

**Old Age Versus Tech: Representations of Elderly Interaction with
Technology in *Robot & Frank* and *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25***

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Abstract: We live at a time in which spending even a single day without the proximity to technology is unimaginable. Technology interacts with all the aspects of life, with the number of machines turning ‘smart’ on the rise every day. Collectively, art across the globe features a critical view of this condition, and cinema is at the vanguard of it. Science Fiction cinemas, with its theme more often set in the future, gives out a vivid idea of human interaction with advanced tech. Numerous sci-fi films have portrayed human-like robots and its assimilation into the society. However, old age is a rarely represented area in such films. It is a common scenario in contemporary world to observe elderly people finding it difficult to navigate technology such as smartphones. They have often been ridiculed in social media platforms, and even in films as well. The two films sampled in this study portray advanced humanoid robots entrusted with geriatric care. Problematizing the representation of elderly interaction with technology in these films, this study aims to evaluate its fidelity to real life and its response to the impugning stereotypes.

Keywords: Sci-fi, Technology, Old age, AI, Robots

One of the earliest movies to have ever produced, *A Trip to the Moon* (created by Georges Melies in 1902) qualifies to be a fantastic sci-fi adventure although the genre of ‘sci-fi’ was not yet recognized as a singular modality during the time of its production. This amusing cinema features a bunch of ‘old men’ as central characters, who have been lucky to visit the moon and return to earth safely. These characters not only embody the stakes of personnels and interests when an event of lunar expedition should occur in reality, but also represent a demographic faction who had social dominance over such important events. Pre-19th century world perceived older adults as “esteemed and authoritative” and the 20th century witnessed a radical change to this situation (Ng and Chow 1799). The film symbolized an era and locale, where older men were deployed at the top of every power structure of the society such as government, politics, religion, academia and international affairs. From this standpoint, it will not be off beam to assume that the state of older people had faced a downfall, considering the way contemporary world represents them in art. The booming of science and technology, the progression of war, creative art and impactful civil movements, all being prolific in the 20th century, sidelined the elderly to a social space that rarely gathered attention.

Sci-fi films have come a long way since *A Trip to the Moon*. Perspectives and interests have drastically changed. A significant catalyst to this evolution was the world wars. It even became a suitable domain of social and political theory benefiting its socially extrapolative characteristic (Gerlach and Sheryl). The films explored new areas resounding to the concerns of the world “with the reproducible being (robots, androids), with the construction of reality (virtual worlds, virtual selves), with spectacular threats to our fragile world (an environment on the brink)” (Telotte, 42). In other words, advanced technology and its interaction with humanity developed into a staple idea for sci-f films.

Sci-fi is perhaps the genre of film which receives the least scholastic attention. Nonetheless, there are numerous sci-fi films that invites serious overview and attention. Instead of invoking a sense of prophecy or fantasy, these films initiated discussions of wide social significance. They have grown very inclusive over the years that all sorts of collectives seem to have found their space in the network of this mainstream entertainment segment. Yet, there is one social group that one of the largest - if not the largest - film genre appears to have neglected: the elderly. This study, however, do not intend to consider the 'evil villain' who has some grey hair and a little too much madness, which is a common scene despite being a highly fantasized role. This enquiry focusses on the struggling elderly, who demands a lot of attention, care and company. The marketing interests involved in the scenario are quite evident. People aged above 35 used to dominate the discussion of sci-fi, but a statistical study conducted between 2013 and 2015 proves that "people aged 17 and under and between 18 and 24 accounted for 37 percent and 30 percent, respectively, of social discussion related to sci-fi movies" (Donelly III). The two sci-fi movies in discussion present visions grounded in contemporary reality, except the robots showcased in the film are highly extrapolated and their activities, whimsical. But they invoke certain questions that strike against what had been generally perceived of the elderly. Are they really reluctant towards tech as much as we think? Are they at all unintelligible about the operations of it? What is it that the elderly anticipate from the technological advancements around them? Why do they seem to have developed a more curious and much more personal relationship with these robots compared to the younger generation? Understanding the deep psychological mechanisms behind the interaction between the 'aged' mind and the artificial mind is beyond the scope of this study. Yet, it seeks to find the answers to these questions by analysing two very interesting samples, intricately designed so as to project an early picture of an imminent development in the future of geriatric care.

The Old Man and the Robot

Being analysed here, are two films that emerged from two different parts of the world about 7 years apart. The first sample, *Robot & Frank*, is an American sci-fi drama directed by Jake Schreier, released in 2012. The film depicts the life of an old man named Frank (performed by Frank Langella) who used to be a burglar, and his relationship with the robot that his son brings home to take care of him. *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25* is the second sample which is a Malayalam sci-fi comedy drama directed by Ratheesh Balakrishnan Poduval, released in 2019. It discusses the life of Bhaskaran Poduval, an old man who hates technology, being forced to live with a robot. Although the setting of these two movies are quite different, the discussion they bring about, are evidently the same. In both movies, an old man and the assistant robot they have been entrusted to, play the central characters and the plot unfurls through the evolution of the relationship between the duo.

In *Robot & Frank*, before the robot is introduced in the movie, we are given clear indicators and cues that reveal the falling physical condition that Frank is in. His memory is affected, and he is frequently found recalling things that existed way back in his past. He lives alone, separated from his wife, and his son pays a weekly visit to him. Frank is a character emblematic of the random lonely elder in our neighbourhoods. His struggle with remembering things and executing tasks more or less establishes the ‘type’ of Frank’s character. Frank’s symptoms let the viewers assume that he is suffering from dementia, although it is not stated per se. Age is the foremost causal factor in patients of dementia “with more common in those 65 or older” (WHO, 2023). Tending to memory related issues, therefore, is given prominence in geriatric care worldwide. Frank’s situation is no different from this context. He is often found frustrated with operating daily tasks. Yet, he continuously refuses to seek help about it. This might appeal to the viewers as a typical characteristic of the elderly who struggle with cognitive or locomotive problems. Frank’s frustration grows to

arrogance and a total negligence towards the growing world around him. The peak point of such changes in Frank's life is established by the film as a serendipitous moment that Frank, indeed, cannot handle his own life anymore, and that he bears the risk of hurting himself.

The film *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25* which is deeply rooted in the milieu of northern Kerala introduces Bhaskaran Poduval, the central character (performed by Suraj Venjaaramoodu), as an arrogant man who clings on to the obsolete ways of living. He lives with his son Subramanian alias Chuppan, (performed by Soubin Shahir) who is a graduate in technology and there is a never-ending quarrel in action between the only two members of this tiny family. The plot of the film develops to Subramanian being forced to move to Russia and Bhaskaran Poduval consequently, has to bear the solitude. The film, then proceeds to the important discussion it tries to actuate when Subramanian brings home a robot from his own firm to assist Poduval. From here on, significant screen time is dedicated to portray how the robot (who later acquires the name 'Kunjappan) involves with, and changes Bhaskaran Poduval's life, before concluding with the apparent elimination of the robot that had gone overboard.

Both films portray a turbulent father-son relationship as an integral subplot. *Robot & Frank* carefully invests the initial scenes to convey how much better his life would have been, had his son stayed with him. He clearly needs help and it is a fact that the problems with one's memory can turn fatal if ignored. Frank, nonetheless, do not accept the fact that he has an issue with the memory, and continues to believe that he can be on his own. The film therein employs a stereotypical attribute towards the character. Studies show that older adults do realise when they are having issues, although they might not exactly understand what seems to be the problem. They face and realise the decline in the performance and speed in executing daily tasks. It has been found that they perceive this issue which in turn lead them to complain; "...the majority of older adults tend to attribute their daily cognitive failures to

the impairment of memory (indeed, they do not complaint about problems in executive functions)” (Montejo, 304). Frank visits a library in the town of which the librarian states that he has already read all their books multiple times. Frank appears to have developed a romantic interest towards this librarian, who in the later part of the movie is revealed to be his ex-wife.

Frank’s visits to the town are a part of finding his connection to the world. However, the restaurant Harry’s that he tries to visit, had been closed down since long, and the library he now frequents, is undergoing a process of modernisation. It is evident that Frank, like many other elderly people, is finding it difficult to keep up with the rapid change in life and environment. Frank expresses disregard towards the concept of ‘library experience’ without actual books and he perceives all this as a sham. A frustrated Frank returns home. He walks through the middle of the road in the suburban area and adamantly refuses to move out of the way when a car honks the horn behind him. Without even bothering to look back, he directs the car to go around him, but to his surprise, the car stops and his son gets out from it. In a psychological perspective, this activity of Frank may be observed as his refusal to change in favour with the developing world around him. In an argument that follows this incident, his son Hunter (performed by James Marsden) critiques Frank’s lifestyle which adds up to the problem at hand, why Frank needs help.

Compared to this context, ‘Bhaskaran Poduval’ is portrayed under a different light. Rather than physical inabilities, it is the beliefs and values that fuel Poduval’s stubbornness. The opening scene of the movie is a dark, dreamy sequence which shows an old man being attacked by an assistant robot. The robot appears to be sentient and resorts to aggression when threatened, with its display showing “SELF PROTECTION MODE” (00:03:04). At a later point in the movie, it is revealed that two out of four robots sent out for trial run from Subramanian’s company had been failed. The viewers are then suggested to figure out the

opening sequence. The setting of the movie, the environment and all the modes of technology in use belong to the present era, except the proficient robot 'Kunjappan'. It can be identified then, that the movie tries to portray its plot unfolding in the near future or the present era itself. So far in the development of social robots, none of them have been able to hurt a human being by its own accord. Sci-fi literatures continuously explore such scenarios.

An important contributor in the field, Isaac Asimov is remembered specifically in this context, for his concept of three foundational laws in robotics. The first law states a robot should not harm a human being, the second law states it should obey the humans unless to break the first law, and the third law clearly states a robot "must protect its own existence" as long as it does not agree with the two former laws (Britannica). The three laws have been enjoying popularity since long and many of the sci-fi imaginaries had much to do with the breaking of any of these laws to initiate the turn of events in the plot. The film, opening straight up with a similar pattern, claims its place in the genre of sci-fi. However, such a development is highly unlikely, considering the ethical grounds with which social robots are being developed today. Towards the ending scenes, the robot's potential to harm other humans get revealed in front of Bhaskaran, to his surprise and terror. The film follows a linear narration, and a steady rise of emotional graph, with this scene attaining the peak.

Bhaskaran Poduval is a socially active old man, although the people in the neighbourhood is often irritated by the way he responds to everything. Bhaskaran and his son Subramanian live a rather boring life at their rusty old house. It is not equipped with even the essential electronic equipment such as a mixer grinder or washing machine. Bhaskaran Poduval, most of the time, involves himself with farming and it appears his only means of entertainment is the chess board, since he doesn't use a television or the smart phone. Bhaskaran's character is quite a bit intense in his ways, compared to the nature of elder men in contemporary era. Among the 104 million older adults in India 60% of them use a

smartphone even though 85% of them find it “challenging to use smart-phone during daily activities” (Das 2020). Without considering the cohort, “nearly 96 out of every 100 Keralites own a phone” (Businessline 2017). Bhaskaran Poduval comfortably belongs to the minority in these groups, addition to which the strong feeling of reluctance he has developed towards technology. It is also quite evident that Bhaskaran holds on to arbitrary socio-cultural values based on religion and caste. He asks his son whether the newly appointed maid belongs to the same caste as them: “Is she a Poduval?” (00:13:24). It shows how orthodox Bhaskaran is, and it should be given critical importance in analysing the way he responds to technological supports.

Ageism and Stereotypes

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines the word ‘geezer’ as “an odd, eccentric, or unreasonable person (usually a man) especially : an old man”. The word is quite popular (aside ‘boomers’) across America, and is used as part of an ageist behaviour. The same words have now gained worldwide popularity and they have started to appear in the Indian entertainment scenario as well. Any average user of social media in India is very likely to be familiar with these words. Ageing is a factor of discrimination among all the cultures of the world, despite being a vaguely acknowledged matter. The two films sampled in this study originates from opposite sides of the world, and yet they discuss an issue relevant to any given place across the globe. It is, therefore, increasingly relevant to discuss how these two films respond to the - much common and yet, hardly addressed - ageist stereotypes.

One of the areas most affected by ageism is the workplace, where the employees of the younger generation tend to believe that the older workers cannot keep up with their performance. They have been largely prejudiced against, and are often impugned at the pretext of their own wellbeing. The American Psychological Association studied ageism at

large spectrum and have found that the “the negative stereotypes that fuel ageism often get aging all wrong” and that “the attitudes that underlie age bias are often rooted in falsehoods”. In the film *Robot & Frank*, the central character Frank appears to be quite agile and creative in executing a shoplift. Similarly, the film *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25* portrays Bhaskaran as an avid chess player, whom his son cannot win against. Neither Frank nor Bhaskaran Poduval appears to be having trouble with their creative faculties, contrary to the common misconception that the elderly people are less creative and enthusiastic. Most of the ageist stereotypes are associated with the attitude of elderly people towards the changing or new world. We find both Frank and Bhaskaran expressing solid responses against change.

More than the change itself, what appears to be troubling to the elderly is the pace of the change. It is easier for the younger generation to implement developments with which they have grown accustomed to from a very young age, like the smart phone technology. The older generation who got acquainted with such novelties at a later stage of life might find it difficult to align their sensibility with new mechanisms, although it is only a matter of time before they can catch up. It is evident in both films that Frank and Bhaskaran learn, adapt and improvise their way around their respective robots. Frank figures how to use the robot’s camera to record events for his benefits and Bhaskaran overrides the robot’s privacy settings to hide his activity from his son. Both the movies initially portray its central characters as frequently agitated, arrogant and frustrated. In other words, two old men who are ‘odd’ and ‘unreasonable’ in their behaviour. It can be suggested that both the movies work their way around the ‘geezer’ stereotype but revealing that such a difference in behaviour comes from the rapidity of change and the treatment they receive from the world around them. Although both Bhaskaran and Frank are too naïve to believe that the assistive robots love them, both of these characters are portrayed as making the most of such technological aid in various levels. The films successfully negate the stereotypes that encircle the elderly to the lesser active

locations of the society and tries to act in favour of implementing thoughtful measures to assist them.

Regarding the films' response to stereotypes, there is one interesting factor that both films inadvertently try to discuss. Besides the concerns that we have deliberated so far, the films persistently force us to engage the question whether women are more adaptive to change than men. It definitely widens the spectrum of the study, and the objective is apparently beyond the scope of this limited context. Nevertheless, we shall discuss how our sample specimens express their views concerning the matter. In *Robot & Frank*, only two female characters are allowed a considerable screen time. One is the Librarian, Jennifer (who is also Frank's wife) and the other is Madison (Frank's daughter). We can focus on Jennifer's character alone, since Madison belongs to a different cohort which enables her to interact with technological change with ease irrespective of her gender. We shall limit the population to 'elder women' and encircle premise to 'technological change' so as to contain the discussion within just the two samples. Jennifer works as a librarian, and she is assisted at her workplace by a robot as well. She talks to Frank about the modern library experience that her employers are planning to implement, and appears to be quite welcoming about it. The viewers are also allowed a glimpse of how Jennifer interacts with her assistant robot. At a later scene, Jennifer even suggests Frank to name his robot, just like she has named her helper 'Mr Darcy'. Jennifer appears to be comfortable around Mr Darcy and she is never found frustrated about the transformations (empowered by technology) around her life, even though she has concerns about it.

In the movie *Android Kunjappan Ver 5.25*, the elderly female character that we shall focus on, is Saudamini, Bhaskaran's romantic interest (performed by Parvathi Malaa). There is vast difference between how Bhaskaran and Saudamini react at their first interaction with the robot. Though Saudamini is startled as the robot emerge from the darkness, she quickly

regains composure once she understands it's the robot. At a later instance, she casually approaches the robot when she needed help finding her stalker on Facebook. She also appears to be seamlessly handling communication software like 'Facebook' and 'Skype'. Let's observe how the contemporary world functions in similar regard. John Donovan of AT&T, one of the giant corporate in communication technology, promotes the role of women at their workforce as "he finds women are better able to adapt" (Thomas 2017). The roles that women handle in the field of technology and communication are increasing, and they turn out to be quite successful as claimed by movements of global scale such as 'Women 2.0'. Contrary to popular belief, women are also found to be handling the changes that come with age more comfortably than men. Kelly Wallace presents a comprehensive report on men who had adapted a different career path in addition to presenting how women over 50 enjoy a happier time adapting to change. According to her report, social pressures and the biological connections to change are detrimental to the comfort of men facing the changes. The two films provide a clear reflection of this condition, and are inclined to reality when they discuss the women, in response to change.

Technophobia vs Trust

In *Robot & Frank*, the old man doesn't appear to be bothered by his son's claims that his father needs help. Yet Frank's own dialogues have a tone of re-assurance in it, as if he is trying to convince himself and others: "I'm fine, I don't need your help, I'm fine" (00:10:07). But his son has come up with a modern solution to keep his old man safe: A robot. This is also Hunter's way to respond to Frank's refrain from moving to a care home. Hunter doesn't realise why his father wouldn't go to a care home (which Frank refers to as a 'brain centre') and rather stay at his old place alone. The attachment to the idea of 'home' and the wish to be in that place is common among the elderly. The support to those who wish to remain independent in their home as they grow older is claimed to be "central to any strategy

addressing the challenges presented by ageing populations” which is beneficial for the elderly and the society as a whole (Barry, 142). But such strategies are planned and performed with technology as the major resource, especially ICT (Information and Communication Technology). As a regular household in the near future America, Frank’s home is equipped with advanced connectivity and communication systems. Frank handles his smartphone and the television-integrated video calls quite well. This is not an extrapolated overview of elderly assisted through ICT. Particularly to assist persons with dementia, such technologies are already being implemented in different parts of the world and it can broadly be classified as Smart Health technologies which include “ambient assisted living technologies, and smart homes” as well (Guisado-Fernández et al 2). Frank appears to have grown accustomed to this technological aid. It is then a contrasting response to find Frank refusing the robot assistant.

It had already been discussed how the belief systems and values of culture shall be taken into consideration before administering new forms of technological assistance. When it comes to *Android Kunjappan*, Bhaskaran, being a radical conservative, it is all the more important to be careful while introducing a new form of technology to him. However, Subramanian brings the robot in without prior notice to his father. On the other hand, Subramanian could not find any other ways to help his father while he is away for work.

Frank’s case is no different in this situation. A bewildered Frank asks; “You’re gonna leave me with this death machine?” (00:10:48). The term which he uses to refer to the robot, ‘death machine’ is strongly suggestive of the fear that the machine itself or the concept as a whole would invoke in him. It also implies the level of trust that he would exchange to the robot, which would be miniscule. Frank may have been belonging to a generation that celebrated fictionalised accounts of powerful, sentient robots that wreaked havoc. On the other hand, Hunter doesn’t seem to have considered how a robot assistant might appeal to his dad. Introducing advanced technology to older people shall be executed with empathy, as it is

crucial that they should be comfortable around it. “When introducing new methods and assistive technologies, the belief systems and values of the cultures in which they are implemented must be considered” (Savenstedt et al 18). Yet, Hunter convinces Frank to keep the robot not only because it is helpful but also is ‘expensive’. Frank, on the other hand, realises that living with the robot at his home is better than going to a care home. Even though he is aloof towards the robot at first, he continues to engage in conversation with it. The responses from the robot, often seems to amaze Frank. He engages in deep conversation with the robot as they walk together, as if the robot is an actual human being with emotions and feelings. These instances of conversation direct the viewers to realise that Frank was in dire need of company more than anything. Many intriguing parts of Frank’s conversation with the robot involves memory. He finds it uncomfortable when the robot states that his memory can be wiped out and his responses are only programmed. In other words, Frank finds it difficult to accept that the care and attention he enjoys from the robot is not drawn from any affection for him. Still, Frank continues to treat the robot like a real person.

In *Android Kunjappan*, Bhaskaran’s initial response towards the robot is skilfully portrayed in the movie. When Subramanian shows the robot for the first time, Bhaskaran gets startled and demands it be taken back when Subramanian returns for Russia (00:41:10). Even after being introduced, the robot remains an unsettling presence for Bhaskaran, as he gets frightened again the following day. He reflexively throws a defensive posture.

Signs of technophobia can be attributed to Bhaskaran’s responses. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Technophobia as “fear or dislike of advanced technology or complex devices and especially computers”. The fear of technology had long been a concern since mid-20th century, but technophobia is not a recognized clinical diagnosis. Aside from the direct interaction with technology, technophobia can also be caused by a “General anxiety

about the future” (Cleavland Clinic). Bhaskaran’s dialogues agree with this anxiety as he talks to Subramanian: “only time will tell what kind of kids you will have” (00:42:02).

The fear, as we are able to witness from these old men gradually change to trust, and both movies devote considerable screen time to present a sense of companionship being developed from what started off as a timid interaction. The robot who is programmed assist Frank tries to promote an active lifestyle by asking him to start gardening. On the contrary, it is evident that Frank was quite active in his own way, even before the robot was introduced to him. Frank understands that the robot can become handy when he decides to pursue his personal interests, a turning point in the film. He had the habit of shop lifting after his usual library visits, and at one instance Frank realises that the robot picked something up without anyone noticing, the same piece that Frank tried to shoplift but failed. It kindles Frank’s interests in the robot that he teaches it to pick locks, elaborating on the tips and tricks of burglary. The robot appears to consider this an engaging activity for the old man, and plays along. The old thief and his robot assistant successfully execute two robberies. These events eventually lead to obvious social consequences and it culminates in Frank being ultimately having to get rid of his robot and admitted to a care home.

Similarly, in *Android Kunjappan*, Bhaskaran’s tautness around the robot eases for the first time when he finds out that the robot did a good job tidying up his room. The audience behold Bhaskaran and the robot engaged in a game of chess, and this is the first time Bhaskaran is shown in such proximity with the robot with ease. Subramanian soon leaves for work and the robot is left with Bhaskaran. The relationship between the old man and the robot gradually evolves. Bhaskaran’s initial reluctance towards technology diminish as he proceeds to engage in more activities with the robot. The film shows a very curious Bhaskaran while asking questions to the robot. When he asks the robot what does it know about Prasannan (Bhaskaran’s nephew), the robot claims: “Prasannan does not exist. There is

no evidence that such a person is alive” (01:02:32 – 01:02:36) after searching for his information in various web resources and social media platforms. The film here by puts forwards an intellectual question that whether people’s existence is validated by their digital presence. Bhaskaran appears to be thoughtful and confused against this response as he finds Prasannan stands right behind the robot. The relation between the duo turns warmer once Bhaskaran has a fall and had to depend on the robot for executing daily tasks. The chain of events that brings them closer is vividly illustrated through a song in the movie (01:12:45 – 01:16:59). It is also evident that the robot is engaged in Bhaskaran’s favourites activities such as farming, reading religious texts and playing chess, the likes of which Subramanian had rarely been taking part.

In *Robot & Frank*, the scenes of Frank and the robot’s curious conversations are enriched with close and tight follow of camera besides the soothing ambient noises and pleasing background soundscapes. It thereby tries to convey an impression that Frank involves in the conversations with the robot on a deeper level than his daily communications with any other persons in contact with him. These moments present a calm, and composed Frank. He doesn’t know how to counter his frustrations, or what might be its triggers, which can be assumed to emerge from his loneliness. Even though Frank had not realised that, the film conveys a very subtle image of how loneliness manifest in elderly. Age has a substantial effect on feelings of loneliness, and it can even affect the ability for self-evaluation of health (Fees, Bronwyn S. et al). Frank does not realise how much he wanted to share his thoughts and feelings until he engages in conversations with the robot. The script is quite careful about what can be deduced from the conversations of the robot as to its motives. Although the idea of a human being finding comfort in the conversation with a robot might appeal to most of the older adults among the audience as farfetched, real-life contexts prove otherwise. Socially assistive robots have been proven to improve the mental health of adults in distress, addition

to which people have also been found developing a deep emotional connection towards the robots (González-González et al). The robot's verbal responses in the movie (surprisingly human-like) provide an optimal image of how socially assistive robots can and will improve the overall mental health, mood and level of engagement in older adults.

Frank's Indian counterpart here – Bhaskaran – starts to depend way too much on the robot. His reluctance to technology appears to be long gone once he finds solace in the company of 'Kunjappan' the robot. We shall now revisit the scenes of Bhaskaran's aggression and understand that it must have come from Bhaskaran's fear of the 'unknown' rather than the fear of technology as such. Bhaskaran utilises the robot's service to pursue his romantic interest, a widow in the neighbourhood named Saudamini. Bhaskaran generates an interest in 'Facebook' through the robot and he even says that "This should have been invented years ago" (01:20:46). Bhaskaran creates an account under the name 'Sathyan' to chat with Saudamini. He appears to have a good grasp on the mechanics of social media once he gets acquainted with it through the robot. Social interactions, without doubt, are important to the physical and mental wellbeing of the elderly. However, in most cases, the declining physical capacities prevent the elderly from participating in social events. In this scenario, social activities that are being rendered in a virtual space could be beneficial to them. It is ever more apparent in the Indian social context -which contributes about six million senior citizens to 'Facebook' - as it had been reported that the elderly are "more connected to social media than millennials and Gen Z" (The Economic Times 2022). The report also states that they have been found spending quality time in the digital space, maintaining contact with family members, co-workers, class mates in addition to acquiring new skills and knowledge.

The young adults dominate the digital world in population. Contrary to the many assumptions, the senior citizens turn out to be social media enthusiasts in no less intensity compared to the younger generation. Bhaskaran Poduval is emblematic of this situation. He

had the habit of reading the newspaper and even used to find it a pleasing experience. Later on, Bhaskaran relies on the robot's screen to read the newspaper, totally forsaking the former experience with actual 'paper' and embracing the joy of 'zooming in' as he wants: "I read online now" (01:23:25). Bhaskaran's bonding with the robot gets stronger to the threatening extent that he starts to attribute human qualities to the robot. Besides dressing up the robot, Bhaskaran takes it to an astrologer to check its horoscope and even ties an auspicious thread to the robot's hand to ward off the evil forces.

Bhaskaran starts to treat 'Kunjappan' the robot like a child and is eager to look after it. Prasannan senses something wrong in Bhaskaran's behaviour and observe Bhaskaran scolding the robot when it gets out in the rain and wiping its metal head as if it would catch a cold. (01:26:49 – 01:26:59). The audience are allowed to grasp the intensity of the condition when some government officials take the robot away from Bhaskaran. He pleads to Subramanian to do something about the situation, claiming that he won't be happy without the robot. Bhaskaran's first day without the robot in a long time goes quite frustrating for him. Subramanian doubts that his father is failing to understand the difference between him and the robot. It is fairly evident that Bhaskaran is dependent on the robot in various levels. More than the physical support that the robot is capable of providing, Bhaskaran Poduval appears to enjoy the presence of the robot in an emotional realm.

Bhaskaran tends to compose his days around spending time with the robot, which reveals how much Bhaskaran loves its company. On the other hand, the robot also acts as Bhaskaran's confidante. He shares his secrets to the robot in confidence, understanding that he can tell the robot things that he doesn't want to share with his son. In other words, the robot, to Bhaskaran, is so many things at once. It is a personal assistant, a nurse, a friend, a companion, and almost a son. Over the short span of time that Bhaskaran spends with the robot, his values undergo incredible change. The film portrays a 'changed' Bhaskaran who

now understands that the arbitrary traditional values will not stand in the world to come. This change, in other words, mark the depth of influence that the robot was able to make in Bhaskaran. We shall perceive this development the other way around: It can then be inferred that, if there is a profound influence so much as to subvert a person's core beliefs and values, the source of that influence must have had tremendous psychological impact.

In *Robot & Frank*, the intimacy and affection that Frank, thus, develops towards the robot goes far beyond what can be naturally expected from such AI stimulated experiences. Frank even confuses the robot with his son Hunter. During their first attempt of robbery together, Frank asks the robot: "Why are you wearing a space helmet?" (00:32:14). The situation grows even more complex as Madison (Frank's daughter) comes in to stay with him for a while. She turns off the robot since she is there to take care of Frank. But Frank is shown missing the robot very much. When Madison uses the robots to get some chores done, Frank turns emotional and defends the robot, saying: "The robot is not your servant, Maddy! You don't turn him on and off like he's a slave!" (01:29:00) where the robot really is a servant programmed to assist him. The strong emotional edge enables Frank to oversee the actual purpose of the robot. As the film proceeds, the police enquiry catches up to Frank even though they don't have any strong evidence to uncover this perfect robbery. However, they figure out that the memory of the robot can be used as evidence. The situation escalates and Frank is forced to flee with the robot. He goes at great length not to erase the robot's memory before finally giving in. Frank's attempt to save the robot's memory originates from his fear that he would lose the person that he sees in the robot. The final scene of the film shows Frank (happy and healthy) being re-united with his family as they spent time together before he has to get back to his room in the care home. As the film comes to a close, Frank intensely looks at some other members at the care home, being assisted by the same model robot that he had.

Bhaskaran in *Android Kunjappan*, appears to have gone through a much deeper emotional trauma towards the end of the movie. His son understands that Bhaskaran's affection towards the robot has exceeded the limit. In addition to this, he is supposed to return the robot to 'Kyoto Dynamics' (Subramanian's company) as it was only a trial unit. His attempts to separate Bhaskaran from the robot ends up in grave consequences. Bhaskaran Poduval turns arrogant and violent towards Subramanian. In an intense conversation, Bhaskaran explains how much the robot means to him, and that neither Subramanian can replace the robot nor the other way around (01:57:10 - 01:59:18). Bhaskaran's dialogues in this scene are self-explanatory, revealing to the viewers why Bhaskaran has developed a deep, personal connection with the robot. 'Kunjappan' the robot, is a machine after all, and so is its way of responding to humans rudimentary. It will not question the authority of its 'owner' since it is programmed to obey, and for the lack of an active conscience. It is unable to judge and is able to remain unaffected by the tasks which would be discomforting to humans. Such abilities are part of a robot's functionality, what Bhaskaran seems to mistake for signs of unconditional love.

Kunjappan the robot, is highly intelligent and appears to be sentient. Subramanian gets frightened as he receives a video footage of one of the models that went for trial run killing its owner. He immediately goes to Bhaskaran's room, only to find him missing, along with the robot. Upon their journey together, the robot itself reveals to Bhaskaran that it is a machine programmed to assist him, and that it doesn't "understand love" (02:11:15). Bhaskaran reacts to this in a frantic way. Subramanian catches up and intervenes when one of their neighbours who had been following them, tries to destroy the robot. In its attempt to 'self protect', the robot attacks Subramanian. Bhaskaran saves his son, but the robot is left dismantled. The movie ends as Bhaskaran lovingly utters the robot's name mistaking Subramanian's appearance for the robot. Even though the emotional bonding between an old

man and a robot is the theme of the movie, it also tries to foreground the ethical question whether robots shall be allowed to protect itself at the expense of posing threat to the human beings around them.

Both movies magnify the dynamics of the relationship between an old man and a caretaker robot within the context of a crisis situation. It allows the audience to have a sneak peek into the innermost feelings of the central characters and realise how much of an influence were these machines able to create.

Conclusion

Change is ubiquitous. It is a constant part of the movement of the world. In regard to the technological change, the human race had been a subject to it since time immemorial: A sharpened stone, a drawing on a cave, or the wheel is just as good an example of technology that we have learned to rely on as a smartphone. However, modern technology that emerged out of the revolutionary impact of science took the world by storm and it continues at surprising rapidity for the past few decades. We have observed how two contemporary movies project their concerns over the interactions of elderly with technologies of the world to come.

The focus of the films falls on how its central characters, both older men, interact with a robot. Yet, the arc of this relationship with technology is portrayed as an exemplar of companionship. It is evident that both 'Frank' and 'Bhaskaran' saw their assistant robots as companions. The movies tactically approached the stereotypes that are commonly enforced on the elderly people and tries to unravel the follies behind it through these characters. Both these films deserve appreciation for the subtle manner in which they have handled the subject. There is no doubt that companion robots will be the future of geriatric care, even though the robots presented in the movies are barely pragmatic. In addition to lack of

emotional support, companionship is identified to be a risk factor to the health of the elderly (Sorkin et al). It is also the answer to many questions that we have discussed in this research. The films are exceptionally realistic in portraying the needs of the elder men. They also project that the elderly can be as good with technology as they younger generation, given enough time and proper introduction. They break the stereotype of the ‘unreasonable’ old man, by foregrounding their frustrations which explains how the inconsiderate ways of the changing world are forceful on them. Beyond the matter of technological support in geriatric care, the films expound the significance of companionship in the life of the elderly, a subject that cannot be overstated. Lastly, we shall extend our gratitude to the films for being visual guidelines for the implementation of tech in geriatric care in a world to come.

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