

Subverting the Male Gaze: A Critical Study of *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*



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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this project “titled” The male gaze theory is not applicable In the Malayalam movie Jaya jaya jaya jaya hey is the record of bona fide work done by me under the guidance and supervision of Dr. Vinitha john, Assistant professor, Department of English

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CERTIFICATE

I hereby declare that this project entitled “titled” The rejection of male gaze theory in the Malayalam movie *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* is the record of bona fide work done by me under my supervision and guidance.

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CONTENTS

List of figures	(i)
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Male gaze theory
	4
Chapter 2	Rejection of male gaze in the movie
	8
Conclusion	15
Work consulted.	18

LIST OF FIGURES

SL.No	Title	Page Number
Fig.1.	After marriage	10
Fig.2.	She fights back	11
Fig.3.	She gets freedom after her fighting back	13

(i)

INTRODUCTION

Despite advancements in social and economic spheres, the Indian film industry continues to perpetuate gender inequality, misogyny, and patriarchal attitudes through its depiction of women. The normalization of objectification and sexualization of female characters in movies reflects broader societal norms and values, contributing to the marginalization of women and reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes. It is crucial for the film industry to move towards more nuanced and empowering portrayals of women to challenge existing gender norms and promote gender equality in society. In movies the characters' gender was portrayed in different ways. The central main male character has given higher value for emotions like anger, heroism, aggressiveness etc. In media targeting adults, male characters reflect societal expectations regarding masculinities and are more often portrayed as unemotional, violent, tough, dominant, and aggressive compared to women. But the female characters are shown in different ways in most films, women are portrayed as mere objects of desire, and their characters are often reduced to their physical appearance and sexuality.

The film industry's depiction of women reinforces the idea that a woman's worth lies in her beauty, and she is only valuable if she can attract men. Women have always been objectified and sexualized in Indian films, and it has become a norm rather than an exception. Despite the country's rapid social and economic progress, the film industry continues to perpetuate gender inequality, misogyny, and patriarchal attitudes. Women are traditionally portrayed as caregivers, nurturers, homemakers, and helpers. Men's gender roles revolve around characteristics such as dominance, assertiveness, and strength. Traditionally, men's gender roles include leader, and protector.

The analysis presented in this project focuses on the movie *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*, highlighting the central female character, Jayabarathi. Throughout the film, Jayabarathi is portrayed as assertive, bold, and determined, challenging typical gender norms. She refuses to conform to the male gaze, particularly when it comes to her husband Rakesh and her own family. From a young age, Jayabarathi faces struggles as she adheres to the expectations set by her father and uncles. However, as she grows older, she begins to assert and fightback herself. Jayabarathi becomes a symbol of empowerment for women who are often marginalized and oppressed in similar situations. Her journey towards self-discovery and liberation serves as a powerful commentary on the struggles faced by women in a male-dominated society. Then we comming to annalyse the feminist theory in this project Male Gaze theory, proposed by British feminist Laura Mulvey, asserts that visual media is predominantly created from the perspective of heterosexual males. This theory suggests that women are often depicted in a way that reduces them to objects of admiration rather than portraying them in positions of power or agency. Mulvey's concept of the 'male gaze' specifically focuses on how cinema narratives and portrayals of women are constructed in a manner that objectifies and limits them, ultimately serving the psychological needs of men and the broader patriarchal society. In her influential essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey explores the act of depicting women and the world in the visual arts through a feminist lens. By analyzing the ways in which women are depicted in visual arts, Mulvey aims to challenge and dismantle the unequal power dynamics between men and women, ultimately striving for a more equitable and inclusive representation of gender in media.

This project was structured into two distinct chapters, each focusing on different aspects related to Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory. The initial chapter delved into the theoretical framework of Mulvey's theory, exploring how women were traditionally portrayed in stereotypical

societal roles. It also discussed the ways in which these stereotypes were challenged and dismantled. Various key factors such as scopophilia and voyeurism were examined in relation to Mulvey's theory, shedding light on the complexities of the male gaze in visual culture. The second chapter of the project shifted its focus towards the rejection of the male gaze theory, particularly through the lens of the central female character, Jayabarathi. Jayabarathi's character was portrayed as assertive and bold, embodying qualities that directly contradicted the traditional male gaze perspective. Through her actions and decisions, Jayabarathi symbolically rejected the concept of the male gaze theory, asserting her independence and agency in a patriarchal society. This rejection served as a powerful statement against the objectification and subjugation of women in visual media.

Chapter 1

Male gaze theory

In many films, women are often depicted as sexual objects, with their characters frequently reduced to their physical appearance and sexuality. The film industry strategically employs camera angles that emphasize specific body parts, zooming in to showcase curves, bumps, lips, and more. This focus extends to marketing, where such imagery is utilized to sell products. In the Malayalam movie *Masterpiece*, an example of female character sexual objectification occurs when a lecturer arrives at the college. As she imparts her lessons, male students gaze at her in a sexual manner, primarily influenced by her choice of clothing, particularly sarees. This portrayal suggests that the film emphasizes the objectification of the female character based on her attire, contributing to the broader discussion of the male gaze in cinema. The male gaze involves depicting women in the world as they are shown in the visual arts and presenting women on the screen as sexual objects, catering to the pleasure of the heterosexual male viewer.

The male gaze is a feminist theory that examines how women are objectified as sexual objects through the lens of a camera, placing them in the context of male desire. Coined by British feminist and filmmaker Laura Mulvey in her 1973 work "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", this theory explores the way women are portrayed on screen through sexual objectification. In the essay, Mulvey delves into the concept of the male gaze, discussing how women in the media are often viewed through the eyes of heterosexual men. The essay explores the passive objectification of women as objects of desire. Laura Mulvey argues that female characters presented on the screen

exist to fulfill specific desires of the audience, a phenomenon known as the male gaze. With such mannerism, she notes that scopophilia, the pleasure of looking at people's bodies on or off-screen in daily life, is giving pleasure to the male audience.

The ideological aspect of the male gaze theory suggests that the objectification of women for male pleasure is incredibly damaging. "The feminist interpretations of psychoanalysis in Mulvey's essay reflect on the act of 'looking' in cinema; she describes the viewer experience as one of 'scopophilia' a sort of sexual pleasure derived from looking at others "(Walsh). The male gaze theory also plays a significant role in the fashion, academic, and film industries. Mulvey's concept of male gaze theory criticizes the objective portrayal of the roles of women as objects of pleasure for the audience.

In the film sector, where male dominance sovereignty the narrative style, the female film characters are frequently portraying sexual and other pleasure to the spectators. This power dynamic positions women as secondary to male protagonists, downgrade them to roles that primarily exist to enhance the male lead's storyline or provide a visual spectacle for the audience. Women's beauty is conscientiously portrayed on screen, but it is often stylized and fragmented through close-ups, emphasizing specific body parts like Bums and curves rather than their holistic presence as characters. These close-ups serve to objectify women, enlarge them to mere visual objects for the audience's consumption. The nowadays women are frequently against the male protagonist journey because they were didn't decided to live under the male gender gazing.

This portrayal reinforces traditional gender norms and perpetuates the idea that women's primary purpose within narratives is to enhance the male experience rather than to have agency and autonomy of their own. Overall, the portrayal of women in the film industry often reinforces

and perpetuates patriarchal power structures, wherein women are subjugated to the whims and desires of male characters and audiences. This not only limits the representation of women on screen but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and contributes to the objectification and marginalization of women both within the industry and in society

In the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey also introduces the concept of scopophilia, or pleasure in looking, as a key element in understanding the dynamics of spectatorship in film. The concept beings into the notion of scopophilia within the framework of the male gaze theory. Scopophilia refers to the pleasure derived from gazing, particularly in the context of viewing others as objects of sexual desire. The male gaze theory prapose that in visual arts and media, the audience tends to adopt a heterosexual male perspective, which shapes how narratives are constructed and how characters, especially women, are depicted. Mulvey's analysis delves into how this male gaze perpetuates power imbalances and reinforces traditional gender roles, with men positioned as active viewers and women as passive objects of desire for male gaze. This examination highlights the ways in which media representations reflect and reinforce societal norms and expectations regarding gender and sexuality. The concept being explored delves Mulvey asserts that in societies dominated by patriarchy, the pleasure derived from visual consumption is divided based on gender, with men typically assuming an active role as viewers, while women are positioned as passive objects subjected to the male gaze. This division is evident in mainstream cinema, where male characters often possess agency and control over the narrative, while female characters are relegated to supporting roles or exist primarily as objects of desire. The male gaze, a central concept in Mulvey's analysis, refers to the alignment of the camera's perspective and the construction of the film's narrative with the desires and fantasies of male viewers. Female characters are frequently presented and styled in ways that cater to this gaze, reinforcing traditional

gender roles and perpetuating the notion of women as objects to be observed and desired by men. Overall, Mulvey's exploration of scopophilia and the male gaze offers valuable insights into the intersection of power dynamics, gender roles, and sexuality within the realm of cinema. By drawing attention to these dynamics, Mulvey encourages viewers to critically analyze the representations of gender and desire that are often portrayed on screen.

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (Mulvey).

Objectification and sexual gazing have the pretension to shrink into women's specific body parts or sexual aspects, strengthening the concept of sexual objectification. Mulvey's critique highlights the need to challenge these cinematic norms and promote more diverse and empowering representations of women in films. The women have long been subjected to a traditional role in society which they are both observed and exhibited, their appearance carefully crafted to have a strong visual and erotic impact on a predominantly male audience. This phenomenon, known as sexual objectification, was first proposed by Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts in 1997. Their theory emphasizes how women are often socialized to internalize this objectification, resulting in self-objectification. Unfortunately, this self-objectification can have detrimental effects on women's mental health, as it leads them to view themselves as mere objects to be looked at, rather than as individuals with their own agency and autonomy. Fredrickson and Roberts define sexual objectification as the act of reducing women to mere objects of male sexual desire, disregarding their unique qualities, intelligence, and humanity. This reduction of women to their physical attributes or sexual appeal perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces power imbalances between genders. It was feminist groups in the 1970s who first brought attention to the issue of sexual objectification, critiquing the portrayal of women in various forms of media as

passive objects to be desired or controlled by male characters. This further exploration of the role of gender in media representation and its broader impact on society. sexual objectification theory with Laura Mulvey's analysis of the male gaze, we gain a deeper understanding of how gender dynamics operate within the realm of media and society. Mulvey's concept of the male gaze refers to the same way in which media often presents women from a heterosexual male perspective, objectifying them for the pleasure to the male spectators.

Chapter 2

The rejection of male gaze theory

In the movie *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*, the director presents the female character Jayabharathi as a woman in a stereotypical village. She lost her freedom in childhood on-wards, her parents were uneducated and typical village parents who were highly concerned about society's norms. She has a brother, Jayan, who demands the females in his life to stay in the four walls, not allowing them to mingle in public, and he thinks that women have no voices in public places. He is a narrow-minded man and narcissist character.

This movie cleverly uses irony to highlight the injustice faced by Jaya at her early age at home and outside. When she was studying in twelfth grade her school decided to go on a study tour to Ooty, but her parents didn't allow her to visit that place, her brother also said there is nothing to see there only snow and cold. Her parents gave priority to their son Jayan. Jaya had no voice to say her wishes. But the movie female character Jaya is a bold character and the ideal women. She is determined and has her own perspective. She rejects male gaze theory because she is not willing to be constrained by the male gaze.

Jaya achieved a high destination mark in her twelfth grade, by studying with her brother's tattered books and she was awarded a merit seat to Bachelor of Science degree in Anthropology, her preferred subject. However, the uncle advised her father to make her take admission in the nearby parallel college and to take another course. He says, "if she is a good student, she will find their own way, or you can pursue your studies after marriage also" (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00:14:55). That door of opportunity is completely shut in her face. Her father told her to apply for a Bachelor of Arts degree at a parallel institution. She told her mother about her dream, that she wanted to complete her higher education and to get a job. But she didn't care about it, gave some advice to her, she eventually came to the visiting hall and spoke loudly to her father and uncle, too. She says, "I only want to study my favorite course BSc anthropology that is only available in this college" (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00:15:35). She is taking admission at the nearest college because, in her uncle's opinion, she wasn't interested in literature. After some months later she fell in love with her lecturer because of his classes about women empowerment, the problems of employees, etc. After some days, he asked Jaya, whether she loves him. The next day, she answered yes. After some days, he starts restricting her rights and questions her basic rights and freedoms, like updating social media pictures and using social media overnight, and he rudely talks in public places about giving her freedom. Once, he even slapped Jaya questioning her manner of dressing. She stops her degree and was married off against her will to another man to save her honour after her affair with her professor.

When Rajesh's family meets Jaya with a marriage proposal, they casually talk to her family about their life and surroundings. Jaya's uncle requests Rajesh family to support Jaya's higher education and jobs after marriage. Rajesh said she wants to continue her studies by trying psc

coaching for jobs near Rajesh's house. They told Jaya to give tea or coffee to Rajesh's family. Rajesh talks to Jaya about his business, like the rates of chicken.

On their wedding day, Jaya's entire family breaks down into tears, and almost mourns Jaya. As Jaya incredulously observes the tears of her family as though they did not force her into marriage, the song 'Enthanithu Engottithu' accurately portrays her confusion. Jaya notices signs of violence as soon as she steps into her in-law's house. Cracked glass, broken T.V remote put together by a rubber band, chipped wooden furniture, and distorted photo frames- they all give an unsavory warning about what would follow soon. Jaya was too confused, but her inner mind consoles her.



Fig.1. After marriage (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00:29:40)

After marriage there is not enough romance between Jaya and Rajesh, because he is a self-loved character. Rajesh hits Jaya daily without any reason, like the one morning she prepared a

new recipe for Rajesh he hesitates to take it and argues with her even though he didn't even taste it and throws away the food from the table. She said to him that his behavior was wrong, but he never accepts his mistakes even though he is wrong. Rajesh listening to Jaya, slaps Jaya for the first time. Then he says, "I already said sorry then what? talk anything to Rajesh be carefully" he said, (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00:41:49). Then he also gets angry with his sister about her marriage.

After he slaps Jaya, he says sorry to her and takes her to a theater to watch a film. Then he goes to a hotel and tells Jaya to place the order; she orders her favorite food porotta and beef, but Rajesh cancels her order and orders his favorite food, string hoppers and chicken curry, for both of them. This sequence shows up many times in many situations. For six months, she begs her parents and brother to help her out of the situation. They all resort to justifying violence as men's second nature and advise her to "adjust". As she realizes that no one would come to help her overcome her situation, she decides to fight back her husband. She does work hard to overcome the harassment from her narcissist husband. She decides to fight back, and she studies martial arts on her mobile phone. She works hard day and night in the bathroom and bedroom, as well as under the trees. This scene portrays the strength and boldness of the character Jaya. According to Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, women in visual media are passive object presented only to provide the spectator's pleasure. But the character Jaya in the film is an active female. She rejects her being portrayed as a passive woman.

When Rajesh came home for lunch, he called Jaya and commanded her to serve him food. But at the moment she was watching a YouTube video on her mobile phone. He enquires about his mother, to which she replies that she doesn't know. Listening to this Rajesh tries to snatch Jaya's

phone; she resists. He tries to slap her, but she defends it and pushes him backward, punching him with her leg. Rajesh goes and falls under the aquarium.



Fig.2 She fight back (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00: 48:59)

When Rajesh went to talk about this situation with his friend as well as his brother. The man provokes him to hit back Jaya, by saying that getting hit by her wife is not suitable for their gender as a male. If he never hits back at his wife in response to what she did it will be shameful to all masculine genders. The character Jaya represents not a stereotypical, meek woman but a woman who stands against inequality and domestic violences. She works hard and studies everything on the mobile phone like sewing, cooking new recipes, psc, martial arts etc.

Rajesh, who was good at karate in his childhood, attempts to brush up his skills to fight back Jaya. Rajesh decides to listen to his friend's advice to shoot his wife hitting him in order to present in the family court. He takes precautions like safety pads in private areas and starts recording. He asks Jaya to come to the hall and tells her to move forward. He asks Jaya what happened the previous day. Jaya replied, "I slapped you" (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 00:72:20) This

scene portrays Jaya's boldness, and she refuses to keep silent. He asks Jaya to slap him first to start the fight. She kicks Rajesh without mercy. The background commentaries during the scene shows the boldness and ideal women through the character Jayabarathi because the self-defense and attacking from Jaya's side, through this project it proves this character was an ideal woman and she creates her own identity in this film, minimizing the male gaze theory in this scenes. Then Rajesh's family and friend calls Jaya's family home to contrive a solution. Jaya's father and mother requests Rajesh's family to forgive Jaya. But Jaya asks Rajesh's friend that she has faced the violence and slapping from Rajesh in between these six months a total of 21 slaps from him, she questioned him that if she kept silent and never react after 10 year, she would have face 420 slap after 40 years she face 1280 number of slaps from Rajesh (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey 00:80:50*). She speaks about her basic rights. Jaya looked at everyone sympathetically and declared that she would not pardon Rajesh.

Rajesh decides to trap Jaya with her friend's advice, which was to act as if he is in love with Jaya. In these scenes, Rajesh and his friend try to limit the identity of Jaya as just a mere object wanting love and care. When Jaya enters her bedroom, Rajesh approaches Jaya with a sexual intent saying, "give me a kiss; can I hug you?" (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey 01:02:07*).

When Jaya gets pregnant and visits a hospital for checkup, she feels something went wrong and uncomfortable when she hears the voice messages from Rajesh's friend. She asks about the plan? Then she realizes that Rajesh cheated on her with the friend's advice. Realizing this she faints and gets hospitalized, leading to an abortion. She leaves the hospital to women hostel and decides to be independent.



Fig.6. She gets freedom after her fighting back (*Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* 01:35:54)

Then she asks for divorce. Jaya, now a woman empowered, bravely speaks out against Rajesh in the Court. She challenges the male-dominated perspective, striving to create a society where she can live without fear or violence. By accusing Rajesh of harassment and obtaining a favorable verdict, she becomes a symbol of fighting gender inequality. The movie "Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey" highlights the significance of education and awareness in empowering women and preventing physical harassment. Ultimately, Jaya chooses to embrace her freedom and confront the oppressive patriarchal norms. It also proves Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory is not applicable in this movie. Here the film presents the female character Jaya as not an object born to provide pleasure, but as a bold, assertive woman with her own whims and desires. When her parents and partner Rajesh tries to view like an object, the strong determined female character Jayabarathi fights back. Thereby,

she rejects the Laura Mulvey's theory of male gaze. She refuses to be viewed as a sexual object and a source of pleasure for the audience.

When majority of Malayalam cinema presents the masculinity power and prestige of men on screens, and neglects woman's roles to a typical village woman, this movie *Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*, portrays the female character Jayabarathi not as glorified beauty or object of desire, but as bold woman who fights against her families for her rights and against the injustices. In the end of this film, she regains her identity as a strong lady who tries truly to archive freedom through her hard work and firm mind.

Conclusion

The study has observed that most movies do not portray female characters as strong feminist figures. However, viewers find satisfaction and admiration in the boldness and strong perspective of the character Jayabharathi. Unlike and she rejects Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, Jayabharathi as a strongly opposes it and stands as a courageous character. These discussions are presented in the first two chapters of the researchpaper. In the first chapter, delve into Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, which highlights the sexual pleasure derived from objectifying female characters on and off the screen. How women portray in the sterotypical society. Various key factors such as scopophilia and voyeurism were examined in relation to Mulvey's theory, shedding light on the complexities of the male gaze in visual culture.

The second chapter focuses on the rejection of this theory in movies. Through my project, I provide strong evidence that the protagonist in the movie defies the male gaze theory with her fearless actions and strong perspective. The character protagonist, Jayabarathi, is thoroughly analyzed. Despite growing up in a patriarchal family, she is a bold and outspoken village woman who challenges inequality from the very beginning. She fearlessly fights for her basic rights and freedom within her family. Throughout the movie, she continuously stands up for herself, breaking the gaze of men and asserting her self-respect. The movie "Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey" strongly opposes and rejects Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory because of the character Jayabarathi's strength, boldness, self-determination, and strong perspective. She trains herself in martial arts without any coaching and fights back against Rajesh, her narcissistic husband, without mercy. This scene showcases the power and liberation that Jayabarathi achieves, ultimately freeing herself from her marital relationship. Then she leaves without fear in society as a true feminine.

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