

It is the tension of this kind which gives to "Aalathinu centre" its critical importance. The song has a dual position: it is a cultural commodity and a political gesture at the same time. Its virality indicates that popular culture might be used as a powerful deployment of feminist and postcolonial messages, which transforms ideology issues into a form that is both more comfortable and easily relatable. Simultaneously, its triumph in the market-oriented cinema reveals the hypocrisy of displaying resistance in form of spectacle. According to Rosalind Brunt, popular culture occupies "a contradictory terrain—where the struggle between incorporation and opposition is continuous" (78). Instead of dismantling the politics of the song, this contradiction puts it in the position of the dynamics by which ideology circulates in the contemporary media.

In such a perspective, the fact that "Aalathinu Centre" is so popular does not weaken its meaning; it is rather a time when feminism and postcolonial discourse is becoming a part of mainstream Malayalam consciousness. The reception of the song indicates the audience that is eager to follow empowerment stories despite discussing their boundaries and consequences. Thus Lokah is a good example of regional cinema playing the global spectacle and domestic politics and making entertainment a place of dialogue. The success of the song represents not the end of resistance but a transformation into the popular form a form where ideology is neither solved but is constantly struggled with, rewritten, and experienced.

10. HYBRIDISATION OF FORM: GLOBAL SOUND IN REGIONAL CINEMA

The conscious musical hybridity of "Aalathinu Centre" is one of the most impressive of its features that predestines the changing association between the regional cinema and the world sound culture. The composition combines folk-devotional idioms, cinematic orchestration, and rap-impregnated protest rhythms and creates what Philip Tagg describes as "genre syncretism", where "musical meanings are generated through the interaction of different stylistic codes" (19). Instead of perceiving musical traditions as closed or original forms, the song adopts syncretism as expressive strategy that has been informed by the globalization. The method is symptomatic of a larger change in Malayalam film music, as local acoustic environments are gradually more deeply involved in the used and utilised musical languages of the world without any loss of cultural particularity.

This hybrid version can be understood as an example of what could be termed as a glocal compositional logic, that is, regional identity, expressed using globally circulating musical forms. The rap rhythms and electronic bass make the song fit in the transnational protest music, whereas indigenous percussion and melodic patterns make the song fit in the cultural soundscape in Kerala. Notably, this synthesis does not homogenize difference but rather creates stratified sonic texture where meanings are bargained as opposed to being wiped out. According to Tagg, genre syncretism is often created by the “the need to communicate local identities in a globalized cultural economy” (21). Hybridity, therefore, as seen in “Aalathinu Centre”, is both a form and a strategy applied to culture, and it allows the regional film to speak with a voice that is both local and recognizable.

Such hybridity literally confronts the longstanding dichotomy between the supposedly unadulterated tradition and the supposedly westernized one, which has been used for as long as digital media has been studying Indian film music to frame the discussion of the topic. The idea of the “third space” presented by Homi K. Bhabha can be used as a fruitful approach to the interpretation of this breakage. According to Bhabha, the “third space of enunciation” enables cultures of the postcolonial age to “rearticulate modernity” in a manner that is not nostalgically traditionalistic and unquestionably imitative of the West (56). This third space is exactly the mixture of local percussion instruments like chenda and ilathaalam and trap music and artificial bass in the score of Jakes Bejoy. In this case, modernity is not handed over, but rather remade in the performance traditions and rhythms of the indigenous.

The sonic identity that is produced is nationwide and worldwide all the same. The violent bass lines and computerized sound feelings are reminiscent of world youth culture and the rhythmic forms and harmonic sensibilities are reminiscent of the Kerala ritual and folk. This comity leads to the production of a sound that does not disavow locality and fetishizes the latter. Rather, it claims regional cinema as an agent of the world musical relations. Although Malayalam film music in the early days was mostly governed by Bollywood fashions or Hollywood orchestration, “Aalathinu Centre” is an indication of a change to regional experimentation, which exists with global languages confidently.

More importantly, this hybridization has ideological connotations. The song turns down rigid musical categories hence reflecting hybrid subjectivities of postcolonial audiences who live in more than one cultural world. Soundscape forms an aural metaphor to the modern identity, which is fluid, negotiated, and uncharacterised. In this regard, “Aalathinu Centre” illustrates how the musical form can be used as artistic commentary of its own, questioning the hierarchies of tradition and modernity, as well as how the regional cinema can be the place of creative and political experimentation.

11. THE ROLE OF THE SONG IN WORLD-BUILDING

Historically, the song sequence in Indian film usually served the purpose of a narrative interruption, an affective or aesthetic breach of narrative flow that momentarily halts the action of the plot in favour of spectacle or emotional outburst. According to Claudia Gorbman, film music has long been perceived as functioning on the background, setting the mood but not directly progressing the story line, and this role has been defined as a sort of narrative “pause” in the continuity (73). However, in Lokah, the radical break with this convention is made in “Aalathinu Centre”. Instead of interrupting the story, the song itself is part of the world-building of this film: as an anthem, character exposition, and a marketing tool. Its placement and form is actively involved in the creation of the mythic universe of the film and not a diversionary aspect.

One concept that is especially helpful in the interpretation of this change is Gorbman concept of “narrative cueing”. She maintains that music has the ability to induce “emotional and narrative interpretation” by leading the audience to read certain characters and themes (90). Rhythmic intensity, percussion aggression, and assertive lyrics are combined in “Aalathinu Centre” to prepare the viewers to interpret the heroine as something more than a typical hero. She is made to be mythic and prophetic--the core of the cosmology of the film as opposed to being merely a part of the plot. The sonic architecture in this way emerges as a narrative cue, teaching the audience on how to read the vested interests of the fictional world and the role of the protagonist in the fictional world.

More importantly, the world-building role of the song is not sparse of the diegesis of the movie. Aalathinu Centre is a transmedia anthem via its strategic repetition in its trailers, promotional teasers, music videos, and online campaigns. This circulation enables the song to put in place the tone, ideology and emotional register of Lokah even before viewers view the film itself. Of particular relevance in this case is the idea of “ubiquitous listening environments”, proposed by musicologist Anahid Kassabian, which claims that modern-day media music is shaping subjectivity on various platforms,

which exist in the area where people hear it repeatedly and unconsciously (102). Music becomes one of the most important processes that generate identity and affect in such surroundings.

The example of this change is “Aalathinu Centre” which is also simultaneously a cinematic story, digital commodity, and cultural chant. The repetition of the platforms enables it to go beyond the temporal boundaries of the film and embed itself in the daily practices of listening. Consequently, this makes the song a cross between film and fandom in that audiences can engage in the film world by repeating, remixing, and sharing it on social media. This participatory aspect makes the audience members co-inhabitants of the cinematic universe, and there is blurred boundaries between consumption and identification.

More importantly, the reconfiguration is an indication of a larger change in how Malayalam cinema approached music. The movie song is no longer restricted to the purpose of storytelling or emotional expenditure. Rather, it serves as a multi-platform world-building engine that has centralized narrative significance, ideological placement and spectatorship. “Aalathinu Centre” in *Lokah* illustrates the possibility of using music as an infrastructural component of cinematic worlds, which the regional cinema can adjust to the modern global patterns of building franchises without sacrificing cultural particularism. This song is therefore a good example of how sound when tactfully used is given the centrality of narrative coherence, myth-making, and cultural circulation.

“Aalathinu Centre” is a turning point in the ideological intervention in Malayalam cinema because it places female subjectivity on the narrative periphery and into the sonic and symbolic centre. Traditionally, the women in the mainstream Malayalam movies have served as emotional stabilizers, moral markers or narrative casualties—hardly as the agents of transformation of the cinematic universe. Even when females are in the center of the screen, their empowerment can be achieved through mediating male action or sacrifice. *Lokah* breaks this representational trend by giving the female protagonist not only narrative priority, but vocal authority. The repetition of the statement in the song about the woman being the centre of the world, works as the direct symbolic reverse of the established history of gender logic that has pushed women to peripheral status.

This reversal is an ideological power of the song, mainly in the sonic construction of the song. The female voice in this case is not ornamental and romantic, but rather commanding, rhythmic and insistent. According to film theorist Kaja Silverman, the filmic voice is a “site where ideology speak” (45), and thus, in most cases, it perpetuates such patriarchal hierarchies as establishing the power and vocal presence of masculinity. But in *Lokah* the woman voice takes back this ideological location. The voice has discursive power by influencing the musical structure and dominating the sonic foreground, and it alters sound into a gendered resistance mechanism instead of a passive expression.

This transition is further enhanced by the aggressive percussion and the multiple vocal textures, which occur in the song. Based on the ideas of R. Murray Schafer who interprets the notion of “acoustic space of power” as a way in which sound structures social relations and spatial power (92), *Aalathinu Centre* creates a sound space that disrupts the historically male dominated sphere of sound in auditory art in the region in terms of cinema. The song is not just a presence to the appearance of the main character; it actually creates her superiority in the sensual world of the film. Sound in this case is a spatializing power, placing the female body in the center of which narrative and myth revolve.

This sonic empowerment is reminiscent of the theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler, who perceives gender as a product of a “stylized repetition of acts” instead of deciding the nature of biology (179). The chanting of the protagonist, her dominating body position, and stable position serve as performative actions creating a new femininity based on power and action. Gender is therefore not a natural identity but a performance of power described in the song.

In turn, “Aalathinu Centre” is a feminist story and sound resistance at once. The song dislodges the established rules of cinema by putting female agency in line with acoustic dominance, and offers an alternative politics, grounded in sound. By doing this, *Lokah* redefines not only of the role of women in the Malayalam cinema but also the ideological potentials of sound as a form of empowerment.

12. CULTURAL ASSERTION WITHIN GLOBAL GENRE

The commercial and cultural success of *Lokah* is an indicator of a landmark of cultural assertion of the Malayalam cinema in the context of a global genre economy that is becoming more homogenized. Although the film can be subsumed under high budget production values, sophisticated visual effects, and narrative structures of the international superhero franchise, it cannot be easily absorbed by ideologies into a universalized film language. *Lokah* is, rather, an example of what Arjun Appadurai refers to as the “vernacular globalization”, which is a process where the global forms of culture

have been remade to express local histories, myths, and political sensibilities (32). The movie, therefore, proves that one does not need to be culturally erased or imitated to be a part of global systems of genres.

The key in this statement is the strategic application of mythic motifs and local cosmology in an internationally familiar template of the film. Instead of substituting the local belief systems with the abstract universal myths, Lokah incorporates its superhero story into culturally definite symbols, ritualistic images and textual textures. “Aalathinu Centre” becomes an important place where this negotiation is taking place. Its hybridity of sound, a fusion of electronic orchestration linked to the world pop culture and Malayalam hegemony of lyrics, creates a multiple auditory identity. The intentional code-switching of Malayalam-English is not an indicator of aspirational cosmopolitanism, but insists on linguistic competence, making it possible to write not only epic, futuristic, and mythic registers in Malayalam but also to do so successfully.

This denial of assimilation makes the song a cultural sovereignty. Global genres in the case of postcolonial media economies may be regarded as the arenas of unequal exchange, as the local industries accommodate the prevailing western models of narratives at the expense of the cultural specificity. The “Aalathinu Centre” reverses this habit in re-establishing regional epistemologies in an international spectacle. The song is not just a localization of a world genre; it is an indigenization of it, in the sense that global aesthetics are distributed via local systems of meaning-making and not imposed upon them.

It is especially applicable in the case when Stuart Hall claims that identity is “a politics of representation where identity is not found but produced” (5). In this context, identity is not a fixed inheritance, it is a performative act which is created in terms of representation, sound and circulation. Lokah generates an identity that opposes the cultural nostalgia and global standardization through foregrounding of regional myth, language and sonic authority.

Finally, the example of “Aalathinu Centre” is one of the postcolonial interventions of the global pop aesthetics. It shows how local cinema can be a way of absorbing international genre economies in its own mode, and of reinforcing world cinematic grammar in order to produce cultural affirmation instead of cultural watering down. By doing this, Lokah places Malayalam cinema not within the periphery of world popular culture, but as a force within itself, remaking its ideological formations.

13. IMPLICATIONS FOR FILM-MUSIC STUDIES

The prevalence and its popular culture appeal of the term “Aalathinu Centre” provoke a drastic reconsideration of major premises in the film-music studies, especially when considering regional cinemas. To begin with, the song prefigures the increasing multimodality of the film music today. No longer relegated to the sound register, the regional film songs are now operative as a text, event, and spectacle and, more importantly, performance. According to Claudia Gorbman, film music is involved in the making of meaning at “multiple levels of cinema experience” (2). A case in point is the “Aalathinu Centre” where sound, choreography, visual symbolism and lyrical assertion are all united to make a single ideological statement that transcends its contextual placement in the narrative of the movie.

Second, the song corrects the ancient belief that musical patterns work as story interruptions or emotional digressions. Classical film theory tended to consider the songs as the elements of overindulgence, and the cause-effect relations were not followed, but the emotional discharge. But the idea of Gorbman concerning the “narrative cueing” in which the music constructively organizes thematic interpretation (90) is especially applicable here. Not as interruption, but as infrastructure, “Aalathinu Centre” opens mythic hierarchies, makes the female protagonist the centre of the cosmology in the film, and sets the interpretive frame of the audience. In the case of film-music studies, this is an indication that we are moving beyond the interpretation of songs as secondary accessory elements to understanding how they are the processes of world-making that constitute ontology of narratives themselves.

Third, the urgency of film-music scholarship to respond to the digital and participatory cultures is pre-empted in the reception of the song. The engagement between the audience and Aalathinu Centre has been conducted mostly over social media, through memes, dance challenges, remixes and performative re-enactments instead of the traditional critical reviews. The critical idea, in this case, is the concept of participatory culture, introduced by Henry Jenkins, in which participants, the audiences, play as “active participants in the circulation and reinterpretation of media texts” (3). The film alone no longer stabilizes the meaning of the song, but is constantly re-authored when it comes to digital practices which dismantle the barriers between consumption and production.

This form of participatory afterlife also correlates with the assertion put forward by Anahid Kassabian that the contemporary film music is located in the atmosphere of “ubiquitous listening” in which viewers are exposed to songs in various platforms and contexts (102). “Aalathinu Centre” is spread as soundtrack, viral audio, political slogan, and cultural chant, which makes it difficult to follow classic spectatorship models. In the case of studies in film-music, it requires a broad methodological platform that takes into consideration circulatory, repetitive and affective attachment outside the cinema hall.

To the theorist of Indian cinema, the song illustrates that regional film music can be both global and local at the same time and both popular and political. Its hybridity, a sonic, linguistic, and ideological one, breaks down binaries commonly used to draw a line between mass entertainment and serious conversation. Furthermore, the way it expresses feminist agency with the help of sound and performance makes film music an important location in terms of gender ideology negotiation but not reflection.

After all, “Aalathinu Centre” is echoed, which implies that film music nowadays is a living discourse. It is the convergence of cultural politics, gender performativity, technological mediation and sonic experimentation. It is a paradigmatic step in regards to film-music studies: the study of songs cannot be conducted as part of a film, but as a dynamic cultural text within the framework of which identity, power, and collective imagination are actively created.

14. CONCLUSION

After all, Thani Lokah Murakkaari / Aalathinu Centre is not only an effective film song, but a cultural border where Malayalam popular film redefines its ideological parameters. What is remarkable about this song is that it is able to compress various changes, which include industrial, aesthetic, and political, into one performative change. The song is more a call than a statement, the music is more of a hybrid sonic identity based on the localized confidence and the song itself becomes a story generator and a statement of culture. These factors combined are an indication of a coming of age of Malayalam film culture in relation to myth, power and gender.

The song creates another cinematic subjectivity a female character, who is not unique in that she takes on masculine codes of heroism, yet because the narrative universe is reconfigured around her appearance. She is both symbolically and structurally central. She is not opposed to the world: she is the turning point, namely through which the world is comprehended. With this reconfiguration, a radical change in the way agency is conceived of in popular cinema is underway, in which sound, body and spectacle can all work together and enable female power instead of imprisoning it.

To Malayalam film-music studies, this case is indicative of a larger shift in realism-constrained narrative therapy towards trans-local myth-making, of the songs as decorative supplements to the songs as narrative sovereignty. The fact that the anthem has also been released in the digital realms also substantiates that film music is now an ideological interface between the film and the pop culture.

The repositioning of the woman as the “centre” of the world is thus not a rhetoric flourish but rather an effort to reclaim one culture. It claims that the modern Malayalam cinema can transform popular form into place of feminist and postcolonial reimbursement- where what used to be peripheral now has the power to determine what the entirety is.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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