

# Narratives of Survival: A Content Analysis of 'Aadu Jeevitham' (The Goat Life) 2024

**Dr. Jisha K, Saranya P S**

Assistant Professor, Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Southern Regional Campus, Kottayam, Kerala, India

## Abstract

This study provides a comprehensive content analysis of the Malayalam movie *Aadu Jeevitham*, directed by Blessy and based on Benjamin's novel. The film, set against the backdrop of the harsh deserts of Saudi Arabia, delves into the life of Najeeb, a Malayali migrant worker. Through a detailed examination of the plot, themes, and cinematic techniques, this analysis explores the movie's portrayal of isolation, survival, and the dehumanizing experiences of migrant laborers. The study also highlights the cultural and social commentary embedded within the narrative, reflecting on the broader implications of migration and displacement. The film's critical reception and its impact on audiences, particularly in Kerala, are also discussed, emphasizing its relevance in contemporary discussions on migrant labor rights and human dignity.

**Keywords:** Migration, Isolation, Survival, Exploitation, Cinematic Realism

## INTRODUCTION

The transition from literature to film is often fraught with challenges, as filmmakers grapple with the nuances of storytelling within a limited timeframe. "Aadu Jeevitham" (The Goat Life), directed by Blessy, is one such adaptation that takes a semi-autobiographical account of a Keralite's harrowing experience as a slave in a goat farm in Saudi Arabia. The film and the novel depict Najeeb's stressful journey, which serves as a gripping portrayal of the predicament faced by numerous migrant laborers who head off from their homes in pursuit of a better life, only to come across a brutal reality of being exploited and dehumanized. This content analysis aims to dissect how the film captures real-life social issues, emotional depth, and narrative techniques while staying true to the essence of Benjamin's original work.

The Malayalam film *Aadu Jeevitham*, directed by Blessy and based on the acclaimed novel by Benjamin, is a powerful cinematic exploration of the life of Najeeb, a Malayali migrant worker who endures unimaginable hardships in the deserts of Saudi Arabia. This film, which transcends the boundaries of conventional storytelling, delves deep into the themes of isolation, survival, and the exploitation of migrant laborers. *Aadu Jeevitham* is not just a story of an individual's struggle but a reflection of the broader socio-economic realities faced by millions of migrant workers from Kerala and other parts of India.

The narrative of *Aadu Jeevitham* is a poignant portrayal of the human spirit's resilience in the face of extreme adversity. Najeeb's journey from a hopeful worker to a broken man serves as a microcosm of the migrant experience, highlighting the physical and emotional toll of displacement and exploitation. The

film's stark visual and auditory elements effectively convey the protagonist's inner turmoil, creating a visceral experience for the audience.

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive content analysis of *Aadu Jeevitham*, focusing on its thematic depth, character development, and cinematic techniques. By examining these elements, the study seeks to understand how the film addresses critical issues related to migration, identity, and human dignity. Additionally, the study explores the cultural and social commentary embedded within the narrative, particularly in the context of Kerala's long history of migration to the Gulf countries.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### 1. Migration and the Gulf Experience

The phenomenon of migration from Kerala to the Gulf countries has been extensively studied in both academic and popular literature. Researchers such as K.C. Zachariah and S. Irudaya Rajan have documented the socio-economic impact of this migration on Kerala society. Their studies highlight the economic benefits, as well as the social and emotional costs, associated with migration. These works provide a critical backdrop for understanding the context in which *Aadu Jeevitham* is set, as the film offers a narrative representation of the lived experiences of these migrants. Najeeb's efforts to adapt to the new cultural and social norms in the Arab region serves as a remarkable representation of the predicaments faced by migrant laborers in navigating the complexities of a foreign setting (Athisayamani, 2019).

### 2. Depiction of Migrant Labor in Cinema

The portrayal of migrant labor in cinema has been a subject of interest for film scholars, particularly in the context of Indian and global cinema. Films like *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The Lunchbox*, and *City of Gold* have explored various aspects of migration, such as displacement, exploitation, and the search for identity. Scholars like Rachel Dwyer and Ravi Vasudevan have analyzed how these films reflect the socio-political realities of the times and contribute to the discourse on migration. *Aadu Jeevitham*, with its focus on the harsh realities faced by migrant workers, can be situated within this broader cinematic tradition.

### 3. Thematic Analysis of *Aadu Jeevitham*

The novel *Aadu Jeevitham* by Benyamin, on which the film is based, has been the subject of numerous literary analyses. Critics have lauded the novel for its stark realism and its unflinching portrayal of the migrant experience. Studies by scholars such as Dr. K.M. Tharakan and Dr. P.P. Raveendran have explored the novel's themes of isolation, survival, and the loss of identity. These analyses provide a foundation for understanding how these themes are translated into the cinematic medium in Blessy's adaptation.

### 4. Cinematic Techniques and Realism

The use of cinematic techniques to convey realism has been a key area of study in film theory. André Bazin's work on realism in cinema, particularly his emphasis on long takes, deep focus, and minimal editing, provides a theoretical framework for analyzing Blessy's directorial choices in *Aadu Jeevitham*. The film's use of desolate landscapes, natural lighting, and a restrained score contribute to its realistic portrayal of Najeeb's harrowing journey. Scholars like David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson have also discussed how cinematic techniques can enhance narrative and emotional impact, which is particularly relevant in the context of *Aadu Jeevitham*. Furthermore, a study based on the original literary work states that the goats and camels encountered by Najeeb on the desert farm may symbolize a multispecies sense

of place, one that challenges human exceptionalism and calls for a more holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of all living beings (Thiyagarajan, 2020).

### 5. Cultural and Social Commentary in Indian Cinema

Indian cinema has a long tradition of addressing social issues, and films like *Aadu Jeevitham* continue this legacy by focusing on the plight of marginalized communities. Scholars like Ashish Rajadhyaksha and Paul Willemen have explored the role of Indian cinema in shaping public discourse and reflecting societal concerns. In this context, *Aadu Jeevitham* can be seen as a critical commentary on the exploitation of migrant workers and the dehumanizing conditions they often endure.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study on the Malayalam movie *Aadu Jeevitham* is structured around qualitative content analysis, which allows for an in-depth exploration of the film's narrative, themes, and cultural significance. The methodology comprises the following steps:

### 1. Research Design

- **Qualitative Content Analysis:** This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the various elements of the film. This method is appropriate for understanding the nuanced meanings and underlying messages conveyed through the film's narrative and visual elements.
- **Descriptive and Interpretive Approach:** The analysis is both descriptive, focusing on the observable features of the film, and interpretive, aiming to uncover the deeper meanings and cultural contexts.

### 2. Sampling

- **Film Selection:** *Aadu Jeevitham* was selected for its significant cultural relevance and the depth of its narrative, which addresses critical issues like migration, exploitation, and survival.
- **Scenes and Segments:** Key scenes and segments of the film that exemplify the major themes—such as isolation, survival, and exploitation—were identified and analyzed in detail.

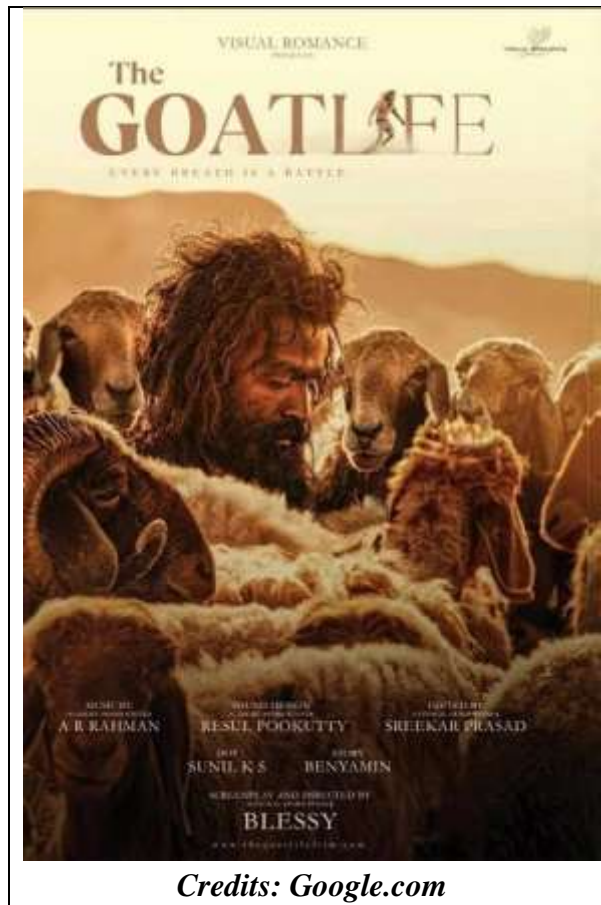
### 3. Data Collection

- **Primary Data:** The primary data for this study is the movie *Aadu Jeevitham* itself. The film was viewed multiple times to ensure a thorough understanding of its narrative structure, character development, and thematic content.
- **Secondary Data:** Relevant secondary sources, including reviews, critiques, interviews with the director and actors, and scholarly articles on the novel by Benyamin, were also examined to provide context and support the analysis.

### 4. Analytical Framework

- **Thematic Analysis:** The film was analyzed thematically, focusing on key themes such as isolation, survival, identity, and exploitation. This involved identifying recurring motifs, symbols, and narrative elements that contribute to these themes.
- **Character Analysis:** The development of the protagonist, Najeeb, and other key characters was examined to understand how their journeys reflect the film's broader themes.
- **Cinematic Techniques:** The use of cinematography, sound design, editing, and direction was analyzed to understand how these techniques contribute to the film's emotional and thematic impact.
- **Cultural and Social Context:** The analysis also included an exploration of the film's cultural and social commentary, particularly in relation to the experiences of migrant workers from Kerala in the Gulf countries.

## DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION



### 1. Plot and Themes

- **Plot Overview:** *Aadu Jeevitham* is an adaptation of the novel by Benyamin, which narrates the life of Najeeb, a Malayali immigrant worker in Saudi Arabia. The film explores his struggles, resilience, and the harsh realities of migrant labor.
- **Themes:**
  - **Isolation and Loneliness:** The protagonist's journey through the desert symbolizes his emotional and physical isolation.
  - **Survival and Endurance:** The film highlights the human spirit's capacity to endure extreme hardships.
  - **Identity and Displacement:** The narrative delves into the loss of identity and the sense of displacement experienced by migrant workers.
  - **Exploitation and Modern Slavery:** The movie also sheds light on the exploitation and dehumanization of migrant laborers in the Gulf countries.

### 2. Character Analysis

- **Najeeb:** The protagonist, portrayed by Prithviraj Sukumaran, represents the everyman migrant worker, struggling to survive in an alien land. His character arc from a hopeful worker to a broken man reflects the broader experience of many migrant laborers.
- **Supporting Characters:** Each supporting character contributes to the narrative, either as fellow sufferers or as representatives of the oppressive system.

### 3. Cinematic Techniques

- **Cinematography:** The stark, desolate landscapes of the desert are used effectively to symbolize the

protagonist's inner turmoil and isolation.

- **Sound Design:** The use of silence and minimal background score enhances the feeling of loneliness and despair.
- **Editing:** The pacing of the film, with long takes and minimal cuts, allows the audience to fully absorb the protagonist's slow descent into despair.
- **Direction:** Blessy's direction is marked by a focus on realism, with a strong emphasis on the physical and emotional toll of Najeeb's journey.

#### 4. Cultural and Social Commentary

- **Depiction of Migrant Labor:** The film provides a poignant commentary on the plight of migrant workers from Kerala and other parts of India who go to the Gulf in search of better opportunities but often end up in inhumane conditions.
- **Impact on Kerala Society:** The movie also touches upon the impact of this migration on the families left behind, the societal pressures, and the often unrealistic expectations placed on these workers.
- **Religious and Moral Undertones:** There are subtle references to faith and spirituality, as Najeeb's belief in God is tested throughout his ordeal.

#### 5. Reception and Impact

- **Critical Reception:** *Aadu Jeevitham* has been widely praised for its powerful storytelling, realistic portrayal of the harsh realities faced by migrant workers, and the stellar performance by Prithviraj Sukumaran.
- **Audience Response:** The film has resonated with audiences, especially in Kerala, due to its relatable themes and emotional depth. It has sparked discussions about the conditions of migrant workers and the need for better protections and rights.
- **Awards and Recognition:** The film is expected to be a strong contender in various film festivals and award circuits due to its strong narrative and social relevance.

### CONCLUSION

*Aadu Jeevitham* is more than just a film; it's a powerful narrative that brings to light the struggles of a largely invisible segment of society. Through its intense storytelling, compelling characters, and striking visuals, it offers a moving commentary on the human condition and the price of survival. This content analysis has shed light on how "Aadu Jeevitham" stands not only as an adaptation of a beloved novel but also as a statement on human dignity and the plight of laborers worldwide. The film's portrayal of Najeeb's journey through cinematic techniques serves as a powerful reminder of the unwavering strength and honor of the human soul, even in the midst of terrible adversity.

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