



Research Paper

A Critical Analysis of *Marakkar* as an Epic on Love, Loss and Vengeance

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Marakkar: Lion of the Arabian Seas is an epic Malayalam movie on warfare by the legendary admiral, KunjaliMarakkar, against the Portuguese. The movie is read in the light of history, unending warfare for wealth, power, geographical expansion, the unyielding spirit of patriotism and many more. The narrative of Kunjalimarakkar dates back to the 16th century. Legends sing of his heroic and secular deeds, applauding him as a bread giver to the poor, protector to the unguarded, and helper to the helpless. Bringing in the perspective of a tragedy, *Marakkar* contains the elements of a conventional tragedy. The titular hero Kunjali, like any classical tragic hero, was governed by a tragic flaw that drew him towards his death penalty. He is driven by an error in judgment and is left grief-stricken due to his unforeseen action. This paper attempts to throw light on the fact that it is blind love for family, friends, community, power, honour and wealth that has resulted in the tragic ending of most of the characters including the central character of the movie, Marakkar IV. The array of traitors is born out of a blind passion for wealth, power, life and blood relations. The hero is torn between love, guilt and an unquenched thirst for vengeance. Love and being loved are humane. But, the ultimate truth of love is achieved when one ceases the pursuit of material possession in the name of love and seek forth inner peace by abandoning bloodshed and vengeance.

Key words: bloodshed, love, loss, warfare, vengeance

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Vengeance has been a recurrent theme in movies, in fact, Malayalam movies are no different. The renowned director, Priyadarshan, has experimented with the theme in his various motion pictures including *Oppam* and *Aryan*. Basically, historical narratives are found incomplete without barbaric, fiendish and heartless acts. *Marakkar: Lion of Arabia* is enriched with a sweeping battle sequence that explores the conflicting human minds caught and torn between the antithetical notions of right and wrong, good and bad, and love and vengeance. It is an epic movie on warfare by the legendary admiral, KunjaliMarakkar, against the Portuguese. The movie was produced by Antony Perumbavoor. Synthesizing history, fiction, and folklore, *Marakkar* hit the big screens on 2 December 2021, against the crew's planning to release it on OTT. Encountered with mixed reviews of praise and criticism, it screens the life of Marakkar IV. It was not because Marakkar IV was the one who brought war strategies against the Portuguese, but because it was his biography that has some clarity in history, remarks the director. While the Portuguese underwrite him as a villain, the Arabs hail Marakkar as a savior.

"Marakkar was a patriot whose loyalty to his land came above barriers of caste and religion. That is my message in my film. If KunjaliMarakkar could do it so many years ago, why do we find it so difficult to put our country ahead of caste, religion, and region?" -The Hindu

Priyadarshan reveals the fact that the story of Marakkar is oblivious and the facts available are contradictory. In addition to that, he admits that the movie is a combination of very little fact and more of fiction.

Kunjali is found cajoled and doted on by Kadheejumma, his mother when the movie begins. He was protected immensely as he became fatherless in his early childhood. Kunjaliloved her back only to lose her irreclaimably. He was defenseless when his mother encountered untimely death. His fondness and tenderness towards his mother are revealed during a conversation with his friend Thangudu.

“From the time I can remember, till I saw my mother’s death, she fed me with her hands and slept on her lap. Whenever I close my eyes, my mother stands before me even now. She wakes me up calling, ‘Kunha’.” (01. 45. 20)

His wedlock with Ayesha, his childhood friend, did not last longer than a night. She was shot dead by the Portuguese army and he had to carry her motionless body that very night. Before he regained consciousness of what was happening around him, within a matter of minutes, he lost his whole family. Apparently, the night left a gory stain in the mind of young Kunhali. Bette Davis, the renowned American actor, documents her traumatic life in her only novel, *The Lonely Life* the pleasure and pain of love and loss. She points up the stain left by lost love, “Pleasure of love lasts but a moment. Pain of love lasts a lifetime” (169.) It created an inflicting anguish on the family, when it dawned on them that Moidu, their close associate and a family friend, was behind this treason.

Moidu’s avarice persuaded him to join hands with their common enemy to demolish the entire family. His avarice had a short life, though. Kunhali’s affection for his mother and Aysha outstayed Moidu’s. The plot devised by Kunhali and his uncle worked against Moidu and he too faced an untimely death. Though seeking revenge is a nature impulse of the wounded, it “... is an act of passion; vengeance of justice. Injuries are revenged; crimes are avenged” elucidates Johnson in his essays on revenge. Taking vengeance upon Moidu does not bring an end to his thirst for blood. Kunhali wades through blood further to assassinate Alphonso de Noronha, Portuguese Viceroy of India. Kunhali reminds the Viceroy before he was killed,

“Years ago, do you remember killing and burning down an elderly Marakkara and his family? You tied my mother to a pole and slit her throat. I stood there, unable to open my mouth, listening to her shrieks”. (01. 28. 31)

It was his command to burn down Kunhali’s family and uproot their existence. Kunhali retaliated with the same coin! The Viceroy had his last breath in the same way as Kunhali’s mother had. “...I have searched rigorously for your face. But destiny brought us face to face only now” (01. 29. 07) were the last words echoed in the Viceroy’s ears.

Kunhali developed a fraternal love for the young Chinese, Chinali, who was kept hostage during an attack. Chinali fought Kunhali’s army to protect his mother from the hands of the enemies. Kunhali found him in Chinali, the son who doted heavily on his mother. The musician in Chinali caught the attention of Archa. The daughter of Dharmoth Paniker, a rich man from a privileged class. Nonetheless she was betrothed to Achuthan, the youngest son of Mangattachan and an admirer of her. Despite that, Archa and Chinali fell for each other as they shared common interest in music and arts.

“Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused.” (Coelho 76)

As a consequence of their mutual courtship, Archa and Chinali had to succumb to unprecedented death. Kunhali who is predetermined to witness the gory sight reflects, “Just because they made a mistake of loving each other, look at them lying like dead logs” (01. 59. 15)

In fact, this incident instills anger and resentment in Kunhali. Apparently, he resolves to counterattack, “I won’t spare that scoundrel who did this heinous act...I will wash his sins with his own blood” (01. 59. 24) following which he murders Anandhan who was proven innocent as the narrative unfurls. Anandhan’s innocence dawned on Kunhali subsequently when things fell apart. Vengeance in terms of love for kinsmen exists since ancient times. Shakespeare puts it in Henry VI- Part 3, “As for the brat of this accursed duke// Whose father slew my father, he shall die” (1.3.5-6).

Moin Kutty, the brother of Aimooty met with death at the hands of Chinali. As a result of his covetousness and benevolence for his brother, Moin Kutty gave in to death. He joined allies with the Zamorins to trap and murder Kunhali. Fate was not in favour of Moin that he was killed in succession.

The uncompromising concern for Achu, led Anandhan to win the hands of Archa who was, by now, pregnant with Chinali’s baby. Achu’s failure in winning Archa’s heart poisoned his mind and action which resulted in Chinali’s death. Achu stabbed Chinali from behind, an action that does not suit a warrior. In fact, truth shall not reveal until the appropriate time arrives. Kunhali misjudged Anandhan’s taking his sword off Chinali’s body and presumed Anandhan to be the murderer of Chinali. Often tragic heroes do succumb to such instincts! So did Kunhali. Subsequently, Kunhali slayed Anandhan thereby denying to let his body off for the burial rituals. Kunhali was blinded by his love for Chinali and Archa. Death awaited Kunhali in the guise of treason when Sainaba betrayed Kunhali to the Portuguese. Sainaba, the mourning widow of Aimooty, was easily convinced by Achu about Kunhali’s role behind her husband’s murder. The helplessness and abandonment of the widow are exploited by the power.

Achu’s notions for power and honour brought about the act of vengeance on Kunhali. Zamorin’s decision to rope in Kunhali as the Commander of the Zamorin Navy kindled the fire in Achu. In addition to that, his love for Archa resulted in treachery and serialized murders of Chinali, Achu, consequently, of his elder brother, Anandhan.

It is evident that love for humanity is often rewarded. Kunhali was able to conquer the minds of the poverty-stricken community because of his unparalleled and secular approach toward humanity. The poor who were helped by Kunhali tore off the lookout notice on him. Anandan announces that “Kunhali’s hideout is within the hearts of the countrymen. They won’t allow Gods to enter there and touch him” (00. 52. 06)

Khadeejumma tells Kunhali about how his grandfather longed to cease his involvement in war and bloodshed. “I- got devastated by the bloodshed” (0.12.15). He lost many of his blood relations in the war through the final victory was his. Khadheejumma adds, “After the burial of his relatives he (Kutti Ali Marakkar) promised, I don’t want to cause anymore bloodshed, Your Highness” (0.12.33).

In the concluding part of the movie, Mangattachan, the Commander in Chief of King Zamorin’s army resolves to denounce his position and resolves to live a life aloof from war and bloodshed. “I have lost my son and I don’t want to be held in power” (2.03.12). This is when his son is murdered and was denied the burial rites deserved by Kshatriyas. Mangattachan is a strong and loyal historical figure who stood stern to establish justice. Losing his son was an epiphanic moment and the lesson he learnt was to denounce his material possessions on the Earth.

Marakkar: The Lion of Arabia is an epic narrative of love and loss. The personages are caught between good and evil, vice and virtue, and love and revenge. Questions around love abound. There had been debates on whether revenge is legally or morally defensible. Sir Francis Bacon in his essay elaborates on the aspects of vengeance in a Humanist perspective. He argues, ‘Revenge is a kind of wild Justice; which the more Man’s nature runs to, the more ought the Law to weed it out’ (p. 9). David Leeming quotes Baldwin in his biography about love, “Love does not begin and end the way we seem to think it does. Love is a battle; love is a war; love is a growing up” (265). To sum up, *Marakkar* documents love as adorable for it’s a potion to one extend and toxic at the other end.

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