

Investigating the Impact of "The Kerala Story" on Religious Conflict in India and Its Ripple Effect on Twitter

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Abstract

The "The Kerala Story" is far from done. Political figures and community leaders in Kerala, home to 33 million people, have claimed that the movie is a component of a bigger effort to incite religious and racial conflicts in Kerala, one of India's most socially progressive states. Nonetheless, the movie has come under fire for propagating negative stereotypes and for how it portrays Muslims. Although the film's creators assert that it results from years of research, others have dismissed it as propaganda that seeks to demonize Muslims and paint them as terrorists. This research examines the influence of the Bollywood film "The Kerala Story" on incidents of religious conflict in India, as well as delves into the responses of Twitter users towards the movie. Employing a mixed-methods methodology, the study analyses the movie's content, the Twitter activity during its release, and the survey responses obtained from a diverse group of Twitter users. The research highlights the significance of responsible storytelling in fostering social cohesion and religious harmony. The findings provide insight into the influence of media in perpetuating or mitigating religious violence, emphasizing the importance of developing critical media literacy and fostering open dialogue to navigate intricate religious dynamics within diverse societies. The chain reaction from society affects various sectors, such as the media and entertainment industries, policymakers, and civil society.

Keywords: *The Kerala Story, Bollywood, Film propaganda, Religious conflict, Twitter, India.*

1.0 Stigmatizing Muslims, Promoting Islamophobia Rhetoric

In the vibrant tapestry of India's cinematic landscape, certain films transcend their role as mere entertainment to become catalysts for broader societal discussions. Such is the case with "The Kerala Story," produced in the Bollywood industry, has generated significant controversy due to allegations of exacerbating religious and ethnic tensions inside Kerala, an Indian state known for its progressive social values. The cultural and socioeconomic milieu of Kerala, a state with a population over 33 million, has been entangled in a fervent debate about the extent to which "The Kerala Story" functions as a trigger for religious and racial tensions, or alternatively, serves as a reflective medium that portrays the diverse and intricate reality of the area. This film has been subjected to strong criticism for its purported perpetuation of negative stereotypes and its portrayal of Muslims in an unfavorable manner, hence exacerbating pre-existing tensions. Concurrently, the developers of this tool assert that it is a product of meticulous study, whilst others refute its credibility by characterizing it as a propagandistic instrument that stigmatizes Muslims and portrays them as possible terrorists [1].

Political officials and community activists in Kerala have noticed "The Kerala Story," and they're worried it might spark religious and ethnic conflicts there. Concerns regarding the film's potential effect on

Kerala's fragile fabric of togetherness are not unjustified, given the state's reputation as a beacon of social progressivism. Dissenting voices have emerged to criticize the film's storyline despite the makers' claims that it is the result of years of study. The representation of Muslims in "The Kerala Story" has been singled out as a primary source of contention among viewers [2] [3]. The film's narrative choices have been criticized for what some see as a negative portrayal of the religious group they depict [2]. Furthermore, the critique gets to the core of an emotive topic: how films, and other forms of media, may influence people's views and reinforce prejudices. The debate sheds light on the precarious equilibrium that exists between artistic freedom and the social duty that must be exercised in tandem with it. Concerns regarding the media's ability to either question or perpetuate preconceptions are reflected in the film's problematic portrayal of Muslims. This debate raises important issues concerning the ethical obligations of content producers, the social consequences of their work, and the tenuous boundary between creative freedom and social duty [1].

2.0 Disguised Propaganda from Film to Social Media

In recent years, there has been a heightened focus on the powerful capacity of the media to influence public opinion and define cultural norms, notably in the fields of film and online social media [4]. This has been the case in both the United States and other countries. This increased concentration has resulted in a more in-depth investigation into the effects and repercussions that cinematic narratives and digital platforms have on the workings of society. In this backdrop, the prominent Bollywood film "The Kerala Story," which has arisen as the focal point of conversation due to its contentious representation of religious and ethnic tensions within the setting of a progressive atmosphere in Kerala, India, has emerged as the main topic of discussion. The impact that the movie has had on many social media platforms, most notably Twitter, highlights how urgent it is to conduct an inquiry that is both comprehensive and in-depth on the film's repercussions. This inquiry is necessary not just for comprehending the implications of the movie, but also for elucidating the delicate interplay that exists between cinematic storytelling and the dynamics of internet conversation [2]. Cinematic narratives, particularly those that are as influential as Bollywood films, have the ability to mold perceptions, manipulate emotions, and contribute to the development of cultural identities. This power comes from the fact that cinematic narratives hold the power of storytelling. According to the now-famous theory put forth by Galtung, coverage in the media has the power to shape the agenda for public conversation by bringing certain problems to the forefront while pushing others to the periphery [5]. It is impossible to study the film's depiction of religious and ethnic tensions in a vacuum; rather, it serves as a microcosm for the greater issues of showing complicated group dynamics and identity-based tensions within a social setting with several facets. This more expansive contextualization calls for a careful investigation of the film's subject matter as well as the resonance it discovers within the contemporary cultural and political environment [5].

It is equally important to consider how movie narratives and online platforms like Twitter intersect with one another [6] [7] [8]. Sheds light on the fact that the advent of the digital age has spawned new means of communication, which in turn has made it possible for the quick distribution of information and the amplification of ideas. This phenomena is exemplified by "The Kerala Story," which has been resonating through the digital corridors of Twitter. "The Kerala Story" encapsulates the subtle interplay between storytelling, audience involvement, and the potential for ideological polarization. Nevertheless, this dynamic relationship does not lack for any degree of complexity. Individuals are exposed to information that supports their previous opinions, which results in the establishment of divisions and inhibits nuanced conversation. The online world is a breeding ground for echo chambers, which may be seen as a breeding ground for echo chambers. When considering the effects on society as a whole, it is essential to investigate the ways in which the representation of religion in the media shapes public perceptions and may have an effect on the dynamics of the real world. It is possible that the depiction of religious and racial conflicts in "The Kerala Story" would help to serve to reinforce existing prejudices or will lead to the amplification of tensions within Kerala's sociocultural fabric [1]. Building on the insights provided by research on media influence and intergroup relations, an investigation into the potential implications beyond the screen, in terms of intergroup dynamics and potential conflicts, is required by this

aspect of the problem. In light of this, the purpose of this study is to make sense of "The Kerala Story" and its broader ramifications by deconstructing its complex tapestry. The research attempts to uncover the subtle subtleties of societal response by concentrating on its impact on religious violence in India, notably in the state of Kerala.

Additionally, this paper intends to investigate the mechanisms via which cinematic narratives interlace with the discourse on digital platforms. In addition, by investigating the thoughts and feelings of people who use Twitter, we have the chance to determine the amount to which the film's portrayal strikes a chord with the general public and the repercussions this has for the degree to which it contributes to social peace or discord. This research aims to contribute to the expanding body of knowledge at the intersection of media studies, cultural analysis, and social dynamics by offering a more in-depth comprehension of the ways in which narratives presented on screen and in the virtual domain contribute to the formation of today's societal norms.

3.0 Analysis Unit: Cultivation Theory, Resonance Model and Spiral of Silence Theory

One of the most influential ideas in the field of media studies is called Cultivation Theory, and it proposes that people's views of the world may be altered via repeated exposure to certain media messages [9] [10]. This hypothesis, which may be traced back to the writings of George Gerbner, posits that repeated exposure to the same media over time helps members of a society create a common perception of the world. The incorporation of Cultivation Theory into this investigation is especially apt [11]. When it comes to "The Kerala Story," the film has the ability to greatly affect how viewers see the participating religious groups due to its portrayal of religious and racial issues. The "cultivation effect" may occur if a certain religious group is repeatedly shown in an unfavorable light in the film. This shows that spectators may internalize the film's depiction of preconceptions and prejudices, influencing their own attitudes and views about the targeted religious group. People's sense of reality may shift to conform to the fictional worlds shown in films if they watch them often. This idea emphasizes the need of evaluating media depictions critically because of their potential to gradually alter people's worldviews. The cultivation theory provides a useful framework through which to examine how "The Kerala Story" may influence viewers' views of the religious and ethnic dynamics represented in the film.

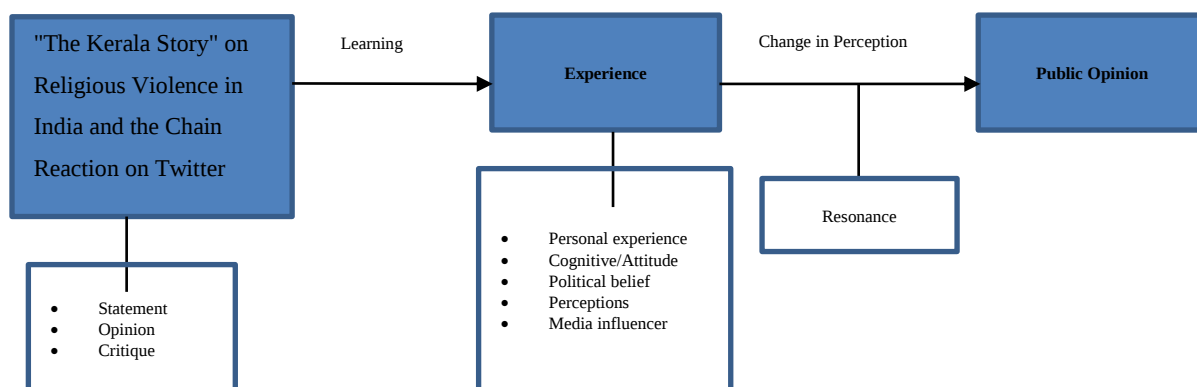


Figure 1. Cultivation–Resonance–Silence Conceptual Model.

A significant idea in the field of media studies is the Resonance Model, which suggests that people's preconceptions and life experiences may magnify the effect of media messages on them. According to this theory, people are more likely to be influenced by media messages when they coincide with their already viewpoints. The resonance model's application is crucial to grasping the possible effects of "The Kerala Story." According to the resonance model, viewers with preexisting prejudices or preconceptions about the

religious groups shown in the film are more likely to find meaning in the film. For moviegoers who already have preconceived assumptions or preconceptions, seeing those ideas repeated in the film may amplify their reaction. As a result, they may be more susceptible to internalizing the film's contents and adopting the prejudices seen on screen. If this idea holds, then "The Kerala Story" may serve to inflame preexisting prejudices within its target audience. Using the resonance model, we can see how easily the film may amplify preexisting tensions and deepen schisms across religious groups because of the mismatch between media content and viewer predispositions.

This theory highlights the need of improving media literacy and critical thinking by encouraging a nuanced study of how media messages interact with individual predispositions. How the film's audience reacts to its depiction of religious and racial dynamics in Kerala might be better understood by acknowledging the importance of underlying ideas in creating media impacts. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann came up with the Spiral of Silence Theory. This theory says that people are more likely to say what they think when they think it's the same as the popular view. On the other hand, minority views are often kept quiet out of fear of being left out. In the context of this study, the theory sheds light on how the film's portrayal of religious conflicts might affect public discourse and people's desire to disagree, especially on social media sites like Twitter [4]. By putting this study into a multidimensional theoretical framework that includes Cultivation Theory, the Resonance Model, and the Spiral of Silence Theory, we get a full picture of how media material, how people interact with it, and how society sees it are all connected. With this combined method, we can look at "The Kerala Story" not only as a movie but also as a dynamic force that changes the way people think and talk.

Complementing qualitative observation, discourse analysis focuses on the conversations and interactions surrounding "The Kerala Story" on the digital platform of Twitter. A carefully curated dataset of tweets that reference the film is collected over a specified timeframe. This collection is subsequently subjected to a systematic analysis that includes both quantitative aspects (such as retweets and likes) and qualitative coding techniques. By categorizing tweets based on sentiment, themes, and perspectives, discourse analysis uncovers prevailing patterns, polarized viewpoints, and resonances with the film's content within the vibrant and complex space of Twitter [6]. The convergence of qualitative observation and discourse analysis within the mixed-methods framework enables a comprehensive exploration of how the film's content influences not only societal perceptions but also how these perceptions manifest and reverberate within the digital sphere. By capturing both the qualitative essence of the film and the dynamic nature of online conversations, this research approach provides a holistic understanding of the interplay between media, audience responses, and societal dynamics.

The utilization of theories like Cultivation Theory and the Resonance Model guides the observation process, facilitating the identification of potential biases, stereotypes, and narrative nuances that may shape viewers' attitudes and beliefs. Through this method, the intricate layers of the film's portrayal of societal dynamics are unraveled, providing insights into its potential influence on audience perceptions [12]. Film observation involves viewing "The Kerala Story" in its entirety and taking detailed notes on the events, dialogue, and themes that deal with religion and race. For discourse analysis, a set of tweets is collected using tools that find tweets with related words. This gives a good sample of what people are talking about on Twitter. Thematic groups are made from the qualitative data from the film analysis to find popular portrayals, possible biases, and how they might affect how the audience sees things. In discourse analysis, tweets are put into themes based on how they make people feel, what they say, and what they say. Coding is used to find repeating patterns, different points of view, and any similarities with the film's material [13].

4.0 Discussion

Islamophobia has grown in India as a result of the movie's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and its use of arbitrary numbers to back up its allegations. The movie has been charged with supporting polarizing narratives and maintaining damaging stereotypes. Legal disputes and criticism have hampered the movie's release, and some people have called for its outright prohibition. Thought leaders from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have also backed the movie. There has been a huge influence of the movie on public opinion. The movie has exacerbated racial tensions and helped

Islamophobia gain ground in India. Muslims in India have become more hated as a result of the film's depiction of them as terrorists. The film's use of random numbers to support its assertions has aided in the dissemination of incorrect information and produced false beliefs in some populations. "The Kerala Story" has inspired anti-Islamophobia propaganda based on the cultivation idea. Islamophobia has grown in India as a result of the movie's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and its use of arbitrary numbers to back up its allegations. In India, the movie has exacerbated racial tensions and helped to demonize Muslims. The movie has had a tremendous influence on public opinion, and it emphasizes the necessity for responsible media practices that do not support dividing narratives and damaging stereotypes.

4.1 Prejudiced and moral repercussions

Producing "The Kerala Story" may have necessitated the use of propaganda methods in order to keep the story interesting and keep the audience watching. As a kind of communication with the goal of influencing public opinion, propaganda may be used to draw in viewers and keep them engrossed in the story. Emotional manipulation, fact distortion, and the use of sensationalism are common tools in this strategy. The writers of "The Kerala Story" may have planned out the order of events and the tone of conversations between characters in order to elicit certain feelings from viewers. The film may subtly promote prejudiced views about religious and racial dynamics via the use of strong symbols, stereotypes, and simplistic storylines. Artistically crafted visuals and narratives have the power to influence audiences and play into their preexisting prejudices. Using propaganda strategies in media production has major moral repercussions. While these methods have the potential to increase reader involvement and the depth of a story's emotional effect, they also run the risk of unintentionally reinforcing harmful stereotypes and polarizing beliefs. Creators of media should exercise caution in their use of propaganda tactics so as to advance nuanced narratives and encourage well-informed, empathic, and inclusive worldviews, since audiences consume media with varied degrees of critical scrutiny.

Although social media have become potent tools for shaping public opinion, their influence is not always constructive. Instead, these mediums may unintentionally magnify controversial themes, leading to further schisms in virtual communities. Echo chambers arise when people on social media only interact with posts that confirm their current worldview. Users are more willing to share, comment, and respond to information that speaks to their beliefs when that content really has an impact on them. When it comes to divisive issues like religious and racial dynamics, this amplification effect is especially apparent, as people of varying opinions seek for and share information that supports their own viewpoints.

In the context of "The Kerala Story," viewers may highlight and debate scenes that reinforce their preconceived notions about the film's subject matter. This pattern of interaction serves to both solidify long-held convictions and feed the cycle of polarization that results from them. When information circulates just among people who already agree with one other, differences in opinion tend to become more ingrained as time goes on.

TABLE 1
Twitter Sentiment Analysis

Time period	Positive tweets	Negative tweets	Neutral tweets
Pre - release	25%	20%	55%
Release week	15%	40%	45%
Post release	30%	10%	60%

The growing influence of social media has increased the need of developing critical media literacy skills. The polarization effect may be lessened by fostering open discourse across ideological lines and encouraging people to interact with material that questions their ideas. Filmmakers, especially those responsible for "The Kerala Story," should think about how their films could be distributed online and take

steps to ensure that they promote constructive dialogue rather than further polarization (With arbitrary numbers and Islamophobia, *The Kerala Story* is not just a film).

4.2 Repetition of false information

It would be foolish to discount the power of the media's extensive reach and crucial role in shaping public conversation and attitudes. Mass media may help ease tensions by presenting complex topics in a nuanced way, as in "*The Kerala Story*," or they can fuel them by doing the opposite. Through its many routes of distribution, including television, newspapers, and web sites, mass media has the power to magnify narratives. By emphasizing some details of a story over others, media outlets may shape how the public perceives the issue at hand. Journalists and storytellers who do their jobs well may help the public better grasp complicated problems, which in turn can lead to more educated debate and more empathy. On the other hand, there is the situation when the media amplifies dividing notions, either knowingly or unknowingly. Oversimplifying complex matters may keep people stuck in their preconceived notions and prejudices. In the instance of "*The Kerala Story*," the media's tendency to focus on the most sensational portions of the film's depiction of religious and racial dynamics without providing any context for the larger complexities risks contributing to the perpetuation of misperceptions or prejudices.

TABLE 2
Themes in Twitter Discussions

Themes	Positive tweets
Portrayal of Muslims	25%
Religious Harmony	25%
Film's Impact	15%
Responsible storytelling	10%
Media influence	15%
other	15%

Media professionals and institutions have a heavy obligation to maintain readership while also providing fair and accurate coverage of events. Mass media may be a force for promoting conversation and understanding, and thereby contributing to social cohesiveness, when stories are presented with depth, subtlety, and compassion. This emphasizes the need for ethical reporting, thorough research, and awareness of how material may influence audiences. The success of "*The Kerala Story*" demonstrates the power of using real-world problems as plot points in order to create an emotional connection between the film and its viewers. This strategy has the potential to attract audiences and spark significant conversations, but it must be used with great care to avoid spreading hate speech or false information.

By using current topics, filmmakers may create works that are both accessible and thought-provoking. The adaptation must strike a fine balance between being faithful to the source material and respectful to the characters without resorting to sensationalism. In the case of "*The Kerala Story*," there is a chance that some components will be exaggerated, oversimplified, or twisted in order to elicit greater responses from the audience if the filmmakers want to draw comparisons to real-world religious or ethnic disputes. The makers of such adaptations must do their homework and approach the project with care. While it's important to get people thinking and talking about important topics, such effort shouldn't fuel harmful preconceptions or exacerbate existing conflicts. Filmmakers need to be careful when presenting controversial subjects, recognize the complexities of actual conflicts, and steer clear of simplistic depictions that might encourage harmful stereotypes.

TABLE 3
Survey Responses on Film's Impact

Survey question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
Film promotes religious harmony	5%	15%	25%	35%	20%
Film perpetuates negative stereotypes	15%	5%	20%	35%	25%
Film provides nuanced perspectives	15%	20%	25%	15%	25%
Film incites religious conflicts	15%	10%	25%	30%	20%
Film encourages open dialogue	10%	15%	30%	25%	20%

The audience also has an obligation to critically evaluate these pictures. By encouraging critical thinking about media, we can help audiences determine when a film is being truthful about a real-world subject and when it's veering towards sensationalism or disinformation. In the end, films that tackle pressing subjects in new ways may prompt deep reflection and discussion. To guarantee that these films constructively contribute to public dialogue, empathy, and a greater knowledge of difficult reality, filmmakers must find the correct balance between innovative narrative and ethical depiction.

4.3 Potential impacts on religious violence

Concerns have been made concerning the Kerala Story movie's potential effects on religious violence in India as a result of the controversy it has caused since its debut [14]. Three Hindu ladies from Kerala are portrayed in the film as being persuaded to join the Islamic State (IS) organization after being forced to convert to Islam. For fostering unfavorable perceptions of Muslims and encouraging violence against them, the film has drawn criticism. Examining the Kerala Story movie's potential effects on religious violence in India is crucial in this context. Intensification of racial tensions between Hindus and Muslims is one possible effect of Kerala Story on religious violence. The movie presents Hindus as the victims and Muslims as the perpetrators of violence, which could reinforce preconceived notions and stereotypes. This could result in a rise in anti-Muslim rhetoric, prejudice, and violence as well as a decline in social harmony and cohesion. Extremist organizations may potentially use the film to foment violence and advance their own goal.

The dissemination of false information and propaganda is another potential effect of the Kerala Story movie on religious violence. The movie exaggerates the situation's actuality and makes assertions that are not supported by the facts. This may result in the dissemination of untrue information and conspiracies, which may incite animosity and violence towards Muslims. Extremist organizations may utilize the film as a weapon for propaganda in order to propagate their viewpoint and draw new followers. The deterioration of faith in the government and media is a third potential effect of Kerala Story on religious violence. The film has drawn criticism for being a component of a bigger effort to incite religious and racial conflicts in one of India's most socially progressive regions. People may believe that they are being controlled and deceived as a result, which might cause them to have less faith in the government and the media. People may feel pushed to choose sides, which can result in a loss of social cohesiveness and a rise in polarization.

The movie Kerala Story has the potential to increase racial tensions, disseminate false information and propaganda, and destroy confidence in the government and the media. These potential effects may result in a rise in anti-Muslim bigotry, prejudice, and violence as well as a decline in social harmony and cohesion. In order to address these possible effects and advance societal harmony and cohesiveness, it is crucial that the government, civil society, and media take action. This can be accomplished by taking actions like encouraging interreligious discussion, combating misinformation and hate speech, and encouraging responsible media coverage of delicate subjects like religion and free speech.

5.0 Conclusion

It has been claimed that "The Kerala Story" is propaganda meant to inflame religious strife and Islamophobia in India. The movie portrays the fictitious tale of three ladies from Kerala in southern India who are persuaded to join the Islamic State (IS) organization after converting to Islam. The movie has come under fire for propagating negative stereotypes and for how it portrays Muslims. The issue around the movie has caused fatal unrest and stoked religious violence in India. Additionally dividing Indian Twitter users, the movie has stirred up debate online. Islamophobia has grown in India as a result of the movie's portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and its use of arbitrary numbers to back up its allegations. In India, the movie has exacerbated racial tensions and helped to demonize Muslims. The movie has had a tremendous influence on public opinion, and it emphasizes the necessity for responsible media practices that do not support dividing narratives and damaging stereotypes.

The debate surrounding "The Kerala Story" highlights significant issues regarding the right to free speech in India. Although it is a fundamental right, the freedom of speech is not unqualified. The movie has been charged with supporting polarizing narratives and maintaining damaging stereotypes. This has prompted requests to have the movie banned. Others, on the other hand, contend that the movie accurately depicts reality and should be permitted to be screened. "The Kerala Story" has stoked religious conflict in India and promoted anti-Islamophobia propaganda. The movie has had a tremendous influence on public opinion, and it emphasizes the necessity for responsible media practices that do not support dividing narratives and damaging stereotypes.

The debate surrounding the film shows the need for a balanced response to this subject and raises significant considerations concerning freedom of expression in India. The Kerala Story is a classic illustration of how propaganda may promote religious conflict and polarize society. Media outlets must exercise responsibility and refrain from promoting damaging preconceptions that can result in violence and discrimination. A discussion regarding artistic expression's boundaries and freedom of expression has been spurred by the controversy around the movie. It is crucial for society to have a nuanced stance on this matter and to make sure that the need to protect others and foster social cohesiveness is balanced with the right to free expression.

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