



## Android Kunjappan version 5.25: movie review and healthcare perspectives

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Android Kunjappan is a Malayalam language comedy, science-fiction movie released in 2019. It was a huge critical and commercial success. This film was written and directed by Ratheesh Balakrishnan Poduval (in his directorial debut), produced by Santhosh T. Kuruvilla, and starred Suraj Venjaramoodu, Soubin Shahir, Sooraj Thelakkad, Kendy Zirdo, and Saiju Kurup. Most are well-known Malayalam actors.

The movie explores the relationship between a robot and humans and is set in a small town in Northern Kerala. It tells the story of an elderly man, his son and their caregiver robot. His relatives also have an important role to play in the movie. The film explores several issues related to society, aging, loneliness,

healthcare and companionship.

As Kerala and many parts of India move towards becoming an aging society, the conflicts between the elderly and their children, the collapse of joint families, and the acceptance by society of technology in various roles become important issues. The problems of a rapidly aging population in Kerala and the shortage of caregivers are explored. The father is reluctant to let his son take up a job outside the town as he wants him to be at his side and take care of him in his old age. The father is suspicious of technology, and of his robot companion, but slowly moves toward acceptance.

The robot is short and is named 'Kunjappan'

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(small man, in Malayalam). Suraj plays the character of the old man, Bhaskaran, who has strong likes and dislikes. The relationship between the father and the son living in a traditional house is carefully portrayed. The scene in the tea shop where different issues related to life and politics are freely discussed represents an important aspect of village life in Kerala. The challenges of finding a home nurse and the stubborn nature of the old man are elegantly portrayed toward the beginning of the film. Many readers may have elderly parents and the challenge of providing care for them and balancing their job and other responsibilities may lead to feelings of guilt on not being able to do enough for one's parents. In India we have been always proud of being able to take care of our elderly relatives but today several factors are hampering the provision of care.

Another interesting scene is the blossoming relationship between Hitomi (played by Kendy Zirido) and the old man's son, Subramanian (played by Soubin Shahir) in Russia. Hitomi is the daughter of a Malayali father and a Japanese mother and has a special connection with Kerala. As our society becomes increasingly diverse and multicultural, relationships between people of different cultures will become more common. We increasingly notice this in medical colleges and among our colleagues and students.

The old man is initially very suspicious of the robot and possessive of his personal space. The old house is not exactly designed for an elderly man living alone. I found it interesting that the robot was able to navigate around the old house and the surroundings without much difficulty. Old houses in rural Kerala (like in other parts of India) have been built to enable generations to live together under one roof with the young taking care of the elderly in a joint family.

Slowly the relationship between the robot and the elderly man changes. He begins to look at the robot as a young child and probably as his son. He stops subscribing to print newspapers

and reads the news online on the robot's screen. This scene is lovingly depicted. Bhaskaran begins going for walks, and to the market, taking the robot along, much to the amusement of the villagers. The community begins to slowly interact with and accept the robot. A hilarious and yet profound scene is where a group of middle-aged women inform Kunjappan and the father, Bhaskaran, that he (Kunjappan) should not go around naked in the community as there are ladies present and it gives a wrong impression. Eventually, the robot begins to wear a lungi around his waist, the traditional attire of men in Kerala. On more formal occasions he wears a white mundu. It was intriguing to watch humans developing relationships with the robot, and this has been portrayed in other movies too.

Kunjappan introduces Bhaskaran to the internet and to social media and the old man joins Facebook where he eventually connects with an ex-love. Loneliness is a major problem for the elderly and human connections can improve health. In Kerala, many households only have the elderly, with their children working outside the state or the country.

Later the robotics company discovers a bug in the robot series, which includes Kunjappan, that could cause robots to become violent and attack people. Bhaskaran's son rushes back to Kerala and he and his girl friend keep a careful eye on the robot. They try to disassemble it, but Bhaskaran is protective and violent, and runs away with it. The depth of the relationship between Bhaskaran and the robot is underlined in this scene.

I found this to be an interesting movie on many levels. Robots and artificial intelligence (AI) are current buzzwords. AI is now ubiquitous in many aspects of modern life. I am fascinated by the concept of consciousness, and wonder whether AI and robots can attain consciousness. Affective computing and emotions in robots may be of special interest to humanities scholars. Robots can already show concern, interest, empathy and support. However, the relationship

between AI and humans raises several dilemmas for doctors, educators and ethicists. There are many areas of interest in the movie for those interested in the health humanities. Urbanization, nuclear families, an aging society, loneliness and its effects, interactions between humans and robots, are explored well. In the future, robots may become much more common and may become as common as mobile phones. The use of the term 'android' in the title may be a stroke of genius because due to the ubiquitous presence of mobile phones, 'android' is a well-known word.

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I wonder how people would react to a robot living amongst them. What factors will influence human-robot interactions? Will robots be accepted? What apprehensions will remain? With the continuing development of AI will the line between a robot and a human get increasingly blurred? What will be the role of AI in the healthcare sector with a declining and aging human population? Will you be comfortable receiving care from a robot enabled with AI? The last one may be a question for the readers to carefully consider.