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Biannual Multidisciplinary Journal

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Message from the Editor

It is with great pleasure that I present the latest issue of *Meridian*, the biannual interdisciplinary research journal of MES Asmabi College, P. Vemballur. Serving as a platform that encourages academic exploration and intellectual dialogue, *Meridian* remains committed to publishing high-quality, peer-reviewed research from diverse fields of study.

This edition is a special issue featuring papers presented at the two-day national seminar titled “*Page to Screen: Intersections of Cinema and Literature*,” held on September 15 and 16, 2025 at MES Asmabi College, P. Vemballur. The seminar was organized by the Research Department of English, the Film Club, and IQAC in association with the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy. The articles included in this volume demonstrate the depth and quality of contemporary scholarship, highlighting the dynamic nature of interdisciplinary studies within and beyond our academic community. Through their contributions, the authors explore the seminar themes and provide fresh insights that enhance both theoretical perspectives and practical understanding.

I sincerely thank all the contributors for selecting *Meridian* as the platform to share their research. I also extend my gratitude to the reviewers and members of the editorial board for their dedicated efforts in upholding the academic standards of the journal. Their careful evaluation and commitment play a vital role in ensuring the quality and credibility of each issue.

We hope this issue encourages further research, meaningful discussions, and intellectual engagement among our readers. As always, we welcome constructive suggestions and look forward to continued academic collaboration.

Dr. Sameena Kalathodi
Editor in Chief
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MES Asmabi College, P. Vemballur

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MALAYALAM CINEMA: RETELLING OF MYTH AS COMMODITY AND CULTURAL MEMORY

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ABSTRACT

Malayalam cinema has a history of portraying social realism over mythological retellings. Recent films such as *Lokah: Chapter 1* (2025) and *Bramayugam* (2024) introduce new strategies of engaging with regional myth and legends. At the skeletal level, both movies deal with screen adaptations of myth. However, they have two different modes of reshaping the cinematic narrative. *Lokah* constructs a cinematic universe and employs CGI-driven spectacle that turns myth into a consumable commodity that aligns with the ideals of global franchise models. Whereas *Bramayugam* employs a black and white visual style and a minimal soundscape. It focuses more on ideological retelling than commodification, and so has the narrative grounded in Kerala's feudal history. This study attempts to examine both the films with polar narrative styles that have led to the retelling of myth in the Malayalam cinema industry, by balancing budget, audience reception, and aesthetic experimentation. By applying Roland Barthes' framework of myth as a semiotic system, this study analyses the new phase in Malayalam cinema that shifts from the portrayal of social realism to mythological retellings with polar narrative styles. It then demonstrates how Malayalam cinema doesn't adhere to a single formula of mythological retelling, rather it systematically experiments with divergent narrative approaches.

Keywords: *Malayalam Cinema, Mythological retellings, Myth as commodity, Polar narrative experimentation.*

INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema has a long tradition of drawing on mythology, legend, and folklore for the screen. Industries such as Tamil and Telugu repeatedly produce mythological blockbusters and devotional films that blend spectacle with religious sentiment. However, Malayalam cinema has historically taken a different trajectory. Malayalam films are widely acknowledged for their emphasis on social realism, middle-class concerns, and literary adaptations. The frequency and scale of Malayalam cinema pursuing mythological retellings are comparably low when held against neighbouring film industries. Its artistic reputation has rested mainly on the narratives grounded in the everyday and the socio-political realities of Kerala. In recent years, Malayalam cinema has begun to turn towards mythological storytelling with a different spin. It diverges significantly from the formulaic approaches found elsewhere in Indian cinema. Filmmakers in Kerala appear to be experimenting with multiple narrative and aesthetic strategies rather than adhering to a singular mode of retelling. This shift brings out two possibilities. Firstly, it signals a new phase in the industry. Secondly, it challenges the assumption that myth on screen must be confined to devotional spectacle or popular epics.

Two recent films released in Malayalam, '*Lokah: Chapter 1*' (2025) and '*Bramayugam*' (2024), exemplifies experimentation of myth through their polar narrative styles. '*Lokah*' constructs a CGI-driven cinematic universe that aligns with global franchise models and transforms myth into a

consumable commodity. Whereas, *Bramayugam* adopts a black-and-white visual style and minimalist soundscape to produce an ideologically grounded retelling rooted in Kerala's folklore and feudal histories. When these films are taken together, it demonstrates how Malayalam cinema simultaneously embraces spectacle and austerity in its mythological retellings. This paper argues that the coexistence of divergent strategies reflects a systematic attempt by Malayalam cinema to expand its narrative repertoire and cultural relevance. By applying Roland Barthes' framework of myth as a semiotic system (Barthes 1957), the study examines how these films transform myth into either commodity or cultural memory. Through this it redefines the possibilities of mythological retelling in regional cinema.

Indian cinema has been widely studied for its use of mythology. Particularly in the context of Hindi devotional films and the Tamil, Telugu traditions of epic spectacle. However, Malayalam cinema's emerging mythological turn has received little scholarly attention. Existing research tends to emphasise on Malayalam films history of social realism, political commentary, and literary adaptation. The recent experiments with myth are often left out and underexplored. The contrasting approaches of 'Lokah: Chapter 1' and 'Bramayugam' reveals ideological divergences but most importantly, an industry wide strategy of systematic experimentation that distinguishes Malayalam cinema from its counterparts. Therefore, this study addresses a critical gap by examining how contemporary Malayalam films retell myths in ways that balance budget, audience reception, and cultural significance.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Since the inception of Indian Cinema, the retelling of myth has been a defining feature of the cinema industry. The very first Indian feature film, 'Raja Harishchandra' (1913), drew its plot directly from Hindu mythology. It set an early cinematic engagement with religious and legendary narratives. Throughout the 20th century, particularly in Tamil and Telugu cinema, mythological films flourished as spectacular productions and they reinforced cultural values and offered devotional entertainment. Intermittently Bollywood also engaged with epics such as the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata'. This legacy firmly established mythology as both a narrative resource and a commercial strategy within Indian film industries.

Malayalam cinema in contrast, developed a markedly different trajectory. Scholars often describe its aesthetic of realism, which is rooted in middle-class domestic narratives and politically engaged storytelling. There have been occasional ventures in Malayalam cinema into mythological or devotional films such as 'Kumara Sambhavam' (1969) or 'Seeta' (1934). These films were exceptions rather than the norm. These films were often overshadowed by the industry's reputation for social critique and quotidian realism. Thus, mythological retellings in Malayalam cinema remained relatively sparse when compared with the majority of films produced.

The new generation filmmakers are experimenting with genre hybridity, fantasy elements, and folklore to reconfigure the possibilities of Malayalam cinema. However, systematic analyses of how myths are retold in contemporary Malayalam films remain rare. The industry's experimentation with divergent narrative strategies has not yet been critically examined. The Malayalam cinema industry can be seen to experiment from CGI-heavy spectacle designed for global consumption to austere culturally rooted retellings. This paper addresses that gap by situating Malayalam

cinema's mythological turn within Roland Barthes' framework of myth as a semiotic system. It also highlights how it oscillates between myth as commodity and myth as cultural memory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes conceptualises myth not as an ancient story, but as a semiotic system. A semiotic system refers to a way in which cultural meanings are produced and naturalised. According to Barthes, myth operates as a second-order signification. For instance, a sign (image, word, or narrative) from everyday culture becomes invested with an additional layer of meaning. It renders ideology appear more natural and unquestionable (Barthes 1972). In this sense, myth transforms history into a natural phenomenon. It converts contingent social and political constructs into self-evident truths.

When this framework is applied to cinema, it suggests that films do more than narrate stories. They create myths that resonate with the audience. Film images, genres, and narrative choices frequently serve as signifiers that can reproduce dominant ideologies and sometimes even challenge them (Stam 2000). The process of cinematic retelling becomes a site where myth is re-coded when filmmakers adapt regional legends or cultural folklore. It is either, but not limited to, a spectacle aligned with global entertainment models or a cultural memory rooted in local histories.

Therefore, the new engagement of Malayalam cinema with myth can be understood as a dual process. In films like 'Lokah: Chapter 1', myth functions as a commodity. It is reconfigured into a consumable spectacle that naturalises the global franchise model within the regional industry. Whereas, in *Bramayugam*, myth functions as memory. Here, the black-and-white aesthetic and minimalism recast myth as cultural critique. Hence, this paper interprets the divergent narrative strategies as competing semiotic processes by viewing Malayalam cinema's myth retellings through Barthes' lens. One view interprets how myth is commodified for mass consumption, and the other view preserves myth as an ideological and cultural archive.

Analysis: Lokah: Chapter 1

'Lokah: Chapter 1' (2025) represents a radical shift in Malayalam cinema's engagement with myth. This shift is marked by its adoption of the narrative and visual logic of the cinematic universe. Unlike earlier Malayalam films, *Lokah* positions itself within the global franchise economy, which draws parallels with Hollywood productions such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe and DC. In this sense, the film reframes myth as a commodity, capable of being expanded, sequenced, and consumed across various platforms.

From a Barthesian perspective, 'Lokah' alters regional myth into a signifier of a global spectacle. The narrative appropriates fragments of local legends and reconstitutes them through elaborate world-building and a serialized story structure. At the same time, it makes deliberate alterations to the original myth to align with contemporary cultural and political sensibilities. For instance, the writer and dramaturgist Santhy Balachandran has noted in an interview that she envisioned Neeli, a central mythological figure, as inherently good rather than being controlled or redeemed by *Kadamattathu Kathanar*. In the actual legend, Neeli is subdued and transformed into a benevolent spirit by the priest. However, in the film, she is reimagined as a saviour figure who protects helpless people like her clan and other innocent people even after decades of her clan's slaughter. By

repositioning Neeli as a protagonist with autonomous moral strength, the film centralises female agency. At the same time, it also reflects the ideological currents of the contemporary audiences, who are increasingly attuned to gender politics and resistant to patriarchal dominance in narrative structures.

The film's strategy of expanding its mythological universe through intertextual character insertions is equally significant. The Introduction of Charlie as Odiyan and Michael as Chathan with minimal exposition makes their appearance feel both natural and inevitable. Importantly, all of this is achieved within a relatively modest budget of ₹30 crores. It demonstrates a careful balancing act between financial constraints and the demands of spectacle. Malayalam cinema's ability to innovate systematically with cost-effective mythic expansion underscores producing a film that satisfies local expectations of cultural rootedness while simultaneously adopting the scalability and franchise logic of global cinematic models.

The film's visual language emphasises its commodification. The film rebrands myth to a hyperreal space accessible to any audience, regardless of regional familiarity. In *Lokah*, the ideology made natural is the inevitability of globalised storytelling models. For a wider range of audience appeal, myths must be spectacular and profit-oriented to survive.

Nevertheless, this does not suggest that *Lokah* abandons regional specificity entirely. The film secures cultural legitimacy by drawing on familiar Kerala myths as its narrative skeleton. The film closes not with narrative resolution but with an array of unanswered questions that deliberately extend the mythic imagination beyond the screen. The identity of Moothan remains shrouded in mystery, as does his summoning of Chandra to Bangalore. It leaves the viewers speculating about the deeper hierarchies of power within this universe. By refusing closure, the film signals its intention to inaugurate a larger serial mythology. As Jenkins observes, transmedia storytelling thrives on "creating openings rather than endings" to sustain audience engagement across installments (2006, p. 114). The film's reception also demonstrates that the commodification of regional myths can generate resonance far beyond Kerala. Despite working with a relatively modest budget, the film managed to create a global uproar, garnering attention across diasporic and international audiences.

Analysis: Bramayugam

'Bramayugam' (2024) travels in the opposite direction as opposed to *Lokah*. The film employs a stark black-and-white aesthetic, a minimal soundscape, and a confined spatial setting to retell myth in a way that resists spectacle. *Bramayugam* contracts its setting into an intimate, atmospheric narrative that resonates with Kerala's feudal history and cultural memory. Instead of expanding myth into a consumable cinematic universe. When viewed through Barthes' semiotic framework, it can be inferred that *Bramayugam* operates by refusing the second-order signification that naturalises globalised entertainment forms. At the first level of signification, the film presents a story rooted in folklore, ritual, and localised fears. At the second level, the film re-signifies these myths as a critique of social hierarchies and power structures. Drawing attention to how feudal ideologies persist within cultural memory. Myth here is not stripped of history but re-embedded into it. The film foregrounds its historical and ideological weight by presenting myth in monochrome rather than masking it with spectacle.

The choice of black-and-white cinematography is particularly significant. It functions as a signifier of austerity, lending the myth an archival quality. This can be situated as cultural memory rather than an entertainment commodity. This aesthetic recalls Barthes' claim that myth naturalises ideology. In the case of this film, it naturalises the idea that myths belong to history, memory, and lived social experience. By doing so, Bramayugam presents myth as a lens for understanding Kerala's cultural past. Furthermore, the film's focus on limited settings and psychological tension suggests a budget-conscious approach that nonetheless achieves critical acclaim and popular reception. This balance underscores Malayalam cinema's strategy of systematic experimentation. Together, both films embody two polar narrative strategies, yet both reveal how Malayalam cinema innovates in myth retelling without adhering to a single formula.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The contrasting strategies employed in both films highlight a significant development in Malayalam cinema. The emergence of mythological retellings as a site of systematic experimentation can be observed. Where Lokah employs spectacle and franchise logic to transform myth into a consumable commodity, Bramayugam retreats to presenting myth as an ideological archive of Kerala's cultural memory. At first glance, these appear to be contradictory impulses. One is aligned with globalisation and mass consumption, while the other is with historical introspection and regional authenticity.

Yet, when considered together, these films demonstrate the capacity of Malayalam cinema to inhabit both ends of the narrative spectrum while maintaining coherence as an industry. This duality can be read through Barthes' framework of myth as a semiotic system. Where Lokah exemplifies the process by which myth is stripped of history and re-coded into global entertainment ideologies, while Bramayugam re-embeds myth into local memory, refusing the commodification that global models demand. In this sense, Malayalam cinema reveals itself not as passively imitative of larger industries but as an active innovator that is capable of testing divergent strategies that reflect both market realities and cultural commitments.

This dual approach distinguishes Malayalam cinema from other Indian industries. While Hindi, Tamil, and Telugu cinemas often follow formulaic patterns in their mythological productions, either devotional reverence or spectacle-driven blockbusters, Malayalam cinema demonstrates a conscious willingness to diversify. Malayalam filmmakers expand the narrative possibilities of myth by experimenting simultaneously with commodification and memory, with spectacle and austerity, while also negotiating constraints of budget and audience reception.

In conclusion, the retelling of myths in Malayalam cinema is a dialectic between commodity and memory. Films like Lokah: Chapter 1 and Bramayugam occupy polar positions within this dialectic. Yet both reveal a systematic experimentation that ensures Malayalam cinema's distinctiveness. As the industry moves forward, this openness to divergent strategies may well establish Malayalam cinema as a model for how regional industries can balance global aspirations with cultural specificity in the retelling of myths and legends.

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VICTIM OR FIGHTER; A DIVE INTO REPRESENTATION OF GENDERED VIOLENCE IN INDIAN MOVIES.

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ABSTRACT

Cinematic representation of gendered violence has been a vast area of interest for many scholars. Gender violence, understood as harmful acts directed at individuals on the basis of gender, functions as a mechanism of power and control that systematically denies victims their fundamental rights. In a patriarchal power structure, women are most vulnerable to such forms of violence. In the Indian context, domestic violence emerges as the most pervasive form of gendered violence. Studies underscore how women, by virtue of their gender, are subjected to violence that manifests both physically and psychologically. In representations of gendered violence, women are depicted as objects upon whom anger, aggression and frustration are enacted. This paper intends to explore the nature of such representations of gendered violence in Indian cinema to understand how films participate in normalizing, critiquing, or resisting gendered violence within society.

In this paper, reviewing two Indian movies *Darlings* (2022) and *Parched* (2015), I intend to question the various ways in which violence against women is portrayed and question its authenticity and the nature of its representation. Jasmeet K. Reen's *Darlings*, portrays the emotional nuances of domestic violence. Badru, the protagonist, is subjected to physical, and psychological violence. Her husband serves as a symbol of patriarchy, not just attacking Badru, but imposing his power and control over other women as well through manipulation or aggression. In *Parched*, four women in rural Rajasthan are shown to go through different yet similar forms of violence. Lajjo, Rani, Janaki and Bijli signify how women endure and resist the every-day forms of violence directed at them. This paper enquires how the representation of gender violence normalises, critiques or subverts such forms of violence. The paper also intends to argue that such portrayals not only foregrounds women's sufferings but also explores their modes of resistance in order to counter-narrative to gendered violence.

Keywords: *Gendered Violence, Power, Control, Patriarchy.*

"I am no bird; and no net ensnares me: I am a free human being with an independent will."

- Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*

INTRODUCTION

Gender is a social construct defined as the roles, behaviors, norms, and expectations associated with being a man, woman, or other gender are created and reinforced by society, rather than being solely determined by biology. Various Feminist and Queer Scholars emphasize that gender is not a fixed biological attribute. One's gender shapes identity, structuring relationships, inequalities and institutions. Gender, in its positive sense, displays an absolute sense of self-identity. But there are two sides to a coin. This one concept of gender can bring out all sorts of actions and reactions from

people in communities. Those may be shrunk into reactions like judgement and authority, but could be stretched as far as to straight up violence.

This is where the Term “Gendered Violence”’s cue to arrive is. According to *UNICEF*, “gender-based violence (GBV) is used to describe any harmful act perpetrated against a person based on socially ascribed/gender differences between males and females. It includes acts of causing physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering, or threats of such acts, and other deprivations of liberty”. In kindergarten terms, violence caused against a particular gender be it mental or physical. It is often articulated in the sense that mental harm is dismissed off as not being a nature of gendered violence.

Another concept that must be delved into is the most common form of violence seen everywhere. The sole 'act' of being a woman gets you not so far, sometimes. Being a woman is faced with horrors and despicable acts of different forms of violence degreering from tolerable to intolerable. But the meaning of 'tolerating' in this sense, is hard to define as nobody on this earth was thrown in to tolerate anything due to their gender. The reason why women suffer the most from this sort of violence is rooted in many of the historical, social, cultural, and structural power imbalances.

Patriarchy is one of the utmost causes for this. In families and homes, men usually hold power and authority over women due to the imbalance in their gender, seeing women as “lesser” or “dependent” which in turn makes them very much vulnerable to abuse and violence. The desire to control and hold power is also another reason. Some ideologies are rooted in history as well, shaping later thinking about women and the violence against them. Like *Aristotle* spoke “The relation of male to female is by nature a relation of superior to inferior and ruler to ruled” giving out the assumption that women are always to be ruled, dominated and to never let astray with power. And that this power must always be within the reach of men. These root causes gradually wind down into the rabbit hole of normalizing such mindsets and acts as a license to violate women.

Different theories tell specific tales of this concept of gender violence. Feminists argue that this form of violence is completely rooted in concepts like patriarchy and unequal distributions of power. And these acts are shown through the usage of violence to maintain a certain control over women. Sociologists examine how social institutions such as religion or family often normalise and let this behaviour be tolerated. It is also seen how religion and culture intersect with gender to create more violence. Looking into the behaviour of the attackers or perpetrators, some may find psychological reasons why a person would use violence against a woman. It may be of mental, or personality related causes. Certain cases may show causes like trauma or even mental conditions. This can also be connected to observance of character from family members or communities, seeing it as accepted behaviour. These actions may be normalized into what shapes the next generation. As mentioned earlier, gender violence cannot just be explained by gender alone—intersecting it with caste, religion, race and culture makes it even more harsh. A lot of postcolonial and historical concepts also shaped gender violence. Such as traditions and globalizations— they influence forms of brutality.

METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate how gendered violence is portrayed in Indian cinema, this study uses a qualitative research methodology based on textual and thematic analysis. The study focuses on two chosen films, *Parched* (2015), directed by Leena Yadav, and *Darlings* (2022), directed by Jasmeet K. Reen. These films are examined as cultural texts that represent social realities and power dynamics.

These films were chosen because they directly address issues of female agency, patriarchy, domestic abuse, and resistance in starkly different urban and rural settings. The representation of gendered violence in India's various sociocultural contexts can be examined thanks to this comparative method.

Feminist theory, in particular viewpoints that see gendered violence as a result of patriarchal power dynamics and social normalisation, informs the analysis. Characterisation, narrative structure, visual imagery, and dialogue are all interpreted analytically using concepts like power, control, objectification, and resistance. In order to analyse how violence against women is depicted, justified, contested, or subverted in the films, close reading of significant scenes, character arcs, and narrative developments is used. Studies on gender-based violence and feminist scholarship are examples of secondary sources that are used to contextualise the analysis and bolster critical interpretations.

The study aims to comprehend how Indian cinema contributes to the reinforcement or resistance of prevailing narratives about gendered violence and women's agency through the use of this qualitative and comparative framework.

ANALYSIS

Movies are a reflection of what usually happens in real life. Representation of societal issues on screen is an excellent way to start shaming and denormalizing such behaviours. Likewise, films have been portraying these brutalities consistently and controversially during the rise of the second wave of feminism in the 1970s. Even though not explicit, Indian movies like *Mother India* (1957) have similar themes like exploitation and suffering. Another important fact to notice is the way these victims are shown to counter the attacks. Many early victims are shown to endure and suffer in silence, while others accept it as "fate". Dependence on a male character to "save" them and end them of their suffering displayed the assumption that the woman's role was to be saved, casually undermining empowerment. Previous movies signified these women to be "naive" and "innocent" characters, opposing the idea of strong bold characters. Even if these unafraid characters were to be shown, they would eventually end up being "punished" by the society. Later on, there has been a drastic change in these displays. Issues have been shown more explicitly, contradicting the actions of the attackers. Moreover, mental harm has also been portrayed in the way it needs to be portrayed. Most times, mentally attacking a woman was seen as comic relief or the "life after marriage". Women in these cases are shown to be manipulated and gaslighted by their partners, dismissing the actions in the name of love and care. Like it is said in the study, *Bollywood as a Site of Resistance: Women and Agency in Indian Popular Culture* (2023) By Sheetal Yadav and Smita Jha, "In recent years, there has been a growing trend of Bollywood films depicting women claiming their sexuality in a transformed and empowered way", women are shown to proudly step out of the closed shutters, embracing their sexuality as women rather than enduring brutalities. Popular films

like *Gangubai Kathiawadi* (2022) further explain this change in track.

The major turning point of women understanding their capacity and value are also shown quite frequently in Indian cinemas. Certain incidents provoke these women to fight for justice against the assaults aimed at them. These acts of defense are usually repelled by societal customs.

In this paper, I analyze two films *Darlings* (2022) and *Parched* (2015) to explore the varied forms of gender-based violence inflicted on women and the ways in which they assert resistance.

Darlings is a 2022 Hindi comedy thriller movie directed by Jasmeet K. Reen.

The movie stars Alia Bhatt, Shefali Shah, Vijay Varma, and Roshan Mathew as the prominent characters. The story revolves around a woman, Badru, who is trapped in a marriage with her abusive husband, Hamza. Following many incidents, the main plot is the plans of Badru and her mother to take revenge on her manipulative husband.

Alia Bhatt's character portrays a trapped woman enduring abuse in the name of love or fear. The movie plays an important visual for topics like patriarchy, domestic violence, and resistance. The recurring cycle of hope is shown in the movie as well. Hamza shows so much love to Badru every morning, just to switch every time he's drunk or angry. This cycle gives Badru a hope that her husband might change, like in a scene where she files a complaint against him just to deny it later on. Vijay Varma plays a character that embodies toxic masculinity, control, and entitlement, which is clearly shown in scenes where he comes home and attacks Badru for reasons that don't fall on her head. Another significant fact shown is the mother daughter bond to plot on the husband. Their bond shows inter-generational resilience, to which we later find out that Shefali Shah's character had also been abused by her husband, when Badru was just an infant. Most importantly the movie shows a transition from victim to fighter as Badru realises that whatever she has gone through is affecting not just her, but her miscarried child.

Parched is a 2015 Hindi drama movie directed by Leena Yadav.

The main cast includes Radhika Apte, Tannishtha Chatterjee, Surveen Chawla, and Adil Hussain. The film is set in a rural village in Rajasthan and follows the intertwined lives of four women suffering from different types of oppression and violence.

Parched is deeply symbolic, and like *Darlings*, it's about gendered oppression—but in a more rural setting where gender roles are rigid and violence is ignored. Characters like Bijli, Lajjo, Rani and Janaki represent the different forms of gendered violence women go through. Bijli, portrayed as a sex worker/ dancer is loved by all the men of the village. Yet, she is constantly judged by the community, but is very unapologetic about her choices. Bijli, is a prime example of objectification of women. In various scenes, she is only seen as eye candy invalidating her feelings and rights as a person. But she also seems to symbolize freedom, which is exclusive to the 'respectable' abused women in the movie. Lajjo, a woman being constantly accused of being infertile by her husband, suffers from both mental and physical abuse. In the movie, she is shown to still explore her sexuality as a woman, perhaps being attracted to females, but not confirmed at all. She lives her life trying to figure out her wrongs which caused her 'infertility'. Bijli, being the educated among the 4 soul sisters, sparks a question about the infertility coming from Lajjo's husband rather than herself. Rani,

the woman playing the widow character is shown to have been abused by her husband. The film also shows her being invisibly harassed and objectified by an anonymous caller. She was only trying to find a bride for her aggressive son, Gulab. The youngest and most vulnerable of the 4 women is Janaki, a 15 year old girl forcibly married to Gulab who is 17 years old. She already had a first love back in her village, but as women didn't have the freedom to have choices, that was out of the question. Janaki suffers through marital rape by her husband. The film in general shows a variety of societal issues women undergo such as child marriage, abuse, marital rape etc. As cited in Nivedita Menon's *Seeing Like a Feminist*, "In the patriarchal perspective, rape is a fate worse than death; there is no normal life possible for the raped woman; the way to avoid rape is to lock women up at home, within the family, under patriarchal controls", but there is a big speck of problem when women are not even safe at home either due to non consensual sexual practices or abuse.

Common themes in both the films are abuse and sexual assault due to the characters' gender. Being a woman in the two visuals, they suffer violations from men to which no one bats an eye to. Implying that the concept of men being dominant and having complete control and power over women is normal.

Resistance in both movies comes in various forms. Some reactions are similar; Badru and Lajjo are where they reach this breaking point in their suffering. Both of their protests come from the motherly instinct or in better words, fertility. Badru, gets enlightened when she has a miscarriage after Hamza pushes her down the stairs. Likewise, Lajjo counters her husband for abusing her even after she gets pregnant. These two women signify a turning point in the lives urging them to fight back.

Another parallel to be found in these movies is the concept of womanhood. Badru is helped by her own mother to fight back and finally call out freedom from her husband's reign of terror while the 4 women set out to find true happiness in themselves by assisting each other. The women's journey from enduring such sufferings to escaping signifies resilience and liberation from everything, claiming the right to live on their own terms. Their laughter, chats and secrets signify hope.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the representation of gendered violence in *Darlings* (2022) and *Parched* (2015) goes beyond the mere showcasing of women's suffering to a more complex meaning with power, resistance, and agency. While *Darlings* emphasizes the psychological and emotional parts of domestic violence within an urban context, *Parched* sets gendered oppression within rural traditions. Together, these films reveal how Indian cinema can both reproduce and challenge patriarchal ideologies. By critically examining the intersections of vulnerability and resilience, the movies resist the normalization of violence against women and stress counter-narratives that emphasize individuality and independence. The analysis highlights the potential of cinema not only as a cultural text reflecting deep rooted gender divisions but also as a metamorphic way that questions, critiques, and reimagines social realities.

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CINEMATIC RETELLINGS OF MYTHS AND FOLKLORE : FROM STEREOTYPES TO CRITICAL REIMAGININGS

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between literature and cinema in India has long been mediated through myths, folklore, and oral traditions that transcend textual boundaries. From Dadasaheb Phalke's *Raja Harishchandra*, the first Indian feature film, to contemporary epics like *Baahubali* and *Kantara*, filmmakers have consistently drawn upon the vast reservoir of Indian mythologies and folk narratives to craft stories that resonate across generations. These cinematic retellings do not merely reproduce textual sources like, Mahabharata, or regional ballads; rather, they reimagine them within shifting socio-political, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. This paper explores how Indian cinema negotiates the transition from page to screen by adapting, revising, and reinterpreting myths and folklore. It examines how mythological films reinforce moral, nationalist ideals, and how they reinterpret engaging with folklore and regional identities. By tracing this trajectory, the study highlights that cinematic retellings of legends and myths not only bridge literature and film but also demonstrate the enduring power of myth to shape collective imagination in a rapidly transforming world.

Keywords: *Myths, folklore, cinematic retellings, cultural memory, postmodernism, adaptation, genre hybridity, identity.*

INTRODUCTION

Myths and folklore have always functioned as powerful cultural archives, preserving collective memory, social values, and ideological structures. In the Indian context, these narratives have travelled fluidly across oral traditions, literary texts, performative art forms, and, more recently, cinema. Far from being static inheritances, myths continuously evolve, shaped by the socio-political contexts in which they are retold. Cinema, with its mass appeal and visual authority, has emerged as a particularly influential medium in reinterpreting these narratives, transforming inherited stories into sites of negotiation, resistance, and cultural critique. Myth and folklore have long been central to Malayalam cinema, drawing from Kerala's rich oral traditions and epics. Traditionally, these narratives have been rendered in rigid binaries: heroes are glorified, villains vilified, and female figures are either idealized or demonized. In mid-20th century films like *Thacholi Othenan* (1964) and *Yakshi* (1968), myths were reproduced as moral fables, reflecting social conservatism rather than interrogating cultural politics. Cinema's visual realism and emotional impact upon the audience further intensify this authority, allowing inherited narratives to appear self-evident and unquestionable. As a result, early mythological films frequently reproduced stereotypes under the guise of tradition.

However, since the late 1980s, Malayalam cinema has increasingly reworked myths, treating it not as fixed moral truth but as cultural text. What distinguishes recent engagements with myth, however, is a conscious departure from reverence toward interrogation. Filmmakers no longer ask

how faithfully myths can be preserved, but rather how it can be re-read to address questions of injustice, marginalization, and agency in the present. This paper explores how Malayalam cinema negotiates the transition from page to screen by adapting, revising, and reinterpreting myths and folklore and also demonstrates the enduring power of myth to shape collective imagination in a rapidly transforming world. This paper examines two films—*Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989) and *Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra* (2025)—to trace this shift from stereotype to critical reinterpretation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research methodology grounded in textual analysis, comparative film studies, and cultural theory to examine cinematic retellings of myths and folklore in Malayalam cinema. The paper treats cinema not merely as an adaptation of pre-existing narratives, but as a cultural text that actively negotiates history, ideology, and power. The research follows a comparative case study approach, focusing on the two Malayalam films from distinct historical moments. The analysis is informed by postmodern and cultural theories of myth and narration. A. K. Ramanujan's concept of narrative plurality and "winner's history" provides a framework for understanding how myths, privilege certain voices while marginalizing others. Homi K. Bhabha's ideas on cultural reinterpretation and hybridity help contextualize the reworking of myths within contemporary socio-political realities.

Malayalam cinema has moved from reproducing stereotypical portrayals of myth/folklore to reframing them as sites of cultural critique. Through humanizing villains (*Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha*) and reclaiming demonized femininity (*Lokah*), these films exemplify how myths and folklore can be continuously reinterpreted to engage with contemporary debates on history, identity, and justice.

1. *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989): Humanizing the Villain

The 'Vadakkanpattu' ballads valorize Aromal Chekavar as the classic hero while branding Chandu as a traitor. This reflects what A.K. Ramanujan (1991) calls the "winner's narrative" in folklore, where cultural memory privileges victors. Hariharan's *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* challenges this structure by re-telling events from Chandu's perspective. Instead of a one-dimensional villain, Chandu emerges as a tragic figure caught between caste prejudice, betrayal, and fate (Pillai, 2005). The film does not merely retell folklore from Chandu's perspective; it restructures cultural memory by shifting narrative focalization. By granting Chandu interiority; his doubts, humiliation, and moral conflict the film foregrounds what folklore traditionally excludes: the emotional and ethical cost of hero-making. This suggests that folklore operates through selective remembrance, privileging collective pride over individual suffering. The film shifts the narrative perspective to Chandu. While the film does not overtly preach caste critique, caste operates as a silent organizing principle in Chandu's marginalization. His skill as a warrior is acknowledged, yet social legitimacy is denied. This exposes how folklore naturalizes caste hierarchies by embedding them into heroic lineages rather than explicitly naming them. Instead of treachery, Chandu is shown as an outsider shaped by caste prejudice and systemic injustice. He is depicted as a skilled warrior but denied respect, constantly mistrusted, and pushed into betrayal as much by circumstance as by choice. The duel with Aromal is presented as a tragic inevitability rather than malicious treason. Here the stereotype is broken: the then villain is now a victim of social circumstances. Through this narrative the film tried to establish a cinematic mode where folklore is interrogated rather than preserved uncritically. The "villain"

becomes a tragic hero and the folklore's black-and-white morality is replaced by shades of gray. The film put forward a question; Whose story gets preserved in ballads, and whose voice is erased?

2. *Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra* (2025): Feminist Superheroic Yakshi

The Yakshi in Kerala folklore—documented in *Aithiyamala* (Namboothiri, 1909/2006)—is traditionally portrayed as a seductive female spirit, dangerous to men, often reflecting patriarchal anxieties around women's sexuality (Devika, 2007). Earlier films such as *Yakshi* (1968) reinforced this eroticized, demonized image. By contrast, *Lokah* reimagines Chandra/Neeli as an immortal guardian figure, more superheroine than seductress. This reversal transforms misogynistic folklore into a feminist narrative of justice. As Warner (1994) argues, myths can be reworked to “speak back” against the cultural systems that created them. *Lokah* exemplifies this by turning the fearful Yakshi into a morally complex protector. The stereotype of demonized femininity is broken to an empowered female agency. This merges local folklore with global superhero aesthetics, embedding feminist critique. Traditional Yakshi narratives frame women as objects of male fear and desire. *Lokah* reverses this by granting Chandra narrative and visual agency. The camera aligns with her perspective, transforming the Yakshi from a spectacle to a subject. This shift destabilizes the male gaze that historically eroticized and demonized her. By blending folklore with superhero conventions, *Lokah* avoids treating myth as a closed, regional past. Instead, it positions folklore within a global narrative economy. This hybridity signals that local myths can be reimagined without losing cultural specificity. Unlike folklore spirits trapped in repetitive vengeance, Chandra's longevity becomes an ethical memory rather than obsessive haunting.

In Malayalam cinema, the reinterpretation of myths and folklore reveals a significant shift from conventional portrayals toward more layered, critical, and often subversive retellings. Traditional narratives, rooted in ballads, myths, and the *Aithiyamala*, functioned as static heritage, reinforcing fixed binaries of good versus evil and serving primarily to moralize and preserve tradition. *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* (1989) marked a radical departure from this mode by reimagining Chandu, long vilified in folk ballads, as a tragic hero rather than a one-dimensional traitor. More recently, *Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra* (2025) reclaims the demonized figure of the Yakshi, a recurring symbol of female monstrosity in Kerala's oral tradition, and transforms her into a feminist superhero.

CONCLUSION

Malayalam cinema's reinterpretation of folklore illustrates a broader cultural trajectory: myths are no longer treated as unquestionable truths but as malleable narratives. *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* destabilized the hero/villain binary by humanizing Chandu and *Lokah* reclaimed the Yakshi, transforming misogynistic folklore into feminist superhero narrative. Earlier films like *Thacholi Othenan* (1964) and *Kadathanattu Makkam* (1978) which drew directly from *Vadakkanpattu* ballads, these films served as cultural preservation of Kerala's oral epics, but did so in a linear, didactic, and spectacular style. Supernatural folklore also entered cinema, with films like *Yakshi* (1968). The Yakshi of those days was eroticized as both temptress and monster, symbolizing patriarchal fear of female desire. The major concept was entertainment through horror spectacle, reinforcing stereotypes of dangerous femininity. *Oru Vadakkan Veeragatha* was the first major cinematic attempt to deconstruct folklore by giving it another perspective. *Lokah* taps into the hybridity of Kerala myths and global superhero aesthetics, yet rooted in local cultural imagination.

This shift reflects folklore's dynamic nature: as Ramanujan (1991) observed, "there is no single version of a story, only a plurality of tellings". Malayalam cinema has embraced this plurality, turning folklore into a site of resistance, identity formation, and cultural critique. Together, these films illustrate a progression from folklore's conventional didacticism toward cinematic reinterpretations that critique inherited biases and reimagine marginalized figures through more inclusive, resistant lenses.

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FRAMES OF (AB)NORMALCY: REPRESENTATION OF MENTAL ILLNESS IN SELECTED THIRD MILLENNIAL MALAYALAM CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

A picture is worth a thousand words. Cinemas help us connect with life and our lives are connected with cinemas. They play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of this world. Moreover, it is necessary to understand how well these cinemas showcase the society. Malayalam cinemas, generally regarded as a role model for the Indian film industry, has always attracted a large set of audience. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the Malayalam cinemas that reaches the silver screen and directly to us. The portrayal of mental health in selected Malayalam cinemas is one of the key aspects that has been examined through this paper. This study will have primary texts including *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* (2014), *Hey Jude* (2018) and *Kishkindha Kaandam* (2024), which explore a wide spectrum of mental health conditions, including Anterograde Amnesia and Asperger's Syndrome. The characters depicted in these cinemas grapple with significant mental health issues that are frequently trivialized and mocked. In a society where standards of normalcy are already defined for mental well-being, these challenges faced by a few are sometimes considered quirky. The study also seeks to unpack the narrative strategies and cultural assumptions that enable this trivialization, exploring how they contribute to broader societal misunderstandings and inadequate support systems for those living with mental illness. Ultimately, a fresh context-sensitive perspective, addressing an area that has yet to be fully explored among the media representations is the motive of such a research paper.

Keywords: *Malayalam Cinema, Mental Health Issues, Media Representations, Cultural assumptions, Trivialization*

INTRODUCTION

Cinema serves as the true reflection of the triumphs, anxieties, and evolving consciousness of the society through its flickering images. Indian cinema, mostly from the Malayalam film industry has always served as a conscience keeper and has engraved a clear niche for itself through the commitment in authentic storytelling and character portrayals. Subjects that were once considered taboo or awkward to be presented in the mainstream are now given equal importance in the third millennial Malayalam cinemas. Among those subjects, one that demands a thorough examination of how it is conveyed to the audience is the theme of mental illness. Our paper tries to understand the portrayal of mental illness in three notable Malayalam cinemas from the third millennium: *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* (2014), *Hey Jude* (2018), *Kishkindha Kaandam* (2024).

Cinema does not exist as an autonomous entity, as it is shaped by cultural contexts from which it emerges. The societal views, understanding, and responses are the factors that come under discussion when we speak specifically of mental health representation. As WHO says, "Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize

their abilities, learn and work well, and contribute to their community. It has intrinsic and instrumental value and is a basic human right.” (World Health Organization) and yet the stigma around people having mental health issues prevail globally. In India, where mental health infrastructure is severely limited and cultural attitudes toward mental illness are often marked by misunderstanding and prejudice, the role of popular media becomes even more critical. Films reach millions of viewers, particularly in Kerala, where cinema-going is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of society. The images, narratives, and characterizations presented on screen can either challenge existing prejudices or reinforce harmful stereotypes.

The three cinemas chosen for the study represent different approaches to various mental health conditions. *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* directed by Anvar Sadik, centres on the suffering of the female lead character Nithya from Anterograde Amnesia, a condition that prevents the formation of new memories. Rom-com elements are the important elements in the movie which raises the question of whether such a serious medical condition should be treated as such. Shyamprasad directed *Hey Jude*, which presents Jude, a young man with Asperger's Syndrome who faces difficulty in social interaction and romantic relation. This cinema, widely acclaimed as one of the most symbolic one for Asperger's Syndrome has been praised a lot for its sensitive handling of the subject, yet it too has some flaws to be noted. And, *Kishkinda Kaandam*, a more recent offering, explores psychological trauma and its manifestations within a family setting, providing yet another lens through which to examine contemporary Malayalam cinema's engagement with mental health themes.

“Our minds are far beyond us. The ingredients that our minds seek for sustenance are far removed from the superficial pleasures we attach ourselves to. The ultimate purpose of our lives is far beyond what we imagine the purpose of our lives to be. The motivational drives of the human mind are often deeper than what is visible on the surface and what we consciously recognize.” (Chathoth,8)

The study has not only been limited to just cataloguing how mental illness appears in these films. Moreover, it examines the narrative strategies used, the cultural assumptions embedded within the story telling, and the real-world implications of these representations. For that, this paper has been divided into three chapters, each focusing on various aspects of the perception around mental illness. The first chapter examines the representation of mental illness in these cinemas, to point out the accuracy of the portrayals. The trivialization of the characters with mental health issues will be analysed in the second chapter, while the third chapter addresses the stigmatization that may reinforce or challenge societal stigma around mental health and what messages the audiences might internalize about the people who suffers it. By blending such ideas under the film studies and medical humanities, this study solely tries to foster a more responsible understanding as well as the portrayal of mental health issues among the general audience.

The Representation of Psychological Conditions in Malayalam Cinema

Representation is never neutral. The cinematic frame picks a point of view, organizes space and time, and thereby assigns meaning. When it comes to mental illness and neurodivergence, representational choices include decisions about language, diagnosis, symptom visibility, sensory experience, and the balance between vulnerability and competence. Across the three selected films, one can identify a continuous push-and-pull between rendering interiority legible and

preserving the protagonist's difference as something not fully transparent to the neurotypical gaze.

Representation, when it comes to movies is tricky; this is because the perfect balance between the dramatic elements and portrayal of a character for itself is difficult to attain. If the dramatic element in a movie exceeds the levels, it might pave ways to stereotyping, which is most common in movies. *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* builds its narrative premise around anterograde amnesia. The heroine's near-term memory resets, she cannot reliably form new memories after a certain point, structure the story's rhythms. The romance depends on repetition becoming care: routines, recordings, visual cues, and daily rituals that re-introduce her to love and to herself. The camera often aligns with the male lead's perspective, inviting the audience to discover how patience and inventiveness can cocoon the beloved from a world that won't slow down. At its best, the film encapsulates what is at stake for people with memory disorders and their caregivers: the moral weight of repetition, the art of designing environments that are forgiving, and the ache of knowing that recognition is a moving target. The film's *mise-en-scène*, bright palettes, soft light, musical motifs, often romanticizes the condition, placing the disorder inside a gently whimsical world. That aesthetic decision makes the protagonist's life feel "movie-manageable," a choice that has two sides: it humanizes by refusing to make her frightening or monstrous (as some older cinema often did with "madness"), yet it risks minimizing the unpredictable severity and hazard that can accompany memory disorders, particularly outside the protective membrane of a love-driven routine. For instance, the opening scene shows the heroine being a charming woman, not disclosing any of her underlying mental disorder shifts the audience perspective from a woman full of life to sympathising with her tragic condition. The representation here is neat since the character is not loaded with any of the unnecessary dramatic elements during the character introduction.

The movie *Hey Jude* takes a markedly different path. The film invites us into the daily life of a young man on the autism spectrum, Jude, and shows us a mind organized by precision, pattern, and honesty. Rather than building the plot on the hope that he will be "fixed," the narrative focuses on how he can flourish when the world around him flexes a little and when he learns to negotiate social thresholds in his own time. Several representational choices matter here. First, the film lets Jude possess both strength and vulnerability without collapsing one into the other. His intense interests (numbers, the natural world, music depending on the scene) are treated not as mere compensations for "deficits" but as part of a different ordering of attention. Second, the film often uses sound and framing to convey sensory and social friction: the buzz of a crowded space amplified, the camera lingering on the overwhelm of multiple simultaneous cues, the quiet relief of order. Third, the script resists the "miracle cure" arc. Jude does not become neurotypical; instead, he gains tools and allies, and the people around him also learn to meet him halfway. The film's representational ethic aligns with contemporary neurodiversity principles: disability is a mismatch between person and environment rather than a solely internal problem to be solved.

In our next movie, *Kishkindha Kaandam*, its very title evoking a section of the Ramayana with fraught brotherhoods, exile, and a kingdom of vanaras, approaches mental health less as a diagnosable condition and more as an atmosphere: frustration, paranoia, restlessness, or compulsion entwined with social stressors. Without forcing a clinical label, one can read its protagonist's behaviour as an index of psychological strain that contemporary life precarious work,

fractured trust, crowded cities, atomized communities, both produces and then disavows. The film's representational strategy relies on oscillations: scenes alternate between heightened stylization and almost documentary everydayness, between the mythic register and mundane routines. Where the earlier two films anchor their protagonists' differences in explicit conditions (anterograde amnesia; autism spectrum), *Kishkindha Kaandam* keeps the mental health axis loosely defined. This ambiguity can be generative, refusing to reduce a person to a checklist of symptoms, and it can be ethically slippery, where audiences are asked to supply their own stigmatizing labels to make sense of a character's volatility or isolation. The very indeterminacy becomes a representational choice, one that mirrors how much "mental illness" in public discourse appears as a floating signifier that attaches to any behaviour that does not fit normative expectations.

Across these films, a few representational patterns emerge. First, interiority is often mediated through caretakers, friends, and family. We learn how to interpret the protagonist's behaviour by how others react to it: a father's exasperation, a lover's tenderness, a neighbour's curiosity. This is especially true in *Ormayundo Ee Mukham*, where the male lead's love-work scaffolds the heroine's world, and in *Hey Jude*, where supportive relationships provide frames but the practice also occurs in *Kishkindha Kaandam*, where the protagonist's social field tags him as odd, volatile, or opaque. Second, the films distribute credibility unevenly. The neurotypical or "stable" characters often hold expository power; they explain or translate the protagonist's mental life to the audience. Third, the films differ in how much they let the protagonist lead the narrative gaze. *Hey Jude* is the most generous in soliciting identification with the protagonist's sensory and cognitive perspective, while *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* and *Kishkindha Kaandam* more frequently solicit empathy through relational frames (the lover's patience; the society's misreading).

"Malayalam cinema is perhaps an example of how the most ingenious works of art are often fostered under conditions of rigid conservatism." (Chathoth, 15)

To represent mental illness ethically in cinema is to tread between two pitfalls: voyeurism and erasure. Too close a look can become prurience; too distant a frame can erase the reality of struggle. *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* avoids monstrosity and medical sensationalism; *Hey Jude* avoids the saviour-cure arc; *Kishkindha Kaandam* avoids reductive labelling. These are achievements. Yet each film must also contend with the limits of its chosen form. Romances tend to domesticate conflict into solvable problems; coming-of-age arcs tend to centre growth; allegorical thrillers tend to blur the social and the psychic. Representation is therefore never just about accuracy; it is about the affordances and constraints of genre, star persona, and audience expectation. The next chapter turns to how these representational logics, even when empathetically crafted, can morph into trivialization: difference becomes lovable oddity or comic ornament, and structural barriers fade from view.

The Stigmatisation of Psychological Conditions in Malayalam Cinema

Stigma is an age-old world which connotes a negative meaning surrounding it. Here we use the term to depict how the characters from the selected Malayalam movies are made to fit into a box which is labelled, mental disorders. Stigma operates as a social mechanism through which difference is marked, moralized, and marginalized. When applied to mental health, it transforms a

medical or psychological condition into a site of moral judgment and social exclusion. “Kerala which is in the forefront in literacy and development, has over 30 lakh persons affected with mental disorders, according to the report by the Kerala State Mental Health Authority. This figure would amount to 10 percent of the total Kerala population (Chathoth 23). Stigmatisation within cinema functions at multiple levels: textual, visual, and cultural. It begins with the scripting and characterization, the language used to describe and frame the protagonist, and extends into the *mise-en-scène*, the supporting characters' responses, and the ultimate moral of the story.

In *Ormayundo Ee Mukham*, Nithya's anterograde amnesia is presented through the lens of romance and tragedy. Her condition becomes a narrative obstacle that the male protagonist must lovingly overcome. While the film's tonal gentleness appears to humanize her experience, it subtly reinforces a hierarchical gaze: she exists primarily through the care and patience of her male counterpart. The cinematic framing thus reproduces a benevolent stigma, one that cloaks itself in compassion but nevertheless denies full agency to the person with the disorder. Her identity is defined by lack of memory, continuity, and autonomy and the film's sentimental resolution frames her condition as a source of pity rather than difference. In public perception, such portrayals reinforce the idea that individuals with neurological or psychological impairments are incomplete beings, dependent upon the moral labour of others for survival.

The rhetoric of love and care in *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* reveals a subtler stigma arising from romantic idealization. By aestheticizing amnesia, the narrative diminishes the disorder's medical seriousness and trivializes its daily challenges. The audience is led to view the illness as endearing rather than debilitating, transforming a psychological reality into an emotional metaphor for love's endurance. Here, stigma manifests not as overt ridicule but as containment, confining the mentally ill character to an affective spectacle instead of a realistic portrayal.

In contrast, *Hey Jude* offers a more progressive textual field yet cannot entirely escape the cultural residues of stigma. Shyamaprasad's portrayal of Jude, a young man on the autism spectrum, is widely celebrated for its authenticity and restraint. However, the very acclaim it received reveals how deeply entrenched ableist expectations remain in cultural discourse. Although the film grants Jude narrative centrality, his social acceptance still hinges on the intervention of neurotypical figures who mediate his entry into “normal” life. This dynamic, though compassionate, mirrors the rehabilitative model of disability, where the burden of adaptation falls disproportionately on the individual, and acceptance is contingent on behavioural modification.

The script's recurrent emphasis on Jude's “innocence” and “purity” contributes to a moralised form of stigma. Innocence, in such contexts, becomes a euphemism for infantilisation. His difference is made tolerable because it is harmless, a trope that allows society to empathize with neurodivergent individuals only when they conform to the ideals of docility and non-threat. Moreover, the film's aesthetic restraint—the clean visuals, the measured dialogue, the restrained emotionality—reflects an anxious desire to maintain respectability in representing mental difference. By making Jude a figure of moral exemplarity, the narrative neutralizes the discomfort of his disorder, translating neurodivergence into a digestible moral lesson rather than a lived social struggle. Stigma thus persists not as mockery but as moralisation: the neurodivergent subject is positioned as a moral mirror for the audience rather than a full participant in social life.

Hey Jude also exposes the intersection between stigma and social class. The family's middle-class respectability heightens their anxiety about social perception. The father's irritability stems less from ignorance than from the fear of social embarrassment a reflection of Kerala's modernity complex, where education and refinement coexist uneasily with the stigma surrounding mental difference. The narrative arc, which moves from concealment to cautious acceptance, mirrors Kerala's broader sociocultural attitude toward mental health: progressive in discourse but hesitant in practice. Shyamaprasad's film, despite its sensitivity, cannot entirely dismantle this ambivalence, revealing how stigma persists even within empathetic frameworks.

In *Kishkindha Kaandam*, the dynamics of stigmatisation shift toward a more diffuse, systemic form. The film's refusal to name or clinically categorize the protagonist's psychological turmoil serves both as a critique of psychiatric reductionism and as a risky aesthetic strategy. By rendering mental illness as an allegory for existential and societal alienation, the film opens space for critical reflection but also invites interpretive imprecision. The audience, accustomed to diagnostic clarity, may project their own stigmatizing assumptions onto the protagonist, interpreting his behavioural volatility as madness, aggression, or moral failure. This participatory stigma where viewers themselves become complicit in othering illustrates how ambiguity can inadvertently reinforce social prejudice. The lack of diagnostic framing, though intellectually ambitious, leaves the mental state vulnerable to moral interpretation rather than clinical empathy.

Moreover, *Kishkindha Kaandam* situates psychological distress within a socio-political framework. The protagonist's fractured psyche becomes a metaphor for a fragmented society, one plagued by economic precarity, familial breakdown, and political disillusionment. However, this metaphorization can also obscure the specificity of mental illness, transforming psychological suffering into a symbol rather than a condition. The use of mythological allusion the echo of *Ramayana's* Kishkindha episode reinforces this symbolic mode, displacing the conversation from psychiatry to morality. Madness here is coded as rebellion, introspection, or divine estrangement, thereby aestheticizing rather than humanizing mental suffering. The stigma persists in the form of mystification: mental illness becomes meaningful only when it serves as a metaphor for societal malaise.

Across these films, stigmatisation manifests through recurring cinematic patterns. First, mental illness is consistently externalized it must be seen, explained, or managed by others. The cinematic gaze privileges the observer over the sufferer, thereby reproducing social hierarchies of knowledge and control. Second, the narrative closure in all three films reaffirms social harmony through containment: the ill character either adapts to normative expectations or retreats from the social world. Third, humour and sentiment often function as mechanisms of distance. The mild comic undertones in *Hey Jude* and the romantic sweetness of *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* convert psychological distress into narrative charm, allowing audiences to sympathize without engaging with discomfort. Such strategies domesticate difference, transforming potential sites of critique into spectacles of emotional consumption.

The persistence of stigma in Malayalam cinema also reflects broader cultural paradoxes. Kerala, despite its high literacy rates and robust social development, remains deeply bound to notions of familial reputation and social conformity. Mental illness disrupts the collective ideal of the rational,

educated Malayali subject. Thus, cinematic representations often oscillate between denial and overexposure, between silence and spectacle. The social stigma attached to psychological difference is both challenged and reinforced through these cultural performances of normalcy.

To address stigma in Malayalam cinema, it is essential to move beyond sympathetic storytelling toward structural critique. Representation must interrogate not only individual pathology but also the institutional and cultural systems that produce and sustain stigma schools, workplaces, religious communities, and media industries themselves. Films such as *Hey Jude* and *Kishkindha Kaandam* gesture toward this direction, yet they stop short of dismantling the underlying moral hierarchies. The future of Malayalam cinema's engagement with mental health depends on its ability to reimagine the "abnormal" not as deviation from the norm but as an integral dimension of human diversity.

Stigmatisation in Malayalam cinema operates less through overt ridicule and more through subtle moral and aesthetic containment. Whether rendered as tragic romance, moral fable, or existential allegory, mental illness is often displaced from lived reality into symbolic or sentimental terrain. These films, while progressive in tone, remain symptomatic of a culture negotiating its discomfort with psychological vulnerability. The path forward lies not in erasing difference but in decentralizing the normative gaze allowing characters with mental health disorders to exist beyond the binaries of cure and catastrophe, sympathy and shame. Only then can Malayalam cinema transcend its frames of (ab)normalcy to envision a more inclusive, de-stigmatized cinematic imagination

The Trivialisation of Psychological Conditions in Malayalam Cinema

The depiction of psychological conditions in Malayalam cinema has often been situated within a precarious balance between sensitivity and spectacle. While recent decades have seen an increased willingness to explore mental health as a narrative theme, this exploration frequently succumbs to the mechanisms of commercial cinema romanticization, humour, and emotional exaggeration. Trivialisation, in this context, refers to the cinematic strategies that downplay, distort, or aestheticise mental disorders to make them palatable for popular consumption. Rather than offering a nuanced engagement with the lived realities of mental illness, many Malayalam films have converted psychological difference into an instrument for evoking laughter, pity, or facile sentimentality. This process, though subtle, has significant implications for how audiences internalize mental health discourse within the cultural domain of Kerala.

Trivialisation also manifests through genre conventions. Malayalam cinema's strong tradition of melodrama has historically relied on the oscillation between comedy and tragedy, where extremes of emotion are used to engage the audience. Within this framework, mental illness often becomes a performative excess. Even in films that avoid overt caricature, there persists a tendency to equate psychological abnormality with eccentricity or childlike innocence. *Hey Jude* (2018) ostensibly challenges this pattern by positioning Jude as a protagonist whose autism spectrum disorder is treated with dignity and insight. Yet, upon closer examination, even this film participates in subtler forms of trivialisation. Jude's Asperger's Syndrome is domesticated within a narrative of self-improvement and romantic discovery, culminating in a symbolic "completion" of his personality through love. The film's visual palette pastel tones, picturesque seascapes, and rhythmic musicality,

functions as a buffer that renders the disorder aesthetically pleasing. The viewer is invited to appreciate Jude's quirks rather than grapple with the structural barriers faced by neurodivergent individuals in real life. His difference becomes a source of endearment rather than alienation, transforming disability into cinematic charm.

Such portrayals illustrate how Malayalam cinema, despite its claims of realism, often mediates psychological complexity through emotional simplification. The sociocultural framework of Kerala deeply informed by moral conservatism and middle-class ideals encourages depictions that prioritize social harmony over discomfort. Thus, the characters with mental health conditions are rarely allowed to disrupt the normative moral order; instead, they are rehabilitated into it. In this sense, the film both resists and reproduces the trivialisation it seeks to critique: it grants visibility to autism yet absorbs it into the sentimental grammar of the mainstream.

Kishkindha Kaandam (2024) on the other hand, presents a darker, more ambiguous engagement with psychological disturbance. The film's refusal to label its protagonist's mental condition can initially appear as a rejection of medical reductionism. However, this indeterminacy also risks trivialisation by making psychological distress a symbol of social decay rather than an embodied, lived experience. The protagonist's erratic behaviour, paranoia, and alienation are stylised into visual metaphors for modernity's fragmentation. While this abstraction invites philosophical reflection, it simultaneously erases the specificity of mental illness. The absence of context therapeutic, medical, or interpersonal renders suffering an aesthetic surface rather than a human condition. The trivialisation here is not through humour or romance but through abstraction: the mental becomes a narrative texture, not a reality.

Another significant dimension of trivialisation in Malayalam cinema emerges through linguistic and performative registers. The Malayalam lexicon surrounding mental health remains deeply stigmatized, with colloquial terms such as *pitham*, *madakkan*, and *mental* retaining pejorative connotations. Even when filmmakers attempt to challenge these notions, the performative excesses of acting exaggerated gestures, tonal shifts, and musical cues—often undercut the seriousness of the condition. The audience is trained to read eccentric behaviour as either comic relief or as a mark of tragic innocence. This binary leaves little space for the ordinary, functional lives of those with psychological conditions. Cinema's insistence on dramatizing mental difference transforms it into spectacle, thereby trivializing the mundane struggles of coping and adaptation that constitute the real experience of mental illness.

The commodification of mental health within cinematic discourse also deserves attention. Malayalam cinema, particularly in the post-2010 period, has developed a penchant for psychological themes as markers of sophistication. Filmmakers employ psychiatric vocabulary and clinical imagery not for diagnostic accuracy but as aesthetic signifiers of depth and modernity. The result is what scholars of disability studies term “aesthetic psychiatry”, a mode in which mental illness serves as an artistic metaphor rather than a social reality. This strategy contributes to the trivialisation of psychological suffering by displacing it from the socio-political field into the realm of poetic symbolism. The audience is encouraged to admire the “mad genius” or the “innocent sufferer,” but rarely to confront the institutional failures that perpetuate mental health crises in Kerala.

CONCLUSION

Being able to be one's true self is one of the strongest components of good mental health. This is one among the many ideas this paper suggests. Cinema as a medium of proper representation, without any trivialisation or stigmatisation. While it is true that the Malayalam film industry choose such topics of high seriousness, it is also necessary to handle them effectively as opposed to just choosing them. Up to an extent, there are good examples of proper representation in these selected cinemas, but as a part of the study we have pointed out things that are a bit off. The whole idea of this paper was never to defame or spread hate against the casts or directors of the mentioned movies, but to make the audience think of the seriousness of mental health issues around us. Trivialisation which leads to the exclusion or alienation of those suffering and the stigmatisation that sets off stereotypical approach towards them are also highlighted in this work. Our theories always float around in the society and its implementation to a level of hundred is quite impossible, therefore we find the accessibility and reach of such a study limited. Another limitation would be the lack of precision in the separation of dramatic elements from those of narrative. Above all, a genuine effort was made to convey the idea of handling the themes of mental health issues carefully.

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FEMININE TOXICITY EMBODIED: A CRITICAL STUDY OF STEFFI'S CHARACTER IN JOTHISH SHANKAR'S PONMAN

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of feminine toxicity through the character of Steffi in the 2025 Malayalam film *Ponman*. Traditionally, women in Indian cinema have been represented as puppets who play roles dictated by the patriarchal order. Steffi, however, occupies this conventional space while also weaponizing gender roles to her advantage. Drawing on poststructuralist feminist theories, psychological frameworks, and a critical analysis of the film, this study examines how the heroine employs emotional manipulation, strategic victimhood, and performative vulnerability as tools of control within personal and social relationships. Her character demonstrates how femininity can be strategically mobilized to evade responsibility while appearing to comply with patriarchal prescriptions. The paper further investigates how subtle forms of power exercised in intimate spaces challenge existing discourses on gender, feminism, and power. Ultimately, it argues that toxicity transcends gender binaries, leading to psychological manipulation and discrimination.

Keywords: *Gender roles, femininity, power, feminine toxicity.*

INTRODUCTION

The paper entitled "Feminine Toxicity Embodied: A Critical Study of Steffi's Character in Jothish Shankar's *Ponman*" explores the concept of feminine toxicity through the character of Steffi in the 2025 Malayalam film *Ponman*. Traditionally, women in Indian cinema have been represented as puppets who play their roles according to the whims and fancies of the patriarchal world around her. The character of Steffi comfortably occupies the space defined by traditional gender roles, while simultaneously weaponizing those very roles to her advantage. This study utilizes an interdisciplinary approach combining post structuralist feminist theories, psychological frameworks, and a critical analysis of the film, to demonstrate the heroine's emotional manipulation, strategic victim play and performative vulnerability as tools of control within personal and social relationships.

The 2025 released black comedy thriller movie *Ponman* directed by Jothish Shankar is set in the coastal areas of Kollam and the plot is adapted from the novel *Nālañcu Ceruppakar* by G. R. Indugopan. The movie revolves around the character P P Ajesh, a small-time gold dealer played by Basil Joseph who lends 25 sovereigns of gold for the wedding of Steffi, the sister of Bruno. Ajesh belongs to the 'common man' category who earns his bread by fighting with the stark realities of life and he finds lending gold as a means of earning money. He gives the gold to Steffi under the condition that it has to be repaid through wedding gifts. The money collected as a part of wedding gifts falls short and the family could manage to get only an amount equivalent to thirteen sovereigns of gold. Since Ajesh is so particular about returning the money or gold as he is only a

dealer, he demands the return of twelve sovereigns of the gold, leading to a tense conflict with Bruno and Steffi's husband Mariyano. When Ajesh demands Steffi to return the gold, she was so adamant that she would not do it and asserts her authority over it blaming the inefficiency of her brother Bruno.

Steffi is entrapped in the pressure of marriage and the expectations of her family. Like many other girls, she can also be considered as a victim of the unjust dowry system. But what makes Steffi peculiar is the way she turns the table after accepting the gold. Steffi doesn't want to place herself in a bad light at her husband's family by losing the gold even though she is not completely satisfied with her marriage to Mariyano. Mariyano is a prawn farmer from the coastal village called Thalavettichira, notorious for the way they handle people. His family is also depicted as a demanding one where his mother finds the dowry obtained from Steffi's family as a resort for paying the balance of the dowry needed to be given to her eldest daughter and the rest to be utilized for the marriage of her youngest daughter.

The film towards moving to its climax underlines that dark realities of dowry associated with marriage and the pride and reputation it brings to the life of the women after marriage. The movie tries to dismantle the concept of gold given as dowry and establishes the very notion that human relations and empathy should champion in spite of the age-old societal restrictions and customs associated with marriage and fuelled by patriarchy. The film portrays some bitter realities of life where we see a woman weaponizing traditional gender roles to her advantage. Coming to the character of Steffi, we can see that she uses emotional and psychological manipulation as a tool to exercise power over others by her strategies of strategic victimhood and performative vulnerability.

METHODOLOGY

Steffi, played by Lijimol in the film shows how femininity can be strategically used to escape from the responsibilities of the world by adhering to gender roles prescribed by the patriarchal world. The paper attempts to study how power that acts in a subtle manner which is exercised in the intimate spaces challenges the discourses in gender, feminism and power. The paper also shows how toxicity can transcend gender binaries and how it leads to psychological manipulation and discrimination. The various discourses on gender and power commonly focus on the patriarchal world where men are portrayed as the oppressors and women as the victims. While this view has often been perceived by the majority of people in our world, it's necessary to overlook the ways in which how these gender binaries are being challenged over and over by some women who exercise power in the form of emotional and psychological manipulation.

An exploration of poststructuralist feminist and psychoanalytic theories suggests that the movie is a critique of traditional gender representation in Indian cinema. For many centuries, women were represented as passive sufferers and submissive who plays victim in a patriarchal world. For over a long period, women have been represented in Indian cinema as virtuous victims or seductress. In recent years, there is a shift in the portrayal of these women characters. In movies like *22 Female Kottayam*, *Uyare* and *The Great Indian Kitchen*, there has been a shift towards more complex characters. In the movie *Ponman*, the character of Steffi illustrates how femininity can be used as a tool of exploitation and as a form of power used for personal gains to oppress others. But this paper attempts to investigate how the very same femininity is used as a toxic weapon in intimate spaces

and shows how it transcends gender binaries and how personal and social life of people around is affected. "There is no pre-existing identity by which an act or attribute might be measured" (Butler 18). Here Steffi appears to be someone who falls to the so called feminine-self portrayed by patriarchy, but the way she tries to establish her pride and dignity by twisting the very same ideals places her at a different pedestal.

Toxic femininity is a form of internalised misogyny where you restrict yourself deliberately to traditional feminine ideals prescribed by the patriarchal world. "Toxic femininity isn't just being nice to survive a man's world—it's wielding traditional gender roles to gain power over other women or avoid accountability" (Marcotte). This form of femininity can be used as tool for women to dominate others while portraying themselves as weak and vulnerable. It helps them to escape from the responsibilities of life by adhering themselves to gender stereotypes. As Judith Butler states, gender is performative. It means gender is constituted through repeated behaviour and practices. Within this framework, femininity itself becomes a script that can be both internalized and weaponized. Steffi's character demonstrates this dynamic vividly. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 25).

At the outset of the movie, Steffi is portrayed as a good woman who is soft spoken, shy and reluctant. Her attire itself is appealing to the aesthetics of idealized femininity. She wears a salwar along with dupatta and speaks gently to people around. She is portrayed as a family girl who prioritizes family over herself. As Butler writes, "gender is a strategy of survival within compulsory systems" (26). Steffi's mother is very eager to get her married. In Kollam's dowry driven society, they struggle to meet the demands. Steffi's brother Bruno is represented as jobless and carefree who also get into troubles. As per the traditional norms, men are meant for work and women are meant for kitchen. Girls are traditionally raised with restrictions and boy with demands. Both these expectations are equally dangerous. "Girls are weighed down by restrictions, boys with demands—two equally harmful disciplines" (Beauvoir 365). This is a norm that is internalized in the minds of men and women in the society. The character of Steffi fits into this very same category where she doesn't go for work and intend to get married and settle down. She even considers it as others responsibility and burden to secure her a good future. She despises her jobless brother for not taking caring of her future. Thus, Steffi becomes a synonym of toxic femininity where she weaponize her gender to take advantage of others and to escape herself from the worries of the world. "Patriarchy has no gender." (Hooks 78) Thus, Steffi participates in patriarchal expectation and even benefits from it. The notion of gender roles is strictly cultivated in her through social norms. As Judith Bultler suggests, "Gender is performed", she performs a passive and domestic femininity as strategy and not as her identity. She expects others to secure her future rather than building one of her own. Steffi's character says to Ajesh about Bruno at a point, "You better take the money from Bruno as he is a well-built man and he can pay it by doing labour... Bruno has never thought the fact that he has a sister to take care of and to be married of" (Shankar *Ponman*). This statement clearly marks her conviction that keeping a sister's life safe and secure is the responsibility of a brother or the men surrounding her. Even the same notion is asserted by Bruno's mother. She also blames Bruno for the troubles happening related to dowry. Rather than rejecting the notion of dowry that stands against the freedom and space of women she simply asserts it as the responsibility of her son

to find means to arrange the gold for his sister's marriage.

Steffi's relationship with the character P.P. Ajesh, played by Basil Joseph, further reveals her strategic manipulation of traditional gender expectations. When her family is unable to gather enough dowry to get her married, Ajesh proposes a business-like arrangement: he offers to finance the wedding expenses in exchange for the cash gifts received during the ceremony. However, when Steffi's mother is unable to return the excess gold given by Ajesh, neither she nor Steffi shows any sense of guilt or obligation. Their indifference toward repaying the debt reflects a deep-rooted entitlement masked as vulnerability. "Some women wield their 'nurturing' roles like weapons—disguised control through dependence and guilt" (Chesler 78).

Here the cultural norms around marriage are exploited and the gender roles underscore their departure from the stereotypical "angelic" feminine ideal often seen in Malayalam cinema. Instead of being passive or morally upright, these women manipulate the very roles that traditionally constrain them, embodying a form of feminine toxicity that challenges both patriarchal and feminist expectations. Rather than being a fierce woman fighting against the dowry system that's exploiting her life and other people around, she accepts the system of injustice and inhabits them so deeply that she transforms that passivity and vulnerability to a kind of emotional trap to which Ajesh is entangled to.

Jessica Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity becomes relevant in the character of Steffy. Steffi displays "the desire to be recognized without recognizing the other" (Benjamin 52). She thinks it's the responsibility of other people to protect her life while at the same time, she never values the lives of people around her often turning a blind eye towards them. She doesn't show the courage to reject the marriage proposal of Mariyano, nor try to discard him even when she realises the attitude of his family. Though she tells Ajesh that Bruno has thrown her away to a macho man whom she doesn't like much, she tries to remain in the framework of the so-called ideal wife after the marriage with the gold she got. "When women hate themselves, they reinforce the very system that oppressed them" (Caitlin Moran *How to Be a Woman*). She enjoys the privileges of a wife by hiding the reality from Mariyano's family.

CONCLUSION

Thus, on a close examination, we can see that Steffi is a character who sticks on to the dictates of the patriarchal society, but uses the very notion of femininity and the submissive status quo to stand behind and imposes the responsibility of a family into a man's shoulder. Her toxic femininity is well established through many scenes in the movie which is also supported adequately by other women characters like Steffi's mother, Mariyano's mother, sisters et al. Though she changes her mind in favour of Ajesh towards the end of the film, she again confirms to the patriarchal dictates by uniting with Ajesh. A highlight of the film is that, it has successfully thrown light on the ill practice of dowry associated with marriage. Though the character of Steffi may seem to be a hapless woman who gets entrapped in the marital constrictions, she marks her space as some one who utilises the scenario wisely and steers away the responsibility of her plight upon her family, especially her brother. Steffi portrayed effectively by Lijimol stands out as an embodiment of feminine toxicity and shrewdness in the frame work of patriarchal hegemony.

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FROM FOLKLORE TO FRAME: KERALA'S MYTHS AND NARRATIVES IN REGIONAL CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the dynamic relationship between Kerala's rich folkloric traditions and their cinematic representations in Malayalam regional cinema. It investigates how foundational myths, superstitions, and narrative archetypes — such as Yakshi and Odiyan — are adapted, reinterpreted, and reimagined in movies. Drawing on cultural theory and film studies, the paper examines the ways Malayalam filmmakers engage with oral storytelling, ritualistic origins, and local identity, blending tradition with modern cinematic language and aesthetics. By analyzing key films such as *Ananthabhadram* and *Odiyan* this paper attempts to reveal how regional cinema serves as a vital site for preserving, contesting, and transforming Kerala's mythic imagination. The findings highlight the role of cinema as a cultural interlocutor that both honors and innovates folklore, reinforcing narrative continuity within evolving social contexts. This paper contributes to broader discussions on folklore in contemporary media and the politics of cultural memory in South Indian regional cinema.

Keywords: *Kerala folklore, Malayalam cinema, myth adaptation, regional narratives, cultural memory, oral tradition, cinematic representation*

INTRODUCTION: FOLKLORE, MEMORY, AND MODERN MALAYALAM CINEMA

Kerala's cultural identity is inextricably bound to the depth and variety of its folklore, a vast corpus of oral narratives, supernatural legends, ritual practices, and symbolic archetypes. Folkloric figures such as Yakshi, Odiyan, and Madan are not marginal stories relegated to the realm of superstition or peasant credulity. They are manifestations of the collective unconscious, shaped by histories of gender, caste, environment, and the “shifting boundaries between the sacred and profane” (Gupta and Menon 27). As Richard Swiderski observes, “oral texts live in performance, accumulating nuance and relevance with each transmission” (Swiderski 215). In this sense, oral folklore is not simply a record of the past, but a site for the negotiation of meaning, identity, and resistance.

Malayalam cinema has emerged as a powerful modern repository and interpreter for these stories, enabling their reinvention for diverse audiences. The adaptation of oral tradition into film is a complex process. It requires the filmmaker not only to capture the spirit of the source material, but to translate its aesthetic, social, and philosophical import into a visual medium. The “cultural monsters” of Kerala's folklore, as Jalarajan Raj et al. point out, “function as metaphors for the negotiation of anxiety, difference, and social order,” taking new forms with each retelling (Jalarajan Raj et al. 140).

METHODOLOGY

This paper attempts to bring out the tug that lies dormant in the cultural realm with regard to

folklore, memory and the movie. Such a negotiation is especially acute in a region like Kerala, where rapid modernization, urban migration, environmental decline, and shifting gender and caste relations are redefining the meanings of tradition and authenticity (Dawn; Dönmez-Colin). In this context, the transition “from folklore to frame” in Malayalam cinema is not a linear process of archiving or memorializing stories, but a continual act of translation, contestation, and creative transformation. The two films at the centre of this study — *Ananthabhadram* and *Odiyan* — reveal different strategies of adaptation: gothic excess and magical realism. Together, they offer a revealing lens through which to examine how myth continues to shape and be shaped by the contemporary Malayali imagination.

The Cinematic Reimagining of Yakshi and Ritual: Ananthabhadram

Santosh Sivan's *Ananthabhadram* (2005), adapted from Sunil Parameswaran's novel, remains a crucial cinematic text in the Malayalam Gothic for its reanimation of the Yakshi myth and its embedding of ritual into aesthetic form. The novel, rooted in the author's grandmother's oral tales, provides the film with a narrative architecture where memory and myth are coextensive. In one evocative passage, Gayathri recalls, “*Ente muthassi paranju... yakshiyude kathakal*” (“My grandmother used to say... the stories of the Yakshi”) (Parameswaran 23). This act of remembrance reflects Richard Swiderski's claim that oral performance “validates and renews communal memory” (216), situating the Yakshi within the familial and domestic domain of storytelling, rather than as an abstract folkloric entity.

Sivan visualizes this embeddedness through a ritualized *mise-en-scène*. Digambaran, the tantric antagonist, is staged with long nails, kohl-rimmed eyes, and stylized gestures borrowed from Kathakali and Theyyam. The sacred grove (*kavu*), the *maantrikapura* (sorcerer's cave), and the *Shivakavu* (serpent shrine) are not mere narrative sites but charged spaces where myth, ritual, and ecological sacredness converge. As Menon and Jose argue, such landscapes are “saturated with sensuality and danger, sites where myth, memory, and the body intertwine” (27). The iconography of lamps, flowers, and serpent deities in these spaces is both ornamental and ontological: “*Deepam naadinte aishwaryam aane*” (“The lamp is the glory of the land”), Gayathri insists (Parameswaran 101). Here, ritual objects emerge as anchors of memory, connecting the community to its unseen guardians.

The Yakshi herself embodies Jeffrey Cohen's notion that “monsters are the harbingers of category crisis” (6). Neither demon nor victim, she destabilizes boundaries of desire, death, and taboo. Her spectral presence at twilight, when even trees “walk in cinematic motion” (Parameswaran 57), reveals how folklore inhabits liminal temporalities. Jalarajan Raj et al. highlight how such figures articulate “the gendered politics of fear and fascination... folklore as a register of anxieties about the body, the feminine, and cultural change” (143). Sivan's chromatic palette of fiery reds and lush blues underscores this duality, aestheticizing the Yakshi as both erotic and terrifying.

Yet, *Ananthabhadram* does not resolve the tension between rational skepticism and mythic persistence. Ananthan, returning from abroad, becomes a conduit for viewers navigating the friction of belief and disbelief. As Scott Rodgers suggests, “the film's monsters are not meant to be exorcised but dialogued with — symbols of permanent cultural negotiation, connection, and change” (48). The Yakshi remains a haunting interlocutor, reminding us that folklore is never

silenced but continually re-emerges to trouble cultural memory. Dönmez-Colin's observation that the female body in Malayalam cinema is placed at "the intersection of spiritual terror and erotic fascination" is particularly apt here: the Yakshi is not resolved into one pole but is amplified as an enduring site of trauma, desire, and reflection. In this sense, the film's gothic aesthetics become acts of cultural retrieval—retrieval not of closure but of unresolved haunting that compels dialogue across generations.

Caste, Ecology, and Shape-Shifting: *Odiyan*

With *Odiyan* (2018), director V. A. Shrikumar Menon and actor Mohanlal revive one of Kerala's most enigmatic and socially charged legends: the Odiyan, a shape-shifting magician embedded in North Malabar's folk imagination. Odiyan lore, as Thomas and Thomas observe, historically "functioned as a locus for both caste anxiety and dreams of subversive, liminal agency in the village order" (593). To the dominant castes, the Odiyan was a figure of terror, embodying the latent threat of the marginalized striking back under the cover of night. At the same time, to subaltern groups, Odiyan stories could be reclaimed as registers of resistance, a way of unsettling entrenched hierarchies. The film's protagonist, Manikyan, embodies this ambivalence: he is feared as a practitioner of black magic, yet he is also vulnerable to the economic, social, and ecological transformations that render his skills obsolete. As Sen argues, the Odiyan thus becomes "a repository of the memory of marginality, resistance, and complaint" (91).

The narrative's temporal sweep—from a pre-modern village economy to a late-capitalist Kerala of concrete and commodification—foregrounds this historical rupture. In the earlier sections of the film, the village is rife with gossip, half-truths, and the palpable tension of oral knowledge: cattle vanish, mysterious deaths occur, and children grow up with whispered warnings about shadowy figures. This structure echoes Richard Swiderski's point that oral performance "validates and renews communal memory" (216), making folklore a lived experience rather than static tradition. Yet as the film progresses, the mystical atmosphere dissipates. When Manikyan returns to a transformed Kerala decades later, the villagers' fears have been replaced by nostalgia, and the Odiyan has become less a monster than a relic. Rodgers notes that the film is "less an affirmation of the old order than a meditation on its passing, and the sense of loss that comes with the fading of magical knowledge and subaltern voice" (56).

This elegiac tone is reinforced through the film's ecological imagery. The Odiyan's powers, which rely on blending seamlessly into the landscape, are framed against an environment itself under threat. As Gupta and Menon suggest, rural landscapes in *Odiyan* are "haunted by the absence of what once was," underscoring ecological as well as cultural erosion (29). Manikyan's shape-shifting—into animals, shadows, or spectral presences—is symbolic of a symbiotic relation with the land that modern Kerala has eroded. His body becomes an archive of ecological intimacy, a way of inhabiting space that resists commodification. The camera lingers on barren fields, drained ponds, and roads cutting across what were once Odiyan haunts, contrasting the vitality of myth with the sterility of modern development. The figure of the Odiyan thus becomes an environmental allegory, a reminder of modes of survival and imagination extinguished by capitalist modernity.

At the same time, the film dramatizes the contradictions of folklore adaptation in a commercial medium. As Jalarajan Raj et al. argue, "adaptive folklore is both incomplete and provocative, inciting

debate and the possibility of renegotiation in popular culture” (148). In this sense, *Odiyan* stages a paradox: while it re-centers a marginalized mythic figure within a mainstream blockbuster format, it also flattens his complexity into the recognizable tropes of the heroic male lead. The Odiyan's radical potential to unsettle caste structures is muted when translated into Mohanlal's star persona, which reframes him as a tragic hero of lost love and personal redemption. The folkloric Odiyan, feared for his uncanny tactics and association with outcaste communities, is absorbed into a cinematic idiom that privileges individual charisma over collective marginality. Yet, as Rodgers contends, this very tension points to cinema's “greatest feat”—to return myth to everyday life “as a problem, an inheritance, and an inspiration” (57). The Odiyan on screen thus compels audiences to grapple with questions of memory, erasure, and survival, even if the answers are partial or contradictory.

Moreover, the film highlights the fraught intersections of caste and ecology. Odiyan practices—concealment in darkness, mastery over fear, shape-shifting—were historically connected to communities denied social visibility and relegated to the peripheries of caste society. The ecological spaces that nurtured Odiyan lore—dense groves, water tanks, shadowy fields—were often liminal zones themselves, places of both livelihood and stigma. By situating Manikyan's survival in these interstitial spaces, the film dramatizes the lived negotiations of caste marginality with environment. As Thomas and Thomas note, Malayalam cinema often “reconstitutes cultural stereotypes” even as it claims to subvert them (593). *Odiyan* exemplifies this process, where a subaltern myth is both resurrected and domesticated, simultaneously unsettling and reinscribing the caste imagination of Kerala.

In the end, *Odiyan* functions as a cinematic elegy. It mourns the loss of a world where myth animated the landscape and where marginal figures carried cultural agency, even if in distorted form. Yet it also gestures toward the continuing necessity of such figures. By reanimating the Odiyan, the film insists that folklore is not dead but in transition, adapting to new cultural economies while retaining its power to unsettle. In this way, *Odiyan* underscores what Dawn's study of Malayalam folklore cinema calls the “unending dialogue between memory, myth, and modernity” (Dawn). The Odiyan becomes a figure not only of shape-shifting in the literal sense but of cultural transformation itself, embodying Kerala's ongoing negotiations with caste, ecology, and the politics of remembrance.

CONCLUSION

The explorations of *Ananthabhadram* and *Odiyan* together demonstrate the resilience and adaptive vitality of Kerala's folklore in the cinematic imagination. These films refuse to present folklore as a frozen relic of the past; rather, they activate it as a living archive of uncertainty, negotiation, and cultural debate. In Cohen's terms, “monsters, spirits, and storytellers [function] as thresholds—challenges to the fixities of social order and cultural narrative” (7). Both the Yakshi and the Odiyan occupy this liminal threshold: the Yakshi unsettles boundaries of desire and gendered power, while the Odiyan complicates caste hierarchies and ecological belonging. Their cinematic presence underscores that folklore is not merely entertainment but a site of social struggle, cultural memory, and speculative renewal.

The strategies of representation differ—Santosh Sivan's *Ananthabhadram* leans toward a gothic

aesthetic, ritual-inflected spectacle, and the erotic charge of mythic femininity, while Shrikumar Menon's *Odiyan* emphasizes nostalgia, ecological erosion, and the tragic pathos of marginality. Yet despite these differences, both films are united in their refusal to resolve myth into comfortable closure. They insist instead on the persistence of the uncanny, leaving audiences with figures who demand dialogue rather than exorcism. This persistence affirms Dönmez-Colin's observation that Malayalam cinema is "a living theater of contradictions—at once invested in the past and pregnant with the politics of the present" (Dönmez-Colin). By revitalizing folkloric archetypes, these films render visible the cultural work of negotiating between memory and modernity, tradition and transformation.

Just as importantly, these films serve as counter-archives. Against the tendency of cultural heritage industries to sanitize folklore into touristic spectacle or nationalist nostalgia, *Ananthabhadram* and *Odiyan* foreground the very dimensions that unsettle collective memory. The *Yakshi* embodies unresolved questions of female desire, danger, and ritual embodiment, while the *Odiyan* becomes a reminder of caste marginality and ecological interdependence in the face of erasure. In this sense, the films echo Jalarajan Raj et al.'s assertion that "folklore in film becomes most powerful not when it confirms cultural memory but when it disrupts it, making space for alternative voices and speculative futures" (150).

Regional cinema thus emerges as a crucial mediator between continuity and rupture. By drawing upon oral traditions, ritual aesthetics, and marginalized cosmologies, films like *Ananthabhadram* and *Odiyan* ensure that myths endure not as closed symbols but as sites of struggle and transformation. They stage folklore as a conversation with the present, where unresolved tensions—between gender and patriarchy, caste and subalternity, ecology and commodification—can be brought into view. Rodgers reminds us that "monsters and marvels are not exiled to the storybook; they walk with us, demand acknowledgement, and invite us to imagine better worlds" (61). The *Yakshi* and the *Odiyan*, reimagined through cinema, embody precisely this invitation: to engage folklore not as nostalgia but as provocation, not as closure but as possibility.

Ultimately, the journey from "folklore to frame" is neither a backward glance nor a simple celebration of cultural "roots." It is, instead, an act of cultural labor—creative, political, and poetic—that keeps alive the tensions and aspirations embedded in Kerala's myths. As Gupta and Menon argue, myths endure because they remain "sites of struggle, negotiation, and hope" (31). By embracing this imaginative labor, Malayalam cinema performs more than adaptation: it sustains storytelling itself as a living practice, one that continually reshapes community, memory, and the horizons of what might yet be imagined.

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AFTERLIFE OF SLAUGHTERHOUSE-FIVE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NONLINEAR NARRATION IN KURT VONNEGUT'S NOVEL AND ITS CINEMATIC ADAPTATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper conducts a comparative study of *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) by Kurt Vonnegut and its 1972 film adaptation by George Roy Hill on the use of nonlinear narrative methods used in novel and in film. The novel, renowned for its narrative strategy of employing fragmented temporalities and metafictional commentaries, reimagines traditional war narratives by situating trauma within cyclical and discontinuous temporal experiences. Although limited by the conventions of cinema, Hill tries to reproduce this disjunction of linear time with editing, voice-over, and cross-cutting. But the film adaptation diverges in the simplification of metafictional layers and in the quest to provide a narrative closure. Employing theories from narratology, adaptation studies, and trauma studies, this study tries to understand how the respective media address the challenge of representing memory and trauma beyond linear chronology. Besides, this paper also emphasises the significance of the nonlinear narration for aesthetic and thematic purposes in both literary and cinematic mediums.

Keywords: *Slaughterhouse-Five, nonlinear narration, trauma theory, adaptation studies, Kurt Vonnegut, George Roy Hill, narratology*

INTRODUCTION

Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut (1969) is one of the best novels that defies the rules and principles of linear narration and resorts to nonlinear narrative methods in exploring the trauma of war to mark its place in twentieth century American literature. The protagonist Billy Pilgrim whose temporal experiences make him exist in varied dimensions of time, simultaneously places him both in present and past at the same instance. This palimpsest comes out in fragmented bits in the novel. This non-linear narration disrupts the cause-effect of the conventional narrative and is further linked to the disruption of time of the trauma. It becomes a nonlinear narrative strategy that dislocates memories of war.

In 1972 *Slaughterhouse-Five* was adapted into film by George Roy Hill who attempted to translate the shifting narrative temporalities into action pictures. The editing tricks like flashback, jump cut, voice-over narration etc. were applied to reconstruct the discontinuous time of the novel and to examine both the peculiar opportunities and limitations of the filmmaking as a form at the same time. The adaptation is a tricky undertaking balancing between a hard task of telling a story with the very form which will not allow being coherent and these questions make one wonder the extent to which a story is faithful, to which the story is interpreted, and to which the story is presented.

This study attempts at a comparative analysis of the novel and the movie adaptation on the basis of the narrative tools used to reflect the trauma and the memory. It contemplates on the application of non-linear narration in the novel by the author and the film; on the difficulties of representation of trauma; and also, how the two mediums handle the subjects subject to their own strengths and limitations. This analysis will explore the obvious differences between the representation of nonlinear narration in literature and cinematic works with the aid of the combination of narratology, adaptation studies, and the trauma theory. As an investigation into transmedial narrative treatment, this study illustrates the macro implications of narrative experimentation in the framework of war, especially in expressing its challenges.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

In 1969, when *Slaughterhouse-Five* was published, the U.S was deeply embroiled in the Vietnam war and parallelly, as opposed to it, a vehement anti-war sentiment gained momentum across American populace. Vonnegut himself, serving in World War II, as a war captive incarcerated in Dresden, is reflected in the protagonist of the novel serving as a testament to the crucial historical fact of the novel. The novel is in the form of collage of satire, science fiction, biography and nonlinear narration making it unique in a traditional work of war. The war becomes an impasse, denying heroism and solution and presents a negative view of the past.

Vonnegut could be read in the context of the postmodernism cultural period. Its metafictional intrusions, irony and denial of closure are consistent with the experiments of the moment which were being undertaken in the literature of the time such as that of Thomas Pynchon and John Barth. The novel therefore serves two roles: it is a very personal story of the trauma of war and it is a novel that doubts the account of the same.

The film version of 1972 was released at the day when the anti-war films, such as *M*A*S*H* (1970) (asterisk is part of the title) and *Johnny Got his Gun* (1971) were in the focus of the populace. George Roy Hill made an attempt to retain the temporality disjointed as in the novel, in adapting the novel, however, to condense the enormous narrative. Such techniques as cross-cutting, sound bridges, voice-over narration are examples of such techniques, in fact, an effort to recreate the sense of being unstuck in time on the part of Billy. Nevertheless, this adaptation was not without its issues: the metafictional commentary was downgraded to a minimum, and the need of the audience to have coherence and endings forced modification of the narratives.

THE NONLINEAR NARRATION IN THE NOVEL

Vonnegut exploited the literary possibilities of nonlinear narrative methods in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. The time dislocation frequently affecting Billy Pilgrim can be regarded as the Tralfamadorian understanding of time. The time, thus portrayed, presupposes that all events take place in a single moment and the progressive, chronological historical process loses its significance (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 27). The conception also offers a philosophical and narrative frame: Billy is drifting through a series of the memories of World War II, of his alien abduction and trauma that he suffers in the postwar period, and lastly the suburban life. These disjunctions reflect the mental gaps of trauma that cannot be accommodated in a linear time frame.

The portrayal of war trauma and subsequent anti-war attitude of the novel cannot be separated

from the ingenious narrative techniques employed by Vonnegut as it becomes a necessary, indispensable part of the novel itself. The novel contrives the anticipation of the amelioration and the closure that is the standard in war narratives through the denial of the linear progression. The same thread, as it goes, puts everything in the context of death and tragedy because these indicate the way the loss accrued by war continues with no consolation and relief (Vonnegut, 1969, p. 64). This discontinuity of the story, as is noted by Woodlief (1994), is a recreation of the actual effects of post-traumatic stress disorder where the images of the memory are recollected not sequentially but in bursts (p. 112).

The metafictional aspect of the novel also makes the non-linear nature of the novel intricate and vehemently pronounced. Vonnegut continues to place himself into the story, to observe the inability of the Allied forces to capture the city of Dresden and the unrealism of narration that surrounds it. These interruptions fail to help the readers forget that they are reading a mediated reconstruction of trauma. Harris (1998) concludes that the failure of the traditional narrative as a method of constraining the excesses of the historical violence is revealed through Vonnegut nonlinear narration as a critique of the narrative style (p. 67). This becomes the only viable stylistic choice to delineate the nonlinear narration in *Slaughterhouse-Five* that displays a discursive workout of trauma, memory, and controlling of stories over war.

NONLINEAR TECHNIQUES IN THE MOVIE ADAPTATION

Nevertheless, the movie *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1972) by George Roy Hill transfers Vonnegut fractured temporality into a visual and aural space. Through editing techniques and specifically jump cuts, cross-cutting, and the hasty swapping of mise-en-scene, the film produces the impression of the experience of Billy Pilgrim, who is out of time, or to borrow the words of Vonnegut, 'unstuck' in time. These techniques that are more or less an approximation of the internal monologues in the novel are buttressed with voice-over narration and lead the viewer back into a state of dislocation in time and space.

The voice-over narration that stands as an approximation of internal monologues is, however, curtailed to a large degree in the film. Unlike the textual intrusions, which Vonnegut uses, of which he foreshadows the instability of the narrative itself, the film by Hill is largely left to the subjective perspective on the part of Billy. The absence of an authorial voice renders the metafictional complexity less pronounced and the story itself becomes more of a conventional character driven narrative (King, 2005, p. 89). The film follows a disjointed chronology, yet in certain scenes, the chaos of narration is given way to order and the linear narrative is closely followed. This becomes evident in the scene of the Dresden bombing depicted in the film that tends to be more susceptible to spatial and time synchronization.

But it can be seen as compensatory strategies in films, in its urge to find an order out of chaos and a neat ending. According to Bordwell, (1985) it is seen that cinema can experiment with the concept of time through its stylistic features which incorporate bridging sounds, change of color and montage (p. 74). The adaptation into film capitalizes on the following resources: the transformation of the musical score suggests a jump of time, and the visual tropes, i.e. the images of trains and clocks that appear in the film are symbolically applied as reference points in the disjointed times. The ironic ending of the novel is completely changed in the final scenes of the film on Tralfamador

where the reader can see Billy and Montana Wildhack in a domestic setting in the country. Sandler (2010) interprets such a change as the concession to the filmmaking tradition of the closure, and the attempt to counter the aspect of fatalism of the novel with a more positive resolution (p. 135).

Thus, in spite of the fact that the film adaptation omits certain aspects of the narrative experiment of the novel, it also demonstrates how the cinematic medium can unveil non-linear narration through sensorial and other formal means that may not be offered by literature.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparison of the novel and the film demonstrates the presence and manipulation of nonlinear narratives and the extent of limitation of both the forms. The continuity of the temporality of the novel is at the sources of language and the narrating voice. Vonnegut breaks the plot as he insists on the open artificiality of it and he causes the reader to think about the impossibility of the expression of trauma in such an explicit form. Instead, the exteriorisation of internal disjunction used in editing and visual motifs in the film does not reproduce the metafictional gestures, which is marked as the signature feature of the novel.

In addition, the novel lacks the element of catharsis as rapid alteration between war and non-war scenes fail to immerse the reader in prolonged emotions. However, the film cares more about the events of the war, and treats the novel as a blueprint for a more conventional war film. Such choices of adaptations, as Clark states, are required not only congruent to the needs of the medium, but should also be consistent with the culture of cinematic narration (Clark 2012, p. 41). Despite this, the use of nonlinear narration in these two works is a kind of barrier to offer a definite closure to the narration and also to underline the message on how trauma is always present. A comparison between the techniques used both in novel and in film is given in a table below.

Techniques used	Novel	Film
Narrative Structure	Fragmented, non-linear. Example: On p.22-24, Billy first becomes "unstuck in time."	Around 12:00 min, an abrupt cut from Billy in wartime Luxembourg to his suburban home in Ilium.
Tone/Irony	Use of refrain "So it goes" after every mention of death (e.g., p.25 after the soldiers' deaths).	Actor Michael Sacks (Billy) delivers lines in a detached, almost deadpan tone (e.g., ~14:30 during war camp scenes).
Internal Monologue	Billy's inner thoughts are narrated, such as his detachment during the Dresden bombing (p.152-155).	At ~1:05:00, dreamlike sequence of Billy in Tralfamadore shows visual equivalents of his internal detachment.
Time Shifts	Abrupt textual breaks: e.g., Billy jumps from war hospital (p.56) to his daughter's wedding.	At ~22:00, film cuts suddenly from Billy in the POW train to him in a future hospital bed.

Symbolism	Descriptions of birds singing "Poo-tee-weet?" after the Dresden bombing (final page, p.186).	The closing scene at ~1:39:00 shows bird imagery, visually echoing the absurd silence after destruction.
Pacing	Novel lingers on wartime episodes, e.g., Dresden firebombing chapter (pp.147–157).	Condensed into a few powerful sequences, e.g., bombing shown briefly around ~1:20:00.
Themes of War/Trauma	Billy's time travel as coping with PTSD (p.61-63, hospital ward with other veterans).	Trauma shown visually at ~34:00 when Billy stares blankly after witnessing POW suffering.
Repetition/Motif	"So it goes" appears 100 times across the text (first instance p.25, after Vonnegut's intro).	Repeated through dialogue and tone, e.g., ~18:00 after witnessing the soldier's death.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Three related theoretical approaches to better understand the analysis of *Slaughterhouse-Five* are through the prism of the narratology, the adaptation theory and the trauma studies. Gerard Genette, in his concepts of analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (flash-forward) as narratological devices, showcases how Vonnegut manipulates the order of the narrative sequence to create the fragmented consciousness of Billy Pilgrim (Genette, 1980, p. 45). Cinematically, this concept of parametric narration as defined by David Bordwell is where editing processes are applied to make the narrative subordinate to stylistic patterning, in which time is made discontinuous and nonlinear narration becomes an inherent feature (Bordwell, 1985, p. 74).

The theory of adaptation is also used to describe the relationship between films and novels. According to Linda Hutcheon, the meaning of adaptation is not to be judged on the basis of fidelity to the source but depended on the creative dialogue it establishes with the source text (p.48). This stance, as postulated by Hutcheon, can be observed in the film of Hill. The metafictional techniques that Hill displays in the film is not an imitation of the same employed by Vonnegut in the novel. Instead, the discrepancy of the narrative is projected into the contexts of a film. It is this use of different mediums to translate metafictional and other methods from text to screen that reveals both the affinity and constraints of each medium.

Last but not the least, the nonlinear narration is used to detail the theory of trauma and it closely resembles the discontinuous nature of trauma from war as shown in the novel. Trauma cannot be, to a certain extent, understood through plain linear narration; this is why it manifests itself in the form of fragmentation and recurrence according to LaCapra (p.11) and Caruth (p.36). The portrayal of these experiences in the novel and its editing choices as seen in the film adaptation become a crude approximation of the traumatic temporality and subjects the viewers to engage in the shocks of memory and history rather than making them just observe these.

Reception and Legacy

The novel and its adaptation into film have received a lot of critical appreciation since its

publication. *Slaughterhouse-Five* was heavily praised because of being innovative, even though some critics could not find their way around its nonlinear structure. Its anti-war rhetoric was very successful among the readers of the Vietnam era and therefore it became a classic of counterculture.

The movie was also heavily reviewed by various critics. Although some critics have admired the fact that Hill could draw the essence of the novel, there are those who criticize it because it simplified the complexity of the text. Its stylistic boldness of the film was praised by Roger Ebert and condemned by Pauline Kael who felt that the novelistic nuances are rendered flattened by the effects of the film. Regardless of such divisions, the film received the Jury Prize at the 1972 Cannes Film Festival and secured its niche in the history of the movies. The reception and appreciation of *Slaughterhouse-Five* is not contained within the immediate vicinity of its publication. The oft repeated phrase of the novel 'so it goes' is now used to indicate the imminence of death and is a testament to its everlasting legacy.

CONCLUSION

When comparing the use of the nonlinear narrative employed in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and its film adaptation, the methods of its application become evident. Metafictional intrusions that flout the authority of the narration in the novel, support the application of temporal disjunction as a metaphor of trauma in the film. It relies on editing, voice-over and symbolic motifs to remind viewers of the fractured temporality of Billy Pilgrim. At the time, the absence of authorial remarks starkly made it stand away from the written narrative modes. This, ascribes a relatively standard narrative linearity to the film.

Nevertheless, in both works, the chronological norms are disrupted, and viewers are forced to approach the issue of trauma as something that will persist disruption rather than be overcome. The transmedia and nonlinear narration is flexible as noted through the interaction of novel and film. It could be concluded that narrative experimentation has deep cultural significance in postwar reconstruction as observed in the process by which each medium of expression responds to exigencies of representing trauma and memory.

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FROM FILIAL PIETY TO FEMINIST ICON: RE-TELLING THE MULAN MYTH IN GLOBAL ADAPTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The Ballad of Mulan encapsulates the themes of filial piety and devotion in a brief narrative and was first documented in the Northern Wei period (386–534 A.D.). Yet, the flexibility of this narrative is incredible. Originating as a nameless song, it eventually appeared in Ming novels and Qing operas, and more recently, in movies everywhere from this world. Such variations demonstrate the influence and durability of myths. Storytelling is a mode of cultural remembrance, but each version is a departure from the original. It is modified to fulfil the needs of the contemporary mindsets.

This paper will explore how Mulan has been adapted most recently and how the adaptations reflect gender, culture, and ideology as accessed through illustrative frameworks of Myth Retelling and Feminist Literary Criticism. In the preface to Ballad of Mulan, it shows the sacrifice as the liquid form of filial piety and collective duty and loyalty toward family and nation. Disney's animated version in 1998 shifts the story to one of self-discovery and personal growth, mirroring Western ideas of independence and individuality. This homage is carried over into the 2020 live-action remake that remixes Mulan's identity as well and adds martial identity, destiny, oppression, women empowerment, among other things feminist of anyone in this side of Chinese honorifics. Adaptations reveal the hybridisation of Eastern traditional narrative and Western film in transnational tales whose appeal is world-wide but still deep-rooted within its culture. Theoretically, from a feminist approach these adaptations can be understood as providing alternative reactions to patriarchy with the adaptations endorsing (or at times resisting or altering) patriarchy more radically. The Mulan myth speaks to the cross-section Myth: Feminism; Hybridity; Gender and Ideology. It foregrounds this interrelated constellation of topics in Chinese cultural history and global imaginative/meta-poetic traditions that the Mulan legend continues to stimulate.

Keywords: *Adaptation Studies, Myth Re-telling, Hybridization, Feminist Literary Criticism, Transnational Narratives*

INTRODUCTION

The ancient tale of Mulan has been interpreted a myriad of ways in cinema, opera, animated films in the range of minutes, and more recently, through live-action remakes, each time mutating her character in accordance with the changing values and belief systems of the time. In certain interpretations, Mulan has always been a traditional sign of filial piety and obedience, portrayed here as a duty-bound daughter who would place personal desires above obligations to the nation and family. In contrast, in other interpretations, Mulan symbolizes freedom and feminine power, going against gender norms and patrilineality. This juxtaposition in interpretation demonstrates how legend and myth are fluid entities that change so as to accommodate new audiences and environments, overtime.

This research looks at Mulan as a deeply cultural artifact that has transformed in many ways. Her story becomes a place in culture wherein power, gender, and duty are all renegotiated according to contemporary modes highlighting how new adaptations work as cultural negotiation. Mulan also represents how complex the discourses of power, gender and duty are. Her transformation from poetry to animation and live cinema also shows how every form and medium shifts the meaning of the narrative. Mulan is a continuous discourse between the past and present culture that is able to go beyond the stories in itself.

THEMATIC EXPLORATION

- **Adaptation as Cultural Negotiation**

Any form of adaptation is complex. As Hutcheon (2006) says, it is both “repetition without replication” and a process of change. Mulan, like other stories, crosses borders and enters a form of bargaining where cultural practices, business needs, and audience demands come together. Mulan's myth illustrates how adaptation can act as a cultural negotiation where both Eastern and Western elements come together to form a new hybrid. Ethically and culturally, which the Ballad of Mulan content is firmly rooted in, the poem is brief, composed of morals, and emphasizes Mulan's loyalty to her family and devotion to the emperor. While Mulan's cross-dressing is astounding, it is not considered a form of rebellion, but rather, a way of completing family obligations. Mulan's action in the end of the poem, where she declines the honors and goes back to domestic life, maintains the Confucian principles of social order harmony.

Disney's animated version of Mulan released in 1998 fully integrates Mulan's narrative and surrounding dynamics. Mulan detailed American story-telling dynamics such as three-act structure with a resource Western musical. The transition in character motivation pivots from defending a family's honor to one's self. During an internal struggle, the song Reflection illustrates Mulan as a self-liberated woman. Despite the movie's success with western audiences, the version of Mulan portrayed drew criticism in China because of the lack of her conservative ideas as well as marriage and traditional family structure, showcasing the issues with cultural. In the 2020 Version of Mulan the dealt with the issue and attempts to reply to the critique of the cultural inauthenticity of animated Mulan by taking out Mushu to musical, the Movie attempts to remake the Mulan and adds the gravity of resurrection of wuxia cinema. The movie focuses on the Western ideas of qi and other cinematically pleasing landscapes with Western ideas and concepts. Yet the cultural, ideas, centered along the protective gaze of a global Disney-field of western ideals block of cinema. The block portrays the supposedly empowered Xian Lang with the CGI of a western 'witch', full of battle and the 'chosen one' philosophy. The partial complex western feminism with a layer of transnational interlaces. The movie comes with an ambivalent hybrid fully Disney skyscraper wrapped with aired epic realism.

In these different versions, adaptation appears as the process of shifting the weighting of different values. Mulan's ballad gives pride of place to duty and collectivity, the 1998 movie offers the opposite extreme of self-importance and self-development, while the 2020 attempt awkwardly tries to give authentic self-expression and global marketability equal sponson. Mulan's myth, then, illustrates adaptation as the cultural negotiation of the hybrid, which creates new meanings while preserving the sources.

- **Feminist Re-telling of Myth**

Feminist criticism has for a long time regarded myth retelling as a form of political action — to revise taken-for-granted stories to place women at the center of the narrative and challenge the silences of a patriarchal discourse (Ostriker, 1982). In this light, Mulan's adaptations operate as feminist re-visions, negotiating gender, power, and identity in distinctive ways.

The Ballad of Mulan, although lacking feminist intentions, does contain proto-feminist potential. The ability to successfully impersonate a male soldier for twelve years demonstrates the performativity of gender roles. Mulan's male comrades lose their sense of self as women and until she reveals herself, they do not recognize her. This points to the conclusion that gender distinctions are a social construct. Though the poem restores her to the home, she is able to enter and perform in the masculine space and excel in it, which does not only challenge patriarchal norms, but sets the stage for future feminist reinterpretations.

Disney's 1998 animation Mulan propels the story to the next level by including feminist aspects within the story. Her conflict is personal as well as filial, as she cannot do the expected womanly duties. The film portrays her journey as an act of feminism. Mulan saves China and is recognized for her achievements because of her self-determination and hard work. She is the only one who saves the day, and the secondary romance with Shang only adds to her strength, marking a change from patriarchal to female dominance. The third wave of feminism is insulted by Disney's corporate monopoly of the phrase "girl power".

The 2020 statue replication misses the point because it strengthens the female leaders through stereotypical notions ones of which are; kung fu is dressed in masculine armor. Mulan only gains affirmation from the empire while Xian Lang, the female who embodies limitless female power, is punished. Feminist representation is doubled bladed, women who break the rules are celebrated as long as the end result is in accordance with the patriarchal system.

The story ballads also depict Mulan's change from a respectful daughter to a complex feminist figure. The 1998 animation relocated independence. The 2020 remake reconciles cultural authenticity with global empowerment. Mulan's myths are juxtaposed with feminist meanings which surround the story. These meanings are rewritten to reflect the enduring historical, ideological, and contextual changes.

- **Transitional Myth Narrative**

The core theme of myths is the ability to change narrative form during a time span and cross different mediums. Hutcheon (2006) and Sanders (2006) argue that an adaptation is a form of re-creation and not simple duplication of the original work. Mulan's myth demonstrates this through its narrative transitions; from a light lyric to a comedic musical to a grand realist epic.

The Ballad of Mulan is a primer and episodic narrative showcasing the oral tradition. Un-embellished, stream lined, with no emotional interconnectedness: Mulan put on a uniform, fought, received and then declined awards, and eventually came home. It serves the purpose of cultural moral. The gaps and silences: how she felt, what challenges she endured are narrative expansions which come to light during later reinterpretations.

The 1998 adaptation of the Disney animated movie *Mulan* built on the original poem, turning it into a three-act musical comedy. The internal conflict *Mulan* faced, along with the psychological aspects of it, were the focus of the song *Reflection*. The family friendly story still retained, with comic relief characters like Mushu and Cri-Kee along with several musical numbers. As with the rest of the Disney animation films, a romantic interest was added, furthering the story's alignment with western narrative structures. The added romance was explained through a series of text messages describing the character's relationship, used as a frame narrative.

The 2020 live action adaptation ditched the romance and comedy, instead focusing on the themes of fate and martial prowess. The tone of the narrative was elevated with dramatic elements, becoming solemn and filled with grandeur and spectacle. Still holding the character's interest, the witch figure character provided an alternative path of female power, parallel to *Mulan*.

Mulan portrayed as a legend emphasizes how the story of *Mulan* has always been reconstituted in order to fit into different linguistic, cultural and ideological structures. She fills the grandeur of epic verse in the original ballad, while subsequent adaptations — musical comedies and animated treatments — cast her to fit contemporary taste. As each re-engineering testifies: Myth is not just about change, it's all about change; that's how it has managed to keep its vitality throughout the ages and over so many religious terrains.

CONCLUSION

Mulan's experiences are a fascinating case of culture adaptation. Since the *Ballad of Mulan* focused on obligations of family and duty to the community, then on to Disney's 1998 animated film that focused on the ideals of liberal feminism, and then to the 2020 live-action film that combines the new and the old, *Mulan*'s tale embodies the endless adaptations of a cultural myth. Every version illustrates the mutable nature of cultural memory and the prevailing ideological structures while retaining the core essence of the story.

Viewed in the light of adaptation studies, *Mulan*'s transnational circulation is illustrative of "cultural negotiation", a form of hybridity that does not efface the source, but produces new meanings. What feminist criticism brings about is the revelation of different dimensions are reflected in *Mulan*: her roles as a filial daughter and as a female figure fighting for womanist power among other issues related to social order, power, and representation through gender. More than one narrative theory tries to explain how different forms of a single narrative—poetry, animation, and film—can be used to reconstruct a myth by changing its mood, tone, and even structure, giving voice to what was once silent and transforming the old into something new. In adaptation studies, *Mulan*'s shifts should be seen as constructive, as the different evolving cultural meanings she embodies signify productive change. Her story is at the crossroads of the East and the West, modernity and tradition, feminism and patriarchy, individuality and social obligation. The change *Mulan* undergoes, from a compliant daughter to a warrior, is an example of the change storytelling can convey. *Mulan* is a symbol of global hybridity—timeless, versatile, and indicative of dual cultural and imaginative social facets of the world.

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WEAVING WORLDS; INTERTEXTUAL STRATEGIES IN THE NARRATIVE ARCHITECTURE OF EMPURAAAN

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ABSTRACT

Intertextuality can be simply defined as the shaping of a text's meaning by other texts or by the relationships between texts. It is a literary technique that involves referencing, borrowing, or alluding to other texts within a new work. The concept was coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s and has since become influential in literary and media studies. *L2: Empuraan* is a 2025 Malayalam political action thriller directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran and starring Mohanlal. It is a sequel to the 2019 film *Lucifer*. While the movie is celebrated as a mass entertainer like its predecessor, it goes beyond surface-level action by combining themes of politics, mythology, and religion to create a deeper and more complex narrative. This paper examines how *Empuraan* employs intertextuality as a deliberate narrative strategy to construct a rich, immersive world that weaves together the domains of politics, myth, creativity, and spirituality. Through a close reading of the characters, narrative structure, symbolism, and plot, this analysis argues that *Empuraan* operates on multiple levels: as a mass-market action thriller, a sociopolitical commentary, and a modern reimagining of ancient myth.

Keywords: *Intertextuality, allusion, referencing, symbolism, narrative structure*

INTRODUCTION

L2: Empuraan is a 2025 political action thriller directed by Prithviraj Sukumaran and written by Murali Gopy. The film stars Mohanlal and Prithviraj in the lead roles and serves as the sequel to the 2019 film *Lucifer*. *Lucifer* was originally conceived as part of a three-part film series. The first installment was *Lucifer*, followed by *Empuraan* as the second. The third installment, tentatively titled *L3: The Beginning* or *L3: Azrael*, is yet to be released. The trilogy is produced by Antony Perumbavoor, Subaskaran Allirajah, and Gokulam Gopalan. When *L2: Empuraan* was released, it became a major success. The director had envisioned it as a pan-Indian film and promoted it extensively across the country. However, following its release, the movie sparked several controversies—both political and religious. These disputes led to widespread protests and criticism, prompting the filmmakers to re-edit the film. In response, the movie underwent nearly 24 changes, amounting to approximately two minutes of footage being altered or removed in an effort to address the concerns and ease tensions. Even after all these changes, the film remained a major success, going on to become one of the highest-grossing Malayalam films worldwide and earning blockbuster status.

Intertextuality can be simply defined as the shaping of a text's meaning by other texts or by the relationships between texts. It is a literary technique that involves referencing, borrowing, or alluding to other texts within a new work. The concept was coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s and has since become influential in literary and media studies. Although the term “intertextuality” was coined in the 20th century, the practice of texts referencing, echoing, and responding to one

another is centuries old. The theoretical foundation was laid by Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin, whose concept of dialogism emphasized that no text exists in isolation—it is always in conversation with other texts, voices, and cultural contexts. His idea of heteroglossia further highlighted how multiple social languages and perspectives coexist within a single work, especially in novels. Building on Bakhtin's insights, Julia Kristeva introduced the term “intertextuality” in the 1960s, arguing that every text is a “permutation of texts,” shaped by cultural codes and prior discourses. She challenged the notion of a text as a closed, self-contained system, proposing instead that meaning is generated through its relationship with other texts. Roland Barthes later expanded this framework in his seminal essay *The Death of the Author*, where he argued that the meaning of a text does not stem from the author's intent but from the reader's interpretation within a broader cultural and textual network. For Barthes, the author becomes a “scriptor,” and the reader emerges as the central figure who constructs meaning by weaving together multiple textual threads. Collectively, these thinkers shifted literary theory away from individual authorship and toward a view of literature as a dynamic, interwoven field of cultural and textual exchange. Intertextuality enriches film by linking it to other texts, genres, and cultural moments, allowing deeper meaning and audience engagement. It turns cinema into a layered conversation across time and context. This paper examines how *Empuraan* employs intertextuality as a deliberate narrative strategy to enrich its thematic depth and cultural resonance, allowing the film to engage with broader political, cinematic, and mythological discourses.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive textual analysis grounded in intertextual theory to examine how *L2: Empuraan* constructs meaning through its engagement with political, historical, mythological, cinematic, and star-based references. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, Julia Kristeva's formulation of intertextuality as a “permutation of texts,” and Roland Barthes's reader-centered approach to meaning-making, the film is analyzed as a culturally embedded text rather than a self-contained narrative. The methodology involves close reading of *Empuraan* alongside its prequel *Lucifer*, identifying recurring intertextual patterns and categorizing them into political-historical, mythological-religious, cinematic, and meta-intertextual domains rooted in Mohanlal's star persona. Real-world events, political figures, mythic archetypes, and cinematic traditions are treated as cultural texts that inform the film's symbolic and ideological framework. Rather than focusing on authorial intent or audience reception, the analysis prioritizes how intertextual references function narratively and ideologically to generate layered meanings, enabling the film to comment on contemporary socio-political realities while operating within the conventions of a mainstream political thriller.

Intertextual Foundations in *Empuraan*

The intertextuality in *Empuraan* can be broadly categorized into four distinct yet overlapping domains: political or historical intertextuality, mythological or religious intertextuality, cinematic intertextuality, and meta-intertextuality rooted in Mohanlal's stardom.

1) Political and historical intertextuality:

The movie begins with the reference to the Godhra train incident which caused the Gujarat riots

in 2002. On February 27, 2002, Coach S6 of the Sabarmati Express was set ablaze near Godhra railway station in Gujarat, killing 59 Hindu pilgrims—many of them Kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya. The incident, widely reported as a targeted attack by a Muslim mob, sparked one of the most devastating communal riots in modern Indian history. Over the following months, violence swept across Gujarat, resulting in the deaths of nearly 1,000 people, the majority of whom were Muslims, and displacing tens of thousands. Multiple investigations—including the Nanavati-Mehta Commission and the Banerjee Committee—offered conflicting conclusions about the nature of the train fire, with debates continuing over whether it was a premeditated act or an accident. The events profoundly shaped India's political and social landscape, raising enduring questions about governance, justice, and communal harmony. In the movie the character Zayed Masood (Prithviraj Sukumaran) is a survivor of the Gujarat riots and is seeking revenge for the tragedy of his family.

The character initially named Baba Bajrang in the film was later changed to Baldev following controversy. He symbolically represents Babu Bajrangi, also known as Babubhai Patel, a central figure in the 2002 Gujarat riots who was sentenced to life imprisonment by a special court for orchestrating the Naroda Patiya massacre, in which around 97 Muslims—including women and children—were killed. He serves as the film's central antagonist, and his characterization functions as a symbolic critique of religious extremism. By aligning the villain with real-world figures implicated in communal violence, *Empuraan* implicitly urges viewers to recognize and reject such ideologies—not just within the narrative, but in society at large.

In *Empuraan*, the political parties shown in the story clearly reflect real-life parties in Kerala. The IUF (Indian Union Front) represents the Indian National Congress, the RPI(M) stands for the Communist Party of India (Marxist), and the ASM (Akhandha Sathya Morcha) is a symbolic version of the BJP or RSS. By using these fictional names, the film comments on actual political dynamics while keeping the story within a fictional frame. In *Lucifer* and *Empuraan*, several characters appear to symbolically mirror prominent figures from the Nehru-Gandhi family. P.K. Ramdas (PKR) evokes the legacy of the Nehru dynasty, while Priyadarshini Ramdas (Manju Warriar) closely resembles Priyanka Gandhi in both name and political positioning. Jathin Ramdas (Tovino Thomas) can be seen as a fictional parallel to Rahul Gandhi, especially in his role as the heir to a political legacy. In *Lucifer*, the antagonist Bimal Nair shares notable similarities with Robert Vadra, Priyanka Gandhi's husband, who has faced multiple investigations by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for alleged involvement in money laundering and irregular land deals, including reported links to UK-based arms dealers.

The film does not glorify any particular political party; instead, it presents a nuanced critique of Kerala's political landscape by highlighting the limitations within each faction. BJP is portrayed as religiously extreme, INC as vulnerable to manipulation, and CPI as lacking national influence. The narrative uses Kerala's political framework as a foundation to explore broader questions about power, ideology, and the ultimate consequences of political decay. So all these character choices and ideologies reflect the film's use of intertextuality to comment on real-world political dynamics through fictional storytelling.

Another historical reference in *Empuraan* is to the Mullaperiyar Dam, subtly mirrored through

the fictional Nedumpally Dam. In the film, the dam is portrayed as a looming threat, and Chief Minister Jathin Ramdas attempts to address the issue by proposing a check dam—an act that involves relocating Adivasi communities from their land. His sister publicly accuses him of corruption, arguing that the plan is merely a temporary fix rather than a real solution. During her speech, she recalls the dam's colonial history, referencing a 999-year lease agreement between the British and the then ruling king—an unmistakable nod to the real-life Mullaperiyar arrangement, which remains a contentious issue between Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

2) Mythological or Religious Intertextuality:

In W. B. Yeats's poem, *The Second Coming*, the anticipated return of a Christ-like figure is subverted into something darker—an antichrist-like presence born out of chaos. Yeats suggests that the world's problems have grown so severe that the traditional image of a benevolent saviour is no longer sufficient; instead, a more disruptive force is needed. *Empuraan* echoes this idea through its central character, Stephen Nedumpally, also known as Khureshi Abraham. The film implies that Kerala's deep-rooted political and social issues cannot be resolved by a conventional hero. Stephen, initially portrayed in *Lucifer* as a local leader with a mysterious past, is revealed in *Empuraan* to have a far more complex and morally ambiguous identity—as a global criminal mastermind. His transformation reflects the unsettling notion that in a fractured world, salvation may come not from purity, but from power cloaked in shadow.

The idea of a saviour emerging from darkness is embedded in the very title *Lucifer*, which refers to the fallen angel in Christian theology. However, the concept is not confined to Christianity alone. In Hindu mythology, Mahiravana—a relative of Ravana and ruler of the underworld (Pathala Loka)—kidnaps Rama and Lakshmana with the intent to sacrifice them to his deity, aiding his brother's cause. Similarly, in Islamic belief, Iblis is a fallen angel who defies divine command, echoing the rebellious nature of Lucifer. In *Lucifer*, the title is assigned to Stephen Nedumpally by journalist Govardhan (Indrajith Sukumaran), and in *Empuraan*, when Govardhan confronts Khureshi Abraham, he asks about his true identity. Stephen responds that people call him by many names, but the one he prefers is the one Govardhan gave him—Lucifer, Mahiravana, or Iblis. This blending of mythologies across religions avoids anchoring the character to a single tradition, instead presenting him as an anti-Christ-like figure whose shadowy power is positioned as necessary to confront the deep-rooted problems of the state. The film thus challenges conventional notions of heroism, suggesting that true change may not come from peace and purity, but from a force that understands and operates within the darkness.

3) Cinematic Intertextuality

The primary cinematic intertextuality in *Empuraan* is rooted in its prequel, *Lucifer*. *Lucifer* unfolds around the death of P.K. Ramdas (PKR), a powerful and beloved Chief Minister of Kerala, and the political turmoil that follows. Amidst this chaos, Stephen Nedumpally emerges as the MLA of Nedumpally constituency—a charismatic and influential figure whose source of power remains mysterious. He ultimately becomes the savior of the IUF party and the state by eliminating the antagonist Bimal Nair (Vivek Oberoi) and positioning PKR's son, Jathin Ramdas, as the party's new face for the upcoming election. The film ends with subtle hints about Stephen's shadowy past and his possible identity as Khureshi Abraham.

In *Empuraan*, this universe expands. Jathin Ramdas, once seen as a hopeful successor, has now become corrupt—engaging in questionable land deals and introducing extremist figures like Baldev into Kerala's politics. The state is once again in disarray, and Stephen's public persona disappears, replaced by the global criminal identity of Khureshi Abraham. The sequel shifts focus from Stephen's political role to Khureshi's deeper, darker origins, suggesting that the state once again needs him—not as a conventional leader, but as a force capable of restoring balance through unconventional means.

Empuraan draws subtle but deliberate intertextual parallels to Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight trilogy*, particularly in its narrative structure and treatment of the protagonist. Director Prithviraj Sukumaran has acknowledged that both *Lucifer* and *Empuraan* were inspired by Nolan's approach to storytelling, where the central character—like Batman—is not always present on screen, yet his influence permeates every scene.

In *Empuraan*, Khureshi Abraham (Stephen Nedumpally) is largely absent from the early parts of the film, much like Bruce Wayne in *The Dark Knight Rises*, who disappears from Gotham. Yet, the chaos unfolding in Kerala constantly points to his looming presence, creating an aura around him before he reappears. This technique builds tension and mythos, suggesting that the protagonist is not just a person but a symbol—an idea deeply rooted in Nolan's portrayal of Batman as more than a man, but a legend.

4) Meta-Intertextuality Rooted in Mohanlal's Stardom

Empuraan's metaintertextuality is deeply enriched by Mohanlal's legendary screen persona, drawing from a lineage of iconic roles that have shaped Malayalam cinema's mass hero archetype. Characters like Jagannadhan from *Aaram Thampuran*, Sagar Alias Jacky from *Irupatham Noottandu* and *Sagar Alias Jacky Reloaded*, and Induchoodan from *Narasimham* are not just cinematic figures—they are cultural symbols of power, mystery, and moral complexity.

Stephen Nedumpally, and more intensely Khureshi Abraham, inherits this legacy. Like Jagannadhan, he enters a space in turmoil and silently shifts the balance of power. Like Sagar Alias Jacky, he operates in the shadows of global crime, commanding respect and fear. And like Induchoodan, he stands against corruption with a personal code that defies conventional morality. *Empuraan* doesn't just reference these roles—it builds upon them, allowing Mohanlal's past characters to echo through the narrative, making Stephen/Khureshi a culmination of decades of cinematic mythmaking. This layering creates a powerful metatextual experience where the audience's memory of Mohanlal's stardom becomes part of the film's emotional and symbolic weight. All these blurs the line between the character he portrays and the actor himself.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Empuraan* masterfully weaves together multiple layers of intertextuality—political, historical, mythological, cinematic, and meta—creating a rich network of meaning that goes beyond conventional storytelling. By drawing from real-life figures, events, and cultural archetypes, the film blurs the line between fiction and reality, challenging viewers to engage with its deeper social and political commentary. Though it presents itself as a fictional narrative, the unmistakable references to Kerala's political climate, historical tensions, and religious symbolism

reveal a deliberate intent. *Empuraan* is not just a mass entertainer; it stands as a bold artistic statement from its creators, reflecting on the complexities of leadership, identity, and the moral ambiguity of power in contemporary society.

One of the key strengths of *Empuraan* lies in its ability to engage a younger audience through the lens of a commercial entertainer while subtly introducing them to politically and historically significant issues. Since the film is crafted with mass appeal, it naturally draws in viewers who might not otherwise seek out such topics. By embedding references to real-life events—like the Godhra incident, Mullaperiyar Dam, and Kerala's political dynamics—the film sparks curiosity and encourages viewers to explore these subjects further. In this way, *Empuraan* becomes more than just a cinematic experience; it acts as a cultural trigger, prompting many to research and reflect on historical realities they were previously unaware of. This blend of entertainment and awareness makes the film socially impactful, even if its influence begins with just a spark of interest.

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ECHOES OF LONGING: A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN NASTAPETTA NEELAMBARİ AND MAZHA

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the narrative strategies employed in *Nastapetta Neelambari* and *Mazha*, two works that resonate with themes of memory, desire, and unfulfilled longing. Through a comparative lens, the analysis highlights how the authors use fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and evocative imagery to construct deeply personal yet universally relatable emotional landscapes. Both texts reveal how silence, absence, and ellipses function as powerful narrative tools, allowing readers to inhabit the unsaid as much as the spoken. The study also explores the interplay of music, rain, and recurring motifs as symbolic devices that deepen the affective texture of the narratives. By situating these works within the broader context of Malayalam literature, the paper underscores how narrative form becomes inseparable from thematic depth, transforming longing into both a structural and emotional principle.

Keywords: *Malayalam literature, narrative techniques, longing, symbolism, Nastapetta Neelambari, Mazha, memory, desire.*

INTRODUCTION

Nastapetta Neelambari, a poignant short story by Madhavikutty, and *Mazha*, a film directed by Lenin Rajendran, are two works that resonate deeply with themes of memory, desire, and unfulfilled longing. This study aims to explore the narrative strategies employed in these works, highlighting their use of fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and evocative imagery to construct deeply personal yet universally relatable emotional landscapes. It explores themes of love, loss and the realities of married life through the protagonists pursuit of idealised love and their eventual dissolutionment with patriarchal societal structures. The narrative techniques involve contrast between romantic ideals and harsh reality, exemplified by subhadras idealised love for her spiritual Krishna and her husband's inability to fullfil this idealised longing, leading to the deterioration of their relationship. The film source story, use a parallel cinema approach to present a poignant narrative of emotional struggle and a woman's confinement within a rigid social framework. The narrative deeply embedded in subhadras perspective, allowing the audience to experience her profound emotional and psychological journey. The film operates within in the tradition of parallel cinema, a style known for its realistic and thought provoking explanation of complex social and psychological themes.

METHODOLOGY

Narrative Techniques implied in story and film

Both *Nastapetta Neelambari* and *Mazha* employ fragmented storytelling, where the narrative is presented in non-linear fashion. This technique allows the reader to piece together the story, mirroring the fragmented nature of human memory. In *Nastapetta Neelambari*, the narrative jumps between past and present, revealing the protagonist's inner world and emotional state.

Similarly, in *Mazha*, the film's non-linear structure adds depth and complexity to the narrative. The story relies heavily on subadra's internal thoughts and feelings, providing direct access to her inner world of dreams, longing and anxieties. The narrative is intensely introspective, as it delves into the protagonist's motivations, fears and desires, painting a vivid portrait of her mental state. She presently lived with her husband, but in inner world she desired a life with her lover. Through her experience, the story offers a powerful critique of women's subordinate position within male oriented world, where their value is often tied to their reproductive and sexual role.

Shifting Perspectives

The use of shifting perspectives in both works adds to the complexity of the narrative. In *Nastapetta Neelambari*, the protagonist's inner world is revealed through her thoughts and emotions, while in *Mazha*, the film's narrative is presented through multiple perspectives, including the protagonist's and other characters'. This technique allows the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the characters' motivations and emotions. In the film the protagonist had a hectic schedule with her work in order to escape from her family life. It indicates that she lived a life which she even not imagined in her entire life. An unsatisfied, failed marriage she is dealing in the story. Mentally the character is not accepted her husband. This inner thought of the protagonist is easily revealed in the movie and the viewers can sense that emotions. The shifting perspectives of inner world and external world is strongly reflected in the film "*Mazha*". While the protagonist tried to be a good wife but miserably failed in that attempt. There are so many scenes in the movie that the character is like a lone figure. She affectionately remembering her lost love and she writes her nostalgic thoughts in her diary from that she finding solace, happiness and peace.

Evocative Imagery

Both works employ evocative imagery to create a rich and immersive narrative. In *Nastapetta Neelambari*, Madhavikutty's vivid descriptions of nature and emotions transport the reader to the world of the protagonist. Similarly, in *Mazha*, the film's cinematography captures the beauty of the Tamil Nadu landscape, adding depth and nuance to the narrative. Here, the landscape of the the Madurai village also had a role in the story. In her innerworld she lived in that village always. In the movie there are flashbacks of her childhood memories visualised by the director. The temple had a strong connection towards her past life. The beautiful temple depicted in the beginning and ending of the movie. So her deep attachment to the village is visualised in the movie, the cinematography captured it very well.

Objective correlative in "*Lost Neelambari*"

Applying the principle of the objective correlative to the story involves identifying specific objects, situations, or images that evoke the emotions of the characters or the reader, rather than the author directly stating them. The title itself _ "*Lost Neelambari*" _ acts as a powerful correlative for the central theme of loss and fragmentation, while symbols like the sea might represent the overwhelming and untamable nature of grief, or the shattered remnants of things symbolize broken relationships and shattered dreams, all working together to create a profound emotional experience for the audience without explicit explanation. If "the character was sad", the author used imagery, symbols or specific circumstances to create a mood or emotional state in the reader.

Symbolism

Music and Rain

Music and rain are recurring motifs in both works, serving as symbolic devices that deepen the affective texture of the narratives. In *Nastapetta Neelambari*, the Neelambari raga is a powerful symbol of the protagonist's emotions, while in *Mazha*, the rain serves as a backdrop for the protagonist's emotional journey. The important theme of the story is music, most prominently the "Neelambari raga". She attracted towards the music and she learned music from her lover as he teaches music to students. In the opening scene of the movie she heard the raga in the temple and she fell in love with it. The ending of the movie also she visited to temple to fulfill her wish. She requested to her lover to sing that "Neelambari Raga". The raga and rain is connected in the movie. One more incident from her childhood to indicate that connection of music and rain. She wrote a poem and her lover tuned it. While she sings the song, suddenly rains. There are so many melodious songs in the movie. These symbols add depth and complexity to the narrative, inviting reader to interpret their significance.

Silence and Absence

Silence and absence are also powerful narrative tools in both works. In *Nastapetta Neelambari*, the protagonist's silence is a testament to her inner turmoil, while in *Mazha*, the absence of certain characters serves to highlight their importance in the narrative. These techniques allow the reader to inhabit the unsaid as much as the spoken, adding depth and nuance to the narrative.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the narrative techniques employed in *Nastapetta Neelambari* and *Mazha*, two works that resonate deeply with themes of memory, desire, and unfulfilled longing. Through a comparative analysis, we have seen how these works use fragmented storytelling, shifting perspectives, and evocative imagery to construct deeply personal yet universally relatable emotional landscapes. By situating these works within the broader context of Malayalam literature, we can see how narrative form becomes inseparable from thematic depth, transforming longing into both a structural and emotional principle.

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GENDER VIOLENCE AND RESISTANCE IN FILMS AND LITERARY TEXTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper undertakes a critical examination of the complex and multifaceted representations of gender violence and resistance in films and literary texts. By analyzing a diverse range of works, including those by prominent authors like Mahasweta Devi, Arundhati Roy, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as well as thought-provoking films like "The Color Purple," "The Accused," and "Pink," this study seeks to illuminate the ways in which narratives can shape public discourse and influence policy. Through a feminist lens that prioritizes intersectionality and cultural context, the presentation explores themes of representation, visibility, and forms of resistance, highlighting the agency and resilience of survivors and the impact of these narratives on societal attitudes toward gender violence. The analysis will delve into the ways in which films and literary texts portray gender violence, including the physical, emotional, and psychological tolls on survivors, as well as the various forms of resistance employed by individuals and communities. By investigating the intersections of gender violence with other forms of oppression, such as class, caste, race, and culture, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex issues surrounding gender violence and resistance. Ultimately, this presentation seeks to demonstrate the importance of representation and visibility in promoting social change and influencing policy, highlighting the potential of films and literary texts to drive meaningful reform and challenge dominant narratives around gender violence. By shedding light on the experiences of survivors and the forms of resistance they employ, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding gender violence and resistance, and to inspire further exploration and discussion of these critical themes.

Keywords: *Gender violence, resistance, films, literary texts, feminism, intersectionality, representation, visibility, social change, policy*

INTRODUCTION

Gender violence is a widespread issue that affects individuals and communities around the globe. It is a complicated problem that is rooted in societal norms, power dynamics, and cultural practices. Literature and film can play a vital role in raising awareness about gender violence and encouraging resistance. By highlighting the experiences of individuals and communities impacted by gender violence, these mediums can foster empathy, challenge societal norms, and inspire social change. The importance of this topic is immense. Gender violence impacts millions of people worldwide and can take various forms, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, and harassment. The consequences of gender violence can be severe, resulting in physical and emotional trauma and even death. Despite the seriousness of this issue, much work remains to raise awareness and drive change.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology, as the subject of gender

violence demands sensitivity, contextual depth, and ethical engagement rather than statistical measurement. Since the research focuses on representation, lived experience, and narrative resistance, the approach centers on close reading, critical interpretation, and contextual analysis of selected literary texts and films.

DISCUSSION

Portraying gender violence in literature offers a powerful way to delve into the complexities of this issue. In "The God of Small Things," Arundhati Roy skillfully weaves together the stories of two Indian twins, Rahel and Estha, who face domestic violence, child abuse, and societal norms that support gender violence. The novel emphasizes how societal expectations and power dynamics can lead to the oppression and marginalization of women and children.

In "Half of a Yellow Sun," Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts the experiences of women during the Biafran War. She shows how war and conflict can worsen gender violence. The novel illustrates how women often find themselves in the midst of conflict and suffer disproportionately from violence and displacement.

The short story "Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi offers another strong example of gender violence in literature. It tells the story of a young tribal woman named Draupadi, who is gang-raped by soldiers. This narrative highlights how women are objectified and treated as commodities in Indian society. It also reveals how Draupadi resists and challenges the societal norms that oppress her, asserting her agency and autonomy amid hardship. The film "The Color Purple" also powerfully depicts gender violence. Based on Alice Walker's novel, it follows Celie, a young Black woman in the rural South in the early 20th century. Celie's life is filled with poverty, abuse, and marginalization, yet she finds ways to resist societal norms that perpetuate her oppression. The film emphasizes how women of color are disproportionately affected by gender violence and demonstrates how they can find strength and solidarity within their communities.

Film serves as another impactful medium for exploring the complexities of gender violence. In "The Accused," Jonathan Kaplan tells the story of a woman who is gang-raped in a bar, revealing how societal norms and institutions can uphold rape culture during the ensuing trial. "Pink" presents a similar narrative, focusing on three women accused of trying to kill a man who attempted to assault them. This film also underscores how women are objectified and expected to conform to specific norms in Indian society.

The chosen texts and films illustrate the significance of resistance and empowerment. The characters in these stories find ways to confront and challenge the societal norms and power dynamics that fuel gender violence. They assert their agency and work toward building a more just and equitable society.

Several theoretical frameworks can help us better understand gender violence and resistance in literature. Feminist literary theory, postcolonial literary theory, intersectional literary theory, trauma theory, and resistance theory offer valuable insights into the complex issues surrounding gender violence and resistance in literature.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the selected literary texts and films provide a compelling portrayal of gender violence and resistance. They reveal the complexity of the issue and how societal norms and power dynamics can sustain gender violence. Furthermore, they highlight the importance of resistance and empowerment, illustrating how individuals and communities can strive for a more just and equitable society. By examining the complexities of gender violence and resistance in literature and film, we can deepen our understanding of the issue and work toward societal change. Ultimately, this seminar aims to encourage social change and promote gender equality by emphasizing the need for resistance and empowerment in the face of gender violence.

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HAMLET AND THE LION KING: AN INTERTEXTUAL COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Disney's *The Lion King* (1994) through the lens of intertextuality. Julia Kristeva's theory of intertextuality, Barthe's "death of the author" and Bakhtin's dialogism were used in the study to highlight how both texts share a common narrative while form, tone and resolution are still different. Central to both stories is the murder of a noble king by a jealous brother, the usurpation of the throne and the young prince's struggle to confront betrayal and reclaim justice. While *Hamlet* depicts the tragic nature and death of all the characters, *The Lion King* depicts rediscovery and hope and works on restoration and comeback. This comparison propounds how intertextuality has moulded and reshaped the narrative for new audience.

Keywords: *Revenge, Murder, Fratricide, Seize the throne.*

INTRODUCTION

Ben Johnson remarked Shakespeare as "not of an age but for all time" (45). Among the Bard of Avon's works, *Hamlet* stands out as endless inspiring reinterpretations are made day by day. Being an animated narrative that restructures Hamlet's central themes of betrayal and loss, Disney's *The Lion King* is one such reinterpretation meant for a younger audience.

Although *The Lion King* and *Hamlet* were produced centuries apart, they share a core narrative: the fratricide of a noble king, the usurpation of the throne and the young prince's journey to avenge his father's murder. However, differences in tone, resolution and cultural codes reflect how the narrative was reshaped for a much more modern and younger audience. This paper examines these intertextual relationships, demonstrating how *The Lion King* appears as a reinterpretation that alludes and parodies *Hamlet*.

METHODOLOGY

The study of the paper adopts a qualitative intertextual approach to explore the relationship between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Disney's *The Lion King*. Drawing on the theories of intertextuality, the paper employs a comparative textual analysis of the texts tracing narrative and character correspondences within them.

An attempt to close reading was also implemented in order to focus on key elements such as the motif of revenge, the figure of the usurping uncle and the moral dilemma between kingship and responsibility. Throughout the study, *Hamlet* is treated as the primary literary text while the cinematic adaptation is analysed as a tool of recontextualization.

The study emphasizes dialogic interaction between texts showcasing how meaning is produced through repetition and transformation. The analysis explores how a classical tragedy is reshaped within popular culture, preserving the narrative flow across diverse cultural and historical contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Julia Kristeva introduced the concept of intertextuality in the 1960s which propounded that no literary work exists in isolation. Instead, each text is a “mosaic of quotations” – a blend of cultural, historical and linguistic codes woven together to generate meaning.

Roland Barthe's notion of the “death of the author” also posits that texts derive their meanings through intertextual relationships rather than from the author's intention. Thus, the role of the reader is crucial in the process. Both the texts have been studied through the lens of dialogism propounded by Mikhail Bakhtin which posits the coexistence of multiple voices and perspectives within a text.

FINDINGS

The narrative of the texts selected for the study here run on common story lines. The eponymous heroes of both *Hamlet* and *The Lion King* are young princes who lost their fathers to death and are on a mission to avenge their murders. The act of fratricide drives the plots forward. While in the *Hamlet*, Claudius kills his brother King Hamlet, it is Scar, Mufasa's brother who kills him in *The Lion King*. Both the murders take place with the motive of seizing the throne. Both the antagonists are portrayed as ambitious and jealous brothers.

The indirect reference of *Hamlet*'s opening scene in the Disney's adaptation hints an allusion. Mufasa's spirit urges Simba to “remember who you are.” This scene is an Interconnection of Act 1 Scene 1 of *Hamlet* where King Hamlet lets his son know that his death was a murder.

Many characters of *Hamlet* parallels with that of the adaptation. Scar mirrors the ambitious brother Claudius while Timon and Pumba parallels Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The latter are undercover spies assigned by Claudius while the former are loyal and funny sidekicks who stand by Simba in his lows and highs. These character parallels evident pastiche, a major component of intertextuality.

There exists elements of parody as humorous reinterpretation. For instance, “Hakuna matata” is a care-free philosophy which means “no problem.” Simba lives through the philosophy throughout his exile. This often parallels with the “not to be” notion of the famous quoting of *Hamlet* “to be or not to be is the question” (3.1.56).

Hamlet evolves around the central theme of revenge while *The Lion King* witnessed a transformation. Simba's tale is more of a narrative that focuses on responsibility, identity and self-discovery and has a just ending with Simba seizing the throne. This is not the case with the Shakespearean Tragedy where everyone faces a brutal ending. Also, *The Lion King* is portrayed as a coming-of-age adaptation where Simba grows with his parents and later faces his father's death while the King Hamlet's death is a *media res* reference in the play. This variation in the adaptation intends Disney's attempt to portray death as a slow and ready process owing to the theory that death is abstract for children. Similarly, the illegitimate relationship of Gertrude and Claudius is not carried to *The Lion King* and there are no elements evidencing such a relationship between Sarabi and Scar in the plot.

CONCLUSION

The Lion King is a dialogic text with intertextual elements of *Hamlet* and appears as an animated retelling of the latter. The adaptation was a reimagining across cultural and historical divides. *Hamlet* set in Denmark underwent a cultural adaptation when it came to *The Lion King*, which was set in an African Savannah with anthropomorphic animals.

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THE EVOLVING NARRATIVE OF WOMEN FROM PAGE TO SCREEN IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the evolution of women's representation in Indian literature and cinema, highlighting a key contradiction: literature has consistently offered more complex, nuanced female characters. From the 1970s, Indian women's literature, influenced by second-wave feminism, moved from depicting psychological confinement and domestic discontent to exploring themes of sexuality and desire through authors like Anita Desai and Kamala Das. In the contemporary period, writers such as Arundhati Roy and Jhumpa Lahiri have expanded the narrative to include intersectional identities shaped by globalization and social hierarchies like caste and class. In stark contrast, mainstream Indian cinema, driven by commercial pressures and a male-dominated power structure, historically relied on rigid archetypes like the "idealized heroine" and the "vamp". However, a modern renaissance is underway, fuelled by a new generation of female filmmakers and the disruptive influence of streaming platforms. Malayalam cinema, with its distinct economic model, serves as a case study for progressive storytelling that more closely aligns with the complexity found in literature. This paper concludes that while a historical gap exists, cinema is increasingly moving toward authentic and multifaceted female narratives, a shift driven by both creative voices and changing audience expectations.

Keywords: *Indian literature, Indian cinema, Feminism, Patriarchy, Sexuality, Globalization, Archetypes, Malayalam cinema, and Streaming platforms.*

INTRODUCTION: A NEW CANON FOR AN EVOLVING NATION

Cinema and the representation of women in Indian literature from the second-wave feminist to the post-feminist movement captures a complex and multi-dimensional evolution. The paper posits that Indian literature has long overtaken mainstream Indian cinema in its careful representation of women by moving from the narrative of "confined self" to that of "intersectional protagonist". Though conventional cinema, and notably Bollywood, often stereotyped women to a narrow range of characters on commercial considerations and the stranglehold of male control, parallel and regional cinema, in particular the Malayalam New Wave, serves as a necessary cinematic corollary to the evolving literary trajectory. Parallel and regional cinema in general, most notably the Malayalam New Wave, has offered a cinematic parallel to this literary movement. The comparison suggests an underlying disjuncture between the two media, a rift in which literature is at its best when it comes to psychological depth and socio-political critique, while cinema works against those values, forced by market considerations towards banalisations of challenging issues.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine the evolution of female narratives in Indian literature and cinema, with a focus on the contrast between the complexity of female characters in literary works and mainstream films. The study included a thorough examination of a

few literary works by well-known Indian women authors, such as Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Sarah Joseph, K. R. Meera, etc., who have made substantial contributions to the study of subjects including desire, sexuality, and domestic discontent. These pieces had a prominent impact that indicates a change from portraying psychological captivity to examining nuanced female realities. In order to comprehend how women are portrayed and how commercial pressures affect cinematic storylines, the study looked at popular Indian films, publications, and film reviews.

A case study of the Malayalam film industry, which offers a unique economic paradigm that has made progressive storytelling and more complex female tales possible, was also a part of the technique. An understanding of the new trends in Indian cinema can be gained from the study of films made by a new generation of female directors and the effect that streaming services have on viewer expectations. This study investigates the historical discrepancy between literary and cinematic portrayals of women in India and the forces behind the trend toward more genuine and complex female tales in modern cinema by examining literary works, films, and critical reviews. The research draws on feminist literary theory and film criticism to contextualize the findings and identify areas for future study.

Historical Context: Defining the Second Wave of Indian Feminism

The Indian feminist movement was not a single wave, unlike its counterpart in the West. Its roots extended deep into 19th-century social reform movements and nationalist attempts to wrest independence from colonial rule. But except for the 1970s—which was a key period throughout the world, because women staged a robust struggle for their rights—post-independence registered a relative let-down in feminist activism.

A key precipitant for this phase was the government-commissioned study *Towards Equality* (1974). This report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was a startling revelation. It simply revealed the vast gap between the constitutional commitment to gender equality and the brutal, mundane reality of existence for most women in India. The report proved a potent catalyst, giving birth to a new round of political activism and scholarship. The focus of the movement also moved from welfare-based contentions, such as to those in objection of annual dowry-related cases and custodial rape, towards a more serious challenge against violence reflected through female feticide. This change in the questions that life posed, was rapidly and jarringly reflected in the various themes - personal, societal or spiritual - and characters that Indian Literature began to show forth. This new feminist consciousness provided a strong foundation in literature that portrayed the process of self-discovery of an independent woman's mind: it moved from traditional domesticity to active challenging of the system imposed on them.

The paper aims to focus on the pan-Indian women narrative from Indian literature and cinema depicting a comparative approach that highlights how women progress as a matter of theme and character from each period in time up to the contemporary. From the comparison of the textual story and its film rendering, a more sensitive insight to each medium's unique functions and challenges in representing women is gained.

The Confined Self: Narratives of Psychological and Domestic Confinement

A clear and notable break from the traditional representation of women may be seen in the creative output of the 1970s and 1980s. In order to examine the psychological and emotional trauma that binds them to a patriarchal system, it has gone beyond a passive heroine. The idealized concept of the "angel in the house," which is frequently romanticized in the media, was contested by the literature. Instead, it explored women's lives in great detail, reflecting their inner and exterior spaces and delving into their disordered core.

Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande were some of the authors to take up the cause. Desai's novels, like *Cry, the Peacock* and *Clear Light of Day* explored the inner lives and smaller corners of the homes of women who continued to live in loveless marriages trapped by stifling domestic space, on a psychological level. The latter, which concentrates on its heroine Maya's descent into madness, is a searing examination of the terror of a woman's lonely lot under an oppressive patriarchy. Likewise, Deshpande's writing as seen in *That Long Silence*, delved into the silent, everyday wars as well as purposeful suppression of identity to fit into the traditional mould of womanhood. Deshpande's characters are frequently negotiating the question of silence.

One of the leading voices in the political sphere during this time was Nayantara Sahgal. Meanwhile, her protagonists (and even secondary characters) reflect the experience of married women whose identity as individuals is crushed by their social condition. *The Day in Shadow* (1971), is the story of Simrit, a well-educated and divorced woman, and her life amidst an acrimonious divorce settlement and ostracism in a male-dominated society.

Simrit's struggle is not just her own; it is a deeply political act that runs counter to the convention and culture in which it has become customary for a woman never to have an identity of her own outside of being someone's wife. Sahgal's women are unyielding in their modernity, pursuing nothing less than equality as a right and not a choice, while they, moreover, are often contrasted with men who cling to patriarchal attitudes even when educated or having lofty social status.

The literature of this period was, in a sense, a collective psychoanalysis of the society. By directly depicting the female psyche and giving a face to its suffering, writers were diagnosing the deep-seated illness of patriarchy from within. This offered a vital, often painful rebuttal to the romanticised, glamorous domesticity that was idealised in mainstream Bollywood depictions of home during this same period (the big family dramas of the 1970s, for example, where self-sacrifice on the part of mothers/wives remained to be celebrated).

The transformation of society due to urbanization and economic development created a new "problem" for women; it was a struggle between traditional values and the possibility of independence. What had long been the great inner conflict, still unexamined as mainstream culture dared not scrutinise it, now found a strong and authentic voice in words that were free from commercial pressures that had driven mass media to evade so difficult and introspective themes.

Breaking the Silence: The Body, Desire, and Revolutionary Voice

This was a game-changer for its honest and unabashed disclosure of female sexuality and desire, formerly taboo in Indian society, life, and literature. This new wave of literature intentionally turned

away from the stark contrast between the saree-clad, cultured 'Sanskari' woman and the morally corrupt vamp that we had seen then.

Kamala Das' 1976 autobiography *My Story* and poetry served the ground for this transition. She employed her fiercely feminine sensibility to express the emotional and physical "hurts it has taken in an insensitive man-made world". Das was one of the first Indian women writers who dared to explore marital discord and female desire, declaring with astonishing boldness that the world was "far bigger than their 6-foot-tall husbands". Her writing served as a touchstone for a generation of women writers who were trying to wrest the female body and experience back from patriarchal control.

Though *Lihaaf* by Ismat Chughtai is studied in contemporary English-language academic work as a pioneering queer feminist text, there is an important but often obscure extent to which it can be complex. Many translations and critical treatments in their own way systematically muted the caste ecology of the text by risking skipping the caste slurs and context that are integral to the original Urdu version. By intentionally leaving caste out, a huge factor in virtually all social interactions, the narrative becomes one of a "caste-less queer curricular choice". This analytical elision reflects a larger trend in some postcolonial studies of favouring a "sanitized" story (for example, one more exclusively marked by sexuality) over a "messier" and messily entangled, intersectional story (such as caste-based power dynamics). If this process is done selectively and repetitively, using Western theoretical categories for non-Western texts without taking the full socio-cultural context into account, it risks making 'complicated' stories seem simpler than they are.

In regional language writing, for Malayalam in particular, writers like Sarah Joseph (*Aalabayude Penmakal*) and K. R Meera (*Aarachar or Hangwoman*) were subversive with a female voice and political critique. Joseph's fiction frequently weaves mythology and history to probe female victimisation and silent revolt. Meera's protagonists, like the executioner's daughter Chetna Grddha Mullick in *Aarachar*, manifest an aggressive, almost evil-tinted feminism, taking on society, law, and the patriarchal paradigm.

This exploration of female desire found resonance in mainstream cinema of the late 80's and 90's. The explicit representation of female desire and intimacy between women for the first time on screen (in films such as Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991) and Deepa Mehta's *Fire* (1996), caused immense socio-political uproar. Provoking violent protests on its release for dealing with lesbianism, *Fire* was a newfound landmark in world cinema that brought the discussion of female sexuality from behind the metaphorical subtext of literature.

New Horizons: Globalization, Migration, and the Diasporic Identity

The economic liberalization in the early 1990s was followed by the introduction of new themes in Indian literature. With India being increasingly integrated with the global economy, writers began to contemplate how globalization, migration, and growing consumerism are altering women's lives. This era gave rise to a literary new archetype: the "diasporic woman." Writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri beautifully chronicled the lives of women living two existences, straddling their Indian identity with their adopted Western landscapes. Her characters frequently exist in a "state of

loneliness," with a feeling of "home" that's nothing more than a construct in their own mind built from memory. Her fiction, from *Interpreter of Maladies* to *The Namesake*, explores the heartache of cultural dislocation and the often-painful path toward self-definition.

This diasporic narrative had in the meantime been complicated by writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni whose *The Mistress of Spices* (1997) deploys the trope of magic realism and that lovable being, Tilo, an immigrant grocer, to investigate the complexities of immigrant life, longing and cultural memory. The Booker Prize-winning novel, *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai (2006), deepened the story by juxtaposing Biju's experiences in New York with those of his grandfather and orphaned granddaughter, Sai, in an upheaval Himalayan town. The novel thus knits the isolation of the immigrant back to the failure of the post-colonial nation-state and its class war.

This theme of globalization also appeared in movies like Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2006, based on Lahiri's novel) and Gurinder Chadha's *Bend It Like Beckham* (2002). Where *The Namesake* provided a literary-minded, interiorized filmic depiction of the "mental construct" of home, *Bend It Like Beckham* employed rom-com to reflect on the push-pull between traditional Indian-Sikh family values and modern professional female ambition (football) in the diaspora, finding commercial success by packaging the cultural clash for audience across the globe.

Beyond Gender: An Intersectional Framework

In the 1990s there has been a crucial development in feminist literary thinking: an analytical shift from the sole-focus on gender and to acknowledge its interconnections with other markers of social difference such as caste, class, religion, and regional identity. This literature articulated the lives of those women who were earlier relegated to the margins, and forever altered our literary landscape. This was the age in which Kimberlé Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality, despite being another English word that refers to a theory coined in 1989 found its most potent practice in Indian literature.

Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* is another source of inspiration for this movement. What really drives is the deliberate coupling between 'subjugation of women' and 'oppressions of class and caste,' with Devi's female characters depicted as "rebellious spirits" who resist exploitation at the systemic level. Her fierce, earthy stories from the lives of tribal and oppressed women were a fitting rebuff to the upper-caste, urban orientation of previous feminist writing.

The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy is another classic example of this treatment. The heroine, Ammu (played by Roy), was "doubly marginalised", first being a woman and then belonging to the oppressed caste. Her illicit liaison with Velutha, a Paravan (Untouchable), is not just a personal betrayal but an "act of defiance against rigid caste and class boundaries". Roy interlaces themes of gender oppression, communist politics and caste hierarchy to show how the "Love Laws" dictated whom one could love and how, it was deeply rooted in patriarchy.

Bama Faustina was one of the earliest and most important Dalit writers in India, who penned her autobiography *Karukku* — which literally means Palmyra leaf but comes to denote a suppressed people by extension — that can be seen as a literary landmark. Published in 1992, it was the first time a Dalit woman had narrated in her own voice the "joys and sorrows" and "resistance and rebellious character" of her community. In depicting the omnipresent violence of caste-based

discrimination through the life-story of a Christian Dalit nun, Bama foregrounded a Dalit-feminist standpoint. Not only did it become an inspiration for women's writing, but it also provided a theoretical framework or boundaries. Her work is testimony to the fact that mainstream feminism routinely suppresses caste as a vital facet of oppression. In the landscape of contemporary Indian women's poetry, Meena Kandasamy has emerged as a major writer investigating, in particular, caste, gender, and institutionalised oppression. Works like *Ms. Militancy* (2010) carry an aggressive, militaristic tenor that directly confronts the Brahminical patriarchy by subverting myths with a Dalit feminist perspective.

This contemporary literary push-back, far from an accident, is a move born purely as a necessity to repel the idea, just one of many, that Indian women's stories and experiences are all alike. Through their foregrounding of the struggles of Dalit and adivasi women, these writers showed that demands for liberation must be broad-based and all-encompassing to take into account multiple, intersecting systems as oppression.

Rejection of the upper-class orientation that had dominated the women's movement in the 1970s was also a reaction to a more grassroots, politically involved women's movement popularized in the late 20th Century. This movement insisted on the representation of the women's real world, whose realities and final complexity reorientation. This challenge was taken up by writers like Devi and Bama, resulting in a "plurality of feminist expressions," thereby transforming the fabric of the literary canon itself to better reflect diverse women's experiences across India.

The Screen and the Page: A Comparative Analysis

For decades, there was this basic gulf between how women were depicted in literature and popular cinema in India. Due to the profit-inclined commercial cinema, female characters were usually portrayed as either extreme type: the passive, self-sacrificing "good woman" (heroine/mother who merely serves to be saved by man) and the aggressive and ruthless "femme fatale" (vamp). Women have often been "sidelined in secondary or ornamental roles" for the storyline of a male protagonist. The structural bias is then compounded by a male-dominated power structure in the industry, wherein "writers' rooms and production offices are overwhelmingly male spaces," leading to female characters with "little depth or agency".

Commercial pressures also accelerated the commodification of the roles appropriate to women. The continued prevalence of item songs, more or less irrelevant dance numbers that woo male viewers by presenting women as "visual spectacles" rather than full-fledged characters—has been one such issue that critics have long complained about. This inclination in cinema to objectify and reduce is perhaps best demonstrated when translating complex literary creations from page to screen. The movie adaptations of Saratchandra Chatterjee's *Devdas* frequently put the predictable needs of the audience before fidelity to text, in an effort to "empower" female characters according to a "postmodernist breakthrough" rather than the particularities of the text. Likewise, while the 1969 film version of *Parineeta* drew praise for how closely and subtly it remained true to the source material, its 2005 adaptation was successful at the box office but singled out for "physicality harped upon" that would be crucial in pursuing our twenty-first-century audience.

The fundamental difference between the two channels is that one is for a purpose. The very fact

that literature is an explorative entity, however, and can shed light on the inner thoughts or emotions of its characters, means it is suitable for addressing certain feminist issues in lyrical subtlety. Cinema, on the other hand, is big business, and it always seems to cheapen things up, dumbing down its femininity for mass consumption by reducing females into commodity groups that every single conservative viewer can be comfortable with.

The new post 2010 decade though, witnessed a small, if commercial, turnaround in Hindi cinema. Movies such as *Kahaani* (2012) and Alankrita Shrivastava's *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2017) tried to take back control over female sexual identities and portray women in multifaceted, non-conformist lights. *Kahaani* subverted the genre of thriller to make a pregnant woman chase the truth relentlessly, and turned her into an active protagonist, while *Lipstick Under My Burkha* directly engaged with how women across ages share their desire and suffer; it defied the sexual conservatism of the audience.

A Shared Path: The Role of Parallel and New Wave Cinema

The mainstream cinema showcased a different tradition since the 1970s, reflecting a parallel to the literary oeuvre. Directors like Shyam Benegal (*Ankur*, *Bhumika*) and Gulzar (*Mausam*, *Ijaazat*), with their art cinema, threw a flood of light on the social conditions of women trapped within the shackles of patriarchy. A crucial instance could be Benegal's *Bhumika*, which illustrated a woman's search for selfhood and freedom.

This tradition has a profound existence in regional industries, particularly the Malayalam New Wave cinema movement and the more recent wave in Tamil cinema. The Malayalam New Wave has some immaculate narrations depicting the essence of Malayalee life and landscape, defying the very bondage and conventional narrative style. *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), *Uyare* (2019), and *How Old Are You?* (2014) point fingers at domestic patriarchy, female ambition, and breaking free from stifling expectations, which is usually eulogized in the mainstream cinema. *The Great Indian Kitchen*, is a cinematic experience of evolving from the confined self to exploring the woman desiring to break the fence erected around her, representing the powerful act of rebellion explicit in the works of Desai and Deshpande.

The Kollywood industry has not taken a step back in portraying the essential life of women, particularly through an intersectional lens. Directors like Vetrimaaran have exposed caste and class through a critical lens that not only focuses on identity as a woman, but also its coalescence with the socio-political backdrop that forms her identity. The rise of potent, woman-centric films like Mari Selvaraj's *Karnan* (2021), a framework rooted in a Dalit- feminist perspective, showcases how regional cinema can successfully translate the intersectional narrative of authors like Bama and Mahasweta Devi onto the screen.

This revolution brought by the new wave cinema does not just reflect in the themes or breaking stereotypes. Nevertheless, the creation of compelling cinema on low budgets is a signature of their meticulous grip in various technical aspects of the cinema as well. This unique economic model serves a surreal experience in weaving life, bridging the gulf between real and reel. Unlike Bollywood's blockbuster budgets, Malayalam cinema operates with lower costs and a smaller, more discerning audience. This gallantry reflected by regional industries has brought copious

experimental storytelling with unconventional themes. The final and most crucial connection between progressive cinema and literature is the rise of women creators. As rightly pointed by Gayathri Chakraborty Spivak, a subaltern can raise voice for their own rights and justice, female directors and writers like Anjali Menon (*Bangalore Days*), Gauri Shinde (*English Vinglish*), and Reema Kagti (*Talaash*) have been a reflection of women's voice speaking for herself, exploring her inner self and living her life instead of mere survival. Creating such "female-driven stories" has slowly bridged the gap between the page and the screen.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF THE INDIAN FEMALE NARRATIVE

The evolution of the Indian woman's narrative—from the 'confined self' of the 1970s literature to exploring the 'intersectional, globalized protagonist' of contemporary works is a journey that had its backbone in artistic progress as well as a farewell to the commercial and consumeristic attitude that couldn't measure cinema beyond monetary benefits that funded the patriarchal structure. Literature has consistently been the torchbearer of this transformation that paved the way for opportunities for radical self-examination, devoid of market needs. Yet the emergence of a powerful, globalized, and intersectional literary canon—featuring voices like Meena Kandasamy—and Nayantara Sahgal's continued political engagement have fundamentally shifted the conversation. Travelling through the new road, regional cinema, particularly the New Wave movements, has proven that nuanced, female-centric storytelling can be commercially and critically successful. This liberation is an indication of coming out of the box to explore a world full of adventure and opportunities to identify their true selves. The bold, complex, and intersectional voices of the page become the norm, not the exception, on the screen.

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TRAGEDY REIMAGINED : CINEMATIC RETELLING OF HAMLET IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's tragedies have long functioned as cultural myths, continually adapted and reimagined across time and space. Among their many cinematic afterlives, Vishal Bhardwaj's *Haider* (2014) stands out as a powerful retelling of *Hamlet* within the fraught political landscape of insurgency-torn Kashmir. More than a straightforward adaptation, *Haider* transforms Shakespeare's narrative of revenge, betrayal, and existential conflict into a contemporary tragedy that resonates with the anxieties of modern India.

This paper examines how *Haider* preserves the mythic essence of Shakespearean tragedy while reconfiguring it through local histories and political realities. Drawing on Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation and Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism, the analysis highlights the enduring relevance of *Hamlet*'s archetype—the anguished son torn between duty and morality—in a setting shaped by violence, militarization, and loss. The paper also considers how Bhardwaj's film humanizes and reshapes Shakespeare's characters: *Haider* as the archetypal tragic hero whose madness becomes political critique, *Ghazala* as a complex reworking of *Gertrude*, and *Arshia* as a fragile yet resistant *Ophelia*.

By situating Shakespeare's universal myth within the specificity of Kashmir, *Haider* demonstrates how cinema can breathe new life into canonical texts, making them urgent commentaries on identity, violence, and resistance. The film not only affirms the timelessness of Shakespearean tragedy but also proves the transformative power of adaptation to bridge cultural boundaries and voice contemporary concerns.

Keywords: *Archetypal criticism, Historiographic meta fiction, mythic retelling*

INTRODUCTION

Few writers have achieved the adaptability of William Shakespeare, whose plays have been reimagined across centuries, languages, and media. In cinema, Shakespeare has become a global presence, finding voice in contexts far removed from Renaissance England. Vishal Bhardwaj's trilogy of Shakespearean adaptations—*Maqbool* (*Macbeth*), *Omkara* (*Othello*), and *Haider* (*Hamlet*)—represents one of the most acclaimed attempts to translate Shakespeare into the idioms of contemporary India. Of these, *Haider* (2014), co-written with Basharat Peer, remains the most politically charged, relocating the drama of *Hamlet*'s grief and revenge to Kashmir in the 1990s, a region scarred by militancy and state violence.

This paper seeks to read *Haider* through two intersecting theoretical frameworks. First, Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* reminds us that adaptations are not derivative but autonomous works, reshaping prior narratives to address new audiences and contexts. Second, Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism highlights the underlying mythic patterns of tragedy, where characters and

settings assume symbolic significance. By applying these approaches, the paper demonstrates how Haider is both an intertextual dialogue with Hamlet and a mythic retelling of timeless archetypes within the political landscape of Kashmir.

Hamlet and the Archetype of Tragedy

Shakespeare's Hamlet is the paradigmatic revenge tragedy, centered on the archetypal figure of the avenging son. In Frye's model of the "mythos of tragedy," the hero is ensnared by cycles of vengeance, betrayal, and inevitable downfall. The play resonates with archetypal images: the ghost as the return of the repressed past, the corrupt court as a diseased body politic, the mad prince as truth-teller. Hamlet's indecision, oscillating between action and hesitation, becomes emblematic of the tragic condition itself.

Jungian psychology further enriches this reading: Hamlet's descent into madness and confrontation with mortality dramatize archetypal encounters with the shadow, death, and the collective unconscious. These patterns allow the play to transcend its original setting, becoming a universal myth of grief, revenge, and moral ambiguity.

Haider as Adaptation

In Haider, Bhardwaj transposes this tragic framework into the troubled landscape of Kashmir. Haider (Shahid Kapoor) returns to find his father "disappeared" after being detained by the Indian army. His mother Ghazala (Tabu) has grown close to Khurram (Kay Kay Menon), his father's brother. The narrative parallels Hamlet, but the setting amplifies its tragic stakes: instead of a royal court, the corruption is political and systemic, implicating the machinery of state power.

Hutcheon's theory of adaptation emphasizes that adaptations are not about fidelity but reinterpretation. Haider exemplifies this principle: while it retains key characters and plotlines, it transforms soliloquies into musical sequences, ghosts into silences, and Denmark into Kashmir. For instance, the famous "To be or not to be" soliloquy becomes the song "Bismil," staged in ruins—a performance that blends Shakespearean introspection with Kashmiri cultural forms. Similarly, the graveyard scene echoes Hamlet's meditation on mortality but in a distinctly Kashmiri idiom.

Most significantly, Bhardwaj alters the ending. Instead of completing the cycle of revenge, Haider refrains from killing Khurram. This departure from the archetypal tragic closure suggests an ethical refusal of vengeance, reconfiguring Hamlet's myth into a plea for peace in a context of unending violence.

Archetypal Patterns in Haider

The Avenging Son

Haider, like Hamlet, embodies the archetype of the son compelled to avenge his father. Yet, his journey is complicated by the collective trauma of Kashmir—his personal grief merges with the suffering of countless others whose fathers, brothers, and sons have vanished. The archetype expands from an individual's quest to a community's struggle.

The Ambivalent Mother

Ghazala is perhaps Bhardwaj's most radical reinterpretation. Unlike Shakespeare's Gertrude, she

is given agency, desire, and interiority. Archetypally, she reflects Jung's "Great Mother"—both nurturing and destructive. Her choices destabilize Haider's identity, and her eventual death cements her as the tragic center of the narrative.

The Wasteland

Frye describes tragic settings as wastelands—sterile, ruined landscapes where human corruption is mirrored in nature. Bhardwaj visualizes this archetype through Kashmir's snow-covered ruins, graveyards, and abandoned homes. The landscape itself becomes a character, embodying loss and desolation.

Madness as Archetype

Haider's public outbursts and erratic behavior mirror the archetype of the madman as prophet. His madness, whether feigned or real, becomes a vehicle of truth-telling—exposing both family betrayal and political violence.

Politics of Retelling

By situating Hamlet's archetypal story in Kashmir, Haider engages with both myth and history. It is not merely a cultural translation but a political intervention. The archetype of revenge becomes a metaphor for cycles of violence in Kashmir; the archetype of the wasteland reflects the devastation of a militarized zone; the archetype of the avenging son is redefined when Haider chooses restraint over vengeance.

In doing so, Haider challenges the tragic inevitability of Shakespeare's ending. Instead of affirming the myth of revenge, it interrupts it, suggesting that true resolution lies not in death but in the refusal to perpetuate violence.

CONCLUSION

Haider is both faithful and transformative: it retains the tragic essence of Hamlet while reframing it through Kashmiri politics and archetypal imagery. Using Hutcheon's adaptation theory, we can see it as an autonomous work that creatively reinterprets Shakespeare for a new audience. Through Frye's archetypal lens, we recognize how Haider taps into universal patterns of tragedy—the avenging son, the ambivalent mother, the wasteland landscape—while also subverting them to resist cycles of revenge.

In this fusion of adaptation and archetype, Haider demonstrates how timeless myths are continually reborn, acquiring new urgency in the face of contemporary realities. It is at once a Shakespearean tragedy, a Kashmiri allegory, and a universal myth of grief, madness, and resistance.

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CINEMATIC RESISTANCE IN *THE NIGHTINGALE* AND *PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN*: CHALLENGING NORMS AND EXPOSING VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of cinematic resistance through a comparative analysis of *The Nightingale* (2018) directed by Jennifer Kent and *Promising Young Woman* (2020) directed by Emerald Fennell. *The Nightingale* situates its resistance within a colonial and racialized landscape, exposing the brutal intersection of imperialism and misogyny. *Promising Young Woman* employs subversive aesthetics and genre-bending techniques to critique contemporary rape culture and systemic complicity. Together, these films demonstrate how cinema can serve as a form of resistance, not only by exposing entrenched violence but also by reshaping the audience's understanding of justice and accountability. This study situates both works within feminist film theory and postcolonial critique, emphasizing their role in redefining how violence and resistance are represented on screen.

Keywords: *Cinematic Resistance, Gendered Violence, Feminist Film Theory, Patriarchy, Justice*

INTRODUCTION

Cinema has historically served as a platform for both resistance and amusement. Movies have the power to subvert cultural clichés, question prevailing beliefs, and elevate under represented voices. Filmmakers have been using the screen as a platform for feminist intervention more and more in recent years, challenging how women are portrayed in movies and the structural violence they face. *The Nightingale* (2018) by Jennifer Kent and *Promising Young Woman* (2020) by Emerald Fennell are two notable examples of cinematic resistance.

The Nightingale is a 2018 Australian historical psychological thriller film written and directed by Jennifer Kent, set in colonial Tasmania, explores the intersection of imperialism, gender, and race through the brutal story of Clare, an Irish convict seeking justice after being subjected to sexual violence by British soldiers. The film refuses to whitewash or glorify violence, instead confronting spectators with its raw and disturbing facts. Kent demonstrates how resistance must be viewed via various axes of power by combining women's oppression with colonial cruelty. In contrast, Emerald Fennell's feature directorial debut, *Promising Young Woman*, was written, directed, and co-produced in 2020. Its critique is set in the modern day, negotiating the landscape of rape culture, systemic complicity, and institutional failures of justice. The film challenges preconceptions of the "rape-revenge" genre by following Cassie, a woman who resists predatory males and the mechanisms that protect them. Its acute use of irony, black comedy, and color-coded aesthetics disrupts traditional storytelling, compelling us to reexamine our ideas about justice and closure.

By upending established narrative patterns, elevating marginalized voices, and redefining the possibilities of justice on screen, these films collectively demonstrate how cinema can challenge deeply ingrained systems of violence. The audience's need for catharsis is resisted in both films.

Instead of bringing about victorious retribution, they leave behind unresolved trauma. Cassie's passing highlights the futility of individual resistance to institutional brutality, and Clare's grief endures. The films subvert the conventional expectation of narrative resolution by refusing closure, substituting discomfort and introspection for satisfaction. "Representation is the politics of looking," as Bell Hooks reminds us (*Black Looks: Race and Representation*). These pieces challenge the way women are viewed, remembered, and retaliated against in movies in addition to their substance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative comparative film analysis, focusing on textual, thematic, and theoretical readings of *The Nightingale* and *Promising Young Woman*. Using feminist film theory (particularly Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze") and postcolonial critique, the films are examined for how they represent gender, violence, and justice. Narrative structure, visual aesthetics, and genre conventions are closely analyzed to determine how these cinematic techniques embody resistance. The methodology prioritizes interpretive analysis over audience reception, aiming to reveal how these films intervene in cultural narratives around violence and female agency.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this study is to demonstrate how these films serve as resistant texts, challenging narrative traditions and exposing systemic brutality. They demonstrate that cinema may resist by rejecting spectacle, reinventing justice, and upsetting audiences rather than soothing them. Both films satirize the rape-revenge trope. Traditionally, this genre has used women's suffering as a justification for dramatic violence or male-driven retribution. Both *The Nightingale* and *Promising Young Woman* are marked by a deliberate rejection of conventional cinematic rules, notably those associated with the revenge genre. These films challenge profoundly rooted patriarchal assumptions about how violence is depicted, who has the right to speak, and what justice entails. Rather than rewarding the viewer with typical storylines of revenge or redemption, Kent and Fennell focus on trauma, culpability, and discomfort. In doing so, they build cinematic resistance: films that not only convey stories but actively undermine the representational institutions that have traditionally silenced or objectified women.

The Nightingale most directly disrupts standards by refusing to aestheticize violence. From the start, the picture avoids the common cinematic vocabulary of the rape-revenge story, in which trauma is frequently utilized as a plot device leading to violent catharsis. Instead, Kent depicts Clare's anguish in unvarnished detail, free of stylization or voyeurism. The camera does not linger to eroticize or cut away to soften. This stylistic choice contradicts Laura Mulvey's argument in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which states that mainstream cinema frequently caters to the "male gaze," portraying women as passive objects of desire. "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 11); hence, By declining to present Clare as a fantasy object, Kent recovers female subjectivity from conventional film exploitation.

Additionally, the movie reveals the multi-layered horrors of colonial patriarchy. Billy's racial oppression and Clare's gendered subjugation are inextricably linked as both characters deal with

the cruelty of British imperial authority. This intersectional framing subverts cinematic conventions that frequently separate women's problems from more general racial or historical backgrounds. Here, Kent shows how patriarchy and empire feed off one another by situating gendered violence within the framework of structural authority. By doing this, the movie avoids oversimplified portrayals of victimization and instead emphasizes structural criticism, transforming cinema into a site of historical resistance. Additionally, its aesthetic language is infused with cinematic resistance. The movie defies the dominant cinematic rhythm, which aims to pace trauma for viewer comfort, with its use of quiet, unadulterated natural surroundings, and extended, continuous takes. The audience is forced to watch violence unfold while feeling uneasy and unable to leave. By defying cinematic norms, watching becomes an ethical act in which viewers are forced to face the lingering effects of past violence rather than merely enjoying the narrative. By shifting the focus away from voyeuristic enjoyment and toward empathy and responsibility, Kent subverts the very conventions of movie viewing.

On the other hand, *Promising Young Woman* uses subversion and sarcasm to resist. Fennell uses the aesthetics of romantic comedy and pop culture to cover up a terrible indictment of rape culture. The story's serious tone is starkly contrasted with a surface of lightness created by the pastel color scheme, lively pop soundtrack, and clever dialogue. Sexual violence is typically framed as either brutal reality or melodrama, but this aesthetic dissonance defies convention. Instead, Fennell demonstrates how, hidden behind charm, comedy, and denial, rape culture flourishes beneath the surface of everyday normalcy. The movie challenges the societal tendency to downplay violence against women by disturbing basic expectations. Additionally, Cassie's fictitious meetings with predatory males reveal accepted patterns of violence. By feigning intoxication and then confronting guys who try to use her, she exposes behaviors that are frequently written off as normal or innocuous. By bringing attention to the ways that predation is accepted, justified, and encouraged, these encounters challenge the invisible nature of rape culture. Additionally, Fennell mobilizes that politics by bringing to light things that society would rather keep buried. Exposure provides resistance in this situation, making what is typically invisible or disregarded indisputable.

So *The Nightingale* and *Promising Young Woman* deprive us of the satisfaction of cathartic conclusion. Cassie's purpose comes to an end with her death, rather than triumphant revenge. Her sacrifice demonstrates patriarchy's systemic weight: one woman's resistance cannot shatter entrenched complicity institutions. However, the film concludes with exposure, the release of evidence, and the arrest of criminals. Fennell defies easy conclusion by renouncing both traditional vengeance and legal triumph, leaving spectators perplexed about the continuance of rape culture. This lack of closure defies cinematic and societal traditions that favor comfort over conflict. As a result, these films demonstrate cinematic resistance by rejecting spectacle, resisting closure, and demanding critical spectatorship. Kent challenges norms through realism and historical depth, whereas Fennell uses irony and genre subversion. They reveal violence as a systemic phenomenon, intertwined with patriarchy, colonialism, and institutional complicity. Their resistance is rooted not just in their storylines, but also in how they transform the act of viewing itself, pushing viewers beyond passive consumption and into introspection and discomfort.

These pieces introduce cultural conversation into the realm of cinematic resistance. In Australia, discussions concerning colonial history and the suppression of Indigenous suffering were

rekindled by the *Nightingale*. *Promising Young Woman* sparked diverse reactions regarding feminist ire, accountability, and complicity. Both films demonstrated that cinema can be used as a medium for both artistic expression and political activism by transcending the screen to challenge cultural narratives. These films pave the way for a reinvention of justice, representation, and social accountability by defying cultural and cinematic conventions.

CONCLUSION

The *Nightingale* and *Promising Young Woman* both show how movies may resist entrenched violence by breaking mainstream narratives, opposing patriarchal structures, and emphasizing women's agency. Their different approaches—historical realism in Kent's work and genre subversion in Fennell's—show that resistance may take many shapes in cinema.

By refusing to aestheticize violence or provide easy closure, these films force viewers to confront the ugly reality of gendered oppression. As resistance texts, they change how justice and survival might be envisaged on film, establishing cinema as a place of feminist and cultural reform. Finally, they remind us that film can be a tool for both contemplation and resistance—challenging norms, exposing brutality, and envisioning alternative futures.

Furthermore, these films are significant beyond their immediate narratives: they contribute to cultural discussions about accountability, justice, and institutional reform. As a result, they serve as more than just films; they are acts of cultural criticism and activism. The *Nightingale* and *Promising Young Woman* illustrate the power of cinema to fight not just via representation, but also by influencing public perception.

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