

Cooked and Served with a Pinch of Love: Visualization of Food and Food Culture in the Malayalam movies Salt and Pepper and Usthad Hotel in the Light of Food Porn Theory

Shiji Ibrahim. U, Assistant Professor, Department of English, M. E. S. Asmabi College, P. Vemballur, Kodungallur, Kerala.

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Abstract

We need food to live and to move on. It is a basic necessity for all living beings. More than this, we love to see its preparation and how it is served. We observe how it makes its appearance on the dining table. Alternatively, having food has now taken different dimensions. It has moved from to fulfil the need of hunger to an Art form. Scrumptious food has taken a significant role in the recent Malayalam film industry. Malayali life has been intensely interwoven with various types of mouth-watering dishes. It has become a success- mantra for movies in Malayalam nowadays. In films, food plays the leading role in connecting human relations. It is said that the key to the heart is through the stomach. The movie "Usthad Hotel" (2012), directed by Anvar Rasheed, and "Salt and Pepper" (2011), directed by Aashiq Abu, are super hits in which food with its vibrant forms plays a significant role. The theory of Food Porn mainly deals with the glamorized presentation of food. Food porn provocatively displays food items, as in pornography. Just as the erotic visuals in porno cause sexual excitement in humans, food porn too tantalizes the minds. There is always a craving for the unattainable in both. The paper attempts to analyze this romanticized food culture in Malayalam movies.

Keywords: Food porn, Scrumptious, interwoven, erotic.

Objectives: (1) to analyze the presentation of food and food culture in Malayalam films.

(2) To substantiate the idea that food is a connecting link of human minds and a potent means to spread love and humanity.

The term 'Food Porn' was first used in feminist writer Rosalind Coward's 1984 book female book "Female Desire," in which she wrote:" That we should aspire to produce perfectly finished and presented food and it is a Symbol of willing enjoyable participation in serving others" (Coward 110)

The theory of food porn mainly advocates the glamorized visual presentation of food in advertisements, Cooking shows, and other social media like Instagram, Facebook, etc. food porn presents food items provocatively just in a way similar to porn photography. The sexy presentation of the body tantalizes human eyes in porn visuals, and the captivating appearance

of food also bewitches our senses. There is always a craving for the unattainable in both. This delusion is what makes it more luring.

What makes us enjoy the image of food? The psychological fact is that our brain already signals the experience of having it when we view it.

The various social media platforms lead us is a fantasy world of stimuli. The basic need of human beings includes the need for food and sex. Many associate our craving for food with sex. Cookery shows on television are capable enough to seduce our senses.

This paper attempts to present this romanticized food culture in Malayalam movies and shows that food is always associated with humanistic values like concern, care, affection, and bonding.

Ashiq Abu's movie 'Salt and pepper,' released in 2011, can be termed the first food movie in Malayalam. The title song unveils itself through multitudes of delectable cuisine. The procession of food items in the movie goes like this: The pain dosage, karimeen pollichathu covered in plantain leaves, the deep fried anchovies, steamy pretty, crispy uniyappams, the stalls of various colors of Galway, the famous ambalapuzha payasam, the traditional Kerala Madhya, different types of cool drinks served in busy streets, hot jalebis from the boiling oil, varieties of chips, large pots of Thalassesi dum biryani, etc. When the movie was released, there was a statutory warning - 'Do not watch it with a hungry stomach.'

The leading roles in the movie were played by Mr. Lal and Swetha Menon, who acted as two middle-aged bachelors. Their love story mainly moves forth through the thread of the food narrative. They got connected for the first time through a wrongly dialed food delivery call. However, that call later enkindles a romantic relationship. The hero's narration of the preparation of "Joan's Rainbow Cake" over the phone to the heroin is brilliantly presented.

The multi-colored cake story knits a strong bond between the lovers. After the release of the movie 'Joan's Rainbow Cake,' it became a favourite theme in the cake-making industry. Each layer of this case is baked in expectation and love. The final presentation of this yummy cake in the movie is appetizing.

Passion combined with humanity is something ethereal.

Anvar Rasheed's movie 'Usthad Hotel' was released in 2012. It is a heart-warming movie. The central character is Faizi, who wishes to pursue his career as a chef. He values his passion more than money and is ready to go to any extent to fulfill his dream. As his father disagrees with his choice, he feels disappointed and leaves his family to join his ancestral land, and that is Kerala. His grandfather Kareem Sikka, the role played by the legendary actor Thilakan, was a

great cook, and everyone loved his cooking. 26Both these characters are united with their familiar character, i.e., love for cooking.

His grandfather gives him valuable advice on cooking: to add some love to it (sprinkle a pinch of mohabath) when you cook. Furthermore, that not only fills the stomachs but also the hearts of people. A fantastic presentation of food can be seen in various scenes of the movie. According to food porn, when we have a close visual of food, we have an ultimate experience with it.

In the movie, there are scenes of a busy kitchen of a five-star hotel where varieties of food are prepared according to the order.

Faizi experiments with fusion food. His making of it with Kerala Perotta and Spanish omelet is mouth-watering. These scenes are examples of food porn visuals that sticks the audience to their seats till the end of the movie. Faizi's grandfather asks him to answer a fundamental question: "what is the significance of a great cook?" Faizi sets out to find an answer to this question, eventually leading to a complete transformation. He understands that the real purpose of a cook is to find a solution to the hunger of the poor.

Faizi, with the help of his grandfather's friend in Tamil Nadu, sets out to feed the poor, i.e., the orphans, beggars, and the unwanted and neglected human beings on the streets. So, in modern society, various social media platforms celebrate the aesthetic presentation of food and food culture. Nevertheless, thinking one more step ahead, we realize that the purpose of food other than satisfying one's bowel is to unite human minds and spread the values of humanity and love.

Food is a means of nutrition and a source of entertainment and relief in our life. Even it has a profound psychological influence on our minds. It is said that sweets, especially chocolates, can elevate our mood. It is prescribed by doctors as an antidepressant and does the job of dopamine in our nervous system.

Sometimes we eat together with friends and family and thus constitute communal dining. It proclaims our culture and the social nature of human beings. Looking at history, we can have numerous examples to showcase how food acts as a connecting medium to unite society. The Renaissance movement in Kerala brought about radical changes in society. It reformed Kerala in sociocultural aspects. During the early 20th century, Kerala was a land of many social evils. There existed untouchability, caste system, etc., in the Hindu religion. Sahodaran Ayyappan was a social reformer who came forward with a revolutionary communal dining concept. i.e., eating together with all the casts. It was beyond imagination at that time.

Panthibhojanam called for serious opposition from the upper sections of society. Since the event questioned the upper caste dictums and created unrest in the society. Ezhava community

and related organizations called for a social boycott of the twenty-four Ezhavas who participated in the event. They were not allowed to attend weddings or death ceremonies, and the other members of the society ostracized them and denied services to them. Many faced difficulties in leading a peaceful social life. (Saranya, 2019)

It unveiled the reality that upper-class people are not polluted by simply touching a lower caste. It opened the eyes of many. Here food becomes an artefact from history to show that it can integrate humanity.

Like food, cinema is one of the most popular mediums influencing myriads of minds. It often portrays the realities of life and is one of the fastest-growing industries. Whatever is portrayed onscreen has a real influence on the mass. The films discussed here mainly deal with Kerala's food and food traditions and show how the topic has become an essential factor in making sense of culinary art and culture.

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