

## REVISITING FILM *VIRUS* - PUBLIC EDUCATION WITH MESSAGE OF HOPE DURING THE PANDEMIC TIME

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### Abstract

*After more than one year of the arrival of deadly Covid -19 in the world, we come to know how the coronavirus is transmitted, what happens when the virus enters a human body, and how we should curb the disease from spreading and so on. Aashiq Abu's 'Virus' will help you understand the present scenario in-depth. Of course, the movie is talking about Nipah Virus and not coronavirus, but one can get a better idea of the medical protocol and the sacrifice of the medical professionals for our wellbeing and why all guidelines must be followed. The Malayalam film 'Virus' talks about the Nipah outbreak that happened in Kerala in 2018 and the movie discusses how the state handled the disaster. From the medical team to the administrative level, the film shows how they supported each other and coordinated to conquer the crisis. In this time of ambiguity what we need is the same. Following the guiding principles given by the government and health department is very significant, because only then can we cope with the situation. 'Virus' can be controlled due to the collective effort and the film communicated the same. 'Virus' is not a simple record of the events that took place during the Nipah outbreak, but an insight into the lives of people who fought the crisis, who didn't lose hope even during the intense moments. The movie ends on a positive note about how the state overcomes the deadly virus with hope and confidence.*

**Key Words** – Covid -19, film, pandemic, educational value, message of hope etc...

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After more than half a year of the appearance of fatal Covid - 19 on the planet, we come to know how the coronavirus is transmitted, what happens when the infection enters a human body, and how we should check the ailment from spreading, etc. Aashiq Abu's 'Infection' will assist you with understanding the current situation inside and out. Obviously, the film is discussing Nipah Virus and not coronavirus, yet one can show signs of improvement thought of the clinical convention and the penance of the clinical experts for our prosperity and why all rules must be followed. The Malayalam film 'Infection' discusses the Nipah episode that occurred in Kerala in 2018 and the film examines how the state took care of the fiasco. From the clinical group to the managerial level, the film shows how they upheld one another and composed to vanquish the emergency. In this season of uncertainty what we need is the equivalent. Following the core values given by the administration and wellbeing office is exceptionally critical, in light of the fact that at exactly that point we would be able to adapt to the circumstance. 'Infection' can be controlled because of the aggregate exertion and the film conveyed the equivalent. 'Infection' is certainly not a basic record of the occasions that occurred during the Nipah episode, however a knowledge into the lives of individuals who battled the emergency, who didn't lose trust in any event, during the serious minutes. The film finishes strong about how the state beats the lethal infection with expectation and certainty.

### Medical Thriller

The Malayalam film *Virus* is based on a true story. It is a retelling of Kerala's 2018 battle with Nipah, a deadly virus that is zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans) and can also be transmitted through contaminated food or directly between people.

In May 2018, when Nipah struck Kerala, which is admired across India for its lush greenery, high literacy rate and other progressive human development, the authorities were well aware of the damage it can cause. The virus killed 105 people in Malaysia in 1998-99 and forced the authorities to order the killings of 1.1 million pigs. It also killed dozens of people in different regions of Bangladesh between 2001-2015 and in India in 2001 and 2007.

Two decades after its identification, there is still no vaccine to prevent the spread of the Nipah virus, although the World Health Organisation (WHO) has placed it on a list of "priority diseases" for which "there is an urgent need for accelerated research and development".

Kerala has a high population density. So when the first few cases of Nipah virus were identified in the state two years ago, many feared that the disease could spread rapidly. It would have calamitous consequences for the local population, the economy and India at large.

The state administration, however, swiftly swung into action and contained the outbreak at its onset. In June 2018, less than six weeks after the identification of the first Nipah case, the only two affected districts in the state were declared Nipah free. Seventeen people had died by then, but the local government earned praise in India and abroad for speedily stopping a localised outbreak from turning into an epidemic.

The film *Virus*, directed by Aashiq Abu and written by Muhsin Parari, Sharfu and Suhas, recounts the clinical efficiency with which politicians, bureaucrats, the healthcare fraternity, sanitation workers and the public joined hands to nip the spread of virus in the bud.

### **Film *Virus* vs Steven Soderbergh's *Contagion***

Abu's film is very different from the 2011 Hollywood film *Contagion*, which has been an object of global fascination since the novel coronavirus began gradually extending its grip across continents this year. Viewers have been struck by what appears to be the film's foretelling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Director Steven Soderbergh's star-studded medical drama is about a far more lethal contagion than the novel coronavirus and the social chaos

it causes. The anarchy and devastation portrayed in Contagion bear very much resemblance to what we are experiencing today. The film fills audiences with fear by showing them how bad things can get during a pandemic.

On the other hand, Abu's *Virus*, which belongs to the same genre as Soderbergh's *Contagion*, has a vastly different impact on the viewer.

"After watching *Contagion*, you are afraid to touch a lift button or your face. The film leaves you with a fear," Abu told the reporter in one of his interviews. He further informed that. "We decided that our film should give people hope, not fear."

To offer that hope, Abu did not need to delve into fiction. The news media had widely chronicled the Kerala government's meticulous response to Nipah in 2018. The director and his team also spent several months on research, meeting bureaucrats, medical professionals, Kerala's health minister, scientists and the other real-life characters depicted in *Virus*.

In his film, Abu merely transposed what actually happened in Kerala during the outbreak to the cinematic medium and portrayed with precision how the state's leaders and medical professionals treated those infected by the virus, identified and quarantined individuals who had been exposed to them, investigated their links to Patient Zero, painstakingly tracked down the original source of the virus and prevented new infections, all the while coordinating with the central government in New Delhi.

### **Depiction of result of awareness building and teamwork**

Awareness-building was one of the goals Abu and the script writers had in mind when they chose to make *Virus* a medical procedural rather than pivoting its plot around a single individual's poignant experience.

The story of 28-year-old nurse Lini Puthussery, who died after treating Kerala's first Nipah patients, for example, could have easily been at the centre of the film. The touching farewell note Puthussery wrote to her husband when she fell ill with the virus had made the rounds on social media and was even reported on by national newspapers and websites. Abu said he was first drawn to the story of Kerala's Nipah outbreak when he read about Puthussery

on social media. A conventional approach might have been to build the film around the suffering and sacrifices of a nurse who captured the hearts of the Kerala public.

Rather than using Puthussery's tragedy as the primary ingredient in a typical film, Abu opted to make a film about the community's successful response to the virus. *Virus*'s star lineup was also assembled to underline the teamwork and community spirit that got Kerala out of the crisis.

### **Training of of 5 T's used to conquer the pandemic**

Despite its ultimate positivity, *Virus* is not a tale of sugar 'n' spice and all things nice. It is a tension-ridden suspense saga that, among other things, tells a student of community medicine (played by the popular activist-cum-star Parvathy) and a senior virologist (Kunchacko Boban) as they try to identify "patient zero" and understand how he caught the deadly virus.

In some ways, *Contagion* is about what not to do during a medical crisis, while *Virus* is about what to do to avoid one. As mental wellness experts underline the need for optimism in these troubled times, it is worth wondering whether *Contagion*, as gripping as it may be, is an ideal watch when real-world events are increasingly mirroring the disastrous developments in the film's storyline.

*Contagion*, after all, is a hypothetical worst-case scenario, while *Virus* is a best-case scenario inspired by a true story. *Contagion* is about the devastating spread of a disease; *Virus* is about how the spread of a deadly contagion was efficiently tackled and controlled with the help of teamwork and scientific spirit. Most importantly, *Contagion* is about the worst that human beings can be during a catastrophe, *Virus* is about the best that we have been while averting one.

The film *Virus* very faithfully depicts how the five teams namely tracing tracking testing treatment and teamwork have been used to defeat the virus Nipah in Kerala.

## The message of hope

From an autorickshaw driver refusing to give a ride to a person suspected of Nipah virus to doctors isolating themselves to protect their loved ones, the film enriches the drama by balancing fear and hope. The success of *Virus* lies in its filmmakers understanding the little emotions and presenting them so cleverly that you can't help but relate to the film.

## Contemporary relevance of the monologue appeared in the film

One of the monologues appeared in the film runs as follows,

You are all heroes. At a time like this, did you not come as soon as I asked to meet you? ... In the last several hours, this land has surprised me no end. We did not have enough ventilators - they were provided to us by private hospitals. It is difficult to arrange for the minimum of 800 PPE kits we need per day. But early this morning, PPE kits worth around Rs 80 lakh arrived at our airport - a local industrialist friend got them here in his own aircraft with his own money. This morning, when Dr Sridevi from the medical college stepped out to get her newspaper, an unidentified man was waiting for her with a whole bundle of N95 masks. He handed them over, saying, 'Doctor, you will need these', and left without even telling her his name. You may not think twice about any of this because you are natives of this city, but for me, these are all miracles."

Does this sound like a heartfelt speech delivered by a politician during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic? Well, it is not.

This is a monologue from the critically acclaimed 2019 Mollywood hit *Virus*. Mollywood, the nickname for the Malayalam language film industry based in the southern Indian state of Kerala, is not as widely known internationally as Bollywood, but it is held in high esteem by cineastes and critics within India. The speech I quoted above was delivered in the film by Paul V Abraham, a bureaucrat in Kerala.

'*Virus*' is not a mere documentation of the events that took place during the Nipah outbreak, but an insight into the lives of people who fought the crisis, who didn't lose hope

even during the intense moments. The movie ends on a positive note about how the state defeated the deadly virus with hope and confidence. "No disaster can defeat us anymore," says C K Prameela (Revathy), the health minister as the movie concludes.

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