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Lyrics of Longing, Lines of Control: Amatory Discourse and the Evolution of Malayalam Film Songs

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Abstract: *This paper explores the evolution and subsequent repression of amatory discourse in Keralam, with a specific focus on its expression through Malayalam film songs. Initially cultivated as a cultural instrument to support and naturalise the ideology of monogamous romantic love, amatory discourse emerged as a controlled emotional language with the socio-religious transformations of the colonial and early modern period in Keralam. It gave structure to desire by embedding it within the framework of exclusivity, fidelity, and moral legibility. However, as this discourse became increasingly stylized in popular culture, particularly in film songs, it was subjected to a process of aesthetic regulation and ideological containment. While these songs appear to celebrate romantic passion, they in fact operate within tight boundaries that domesticate desire, turning it into a predictable and harmless sentiment. This study argues that Malayalam film songs both preserve and suppress amorous expression, offering a mediated space where desire is visible yet tamed, emotionally charged yet socially sanctioned.*

Keywords: *Amatory discourse, monogamous relation, romantic song, desire, Julia Kristeva*

Introduction

Songs held a significant place in Kerala's cultural life even before the advent of cinema as an art form. These early songs were not associated with playback singing, as in cinema, but rather occupied the foreground, performing specific social functions. Agricultural songs, *Onam* songs, *Thiruvathira* songs, and Christian devotional songs are notable examples. These forms of musical expression enjoyed an independent identity, distinct from the visual spectacle that cinema would later offer.

Cinema began to attract mass attention across the country when it started to engage with themes related to the nationalist movements in India. However, the British colonial government, through the promulgation of the Cinematograph Act in 1918, imposed strict censorship on political references in cinema. Even framed photographs of national leaders were subject to censorship, and one of the most stringent prohibitions was on the cinematic representation or mention of Mahatma Gandhi. Nevertheless, poets and filmmakers often circumvented this censorship by incorporating patriotic and nationalist undertones into film songs, subtly challenging colonial authority.

A striking example of this subversive practice was the popular response to the film *Bhakta Vidur* (1921), whose songs continued to be sung and celebrated even after the film itself was banned. Songs such as "Ekla Chalo Re" by Rabindranath Tagore, "Sare Jahan Se Acha" by Muhammad Iqbal, "Ek Naya Sansar Basalen" and "Door Hato Ae Duniya Walo" by Pradeep, and "Hindustan Ke Hum" by D. N. Madhok ignited a profound patriotic fervour.

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These songs, which were sung during the freedom struggle, reflected the socio-political climate of the time and became vehicles for the expression of collective aspirations, resistance, and identity. The use of allegory and song to express political messages was a defining feature of the literature and cultural production of this period.

This phenomenon was equally prevalent in Keralam. As eminent Malayalam poet and lyricist P. Bhaskaran notes, "Early patriotic songs and farmers' protest songs are the prototypes of film songs" (*Naariyuzhipalu* 9). Many of these prototypes existed in textual form, which facilitated the dissemination of their messages in the public sphere, even when oral performances, through film, drama, or direct recital, were suppressed. Examples such as *Mahatmagandhi Arrest Pattu* (1928) and *Sworajya Geetham* (1932) testify to this tradition. The patriotic undertones of such songs contributed to the formation of a distinct social space for popular music. The defiant stance these songs adopted against the censorial mechanisms of colonial authority significantly enhanced their popularity and cultural character. Thus, situated within the frame of the present, these songs engaged with both the past and the future, constructing an imaginative cartography of India. They were employed as tools of cultural resistance and national expression, foregrounding the political utility of popular music and its role in shaping collective consciousness.

In the intervening period, the materialization of theatre troupes and musical dramas in Keralam significantly reconfigured the visual and auditory registers of the public sphere. A majority of the performers in these musical dramas were *Bhagavathars*, who were traditionally associated with temple music and ritualistic performance. However, the songs linked to these dramas soon transcended the rigid boundaries of caste and religious affiliation. The introduction of the gramophone further facilitated this process by rendering songs accessible to a broader and more diverse demography. This technological innovation enabled the dissemination of music beyond the confines of privileged spaces, allowing it to circulate across caste and community lines. While gramophone recordings initially focused on classical music, they gradually expanded to include folk and patriotic genres, and in that way extending the affective reach of music to the margins of society.

Early cinema strategically imbibed both folk and classical musical traditions, contributing significantly to its widespread acceptance and cultural entrenchment. In doing so, cinema became a critical site of negotiation between the traditional and the modern, shaping itself as a convergent medium that reformulated preexisting musical forms. It played a crucial role in the vernacularisation of modernity by simplifying, reinterpreting, and popularising both classical and popular cultural expressions. Notably, at the height of India's modernist cultural shift, when classical music came to be marginalised as the preserve of an elite, and folk traditions were rendered invisible within dominant aesthetic hierarchies, film music reanimated both from the periphery, endowing them with renewed cultural legitimacy and mass appeal.

Review of Literature

Film songs in Malayalam have more intimately depicted the emotional experiences and cultural transitions of people in Keralam than any other popular medium. Despite the centrality of film songs to the everyday life of Malayalees, academic studies focusing exclusively on them remain relatively scarce. One of the earliest and most notable mentioning of film songs in literary criticism comes from T.M. Chummar, who devoted an entire chapter to the discussion of film songs in his *Padyasahithya Charithram*, the only literary history text in Malayalam to incorporate such a discussion. Recognising their cultural pervasiveness, Chummar observed that "songs are closer to the populace than poetry" (105), thereby acknowledging the role of film songs as an accessible cultural form.

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Wider public engagement with the histories and creators of Malayalam film songs gained momentum only after 2007. Magazines began publishing articles, memoirs, and interviews with lyricists, composers, and singers, while television shows like *Paatorma*, *Paatinte Naatuvazhikal*, and *Gaanaloka Veedhikalil* nostalgically celebrated the genre. This increased attention enabled film songs to gain recognition as an autonomous cultural form, separate from the cinematic texts they accompanied. Concurrently, anthologies of film lyrics curated by major publishers like DC Books and Current Books, featuring works of eminent lyricists such as Vayalar Ramavarma, P. Bhaskaran, O.N.V. Kurup, Sreekumaran Thampi and many others, led to the legitimization of film songs as literary texts. The scholarly introductions that accompanied these collections further propagated the notion that film songs require analytical, not merely sensory, attention.

A distinguished figure in shaping Malayalam writings on film songs is Ravi Menon, currently the Music Research Head at Mathrubhumi Group. Through his books such as *Paattu Vazhiyorathu*, *Mozhikalil Sangeethamaayi*, and *Soja Rajakumari*, Ravi Menon popularised the genre of *paatezhuthu*. His writings are reflections on film music that combine anecdotal memory, interviews, and cultural storytelling. The titles themselves, often borrowed from famous lyrics, suggest an affective and nostalgic engagement with the songs. However, despite their popularity, these works do not undertake rigorous theoretical inquiry into the cultural, political, or discursive structures underlying the songs. Following Ravi Menon's model, other writers such as Perumpuzha Gopalakrishnan (*Devarajan: Sangeethathinte Raajashilpi*), Jamal Kochangadi (*Baburaj*), and M.D. Manoj (*Raveendrasangeetham*) have authored biographies centred on iconic figures, but have largely overlooked the textual and cultural analysis of the songs themselves.

More recently, a few scholars have attempted to introduce Malayalam film songs into the framework of cultural studies. Works such as *Kaalame Ninakaphinandanam* by Sunil P. Elayidam, *Pothu Lokatheku Thuranna Shabdam* and *Ishda Sugandham Pole* by K.M. Narendran, and edited volumes like *Film Songs and Literary History* and *Ekalokaanashworagaanam* (Pradeepan Pambirikunnu) and *Malayalam Film Songs: Literature and History* (P.K. Harikumar), examine the historical, technological, and visual factors that contributed to the crystelization of film songs in Keralam. These texts mark a significant shift toward treating film songs as legitimate cultural artifacts. However, a dimension that remains significantly undertheorised is the amatory discourse that Malayalam film songs came to constitute and circulate within the cultural landscape of post-independence Keralam. This interpretive position initially supported the manifestation of companionate monogamy, only to be later subjected to various forms of moral and aesthetic containment. The present paper aims to fill this theoretical rupture.

Musical Tradition of Keralam

The musical tradition of Keralam possesses a long and rich history, distinct from, though often intertwined with, the trajectory of Malayalam poetry. While much of the region's music is lyrically driven, and therefore intersects with poetic composition, it constitutes an independent and dynamic cultural formation. Keralam holds an indelible place within the heritage of Carnatic music, and song has played a central role in early Malayalam literary expression, whose origins can be traced back to the 9th century CE. In the evolution of the Malayalam language, poetic forms grounded in musicality developed long before the appearance of prose, indicating the primacy of sound, rhythm, and lyricism in the cultural and linguistic imagination of the region. As musical practices evolved in Keralam, they diversified

into distinct streams, with classical music, predominantly oriented toward the Carnatic tradition, and popular music, represented by film songs and independent albums.

Among these, film music has come to represent the most accessible and influential form of musical expression in the state. Prior to the rise of Malayalam cinema and its attendant music industry, Malayali audiences enthusiastically consumed Tamil and Hindi film songs, which dominated the sonic landscape. The history of Malayalam film music formally begins with the release of *Nirmala* in 1948, a film produced by Artist P. J. Cherian, who was instrumental in introducing playback singing to Malayalam cinema. The music for the film was composed by P. S. Divakar, with lyrics by the acclaimed poet G. Sankara Kurup. The songs were rendered by a diverse ensemble of singers including P. Leela, T. K. Govinda Rao, Vasudeva Kurup, C. K. Raghavan, Sarojini Menon, and Vimala B. Varma, who holds the distinction of being the first recorded playback singer in Malayalam cinema.

In its formative years, Malayalam film music frequently borrowed melodic structures from popular Hindi and Tamil songs. It was a common practice to insert Malayalam lyrics into already established tunes, and in some cases, to translate entire Hindi lyrics directly. However, this derivative mode of production gradually gave way to an indigenized aesthetic with the arrival of a new generation of poets and composers during the early 1950s. By the mid-1950s, Malayalam film music began to acquire a distinctive identity, a transformation spearheaded by pioneering music directors such as G. Devarajan, V. Dakshinamurthy, M. S. Baburaj, and K. Raghavan. They collaborated with eminent lyricists including P. Bhaskaran, O. N. V. Kurup, Vayalar Rama Varma and Sreekumaran Thampi whose literary sensibilities enriched the lyrical content of Malayalam film songs. Major playback singers of the period included Kamukara Purushothaman, K. P. Udayabhanu, A. M. Raja, P. Leela, Santha P. Nair, and P. Susheela, whose voices came to symbolise the aural identity of what is often referred to as the golden age of Malayalam film music.

The rise of K. J. Yesudas in the Malayalam film music industry marked a paradigmatic shift that virtually redefined the musical scenario of Kerala's cinematic culture. Alongside other distinguished vocalists such as P. Jayachandran, K. P. Brahmanandan, S. Janaki, and P. Susheela, Yesudas rose to iconic stature and became one of the most celebrated figures in the history of Malayalam music. His appeal extended across diverse audience groups, as he garnered immense popularity among both connoisseurs of classical music and the wider populace who consumed film music. Together with P. Jayachandran, he was instrumental in revitalising Malayalam playback singing during the 1960s and 1970s, elevating it to unprecedented aesthetic and technical standards. This phase also witnessed the arrival of K. S. Chithra, who debuted in 1979 and, by the mid-1980s, grew up as the most sought-after female playback singer in South India, securing a trans-regional presence.

As the musical ethos of Malayalam cinema continued to advance, the late 1970s signalled the onset of new stylistic shifts. A discernible movement toward rhythm-oriented compositions infused with Western musical elements began to dominate the soundscape. Music directors such as Shyam, K. J. Joy, and Jerry Amaldev catalysed this transition, introducing novel arrangements and textures that departed from the melodic and lyrical conventions of earlier decades. It was during this period that the practice of composing tunes prior to the writing of lyrics gained widespread currency, thereby inverting the traditional lyric-centric approach to song production.

Nevertheless, the 1980s witnessed a significant counter-current in the form of a second musical renaissance led by visionary composers such as Raveendran, Johnson, M. G. Radhakrishnan etc. Their works reinstated the melodic richness and classical foundations of

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Malayalam film music, blending aesthetic sophistication with popular appeal. Lyricists such as Poovachal Khader, Kavalam Narayana Panicker, and Bichu Thirumala were central to this resurgence, crafting verses that captured both the narrative demands of cinema and the cultural sensibilities of the audience. The 1990s extended this legacy through the contributions of Kaithapram Damodaran Namboothiri and Gireesh Puthenchery, whose lyrical interventions consolidated the genre's lyrical and emotional range.

Consequently, Malayalam film music has undergone a sustained process of transformation across decades, both in its compositional strategies and modes of reception. A conspicuous shift can also be observed in the ways in which songs are appreciated by audiences. Dr. Pradeepan Pampirikunnu, in his critical work *Ekajeevithaanawaraganam*, proposes a typology of appreciation that delineates four distinct categories based on the contexts in which film songs are received. The first category consists of songs embedded within the diegetic narrative of the film. In such instances, the auditory experience is intrinsically allied to the cinematic text, and the audience's appreciation extends to both the film and the song as a unified aesthetic object.

The second category encompasses songs that gained popularity through radio broadcasting, especially via All India Radio. Here, the absence of visual stimuli compels the listener to engage imaginatively with the textual and musical elements of the song, detached from any cinematic referent. The third category refers to songs disseminated through television programmes such as *Chithrageetham* and *Smrithilayam*. Although these platforms present both the audio and visual components, the songs are experienced independently of the larger cinematic narrative, creating a hybrid mode of reception that oscillates between visual pleasure and musical appreciation. The fourth category comprises altered renditions and imitative performances of popular songs in public events such as *ganamelas* and music competitions. These performances often recontextualise the original compositions, offering new affective and aesthetic meanings while simultaneously preserving the familiarity of the original texts.

In addition to these four established categories, contemporary reality shows have introduced a novel paradigm of reception. These programmes do not merely foreground the textual or musical structure of songs but also incorporate the performative embodiment of the singer into the domain of appreciation. In this mode, the physical presence and expressive gestures of the performer are integral to the audience's evaluative gaze, creating a convergence between the corporeal (*śarīram*) and the sonic (*śārīram*) dimensions of musical experience. This marks a significant reconfiguration in the aesthetics of song appreciation, where embodiment and affect are central to the reception of musical texts in the public domain.

The process of reception and appreciation of film songs in Keralam has also been shaped by the institutional influence of All India Radio. As a key auditory medium, radio facilitated the propagation of film music in a manner that ascertained its amatory elements within a clandestine and introspective mode of reception. Unlike the visually saturated experience of television, the act of listening to songs via radio allowed for a deeply personal and imaginative engagement with the musical text. This form of reception, situated entirely within the acoustic register, encouraged an interiorised and solitary encounter with the voice, rendering the experience both intense and individualistic. The absence of visual referents necessitated a heightened imaginative participation, wherein listeners actively constructed the emotional and narrative contours of the song.

It is within this context of disembodied aurality that K. J. Yesudas came to be venerated as "the divine singer," a title reflecting the almost transcendental intimacy cultivated through repetitive and immersive listening. However, as the history of Malayalam film music

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progressed, this same voice, impeccably precise and acoustically perfect, began to transcend class boundaries, becoming the singular medium through which both kings and paupers alike expressed themselves within the cinematic soundscape. This universality, however, came at a cost. The excessive technical refinement and mechanical perfection of Yesudas's voice, though revered, often elided the raw emotive textures typically associated with the human voice, making it somewhat detached, almost inhuman in its precision. In this sense, the "divine" quality attributed to his voice signals not only admiration but also a certain erasure of the corporeal presence of the singer, transforming affective expression into an abstract, decontextualised ideal of musical purity.

Romantic Film Songs as Amatory Discourse

Romantic film songs have played a seminal role in constructing and popularising the notion of the "intimate" in twentieth-century Keralam. Within these songs, discourses around sexuality, virginity, chastity, and conjugality converge, endowing them with identifiable moments of institutionalised intimacy. By doing so, they help construct a modern erotic speaking subject who is an agent whose relation to self, body, desire, and pleasure is mediated through culturally coded musical texts. The gendered subjects occupy distinct positions in Malayalam romantic songs, and these positions embody a logic of authority, and form identity, agency, and emotional experience.

Historically, the concept of romantic love in Keralam emerged alongside the socio-familial transitions of the late nineteenth century from matrilineal joint households toward nuclear, patrifocal families. Puthenkalam's *Marriage and the Family in Kerala* outlines how by the 1960s Kerala had entered into stable monogamous conjugality, where romantic love became a structuring principle in the formation of gendered selves and the conjugal order. According to J.Arunima, "Romantic love was a key structuring principle in the production of monogamous family and gendered selves" (*There Comes Papa* 11). Love marriage was envisioned as erasing the "barbaric promiscuity" (Arunima 12) of the matrilineal past and thus became central to a civilising agenda. In this discourse, love and marriage were conflated, making marriage the natural and the only possible culmination of love.

Similarly, social critic J. Devika describes this as a "moment of individuation" where love is framed as an internal force that "seeks not the body but the internality of the other" (*Engendering Individual* 69). Love, thus appears as a regulative force that delays bodily desire until it can be realised within the sanctioned bonds of marriage. Indeed, this internal, mental conception of love that converses "more about the mind than about the body" (Devika 69), appears repeatedly in modern Malayalam poetry, even in works that do not explicitly depict conjugal union.

Yet, as this idealised notion of love spread, the institution of arranged marriage simultaneously asserted itself. Unlike love marriages, arranged marriages privileged social legitimacy, caste and class boundaries, and property considerations over affective choice. Thus, arranged marriage became hegemonic, bolstering the conjugal ideal through economic logic and caste practices.

Within this tension between love marriage and arranged marriage, romantic film songs offer a distinct account of affective subversion. Often placed at a critical juncture in films, typically preceding the film's resolution or union, the love song signals an imminent conjugal union while also troubling dominant norms. Many songs reveal open landscapes, hill stations, and riversides, celebrating the body in love and rupturing the claustrophobic space of domestic interiors. These settings locate desire and intimacy within culturally braced geographies, thus positioning individual feelings in a social space beyond the system of arranged marriage.

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In line with broader processes of Kerala modernity that emphasizes individualism and internality, the acoustic and visual framing of these songs positions internal mental states as the locus of desire. The "union of mind" is a prerequisite to the "union of body," and this metaphysical logic finds expression in subtle, restrained erotic gestures and tactile suggestions. These romantic rituals channel the listener/viewer into a symbolic locale through coded utterances that are not descriptive representations but performative acts. In doing so, they define and sustain hegemonic social structures around love, gender, and intimacy.

The cultural instrumentality thus developed gradually results in the conceptual bifurcation of the "Ideal Woman" into the "domestic woman" and the "aesthetic woman." J. Devika, in *Womanwriting Manreading*, reflects on how the modern Malayalee woman was reconfigured in the early 20th century: "The ideal woman was imagined to be not so much a unity, as the union of two distinct figures, which may be called the 'domestic woman' and the 'aesthetic woman' while the former was the provider of progeny, the latter had a function which was almost in antipathy to this. The aesthetic woman was the provider of pleasure" (123). The "domestic woman," associated with duty, family, and reproduction, is hardly ever the subject of amorous longing in film songs. She is the backdrop of narrative stability. By contrast, the "aesthetic woman" crafted as a figure of sensual beauty, visual excess, and lyrical devotion dominates the sentimental space of the romantic song. She is the one upon whom the camera lingers and the melody elaborates. Her purpose is not narrative fulfilment but a suspended, often unconsummated evocation of desire. Film songs ritualise this "aesthetic woman," isolating her from the routines of domesticity and placing her in conjunction with the cinematic language of fantasy, music, and metaphor.

However, this division is not merely representational but ideologically productive. The aestheticisation of female desire works not to empower but to contain it within highly managed formal and visual structures. By assigning the role of the sensuous to the aesthetic woman, the songs protect the "domestic woman" from eroticisation, and as a result preserving patriarchal norms under the guise of artistic expression. The romantic song, for this reason, becomes a space where desire is permitted only when detached from the social consequences of female agency or sexual autonomy. What appears as an ode to feminine beauty is, in fact, a coded ritual that reproduces gendered binaries and reinscribes them as natural. The very separation of woman into dual functions, that is, pleasure and progeny, ensures that desire, when it is allowed to speak in song, does so only in the language of fantasy, never of embodied liberation.

Moreover, romantic film songs frequently inscribe performative roles onto lovers. They often take the form of gendered dramatic monologues or duets that "naturalise" male and female domains, defining emotional and behavioural codes. In female-centred monologues like *Anjanakannezhuthi* or "*Sooryakanthi*," the woman speaker occupies a romantic position sanctioned by culture, yet this very positioning is mediated by dominant cultural norms. In these songs, subjects are interpellated as "You" and "I", a binary that Kristeva describes as the "contagious nature of the amorous relation" (*Tales of Love* 13), and this structure perpetuates itself across film narratives, imagining lovers as existing beyond arranged marriage and conventional platonic ideals.

Nevertheless, film songs articulate a mode of love that does repress amorous desires of the modernized individual shaped by renaissance and colonial modernity. In other words, the repressed amorous desire of the modernised individual of the Kerala Renaissance finds a veiled yet poignant expression in the lyrical domain of film songs. The social transformations of the Renaissance period, shaped by reformist ideals, rationalist thinking, and an emphasis on spiritual and intellectual refinement, often forced the individual to suppress bodily and

emotional impulses. Within this evolving moral framework, open expressions of sensual or romantic longing were considered improper, confined to silence or indirect suggestion. Yet film songs provided a culturally acceptable space where these forbidden feelings could be subtly expressed through poetic devices. Julia Kristeva's observation in *Tales of Love* is pertinent here. She states that the language of love often functions through displacement, where "the beloved becomes a figure represented in metaphors and allusions rather than a direct presence" (11). Desire is expressed through thriving metaphors (clouds, flowers, rivers, the moon etc.), all of which perform a symbolic substitution for the love object. Kristeva's assertion that metaphor is a matrix through which desire is both enacted and dislocated is manifested at this point. The metaphor is not just a poetic device but a tool of repression, hiding the rawness of *eros* behind ornamentation. The lyrics suggest the presence of love but also indicate its impossibility, and in this manner, connecting absence within presence through the metaphoric language of love.

Roland Barthes, in *A Lover's Discourse*, notes that the language of love often arises in "moments of absence" (45), with the lover speaking to a body that is not available for physical intimacy. This emotional condition is akin to the inner world of the Renaissance subject, whose longing could not be acknowledged directly. Film songs, with its abundant use of similes, poetic imagery, and emotional depth, allow this individual to express a longing that society would otherwise silence. Amatory discourse, at this juncture, is not declared openly but sung through nature, dreams, and imagined unions, offering a lyrical release to a desire that modern ideals sought to contain. However, this lyrical release is also imbued with feudal constructs denoting an ambiguous subject position. Feudal imagery such as regal settings, classical ornamentation, aristocratic etiquette, is continuously inflected within romantic songs, serving as an ideological apparatus. Consequently, film songs prescribe how lovers should behave, move, and imagine themselves, reestablishing social codes even as they express individual desire.

Asserting a code of conduct also leads to the interpellation of the audience the process of which is not innocent. It constitutes a broader institutional framework in which love is structured not for fulfilment but for eternal anticipation. The listener is placed in the position of the desiring subject, yet is always deprived of a narrative resolution. The erotic energy is redistributed into aesthetic appreciation, turning the song into a site of pleasure that is strictly symbolic and never physical. What is produced here is not love but the discourse of love that is disciplined and aestheticised.

Conclusion

The amatory discourse in Malayalam film songs operates within a codified aesthetic system that transcends individual compositions, making a study of particular songs redundant for understanding the broader ideological engagement of romantic expression. This system is sustained by recurring narrative conventions, musical patterns, and visual tropes that consistently eluicidate desire through deferral, metaphor, and stylised emotional excess. The emotional trajectory-longing, separation, anticipation, and idealization-is not contingent upon specific lyrical content but rather upon a shared cultural script that makes each song a variation of a common thematic structure. Romantic desire, in this context, becomes less a personal sentiment and more a ritualistic enactment of collective yearning. As such, the individual song merely reiterates the same semiotics where love is not fulfilled but endlessly postponed, and in that way maintaining a persistent grammar of repression that underlies the entire corpus of film music. This structural uniformity makes close readings of particular songs theoretically pointless, since the significance lies not in their difference but in their repetition.

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The representation of desire in Malayalam film songs cannot be taken at face value as a spontaneous or liberatory expression. Rather, it must be understood as a carefully modulated performance shaped by the normative structures of visibility, morality, and cultural coherence. What may seem like an outpouring of unrestrained romantic intensity is in fact a managed articulation, formed within an elaborate network of discursive expectations and aesthetic conventions. Foucault has denoted in *History of Sexuality* that modern societies have not silenced sex but have enveloped it within a proliferating discursive mechanism that defines and delimits its expression. Within this framework, Malayalam film songs function not only as sites of transgression but as aesthetic instruments through which desire is made socially acceptable, ideologically stable, and emotionally legible. It also preserves the appearance of passion while ensuring its coalition with prevailing codes of intelligibility and narrative resolution. This dynamic positions amatory discourse as a strategic aesthetic, not merely a narrative embellishment but a mode of emotional regulation and cultural instruction. Thus, a study of the evolution of the amatory discourse in Keralam interrogates how the sensual is simultaneously staged and contained, revealing the structured control behind what is presented as romantic spontaneity.

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