

# Wearing Gold: A Study on Select Malayalam Movies

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## **I. Abstract**

Movies play a major role in the construction of cultures and customs. Rajasenana is a major figure of Malayalam cinema of the late twentieth century, especially when it comes to family entertainers. Family is a major social institution where changes can be initiated and that initiative can be something that would make greater impacts. This paper tries to analyze major Rajasenana movies of the late twentieth century and early twenty first century to study the creation of subtle narratives that would impact the use of gold in marriage and household and thus a construction of a set norm of how much gold a person can (should) ideally wear.

## **Key Words**

Media effects, Media representation, cultural construction.

Movies are mass entertainers and it can influence a large number of people despite the caste, class and educational background. Movies are a reflection society but the same time movies can also reshape society by affecting the thought process of the viewers. This media effect in shaping the culture comes under cultural studies. A lot of messages that people get from the media are taken up unconsciously. Even



when one thinks that they are immune to the influence of the media, it is not so in reality because it is nearly impossible to be uninfluenced by the media.

Rajasenana was one of the most successful film directors of the Malayalam film industry of the 1990s. Most of his films were huge success and are still watched in the Malayali household, especially in the family circle. *Aagraham* (1984) was his debut film. Movies of Rajasenana were the movies that family audience would always choose to go for, back in the late twentieth century and early twenty first century. So the ideas and ideologies perpetrated through his movies play a major role in creating customs and culture in the society. Rajasenana is a familiar name among the Malayali movie audience of the late nineties especially for his movies based on family and familial relationships. The movies that are taken for analysis in this paper are the most popular movies of Rajasenana that would fall into the category of family entertainers.

*Aadyathe Kanmani*(1995), *Malayali Maamanu Vanakkam*(2002), *Kadhanayakan* (1995), *Sreekrishnapuathu Nakshathrathilakkam*(1998), *Kottaram Veetile Appoottan*(1998), *Njangal Santhushtaranu* (1999), *Swapnalokathu Balabhaskar* (1996). These are the few Rajasenana movies that are taken for study in this paper. In almost all these films, the male protagonist belongs to the upper caste Hindu household and therefore the women characters in the household of the protagonist as well the girl that he gets married to, throw light on the simple politics of wearing gold.

In the movie *Swapnalokathu Balabhaskar*, when we get to see the character of Balabhaskar's mother, who is a married woman of an upper class, upper caste background, she is adorned with gold jewellery. Even inside the house she has many numbers of bangles on both her arms and a long gold chain around her neck



and a big earring, everything of gold. The girl who gets married to him is also seen to be wearing ample amount of gold on her body. The significance of tali is raised repeatedly at many points in the movie.

*Njangal Santhushtaranu* is a 1999 movie by Rajasenan that tells the story of a newly married couple Sanjeevan IPS and Geethu. Geethu, who is shown to be a someone who doesn't care about family and the family values, is mostly shown to be wearing hardly any gold at all. She does wear ornaments but not made of gold. Geethu's mother and aunty who are being portrayed as women who completely adhere to family values and bonds are seen to be wearing ample amounts of gold on their body. Geethu's character is shown to be wearing hardly any amount of gold until finally she becomes the woman that fits into the set social norms. In the final scene where a 'changed' Geethu is shown, she is seen to be wearing plenty of gold ornaments and even the earrings that she wears changes in this scene. So here we can see the association of gold ornaments to so called concept of an ideal wife, and an ideal married woman which are quite problematic in this movie as with much of the Rajasenan movies.

*Kottaram Veetile Appoottan* is yet another Rajasenan movie with Jayaram doing the lead role. The character of Jayaam, Appoottan, is seen to be developing feelings for the female lead and in his dreams of marrying her in the future he buys clothes and accessories for her and gold is an inevitable part of it. He buys gold ornaments for her. In his dreams the married Ambili is wearing ample amount of gold ornaments.

*Sreekrishnapurathe Nakshathrathilakkam* is yet another Malayalam movie of Rajasenan that professes the importance of family and familial values. The three main female characters in this movie are seen to be wearing the typical amount of gold that is expected to be worn by women of the upper caste Malayali household as



constructed through many of his other movies. The three women are seen to be wearing many gold chains, bangles and heavy earrings. And at the point where the family goes bankrupt, the men sell the gold ornaments to pay off the debts.

Kadhanayakan is a 1995 Rajasenana movie that is yet another tale of the Malayali upper caste household or *tharavaad*. The movie begins with the wedding of a girl of the household. The bride is obviously wearing plenty of gold, but the other women are also seen to be wearing a lot of gold on them. In the final scene when the entire household is in ransack, the elderly woman who knows the place well goes in search of the golden vessel, which is hinted as a great asset for a household and its value is shown to be more than that of the material value of the gold. In the movie *Malayali Maamanu Vanakkam*, towards the beginning of the movie when people are planning for the wedding and the wedding shopping, gold purchase is given specific significance. *Aadyathe Kanmani* tells the story of a Malayali household where the matriarchal figure insists on having a boy grandchild in the family. Before the wedding of the main leads, the girl who is from a poor household is troubled to raise the money to pay dowry to the guy from the rich household and gold is obviously demanded by the groom's mother. During the naming ceremony of the babies in the movie, the baby of the hero's household is given a golden waist chain while for the baby of the neighborhood it is just a black thread which the hero comes and replaces with a gold chain, thereby reinstating the significance of a gold chain over a black thread. So in the minds of people who are watching the movie it is unconsciously instilled that a baby deserves a gold chain and that a gold chain is socially more acceptable than a black thread.

In most of the movies of Rajasenana the main character belongs to rich upper caste family. The men of such rich household are seen to be wearing a gold chain around



their neck and often a golden bracelet too. An unmarried girl of the village is seen to be wearing tiny earrings, a thin gold chain and a bangle in each hand. The married women are seen to be wearing a long thick gold chain, many number of bangles, heavy earrings, and a much gold as possible. And the bride, the bride is seen to be wearing plenty of gold depending on the social and economic status of the groom. This can instill the idea that a minimal amount of gold should be owned by a household especially by the women.

Movies play a major role in affecting a person's sense of reality. Hardly any viewer can watch a movie without getting affected by it and entrenching at least some of the ideas and cultural practices that are being portrayed in the movie. Films are a powerful vehicle of culture. Film is of course a reflection of society and culture but at the same time it also works the other way around. Films play a major role in the creation of customs and the modification of culture and cultural practices. It would not be wrong to argue that it is an undeniable fact that the role of Malayalam cinema of the late twentieth century in setting customs and rituals for buying gold is not negligible. Movies not only represents society and culture but also a cultural construction happens through movies.

## II. Working Bibliography

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