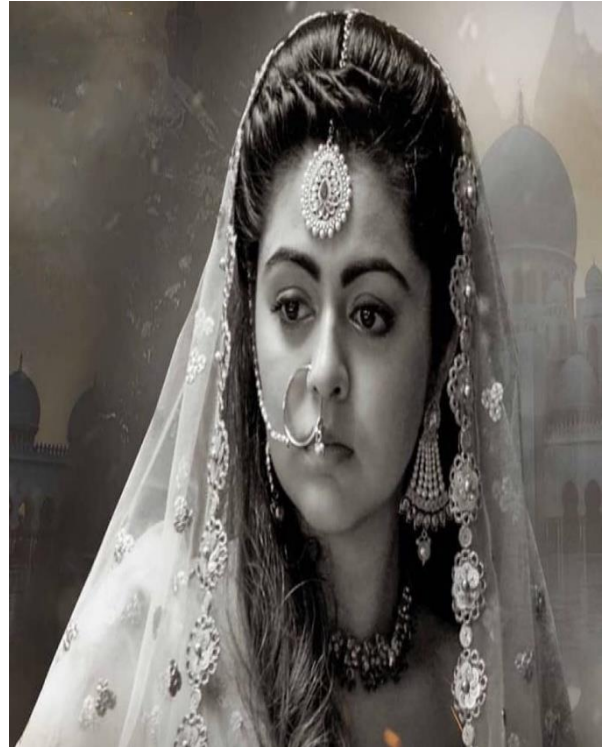


Halala (Talaq) 2019, Web Series (TV Series) Produced by Atrangi Network Private Ltd.

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Halala (Talaq) should not be referred to as a film but a slow-burning, emotionally visceral reflection as to what can go wrong when religion and patriarchy mix with community pressure to target the body and the faith of one simple woman. It sheds light on lived experience of traumatized Muslim women who are made to experience Nikah Halala, a practice that is largely unquestioned and poses enormous patriarchal overtones in which a woman who has divorced through triple talaq once must marry and consummate a relationship with another man before being restored to her previous husband. It is not a



tale of legal mechanics or of theological argument but rather a fable of the sanctity of consent, the cruelty of institutionalised ceremonial and the devastating silence of female suffering.

The main protagonist, Afza, is not developed as a stereotypical character—she is a normal woman and is in an ideal marriage with her husband Rahil and leads a peaceful existence at the periphery of her community. It is that ordinary that the rupture is so shocking. It is one moment of anger, one sudden eruption of the rage and the words talaq, talaq, talaq are out of the mouth of Rahil. The action is fast; the effect is forever. Within seconds, Afza is stripped not just of her marital status but of her social legitimacy. A devoted wife becomes an outcast. What follows is the brutal machinery of Halala. Rahil wants to rectify his mistake, but the religious elders—the custodians of law and tradition—intervene. The only path forward, they insist, is through Halala Nikah. Afza must marry another man, Jahid, and after consummating

the marriage, be divorced by him before she can return to Rahil. The absurdity of this prescription is not lost on her, but her agency is irrelevant. From here on, she is no longer a person—she is a symbol, a vessel, a religious condition.

This is the first and most painful layer of trauma—the erasure of Afza’s consent. Everything is decided on her behalf: the second marriage, the timeline, the legality, the religious framing. Even those who love her speak in conditional support: “*Afza, yeh zaroori hai. Agar wapas jaana hai toh yeh rasta hai.*”

(“Afza, this is necessary. If you want to go back, this is the only way.”)



The character of Jahid is complex and deliberately discomfoting. A respected man in the community, he masks his desire for control under the guise of religious obligation. His manipulation is subtle but sinister. He uses words like “farz” and “shariat” to exert his power over Afza, making her trauma seem like a sacred duty.

At the heart of the film is Afza’s silenced anguish. The camera lingers on her face—silent, numb, blank—not out of cinematic indulgence but as a narrative strategy. Her silence is louder than protest. We watch her preparing for a wedding she never wanted, standing beside a man she does not know, lying beneath a system she cannot escape. There is no romanticisation here. No false redemption. Just the slow violence of obedience.

What makes Halala (Talaq) truly remarkable is its refusal to frame Afza as a helpless victim or a saint. Instead, the film gives her the space to evolve. Gradually, as the rituals press against her dignity, she begins to reclaim her voice. Her pain, once internalised, finds language. In a climactic scene, when confronted by both Rahil and Jahid and the community that enabled them, she says:

“Main kisi ki amanat nahi hoon. Mujh par kisi ka haq nahi, jab tak meri raza na ho. Shariat meri razamandi ke bina poori kaise ho sakti hai?”

(“I am not someone’s possession. No one has a right over me without my consent. How can Shariah be fulfilled without my will?”)

This line becomes the moral core of the film. It is not a rejection of religion—it is a rejection of interpretation without empathy, of laws without humanity, of rituals without justice.

From a cinematic standpoint, the film is deliberately minimalistic. The lighting is often dim, reflecting Afza's psychological state. The spaces she inhabits are narrow—rooms, halls, prayer chambers—mirroring the constriction of her choices. There are no dramatic scores or grand visuals; the emotion lies in restraint, in withheld expression, in the claustrophobia of duty disguised as devotion.

The performances are stunning. The actress portraying Afza carries the weight of the film on her shoulders. Her expressions shift from fear to despair to defiance with subtle precision. Rahil, though remorseful, never quite redeems himself, and rightly so—his regret does not undo her suffering. Jahid is portrayed with the quiet cruelty of men who weaponise theology for personal gain.

But perhaps the most haunting presence is the community. Not a single person forcibly assaults Afza—but everyone participates in her degradation. Her family, her religious leaders, even Rahil's guilt becomes a pressure on her to comply. This is how patriarchy functions: not with violence alone, but with collective persuasion, with emotional blackmail, with sacred shame.

Critics may point out that the film simplifies religious discourse or risks offending conservative audiences. But such critiques often miss the point. *Halala (Talaaq)* does not attack Islam—it attacks the coercive interpretations of it, interpretations that reduce women to tools of atonement and redemption. The film insists on the compatibility of faith and feminism, of belief and bodily autonomy.

In post-2019 India, where the Supreme Court has outlawed instant triple talaq, the film takes on renewed urgency. Legal reforms exist, but social and psychological reforms lag behind. *Nikah Halala* is still practiced, still defended, still endured. This film, then, is not a commentary on the law—it is a cry for intra-community reform, a call for the rethinking of sacred norms through the lens of lived experience.

Thus, *Halala (Talaaq)* is not comfortable viewing. It is not entertainment in the traditional sense. It is education, confrontation, and above all, empathy. For every Afza who is forced into silence, this film gives a voice. For every man who hides behind scripture to justify injustice, this film holds a mirror. And for every viewer who has never imagined the trauma encoded in ritual, it opens the door. It demands not just to be seen—but to be understood.