



JOURNAL OF THE ROYAL LAUREATES ACADEMY

www.rlaindia.org

EMERGING LITERARY TRENDS IN MALAYALAM FICTION: THE WORKS OF AKHIL P. DHARMAJAN

Mohammad Shah Alam Chowdhury¹, Mili Rahman², Dr. Mohammad Sazzad Hossain³
Rousan Ara⁴

¹ Professor, Department of English, Dhaka International University, Bangladesh

E-mail: shahalam.eng@diu.ac ; Orcid ID: 0000-0003-0348-5739

² Associate Professor, Department of English, Dhaka International University, Bangladesh

E-mail: milirahman2010@gmail.com ; Orcid ID: 0009-0008-1686-0394

³ Professor, Department of English, Dhaka International University, Bangladesh

⁴ Research Assistant, Bangladesh Centre for Research and Planning (BCRP), Bangladesh

E-mail: rumi.bd10@gmail.com

DOI: <https://www.doi-ds.org/doi/10.2025-88968269/JRLA/08202601>

ABSTRACT

Malayalam literature, in the last ten years, has seen a significant shift from traditional wholesome mainstream fiction that had been dominated by older writers to the younger ones who put into practice through their writing more visibly cinematic modes and techno linguistic interaction with social media, alongside the influence of emotionally charged narratives. Akhil P. Dharmajan is a leading contemporary writer of the younger generation. This article rigorously analyses the developing literary trends evident in Dharmajan's works, particularly Ram c/o Anandhi, Ouija Board, and Mercury Island. The study examines how his writing reflects evolving reader preferences, urban emotionality, popular culture, digital literary marketing, and the integration of cinematic techniques with conventional narrative forms. This study contends, through textual analysis and secondary qualitative research, that Dharmajan's writing exemplifies a wider democratization of Malayalam literature, characterized by enhanced accessibility, emotional realism, and the impact of multimedia on literary creation and reception. The research additionally assesses the discussions about literary excellence and popular fiction within the present literary discourse of Kerala. This study places Dharmajan in the context of the

development of Malayalam literature in the present day, thus enriching the academic discussion on popular Malayalam literature of the region as well as the newly emerging readership in India.

Keywords: Malayalam fiction, Akhil P. Dharmajan, contemporary literature, cinematic narration, popular fiction, digital readership, Kerala literature

INTRODUCTION

The intellectual and philosophical wealth of Malayalam literature is evident from the works of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, M.T. Vasudevan Nair, O.V. Vijayan, Kamala Das and Benyamin. In Kerala, the new digital media, shift in reading culture and widespread literary culture have changed the context of literary production and consumption. New writers have gradually moved away from symbolic and philosophical writing to the passionately moving and intimate writing style in recent years. Akhil P. Dharmajan is one of the most successful authors of the young readers in the Malayalam medium. This literary journey of Dharmajan's is a new phenomenon in literature. He began serializing stories at Facebook, but healed to become one of the most popular novels of his day, written in Malayalam. The move from social media narrative to the mainstream literary market is captured by his transformation. His transition from a social media story to a literary success exemplifies the evolution of regional writing in the current times. Unlike many classic Malayalam novelists, Dharmajan deliberately incorporates stylish narration, unaffected vernacular, intensity of emotion and fast pace in his tales. Such elements in his work have helped to captivate the interest of a younger readership, many of whom are often repelled by traditional literature. While many believed that literary and popular materials were of equal value, there emerged anxieties around literary merit and popular culture in the Malayalam literature format, especially considering the widespread audience for Ram c/o Anandhi. Dharmajan's fiction, found in Malayalam literature, exemplifies the rise of an emerging literary genre within Indian literature. "Dharmajan" should be replaced by the character to name for definitive identity.] Upon release at theaters this film also performed well enough at the box office and received the Sahitya Akademi Award (2005). Shortly thereafter, this acceptance led to considerable controversy among Critics over whether popular fiction should be validated or censured by institutions like Sahitya Akademy and others; and whether or not there is an emerging distinction between "serious literature" and "popular literature" was evident in these related discussions of popular and serious literature both within Malaysia Lit., as well as within English language literature from across India. It examines his narrative approaches, topics, societal representations, and engagement with digital literary culture. The study examines how his works contest conventional literary hierarchies and facilitate the democratization of Malayalam fiction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The increasing prevalence of popular fiction in Malayalam literature has raised significant enquiries over literary merit, changes in readership, and cultural authenticity. Despite the considerable public support for writers such as Akhil P. Dharmajan, academic work regarding their literary worth is still scarce. The prevailing conversation regarding Dharmajan predominantly emphasizes financial success or controversy, rather than engaging in literary critique. So, a study of the general literary and cultural creations, which reveal his works, is nonexistent. In Malayalam fiction, this study tries to amend this lacuna by critically looking at Dharmajan's fiction as indicative One of the emerging literary trend of the modern literary culture in Kerala.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine and get a complete overview of the key or major literary trends which are manifested in the writings of Akhil P. Dharmajan.
2. To analyze the narrative techniques and thematic concerns in his fiction.
3. To explore the influence of social media and cinematic storytelling on contemporary Malayalam literature.
4. To investigate the debate between popular fiction and literary merit in the context of modern Malayalam literary culture.
5. To evaluate Dharmajan's contribution to the evolution of Malayalam fiction.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What literary trends are reflected in the novels of Akhil P. Dharmajan?
2. How does cinematic narration influence his storytelling style?
3. What role does digital culture play in the popularity of his works?
4. How do his novels represent changing reader expectations in Malayalam literature?
5. Why has his literary recognition generated controversy among critics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The outcome of literature surveys conducted in the context of Kerala on the recent period has shown that the literary landscape in Kerala has undergone a significant change in the wake of technical development, the atmosphere of social media and a new generation of readers. Sinoj Antony says digital marketing, diversification of genres and social media reading is causing a “renaissance” in modern Malayalam literature. Antony says that the popularity of Ram c/o Anandhi illustrates how online platforms enhance literary visibility among younger demographics. The emergence of digital literary

culture has transformed publishing methods. Authors are now increasingly using Facebook, Instagram and self-publishing websites to bypass traditional publishing entities and directly engage with readership, defying the rule of literary legitimacy. Kahil P. Dharmajan has gone through- Facebook serialisation and crowd sourcing- the literature-crafting apparatuses that are making literature democratic. Those who have studied popular literature say that this drama and emotion are what readers love today. Dharmajan's fictions show this. They have movie storylines, quick edits, and a sense of humour, romanticism and heartfelt conversations. The prose is often like a screenplay narrative and the reader is sucked into the story by the writers' style. A significant topic of discourse pertains to the conflict between popular fiction and literary elitism. When Ram c/o Anandhi was sanctioned by the Sahithya Akademi, it created a good amount of debate among the literary fraternity in Kerala. The critics were puzzled by the sense of a popular and controversial novel. Supporters argued that scholarship of a literary kind should not be limited to scholarly complexity or an elite audience. A trend has been observed in the contemporary research of Indian regional literature towards a preoccupation with "inclusivity" and "accessibility". Now, literature is considered not only as a science of mind but also as a tool of emotions and society. Love, loneliness, struggle for existence, migration, gender differences and emotional trauma are the themes that find expression in the novels of Dharmajan and these are pertinent to the impressionable young readers of today's urban setting. Despite the increasing journalistic discourse surrounding Dharmajan, scholarly literary analysis is still inadequate. Most existing studies concentrate on digital Malayalam literature in general rather than conducting a thorough textual study of his works. This paper contributes to current literary studies by critically analyzing Dharmajan's work in the context of the broader evolution of Malayalam literary culture.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is interpretative and has a qualitative approach; the main resources used in this research are primary data in the form of literature. Analyse and interpret texts and use secondary sources. The study presents an analysis of some of the most important works authored by Akhil P. Dharmajan (also known as Ram c/o Anandhi, Ouija Board, and Mercury Island). Secondary data has been collected from journal articles, literary reviews, interviews, newspaper report and discussions of modern Malayalam literature on the academia level. The research has followed a thematic analytical approach and focused on:

- Narrative style
- Characterization
- Cinematic storytelling
- Digital literary culture
- Popular fiction aesthetics
- Reader reception

The study also incorporates discourse analysis to understand debates surrounding literary legitimacy and popular literature in Kerala.

EMERGING TRENDS IN MALAYALAM FICTION THROUGH DHARMAJAN'S WORKS

1. Cinematic Narrative Structure

Dharmajan's narration in the fiction is one of the characteristics of his fiction. His works often present in a pictorial script using emotive speech, dynamic transitions: Good dialogue, transitioning between scenes, and attractive narratives. *Ram c/o Anandhi* is consistently been dubbed a film. Ever since its beginning, literature with reference to an academic context. Over the long run, this approach is similar to extensive shifts in the culture of reading. The modern readers, who are encouraged by the OTT platforms, film and short form visual media, more and more look for fast opportunities for engagement. More and more are looking for quick answers for emotion sensing. Dharmajan adeptly modifies, this is the narration of literature to this media. His characterisation is also greatly influenced by films. Characters like Ram and Anandhi exhibit emotional immediacy and reliability akin to cinema heroes. Their encounters are organized through visually striking episodes instead of prolonged philosophical reflection. The break in the Malayalam novel is this, and it is not a particularly fast turn of events. This is the state of the transition from the slower, thoughtful tone typical of Malayalam novels. Moreover, Dharmajan's role in writing a screenplay, particularly the Malayalam film 2018's, elevates his film literary skills. His story is located in the intersection of literary and visual culture.

2. Rise of Popular Romance Fiction

Realism, political commentary and psychological depth have been an important highlight in Malayalam literature for a long time. The success of the book by Dharmajan reflects the revival of romance writing. The novel was emotionally charged with a romantic storyline, making it popular among younger readers, especially among the *Ram c/o Anandhi* readers. In contrast to conventional love poetry, Dharmajan combines romance with the themes of in between's, movements and friendships in the urban context and emotional strength. His characters' emotional sensitivity is a deep connection that readers who have lived through today's urban life have with his characters. This romance novel is in great demand and the sale of Malayalam books went down because of this. The younger generations don't care about the thinking, they care about the feeling. Dharmajan's novels meet this expectation by highlighting emotion over literary probing.

3. Digital Literary Culture and Social Media Influence

A significant tendency seen in Dharmajan's literary career is the influence of digital media on literary

achievement. His initial ascent via Facebook storytelling exemplifies the advent of alternative literary ecosystems beyond conventional publication frameworks. Fans from Instagram, Facebook and YouTube were a major factor in making the tour a success. Viral launch of Ram c/o Anandhi. Optic modifications from glass for viewing images and messages. Glass was used by readers to make eyepieces and handsome alterations and modifications. Poignant passages have been extracted from the text and presented as an interactive digital on-line resource. This shift means that today's stories need to be literary, not only for their content, but their form as well. Also, on digital presence and engagement. The popularity of Dharmajan is a good indication of this. This is a good case in point of modern literature being employed in the promotion's multimedia environment. Moreover, today; the Internet has opened the doors to literature for an audience. Dharmajan's storytelling even old readers, who were not interested to read Malayalam books, are greatly influenced by these skills. But have discovered love of literature.

4. Genre Hybridization

In the case of the Dharmajan the story has a typical case of hybridisation of genres, which is a prominent feature. Modern Malayalam literature- many of his novels have romance, thrill, fantasy, horror elements and are written in that style. Use of humour, and social realism to accomplish smooth storytelling. For instance, Ouija Board has awful elements; Mercury Island becomes the more of elements of. Fantasy and adventure. At the same time, Ram c/o Anandhi combines the romance with a critique on social issues. The following image shows a transgender woman, symbolically dressed in the cross: This term of adaptability for genre shows the international influences that are increasingly eroding. Rigid genre borders. Modern readers frequently favor intricate narratives that merge amusement with emotional and social profundity.

5. Representation of Marginalized Identities

Despite criticism of his literature that it focuses on amusement, Dharmajan's writings also look at marginalised identities and socioeconomic issues. Malli, a transgender lady, plays an emotionally significant role in the film Ram c/o Anandhi. The image depicts the emerging importance of gender diversity in Malayalam literature. Identity which has been excluded from the dominant narratives is now given due recognition in modern regional literature. Emotions of wandering, emotional displacement and urban instability are common themes in Dharmajan's fiction. The characters often exist in the space between dreams and doubts, and represent the fears of the younger generations in contemporary India.

READER RECEPTION AND LITERARY CONTROVERSY

The remarkable success of Ram c/o Anandhi elevated Dharmajan to a literary sensation. Nonetheless, his achievement elicited significant criticism from certain factions of Kerala's literary establishment. Following his Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar, the question of institutional literary legitimating of popular fiction that has become popular through commercial success was raised. Critics argued that the novel was lacking in the admiration of the award-winning literature which was regarded as stylish and philosophically deep. Some have classified it as "pulp fiction. Supporters were in favour of the emotional truth, readability and cultural meaning of the novel. In this controversy, there is a wider ideological divide in the present Indian literature which should focus upon the aesthetic elevation or the mass emotional response? Is there a literary value to financially successful literature, and can the literary merit be demeaned when it is accessible? Dharmajan's literary attitude casts doubt on the traditional dichotomy between "high literature" and "popular literature." His works clearly show how modern readers are increasingly focusing on emotional involvement, story speed and how story is relatable.

TRANSFORMATION OF MALAYALAM READERSHIP

The success of Dharmajan's writings reflects the changes in the demographic of Malayalam readers. The traditional readers of Malayalam literature were mostly middle class, who read Malayalam literature that was academically oriented and/or philosophical, socially conscious. Yet, the digital culture has produced a new generation of readers influenced by the aesthetics of movies, social media, and the tales of the world. Modern young readers might read with images. As a result, people choose emotionally compelling and visually stimulating storylines. Dharmajan's narrative explicitly confronts this cultural transformation. Moreover, social media has facilitated the public sharing of literary experiences by readers through reviews, reels, quotations, and fan networks. Consequently, literature increasingly serves as a social emotional culture rather than an individual academic pursuit.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Dharmajan's linguistic flair has much contributed to his appeal. His novels are extremely readable with a use of a vernacular Malayalam tone characteristically fluffed up with emotion. His writing is extremely different. The Malayalam literature is very symbolic "from it". It's not a lack of literature. Rather, it's conscious accessibility. In contemporary popular literature emotions are used to the extent that they are highlighted rather than the words. Retelling a film with humour, in ordinary language and the time of film brings intimacy between characters. These literary styles are reflected in the changing standards of literature in the reading domain.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF DHARMAJAN'S FICTION

The cultural significance of Akhil P. Dharmajan extends beyond literary popularity. His success symbolizes broader changes in:

- Publishing culture
- Reader engagement
- Digital literary marketing
- Youth literary participation
- Regional popular fiction

His self-publishing journey particularly inspires aspiring writers excluded from traditional literary institutions. Using social media and crowd funding, Dharmajan went against the grain of traditional publishing structures. Furthermore, his novels helped to rekindle interest among the younger generation in Malayalam literature, which were fond of reading English popular literature.

FINDINGS

This study identifies several major literary trends emerging through Dharmajan's works:

1. The fiction in Malayalam is now increasingly adopting the customary elements of film narrative.
2. There is a significant impact of social media on literary production, promotion and readership.
3. Romantic fiction, which is popular in other fields of literature, is again gaining importance in Malayalam literature.
4. Hybridization of genres is central to practices of modern telling.
5. Literary accessibility is growing in importance and weight along with literary sophistication.
6. Digital readership has brought about a change in literary culture from elite consumption to mass participation.
7. The reader today wants to be emotionally involved with the story and relate it to his or her life experiences.

CONCLUSION

Akhil P. Dharmajan is one of the milestones of the modern Malayalam literature. His literary success represents what's happening in reader expectations, internet culture, narrative aesthetics, and literary accessibility. Dharmajan has emerged as one of the most popular and socially-engaged voices in the film medium in contemporary Kerala. With his ability to narrate in film, emotional characters and the

appeal of social media, Dharmajan has become a celebrated writer of the present day in Kerala. The ongoing debates on literary excellence fail to reflect his writing and it is a clear testimony to the process of democratisation of Malayalam literature in the internet era. Dharmajan merges popular appeal with emotional authenticity and socially pertinent issues, so contesting conventional boundaries between elite and mainstream literature. This study suggests that contemporary literary trends in Malayalam literature are increasingly influenced by multimedia, emotional accessibility, and engaged digital reading. Dharmajan's books serve not just as financial triumphs but also as cultural texts that encapsulate the aspirations, concerns, and emotional realities of modern youth in this dynamic literary landscape. Comparative study of Malayalam popular fiction with other literary traditions of the region in India could be a future study. Moreover, interdisciplinary studies on the relationship between literature, cinema and social media culture may contribute to the understanding of the development of the Indian regional literatures in the twenty first century in an unprecedented way

REFERENCES

1. Akhil P Dharmajan bags Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar for *Ram c/o Anandi*. (2025, June 18). *Onmanorama*.
2. Akhil P. Dharmajan. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 20, 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akhil_P._Dharmajan
3. Akhil P. Dharmajan wins Sahitya Akademi Yuva Puraskar for '*Ram c/o Anandi*'. (2025, June 18). *Madhyamam*.
4. Antony, S. (2024). *Trends in modern Malayalam literature: A renaissance in the making*. *Shanlax International Journal of English*, 12(4).
5. *Facebook made this youth of a sleepy village a novelist*. (2018, August 13). *The Times of India*.
6. *Looks like a book, feels like a movie*. (2020, December 1). *The New Indian Express*.
7. *Malayalam author shares tumultuous journey*. (2024, November 17). *Gulf Today*.
8. *Pulp or prizeworthy? A literary debate in Kerala that no one saw coming*. (2025, August 23). *South First*.
9. *Ram c/o Anandhi*. (n.d.). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved June 20, 2026, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ram_c/o_Anandhi
10. *Why a bestseller has Kerala talking*. (2025, June 21). *The Times of India*.