
Aadu 2 Visual and Real: Costume as A Symbol Of Witty Rustic Style Statement In Youth

Arya P J

Research Scholar, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur

Bhuvaneswari R

Associate Professor, School of Social Sciences and Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vandalur

Abstract

An adaptation can be described as a version of a text or a subject; a borrowing. Unlike usual text to screen adaptations, *Aadu 2*, a Malayalam slapstick comedy film released in 2017 fostered a trend among the audience in Kerala through its novel costumes. Initially costumes were used to mark identity or to impress someone; however now costumes have become a style statement that can define an individual's attitude. The double coloured *mundu*, a garment commonly worn by men in Kerala, designed for the hero in *Aadu 2* went on to become a trend among the audience that it became a symbol of a rustic light hearted youth. The motif of the costume was to denote the humour and the glamour of the middle-aged hero, hidden behind the rustic look with big moustache and beetle nut reddened lips. In addition to serving the commercial purpose, the film influenced the fashion sense of the youth in their twenties; it became a trend costume for their celebrations like farewell, college festivals, dance competitions, college election campaigns, processions, union inaugurations etc. A visual representation or a popular culture has acted as a source for the production of a mass culture; a concept popularised by John Storey in *Inventing Popular Cultures from Folklore to Globalization*. The adaptation of *Aadu 2* costume thus became a cultural icon for a light hearted rustic youth who is adventurous. The double coloured *mundu* soon became available in the market as "*shaji pappan mundu*", named after the hero in the movie. The focus of the research paper is to analyse this cultural adaptation of the popular culture that resulted in production of a mass culture amongst the youth in Kerala.

Keywords: Costume Adaptation, Mass Culture, Popular Culture, Cultural Adaptation, Mass Consciousness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Movies, dress, food, travel and songs are elements that everybody enjoys at their best, especially when we feel to rejoice. Of these, the movies influence the audience effortlessly that they get “immersed differently in a world” (Hutcheon, 138); as it has the main task to make people think and enjoy. This magical transport of the spectator to another world has been discussed by several theorists like Margaret Morse, Metz etc. Since it is a powerful medium, it influences the audience to a great extent that they adapt the ideas conveyed through the films to their lives. This adaptation of the screen to life is an inevitable facet of the visual medium. However, an adaptation from film to life is of greater significance as it is a reverse influence. One such adaptation is perceptible through the Malayalam movie *Aadu 2*, the double coloured mundu designed for the hero became a trend among the youth in Kerala that they adapted it as their clothing for occasions of celebration and used it as their style statement. The dress designed for the hero in the movie, double coloured mundu, went on to become a sensation among the youth in Kerala that the costume became available in the market for purchase. The costume was named after the hero in the movie, “shaji pappan mundu”.

The Hollywood movies like *Superman*, *Spiderman*, *Harry Potter* series etc also imparted the same culture through the costumes used. Other Malayalam movies like *Aniyathipravu*, *Spadikam*, *Premam* also influenced the masses that certain costumes and props that was designed and used in these movies became a sensation and created a trend in Kerala. Similar to these movies but with a different tinge *Aadu 2* also created a ripple in the youth in Kerala that they started associating masculinity, chivalry, conviviality and humour with the costume. This cultural adaptation was indeed splendid because the youth who were behind sophisticated and branded clothing suddenly got attracted to the rustic, native clothing. This is the transformative power that popular culture holds. It can easily change viewers to consumers and producers. R.Barton Palmer in his review article for *Adaptation* examines adaptation thus: “Because adaptation inevitably raises this question of cultural use and rhetoric, it is a process that is often best traced to its institutional roots, in other words, to the purposes that adaptations serve for both producers and consumers” (88).

The paper attempts to understand how the adaptation of the popular culture resulted in the production of *shaji pappan mundu* as a product and a style statement in the youth in Kerala. The research work aims to analyse the reasons for the acceptance of the rustic character Shaji Pappan and

describe those occasions where the youth in Kerala found apt to wear the costume. Understanding the perspective of the young in wearing the *shaji pappan mundu*, using John Storey's concept of popular culture is another objective of this paper. The paper probes into those aspects in the film which resulted in the production of *shaji pappan mundu* as a costume symbolising a witty style statement. The production of such an unusual trend was fascinating; therefore to unravel the reasons for such a style statement is the focus of the research paper.

METHODOLOGY

Gregory Castle in *The Literary Theory Handbook* writes: "Film and other new art forms have the capacity to create an emancipatory popular culture in which the once-sacred artwork is 'de-sacralized' and 'de-aestheticized,' its infinite reproducibility making it...democratic" (94). The popular culture emanated was naturalised and has become a mass culture through the movie *Aadu 2* and that is the reason for costume adaptation by the viewers. Culture is a term that has been discussed and debated by many writers, philosophers, artists and theorists. Raymond Williams in one of his talks delivered at Open University in 1978, describes the term culture as "a body of practices" (903). Popular culture can be described as a set of practices followed by the people. This set of practices could be clothing, fashion, entertainment, art etc. Popular culture is expressed through these modes of expression. Thus, this popular culture, a mode of expression slowly becomes a practice followed by the masses. John Storey, a Cultural studies theorist and Professor in UK in his work titled *Inventing Popular Cultures from Folklore*, observes that the difference between popular culture and mass culture is getting blurred these days, hence he titled a chapter in the book as 'Popular Culture as Mass Culture'. Storey cites other theorists and concludes the chapter thus:

There is a curious unity in the understanding of popular culture as mass culture from both the political left and right. The Left sees the masses as manipulated. The right sees the masses as a threat to social privileges and as a potential polluters of the sacred sphere of culture. The influence of seeing popular culture as mass culture is very difficult to overestimate. Indeed, it could be argued that it still forms a kind of repressed 'common sense'. The principal problem is its working assumption that popular culture as mass culture always represents little more than an example of

cultural decline and potential political disorder. (*Inventing Popular Cultures: From Folklore to Globalization* 30)

Thus, it can be observed that Storey never commends about the virtues and vices of popular culture instead he makes observations after citing other theorists. For, Storey popular culture is mass culture. He never states whether popular culture or mass culture is inferior. Storey in “What is Popular Culture?” defines popular culture as “culture that is widely favoured or liked by many people” (6).

Nasrullah Mambrol in his blog writes: “Popular culture often displays its intelligence in the way that it develops new styles to appeal to new audiences” (“Popular Culture”). The novelty in the clothing designed for the characters in *Aadu 2* was indeed a technique, used by the producers to draw the masses. Mambrol delineate the popular culture as a hybrid of the new and the old which undeniably is true when the film *Aadu 2* is considered.

Modern popular culture has also developed tones and moods unique to itself partly because its consumers know that it is profit-orientated business and that they are being, to some degree, exploited, but generally don’t care! The enjoyment and the meaning of the music, the fashion, the movie or the record exist, not despite commercialisation but because of it. To enjoy and consume it is, whatever else it is, to participate in the present. Hence some popular culture is enjoyed in this spirit... and there is often a sense of solidarity between producers and consumers in that they share the joke. (“Popular Culture”)

A mass consciousness is created by such films that the masses internalize the message conveyed by the films, reframes it to their cultural purview. This research paper attempts to probe into the fact that *Aadu 2* costume, *shaji pappan mundu*, was accepted by the audiences not just as a product, but they added more meaning to the costume; thereby producing a new culture of their own. It was purchased by the audience as clothing, a costume that they wore for special occasions to celebrate with friends. Thereby, a new mass culture evolved from the novel costume designed for the film. Thus, popular culture becomes a mass culture. Shaji Pappan’s rustic appearance thrilled the audience that they became engrossed with the double coloured *mundu* which resulted in the acceptance of the clothing among the youth as their style for enjoyment. Understanding the public demand, shortly the costume was available in the market for purchase. The

youth in Kerala, especially the college going and those in twenties used the *shaji pappan mundu* as their style costume for celebrations like college union inaugurations, cultural festivals, marriages, processions, dance competitions, election campaigns etc. This style proclaimed their stance in their lives. The word culture which was associated with power and authority slowly became a trait connected with style and fashion. This mass culture which was developed out of popular culture became prevalent that it was celebrated as a style statement by the youth in Kerala soon after the release of the movie.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rachel Kemper's *A History of Costume* is a book that traces the history of costume and the different kinds of costume in different countries. Kemper traces the evolution of clothing through ages. For Kemper, Fashion is identity. According to Kemper, we can get to know a person's nationality, social status and occupation with a single glance of the clothes they wear.

Linda Hutcheon's *Adaptation* is a book about Adaptation as a discipline, its features and modes. Hutcheon describes adaptation as a process and provides a theory for the concept. She considers adaptation as a form of intertextuality.

John Storey, the Cultural Studies theorist in 'Popular Culture as Mass Culture', a chapter in the work *Inventing Popular Cultures* examines the terms culture, mass culture and popular culture and traces the evolution of the terms through theorists who have discussed these terms. In Storey's article 'What is Popular Culture?', he considers the different ways in which the concept of popular culture initiated debates in society and academic circles.

Pamela Church Gibson's article 'From Stardom to Celebrity Culture and Beyond: Fashion, Costume, Cinema and Change' in *The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies* considers the association between Fashion and Film. Gibson being a Reader in Film and Cultural Studies at the London College of Fashion explores the interconnectedness between the two disciplines academically. Gibson traces the history of Cinema, discusses the reformed media world post-internet and also differentiates concepts like stardom and celebrity.

John Fiske in 'Television Culture' examines the televisual culture. He analyses television as holding a crucial role in society. In the work, Fiske examines social, technical and ideological codes in the television culture.

Nasrullah Mambrol in his blog articles 'Popular Culture' and 'Mass

Culture' summarises terms like culture, mass culture and popular culture. Mambrol also includes quotes from theorists who explored the same concepts.

Gregory Castle's *Literary Theory Handbook* is a work that contains short notes on major literary and cultural studies theories and theorists. The work provides an overview to scholars, students and researchers as to how to choose and use the major literary and cultural theories in their areas of research.

R.Barton Palmer in his review article for *Adaptation* discusses adaptation in films and performing arts. Palmer defines the term adaptation and explores the discipline and gives an outline of the contents in the journal and also expresses his opinion regarding the journal as a work that plays an important role in developing Adaptation Studies.

Adrian Minz Deepshikha in the thesis titled "Mass Culture, Media and the Feminine: A Post Colonial Exploration of Suzanne Collins *The Hunger Games* Trilogy" explores the concept of popular culture, popular fiction, and addresses questions like: How does the audience respond to filmic adaptation of a text? How does the audience relate to the text?

Sayan Dey in the thesis "New Media and Cultural Hybridisation: A Study of the Influence of New Media Technologies on the Youth of Silchar" writes about the transition and also about how new technologies blur the distinction between visual and real. The work also examines how messages are represented, disseminated and produced. New Media has brought in a hybrid culture among the youth that affects their perception and consumption.

Margaret Morse in her book *Virtualities: Television, Media Art and Cyberculture* analyses how the virtual world transports viewers or consumers to another space. Morse compares television, malls and freeways to a motor vehicle which takes the consumers to another space, a free space, a new world that detaches the users from their real world.

Susan Smulyan in "Popular Ideologies: Mass Culture at Mid-Century" writes how culture industry places ideological constraints upon consumers and also describes how popular culture is produced. Susan explores the intricate relationship between producers and consumers.

Henry Winthrop in the article 'The Untermensch in Popular Culture', describes the difference between lowbrow culture and mass culture. Winthrop depicts lowbrow culture as one that has more vulgarity and mindlessness when compared to mass culture.

"Mass Culture and the Feminine: The Place of Television in Film Studies", is an article by Patrice Petro that appeared in '*Cinema Journal*'. It

discusses cinema and television as a manifestation of mass culture. The article speculates on analysing the reasons for gender oppositions in the visual media.

Sandor Radnoti in 'Mass Culture' describes mass culture as a closed ideology that "may be opened in every individual receptive context and which can be detached from its given context" (47). Radnoti summarises the concept of culture and discusses terms like high art, low art, popular, elite and mass culture.

Deborah Cartmell's *A Companion to Literature, Film and Adaptation* is an international collection of essays on film and adaptation. Cartmell provides a wonderful introduction to adaptation studies and traces the evolution of the discipline. This collection provides an overview of adaptation as a discipline and also presents economic and legal issues in adaptation.

COSTUME ADAPTATION

Clothing implicitly denotes our attitude towards life. In a film, a costume can define the character and can add colour to the story being narrated. A costume worn by a character should blend well with the story being told. John Fiske in 'Television Culture' describes the importance of costume and setting: "physical differences in the social codes of setting and dress are also bearers of the ideological codes of class, of heroism and villainy, of morality, and of attractiveness" (*Literary Theory* 1279). Clothing is a performance as it represents how a person wants others to see him or her. Pamela Church Gibson in 'From Stardom to Celebrity Culture and Beyond: Fashion, Costume, Cinema and Change' argues that costume is "an undeniable source of pleasure for audiences" (*The Routledge Companion to Fashion Studies* 362). In this contemporary world there is an inconspicuous link between films, fashion and consumption. This interdependence will be visible only when examined critically.

In a film, a costume helps in contextualisation. The enthralling effect about the *Aadu 2* costume is that a garment designed for the hero in the movie went on to become a sensation that the youth took it as their way of telling the society that they are cool and rustic like Shaji Pappan. If needed they have the guts to break laws, and at the same time be someone who runs away from situations out of their hands, like Pappan. In films, a costume is not randomly designed; it is designed after a careful study of the character, setting and plot. The *shaji pappan mundu* was one such costume designed for Shaji Pappan, the hero of the Malayalam movie *Aadu 2*. The costume was designed by Stephy Xavier and the styling was done by the Saritha

Jayasurya. The design and the styling suited the character and also served the purpose of conveying the message that Shaji Pappan is a humorous, cool, and delicate and also a daring, dashing man. The interesting fact about Shaji Pappan is that the character is able to foreground cowardice as well as gallantry through the masculine look provided by the costume designer and the stylist. Linda Hutcheon provides her observation regarding the adapted text: “The adapted text, therefore, is not something to be reproduced, but rather something to be interpreted and recreated, often in a new medium...for the adapter is an interpreter before becoming a creator” (Hutcheon, 2006, p.84). Thus, the costume designed for the hero in movie, was adapted by the youth in Kerala, they interpreted the look designed for Shaji Pappan as cool, heroic and stylish. They recreated that visual style into their real lives and used the same *shaji pappan mundu* as a dress code for gatherings, celebrations, meetings to impart the message that they are cool and stylish. For this reason, Hutcheon defines adapters as “first interpreters and then creators” (18).

AADU 2

Aadu 2, the Malayalam slapstick comedy film was released in 2017 as a sequel to *Aadu* (2014). The movie was written and directed by Midhun Manuel Thomas, produced by Friday Film House. The movie has a well-crafted plot. It has a careful choice of characters played by national and state award winning actors like Jayasurya, Indrans, Vinayakan etc. The background score and the songs composed for the movie by Shaan Rahman added dramatic effect to the movie’s plot. The names of the characters are also diligently created in order to maintain the humour and rusticity of the plot. The names of the characters include Shaji Pappan, Arakal Abu, Captain Cleetus, Lolan, Krishnan, Sarbath Shameer, Paili, Simon, Irumbu Abdullah, Mariamma, Mary, Mayilvahanam, Ponnapan, Sathan Xavier etc. The story revolves around demonetisation, smuggling, counterfeit money, robbery, tug-of-war and Pappan’s backache and his friends. The movie has a carefully crafted plot linking the lives of Shaji Pappan and his friends, their tug-of-war match and their massive gold trophy, Prabhakaran and his team of smugglers, Mayilvahanam and Dude’s gang in disguise as labourers, Chekuthan Lasar and Anali Sabu’s team who snatches Pappan’s trophy and burns Pappan’s home down, the police officer Sarbath Shammer and minister Sasi, Mahesh Shetty and his counterfeiting business allies. The movie reaches a climax when Pappan and his friends resolve the maze they entrapped themselves in. They were rewarded by the Government officials

for helping them catch the criminals who tried to print counterfeit notes. Interestingly there is no point in the movie that is emotional or sentimental, though there are scenes that can be called emotional. Such scenes are also presented in the form of sarcasm and humour. The presentation of the serious aspects in humour won the hearts of the young audience that they could relate to the lives of the characters.

VISUAL AND REAL

A visual media can have both influential and detrimental effects on its viewers. Though the virtual space provided for the audience uplifts them to a foreign locale, the mental space of the audience still lingers with their cultural thoughts. The message produced by the visual medium was received by the viewers and reinterpreted by them in their cultural perspective. As a result, the messages that infiltrate the minds of the audience stays back and reverberate when the person gets connected with the real. The visual images embedded a cultural code in the mind of the youth in Kerala who decoded it as a symbol of masculinity, amicability and heroism. In *Aadu2*, the character Shaji Pappan stayed in the minds of the audience as a symbol of a cool humourous man who has the spur to do anything for his friends whom he considers as his siblings. This image of Shaji Pappan as a saviour has delved into the minds of the viewers that in their lives, they feel it is cool to dress up like Pappan. In real life the young audience in Kerala, fascinated by the gorgeous look of the hero in *Aadu 2* started dressing up like Shaji Pappan, to let out the impression that they are audacious. This adaptation of the *shaji pappan mundu* can be described as a costume interpretation. Therefore the production of this new mass culture can be described as a cinematic adaptation by the masses.

CONCLUSION

The reasons for such a costume adaptation by the youth in Kerala could be primarily the light hearted presentation of the story. Secondly, the character Shaji Pappan appeared realistic for the youth in Kerala as he was someone who acted heroic when he led fights and also appeared foolish when he ran away from brawls. Such a mix of bravado and foolishness could be related to by any youth who acted the same in their lives as a common man in society. This is also a reason for the popularity of the character. As the producers calculated, the novelty in the costume designed helped them reach the audience easily. The public appeal of the hero, actor Jayasurya, created a massive fan base for the film. Thirdly it is the stylish presentation of the *shaji pappan costume*, the newness in the narrative style

and the comic extravagance that interested the masses. So as Storey wrote, this new mass culture evolved from the popular culture is simply another popular culture. The conclusion that can be drawn is that this cultural adaptation is a result of the popularity of the film, as it is a sequel to an already successful commercial film and the novelty in the costumes designed. Like Hutcheon writes in *A Theory Of Adaptation* it is the “familiarity and the novelty” (114) that interests the audience for adaptation. The youth in Kerala developed a new popular culture out of another popular culture. The audience being inspired by the rusticity and friendliness of the character found the costume adaptation as a way of presenting themselves as someone cool and humorous like Shaji Pappan. The development of such a mass culture is indeed the result of the manipulation of the masses like Marxist theorists argue, however like Storey writes, mass culture is indeed a popular culture. However, when a new trend sets in, this popular culture will be easily replaced as it is the propensity observed in mass culture.

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BIO

Arya P J is a Research Scholar at Vellore institute of Technology, Chennai. Her research interests include Cultural Studies, Literature and Film Studies.

Dr. Bhuvaneswari R is an Assistant Professor (Sr) at Vellore Institute of Technology, Chennai. Her research interests include Children's Literature, YA Literature, Canadian Theatre and Drama, Environmental Humanities.