A HISTORY OF MALAYALAM HORROR CINEMA AND THE USE OF CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY

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Abstract

The research provides an introduction to Malayalam horror cinema. Malayalam is the language spoken at the region of Kerala located on the south western part of India. The Malayalam horror genre uses narratives that are closely connected with religion. In this doctoral thesis I discuss the use of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror cinema.

This thesis analysed various Malayalam horror films portraying elements of Christian imagery and show how Christianity in Kerala is othered using the horror genre. I argued that the shifts in south Indian society and Indian politics over the past three decades are to blame for the rise of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror films and the alterations in how Christianity is viewed. Christianity has historically served as a haven from Hindutva's restrictions and caste, religion, class and gender-based oppression in India. As a result, Christianity is frequently both positively and adversely associated with moderate libertarianism regarding women and class in Indian films.

Chapter 3 addresses the questions I aimed to answer for this research that is, the Indian political repression that othered the Christian community and its influence on Malayalam cinema using the horror genre. I used film analysis techniques within mis-en-scene, dialogue, cinematography, sound, editing, costumes, characters and the making of selected films to demonstrate how Christianity is consistently positioned as the 'other.'

The Malayalam film industry have significantly changed due to various reasons that will be elaborated in the thesis, some being associated with the western film making culture and practices. This thesis demonstrated inspirations used by Malayalam film makers by comparison and assessment of different films in Hollywood. The practical output I produced would provide the reader with information on important elements that constitute Malayalam horror cinema and its significance within the Malayalam film industry.

Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Illustrations

Table of Video Information

1. The Historical and Political Context of India in Malayalam Horror Films

   (Video Part 3, 10:00min-15:17min)

2. Caste System and Christian Repression

   (Video Part, 3:40min- 07:27min)

3. Christianity in Kerala

   (Video Part 1, 08:40min-14:00min)

4. Portrayal of Anglo-Indians in Malayalam Cinema

   (Video Part 3, 11:16min-12:45min)

5. Representation of Christianity in Malayalam Horror Cinema

   (Video Part 1, 04:30min-08:38min)

6. Christian Iconography in Malayalam Horror Films- Analysis

   a. *Devadoothan*/*Messenger of God* (2000)

      (Video Part 2, 01:55min-09:00min)

   b. *Meghasandesham*/*A Journey Through the Clouds* (2001)

      (Video Part 2, 09:10min-13:36min)

   c. *In Ghost House Inn* (2010)

      (Video Part 2, 13:30min-16:43min)

   d. *The Priest* (2021)

      (Video Part 2, 16:44min-19:25min)

7. Repression of Christianity

   (Video Part 3, 00:00min-03:40min)

Introduction

Popular Malayalam cinema originated in the state of Kerala, a south-western region of India. The language spoken in Kerala is 'Malayalam'. Film genres, for example, drama, romance, action and science fiction, evolved in Kerala over several decades from 1940 till the present. In horror film production, prominent filmmakers include: Aloysius Vincent, Dennis Joseph, Sheela, Kamal, Vinayan, Fazil and, more recently, Prithviraj Sukumaran, Aashique Abu, Ranjith Shankar, Jofin Chacko and Jenuse Mohammad. These latter filmmakers introduced new narrative structures and elements, such as exorcism, ouija boards and parapsychology, that were influences from Western films, with the aim of further enriching the cinematic experience. However, transplanting these elements, which originate from a culture where Christianity is the norm and the majority religion, becomes complicated when presented in the context of Malayalam cinema, the product of a society where Christianity is a minority religion that is often positioned as a marginalised 'other'.

The most significant element specific to Malayalam horror cinema has been the enduring character of the *Yakshi,* (Video Part 1- 00:00min-03:00min) a fictitious character who possesses extraordinary and supernatural abilities. Women come back to life as invincible, unconquerable Yakshis. They are unaffected by earth, water or fire since they are subtle entities without corporeal bodies. They have no need for sleep or rest like humans do because there is no physical body. Yakshis continuously indulge in either causing trouble for others, giving in to their cravings or engaging in spiritual practise to get energy. They can enter any space at any moment since they are both invisible and immaterial (Thafseera, 2018, p.5). Aiyappan and Stephens observe that:

> Horror trauma reinstates the relevance of reading the *Yakshi* myth within the sphere of Malayalam cinema, Kerala culture, and its social structure. Intriguing as it may seem, the *Yakshi* as an iconic representation reign over every Malayalee's cultural

consciousness, which this cinema repeatedly projects to the extent of inflicting "cultural trauma." Exploring this cultural icon inevitably necessitates an understanding of the positioning of *Yakshi* in Malayalam horror cinema across time, engendering several permutations and combinations such as horror-comedies. (Aiyappan & Stephens, 2022, p.5)

However, to date only a few publications have discussed how *Yakshi* are represented in Malayalam horror films. The character of the *Yakshi* and its cultural significance in Malayalam horror cinema is therefore discussed in depth in this thesis.

The evolution of Malayalam horror cinema since its inception, beginning with Aloysius Vincent's film *Bhargvai Nilayam* (1964), and up to the recent film *The Priest* (Jofin T Chacko, 2021), is explored through the representation of religion, specifically Christianity, in these and other selected films. The reason I began to carry out this research is because I am a filmmaker, raised as a Christian in the region of Kerala, where Christians are in a minority. The central purpose of my research is to explore and analyse the use of Christian religious iconography in Malayalam horror cinema. Specifically, I aim to address these questions:

1. What is the production history of horror films made in Kerala and what is the position of these films within the local film industry?

2. What are the styles, techniques and strategies that filmmakers use in Malayalam horror films and for what purpose?

3. What are the sources for the use of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror films and what is the historical and film-industrial context of these stories?

4. How do Malayalam horror films relate to the history of Christianity in Kerala and its connections to colonialism and nationalism?

I argue in the thesis that the increase in Christian iconography in Malayalam horror cinema, and the changes in the way Christianity is perceived, are due to the changes that took place in South Indian society and Indian politics over the last 20 to 30 years. Historically, since the 1910s at least, Christianity in India has functioned as a place of refuge from the strictures

and classist and gender oppression of Hinduism (casteism and misogyny in particular). In Indian cinema, Christianity is accordingly often associated with moderate libertarianism - about women and class - both positively and negatively.

I argue that the increased use of Christian subjects and iconography in Malayalam horror films is linked to (a) the rise of Hindutva and Hindu fundamentalism across India over the last 20/30 years, and the explicit victimisation (and assaults) by Hinduists of Christians in South India; and (b) the increasing popularity of horror films across Indian cinema, where Christianity also functions as a spectacular sales-point. Christian references include, for example, crosses, angelology, songs, metaphors, Biblical references and Ecclesiastical Architecture. My analysis of the films in the written thesis examines in detail the modalities and functions of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror films and advances arguments about possible connections between those generic changes and the historical contexts which the films address.

The Hindu nationalist movement has made use of these resources and attempted to form several support networks. The establishment of such strong transnational public forums is intended to strengthen the Hindutva movement's support globally, including through political advocacy and financial backing for their domestically based activities in India, even though the primary focus remains on the development of the Hindutva public sphere and public at the national level. The movement depends on the Hindutva public sphere both domestically and internationally, as it provides intellectual backing and facilitates the development of the Hindutva public. News television frequently serves as a forum, a public realm, and a channel for the dissemination of information that aids in the development of a public sphere. I have showcased caste discrimination and abuse to Christian in India through news clips in Video Part 3, (00:00min-10:03min).

Alex Roji raises questions about the role news media has played in escalating intercommunal strife in a multifaith and multilingual country which, despite recent strong economic growth, continues to be one of the most unequal societies on the planet, divided through caste, creed and class; these issues have received relatively little attention within India. Similarly, film is a medium that can portray news in a more cinematic way. Malayalam filmmakers have taken issues related to caste, gender and religion and made films dramatically to portray news in an entertaining way.

The thesis contextualises the Hindutva effect in Malayalam horror cinema which proves the factor of Christianity being 'other' after a brief study on the origin and growth of Christianity in Kerala. The historical changes in India which influence Malayalam cinema narratives with circumstances of India post-independence, Hindutva and it's rise, the socio-political changes in Malayalam cinema. This will be studied in relation to Christianity, how India's caste system, gender and political challenges navigate the repression of Christianity. Through these elements of caste, gender, politics and religion, will be a support to explain the wave of new generation Malayalam films. Thus, a connection to Christianity between caste, gender, politics and religion within the discussed Malayalam horror films can be recognised and established.

In Chapter 1, I discuss and review literature in the areas related to representations of the 'other' in horror cinema, and previous studies of Malayalam horror films. Studies of Malayalam horror have accelerated over the past six years, due to the increase in production of prominent Malayalam horror films such as *Ezra* (Jayakrishnan, 2017), *Nine* (Januse Mohammed Majeed, 2019) and *The Priest* (Jofin T Chacko, 2021), which, as I have said above, are inspired by Western filmmaking styles and techniques but applied in their own specific cultural context.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I use a chronological division by decade (pre- and post-2000) to examine changes in trends, events and the growth of filmmaking over time that can be explored alongside the rise of Christian iconography, in order to chart some of the reasons for this increase. I will analyse mis-en-scene, dialogue, cinematography, sound, editing, costumes, characters and the making of selected films to demonstrate how Christianity is consistently positioned as the 'other.' In the conclusion, I will summarise the findings of my thesis and include ideas for future research on Christian iconography in Malayalam horror cinema.

Video Clips

Prior to reading the thesis, the videos provide a significant source of information, helping the reader better comprehend Malayalam Horror Cinema and its use of Christian iconography. The thesis video is divided into three parts, with each prompting the spectator to answer particular questions that support the textual thesis and add to a more complete reading experience. Part 1 delves at different aspects of Malayalam horror cinema, such as the portrayal of disadvantaged individuals, the use of Christian imagery, the history of Christianity in Kerala, and the ingredients utilised to show Christianity.

After seeing Part 1, viewers are urged to read Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis. Part 2 delves into the evolution of Malayalam horror cinema after 2000, studying the rise of the Malayalam film industry, changes in film plots, and providing brief introductions to important films like as Devadoothan (2000), Meghasandesham (2002), In Ghost House Inn (2010), and The Priest (2021). Finally, Part 3 discusses Christian abuse in India and caste discrimination, shedding light on topics such as the caste system in India, Christian abuse, discrimination among different caste and religious communities, the use of film as a medium to spread discrimination and hatred, and the use of the horror genre to evoke fear and otherness toward Christianity in Malayalam films. These accompanying films are given to help with the analysis of the films addressed in the thesis. The selected horror films for viewing generally represent upper-class

Brahmin Hindus, Anglo-Indians, Roman Catholics and Syrian Christians. My personal denomination is derived from the Anglican and Western Missionary system, namely the Church of South India, South Kerala Diocese.

In the video clips I explore, through my voice-over, interviews and archive footage, how Malayalam Horror films are related to the cultural context and notion of the repressed or the 'other'. I selected films, such as *Devadoothan* (2000), *Meghasandesham* (2001) and *In Ghost House Inn* (2010), that integrate particular Christian themes and iconography. Growing up in a country with a Christian minority that was dominated by political bodies misusing the concept of religion for their own benefit has its disadvantages. My memories and encounters are connected with Horror films where I found an escape from the prejudice I encountered when identifying as a minority.

1. Literature review

Indian Cinema comprises of not only Bollywood (Hindi cinema), but comprises of multiple film industries predominantly divided due to language and geographical reasons that are caused because of various cultures and traditions. Apart from a small number of Hindi horror films, most horror films made in other languages, such as Malayalam, Marathi, and Bangla, have mostly featured actors, producers, and directors who are not part of the mainstream. (Dhusiya, pg.2) The main industries are Bollywood (Hindi cinema) which covers most of northern India and there is Tollywood (Telugu cinema), Sandalwood (Kannada cinema), Kollywood (Tamil cinema) and Mollywood (Malayalam cinema). The horror genre was introduced to Indian cinema via Bollywood with the release of *Mahal* (Kamal Amrohi, 1949). Popular horror film scholars in India cinema include Meheli Sen (2017), Dr Omar Ahmed (2018), Mithuraaj Dhusiya (2018), Valentina Vitali (2016) and Shakuntala Banaji (2014) to name a few.

Malayalam horror films adapts narratives within the geographical boundaries of Kerala. Its folklores, traditions, community, and beliefs are predominantly Hindu based, including rebirth, afterlife ghosts, revenge plots and other similarites to Hindi horror but are scripted and presented in the Malayalam language. The Malayalam language is substantially different in terms of text and vocabulary when compared to Hindi, which is largely used in Bollywood cinema. Bollywood's horror genre acknowledges that it has taken many cues from Hollywood's horror genre. The horror genre in Bollywood employs several methods to operationalise ghosts or monsters, including as rebirth or reincarnation, illicit killing, non-performance of last cremation procedures, and disregard for tradition. Ghosts are the afterlife ghosts of people who pass away from unusual causes and come back to exact revenge. Malayalam horror cinema explores religion and gender through the portrayal of ghosts,

monsters and evil spirits as seen in *Yakshi* (K S Sethumadhavan, 1968)*, Lisa* (Baby, 1978)*,*

Karimpoocha (Baby, 1987) and other films analysed in this thesis.

Generally speaking, the majority of Bollywood horror films depict an idyllic, tranquil

setting that is disturbed by an unexplained death, either a suicide or a murder, resulting in an

initially undetectable demonic incursion. Nevertheless, in Bollywood horror films, Sen notes

other academics for their oversimplification when blaming the altered method of driving out

the evil spirit through exorcism; specifically, the use of Hindu mantras and incantations; on a

single, identifiable ideology, Hindutva. Sen points out the use of Hindutva in Bollywood

films and how religious literature is used within these films,

> Scholars have read this sequence as indicative of Bollywood's more general
> capitulation to Hindutva, a process that began well before the millennial turn. And
> certainly, much has changed for the Hindi horror film since the Ramsay horror
> monster had to be vanquished with Gitas, Korans, Bibles, and assorted religious
> talismans ranging from the trident to the crucifix. (Sen,2017, p.109)

Hindi horror film climaxes frequently use religious rites and accoutrements to vanquish

otherworldly evil powers. As a result, even though they are in the horror category, horror

films frequently address faith and belief. Hindu religious themes are explored in Bollywood

horror films, which sit at the nexus of myth, ideology, and popular socio-religious thought.

The Ramsay brothers' Bollywood horror films showcased Christian themes and imagery such

as cemeteries, crosses, and churches, which can also be seen in Malayalam horror films, such

as *Meghasandesham* (2002) and *In Ghost house Inn* (2010). Evil spirits are exorcised by

Biblical liturgy, crosses, angelology and churches, aiming to portray Christian iconography as

the other.

K.F. Sudha argues that the progressive nature of Malayalam cinema has always been at

the forefront when writing about popular culture in the state. Although melodrama primarily

governs the narratives, Sudha explores the concept of progressive cinema as an ideal in

Malayalam films, due to their use of realism and modernity. The 1950s to 1970s was a time when many works of progressive literature were adapted into films, and many of the writers, directors, screenwriters, lyricists and music directors were members of the Communist Party or associated with its cultural movements, such as the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) (Sudha K. F, 2015, p.76). The portrayal of gender in Malayalam horror films also gained increasing attention during this time. In horror, the narratives mostly revolve around the concept of the *Yakshi*, a female ghost, who is portrayed as murderous, hostile and motivated by revenge.

Generally, these films have rape-revenge at the heart of their narratives. The female's vengeful nature and unfulfilled desire is a core narrative element in films such as *Yaakshanaganam* (Sheela, 1976)*, Karimpoocha* (Baby, 1981)*, Meghasandesham* (Rajasenan, 2001) and *Aakashaganga* (Vinayan, 1999).   Most literature on Malayalam cinema concentrates on melodrama and the female devotion narrative of worshipping goddesses that revolve around Hinduism, and while these *Yakshi* films do incorporate melodrama, music, comedy, romance and action tropes, the relationship between society and women in Malayalam horror films has rarely been covered in existing literature.

Over time though, the *Yakshi* rape-revenge narrative has decreased, as young Malayalam filmmakers have begun experimenting with different types of narratives, including new paranormal concepts such as black magic, sorcery, ouija boards, parapsychology and fantasy horror. Studies by Ayushi Jagdish Karande, Shahbaz, Rakhsi Sharma, Deepa, and Niharika Lal, show that youth are now more accepting of Western-themed horror films in India.

The Western influence has led to an increase in Christian imagery in Malayalam horror films, but it is used in the context of a culture where Christians are a minority, not a majority.

This thesis explores how the use of Christianity is represented differently in Malayalam horror films to Western films, depicting Christianity as 'other', as a source of fear or ridicule.

Malayalam horror films are not simple adaptations of horror stories produced by other film industries. Many are based on poems, short stories, novels and literature that revolves around the political context of Kerala. Later these evolved into narratives based on traditional stories, folklore, myths and superstitious beliefs. As time passed, narratives started to focus on the Christian religion, and there was a rise in the use of Christian iconography.

Before examining further the history of Malayalam horror cinema, I will review the concepts I use to position Christianity as an 'other' in Malayalam cinema and society and I will examine previous studies of the 'other' in horror and the concept of The Return of the Repressed.

1.1. Representations of the Repressed/'other' in Malayalam Horror Films

'The Return of the Repressed' is a Freudian term that explains how repressed unconscious feelings and impulses often return in particular forms, such as in our dreams, in instances of slips of the tongue, and through art. Robin Wood demonstrated how the theory of the return of the repressed is present in horror cinema, arguing that:

> Commercial cinema has analogies with mass dreaming; in examining the evolution of a genre, one finds oneself studying the evolution of civilisation's unconscious; horror films are our collective nightmare (Wood, 2018, p.58)

Malayalam horror films often represent feelings and desires that are repressed in society, with the prevalence of scenes showing female sexuality through images of nudity and explicit scenes. These are intended to create fear and anxiety in the spectator, as seen in the prevalence of horror films about the female *Yakshi*.

Linked to repression is a concept onto which psychoanalysis throws much light: the concept of the 'other'. The concept of 'other'ness can be explored in scenes from Malayalam horror films where women (mainly from the Christian community) are physically abused,

raped, and sexualised in a way that signifies their exclusion from the social order. When they then come back from the dead and enact their revenge it is seen as a return of the repressed, as these women have now become monstrous objects to be feared. Vanquishing these monsters then restores the social order.

Wood outlines eight categories that are represented as the 'other' in horror films: "'other' people", "woman", "the proletariat", "'other' cultures", "ethnic groups within the culture", "alternative ideologies or political systems", "deviations from ideological sexual norms" and "children" (Wood, 2018, p.27). These categories will be used as a framework in my analysis to explore how they intersect with representations of Christianity in Malayalam horror films.

In order to explore gender used as 'other' in Malayalam horror cinema, the concept of abjection is used to analyse how women are represented as monstrous and 'other'. Julia Kristeva explains that abjection is the other aspect of religious, moral and intellectual rules that support people's ability to sleep and society's capacity to breathe. These norms are the suppression and purifying of abjection.

> The dramatic convulsions of religious crises, however, are unavoidable because of the re-emergence of their suppressed, which becomes our "apocalypse." The only thing that ultimately separates the reluctance to debate directly with the despised. Who aspires to be a prophet? Because we no longer believe in the One Master-Signifier…Nothing forbids a psychoanalyst from replacing a mystic. As much as their inherent perversion condemns them to mummifying transference in the development of mini-paranoids, if not just stereotyped vestments, psychoanalytic establishments seem even less suited to this. (Kristeva, 1982, p.209)

In the current Indian context, where there is more than one God and many religions, not everyone in India believes in the 'One Master Signifier'; this has led to chaotic confusion with communal fights, riots and protests among the Hindu, Islam and Christian people across India.

Barbara Creed argues convincingly that:

> The deadly femme castra trice, a female figure who appears in the discourses of myth, legend, religion, and art but whose image has been repressed in Freudian psychoanalytic theory largely because it challenges Freud's belief that man fears woman because she is castrated, is the avenging heroine of the slasher film rather than the Freudian phallic woman, whose image is designed to alleviate castration anxiety we encounter her mostly in pornography and film. (Creed, 1993, pp. 461-462)

In the majority of Malayalam horror films, the rape-revenge genre portrays men who are haunted and killed by the ghost of a woman who has been raped and murdered; the ghost seeks revenge through murder (castration). The ghosts in Malayalam horror films are known as *Yakshi*, similar to female vampires, which evolved through myths, folklore and religious beliefs in Kerala. (Video Part 1- 00:00s-3:00s) By examining how the Christian religion has been portrayed in the Indian context, starting in the 1970s (when Malayalam horror films started to use more sexual violence), we can see the gradual increase in Christian characters being placed as 'others', as either evil characters to be feared or as victims to be abused and exploited.

While Wood examines American horror films exclusively, I develop his ideas of the eight categories of the 'other' in my analysis of Malayalam horror films. This has not been done before. From this perspective, the figure of the *Yakshi* represents the violent repression of female sexuality and creativity, which then returns in a violent form. Likewise, I will use Wood's analysis to explore how Christians in Kerala have been othered in horror cinema, reflecting how this minority religion is marginalised within the broader Indian culture and society.

1.2. Structuralism and the Fantastic in Indian Horror Films

Tzvetan Todorov, in his 1975 book *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre,* argues that structural narrative analysis can be used in the criticism of fiction. Structuralism is a universal theory of culture and methodology which states that human culture must be understood in terms of its relationship to the larger systems of order that

establish social hierarchies. Todorov examines how these hierarchies are maintained in literature. According to Todorov, The Fantastic is a name given to a literary genre with a hesitation between belief and disbelief in the supernatural.

Todorov states that:

> The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the 'other', we leave the fantastic for a neighbouring genre, the uncanny or the marvellous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by someone who knows only the laws of nature confronting a supernatural event. (Todorov, 1975, p.25)

According to Todorov, the theory should enable us to see subdivisions and transitory sub-genre systems in the literature. The Fantastic sits between what Todorov calls the uncanny and the marvellous. The uncanny is strange but still familiar, so the supernatural is explained. The marvellous is when the supernatural occurs as an event that is immediately accepted. Thus, the analysis of this between-state of the fantastic will guide the reader to explore the inner dynamics of a story where there is an interconnection between poetry and allegory. This use of allegory within a state of uncertainty will be explored in the films I analyse to consider how this 'other' is done within the conventions of horror cinema, where the supernatural is coded as both Christian and negative.

In her article 'The Hindi horror films of the Ramsay Brothers', Valentina Vitali uses Todorov to explore the complexities inherent in the representation of religion and politics in Indian horror cinema. In analysing the works of the Ramsay Brothers, she concludes:

> Religious iconography and rituals play an important role in the Ramsay Brothers, especially Christian and Hindu iconography. On the one hand, the prominence of Christian iconography is connected to how Christianity reached India during the early stages (and, by the way) of colonialism. On the 'other' hand, it is also associated with notions of modernisation, at least to the extent that, from the mid-twentieth century, Christianity has been perceived in India as having opened spaces where more egalitarian discourses could circulate than had been the case with 'other', more Indigenous religions. (Vitali, 2016, p.116)

Ghostly entities were regarded as exceedingly frightening and strange creatures in mediaeval England. Because the diverse forms of spirits were recognised in mediaeval civilisation, there

was less of a dread of the supernatural. In contrast, supernatural beings profoundly alarmed society in the following centuries, particularly in the Victorian Era, which increased the number of dread stories (Antonio, 2020, p. 4). India was influenced by British colonialism and Victorian art, which comprised many paintings, sculptures and architecture with Christian religious iconography. Over time, Christians in India were influenced by the British Church's superstitious beliefs, such as witchcraft, supernatural elements and evil representation. These horrors were viewed with uncertainty by the Indian audience.

It is noted that Christian religious iconography is used as an ingredient in horror genre films in India in order to commercialise films at the box office. Vitali uses Todorov's theory of the Fantastic to understand the grammar of horror films by the Ramsay Brothers. It is observed that Ramsay Brothers films adopted iconography from both Indian cinema and British Hammer and U.S. Horror Classics. Thus, Christian iconography in Indian horror films demonstrates hybridity in religion and culture, where Christianity is 'other' and used as a sensational device.

1.3. The Historical and Political Context of India in Malayalam Horror Films
(Video Part 3 10:00min-15:17min)

An important moment in the history of India was the Mandal Commission report, which provided space for subaltern communities, such as Dalits and other tribal communities who were uneducated and socially oppressed, to express their views and voices. However, Hindutva forces emerged very powerfully by the beginning of the twentieth century, suppressing democratic values to a certain extent, and they continue to dictate the historical and political dimensions of the country.

The period of Emergency (1975-1977) was declared across India, giving the Prime Minister the power to rule by decree, and allowing for the cancellation of elections and the

suspension of civil liberties. Most of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's political opponents were imprisoned during the Emergency, and the press was controlled. Several other human rights breaches were recorded, including a vast forced sterilisation effort. The Emergency is one of the most controversial periods of independent India's history. Religious minorities experienced a sense of insecurity due to the political Emergency declared by the then-union government, which silenced many human rights voices.

In his 1995 book *India in a Changing World*, Achin Vanaik argued that India had encountered several political and historical trajectories both at the national and international levels. Vanaik argues that in order to explain political networks in a country like India it is mandatory to bring historical sociology, economics, political theory and social psychology into the forefront of discussion (Vanaik, 1995, pg. 3). India's trajectory after 1970 was not without its ups and downs, until the events of 1989 with the implementation of the Mandal Commission report. The Janata Party government, led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai, established the Mandel Commission, otherwise known as the Socially and Educationally Backward Classes Commission (SEBC), in 1979, with the goal of identifying the socially or educationally backward classes' of India (Bhattacharya, 2006). The conflicts and failures due to these political decisions created an atmosphere for right-wing parties to emerge, as Hindutva forces continued to dictate the historical and political dimensions of the country.

The concept of Hindutva uplifts Hinduism and is applied to all people across India, it thus focuses caste as part of a lifestyle within social relations. When this occurs, non-Hindus are stigmatised, as in India many people converted from Hinduism to Christianity and Buddhism to avoid this caste-based discrimination. Hinduism also degrades women in the name of caste, despite its religious sentiments of worshipping goddesses such as Lakshmi, Devi, Durga and Sita.

These gender and caste markers form the foundation and base of the *Yakshi* tale, which is found in Kerala. It is common for visitors to have encounters with supernatural or horrific beings in Indian epics and folktales. Whether it is in stories like the *Yakshaprasna* in the Mahabharata, the Bodhisatta's encounter with the Naga and the Yaksha in Buddhist legends, or his encounter with *Yakshi* in the Jataka tales, travel frequently involved coming across the dangerous 'other' who had to be subdued/satiated/converted. These early traveller's tales can be interpreted as records of the worries surrounding the establishment/expansion of the Kshatriya hero's kingdom, where it was necessary to subdue/appropriate the wild/primitive outside of civilization. The social structure in Malayalam, the previous name for Kerala, was based on the principle of *janmabhedam* (difference by birth), according to which a person's social standing was determined by their place of birth within the social hierarchy.

Castes or *jatis* were arranged hierarchically with little to no individual mobility between them. It was a system in which the *jatis* at the top of the hierarchy persistently extracted external marks of cooperation from the lower *jatis*. The *namboothiris* or Kerala Brahmins, who served as both a landowning aristocracy and a religious elite, made up the caste at the top of the hierarchy. Only the eldest son, known as the *moos*, was permitted to marry within his own caste under the peculiar primogeniture system used by the *Namboothiri* family. The women of the *Namboothiri* group, known as *antarjanams* (inner-people), were required to practise strict isolation and wear a *putappu* (cloak) and carry a *kuta* (huge cadjan umbrella) when they were outside their homes. The younger males in the *namboothiri* household were required to look for marriage partnerships, or *sambandham*, with women from the matrilineal kshatriya castes, as well as from the sudra castes like the *nairs* or the *ambalavasis* (Meenu,2020, p.333). The *namboothiris*, however, believed that these ties went

beyond the scope of kinship. This is not by chance, as it is hard to discuss caste and gender separately in Kerala's pre-colonial society.

In the case of the religious hero, the monster symbolised a crisis of faith; either he or she was a personification of the temptations of worldly pleasure that the ascetic had to avoid, or he or she was a fervent follower of a different faith who had to be persuaded to accept or be conquered. The *Yakshi* tales of mediaeval Kerala, where a shape-shifting tree spirit haunts deserted pathways, recall recollections of the old traveller's experience with the wilderness and its matching deities, bringing all these forgotten traditions of travel together.

In Malayalam horror films made before 2000, the use of a historical and political context does not lie in the dominant rationalist, positivist notions that attempt to explain away the mysterious or the fantastic, nor does it lie in the constant pursuit of the uncanny, but rather in the aim to develop a radically different world-view that envisions legitimate spaces for the excesses and energies of faith, fantasy and sensual desires. For example, *Lisa* (Baby, 1978) shows Christian girls from Kerala objectified by the community, this shows the influence of the historical event of colonialism from the Western countries which will be discussed in Chapter 2.

In Malayalam cinema, filmmakers adapted novels as a ready source in order to address and capitalise on the desires of a large population, who were dissatisfied with scientific and social modernisation, the nation-state or communism; these films nonetheless had fantasies of social transformation, particularly against the forces that suppressed the expression of physical desires and feelings, with films like *Avarude Ravukal* (I V Sasi, 1978) and *Chatakari* (K S Sethumadavan, 1974) that have showcased soft pornography using girls from the Christian community. This use of nudity has also been incorporated in many

Malayalam horror films pre-2000, such as *Lisa* (Baby, 1978)*, Veendum Lisa* (Baby, 1987)*,*

Aadharvam (Dennis Joseph, 1989) and *Sree Krishna Parunthu* (A Vincent, 1984).

Globalisation also played a key role, along with Indian foreign policy, in developing

Hindu nationalism. Vivek Chibber analyses India's situation from a post-colonial viewpoint

regarding India's changing situation and relationship with the international order, such as the

rise of Christianity in Hindu-dominated areas. In the same way, Christian iconography

depicted in Indian films has changed to reflect these social and historical events. Vanaik

argues convincingly that the emergence of Hindutva forces has oppressed minority religions,

specifically Christian religions, in many ways, including the suppression of ritual practices,

festivals and proclamations of faith. Chibber points out that movements of populations in

India and global political decisions are connected to this oppression. Alex Roji claims that:

> The exploitation of religion for political interests and power has caused intensification
> of communal violence over the last three decades. The rise of Hindutva has
> intimidated and ghettoised minorities. Minority religions are demonised to justify the
> communal violence committed against them over the years.' (Roji, 2015, p.16)

Roji observes that the media supports Hindutva in its attempt to suppress minorities,

especially Christianity, through their descriptions of the Christian community as foreign and

anti-national. This same rhetoric can be seen in depictions of Christians in Indian cinema, as I

will explore within the context of Malayalam horror films. Roji found that during the

communal violence following the assassination of Laxmananda Saraswati, a Hindutva leader,

scores of Christians were killed and hundreds became homeless. Attempts were made to

make the Christian minority the 'other' and the 'enemy within'. Violence against them is

considered patriotic, reasonable and a legitimate nationalist response to past colonial

atrocities (Roji, 2015, p.35). Thus, political changes in India eventually impacted on religious

identity, and I would argue that this is reflected in Malayalam horror films.

1.4. Caste System and Christian Repression

(Video Part 3, 3:40min- 07:27min)

In this section I explore the current status of marginalised groups, particularly the Dalits and other minorities. The caste system has historically defined social respectability. Nicholas Dirk, in his 2001 book, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India,* describes how the caste system in India is connected to religious movements. The main geographical areas that saw a conversion to Christianity were south India and north east India (Vinayaraj, 2000, p.8). Many Dalits and tribals converted from Hinduism to embrace Christianity in order to escape caste-based discrimination by upper caste Hindus. Low class people were able to secure a place in the Christian community as the social status was also better in terms of lifestyle. This is what is at stake with Hindutva: a neoliberal, upper-class or upper-caste populism and exclusivist project that legitimates itself through religion/Hinduism.

Though Christianity itself does not promote any particular caste, the highest caste in Indian society, Brahmins, do promote caste using the Hindu religion. Christianity, as an egalitarian faith, was always a religion of lower caste people in India, thus it was always considered different and othered by other communities in India. Harsh Mandir supports the view of Christianity as othered

> The large majority of converts to egalitarian faiths are, not surprisingly, from the lowest Hindu castes, stirred by hopes of greater social dignity and the opportunities to study and escape socially humiliating caste livelihoods'. (Harsh Mandir, 2018, p.190)

It is noted that the films discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 reflect the discriminatory practice of the caste system and the repression of Christianity in many ways. It is further understood that post-2000 films show increased repression and othering of Christianity in the name of caste.

The anti-conversion laws passed by the state assemblies of India also subjugated many Christians (Mandir, 2018, p.190). The question to be debated further is why the filmmakers always reticulate Dalits from India (the people outside the caste system and the vulnerable ones in the caste-based subjugation). It is mainly because of the Hindu mindset of caste repression, ignoring the human dignity of the Dalits in relation to basic rights such as jobs, land, shelter, food and the other necessities that other castes have. The idea of otherness serves as a foundational element of postcolonial thought. The ethnic composition of India is diverse in terms of caste and religion. Manju discusses Dalit themed films in Kerala:

> Millennial Malayalam cinema ensures and rehearses casteism and continues with the abjection of Dalits. Thus, the portrayal of Dalit issues in cinema has been minimal and limited, if not altogether absent. *Papilio Buddha* appropriates as well as exposes mainstream Hinduism which treats Dalits as the "other" and, in so doing, *Papilio Buddha* illustrates how the discourse of Gandhism facilitated and promoted a culture of segregation based on caste. (Manju, 2017, pp. 49-50)

However, although these films portray Dalits they recreate the usual stereotypes of Dalits as impoverished, illiterate and societal outcasts. Various governing bodies in India have endeavoured to end the caste system by economically empowering those from lower castes. Although governing bodies still have issues around education, many, especially in the south of India, do have equal and better access to education in Christian schools.

The population has grown more caste-conscious due to the legal steps taken to enhance their lives, such as job reservations and special cash grants, but this has polarised society further. The caste-class equation explains why being middle class is not just about achieving financial security, it is also about achieving and preserving respectability, sexual modesty and family honour (Roji, 2015). Although unpopular in metropolitan areas, the caste system's hierarchical ranking is still widely used, particularly in rural India.

Indian social activist Swami Agnivesh stated that Christianity as a religion was pushed to the margins by the caste hierarchy and its conflicts and divisions. Agnivesh states that 'Dalits have always suffered from these kinds of attitudes by the dominant forces'(Swami Agnivesh, 2011, p.222). Over the last three decades, John C B Webster's studies unveiled the reality of caste and its multifaceted forms of oppression, including the repression of Christianity. These oppressive perspectives have been introduced into films which portray Christianity as a lower caste and repressed social system.

1.5. Christianity in Kerala

(Video Part 1, 08:40min-14:00min)

Theological studies by Medlycott (1905), C.V. Cherian (1973) and A. Mathias Mundadan (1982) have shown that Portuguese and Dutch colonialism was the origin of the widespread conversion to Christianity in Kerala. Although Christianity itself was founded much earlier (according to cultural beliefs, St. Thomas, the founder of Christianity in India, landed in Muziris in 52 A.D.), its rise started when missionaries began to work in colonised India in the 18th century with the East India Company.

Research shows that Christianity was a covert practice in the Roman world for the first three centuries and expanded widely in the years after. Apocryphal literature such as the five Acts, including the Acts of Thomas, exist in addition to the New Testament and bear witness to Thomas' mission and martyrdom. The Roman Empire's last significant wave of persecution against Christians began in the middle of the third century. Paintings can be found in the catacombs of this period that illustrate supernatural deliverance stories in visual form; there are also oral traditions and written chronicles. However, with the establishment of

the Church's Peace in the early fourth century, catacomb art was improved by inserting uniquely Christian elements, such as biblical scenes including portrayals of the Last Supper and images of the healing miracles that are recounted in the gospels.

Researchers, including the British researcher W.H. Frend, have studied the history of the early Christian Church, particularly its social and archaeological components, and have found both innovative interpretations and disputes. These are relatively new inquiries, and the writings must be matched to archaeological and other data. Christianity arrived in Kerala via pre-existing Christian communities. Routes of commerce, Maritime routes and early settlements in coastal Kerala suggest that Christianity initially arrived in Kerala by sea between the first and sixth centuries C.E., and then by sea again in the fifteenth century from Europe.

One version of this history is that the origin of the Christian community is entirely the fruit of the mission of the Apostle, St. Thomas, in Kerala. Another version is that the community originated from people who converted to the Christian faith on the Coromandel Coast and later migrated to Kerala, settling in different locations there. A third version combines these two versions, suggesting that the community consisted of those who converted within the geographical area of Kerala and those who migrated from the Coromandel Coast (George, 2007).

Christianity has existed since the early centuries of the Common era. It appears to have evolved in Kerala independently, constantly increasing adherents and various distinct churches and sects. Despite its tight ties with Persias orthodox churches, the community thrived independently in the early years, with no hierarchical or legal subordination to any foreign church. In the first century B.C., Greek knowledge of monsoon winds substantially cut the time it took to travel from the Red Sea to the Malabar coast. We only have traditional local narratives of early Christians arriving on the Malabar Coast during this period.

Even though the Sangam literature is current it solely references Yavana ships and trade. On the other hand, maritime trade suggests that Christians and Jews may have migrated early to India's western coast, which the Arabian Sea borders. Kerala's distinct geography determined and facilitated active marine communication with Western sea traders since Kerala was the first port or point of entry to India. As a result, substantial overland connectivity with the locality was established. Conversely, archaeological evidence is increasingly being sought to prove Christianity's antiquity. We can only aspire for more detailed chronologies in the future. Inscriptions, coinage, material records from excavated sites such as Pattanam and Vizhinjam, stone crosses and copper plates, to name a few things, are among the evidence. This, ideally, will aid in our understanding of the early Christian settlements in Kerala.

As George explains, the Syrian Christians of Kerala can trace their history back to select upper-caste Brahmin families who were drawn to Christianity by St. Thomas. It seems that St. Thomas did not interfere with the time-honoured customs of Indian congregations; they were allowed to follow their traditions in dress and language. The only distinction was that the Christians were known as Nasranis, or followers of the Nazarene (a term used in all government documents in Travancore and Cochin until recently). The Apostle emphasised the need for the cross as the mark of a Nasrani. So, in all probability, St. Thomas gave the Nasranis a simple Dravidian theology they could understand and follow (George, 2007).

As a result, modern readings on the early history of Christianity in Kerala take a more secular stance. Secular historians question whether St. Thomas arrived in Kerala in 52AD as part of his goal to deliver the Gospel to the extremities of the earth. As Jenne Peter points out, these discoveries will present a new age in Kerala's history and archaeology, made more rewarding by the availability of techniques for comparing literary and archaeological evidence (Peter, 2014). Textual material such as the Geniza Letters, the Mazaris Papyrus and

the Vienna Papyrus disclose more about the Christians and Jews who arrived at Malabar in the early Christian ages. People could not accept the missionaries' conception of ministry during the Colonial Era because it was shaped by the dominant colonial Church's goal of spreading Christianity and its beliefs (Joy, 2012, p.29). A lack of documentary evidence about the origin of Christianity in India has been the subject of controversy among historians.

Available sources on the early period, such as CV Cherian's *A History of Christianity in Kerala: From the Mission of St. Thomas to the Arrival of Vasco Da Gama (A.D. 52-1498)* (Cherian,1973) and Mathias Mundadan's *Indian Christians: Search for Identity and Struggle for Autonomy* (Mundadan, 1982), reveal the existence of an old Christian community in Malabar, known as St. Thomas Christians, also known as the Persian Christians or Syrian Christians. They are known primarily as St. Thomas Christians because they believed that St. Thomas preached the message of Christ for the first time in Malabar and succeeded in establishing Christianity there (Valliyaveetil, 2004).

In this thesis I also examine the role of caste concerning colonialism and religion; as David Joy states:

> It is worth noting that there was a nexus between the missionaries and the colonisers during the colonial period. Many explorations of the link between the colonial missions and the local movements underlined that cultural and political dimensions were focused on. However, local realities of indigenous institutions like *Vamsha* (lineage) and *Jati* (caste) were not redefined. (Joy, 2008, p.15)

Caste hierarchies influence not only a person's place within Malayalam society but also their opportunities within the local film industry and aspects of narratives in their films.

According to the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner at the India Ministry of Home Affairs (2015), less than twenty percent of the Kerala population practices Christianity. This may explain the lack of Christian iconography in films made before 2000. However, it is still unclear what factors have emerged that have led to the rise in Christian

iconography in Malayalam horror films in the past two decades. This is discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.6.Portrayal of Anglo-Indians in Malayalam Cinema

(Video Part 3 11:16min-12:45min)

The Anglo-Indian minority is poorly represented in Malayalam cinema, and when they do appear their image is marred by misrepresentation, typecasting and a persistent theme of estrangement. As Priya Alphonsa Mathew and Rajesh James state in their article *Between two worlds: Anglo-Indian stereotype and Malayalam Cinema,* written for the International Journal of Anglo-Indian Studies:

> The Anglo-Indians of India are racial hybrids of European and Indian ancestry, which developed due to Europe's four-century colonial contact with India. Despite being India's fourth-largest film industry, Malayalam cinema produced in Kerala has historically been dominated by dominant-caste favoritisms. Regrettably, the Anglo-Indian community receives scant representation in Malayalam films, and when they do, their portrayal is marred by misrepresentation, typecasting, and a persistent discourse of estrangement. (Priya and Rajesh, 2018)

Indians disown the Anglo-Indian community and consider them foreigners. Their ways of living and lifestyle are strange to the Kerala community. The British were responsible for tremendous violence during colonialism. Most British people practised Christianity, and since the Anglo-Indians incorporated their traditions and cultures they were linked together and became figures of hatred. Priya and Rajesh explain further:

> The cultural mosaic of Kerala has been incredibly influenced by the Anglo-Indians' language, culture, lifestyle and food habits. However, at a time when modernity and progress were looked at with suspicion, Anglo-Indians and their way of life and mores seemed a threat to Kerala's 'genuine' or 'authentic' regional culture and traditionalism advocated by the upper class/caste, which was, and is, why Anglo-Indians and their customs are dreaded and consequently 'other'. (ibid, 2018)

The Anglo-Indians of India, racial hybrids of European and Indian stock, have historically been marginalized in Malayalam cinema. Priya and Rajesh's paper argues for a more

inclusive and destabilizing approach to the Anglo-Indian community in Malayalam films. They sought to emphasise the importance of subverting the flawed and stereotypical representations of Anglo-Indians in Malayalam cinema. They examine Anglo-Indian delineations in Malayalam cinema from the 1970s to 2018 as processes and products of the complex historical, cultural, and nationalist policies of majoritarian isolationist politics. Outlining the politics of signification and misrepresentation, they show how the Anglo-Indian community is pigeonholed in Kerala film narratives (Priya and Rajesh, 2018, p.20). They argue for a recognition of the importance of a balanced and inclusive perspective on Anglo-Indians in mainstream Malayalam cinema. Culture, customs and tradition are time-honoured imperialistic and hegemonic tools, where the 'self' is used to construct the 'other' as an exotic spectacle, in diametric opposition to majoritarian discourses of refinement and civilisation.

The films that I will be discussing in Chapter 3 involve many characters and places that belong to the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala. Their characterisations within these horror films will enable me to highlight the factor of otherisation amongst the Christian community in the Kerala tradition.

1.7. Conclusion

This literature review sets a foundation for my contribution towards scholarly discussions of Malayalam horror films. The 'other' of Christians in India is just one example of how an analysis of the intersection of religion and genre in Indian horror films reveals specific power plays. Another is how depictions of women used to advance the narrative in these religious films frequently result in women being portrayed in traditional ways, either as passive, as fallen women or sexual victims, as monsters, or as immoral. This emphasises how closely related the horror genre is to cultural meaning, political power and social context.

The mapping and shaping of a narrative in a film through an analysis of issues related to representation, genre, religion, caste and gender were the focus of this chapter. Additionally, the chapter outlined a discourse on film and Christianity in Kerala, focusing on the discussion of the Christians of Kerala in general, as well as how films represent and balance the various aspects of community, social and political involvement, myth and spirituality. The introduction of the use of filmic conventions in this chapter will guide the analytical discussions in chapters 2 and 3. The development of the Malayalam film industry will be briefly discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

2.1.Introduction

This chapter discusses the history of Malayalam horror films and analyses selected films made before 2000 in order to provide a context on the birth of Malayalam horror films and its transformation in narratives from *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964) until *Devadoothan* (Sibi Malayil, 2000). Analysis of Malayalam horror films that have various themes revolving around caste, religion and gender that serve as a base for these films will be discussed. The next chapter provides case studies and analysis of horror films post-2000 with the use of Christian iconography. In this chapter I will chart the development of the Malayalam film industry, which moved toward producing films primarily in a social realist style. I will then explore how, in contrast to these films, horror films emerged from the 1960s, mostly centred around the *Yakshi* female ghost. I will further explore the first examples of Christian characters in Malayalam horror, examining how they are represented.

The selected films in this chapter are based on relevant types of subjects and production, including factual information that made them notable compared to other films released during this period. The chapter also provides information on Kerala's social issues and how these contributed to the development of Malayalam cinema. The history of Malayalam Cinema's growth and change is listed chronologically for better understanding.

A study of the rise of the horror genre is outlined in this chapter. As Brandon R. Grafius points out:

> The emotion that most frequently dominates the horror genre is anxiety. While fear may be present, this emotion (along with disgust) is usually secondary. Fear is the reaction to a particular object or situation threatening the individual's well-being...horror films make us fear for the physical safety of the characters on screen. (Grafius, 2019, p.20)

Filmmakers in Kerala leaned on perceived superstition, illiteracy, myth, religion and stardom to get the attention of audiences; fear and anxiety were the tools used to raise awareness of social issues and concerns, such as caste discrimination, the 'otherisation' of a religious minority and the oppression of women. 'Religion is a major theme in a surprisingly large number of horror films' (Grafius, 2019, p.9). At first, the Hindu religion was predominantly represented by Malayalam filmmakers, who then gradually included Christianity but primarily in a negative way, using rape-revenge narratives, the objectification of women and the arousal of man's lust using sexual assault, soft pornography and rape.

2.2. History of Kerala Filmmaking: A Brief Summary

Kerala, a state in India, has produced films in its regional language, Malayalam, since 1928. The first film was *Vigathakumaran/The Lost Child* (1928), produced by Joseph Cherian Daniel, acclaimed as the Father of Malayalam cinema. Since then, more than a thousand films have been produced and this is increasing annually. Over the past decade, hundreds of Kerala filmmakers have experimented with and produced films in all genres.

The population of Kerala knew about moving images on screen through the conventional fine art 'Tholpavakooth' (a play with dolls). These plays are generally performed during festive seasons in town centres. 'Tholpavakooth' utilises mannequins made of calfskin with flexible joints. The joints are made from sticks, and the shadow of the moving manikins is seen on a screen utilising a light source from behind, making moving images. Narratives are derived from folklore, with music played with traditional percussion like the Chenda (a local drum made from leather). There are different types of artistry, such as 'Kooth' (play), 'Koodiyattam' (dancing together) and 'Kathakali' (story play), that display high visual characteristics in their structure (Mathew, 2013, p.5).

Most Indian films are focused on the Bollywood style of filmmaking, a mixture of romance, action, music and drama with similar plotlines and narrative concepts. However, filmmakers from Kerala approached cinema differently, using their experience with Tholpavakooth, Koodiyattam, Kooth and other theatre art forms.

2.3. The 1920s and The 1930s: Cinema for the Malayalam Audience

The presentation of films in India began in 1896 with the guidance of the British. Initially, there was clear support from the East India Company and British colonial rulers in promoting cinema across India by establishing cinema theatres for leisure. Over time cinema was introduced to Kerala in the early 1900s by Jose Kattookkaran. As K.S. Sabreena states:

> The first memory of a Kerala watching a film goes back to 1907 when Jose Kattookkaran introduced a physically worked film projector in Thrissur, Kerala. At that point, his foundation developed into Kerala's first changeless performance centre in 1913, named 'Jose Electrical Bioscope,' which, despite everything, exists as 'Jos Theater.' (Basheer, 2019, p.1)

Only six films were produced between 1920 and 1950: the silent films, *Vigathakumaran* (J.C Daniel, 1928) and *Marthandavarma* (P. V Rao, 1933), which was not a commercial success due to the failure to obtain film rights from the publisher of the adapted novel; *Balan* (S.Notani, 1938), the first Malayalam film talkie; and *Gnanambika* (S.Notani, 1940), *Prahlada* (K. Subramaniam, 1941) and *Nirmala* (P.J. Cherian, 1948).

Joseph Cherian Daniel was a dentist from a subaltern community. He was an excellent leader who could negotiate with the British officers of that time to create a space for art and literature for the subalterns (*cinemaofmalayalam*, 2016, p.1). He learnt the art of filmmaking by travelling to studios in Madras and Bombay and observing prominent Indian filmmakers. He then established his film studio, Travancore National Images, in 1926 to begin producing his own films.

The history of Malayalam Cinema is captivating because of the journey and struggle faced by filmmakers, especially J.C Daniel, the father of Malayalam cinema, to introduce and establish cinema in Kerala. The struggles were primarily because of caste issues between the upper-caste and lower-caste communities in Kerala. His journey of falling in love with cinema, making his first film but then failing to achieve his dream is portrayed in the biopic, *Celluloid* (Kamal, 2013).

The plot of Daniel's first film, *Vigathakumaran,* revolves around Chandrakumar, the child of a rich man in Travancore who is kidnapped by the antagonist, Bhoothanathan, and taken to Ceylon. His parents try to find him but fail, and Chandrakumar grows up as a worker. The person who raised him is British, he favours him and, over time, Chandrakumar ascends to the post of superintendent. Jayachandran, a far-off relative of Chandrakumar, happens to come to Ceylon. Unexpectedly, he is robbed of all of his belongings by Bhoothanathan. Abandoned, he gets to know Chandrakumar and they become dear companions. They come to Travancore, where Chandrakumar's sister begins to fall in love with Jayachandran. Meanwhile, Bhoothanathan plans to abduct her but the team manages to save her. A scar on the back discloses Chandrakumar's identity, which prompts the family reunion.

The lead actress, P.K Rosy, was a labourer from the lower caste of society, thus resulting in box office failure due to caste and gender discrimination. Enraged groups upset the show and assaulted Rosy and her family. Upper caste people refused to screen the film. The purpose of the restriction was the involvement of women in the film, which was viewed as equal to prostitution, forcing Rosy to run away from her own home. Notably, Rosy was a progressive woman for that period who became a Kakkarishi entertainer (a Dalit society theatre). She was the first actress in a Malayalam film and the first Dalit on-screen character in an Indian film and she became the principal female on-screen character in Malayalam

films of this period. Her unarchived appearances in Malayalam film re-emerged through various methods: in verse, chronicled stories, anecdotal fiction and documentaries. For example, Kunnukuzhi Mani's articles on Rosy, Sreekumar's sonnet *Nadiyude Rathri/Actress' Night* (2003), Vinu Abraham's novel *Nashta Nayika/The Lost Heroine* (2009) and Kanjiramkulam Sanil's narrative documentary *Ithu Rosiyude Katha/This is Rosy's Story* (2011) are some of the ongoing prominent documentations of Rosy's life (Edachira, 2020, p.2).

Despite the local administration and British Colonial officers being sympathetic to the production of films in Malayalam, they did not make a neutral assessment of the situation but sided with the upper caste. During a crisis of caste discrimination in Kerala, they promoted society's dominant and upper caste members. Daniel was in debt after making his first film as he had borrowed funds to buy equipment and produce the film. He sold his property to clear the debts and, suffering from his loss, he and his family moved away from their hometown. He then studied dentistry and worked as a dentist until he could not work anymore. J.C. Daniel passed away in 1975 without being acknowledged or known worldwide.

A sibling rivalry led to the loss of the only print of the first Malayalam film. Harris Daniel, the youngest son of J.C. Daniel, revealed that he burnt the print because of the presence of his elder brother in the film. Speaking at the Kozhikode celebration of Malayalam cinema's 90th anniversary, Harris Daniel, who was only six when he burnt the film:

> "My brother used to bully me. By burning the print, I enjoyed taking revenge on him." (*The Hindu Newspaper*, Reporter, 2018.)

No copies of the film are available, and the only evidence proving that it existed are the behind-the-scenes photographs and pre-screening advertisement pamphlets.

In the 1930s, several film halls in Kerala showed English, French and German films. *Balan* (1938), the first Malayalam film with a soundtrack, was produced by a Tamilian, T. R. Sundaram, at the Modern Theatre and directed by S. Notani. It was a melodramatic film, more Tamil than Malayalam, highlighting the struggles of two stranded children, Balan and his younger sister, who were persecuted and abused by their insidious stepmother until a lawyer saved them (Joseph, 2013, p.36). In Kerala, Tamil films were more popular than other language films, such as English, Hindi or Telugu, because Kerala people could understand the Tamil language and people were unwilling to invest time and money to produce films just for entertainment in the Malayalam language.

2.4. The 1940s and The 1950s: Growth of Malayalam Films Post Independence

The growth of Malayalam films in the decades of 1940 and 1950 was during the period of India's independence (1947) which marked the beginning of a new era with a fresh perspective. The nation began its arduous journey in 1947 to remove the colonial legacies of economic underdevelopment: severe poverty; nearly total illiteracy; widespread sickness and a lack of access to healthcare; and extreme social injustice and inequality.

The end of colonial government, on August 15, 1947, was only the beginning; centuries of backwardness had to be overcome, the promises of the independence movement had to be kept and people's dreams realised. It is true that there were a number of trajectories in the rise of communal forces in the 1970s in India because of the political uplift of Hindutva where religious subjugation, caste and gender discrimination increased. As a result there were a number of subaltern social movements which encouraged communalism and fundamentalism (Felix Wilfred, 2013, p.14). In order to bring out the complexity of the issues involved, it is suggested that there needs to be an understanding of the major shifts in the growth of Hindutva forces, namely the anti-emergency movement in 1977, the Mandal

Commission report in 1989 and the victory of the Hindutva political party election in most states across India in the 1990s.

The Indian population and their leaders undertook the duties of nation-building with a certain élan, determination and a confidence in their ability to succeed. This upbeat attitude was mirrored in Jawaharlal Nehru's (former Prime Minister of India from 1947 to 1950) well-known 'Tryst with Destiny' address on the eve of independence on August 14, 1947. The ability to build India with a broad social consensus on its fundamental principles, such as nationalism, secularism and democracy, and the pursuit of both rapid economic growth and profound social change, was a huge advantage. Achin Vanaik has analysed the emergence of Hindutva in his 2017 book *Hindutva Rising: Secular Claims and Communal Realities,* where he argues that Nehru had retained an inter-religious approach which was very appropriate in the context of religious and cultural pluralism in India. Hence, the secular stance adopted by Nehru during his leadership was appropriate in preventing communal violence since communal forces could not grow rapidly. However, when later leaders diluted Nehrunian thinking on secularism, communal forces such as the Hindutva government grew swiftly. Therefore, in order to restrict Hindutva forces it is important to strengthen a secular outlook in public life.

1947 marked the beginning of a time of change and advancement. However, some of these changes exacerbated old problems, which frequently resulted from the transition itself, necessitating novel remedies. The nature of the issues, as well as how, when and with what results, were questions that needed to be answered. Gandhiji had stated on the eve of independence that "all the faults of society are going to come to the surface" with the abolition of slavery and the advent of freedom. However, he also believed that there was no need to be overly outraged about it. He believed that if equilibrium was maintained every conundrum would be resolved (Chandra, 2007). The national movement had charted these

principles and objectives and the path to achieving them took more than 70 years. However, it became clear that this consensus had to be continually expanded and built upon. Nehru's role and the concepts he created and advanced were crucial.

In recent years India has been an essentially healthy secular society, despite communalism and communal organisations and movements, but it is currently dominated by the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) hegemony.

> Jawahar Lal Nehru had rightly pointed out that the greater danger for this country is from communalism and not so much from external aggression, because when there is external aggression, the people of India tend to get united but when communalism is rampant the most people get divided. Communalism is, thus, the deadliest enemy of the people of India. Anyone who loves India would hate communalism and anyone who hates India would love communalism. (Vainik, 2017, p.1)

Although communalism is arguably the greatest threat to Indian culture and polity, it is not yet the country's preeminent way of thinking. Even when communalists were successful in using communalism as a fast and simple path to political power and winning elections, the people voted so as to voice their displeasure with the current condition of political and economic events. They still do not have a firm grasp of communal philosophy, as Indian historian Bipin Chandra stated:

> The concept of Communalism is based on the belief that religious distinction is the most important and fundamental distinction, and this distinction over-rides all other distinctions. Since Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs are different religious entities, their social, economic and political interests are also dis-similar and divergent. As such, the loss of one religious group is the gain of another group and vice-versa. (Chandra, 1984)

Christians and other minorities do not live in permanent segregation, even in locations where racial violence occurs. Popular consciousness has been a substantial impediment to the spread of communalism in rural areas and in vast portions of urban India. It is to be noted that Kerala is a communist state where BJP and Hindutva forces do exist, but they have not taken control of the state.

None of the Malayalam films that preceded the Independence of India covered the battle for freedom. However, the films that came out after Independence mirrored the political situation in Kerala, where a Communist uprising was occurring, which changed the whole social atmosphere of the State (www.cinemaofmalayalam.net). The development of Aikya Keralam (United Kerala), or an assembled Kerala, which began in the 1940s, drew upon the custom of producing films in Malayalam rather than watching and depending on Tamil films, leading to the possibility of the local market not being commercially exploited. As elsewhere in southern India, the possibility of becoming a district led to unity, overcoming the unpleasant reality of contrasts in religion, language and culture. However, the way of life in Kerala, as defined by *Aikya Keralam* (United Kerala), was primarily a highly Hindu culture.

Caste, culture, class and religion played a crucial role in controlling the growth of the Malayalam film industry in terms of the business aspect of cinema and influencing the thinking process of the community. The emerging values and powers of Malayalam filmmakers could decisively seize industry control. Until then, the main reason for the failure of Malayalam films was the lack of capital inflow and cooperation from predominantly Tamil experts in the industry.

Until 1947 Malayalam films were made solely by Tamil filmmakers, but this pattern changed when P. J. Cherian made *Nirmala/Name of a Character* (1948), which was in the Malayalam language. *Vellinakshatram/Silver Star* (F. J Beyse, 1949) was the first film made at Udaya Studios in the Alleppey district. *Jeevithanauka* (K. Vembu, 1951), also by Udaya Studios, signified commercial success without the help of Tamil film personnel. The film's protagonist, Thikkurissy Sukumaran Nair, is now commonly acknowledged as the first everlasting star in Malayalam films.

The International Film Festival of India, held in 1952, showcased films made outside Hollywood, such as Italian Neorealist films like *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica, 1948) and films by Bengali film director Satyajit Ray, which were very influential for Indian filmmakers, allowing them to think about a different approach to filmmaking. Ray's film *Pather Panchali* (Satyajit Ray, 1955) signalled this new approach, which other film producers in Northern India then took up (Joseph, 2012, p.27). During the 1950s and the 1960s, intellectual filmmakers and story writers became frustrated with the industry's absurd musical films. To counter this, they wanted to create a genre of films which would depict reality from an art perspective. Different state governments funded most films during this period to promote an authentic art genre from the Indian film fraternity. The most noteworthy Indian 'neo-realist' was Ray, followed by Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, G. Aravindan and Girish Kasaravalli.

Malayalam films, too, changed during the mid-1950s, moving towards a more social realist style, as opposed to corrective social dramatisations. The mythology genre began to be sidelined in Malayalam films, with studios gradually moving towards the production of family romances and social reality films. This movement towards heightened realism was not because of the impact of trends in world cinema, though, as the Kerala producers were not present at international film festivals. It was not until the mid-1970s, with the establishment of The Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), that filmmakers such as Adoor Gopalakrishnan and G. Aravindan produced 'new wave' style films in Malayalam.

Newspaper Boy (P. Ramadas, 1955), directed by P. Ramadas, who was new to filmmaking and influenced by Italian Neorealism, was released a few months before Ray's *Pather Panchali*. Malayalam films did not have much national recognition and were not that different from Tamil films of the time, except in language. Therefore*, Newspaper Boy (1955)*

differed because of its Neorealist approach. The film portrays the tragic story of a print machine representative and his impoverished family. The protagonist struggles through extraordinary poverty and disease, which results in his children having to stop their education. His eldest child, Appu, leaves for Madras looking for a job, but he later returns and chooses to take up the job of a newspaper boy.

The 1950s saw the arrival of the star, Sathyan, in his first starring role in a Malayalam film, *Athmasakhi/My Wife* (G. R. Rao, 1952). Sathyan also starred in *Neelakuyil* (P. Bhaskaran, R Kariat, 1954), which won the President's Silver Award in 1954, increasing the national recognition of Malayalam films. *Neelakuyil* is the first legitimate Malayalam film, as previous films were adaptations from novels, poems or other works. This film explores untouchability and the self-reformation of Sreedharan Nair (Sathyan), an upper caste school teacher, who impregnates Neeli (Miss Kumari), a Dalit woman, but refuses to marry her, saying that he has to respect the sentiments of his community. Sreedharan Nair later marries Nalini (Prema), who is from a decaying Nair family. Meanwhile, Neeli, the pregnant Dalit woman, after being expelled from her community, gives birth to a boy and dies near a railway track. Neeli's baby is rescued and nurtured by Shankaran Nair (P. Bhaskaran), a postman and a radical figure in the film, who does not know that Sreedharan Nair is the father of the child. Later, Sreedharan Nair feels guilty for what he did to Neeli and decides to adopt the Dalit boy, named Mohan.

In the end, Shankaran Nair, the foster father, hands over the Dalit boy to Sreedharan Nair and Nalini, asking them to "bring him up as a human being, not as a Nair, Pulaya or a Mappila", as the lower caste members of the society were considered untouchables by the upper caste. Sensational in style and loaded up with songs and dance, the film was successful with audiences in its choice of theme and the representational strategies that one can identify

in the progressive realist cinema in Hindi and Bengali during the late 1940s and the early 1950s (Jenson, 2012, pp. 26 & 34).

2.5. The 1960s: More Social Realism and the Film Society Movement

Exposed only to European films and other regional films, local filmmakers created new opportunities for film production. Many artists, who will be discussed later in this chapter, began to ask questions about the production of Malayalam films to promote the left party's natural, regional and rationalist ideas. Many of the successful melodramas of the 1960s drew upon critically acclaimed writers with films, like *Chemmeen/Prawns* (Ramu Kariat, 1965) and *Odayil Ninnu/From the Sewer* (K. S Sethumadhavan (1965), *Murappennu* (1965) and *Iruttinte Athmavu* (1966), which enhanced the tradition of progressive writing by portraying the wretchedness of society in their struggle against capital and nature, and it was clear that these were not reflective of a universal condition (D. Menon, 2008).

After *Neelakuyi* (1954), Ramu Kariat made *Minnaminungu/The Firefly* (1957) and then shot Thoppil Bhasi's well-known play *Mudiyanaya Puthran/The Prodigal Son,* in 1961. *Mudiyanaya Puthran* starred Sathyan, an expert in 'macho' characters, in a drama about the recklessness of a conceited youngster who sinks into hostile social conduct before falling in love with an 'untouchable' (because of her caste) young woman. The film is considered one of the best Malayalam films because it projected social evils and injustice, such as untouchability, caste and gender discrimination.

Moodupadam/Hijab (Ramu Kariat, 1963) is a social realist film about the connections between three significant strict beliefs of the State: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. At that time, religion was seen as a significant problem and only men and women from the same religion got approval to marry each other.

After this film, Ramu Kariat made *Chemmeen* (Ramu Kariat, 1965), which was a significant moment in Malayalam film. The film represented the daily lives of people in Kerala and explores caste division through the story of a fisherman. According to the norms of the society, lower caste men could only do fishing but had no right to own the boats. The man was safe only because of his wife's chastity. If she were unfaithful her husband would be eaten by the Kadalamma/Sea Goddess. The film was the first creative work from the southern part of India to be awarded the Indian President's Gold Medal for best film in 1965.

The Film Society Movement, which began in the 1960s and picked up energy during the 1970s, acquired another perception of film as a work of art and represented an alternate sort of film, which were named 'equal,' 'new-wave' or 'craftsmanship' films. Despite the different regions of India, this development was never solely an urban one but something that cut across all landscapes and areas of society. At that time, world cinema even came to rural Kerala, and conversations were held about them at the layman's level (*cinemaofmalayalam*, 2016, p.1).

The Film Society Movement increased people's awareness of what they were going through, and they started to believe in a possible change from their current situation of poverty and discrimination. When notable stories and books, generally serialised in artistic diaries, were made into films, they naturally presented social components that had been missing in the Malayalam films of the 1950s.

Malayalam films could convey the struggle but could not make a change, as filmmakers looked at the commercial aspect. However, works of writers such as M.T. Vasudevan Nair succeeded, with stories about crumbling households, disrupted loves and the decay and degeneration of landed status and property, which were the major social issues at

that period. Films such as *Chemmeen* (1965), *Odayil Ninnu* (1965), *Murappennu* (1965) and *Iruttinte Athmavu* (1966) were inspired by literary works such as his.

The tendency to get material for filmmaking through books, poems and other literary works was prevalent in the later sixties to mid-seventies. The joint effort of authors and executives influenced Malayalam films, and the general standard of creation went up. Malayalam films of the 1960s depended primarily on the books, short stories and plays of Thakazhi, Kesavdev, Parappurath, Basheer, M. T. Vasudevan Nair, Thoppil Bhasi and others (Mathew, 2013 p. 10). Notably, these leading writers in Kerala contributed a lot to the film industry with their works. The objectives of these writings were two-fold: to popularise the ideas of freedom and justice and to promote the value of art and literature in the lives of ordinary people. However, Lenin Rajendran points out that politically themed films, and films about caste discrimination, the lives of farmers and religious views were aimed at attaining commercial growth and were not made to create social change (*Manorama News*, 2016).

For filmmakers during that period, the film industry was a source for creating awareness and commercial business. It is important to note a distinction between films made for entertainment and films with ideological content. Films such as *Chemeen* (R. Kariat, 1965), *Murappennu* (A. Vincent, 1965) and *Iruttinte Athmavu* (P. Bhaskaran, 1966) had acclaimed commercial success, and their plots revolved around social issues. Nevertheless, at this time, the region also began to make horror films.

The main challenge faced by filmmakers during this period was the long-lasting hierarchical caste issues, where lower caste Dalits were stereotyped in films as labourers, unskilled workers, hooligans and farmers. Many films were archived and rebuked by the higher caste of society and, disagreeing with the ideologies of many writers and artists

therein, they burnt copies of reels, destroyed theatre spaces that displayed the films and even physically harmed the artists involved.

Some of these films were later remade, post-2000, as 'cinema within a cinema'. Examples include *Vellari Pravinte Changathi/Friend of a White Dove* (A. Akbar, 2011) and *Balyakalya Sakhi/Childhood Friend* (P. Payyanur, 2014), with a well-known cast, including Dileep, Mammooty, Kavya Madhavan and Isha Talvar, which shows some of the challenges faced in the past by filmmakers. Manju argues that:

> The film studies discourse denotes such productions as 'film within a film' which is considered as a self-referential or reflexive technique just like 'story within a story' or 'play within a play'. (Edachira, 2020, p. 3)

However, Manju prefers the phrase 'cinema within cinema' as a general term over 'film within a film', which she claims to be only technical. By 'cinema within cinema', she refers to cinema on cinema, and cinema about cinema, where the concentration is on cinema itself or a narrative that is explicitly conscious of cinema production. More precisely, cinema becomes the subject of its own storytelling (Manju, 2017, p.4).

In the 1960s, the Malayalam film industry was controlled by the wealthy and upper-class in society, as represented in these 'cinema within cinema' films. Land was being seized from the poor as land reformation was on the rise. The political leader Dr Ambedkar, in his autobiography *Ambedkar: Life and Mission* (D. Keer, 1962), states that:

> I have no homeland…. How can I call this land my own, where we are treated worse than cats and dogs and cannot get water to drink? No self-respecting Untouchable worth the name will be proud of this land. (Keer, 1962, p.166-167)

Children from the lower caste were poorly treated, even by their teachers, and were not allowed to eat with the upper caste children - not even a glass of water would be provided. Likewise, adults from the lower caste were forced to work daily in the fields of the upper

caste without proper wages. They did not revolt because if anyone spoke out the punishment would be death by hanging, stoning, drowning or burning.

Marxist ideology and its philosophy had a considerable influence in this era of progressive writing, with authors such as Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, Thakazhi Shivasankara Pillai, Kesava Dev, S.K. Pottekkat, Lalithambika Antharjanam, Uroob, Cherukad M.T. Vasudevan Nair and the left-wing Thoppil Bhasi becoming prominent novelists. They wrote predominantly about the issues faced by the poor and the lower caste population. Some, like Basheer and Vasudevan Nair, moved into film as screenwriters, along with dynamic filmmakers such as Kariat, Bhaskaran and Vincent. In the 1960s, they decided to address the subject of the lower caste and set out to give those considered low caste a voice; however, the theme was portrayed subtly in their works in comedy, horror and action genre films. Narratives of Malayalam cinema revolved around socio political changes that occurred within Malayalam society, as in the literary works of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer who authored a short story, *Neelakuyil* (The Blue Light), which was adapted into the first Malayalam horror feature film, *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), by Aloysius Vincent.

2.6.Socio-Political Change in Malayalam Cinema

Different types of socio-political considerations moulded many writers in Kerala. Progressive writers were very active in the literary sphere from 1920, with Kesari Balakrishna Pillai being the first progressive writer in Kerala. The works of these writers were considered modern and the writings and attitude of the new writers came to be recognised first as 'athyadhunikam' (High-Modern), since the term postmodern had not become prominent in the critical language of Malayalam.

Thomas Palakeel used the name 'Ultra-Modernism' to allude to postmodernism, while some critics, such as K.P. Appan, later adopted the word 'High-Modernism'. In Malayalam literature, subsequent postmodernism was called 'Uththaraadhunikatha'. Thousands of

individuals representing a cross-section of Kerala populate the landscapes of Thakazhi's novels, including fisher folk, toddy tappers, clerks, small farmers and landlords. His works are firmly rooted in Indian heritage since he also tries to represent the odd social and mythical codes that support their way of life. When O.V. Vijayan's *Khasaakkinte Ithihasam* (*The Tales of Khasak*) was published in 1969 it was dubbed as High-Modern by reviewers, since everything in the novel, including the language, theme and style had moved beyond the modernism that they had seen previously.

Another Malayalam creative writer, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, took a different, realist approach. He gave unadorned descriptions of daily life among Kerala's poor, illiterate Muslim community, striving to conform to modernity, religious plurality and socialism. As I said earlier, Basheer wrote *Bhargavi Nilayam*, which was adapted into the first Malayalam horror film. The film also portrays modernity, socialism and illiteracy amongst the Kerala community, but through the horror genre. People who watch horror films are aware that the actions on screen are not real, which gives them a psychological buffer against the gruesomeness depicted in the film. More viewers are adversely impacted by horror film exposure when they believe the film to be more realistic than when they believe it to be more surreal. Thus, writers influenced filmmakers to produce films that portrayed varied social constructs in Kerala and Indian Cinema.

2.7.A Selection of Malayalam Horror Films from 1964-1999:

Films in the Malayalam horror genre present topics such as caste, religion, black magic, western adaptations, visual effects and soft pornography. These films stand out compared to other films from the same period with their use of practical effects, prosthetics, make-up, mis-en-scene, cinematic lighting and fantasy-based narratives being new to the Kerala cinema audience, and they will be discussed further. Malayalam horror films from 1960 to 2000 had many clichéd elements, as noted by Thafseera. She states:

> Malayalam horror films have certain clichéd elements such as shaking cameras, showing owls, civets, cats, bats, howling noises, crickets, magical threads, humans morphed into one of these animals' loud noises, fire from here and there, a pooja place, lamps falling, candle flames exhausted, very windy ambience. For a viewer of this era, it seems that those films are far away from reality and give the viewer a feeling that the things shown are complete fantasy. The *Yakshi* portrayed at that time was one of the significant character types which aroused a lot of entertainment, fear and publicity among the viewers of that era. (Thafseera, 2018, p. 6)

As Thafseera points out, these films were 'far away from reality' and also far away from the social realist films being made at the time. However, as the years progressed, the plots changed and, although subtle, the filmmakers did portray elements of resistance and social protest and raised issues on gender, caste and religion.

The caste discrimination throughout Kerala led to the birth of horror films in Malayalam. To better understand how the horror film genre was born, one must mention Vaikom Muhammad Basheer, a significant figure who occupies a remarkable position in the Malayalam literary arena. He wrote a different type of narration in his novels, portraying simple portraits of life in the poor, illiterate Muslim (minority) community of Kerala, trying to adjust to modernity, religious pluralism and socialism. With his profound and straightforward writing, which includes a touch of satire, sarcasm and black humour, Basheer created a style of his own and marked his presence as a short story writer, novelist, humanist and freedom fighter. In 1943 he wrote the humorous romance *Premalekhanam*, a tale of love between Keshavan Nair, an upper-caste Hindu, and Saramma, an unemployed Christian (minority) woman, which marked the beginning of his literary career. Love, humanity, poverty and the harsh realities of life all find their place in his works. Amongst all the chaos in society, Basheer tried something he had never tried before: horror.

The journey of how Basheer got the idea for writing *Neela Vellicham/The Blue Light* (1952) is fascinating, as he portrays his own life experience with an element of horror. Basheer explains what inspired him to write his first horror story:

This story, *Neela Vellicham/The Blue Light*, is one of my inexplicable experiences. Perhaps 'experience' is not apt; a 'soap bubble of phantasmagoria' might better describe it. I have often tried to poke it with the needle of the scientific approach. However, I could never succeed in that endeavour. You are capable of doing that - analyse it and interpret it too. I have no other recourse than to depict it as an inexplicable experience… indeed, I have none. (Ministhy, 2017, p.1)

Basheer's short story inspired Aloysius Vincent to experiment with the horror genre in Malayalam films. Vincent's directorial debut, *Bhargavi Nilayam/Bhargavi's House* (1964), is the first Malayalam film made in the horror genre and is now considered a classic.

2.7.1. *Bhargavi Nilayam* (A Vincent, 1964)

(Video Part 1, 00:18min-00:31min)

Aloysius Vincent is one of the most prominent directors and cinematographers of the Malayalam film industry and he has contributed to more than a hundred films in other film industries across India. Vincent states:

Vaikkom Muhammad Basheer wrote himself into the heart of every Kerala by portraying the everyday fabric of life with raw emotion, humour, incredible subtlety and, most importantly, in the simplest of language. Basheer's fictional world is almost indistinguishable from the real world in which he lived; an autobiographical subtext is always inherent in his fictional discourse. Thus, we could see a human constantly searching for eternal truth. Seemingly banal utterings of a character from Basheer's literature carry quaint humour, countless ideas, social commentary, and prodigious philosophy. (Prasad, 2016)

Vincent goes on to explain how he adapted the story:

The script draws mainly from the short story '*Neela Velicham' (Blue Light)* and incorporates portions from several other vital writings. His craft of springboarding from one space and time to another and from one character to another has excellent cinematic potential. Basheer's optimism comes from completely accepting tragedy, not from avoiding confrontation with the embarrassing contradictions of existence. The directorial challenge would be to transpire this optimism into cinematic language. (Prasad, 2016)

The film stars Prem Nazir and Madhu, well-known stars of the Malayalam film industry. The lead actress was Vijaya Nirmala, a Telugu who was making her debut before starting a career

in directing in 1973. She entered *The Guinness Book of World Records* for the most films directed by a female. She also remade the film *Yaakshaganam/Song of Ghost* (Sheela, 1976) in Telugu as *Devude Gelichadu* (Vijaya Nirmala, 1976). *Bhargavi Nilayam* is about an exciting and gifted writer, Basheer (Madhavan Nair), who comes to stay in a rundown chateau called Bhargavi Nilayam. The author and his hireling, Cheriya Pareekkanni (Adoor Bhasi), experience abnormal events there. They discover from neighbours that it is a haunted house frequented by the phantom of a little girl, the daughter of a former owner. The author and his hireling experience strange happenings - the gramophone plays alone and objects move around. The author discovers some old letters to the little girl, Bhargavi (Vijaya Nirmala), from her sweetheart, Sasikumar (Prem Nazir).

The letters give some sign about their relationship and her unfortunate passing. The writer chooses to test the issue and starts composing an account of Bhargavi's life. The data accumulated from the neighbourhood and the indications in the letters encourage him in his composition. Bhargavi experienced passionate feelings for her neighbour, Sasikumar, a skilled musician. Bhargavi's cousin, Nanukuttan (P. J. Antony), is infatuated with Bhargavi. However, Bhargavi dislikes him as he is an evil wastrel. Nanukuttan attempts terrible stunts to isolate the lovers and winds up killing Sasikumar. Bhargavi becomes incensed when she comes to know about her lover's murder. In a fight, Nanukuttan pushes Bhargavi into a well, killing her, and then spreads the news that Bhargavi has committed suicide.

The writer reads the story to the ghost, who, at this point, has become attached to him. Nanukuttan learns about the story and fears that the reality behind the demise of Bhargavi and Sasikumar will come out. He assaults the writer and a fight follows. During the fight, Nanukuttan and the writer arrive at the well where Bhargavi died. While attempting to push the writer into the well, Nanukuttan loses his balance and falls into the well. The author, at

that point, appeals to God for the tranquillity of Bhargavi's spirit, and the film closes with a chuckle from Bhargavi.

Many scenes in this film were inspired and adapted from various works by Basheer, such as *Nilavu Kanumbol*/*When Moonlight Arrives*, *Anuragathinte Dinangal*/ *The Days of Experiences*, *Hunthrappy Bussatto,* and *Anargha Nimisham/A Unique Moment.* The scene where the young writer sees a beautiful woman on a beach (see images 1 and 2) was adapted from the short story *Nilavu Kanumbol*, where Basheer claims that he saw a naked woman taking a bath at the beach, but when he tried to speak to her she disappeared.

Image 1: Writer talks to Bhargavi's Ghost.

Image 2: Sasikumar talks to Bhargavi.

In the film, Basheer's experience is portrayed in two different situations. One, when the writer tries to speak (see Image 1) and the girl disappears, and the other is when Sasikumar sees the girl taking a bath at the beach (see Image 2).

Image 3   Image 4   Image 5

Images 3, 4 and 5 portray Bhargavi, a ghost that is not terrifying and looks beautiful. Bhargavi's presence is graceful, with cinematography using light vignettes highlighting the character's presence in a song sequence.

In a conversation with Madhavan Nair, the lead actor who plays the writer's role in *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), he said, "Director Aloysius Vincent had auditioned many girls for the ghost role, but was not content. One day he visited the projector room of a theatre in Madras and saw two eyes with the light of the rays from the projector. It was Vijaya Nirmala, who was the daughter of the projector operator. He immediately knew that he wanted this girl to play the role of Bhargavi" (personal interview, 2022) because of her eyes. This initiated the use of extreme close-up shots of the eyes of characters as a common technique in horror films from this period, which was used to establish the character's emotions of fear and anger and to create tension between characters and audience (see Images 6 and 7).

Image 6: Bhargavi's close-up emphasises her eyes. Image 7: Nanukutan's reaction when he sees the spirit of Bhargavi.

Image 8: Close-up shot of a Black cat (symbol of bad omen).

Image 9: Naïve minded village folk who are scared of the house.

Image 8 portrays a black cat, another symbol which becomes common in Malayalam horror films, highlighting the superstition that they are believed to bring bad luck and evil, according to Hindu mythology. The use of non-diegetic sound and short screen presence sets up a base before the ghost appears. Image 9 portrays the naïve mindset of village folk who believe that the house is haunted and, through fear, will not enter the building, leaving the writer's luggage at the entrance.

An expression of a simple or lower caste mindset is conveyed (see Images 8 and 9). Thus Image 8 portrays a black cat, which to simple folk is considered a bad omen, while Image 9 shows the men who pull hand carts being scared of the house and refusing to enter the premises, thinking it's haunted. There are brief flashes of understanding regarding caste, customs, gender differences presented in goddess worship, and women's social and ceremonial status. Different castes each play a unique part in *Yakshi* and goddess worship.

While the demonisation of the *Yakshi* in Malayalam horror films is not yet evident in *Bhargavi Nilayam* this film marks the first presence of the Supernatural in Malayalam cinema, which was initially new to audiences but eventually becomes a clichéd trope in Malayalam horror cinema. The use of over-emphatic sound, sound effects and music in the film and the high-contrast, black-and-white cinematography are similar to Italian horror and mystery films of the same period. Thus showing the influence of Western filmmaking on the cultural perspective in Kerala.

Bhargavi's appearance is heralded by forces of nature such as rain, wind, thunder, lightning and stormy weather. Further signs of a *Yakshi*'s presence in Hindu mythology are used in the film, such as the frequent portrayal of black cats, floral scents, beautiful eyes, long hair and white sarees establishing the ghost of Bhargavi. The Malayalam audience perceived this as their first notion of a ghost, the *Yakshi*, which is discussed later. Basheer's story shows that social issues surrounding rural beliefs can be told from a supernatural perspective. *Bhargavi Nilayalam* (1964) thus introduced Malayalam cinema to the horror genre.

2.7.2. *Yakshi* (K.S. Sedhumadahavan, 1968)

(Video Part 1, 01:40min-02:20min)

The late 1960s and mid-1970s saw changes in the representation of gender in horror films. Film critic Dr Meena T Pillai argued in *The Celluloid: Women of Kerala* (2013) that, starting with *Vigatha Kumaran (J.* C Daniel, 1928), women were only occasionally depicted as autonomous; they were essentially represented as the object of the male gaze. Through the 1950s and 1960s, womens work was confined to specific social roles: the lenient spouse, cherishing mother and self-sacrificing ladies who strive to support themselves, shown in the

female characters in films like *Bharya* (1962) and *Iruttinte Aathmavu* (1966) (Gopinath and Raj, 2015).

The battle for gender equality in Kerala began in the late 1960s. The primary goal of the independent Indian women's movement, when it was established in the 1970s, was to denounce such brutality. Political parties and religious authorities typically resisted taking action against those who were allegedly involved in rape or other forms of violence against women, and female leaders who were associated with them hardly ever raised their voices in opposition. Women who would speak out in the interest of justice without fear of retaliation were organised into autonomous women's organisations. Despite Kerala's history as a communist state, a similar situation existed there. Kerala, in contrast to other regions of India, had chosen its first Marxist government in 1957 (Subramanian, 2019, p.3). In the state, the Left front continues to be quite powerful, winning every other election. While the communist/Marxist parties and Kerala's projected progressive society did not change anything regarding women's difficulties, they provided feminists with new obstacles to overcome in their fight against patriarchy. To demonstrate what it meant to be a progressive, they had to reveal the male dominance both inside the party and outside in society. In order to gain independence and unbiased social interventions in favour of women's welfare, the majority of feminists eventually left the left-wing political parties and founded their own women's organisations.

At this time we also see the introduction of *Yakshi* characters in Malayalam films. A *Yakshi* is an unreliable mythological woman with a tremendous force. She is found in Hindu literature and believed in by Hindu communities. Women are said to restore their bodies with the souls of *Yakshi*, unaffected by earth, water or fire. As there is no physical body, there is no prerequisite for rest and *Yakshi* enjoy alarming others, fulfilling their wants, or doing otherworldly practices to gain vitality. They are imperceptible and immaterial, so they can

enter any place whenever they choose (Thafseera, 2018, p.6). In Malayalam films before the 1980s, *Yakshi*s generally had the same appearance – a woman with long, free hair dressed in a white saree, with a startling facial expression, long nails and sharp, long teeth and singing a melancholic melody.

Although they have this unparalleled capacity to defeat all men, we can also see certain attitudes evoked towards *Yakshi* characters. The vast majority of the films present *Yakshi* as an image of over-the-top femininity, with their long hair, enticing grin, and all the characteristics of an attractive woman. These *Yakshi* characters are always portrayed negatively and seen as malicious. Through this, there emerges the notion that a young woman or a woman with power is evil. The *Yakshis* have a historical significance as they were characters made up by the locals to create fear amongst the upper caste. As shown in most of the films discussed, the upper caste population are generally the victims of the *Yakshi's* wrath.

Yakshi (K.S Sethumadhavan, 1968) was written by Thoppil Bhasi, who was associated with socialist development in Kerala. The work of progressive writers like Bhasi was seen as modern and came to be known initially as '*Athyadhunikam*' (High-Modern), as the term postmodern had not become popular in the critical vocabulary of Malayalam (Kurup, 2011). The film is a psychological thriller with horror elements. The central character, Professor Sreeni (Sathyan), is a chemistry professor. He has adapted to Western culture, wearing a suit and frequently using English words, even amongst the local community (see Image 10). The film has several scenes showing the naïve mindsets of locals, in contrast with educated folk such as Sreeni and his colleagues, who are presented as thinkers, just like in the Western world (see Images 11 and 12). The purpose of Sanal Mohan's book, *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala,* is to reconsider colonial modernity's character and its effects on historically oppressed populations in former colonial

areas. With the advent of subaltern studies, we can no longer assume that ex-untouchable castes simply saw colonial modernity as a period of greater exploitation and degradation than previously, or at least in comparison to dominant caste groups (Chandra, 2017, p.211). Instead, mimesis and hybridity opportunities provided by colonialism may be more useful in understanding how Dalits and other subaltern groups have worked to overcome historical oppression, reinvent themselves as groups and individuals and assert their equality in the contemporary public sphere. When colonisers grew their numbers in India, they introduced Christianity as a way of providing comfort for those experiencing caste discrimination. Colonisers provided a chance to be educated and brought a modern lifestyle that was quickly accepted by those who were oppressed. Education helped to attain equality amongst the brahmins and upper caste of the society, which is seen in *Yakshi* through modernisation, displayed in the form of dressing, language and behaviour being closer to colonial than Indian traditions.

In the film, seriously interested in finding the *Yakshi*, Sreeni meets with a lethal accident in the lab while doing his investigations and his face is scorched, leaving him distorted and revolting. Sreeni has been in a romantic relationship with his colleague, but she leaves him after seeing his face, and he secludes himself in a house a long way from the city and the school. There he meets a lovely woman named Ragini (Sharada), who goes to his home one night. The house is known for ghosts/*Yakshi*s. Sreeni and Ragini get married, but during their wedding, Sreeni begins to suspect Ragini is a *Yakshi*. Ragini goes missing, and it is revealed that Sreeni has become psychotic. Sreeni murders Ragini. His companions take him to a therapist who hypnotises him, and he reveals that he killed Ragini because of his suspicions of her. This has driven him insane. He is then arrested.

In this film, even though at the end it is revealed that Sreeni murdered Ragini, there is an element of mystery surrounding Ragini's behaviour. As is common in stories of the Fantastic,

her expressions, movements, dressing and dialogue create a sense of doubt as to whether she is the one with a psychological issue, or is in fact a *Yakshi* (see images 14-17). In the end, it is clear that there was no *Yakshi* but that Sreeni's obsession with *Yakshi*s and the accident made him lose his mental stability, turning him psychotic and hallucinating that Ragini is a *Yakshi.*

Image 10: The characters in the film are educated, and their attire is modern. In the 1960s, people who dressed in modern dress were considered educated in Kerala—an example of modernisation after post-colonialism.

Images 11 and 12: A painting believed to be cursed and possessed by a ghost explained to the professor by a naïve low caste person.

Image 13: village folk's naïve mindset where they believe the house is haunted.

Images 14 and 15: The dogs become restless when Ragini is around, and one dies. According to Hindu mythology, animals can sense the presence of a supernatural entity.
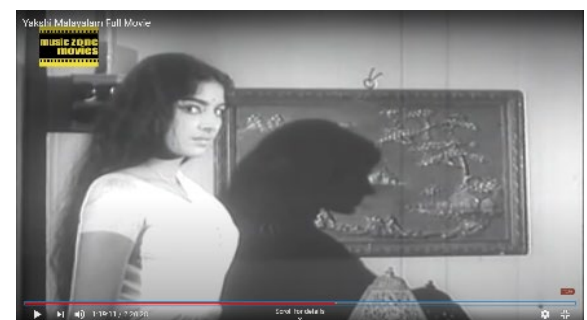
Images 16 and 17: Ragini's expressions change when she sees the painting, and the use of shadows creates a sense of mystery and fear as to whether Ragini is a ghost.

Although the film has no supernatural entity, the filmmakers used all the elements that a *Yakshi* portrays, such as a white saree, beautiful eyes, long hair, seductive behaviour, floral

scents and other aspects, thus misleading the audience into believing the plot has ghosts. In this film the *Yakshi* does not exist and the central female character is both human and a victim. In the 1970s, though, the *Yakshi* becomes real, a threatening figure who embodies female revenge.

2.8. The 1970s: *Yakshi* cliché broken, first female director, first colour film.

The golden age for Malayalam cinema was the 1970s, with films by Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Aravindan and John Abraham being influencd by 'new wave' developments worldwide. The mid-1970s saw an extreme change in producers' and audiences' viewpoints towards film in Kerala. Younger producers began to understand the uniqueness of the language of cinema, which until then was more like filmed theatre. Influenced by Italian Neorealism and the French New Wave, the Malayalam New Wave movement began.

Many of these filmmakers were from the recently established Film Institute in Pune, which used film as an impetus for radical change (www.cinemaofmalayalam.net). As Radhakrishnan states:

> The confluence of an intellectual context provided by the film societies, the economic support from the State and traditionally landed elite, and the pervasive arguments regarding cultural authenticity made Malayalam cinema central in the emergent New Indian cinema. (Radhakrishnan, 2012, p.91)

Horror films of this time were also experimental. Notable were *Yaakshaganam/A Ghost's Song* (Sheela, 1976) (Video Part 1, 02:21min- 02:41min), the first horror film made by a female director; *Vandevatha/Forest Goddess* (Y. Kechery, 1976), the first colour horror film; A. Vincent's second horror film, *Vayanadan Thamban/King of Wayanad* (A. Vincent, 1978), starring the well-known Tamil actor Kamal Haasan in his first horror film; and *Lisa* (Baby, 1978). *Lisa* (Video Party 1, 02:41min-02:46min) broke stereotypes of the *Yakshi* character, not only through the use of costumes and make-up but also by being the first example of a Christian *Yakshi*. The influence of Western regions in Malayalam horror cinema was rising

and can be seen in the film title, *Lisa* being a common anglicised female name. The use of Christian characters was another observed trait, which will be discussed further in this chapter.

2.8.1. *Yaakshaganam* (Sheela, 1976)

(Video Part 1, 02:21min- 02:41min)

Women in Malayalam films had stayed on the edges for decades – frequently assuming subordinate jobs or stereotyped in roles, such as the masochistic saint or the 'beautiful object.' There were very few actresses until the mid-1990s in Malayalam films because of cultural issues where women were viewed as being of lower status than men. Indeed, even in films with solid female characters or female heroes, the roles were adjusted to follow representations endorsed by the domineering social groups (Gopinath and Raj, 2015). Actress and film director Sheela was essential in empowering and encouraging women during this time. She is an outstanding actress and filmmaker who has been active in the industry for over five decades. She was a very selective actress who never aspired to be cast in stereotypical roles and consistently preferred varied characters and themes.

Along with Prem Nazir, Sheela holds the Guinness World Record for acting in the most significant number of films (130). In 2005 she gained the National Film Award for Best Supporting Actress for her work in the Malayalam film *Akale* (Shyamaprasad, 2004). She was one of the most mainstream and highest-paid entertainers, allegedly paid more than her male partners at the time. She began her career as a cinema actress at the age of seventeen. She moved on to television series and then directed and wrote in the Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu languages.

According to Seena, 'female stars in the industry were generally used to give the audience a human sense of beauty and eroticism' (Seena, 2016, p.1). Sheela was able to

uphold her career in Malayalam films without objectifying her body by portraying strong characters that were accepted by the Kerala film audience.

Sheela's directorial debut was a horror film, *Yaakshaganam* (1976), in which she also starred. The film also stars Madhu, the lead actor of the first Malayalam horror film, *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964). It was the first non-adapted original screenplay in a Malayalam horror film. The film's unique story and success led it to be remade in two other languages in India: firstly, as *Devadu Gellichadu* (Vijaya Nirmala,1976), in Telugu, directed by V. Nirmala (the lead Actress in the first Malayalam horror film *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), and it was later remade by Durai, in 1978, in Tamil, as *Aayiram Janmangal/Thousand Births,* (Durai,1978) which was then later remade again in Tamil as *Aranmanai/Palace* (C. Sunder, 2014).

Yaakshaganam's plot centres on Dr Venu (Madhu) and Savitri (Sheela), a Non-Resident Indian (NRI) couple from India, as they settle into a new home. This film shows how NRIs were often portrayed as leading prosperous lives and valuing finer things, such as residing in pricey villas, dressing elegantly and blowing money carelessly. Savitri is taken over by the ghost of Ragini (Jayakumari), a woman who was brutally raped and killed. Ragini seeks retribution by murdering a man, using Savitri's body to perform the act of a *Yakshi*. A psychiatrist friend notes Savitri's change in behaviour, learns the truth about the *Yakshi*, and makes an unsuccessful attempt to assist the pair. Savitri and the Doctor are both fatally killed by the *Yakshi* in the end.

Sheela, the female protagonist who returns from the dead to haunt the heroine's living body, embodies both the tame ideal domesticated feminine and its refractory, eerie 'desiring' opposite. Although the latter tempts the hero to wilder canvasses of desire, both are set inside heteronormative and domestic settings. The character of Savitri, which caused a stir in Kerala

society and boldly inserted a desiring woman with sexual appetites and emotional cravings into its social psyche and public sphere debates, is one example of how the sociocultural and literary milieu of Kerala in the 1970s is marked. This representation had previously been concealed by propriety and chastity (see Images 18 a, 18 b, 18 c).

18 a: Savitri scared of the statue of a nude woman.

18 b: Nudity shown through a statue.

18 c: The possessed Savitri with Ragini's spirit admires the nude statue.

18 d: Ragini expressing her sexual desires.

Sheela's directional venture was a milestone with post-produced visual effects in Malayalam horror cinema. The visual effects were the first in the industry, using post-production and graphic editing methods rather than on-set effects. The ghost was shown as a cloud of white smoke representing the dead person's spirit, which was new to the Malayalam film audience and has been used more in films made later (see Image 18e).

Image 18 e: Supernatural Entity (visual effects using analogue film).

Invoking the monstrous feminine, *Yakhshagaanam*'s visual economy dives into mainstream scopophilic investments of popular cinema, but it does so in a way that celebrates the feminine abject, rather than what Kristeva refers to as abjection, as a source of dread. The abject, which undermines 'identity, system, and order,' inhabits and terrorises the ideal home heroine as the subject (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4). It is to be noted that the ritual does not fundamentally reject the abject. The purification of the abysmal through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct,' resulting in a confrontation with the abysmal (the corpse, bodily wastes, the monstrous-feminine) is, according to Creed, the fundamental ideological project of the well-known horror film (Creed, 1986, p. 75).

In *Yakshagaanam*, the abject's physical allure, sexual immorality and subversive logic - which refuses to recognise borders, positions or rules - come out on top, contrary to Creed's claims. The attempt of the logical doctor to guide the living hero into the depths of the

unknown is thwarted by the dead heroine Ragini, who has returned to be with her masculine lover. The fabled heroine Savithri, who is the representation of virginity, is made motionless while Ravi, the masculine protagonist, is emasculated and devoid of the strength necessary to expel the despicable, as personified in Ragini. In the end, *Yakshaganam* is won over by the abject's physical allure, sexual immorality and subversive logic that rejects borders, positions or norms.

2.8.2. *Vayanadan Thamban* (A.Vincent, 1978)

Aloysius Vincent's second horror genre venture in Malayalam is *Vayanadan Thamban/King of Wayanad* (1978). The plot was a first of its kind and different from the cliched *Yakshi* stories produced in Malayalam, because the narrative did not have a *Yakshi*. It revolved around an old medieval sorcerer known as Vayanadan Thamban (Kamal Haasan).

This plot resembles the characteristics of witches in fairy tales, who do evil deeds in order to look young again, although, in the case of Vayanadan Thamban, it is a man, a sorcerer doing evil deeds. He is shown taking advantage of young virgin girls, making them trust and fall in love with him. The film's plot is developed using Kamal Hassan's charisma and beautiful physical attributes, rather than the conventional idea of an alluring feminine presence.

Vayanadan Thamban, the sorcerer, depends on women to keep young and prevent death. Unlike Christian beliefs of the devil being Lucifer, the fallen angel, Hindu mythology has several hundred devils with different names. Thamban is weak without a woman's love and thus seduces and sacrifices girls, worshipping a devil from Hindu mythology, named Karimuthey, to look young again. The film challenges the widely accepted idea that malevolent women are a staple of formulaic horror stories.

Kamal Hassan plays six different characters representing different backgrounds, such as Upper Caste, Lower Caste, Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The central character is a black magician or warlock; black magicians are part of Indian folklore and regional Hindu stories. In her 1991 book *The Disguises of the Demon: The Development of the Yaksa in Hinduism and Buddhism*, Gail Sutherland makes the case that the *kshatriya* hero's encounter with and ultimate homage to the *Yaksha/Yakshi* was frequently a metaphorical depiction of the hero's encounter with the wild and the keepers of ancient grounds.

Yakshas played a role in this mythology because they were part of a forest sojourn that establishes and reestablishes the sovereignty of the *kshatriya* heroes and religious champions. As *kshetrapalas* (protectors of the field) or *dvarapalas* (door guardians or keepers of the way), *Yakshas* formerly served as signposts on the pilgrimage trial and guardians of ancient, sanctified pools (Sutherland, 1991, p. 121). The *Yaksha* is both a local god and a *kshetrapalaka*. Beyond what this natural order can withstand, he cannot defend it. The edges of this natural order are 'dangerously close to bestiality and abrogation of the order established in the centres of human society' (Sutherland, 1991, p.92). This use of multiple religions and caste perspectives is notable. Its significance lies in using multiple religions in one film to create horror or fear. The character changes religion to trick and lure girls through love, as the girls he targets belong to different communities in Kerala.

The first girl, Kochamani, is a Hindu, characterised by her costume and the prayers she offers at a Hindu temple. The second girl, Nabeesa, is a Muslim, characterised by her name, which is popular in the Islamic community, and she belongs to a family where her father is mentioned to be a '*Hajiyar'* (an old Muslim man). The third girl, Annamma, is a Christian, as she wears a cross rosary and her name is a famous traditional name amongst the Kerala Christian community. The Christian and Muslim girls are portrayed in a similar way to the Hindu girl, without discrimination, and all are characterised as symbols of moral values

and virtue. These three women are represented as good, innocent and virginal, despite being from different religious communities. The common elements which unite them are the fact that they are naïve and virginal, which was needed for Thamban or else the sacrificial ritual would fail. He uses love to conquer their hearts, even though there were possibilities of kidnapping and forcefully taking them away.

Image 19: Thamban seducing Kochamanni.

Image 20: Thamban seduing Nabissa.

Image 21: Thamban seducing Annamma.

Religion and caste can be noted through the costumes worn at the time and even now, as shown in the images above. For example, in Image 20 the protagonist is dressed as a Muslim who wears a *thawb* (long robe) and a *Kufi* (hat), portraying a Muslim stereotype in a positive way, even though we know his intentions are negative. To represent a Hindu, he wears a *dhoti* (white cloth) draped around his lower body and ties his hair towards the side, a famous style of dressing amongst Hindu Brahmins (see Image 19), with mannerisms and language dialects changing as per his character. His change in attire is to convince the girl that he belongs to their community, and is thus making it easier to seduce and lure them into his trap, as only relationships from the same community are accepted by the Kerala society, even today. To show that he is a Christian he wears a shirt and trousers. All his characters have different names common to their respective religious communities. The subtle differences he makes to his character through mannerisms and dialogue dialect shows how each of these communities are perceived in the region as actually being quite similar.

2.9. The rise of soft-porn in the Malayalam Film Industry

It is notable that in the same year that *Vayanadan Thamban* (1978) was released, a new trend in storytelling in Malayalam film began with *Aavalude Raavugal* (I. V Sasi, 1978). This controversial film is known for being responsible for introducing the soft-porn genre into Indian cinema. Critics and reviewers attacked the film for its sexual explicitness, which they believed soiled the reputation of Kerala in the neighbouring states. In 1999, Sridharan abandoned his earlier labelling of the film as pornographic and market-oriented; he reclaimed it as a realistic text and a powerful depiction of human suffering (Maruthur, 2011).

Due to the success of *Aavalude Raavugal,* post-1978 sexual references were incorporated into Malayalam horror cinema. Most of the narratives had sexual abuse, sexual assault or rape in them, as in films such as *Lisa* (Baby, 1979), *Karimpoocha* (Baby, 1981),

Veendum Lisa (Baby,1987), *Sree Krishna Parunthu* (A.Vincent, 1984) and *Adharvam* (D. Joseph, 1989), which were all commercially successful. It is the male narrative of rape scenes and sexual violence that is presented and viewed by the audience; in turn, it is the male gaze that drives the audience to perceive the 'truth' of what has occurred and what has been portrayed as the trustworthy source to be believed in. The rape victim is introduced to the audience by the protagonists in each of the three films. This is clear from how women's bodies are portrayed in films. Through the casting of feminine characters, these films are successful in evoking scopophilic pleasure (situations in which the act of seeing itself is pleasurable, just as there is pleasure in the converse formation) in the viewer's consciousness.

Soft-porn films avoided any outright genital exposure, instead relying on the persuasiveness of visual and aural clichés. In order to convey sexual pleasure and climax, they frequently featured long shots of cleavage and thighs, massage and bath scenes and dubbed moans.

The horror genre may have been a safe space to use soft porn without the need for censorship from the Censor Board for Film Certification in India, since horror films were not encouraged to be watched by children at the time. The popularity amongst the male audience of visual sexual pleasure was taken advantage of to prevent legal implications and attain financial gain, which was successful until critics opposed its use in mainstream cinema. A common element seen in Malayalam horror films that have visuals of soft-pornography is that the victim always returns to seek revenge, by murderous motives, on those who killed her.

These films conveyed the message to the audience not to indulge in sexual violence towards women, whilst also gaining box office success. Gang rapes and the murder of the victims by members of privileged, affluent families, who have the authority to manipulate the law to suit their demands, are an essential component of the films. Despite being released

with the intention of raising awareness, the films fall victim to the prevalent patriarchal worldview that views women as property. The binaries of an active male and a passive female can be seen in all three of the films.

However, most of the directors that filmed these were male and the majority of Malayalam horror films before 1990 portray women as being extremely submissive and as pandering to the demands and wants of the patriarchal world's powerful males. In films that are examined here, the sexual imbalance plays a significant role. One can question why there are rape scenes in films. Projansky mentions, 'suggesting that independent behaviour and sometimes independent sexuality can lead to rape' (Projansky, 2001, 30). Typically, rapes are mainly represented in films to demonstrate that independent behaviour, and occasionally independent sexuality, can lead to rape, as is the case in certain films where the rape occurs when the woman tries to break free from her assigned responsibilities, such as cooking, cleaning and other household chores. The storyline of the films here complies with the notion that soft-porn films are low-budget pictures that take advantage of women to make quick money, which is promoted by the mainstream entertainment business and cultural purists.

2.10. Gender and Repression of Christianity

Post independence in India, Christian missionaries focused on educating girls and tried to address the issue of gender disparities, because the existing hierarchical and patriarchal caste system did not allow for a radical change. According to Alex Roji, when people converted to Christianity they became caste free, which enabled them to work in any job and to freely associate with people in higher castes. However, this did not entirely benefit women. The loss of the caste label gave them a new identity but did not overcome their oppression in the male-dominated Christian church. In recent years many studies have been initiated by the women's studies departments in Christian theological colleges in south India.

In horror films, Christian women are portrayed as uncivilised and lacking in culture and they embody evil forces and structures. Christina Monohar 's 2011 book, *Women's Issues and Reflection*, systematically analyses women's ethnic, cultural and sexual differences in India (Manohar, 2011, p. 88). Through reticulating insults and othering, women in south India still suffer double discrimination, occupying the most vulnerable position within the Christian Church and wider society.

In India, particularly north India, women are not encouraged to pursue education. But missionaries helped by not just spreading Christianity but also by educating women and helping them to read and write. On seeing this positive aspect, women from other religions and castes (mainly Hindus) converted to Christianity and started following the faith. These women who converted were considered bad for the community and referred to as prostitutes (guilty of moral decay). At present, schools and colleges that are managed by the Christian community in India do not stop girls from studying there.

While addressing the causes of anti-Christian violence, the importance of women in strengthening the church can be noticed, and it was observed that women are not allowed by their households to be educated and employed, and if they are it is to be only for menial jobs like cleaning, washing and cooking. Even in educational institutions and offices, women suffer from the effects of the hegemonic hierarchical system, which additionally creates an oppression of Christian women. Malayalam horror films post 1970 started to portray women from the Christian community as educated and different in relation to their lifestyle, attire and traditions as shown in *Lisa* (Baby, 1979) and *Veendum Lisa* (Baby, 1980).

2.10.1. *Lisa* (Baby, 1979)

(Video Part 1, 02:41min-02:46min)

Directed by Baby, who has worked on over fifty Malayalam films, *Lisa* (1979) was his first venture into the horror genre. The screenplay was by Vijayan, and the cast comprises Prem Nazir, Seema, Jayan and Vidhubala in the lead roles. *Lisa* is the story of a Christian Anglo-Indian girl, Lisa (Seema), who is raped and sexually assaulted, leading to her suicide. Her ghost seeks revenge on the man who raped her and needs a physical body to achieve it. Lakshmi is a Hindu girl, raised in a village, who becomes possessed by Lisa's ghost and murders the two people responsible for Lisa's suicide. The concept of demonic possession by the spirit of another human is seen for the first time in this film, a concept made famous in the 1973 Hollywood film *The Exorcist* (William Friedkin, 1973).

As discussed above, in films produced before the 1980s a *Yakshi* was usually depicted wearing a white saree. However, in *Lisa* (1979) the *Yakshi* wears a white gown inspired by the Western community, breaking the conventional stereotype of how a *Yakshi* should dress or be depicted. The significance here was to show that the character was a modern Christian girl following Western fashion. During the 1970s, Christian girls wore white gowns for special occasions such as birthdays, weddings and celebratory events, inspired by European women from the colonial period (see Image 22a).

Image 22a: *Yakshi* dressed in modern attire.

The intransigent patriarchal predilections of Malayalam cinema regard Anglo-Indian women as morally and culturally closer to their European counterparts, despite being a mixed population of two (European and Indian) ancestral communities. European women, according to Brownfoot, 'were portrayed as frivolous, vain, arrogant, and selfish' (Brownfoot, 1984, p. 186). In keeping with this, Malayalam films have also been egregiously unfair in their formulaic portrayal of Anglo-Indian women as shallow, uneducated, useless, arrogant, cold, indifferent, spiteful and irresponsible. Priya and Rajesh mention:

> Filmic discourses seem to be targeting Anglo-Indian women because of their supposed enticement of the European men, which is perceived as an act of moral degradation by the orthodox Malayali community. (Priya and Rajesh, 2018, p.23)

The result of such false perspectives is nothing more than the demonic and libidinous representations of the women of this 'métis' population of Anglo-Indians in films as skimpily dressed playgirls and sensual cyphers who entice the men of the superior castes with their incredibly sensuous ways and acts.

Lisa's character is portrayed similarly; in multiple scenes, Lisa dresses with short skirts exposing her legs and thighs, she wears clothes that are tight, which traditional Kerala people did not approve of, citing this style of dress as the cause of rape and sexual harm towards Christian girls. Lisa is impulsive, open-minded and friendly, she believes in her freedom, which is taken advantage of by her boss. She is trapped by her boss and molested, and in the attempted rape she gets away from his trap and jumps out the window of a high-rise building, falling to her death. The mindset of Lisa's boss is similar to that which many men in Kerala have in regard to Christian girls.

Lisa (1979) started a trend in the representation of Christian girls in Malayalam films. After its release, many Malayalam films started to incorporate this narrative theme of rape-revenge, and the frequency of sexual violence, rape and sexual assault increased, as seen in

films like *Karimpoocha* (Baby,1981)*, Veendum Lisa* (Baby, 1987)*, Sree Krishna Parunthu* (A Vincent, 1984) and *Aadharvam* (Dennis Joseph, 1989). The attempted rape scene in Lisa had no nudity. The scene was filmed with cross-cuts of a spider attacking its prey when trapped in a web. See Images 22 b and 22 c, wherein the spider represents the boss as a predator and Lisa as prey, placing her in the victim role. Despite the notion that Christian girls are 'asking for it' by the way they dress, the inclusion of the spider images demonstrates that this is an attack on an innocent, and this is not something she wants in any way.

22 b: Lisa's boss attempts to rape her.

22 c: Spider trapped its prey on its web.

Image 23: Lakshmi Possessed by Lisa's ghost.

Image 24: Lakshmi Possessed by Lisa's ghost.

In the scene with the possessed Lisa, the visual display is similar to the exorcism scene in the Hollywood film *The Exorcist* (1973) with the use of makeup, prosthetics and contradicting warm and cold lighting and colours. The exorcism scene of Lakshmi shows her crying, her face ripped and unstable (Images 23 and 24). She has to be tied down so she doesn't hurt the other characters or herself, which directly replicates images directly from *The Exorcist* (1973). The possessed character has intentions to kill those who want to help it, such as the Priest from *The Exorcist* (1973); in the case of *Lisa*, the Hindu exorcist is presented as the saviour to a problem created by a Christian girl. Thus, Christianity is creating supernatural events that must be solved by the Hindu faith. The religious anxiety associated with navigating the monstrous unknown and coming into contact with the 'other' is the driving force behind the development of the Christian character of Lisa, who is portrayed as a threat to characters of the Hindu community.

close

Exorcist (1973). The possessed character has intentions to kill those who want to help it, such as the Priest from *The Exorcist* (1973); in the case of *Lisa*, the Hindu exorcist is presented as the saviour responding to a problem created by a Christian girl. Thus, Christianity is creating supernatural events that must be solved by the Hindu faith. The religious anxiety associated with navigating the monstrous unknown and coming into contact with the 'other' is the driving force behind the development of the Christian character of Lisa, who is portrayed as a threat to characters of the Hindu community.

2.11. The 1980s: Influence of soft pornography in Malayalam Horror Films

In the early 1980s, a third strand of Malayalam cinema, called *Madhyavarthi* cinema (middlebrow cinema), emerged, sandwiched between realism and popular melodrama. In film criticism and popular understanding, these commercially viable realist films constitute Malayalam cinema's lost golden age. Melodrama was also deployed in Malayalam horror films through the use of extended musical numbers, action sequences and heightened emotional stakes, to make horror a more commercially viable genre.

2.11.1. *Karimpoocha* (Baby, 1981)

(Video Part 1, 04:35min-05:35min)

Directed by Baby in 1981, *Karimpoocha /Black Cat* (1981) centres on a possessed object, in this instance a car. The plot follows a *Yakshi,* Maria, who seeks revenge by using a car and a black cat/Karimpoocha. Joy (Ratheesh) and Leena (Seema) fall in love without knowing about a dreadful incident which happened ten years earlier. Maria, Leena's mother, was raped and murdered by Joy's father, Cheriyachan. In the film the family are represented as Christians who are socially, politically and monetarily able to manipulate the legal system.

Cheriyachan is a man greedy for money. He owns an estate and business enterprise. Maria was a worker at his estate, and during a night when her daughter, Leena, had a seizure attack, she sought help from Cheriyachan. Instead of helping her, he rapes her in his car and murders her. He then gets rid of the car in a lake.

Cheriyachan disapproves of the relationship between Leena and Joy after seeing that Leena looks precisely like Maria. Paranormal activities occur, such as scenes where Joy experiences the presence of Maria through flashback visuals and when the car in which Maria was raped drives by itself, in an attempt to kill Joy. Leena is frightened while praying, and the car is involved in an accident, which gets Cheriyachan concerned about the well-being of his family. He then asks the Priest to bless the house. The Priest visits and places a wooden cross outside their home to keep out any unholy presence.

What makes this film different to others is that the car in which Maria was raped and murdered is used as a vessel for Maria's spirit in multiple scenes. This concept of paranormal vehicles was new to the Malayalam film industry and was inspired by the 1977 Hollywood film *The Car* (Elliot Silverstein, 1977). Using possessed objects is not new to the Malayalam horror film audience though, as in the first horror film, *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), a bicycle is controlled by a supernatural force. Nevertheless, what makes this unique is its resemblance to the Hollywood film, its vengeful nature of murdering people in the film and a car being exorcised by a Christian Priest (see Images 24 and 25). The representation of the priest shows that the local community members believe they need a priest to move further on with their lives.

Image 25a: Possessed car being exorcised by the Priest.

Image 25b: Close-up shot of a rosary used as a weapon against the possessed car by the Priest.

In *Karimpoocha* most of the characters are Christian, with the plot set in a Christian location with a local Church. The lead characters are all Christian and are shown as rapists, perverts and murderers. Cheriyachan is portrayed as a faithful Christian but he commits evil deeds for pleasure. His character represents Christian businessmen in Kerala who own estates and agricultural property and hire labourers for cultivation. In the film, this businessman uses the poor labourer woman for his own sexual pleasure.

A scene that occurs just before someone is murdered by the ghost features the famous painting by Leonardo da Vinci, The Last Supper, a representation of the last few hours before Jesus Christ was crucified. The Last Supper was made to remember Christ's death: "Do this

in remembrance of me." All the blessings of the new covenant are to be symbolised, sealed and applied to believers. Christ confirms his vows to his people through this ordinance, and they formally dedicate themselves to him and to his complete service to show and encourage the connection of Christians with Christ and to exemplify how believers are in constant communion with one another. It is a crucial moment prior to Jesus Christ's sacrificial death for the sins of others.

Likewise, a Christian man (Johnny), one of the antagonists, was going to sexually use Leena, but her mother, Maria, kills the man before he could do this. The scene shows (Images 26 and 27) the Last Supper painting to symbolise that death was awaiting the Christian because his motives were evil. Jesus Christ was having his last meal before he was punished, and the belief, as per the Christian faith, is that he died for the sins of others. Here, Johnny is seen having his last meal before Maria kills him. The portrayal of the painting entails that this is Johnny's last meal.

Image 26: Johnny stares at the fan, which kills him later in the film.

Image 27: A painting of the Lord's Supper from the POV of Johnny, before he was killed.

The title of the film *Karimpoocha* means black cat, a Hindu belief that considers black cats to be a bad omen. Although the characters in the film are not related or do not actually see a black cat anywhere, each time a Christian person is murdered a shot of a black cat is shown on screen. The use of a possessed object, in this case a car where Maria was raped and killed by Cheriyachan, is shown to be alive. A number of cultural specificities that both overtly and indirectly reflect the prevalent gender and religious norms of the time are present in this application of the mediaeval *Yakshi* tale in Kerala that is intertwined with Western influences.

Many ancient societies from the West have stored religious concerns, such as vampires, ghosts and fearsome supernatural characters, as monster stories. Adaptations from Western cultures in terms of Christian culture, practices and characters like Cheriyachan, Johnny and Maria are portrayed as evil, monstrous and unjust to the society, thus making them 'other'.

2.11.2. *Sreekrishna Parunthu* (A. Vincent, 1984)

Sree Krishna Parunthu/Sree Brahminy Kite (A. Vincent, 1984) is the third film directed by A. Vincent in the horror genre. Scripted by P. V Thampi, adapted from his novel *Krishna Parunthu/ Brahminy Kite,* the cinematographer was the director's son, Ajayan Vincent. This film was the first horror film in which Mohanlal appeared, the same actor who is the lead character in *Devadoothan* (2000), which is discussed in Chapter 3.

The plot is set in the 18th century and follows a family, Puthhor Illam, known for their positive (tantric) magical powers. The oldest person expects his death and gives his powers to his nephew, Kumaran (Mohanlal). The antagonist is a black magician and an evil sorceress who wants to destroy Kumaran's powers. After losing his powers, Kumaran worships another Goddess who helps him destroy his enemies with black magic. After

destroying his enemies, Kumaran becomes greedy and seeks wealth and knowledge from hidden secrets preserved in manuscripts. He is attacked and killed by the protector of those manuscripts, the Sree Krishna Parunthu/Brahminy Kite.

The cinematography in the film is shot with low light and dark tones, which, along with a mise-en-scene, represents the era before electricity, when the communities depended on candles and lanterns to illuminate the dark (see Images 28 and 29). The low lighting generates a stressful environment because it implies that when you're alone nobody can help you, and Kumaran spends most time alone. Michelle Park states that:

> Props in horror films are the "instruments of terror" and essential to the storylines… Shooting a character through an object gives the feeling of being "watched" and is unsettling. Cinematography in horror films often incorporates perspective shots, tracking shots, wide shots, and extreme close-ups. Filmmakers also use distorted shots shooting through objects, hand-held camera shots to suggest shaky subjectivity, and foggy texture to give unworldly suspense. (Park, 2018, pp. 15 -16)

The props in the indoor shots, such as the cot, chairs, stands and tables, were antique and were designed in order to create an old-era mood. The costumes, make-up and hairstyling brought out an element of history inspired by old paintings and past drawings. The use of candlelight in scenes showing nudity distorts the image and creates shadows, which create mystery, tension, and suspense (see Image: 28). The shadows enhance the concealment of features of the characters' physical attributes, and create a distortion of reality. When the girl is shown naked, it is what Kumaran fantasises, but in reality it is actually the sorceress trying to tempt him.

Image 28: Nudity using candlelight at night.

Image 29: POV of an Eagle's eye.

In Image 29 we see the character through the eye of an eagle and the impression of being 'watched' is unnerving to the audience. The use of low lighting with a warm colour grade gives a sense of a voyeur, as the character is half-dressed.

Image 30: Eagle spreading its wings.

Image 31: Aesthetically portraying nudity by spreading herself like an eagle. They are hidden with a white cloth.

Although the film portrays nudity, it was shown with the emphasis on aesthetics rather than sexual titillation (Image 31). The cinematography did not create fear of

ghosts, black magic and Hindu rituals. The use of sexuality through cinematic shots within the Hindu-based plot enhances the aesthetics of the Hindu characters, whereas plots revolving around Christian characters, such as *Karimpoocha* (1984) and *Lisa* (1979), showed sexual violence, assault and rape. Hindu rites, rituals and practices were portrayed as beautiful, aesthetic and visually pleasing. Thus, Christian-themed horror films were 'other' because of their showcasing of sexual violence and their cruel Christian characters.

2.11.3. Veendum Lisa (Baby, 1987)

(Video Part 1, 03:20min-:3:38min)

Directed by Baby, *Veendum Lisa/Lisa Again* (Baby, 1987) is not a sequel to the first *Lisa* but has a similar concept, whereby Saraswathi (Jayarekha) is possessed by the ghost of another woman, called Lisa (Shari), who was gang raped by friends of Saraswathi's husband, Dr Kalyan (Ravi).

The title used - *Veendum Lisa* - was intended to capitalise on the success of the first film, making it easier to promote and market, since it was a large-scale production with particular sequences, eg the scenes depicting the romance between Kalyan and Lisa, where Kalyan cheats on Lisa by marrying Saraswathi, being filmed in London. Also, a song sequence filmed in London shows Lisa's loneliness after Kalyan leaves her walking alone along the streets (see Image 32). This was a way of showing landscapes and new locations to the audience and connecting the Anglo-Indian community with Britain. A sense of 'other' is to be observed when the Christian character, Lisa, crosses cultural and traditional boundaries. Lisa is an orphan and she is seen happy and content whilst in London, working part-time as a waitress, which would not be possible in Kerala - the reason being that the naïve mindset of the Kerala community would view waitressing as a menial job that lacks respect and belongs to the lower class of the community. But in London, there is no such judgement and *Lisa* is an ideal example of how cultural forms vary as per regions, which is mapped and intersected

amongst the cross-cultures (Indians and Anglo community). An identity crisis tends to arise

and this is often portrayed in visual culture; thus Geethu Elizabeth Thomas mentions that the:

> 'other' has become a pertinent theme in continental philosophy and various fields of
> critical theory. The purpose of 'other' in interpretation in turn helps to insight about
> the 'other' and ourselves. All cultural forms of representation hinge on the issue of
> identity creation. The represented images even create a prism that would blur the
> distinction between the real and the represented. Films are the main agency of
> representation which has got significant influence in human minds. Mapping regions
> in visual culture has got its own politics and poetics. As representing the high ranges
> as the 'other', films have created a deep impact in the minds of Keralites, since
> decades. (Thomas, 2021, p.593)

Thus, it is noted that Anglo-Indians are othered in Kerala through films such as *Lisa,* which

maps out visual cultures of a traditional Anglo-Indian girl in London. During the time period

shown in the film, girls from Kerala were not encouraged to be educated, but Lisa, being a

Christian, has this privilege. Lisa, as a Christian, is able to assimilate into Western society,

fitting in when in London more than when in her home country. For example, musical scenes

show her and Kalyan walking together on the streets of London, holding hands and hugging

in public. This is normal in London, but if done in Kerala the public would escalate it as an

issue to defame and 'other' her. This shows how comfortable and happy she is, she feels 'at

home' in London, more so than in Kerala. During this time she has a positive experience in a

foreign country, but then gets raped when she returns to her home in Kerala. It is difficult for

an orphan student to get a scholarship and study in London, it shows her dreams and goals

were big and the city provided her with an opportunity. But this would not be the case if she

was in Kerala, she would be working menial jobs or would have to get married and move

away to live as someone's housewife. Lisa returns to Kerala to find Kalyan but ends up

getting raped and brutally murdered by the antagonists. Thus, it is shown that she fits in more

in London than in Kerala.

Image 32: Lisa in London.

Gomathi and her daughter visit a temple at the start of the film where they meet Saraswathi, the daughter of the late Shankara Iyer (of the Shreehari Madom dynasty). They have a history with the Shreehari Madom family, so Gomathi sets up Saraswathi's union with her son Kalyan, a physician. They choose to spend their honeymoon at Ooty after their wedding. By chance, Saraswathi finds an image of a girl in Kalyan's briefcase one day. When questioned, he admits that he met and fell in love with a woman named Lisa while studying in London. After his studies, Kallyan and Lisa agreed they would get married quickly. However, he never saw her again after he left London. Because Lisa is an orphan and a Christian, his parents are against their union. Kalyan claims that because he is now dating Saraswathi he will never think about or look at any other women and will forget about Lisa.

Saraswathi's character soon undergoes significant modifications. She starts acting like a contemporary city girl and stops showing respect towards her parents. This behaviour expresses that Christian girls are disobedient and disrespectful when compared to Hindu girls. Gomathi is shocked by this and, thinking that Saraswathi might be under the influence of an evil spirit, he hires an exorcist. When this fails, Saraswathi once more exhibits odd behaviour. During this time, three people, Dr Sharath, Kalyan's closest friend, John Fernandes, and Parameshwaran, his elderly mute servant, are killed by an unidentified entity. Now that he is

utterly frustrated, Kalyan beats his wife to drive out the evil within her. He discovers to his dismay and shock that Lisa herself is the spirit.

Lisa tells Saraswathi that she landed in India after Kalyan left London. She eventually made it to Ooty but could not find him there. She ran into Sharath and John, who decided to provide her with temporary housing until Kalyan returned. They both mercilessly murdered her and Parameshwaran before raping her. After that, they burnt her corpse to ashes.

Lisa acquires authority through Saraswathi and eliminates her murderers one by one. She yearns to be with her lover forever, so takes possession of Saraswathi. Kalyan persuades Lisa that if she truly loved him she would leave Saraswathi's body and enter heaven. Without reluctance, Lisa departs from Saraswathi and gives him a sorrowful farewell before departing for her heavenly residence. The pair leave a bouquet at Lisa's grave as the film closes.

Although Lisa is a victim, she is also a threat to society when she harms Saraswathi. As in the first film, Lisa, a Christian character, seeks justice by killing those who harmed her by using a Hindu girl, possessing and harming her to attain her selfish motive. The Hindu girl is tortured and a similar resemblance in the narrative of *Lisa* (1979) is observed during the exorcism scene. Park talks about the use of visual effects to create gore and violence:

> Make-up is also an essential feature in horror genres to create appalling and gruesome effects. Make-up SFX artists, who use special make-up effects and FX prosthesis, are responsible for transforming actors into horrifying monsters and creatures such as: Frankenstein, Dracula, ghosts, and lesions of zombies. Special effects make-up artists in the entertainment industry apply prosthetics, cosmetics, fake blood, and even tissues to create the appearance of bruises, cuts, blood, wrinkles, deformities, and mutations. (Park, 2018, p.23)

This excessive use of makeup and prosthetics on Lisa and Kalyan invokes disgust and fear in a scene where blood rather than water is shown coming out of the shower. There is also a scene where the pain that one can experience when burnt alive is shown with the skin exposed and flesh charred (seen in Image 36) where the use of cuts, bruises wounds and

blood makes the audience feel uncomfortable. This shows the character as disfigured and monstrous, thereby Lisa is being shown as the 'other'. The exorcism scene (see Images 34a, 34b) is portrayed as brutal, similar to that of the prequel *Lisa,* with the makeup resembling the exorcism scene in *The Exorcist* (see Images 35a and 35b). The influence of Western filmography can be seen with the use of prosthetics, makeup and practical visual effects.

Image 33: A gore scene where Saraswathi is bathing but screams on noticing blood coming from the shower head instead of water.

Images 34a and 34b: Possessed Saraswathi.

Images 36 and 37: Scenes from *The Exorcist* where the girl wears makeup and prosthetics to show possession. This is used in *Lisa* as seen in Image 34a and 34b.

Images 38 and 39: Gore scene to scare Kalyan with visuals of his face burnt as he looks at himself in the mirror.

Although this is not the first film to use visual effects (see Images 38-41b) it includes the most advanced use of make-up, prosthetics and practical visual effects of that time. Elements of gore, such as burnt skin, skeletons, blood from the shower and scenes in which Dr Kalyan is seen looking at himself in the mirror with his skin burnt and face deteriorating, signify what Lisa felt after she was raped and murdered by three men who were his friends. Lisa makes the Hindu Man feel the pain she went through. This demonstrates that the only way a Christian minority female can claim revenge on the majority community of a Hindu, male-dominated society is through supernatural means.

Images 40a and 40b: Lisa's burnt skeleton is shown from different angles (long side shot).

Images 41a and 41b: Lisa's burnt skeleton is shown from different angles (front –mid-shot).

The film is unique due to its narrative including scenes set not just outside Kerala but outside India, along with the use of advanced make-up, prosthetics and visual effects and the use of sexual violence, rape and brutal assault on women to melodramatise the horror genre. This melodramatic approach played with the emotions of viewers, which are then heightened further through the use of horror.

2.11.4. *Adharvam* (Dennis Joseph, 1989)

In his film *Adharvam* Dennis Joseph portrays the life of a tantric painter, Anandan (Mammooty), who is rebuked by society for being born to a tribal mother and an upper-caste father. The upper caste people murder his mother in front of him by burning his house (Images 42, 43). They do this because he fell in love with the daughter of one of the upper-caste people. The film explores the caste system in Kerala, which is practiced within the Hindu community. The cruelty of upper caste people is exhibited when Anandan's mother is burnt alive in front of him.

Images 42 and 43: Anandan is tied to a tree and helplessly looks at his mother being burnt alive in his house.

His mother raised him without knowing who his father was, until his early teen years when he asked her to reveal his identity. He then meets his father and younger brother, Vishnu. Anandan experiences various experiences of caste humiliation, as he was born out of wedlock to a woman from the lower caste who was used for sexual pleasure by his father. So he takes up the offer from Thevelli, a sorcerer, to learn Atharvaveda, a ritual practice to conciliate evil spirits.

The use of colour to portray caste traditions and rituals contradicts the psychological perception of colour in one's mind (Images 44, 45). Tones with a dark red atmosphere show anger, hate and prejudice; this is especially so in the scene filmed at night, which is believed by folktales to be the time when evil lurks. That ritual is done by a lower-class person. Whereas as seen in Image 45, the people who are from the upper class perform their rituals during daylight and the white-toned atmosphere shows purity, goodness and happiness. The contradiction arises in one's mind because the people in scenes that show purity actually depict evil personalities in the film. For example, when they burn the lower-class woman in front of her own son.

Image 44: Rituals to show Black Magic, with a dark red atmosphere to show evil.

Image 45: Rituals to show Hindu religion, with a white atmosphere to show purity or goodness.

After his mother is murdered, Anandan goes rogue and learns the art of Atharvaveda (black magic) to harm all those involved in killing his mother and destroying his life. The film does not generate horror through a female body but details aspects of the Kerala caste system in its cultural and social space. Scenes that show evil among upper caste sorcerers and black magicians, such as Anandan, who are perceived as a threat by society, subtly convey information about the hypocrisy of the caste system.

The atrocities that casteism may cause in the domestic domain, both psychological and physical, have not been fully addressed in cinema. With a few exceptions, the majority of Indian films have, according to Konda, 'played blind to the caste discourse for most of its course' (da, 2020, p.64). Consequently, by examining the film's representations of caste-based prejudices, and the accompanying violence brought out on the domestic front, the adverse and disastrous effects on the individual and society that this prejudice causes are

demonstrated (Karthika, 2022). The film bravely chronicles and presents the operation of caste, both in the domestic interiors and social exteriors, wherein Anandan initially accepts the mockery and abuse of the upper caste community, forgiving them and educating his brother, and showing love towards his family despite the hurdles.

The domestic interior portrays the love for his family no matter what caste, but on losing them he goes against the social exterior, which is the upper caste community. For example, Anandan loved his mother and Vishnu, and because of that love he never reacted badly to the negative comments and mocking he grew up with from the upper-class people. But when they killed his mother in front of his eyes he went rogue, ignoring the norms of love. Eventually he rebels, attacking the upper caste community using supernatural forces and black magic.

The film directly criticises the upper caste and informs the general audience of the cruelties low caste people are faced with. The caste discrimination aspect is portrayed in many scenes, even amongst children, with a scene from Anandan's childhood where the other children make fun of him for not knowing his father and being born to a low caste woman, referring to him as the son of a prostitute or bastard.

The film ends with Anandan dying by setting himself on fire, as seen in Image 5. When a black magic ritual goes wrong, endangering the lives of his brother, fiancé and the village, Anandan sacrifices his life to shield them from evil forces.

Atharvam (1989) cannot be considered a general horror film with the clichéd narrative aspects of using the female body to create horror. A woman is used to portray subtle nudity in some scenes, with India's most well-known soft-porn actress, Silk Smitha, playing the role of a tribal girl from the low caste class. However, it is noted that the use of a recognisable soft-porn actress in the role of a lower caste woman associates promiscuity with lower class ways.

Image 46   Image 47

Image 48

Images 46, 47 and 48: Nudity of Silk Smitha is shown aesthetically using warm and cold lighting textures with different angles.

This would have served well for the promotion of the film. By using Silk Smitha, the filmmakers would be able to market a film that openly criticises the superstitious beliefs of the majority. This was also the actor Mammootty's first horror film, and his presence is another way to get the audience to accept a film about the sensitive issue of the caste system.

India in the 1990s saw the birth of the Modi phenomenon and the next section provides a summary of the religious and political situation in India.

2.12. Hindutva and its Rise

In his 2019 book *Malevolent Republic,* explaining the current political climate in India, K.S. Komireddi argues that religion is linked to nationalism, thus creating a hybrid identity. The core of India's current Hindutva movement is this brand of nationalism. The current ruling party in India, the BJP, led by Narendra Modi (the current Prime Minister of India), skilfully exploits religious sentiments to support nationalism and create a political fortress to carry out its secret agendas and ambitions.

The Modi phenomenon resulted from the failure of the Congress party to consistently

sustain democratic norms. In disregarding the fundamentals of democracy, the emergency

government in 1975–1977 destroyed many peaceful social contexts. The state of emergency

declared by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in June 1975 led to a 21-month suspension of

democracy because the then President Fakhruddin Ali and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi

claimed to control internal disturbances across the country, people's rights were suspended

and many rebellious people were arrested. In addition, many wealthy families wholeheartedly

back the Modi government in order to protect their own interests. In order to achieve their

purposes there was a systematic whitewashing of Nehru for his strong secular and democratic

beliefs. As Shah states:

> Nehru is portrayed racing to scenes of communal clashes without regard for his personal safety, threatening Hindu mobs plotting to massacre Muslims and striving to be 'a model of democratic leadership'. Yet while accusing Indian secular historians of airbrushing the military conquests of several hundred years ago, Komireddi does the same for the blood spilled within living memory on Nehru's orders. In his account, Nehru bears no responsibility for the slaughter of perhaps 40,000 Muslims by the troops he dispatched to put down the left-led uprising against the Nizam of Hyderabad in 1947. (Shah 2020, p.141)

Moreover, a polemic on religious beliefs and identities was developed by Hindus, creating a

perplexing climate of intolerance and discord amongst various religions and castes across

India where Christians are a minority. Conflicts between and among castes still exist in

present-day modern society in India.

The three Hs, 'Hindi, Hindu, and Hindustan,' are the foundation of the Hindu

fundamentalist movement, and its adherents were required to speak the same language and

share the same religion and ancestry. It is a synthesis of political, cultural and religious

fundamentalism that has been blended into a specific framework to meet the demands of the

nation's dominant group. It has isolated other religions through persecution and

demonisation; denying their religious rights through stigmatisation, the destruction of their

houses of worship, and through numerous protests. Politically, it has advanced to the point

where it attempted to seize control of the national government; culturally, it isolates

minorities as outsiders who do not share Hindu culture and are therefore viewed as aliens

without the right to reside in India (Tiwari 2000, p. 998). Hindutva laments the passing of

their allegedly magnificent culture. They reject their native country as a holy, pure and sacred

place, and they view non-Hindutva Indians as foreigners and even enemies.

The fundamentalist and fanatical religious organisations who carried out their plans

under the guise of superiority and cultural nationalism pose a threat to Christianity in India.

Scaria Kuthirakkattel writes that:

> Fundamentalism is closely linked with Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity which
> centers on the emotional, non-rational, mystical, and supernatural: miracles, signs,
> wonders, and the gifts of the Spirit (charismata), especially speaking in tongues
> (glossolalia), faith healing, and casting out of demons (exorcism). Supreme
> importance is attached to the subjective religious experience of being filled with or
> possessed by the Holy Spirit. (Kipgen, p.3)

Christians and the Christian Church in India must choose whether to carry on sharing their

faith with their community and nation. Kipgen mentions that other religions, not only

Hinduism, exists in India:

> But Hinduism cannot be the religion of Indians. It's just one among the other
> religions. Nowhere in India in the present or past Hinduism has been a religion of all
> Indians. It has been just the religion of Brahmins. If it were to be everybody's
> religion, Saiva, Buddhist, Jain, Sikh, Lingayat religions would not have been born in
> this land. In fact, these religions came about as a reaction to Brahminism and against
> the evils of Hinduism. (Kipgen, p.5)

The situation grows complicated when sporadic acts of violence against Christian employees

and property persist, along with forceful Hindutva preaching. Hindutva and the BJP attack

Churches and murder Priests and anyone who converts to the Christian Faith. For example,

The New York Times published an article stating that:

The Christians were mid-hymn when the mob kicked in the door. A swarm of men dressed in saffron poured inside. They jumped onstage and shouted Hindu supremacist slogans. They punched pastors in the head. They threw women to the ground, sending terrified children scuttling under their chairs… In church after church, the very act of worship has become dangerous despite constitutional protections for freedom of religion. To many Hindu extremists, the attacks are justified — a means of preventing religious conversions. To them, the possibility that some Indians, even a relatively small number, would reject Hinduism for Christianity is a threat to their dream of turning India into a pure Hindu nation. Many Christians have become so frightened that they try to pass as Hindu to protect themselves. (*New York Times*, 2021)

Recently, globalisation and modernisation have also endangered the Hindutva Vadis. Hindutva forces consider Christians to be symbolic extensions of globalisation and modernisation since they believe that Christianity intrudes on people's culture, identity and rights. They perceive this as a threat to the authority of Brahminical culture and religion. The next section dicusses films such as *Aayushkalam* (1992) and *Manichithrathazhu* (1993 intertwined with experimental narratives revolving around gender, religion and education.

2.13. The 1990s: Globalisation, Education and Malayalam Horror Films

In this period Kerala society's political and cultural ties were centred on appealing to the interests and sentiments of the middle class, who play a critical part in shaping society's overall sensibility. The Indian middle-class views education as a critical component of social development, according to the social critic Pavan K. Varma, who describes the effects of the socio-economic reforms in 1991 (James, 2020), where film producers and production houses focused more on profit and the commercial aspect of cinema than the craft itself, thereby decreasing the use of nudity and violence in Malayalam cinema, and family-friendly narratives in the horror genre were encouraged. This is because, during this decade, a new middle class with diverse tastes emerged with a new perspective on social and political events and the arts. There was also a growth of stardom in cinema and a workforce with technical knowledge was required, due to the information technology industry's rapid advancements. Varma explains that the middle class always prized education, but its significance had

recently increased. Since 1947 there have been generally more education opportunities, but after the economic reforms of 1991, and with the introduction of information technology a few years later, work opportunities grew significantly (Varma and Pavan, 1953, p.23).

The portrayal of women in leading roles also changed, though this has only been subtly expressed through their prominent positioning in a film's marketing. They wear contemporary and modern dresses influenced by Western countries, showing that they have financial freedom, they are able to drive their own vehicles, they have their own homes and they work their own jobs and do not depend on men.

As a result, a new generation with new viewpoints arose, causing a generational split in Kerala society. Venkiteswaran points out that although the formats and styles of the new generation films were heavily affected by regional and national trends, 'their thematic remained firmly rooted in Kerala life and mindscape' (Venkiteswaran, 2012, p.1). Malayalam cinema began targeting a vast audience inside and outside Kerala, including non-resident Keralites (NRK), non-resident Indians (NRI) and non-Malayalam speaking audiences outside Kerala, particularly the metropolitan population that enjoys foreign language films with subtitles (Manju, 2017). The target audience of Malayalam films also shifted due to the multiplex industry's quick expansion and satellite rights. A notable film was released, Rajiv Anchal's *Guru* (Rajiv Anchal, 1997), which was the first Malayalam film to receive an Oscar nomination, serving as India's official submission for the Best Foreign Film Oscar.

The worldwide and cross-regional exposure changed the paradigms of past narratives in popular Malayalam cinema. The horror genre used this expanded audience by requiring filmmakers to create horror films suitable for all ages. In order to appeal to a family audience both inside and outside of Kerala, Malayalam horror films reduced the display of soft pornography, nudity and gore, diminished rape-revenge tales and added humour.

2.13.1. *Aayushkalam* **(Kamal, 1992)**

Directed by Kamal, *Aayushkalam* (1992) is a Malayalam horror film where the ghost is male and friendly, thereby enabling children and the family audience to view it without arousing fear. The narrative was adapted from two Hollywood films, *Heart Condition* (James D. Parriot, 1990) and *Ghost* (Jerry Zucker, 1990).

Balakrishnan (Mukesh) is given the heart of Aby Mathew (Jayaram), a young man who died in a vehicle accident, and both families consent to the surgery. Aby, a Christian man, seeks revenge as he was murdered. His spirit is seen only by Balakrishnan.

Balakrishnan's attempts to expel Aby's ghost from the house fail, leading everyone to believe he has gone insane. Eventually, Balakrishnan befriends Aby and willingly helps him to seek the murderer and take revenge.

The costume worn by the male ghost is a white shirt and white trousers, similar to the colour of the costumes of *Yakshi* shown in most famous Malayalam horror films, such as *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964)*, Yakshi* (1968)*, Yakshaganam*(1976)*, Lisa* (1978) and *Karimpoocha* (1981). However, in other horror films, female ghosts who wear white-themed attire died of brutal rape, murder and sexual assault, so they are not wearing the attire that they come as a ghost in. In Aby's case, he appears in what he is buried in. In Western countries a corpse is dressed in black but in Kerala they use white clothes.

Unlike the previous horror films, the ghost here is a man and is portrayed as friendly, with no willingness to harm Balakrishnan, a Hindu. The uniqueness of *Aayushkalam* (1992)

is the family-friendly, comical narrative structure executed with supernatural and fantasy horror elements. Without the use of a *Yakshi* or a female of any supernatural form, the gender swap creates a ghost who is likeable rather than vengeful and scary. Reasons for this change could be because of criticisms that previous horror narratives used lots of nudity, gore and bloodshed and explored darker subjects, such as rape and the subjugation of women.

The use of a Christian male ghost is intriguing because, in scenes such as when Balakrishnan, a Hindu, fails to get rid of Aby, he uses a cross, a symbol used to fight away evil spirits. But he fails in that too, showing Christian methods to be inefficient and that he lacks faith in its beliefs, thereby othering Christianity.

2.13.2. *Manichithrathazhu* (Fazil, 1993)

(Video Part 1, 03:48min-03:56min)

The film *Manichithrathazhu/The Ornate Lock* (1993) portrays themes such as multiple personality disorder (MPS) and psychological illness. Although the topic of MPS was explored earlier in *Yakshi,* this was the first time many audience members were informed of MPS in society. This film created public awareness and attention and revolutionised Malayalam cinema in Kerala and across India, as many people in real life had until now suffered in silence. Kerala families at the time considered it a disgrace if any person went to a psychologist for treatment. In this horror film a Christian, Dr Sunny, creates awareness of these conditions, even though the Hindu community considered the main character, Ganga, a Hindu girl, to be suffering from a religious or spiritual problem, believing her to be possessed. Dr Sunny is portrayed as rational, smart and educated in America, as during that time many educated NRI's were Christian. Although the Christian character wants to help the Hindu community he is rebuked and avoided, illustrating how Christians were still considered to be a disdained minority.

The success of this film led to its remake in four different languages - *Chandramukhi* (P. Vasu, 2005) in Tamil, *Bhool Bulaiya* (Priyadarshan, 2007) in Hindi, *Rajmohol* (Swapan Saha, 2005) in Bengali and *Apthamitra* (P Vasu, 2004) in Kannada – all of which were commercial successes. Later, post-2000, a spin-off was also released, *Geethanjali* (Priyadarshan, 2010).

The main character, Ganga, has a psychological condition, namely a split personality disorder, and he wants to learn about and explore *Madampally* (the name of the house they are staying in). The family forewarns her not to open the lock, but even after this warning she continues to look into these matters, being drawn to the old tales of a young woman, Nagavalli, and the King, Sankaran Thampi, who kills her.

She opens the forbidden ornate lock. She appears in a psychic trance after entering the taboo room, known as Thekkini. She is mesmerised by Nagavalli's look in a painting she sees. Ganga's trance and spontaneous connection to Nagavalli can be seen as a spiritual possession. She later assumes the personality of Nagavalli when in the trance mode, creating fear within the household and scaring her family. She wears Nagavalli's dress and dance anklets and even speaks in a different language (Tamil). Psychologically, this can be viewed as the onset of a personality disorder or dissociative identity disorder, where a person exhibits two or more separate personas that alternate in some fashion. This condition was once known as multiple personality disorder (Devi, 2017, p.2). Ganga's husband, Nakulan (Suresh Gopi), notices the troublesome events occurring in the household and, since he is a non-believer in Hindu beliefs and traditions, decides to summon a doctor as he believes that Sreedevi (Nakulan's cousin) is the one with mental health problems and not Ganga.

When the family decides to take a spiritual approach to her problem, Nakulan responds by attempting to contact a well-known psychiatrist. He does not believe in

spirituality but only in science. This demonstrates a genuine tension between science and faith.

Ganga has episodes which manifest as aggression, curiosity and weird energy. The development of her condition is related to a childhood event. Ganga was raised without receiving enough parental attention. Lonely, frightened and bullied at school, her only source of comfort was her grandmother's lengthy bedtime tales, which sparked an innate fascination in her that leads her to fixate on folklore. The repressed personality, however, continues to be inactive and separate from the developing personality. These issues are discovered by Dr Sunny as he investigates her background.

Dr Sunny is vital in advancing the ethics of psychiatry, and so protects Ganga and Nakulan by not disclosing Ganga's condition to the family or the wider community. Even though Dr Sunny is a Christian, he encourages and prays during a fake Hindu exorcism which he organises with the help of a Hindu priest. This plan combines exorcism and psychiatry as a way to appease both sides. Such moments demonstrate the strategies employed by the community to incorporate new developments in psychology and science, which were advancing at that time, while not abandoning older beliefs entirely.

The film can be categorised as a psychological horror thriller because of the focus on the treatment of a severe multiple personality disorder. While there is initially the possibility of a supernatural form or ghost, ultimately it is Dr Sunny who figures out that the issue is a psychological one. However, it is considered a horror because of its use of folktales and ancient characters who come alive through Ganga, who walks around at night wearing a white saree singing songs and speaking Tamil (learnt in her childhood).

The sound of her anklets and the extensive use of shadows builds tension and a sense of fear to make her, and us as the audience, believe in a supernatural element of horror.

Michael J. Epstein outlines the four primary types of music used in horror films to elicit a physical reaction:

> Dissonance and unnaturalness; the dynamics of loudness, speed, and pitch; uncertainty, whispered voices, silence; and startle reflex. These sounds immediately make the audience uncomfortable while the dynamics of loudness, speed, and pitch in horror films also create tension. (Park,2018, p.27)

Primitive parts of our brain fear sounds that are unseen; for example, when we hear the sound of anklets without it being actually shown in the scene. The loudness, pitch, tempo and speed of the anklets enhance the sense of fear, and a curiosity develops to know who was wearing the anklets - was it Ganga or Nadavalli? It is later proved by Dr Sunny to be Ganga.

The film creates tension between the involvement of science and religion to help the community when supernatural events occur. Rationalisation of occurrences such as the singing, night hauntings and character switch in Ganga to Nadavalli was shown by Dr Sunny to be a personality disorder in Ganga, rather than what, as the rest of the people thought, a case of Ganga being possessed. Dr Sunny, who is a Christian, is rebuked and disliked by the Hindu community because of his actions to help and he becomes 'othered' from the community.

2.14. Conclusion

The introduction of the horror genre and its impact on the development of Malayalam cinema are briefly discussed in this chapter's review of the Malayalam film industry and its historical environment. As the first section of the chapter discusses caste difficulties that have affected Kerala and India, it is clear that these socioeconomic and socio-political problems in India impacted filmmakers and contributed to Kerala's cultural growth of creative forms. This chapter has outlined some significant examples in the production and promotion of

Malayalam cinema, focusing on the rise of the horror genre and how it has affected the cultural industry.

As a starting point for the analytical discussions in Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter offered a brief understanding of the horror genre and its norms and the main characters, themes and narratives used in Malayalam horror, most notably the character of the *Yakshi* and the narrative of rape-revenge. Additionally, it has established the discourse on film and religion, by exploring the first instances of Christian characters and iconography in Malayalam horror films and how they depict this minority as the 'other'.

The gradual increase in Christian representation in Malayalam horror films continues to develop further in films made after 2000. The next chapter will explore four contemporary horror films, *Devadoothan* (2000)*, Meghasandesham* (2001)*, In Ghost House Inn* (Lal, 2010) and *The Priest* (Jofin T Chacko, 2021).

Chapter 3 Malayalam Horror Cinema post-2000: The use of Christian imagery and iconography (Video Part 2)

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I explore historical changes in Kerala over the last three decades. I analyse the political situation in India during that period and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, as well as conversion laws and communal riots by Hindus who target the minority Christian community across India, and the concept of caste as an ongoing issue. I also explore Christianity's social and historical relevance in India and how communal conflicts have contributed to the marginalisation of Christians in the country. I address the place Christianity occupies in the context of the rise of Hindutva ideology. I explore how and why Christians have become targeted and how this relates to the representation of Christianity in the films analysed. The relationship between historical and cultural changes in India is also explored, specifically in the region of Kerala, and the articulation of such changes in cultural forms, including Malayalam horror cinema.

This chapter begins with Christianity in Kerala and its repression post-2000, followed by a discussion of selected Malayan horror films where I argue that Christian imagery and iconography is used for negative purposes, resulting in the othering of Christianity. In films such as *Devadoothan* (Sibi Malayil, 2000)*, Meghasandesham* (Rajasenan, 2001)*, In Ghost House Inn* (Lal, 2010) and *The Priest* (Jofin T. Chacko, 2021) I argue that Christianity is 'other' in different ways, being presented as a source of fear and evil, or as an object to be mocked.The next section provided information on communcal violence and religious conflicts within the multireligious society.

3.2. Repression of Christianity in India

(Video Part 3, 00:00min-03:40min)

A series of study materials produced by the Christian Institute of the Study of Religion and Society (CISRS) in Bangalore vividly demonstrate the pattern of persecution and cultural alienation suffered by Christians in India. India is a multi-religious society and within it the Christian religion has a distinct identity. As a minority religion, it has always been branded as a continuation of colonial dominance. Specifically, Dalit Christians, subaltern Christians and other marginalised groups have been branded by mainstream media as colonial debris. Such branding destabilised Christian identity. The contribution of Christianity in terms of freedom of movement, freedom struggle and nation-building has not been appreciated or respected by Indian society.

Visual media, mainly filmmaking, in Kerala in particular and South India in general, has portrayed a very negative and distorted image of Christianity and many Hindu organisations have attacked Christianity, through othering, from post-2000 until the present. Thus, Christianity slipped from images of harmonious coexistence to hate and intolerance. The significant factors that provoked these negative representations are caste, gender and religious practices. Most Christians belong to the lower caste, and a negative image is perceived of Christian women. In religious practices, the Holy Communion was misrepresented in films and by society. Notably, the BJP government in Goa officially banned the use of wine for the Holy Communion Service, equating it with alcohol, thus ignoring religious sentiments and subverting religious practices and traditions (2004). Orentsani Shitrie, argues that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries marked a critical period in the history of Indian Christianity and Indian Society when terrible things happened to Christian communities (Shitrie 2021, p. 128) such as communal riots, priests being murdered and Dalit Christian families persecuted and assaulted without mercy by the Hindutva political

community. It is noted that several indigenous movements in Kerala emerged due to this encounter. To give an example:

> An indigenous Christian revival movement was founded by Justus Joseph, a Brahmin Convert. Converted through reading the Bible, the family members were baptized in 1861. Ordained to the Anglican (CMS) ministry in 1869, he became a popular preacher. Thousands were stirred in the revival at Travancore under his ministry. Joseph however sought a wider scope for dissemination of his views. This led to conflict with the missionaries. Joseph wanted to work within the church but was suspected of propagating heresy: he expected the second coming in 1881. Joseph separated and established the Kanneett Revival Church in 1875. This was a clearly indigenous structure with duties for members, revised rituals, direct revelations, innovative interpretations. All members were expected to obey the church regulations. The revival church in 1881 became youmayam, completely separate from any Christian denomination; it now considered itself the fulfilment of Christianity and all religions. After the death of the founder in 1997, the movement declined under his successors (his son and His brothers), then dwindled to a few persons in a few locations. This movement was the product of ferment created by the translation and the publication of the Bible in Malayalam. The founder was always regarded as Christian, his lyrics and hymns found in the hymnals of the Syrian Church. A century ago, his was an example of contextualization. (Thomas, 2015, pp 2-3)

Similarly, Woba James, in his 2013 book *Major Issues in the History of Christianity: A Postcolonial Reading*, argued that due to severe conflict and violent encounters between Christians and Indian Society, an atmosphere of repression gradually emerged (James, 2013, p.36). It is assumed that such repression emerged due to the increased notion of Christianity as specifically Western. A number of indigenous missions developed during this complicated period to provide the people of India with contextual theology, meaning that small theological seminaries and spaces developed to teach ministry and theology. Kaholi mentions:

> In the broadest sense, indigenisation is a term describing the "translatability" of the universal Christian faith into the forms and symbols of the particular cultures of the world. The term indigenisation is also defined as the characteristics of a particular region or country. Missiologists adopted the word and used it to refer to churches that reflect the cultural distinctive of their ethno-linguistic group. The missionary effort to

establish indigenous churches is an effort to plant churches that fit naturally into their environment and to avoid planting churches that replicate Western patterns. (Zimmoni, 2018, p.36)

Despite the indigenisation in worship, rituals and practices of Christianity, the image portrayed in Malayalam horror films was an image of the 'other' and the alien. Since the Christian Church of India attempted to liberate people who were at the margins of society from their socio-economic and cultural oppression, the hegemonic forces tried to distract Christians in violent ways by not allowing them to practice Christianity and destroying places of worship. The resulting process of othering increased in a manner in which aggressive verbal and physical alienation took place. Thus, in recent years, Christians and the Church's authority and influence were pushed to a corner of society in India. The next section explores Malayalam cinema post 2000.

3.3. Malayalam Cinema post-2000

Before 2000, few Malayalam films were made. This was due to the lack of access to filmmaking resources, including cameras, production units and analogue film, which was more difficult to master than digital video.

By 2000, when an increasing number of educational institutions were teaching the subject, students began to learn the craft of filmmaking. Some aspiring filmmakers travelled outside Kerala, and even outside India, to study film. After increased access to technology, numerous people, especially Keralan youth, began to dream of developing their careers in cinema.

Malayalam filmmakers were neither confined to the self-conscious style of the new wave nor were they beholden to the widespread rise in song, dance, action and humour as seen in 'Masala films', which were by then being used as a narrative structure by the majority

of cinema industries across India, such as Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Kannada. Blockbuster films with slapstick comedies and romantic storylines defined the new millennium in Indian cinema.

Filmmakers in Kerala were determined to retain their own vision rather than follow the 'Masala film' format of other Indian film industries. Instead, they maintained a strong connection with specific narratives that were central to their films and were not influenced by popular trends. Contemporary Indian cinema, on the 'other' hand, aimed to keep up with the changing times and invested in modern technology, incorporating Dolby digital sound effects, advanced special effects and choreography. Aiming to market their films to international audiences, they increased corporate investment and improved scripts and performances. For filmmakers, the aesthetic appeal of cinema became critical.

In 2008 the Malayalam film industry produced India's largest-ever multi-star film, *Twenty-20* (Joshiy, 2008). Joshiy directed it and the actor Dileep produced the film, which featured almost all the Association of Malayalam Film Artists (AMMA) members, who worked for free. It was an initiative by AMMA to raise funds for their welfare programmes that assist older artists who have lost their jobs. This was the first and only initiative of its kind in India.

In the last decade, there has been a commendable increase in the number of new artists and directors entering the industry. Therefore, this decade has seen the release of films classified as 'New Generation' – those with experimental plots, unusual themes and novel narration techniques.

Sathish Kalathil produced and directed *Jalachhayam* (Satish, Kalathil) in 2010, the world's first feature film shot entirely on a mobile phone camera. *Drishyam* (Jeethu Joseph, 2013) and *Pulimurugan* (Vysakh, 2016) became the first Malayalam films to cross the box

office's 500 million- and one-billion-dollar marks, respectively. *Drishyam* (2013) was subsequently remade in four additional Indian languages.

The 2014 film *Peruchazhi* (Arun Vaidyanathan, 2014) was released in 500 theatres worldwide, making it the most widely distributed film in Malayalam cinema history.

Another central development was the advances made in the technical quality of films and the use of technology. In 2016, Jenso Jose, co-producer of Siddique's directorial debut *Fukri* (2016), devised the novel idea of a mobile dubbing station. For the first time in Indian cinema history, dubbing took place on-location in a mobile dubbing studio set up in a caravan. Additionally, it was used for some post-production tasks, such as basic scene editing and colour correction. This enhanced a film's quality, as the actors could convey the same emotion in their voices as they did when speaking in front of the camera (Sabreena Basheer, 2019, p.6).

In 2017, another first in Indian cinema occurred when the Malayalam film *Villain* (B. Unnikrishan, 2017) was shot entirely in 8K resolution. The 2018 film *Virus* (Ashiq Abu, 2018), based on the Nipah virus outbreak in Kerala, is hailed as India's first medical subject-based film. In 2019, actor-turned-director Prithviraj's *Lucifer* (Prithviraj Sukumaran, 2019) earned 5 million USD in four days, 10 million USD in eight days and 15 million USD in 21 days, making it the fastest Malayalam film to reach all three milestones and the highest-grossing Malayalam film of all time. Additionally, it was the first Indian film to be shot entirely with anamorphic lenses.

The Kerala film industry started to experience growth in 2000, mainly because of increased technological development and globalisation. This was due to the increase in filmmakers, films and personnel associated with different cultures and film industries following similar narratives or, to be more specific, remaking films such as *Manichithrathzhu* (1993), as elaborated in Chapter 2.

Contemporary social upheavals, such as migration, urban alienation and internal globalisation, also presented cinema with obstacles, which resulted in the development of various dominant narratives with the representation of Kerala migrants, urban nomads and tropes of race displacement amongst the people of Kerala. Malayalam cinema began to target a broader audience within and outside Kerala, including non-resident Keralites (NRK), non-resident Indians (NRI) and non-Malayalam speaking audiences outside Kerala, particularly the metropolitan crowd who watch foreign language films with subtitles. The fast expansion of multiplexes and satellite rights has also altered the target demographic for Malayalam cinema. New paradigms replaced prior narratives of popular Malayalam films due to region-crossing and global exposure.

Through an analysis of selected Malayalam horror films, this chapter investigates the relationship between the production choices, techniques and emotive elements of Malayalam horror films and the increase in contemporary narratives based on the use of Christian religion, incorporating Christian symbols and iconography, in Malayalam horror films, presenting them as forms of repression and 'otherness'. The next section explores developments in Malayalam horror films post-2000.

3.4. Main Developments in Malayalam Horror Post-2000

Post-2000, there was a marked increase in the production of Malayalam horror films due to the rise in young, enthusiastic filmmakers. *Moonnamathoral* (V. K. Prakash, 2006), a Malayalam horror film, was the first Indian film shot in a digital format and distributed digitally (Geni.com, Kerala Film Industry). Computer graphics played an 'other' major role as CGI and VFX were widely used for the horror genre since they often portrayed supernatural elements. Many of these were creative experiments, such as *Meghasandesham*

(Rajasenana, 2002), *Ezra* (2017), *Vellinakshatram* (Vinayan, 2004) and *Nine* (2019), which involved the use of computer graphics and digital visual effects to enhance the horror experience. These films helped rising filmmakers to view the possibilities of using graphics rather than practical and analogue filmmaking methods. For example, in *Vellinakshatram* (2004), in the scene where the child in the film pranks her uncles by elevating herself from the ground, computer graphic imaging is used to achieve the effect. The influence of Western horror films also becomes more pronounced, which is discussed later and establish that the rise of Hindutva, Hindu ideology and representation of Christianity, changed Malayalam horror narratives whilst developing the cinema art form.

Until 2000, most Malayalam horror films followed a clichéd narrative with a *Yakshi* focused on rape-revenge plots. Narratives now began to change with the use of black magic, tantra, ouija boards, period stories, Dracula, vampires, shapeshifters, digital horror, parapsychology thrillers, eco-horror and science fiction, all of which enabled filmmakers to create and experiment beyond the clichéd *Yakshi* concept. The fall in narratives involving rape-revenge and an increase in stories centred around these newer technical elements and experimentation with new horror sub-genres, coupled with more family-friendly techniques and more emphasis on plot, caught the attention of Malayalam audiences. In 2000, three horror films appeared which were quite different from the usual horror narrative: *Devadoothan* (Sibi Malayil, 2000) is a musical horror, while *Indriyam* (George, 2000) and *Summer Palace* (K Murali, 2000) were both horror stories with plots influenced by American horror films and revolving around college students.

However, the films did not perform well at the box office, as the Kerala audience was unable to accept a different narrative structure because, for almost four decades, they had become used to a specific horror narrative, a fusion of comedy and horror. Some of the new horror films that kept to this tradition were *Aakash Ganga* (Vinayan, 1999), which combined

elements of comedy to make it child-friendly, *Vellinakshatram* (Vinayan, 2004) and *Kannakanmani* (Akku Akbar, 2009). Thus, Malayalam horror films grew not only in production quantity but also grew in the range of narrative and thematic elements.

One of the main developments in stories and themes was an increased focus on religion, particularly Christianity. Grafius points out that:

> Horror and religion are often interwoven, as both utilise themes that reflect the anxieties, concerns, and ideologies of the cultures and societies around them. However, a secular humanist view might suggest that these themes explored in horror narratives are not inherently Christian or religious but reflect the human condition. (Grafius, 2017, p.191)

Not all horror films contain explicit religious content. Films where the horror is caused by violent insanity (psycho-horror/slasher films), science fiction-inspired horror (alien possession/metamorphosis films), films about 'mad scientists', ecological horror (where the danger is caused by human activity) and alien invasion films are all examples of what Andrew Tudor refers to as 'secular horror.' Except for supernatural-horror films and psycho-horror films, science-fiction horror films are unlikely to make biblical references as there are no mentions of werewolves, vampires or Draculas in the Bible that are seen as experimental results of mad scientists.

According to Tudor's 1989 study, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Film,* at least a third of all horror films made in the twentieth century can be classified as 'supernatural horror', a sub-genre that peaked in the early 1970s but is still very much alive today (although it must be noted that Tudor was examining mostly American films, with no study of Indian horror films). This sub-genre includes vampire films and films with apocalyptic/Satanic/demonic themes, haunted house films, and so forth - all of which could be expected to make some reference to the Bible.

Along with the numerous horror themes identified by Tudor, Beavis adds the category of 'spiritual horror' films (Mary Ann Beavis, 2003, p.2), where a character or group's most

fundamental and cherished religious beliefs are threatened by discovery or insight, threatening spiritual damnation or chaos; the latter can be classified as religious psycho-horror films. Thus, supernatural and spiritual horror films (which could be grouped as 'religious horror') are the horror sub-genres most likely to feature the Bible in some form. Filmmakers such as Sibi Malayil, Lal, and Rajasenan started to experiment with the horror genre, with narratives related to the Christian religion or, more specifically, the use of stories revolving around Christian communities in Kerala.

To examine how interactions with Christianity as the 'other' have been produced cinematically, I explore four post-2000 films, *Devadoothan* (Sibi Malayil, 2000)*, Meghasandesham* (Rajasenan, 2001)*, In Ghost House Inn* (Lal, 2010) and *The Priest* (Jofin T. Chacko, 2021), which all have representations of Christianity. In these films, Christianity is made 'other' through the portrayal of Christian iconography and spiritual entities as elements of the supernatural that are either characterised as a source of evil or mockery.

3.5. Representation of Christianity in Malayalam Horror Cinema

(Video Part 1, 04:30min-08:38min)

Christianity has been around since the early centuries of the Common Era. Kerala appears to have evolved Christianity on its own, with a constant increase in adherents and the variety of churches and sects within it. At present, there are religious conflicts across the nation of India, with the 2022 Indian census showing that less than 3% of the entire population of India are Christians. However, in Kerala Christianity is the third largest practised religion, after Hinduism and Islam, with 18% of the population in the state identifying as Christian. The uniqueness of this is explored further in the next chapter.

Since colonisation, the Anglo-Indian community (Indian-European ancestry) has maintained a strong and compelling presence across the entire spectrum of Kerala society.

However, Malayalam cinema has always been hostile to the sentiments of this minority ethnic community, and Christians have never been adequately represented in the Malayalam film industry's output. Popular cinema's general sensibility has always been to identify with upper caste and middle-class Keralites. They have been unable to express their complex history or position in Kerala's history, due to the fact that community assertion in a caste-ridden culture is only possible within the framework of the caste hierarchy and that caste society stigmatises Anglo-Indians as a result of interracial marriage.

Further, there has never been a serious attempt by Malayalam cinema to deal with the minute complexities and divisions of Anglo-Indian life or to reflect or represent the tensions of their lives. Malayalam films are inextricably linked to dominant caste favouritisms and have never produced realistic depictions of Anglo-Indian life or Anglo-Indian ethnicity. Rather, the entire Anglo-Indian community is portrayed, stereotypically, as a monolithic entity with a single essentialist and predominantly negative identity, representing them as foreigners through their mannerisms, dress sense and a lifestyle that is different to or mixed with Kerala culture. The community is looked upon as inbred and not given a sense of belonging. Most films ideologically affirm derogatory Anglo-Indian stereotypes, subtly making 'other' this 'hybrid' community, and it is unquestionable that the Anglo-Indians, descended from Europeans, initiated Kerala society's modernisation.

The Anglo-Indian language, culture, lifestyle and food habits have profoundly influenced Kerala's cultural mosaic. However, at a time when modernity and progress were viewed with suspicion, Anglo-Indians and their way of life and mores appeared to be a threat to Kerala's 'genuine' or 'authentic' regional culture, as well as the traditionalism promoted by the upper class/caste, which was, and continues to be, the reason Anglo-Indians and their customs are feared and consequently 'other'. To illustrate this vilification practice, Malayalam cinema sarcastically uses dialogue - referring to Anglo-Indian men and women as

Sayippu, (a reference used to address men), meaning Master, and *Madamma*, (a reference used to address women) meaning mistress - which was used only to address the colonisers and not people from Kerala. These are Malayalam variants of the casteist Kerala society's terms *'sahib'* and *'madamme,'* which alienate Anglo-Indians and thus perpetually remind them of their crossbred status of being half Indian and half foreign. The use of these words is disrespectful to Anglo-Indians and they do not feel safe at home and outcasted by the locals. A close analysis of the following films unveils the status of the 'other' in a horror context.

I explore the relationship between the visuals of 'other' and affective reaction with the portrayal of iconography depicting Christianity and 'otherness', thus exploring how current filmmaking practices that depict encounters with the 'other' may sustain new forms of 'otherness' – othering the 'other'(s) – inside the cultural settings of the cinema audience.

3.6. Christian Iconography in Malayalam Horror Films- Analysis

3.6.1. *Devadoothan*: *Messenger of God* - Someone wants to tell someone something (Sibi Malayil, 2000). (Video Part 2, 01:55min-09:00min)

Devadoothan (2000) depicts the lifestyle of the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala through its location, set design, mise-en-scene and costumes. The director, Sibi, believes that a film should be enjoyed as an art first and foremost and that cinema should reflect the good and the bad and the political and apolitical elements in society, as it often takes inspiration from society. Sibi states that:

> Caste, class, racial and gender discriminations are social realities. However, they must be opposed when they are glorified. When an art form is dissected for political correctness, the artist and the audience cease to exist. (Vijayan 2020,p.3)

However, cinema as an art form can misuse and take advantage of the socially disadvantaged. Sibi tries to create a sense of unity and explains that films must be watched

with an open mind and considered as an art form. If anything that offends you as a person related to caste, class, racial and gender discrimination, in the case of *Devadoothan* it is Anglo-Indian Christian community. The community should not be attacked and nor should they or filmmakers be targeted as the making of the film was based on the social realities that were and are still happening around us. Through such films an understanding of social realities can be spread to a larger, more informed audience through cinema, which may eventually allow the public to ponder more upon the topic that the artist was trying to express.

With *Devadoothan* (2000), Sibi Malayil brought to the Malayalam film industry a new sub-genre in Malayalam horror cinema, in which music (composed by Vidyasagar), romance and comedy merged with horror. This film presented a divergence from the traditional horror narrative structure used in the previous Malayalam horror films.

It took Sibi seventeen years to start the production of this film, from an idea he had in 1983. He believed that the film would be a box office success and would be accepted by the Kerala audience, as he states:

> Everyone wanted to make this film with technological finesse. From cinematography, music and production design to costumes, sound and computer graphics, we were determined to bring in the best artists and technicians. I have not spent so much time and energy on any other film. Those who watched the preview in Chennai said great comments, giving me hope and courage. So, it was with confidence that I awaited the film's release. (Vijayan 2020, p. 4)

Unfortunately, the film initially failed at the box office. Since then, though, the Malayalam audience has accepted the film, and it has become a classic of Malayalam cinema. In 2000 the audience was used to Malayalam horror films being clichéd and did not expect the musical element. However, the comedy scenes followed the general Indian cinema formula to make the audience laugh and not to make it too serious. Yet it was deemed too different to what the audience expected.

Devadoothan (2000) is a musical horror film that tells the story of Vishal Krishnamoorthy, a Hindu character who is a successful musician. He is guided by 'energy' to convey a message to Angela, the owner of the college. This energy is a ghost, but unlike most horror films with a *Yakshi*, this ghost is a man who was murdered and wants to inform Angela of his death, so that she no longer waits for his return. The ghost is represented as a divine presence, as the imagery associated with it is taken from biblical literature, such as a dove, multiple scenes with crosses, and seven bells.

Angela Ignatius (Jayaprabha) maintains the college in remembrance of her father, William Ignatius, who was the one who expelled Vishal. The 'seven bells', an instrument kept locked safely in a chapel within the college, was played by the man she loved, Maheswar, who left her to seek permission from his family to marry her but never returned. Angela still waits for him to return and never marries anyone else, even after her father insists that she should. Maheswar was a talented musician who was blind, and his musical talent made Angela fall in love with him. William did not approve of their love for each other, which is something Angela was unaware of. She never allowed anyone to play the instrument because she only wanted Maheswar to play it.

The instrument plays the same song each time. After many years, Vishal hears the same music from a tape recorder, which plays by itself. Curious about why this is happening, he investigates and notices several instances of paranormal activity. He feels a holy presence, like something spiritual is guiding him, a messenger from heaven. Upon his investigation, he unravels why Maheswar did not return: he was murdered by William, Angela's father.

Vishal, a common name amongst the Hindu community, can be assumed to be a believer of Hinduism, as in the mise-en-scene of his room there are idols and paintings of Gods representing the Hindu religion, such as Goddess Lakshmi, God Rama and Goddess

Sita. Vishal was expelled from a college that the Christian Anglo-Indian management administered. An element of hatred may have risen in his heart for Christianity, as it relates to the person who destroyed his career and ambitions. Vishal is portrayed as short-tempered, aggressive and a drunkard, creating a provocation between Hindus and Christians in Kerala, due to Christian educational institutes not encouraging students of non-Christian faiths to succeed.

Angela is portrayed as negative and an enemy to Vishal, a Hindu. She expelled Vishal from college on the false allegation that he played a forbidden instrument. This instrument could only be played by Maheswar, a Hindu. William Ignatius, Angela's father and a Christian, murdered Maheswar to prevent Angela from marrying him because he was a Hindu and disabled. Vishal helps Angela, despite her negative approach towards him. The Hindu hero, Vishal, is thus shown to be helpful and tolerant, while William, the Christian, is the villain. This is a negative representation of Christianity, because he kills Maheswar in the name of religion (he is not of the correct faith to marry his daughter).

Devadoothan (2000) does not include the traditional element of a *Yakshi* (ghost) nor the rape-revenge theme. But it does have paranormal activity, such as doors and windows opening by themselves, light bulbs switching on and off without human interference, musical dolls and weather changes, tropes common to the horror film genre. Here the audience is more aware of the paranormal activity than the characters in the film. In order to comfort the confused characters, one of the priests in the film tries to give rational explanations to his colleagues and students that the occurrences are due to the wind, humidity and bad circuits, as it is an old building. This confuses the characters as they do not believe it and consider the priest's words as laughable and they ignore him.

Generally, the priests are portrayed comically. A Priest, performed by Jagathy, a famous comedian in the Malayalam industry, dances to hip-hop music in a scene that insults

the principal (Janardhan), who is also a priest. Hip hop music in India was a result of the influence of Western culture, but this was not only a genre listened to by Anglo-Indians but also a genre which spread fast across the country, due to education spreading in English, especially in the region of Kerala where literacy rates are high compared to other regions in India. When students rehearse their skit, Jagathy rewrites certain scenes from the script written by the principal and ridicules him, thus insulting a fellow Priest and undermining his authority.

In most Western horror films revolving around Christian themes, a priest is a saviour and a person to depend upon in fighting away evil spirits. However, the Priest in *Devadoothan* (2000) does not believe in spirits, even though in the Christian faith a believer proclaims to have faith in a true God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is part of the Apostle's creed in Christian liturgy. The Apostle's creed originated in the fifth century and was based on the life and witness of the first disciples of Jesus, which has been the basis of worldwide Christianity (*Sacramentum Mundi* 1989;.47*)* So, any attempt to dilute the Apostle's creed will shake the foundations of the faith of ordinary people. Therefore, I would argue that this scene undermines Christian identity and rituals. According to Christian belief, a priest is a mediator between humans and God; therefore, to show a priest who doesn't actually believe in what he teaches encourages spectators to laugh at Christian spiritual beliefs.

A Christian icon portrayed in multiple scenes throughout the film is a white dove. This is conveyed in the images and by off-screen sound effects of the dove flapping its wings and cooing.

Below are images of the many appearances of the dove. 50 (a-j)

In a scene where Vishal hears the seven bells music at night, which is also the central music in the film, he goes to the chapel where the instrument is kept, but it stops playing when he opens the door. As he approaches, part of the instrument moves by itself, and the non-diegetic sound of a dove flapping its wings is heard. Although there is limited research about doves used in films to represent the Christian religion, the dove is known to be a bird of

spiritual importance. The Bible mentions that a dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, which demonstrates a divine presence. In Mark 1:10, the Bible points out that the dove descended from heaven with Jesus: 'Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove' (Holy Bible, NIV,1973). The recurring image of the dove in *Devaoothan* signifies that something abnormal or supernatural is happening. However, the dove does not represent a Holy Spirit, as Vishal believes, saying "Someone wants to tell someone something", but is in fact the ghost of Maheswar.

When Vishal wears a white robe with a red sash, it references Revelations 19:13, 'He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the word of God' (Holy Bible, NIV, 1973). At the start and finish of the film Vishal has long hair and a beard, referencing the way Jesus is generally portrayed in paintings world-wide. Thus Vishal, a Hindu, becomes a Christlike figure. Maheswar, too, wears a similar costume, a white robe and red sash, when he is tortured and murdered by the Christian Ignatius. Ignatius commits murder, a sin in the Bible's ten commandments, and to break these commandments is to be condemned to hell.

Alberto, the Christian henchman who works for Ignatius and helped kill Maheswar, fears the spirit of Maheswar for the sin he committed against him and uses Hindu religious rites and symbols to protect himself. For example, he wears sacred threads around his neck. As soon as Vishal tears them off, Alberto dies. Alberto is thus shown to believe in whichever faith he feels can protect him from a supernatural entity after committing an evil deed, purely out of fear of death or punishment from the dead. Again, a Christian character is shown as murderous, hypocritical and untrustworthy.

While the sacred threads symbolise the Hindu faith and appear in many Indian films, the Christian cross, the unmistakable emblem of Jesus Christ, is more prominent in Hollywood films, but it appears prominently in *Devadoothan*. A cross symbolises redemption from death, which is shown in several scenes across the film. In one scene, Father Seva is

shown on his deathbed with two crosses on his bedroom wall. The day Jesus was crucified and killed, two others, both thieves, were crucified at the same time. The appearance of two crosses can be noted as a symbolic gesture, foreshadowing the death of Father Seva in the film.

The film also employs cruciform positions, sometimes called the 'pectoral pose.' This emphasis is more concerned with the suffering persona of Jesus Christ than the Roman device used to torture and execute him. The Christians believe that Jesus was crucified for the sins of others, and later in the film we see Angela lying in the pectoral pose, killed because of the sins committed by her father, Ignatius.

Another prop is the unique instrument, the seven bells. Music is important in this film as Vishal is a talented musician, as was Maheswar. This instrument was invented specifically for the film. The Music Director, Vidyasagar, said in an online interview that the instrument was alive and breathing, using seven bells attached to a pipe organ, and was the vision of director, Sibi Malayil (Vidyasagar, 2019).

There are musical connotations throughout the film. The spirit of Maheswar is still present in the seven bells, musical notations are found amongst library books and the song 'Karale Nin Kai' recurs every time paranormal activity relating to the instrument occurs. This helps Vishal decode the mystery and signifies that "Someone wants to say something to someone", meaning that Maheswar wants to contact Angela by guiding Vishal through music. Thus, music is a crucial element in the film, related to an instrument portrayed as holy and associated with Christianity, and which is also an instrument of frightening supernatural vengeance.

The instrument named the Seven Bells in *Devadoothan* (2000) can be related directly to the instrument named the Seven Trumpets in the Book of Revelation. As cited by Bohdan Kuryliak:

One of the New Testament books that are being researched the most is the Book of Revelation. Researchers have been interested in the strange imagery used in apocalyptic literature throughout the history of Christianity. One of the chapters in the Book of Revelation is a vision of the Seven Trumpets, which, according to Ranko Stefanovic, is that one of the most baffling topics in the whole of the book of Revelation. (Kuryliak, 2021, p.24)

It is also important to note that there has not been much analysis of how the Seven Trumpets have been interpreted historically within the context of the Christian Church. As mentioned in Revelation 8:2, 'Then I saw seven angels who stand before God and seven trumpets were given to them.' The angels are known to be great musicians in the Bible,

According to Oecumenius, various passages from the 'Seven Trumpets' chapter express and represent God's wrath and the eternal punishment of sinners, anticipating the resurrection and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ as the time when the Seven Trumpets' prophecy would be fulfilled (Kuryliak 2021; 23). The instrument named Seven Bells in *Devadoothan* can be compared to the instrument named the Seven Trumpets interpretation of Oecumenius as the Second Coming of Christ, as it heralds Maheswar's return in the form of a Holy Spirit where sinners will be punished. However, Maheswar is a spirit that is neither angelic nor holy but disturbed and vengeful. Through the instrument of the Seven Bells, the language of angels is music and is used to communicate a message. Given that the music of the Seven Trumpets is used to signal the end of days, the Seven Bells also signify death and destruction.

Chapels are used for worship and prayers, but in the film they are used for showcasing horrors, such as when the instrument plays by itself and Maheswar's fingers are cut off in the act of violence by Alberto and Ignatius before he is brutally killed. The chapel in the film is a site of horrific events, where Christians abuse non-Christians in their place of worship.

I have argued that there are significant elements of Christian imagery in *Devadoothan,* such as the creed, the dove, the cross, the red robe costumes and musical instruments. Ecclesiastic vestments are considered as the representation of God during

Christian worship services. *Devadoothan* was released in the context of rigid religious values and globalisation. Since the film's narrative was unfamiliar and strange to the Malayalam audience, the Christian religion was made more 'other'. It is noted that Vishal, the hero of this film, was a Hindu and Ignatius, the villain, was a Christian. By portraying Christian characters and their rituals as negative and hypocritical, *Devadoothan* creates a conflicting view of Christian identity. The 'Seven Bells' is presented as a carrier of an evil spirit, which exists to punish Christian wrongdoers. In short, instead of offering an assurance of peace through Christian iconography, such as the dove, the cross and the vestments, *Devadoothan* (2000) creates an atmosphere of fear and vengeance through Christian characters and signifiers. The next section presents how Hindus perceive Christian traditions and beliefs.

3.6.1a. Political Challenges and Repression of Christianity

In Kerala, due to the social reform movements and the work of Christian Missionaries, there have been many changes in education and social equality. As a result, socialist and leftist groups had a clear period of growth in Kerala. However, Christianity continued to experience repression and otherness. The patriarchal schema of hegemonic power by Hindutva movements connects religion to politics in all fields. Hindutva forces attempt to repress Christian movements through the use of popular negative images of Christianity. Gettleman and Raj observe that:

> The issue of conversions to Christianity from Hinduism is an especially touchy subject, one that has vexed the country for years and even drew in Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who fiercely guarded India's secular ideals. In the past few years, Mr Modi and his Hindu nationalist party have tugged India far to the right, away from what many Indians see as the multicultural foundation Nehru built. The rising attacks on Christians comprise about 2 per cent of the population and are part of a broader shift in India, in which minorities feel less safe. (Gettlemen Raj, 2021)

In an example of the ingrained caste system, a participant in Roji's study states that: "If people become Christians on their own, that is fine, but they should still follow the caste they belonged to before they converted" (Roji, 2015). Lancy Lobo's evaluation of the motivations

behind the ongoing conflict and persecution of Christians is significant (Lobo, 2002, p.4). One reason cited is the impact of globalisation, specifically its economic and political effects.

With the intention of addressing the environment of hate and conflict, the politics of intolerance is disguised in Malayalam horror films and peripheral aspects of Christianity are highlighted negatively. For instance, demonic ideas or exorcism rituals are not part of the core doctrine of Christianity. Yet many of the films portray Christianity as a magical religion with many supernatural and popular expressions causing controversy and debates about their use.

In the film *Meghasandesham* (2001), Rosy is showcased as a Christian character who is forecfully imposing her likes on non Christian characters, a similarity is seen here in terms of forceful conversion.

3.6.2. *Meghasandesham/A Journey Through the Clouds* (Rajasenan, 2001)

(Video Part 2, 09:10min-13:36min)

Meghasandesham (Rajasenan, 2001), directed by Rajasthan, is the first film to use computer-generated imagery to express supernatural and horrific events. Romanticising the supernatural as well as presenting it as a horrifying force, the narrative differs from the rape-revenge stories of many Malayalam horror films. It involves aspects of coexistence between Hindus and Christians, which are discussed later in this chapter. The film represents Christianity as the 'other' by presenting Christian characters as intolerant, such as a priest stating that if one does not accept Christianity, "they will go to hell", as well as misusing the cross and Satanic references, aiming to make the spectator question the validity of the Christian religion.

The film's first part does not include many terrifying or horrific elements. It is mainly humorous. However, as the narrative progresses, the tone changes and a serious intervention

of religion is shown in a scene of astral projection, where the ghost, Rosy, rejects religion and Christianity when a Christian priest tries to help her spirit attain peace.

Meghasandesham (2001) is a romantic horror film that focuses on Rosy, who died due to an automobile accident. Her spirit wants to be with the man she loves, Balagopal, who is a Hindu. However, Balagopal cannot love Rosy back because he is already in a relationship. This makes her angry, and her desire to kill results in Balagopal depending on the Christian community to help him get rid of her presence, with the help of a priest from the Kadamattathu Kathanar family, who is a significant real-life character in Kerala. Here, the Christian is 'other' when Rosy tries to interfere in Balagopal and Anjali's romance, trying to kill Anjali for her own selfish desire.

The filmmakers experimented with technology through basic computer graphics, green screens and visual effects. In 2001 technological advancements were rising rapidly in the Malayalam film industry. Horror genre films were the best platforms to try out computer graphic effects, such as warps, strobe lights, lens flare and green screen edits of the characters flying and shapeshifting, things that the audience had not seen before in Malayalam horror films. The use of computer graphic imagery by the filmmakers when portraying Rosy's supernatural hauntings creates humour for the audience by showing how she frightens other characters in the film. To give an example, Rosy scares Kuttikrishnan (Harisree Ashokan) by turning his food into a serpent, while in another scene, she scares him by changing her appearance so she has horns, resembling Satan. Rosy's resemblance to Satan uses images of the Antichrist as a way to conflate and confuse Christian imagery with its evil opposite.

Satan's appearance, according to Christian folklore, varies as widely as his name. He is frequently identified or associated with animals, partly because animals were sacred to pagan gods, whom the Christians identified with demons. In *Meghasandesham* this demonic imagery is used to code Christian characters as evil.

The film starts with Rosy depicted as a friendly ghost, harmless and calm. Rosy's spirit has a great sense of humour, is loving and enjoys pranks that provide moments to laugh, as in the scenes teasing Kuttikrishnan and Thommy (Indians) by changing the food that they have to eat, such as an Indian doughnut, rice cake and banana, into various animals like a snake, frog and rat, which creates comedy. Even in this comedic scene Rosy conjures the image of a serpent, which is associated with the Satanic.

The film includes real-life characters, ie the family of Kathanar, who are legendary exorcists from the Kadamattathu Kathanar house. The priest Kathanar is closely connected to the founding of the Kadamattom Church, one of the earliest church structures still standing in Kerala, the homeland of Saint Thomas Christians. He is known as Kadamattathu Kathanar (a Christian Syrian Orthodox Church priest of Kadamattom church) and as Kadamattathachan (Father Kadamattom). The church, which belongs to the Syrian Orthodox Church, is located on the Moovattupuzha road around 30 kilometres from Ernakulam, which is the oldest metropolitan city in Kerala and has historical relevance to Christianity in India, as St. Thomas (Syrian Orthodox) introduced Christianity here, which then spread across India, and he is considered to be the Patron Saint of India.

In Kerala, a book named *The Aithihyamala* (2019) is a collection of folktales that were passed down orally in pre-modern Kerala and presented in written form by Kottarathil Shankunni in 2019. It includes tales of several Brahmin priests performing exorcisms of *Yakshis* and other ancient demons. The book also tells the tale of Kadamattathu Kathanar, who uses biblical techniques to accomplish similar exorcisms. The *Yakshi* were frightened of iron and holy writings. As a result, if someone held up the nail they were rescued. This was the trick used by Kadamattathu Kathanar.

The story of the iron ezhuttani (stylus) scaring away the witch is attributed to missionaries, who apparently demonstrated the use of the Holy Book and biblical methods to

ward off the evil spirit. In *Meghasandesham* (2002), Father Rosario uses a similar method to exorcise and calm the spirit of Rosy by holding an iron cross against her corpse, which is taken out from her coffin, chanting biblical literature. This helps the violent spirit of Rosy become calm, which shows that Christianity is reduced from a Cross, considered a sacred symbol of Christianity, to an ezhuttani , which is just a metal tool used for writing.

This church's history has not been preserved in writing but is preserved in legends. The stories about Kadamattathu Kathanar encapsulate the exaggerated experience of the inhabitants of that region, which is expressed through magic and sorcery. According to the legends surrounding him, he possessed supernatural abilities and used his magic as a Christian priest for the greater good. Kadamattathu Kathanar's story is a mash-up of history and fables. While there is currently no conclusive evidence that he existed, the fact that a real priest lived in that area in the ninth century cannot be denied, as according to tradition Christians have been in the area since the fifth century of the Christian Era.

The film explores various segments of Christianity, such as the basic sacraments like baptism, life after death and the power of the cross, by using images of priests, black magic and astral projection, which are not considered part of the Christian faith and mislead the audience. For example, baptism is about accepting Christ and following the Christian Church, but in the film there is a scene wherein the Priest mentions that Rosy's ghost needs to be baptised through her parents. Father Rosario performs rites, rituals and practices that are against the rules of the Church, to help Balagopal and his family, who are Hindus. In the film, Balagopal is respectful of Christianity. However, Rosy, a Christian, despises the existence of God and refuses to listen to Father Rosario, threatening to murder him if he tries to help her. Threatening a Priest demonstrates her lack of respect for Christianity.

Astral projection is a forbidden practice by the Church, yet Father Rosario attempts astral projection to speak with Rosy's spirit. In the scenes of astral projection we see props

shaped like termite hills where serpents lurk or burrow themselves. The lighting is warm and has been overexposed in order to show an unearthly setting. The setting looks like large ant hills, which can symbolise the presence of a serpent, as in many natural conditions serpents use ant or termite nests as a hibernaculum. Serpents are a metaphor for evil, as portrayed in the Bible. In Revelation 12:9, 'The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.'

Rosy accepts her fate and asks Father Rosario to fulfil God's will. She starts to believe in Christianity after her parents get baptised, while the exorcism and a marriage occur simultaneously. Rosy's coffin must be dug out and opened again to place a cross on her dead body by Balagopal, a Hindu, to contain her spirit, which is similar to putting a genie back into its lamp. This is another example where there is a confusion and mixing of Christian images in a way that is not accurate.

One scene shows Samuel crying, looking at icons of Christianity, such as a Bible, rosary, cross, candle and a photo of Jesus Christ, despite him being ignorant of the Christian faith. Samuel, who pretends to be a Christian in society, exhibits a hypocritical personality by disobeying Christian beliefs. He approaches the Church only after he loses his daughter. The loss of his daughter Rosy causes him to recognise the importance of his faith, when previously he had been reprimanded for not practising his faith and despising those who did.

The background music used in the final phases of the film consists of the kind of dramatic choir music that is mostly sung in churches. The final phase of the film intercuts four events in four different places: the marriage ceremony to provoke Rosy's spirit to show up; the Baptism of Samuel, where Rosy's spirit needs to be sworn Christian; opening the coffin of the 6-month-old corpse of Rosy to place the cross which will contain her spirit; and

the exorcism itself, which all occur simultaneously in order to exorcise Rosy's possessed spirit from Satan.

The subtle usage of anti-Christian depiction through Satanic signs and the use of Bible verses said by the Priest as a means to encourage 'other's to break the rules, regulations and values of the Church, thereby represses and 'other's Christianity in the story. The use of computer graphics and a scene where an extreme-close-up shot of Rosy's eyes emphasises a display of anger when the Priest reads from the Bible and a cross is shown right after that. Throughout the film there is a confusion of Christian images and rites that are not portrayed in an authentic or correct way but are used to create fear and tension.

Meghasandedsham presents Christianity in a sensationalised manner and it is presented as being linked with Satanism, as represented in many scenes discussed in this section. Although it may have been intended to entertain, the computer graphic imagery misuses Christian imagery and practices, ultimately making Christianity 'other' in the film.

The love triangle between Balagopal, Rosy and Anjali is where a Christian 'other' interferes with another religion. In this case, Hinduism is a space where healthy romantic relationships are constructed. The selfish and evil motives of Rosy, a Christian, interfere with this unity, identifying Christian identity and faith as a disruptive force within society.

The Christian Priest, Kadamattathu Kathanar, an exorcist and black magician, appears in the film as heroic and helpful to Balagopal and his family, who are Hindus, but the high level of distortion of Christian priesthood values and principles still 'others' and confuses Christian identity in society. Though Christianity is presented as victorious by destroying evil, the social and cultural misrepresentation damages many Christian traditions, rituals and practices as they are mixed and confused with elements of Satanism.

3.6.3. *In Ghost House Inn* (Lal, 2010)

(Video Part 2, 13:30min-16:43min)

Directed by Lal, *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) is the last in a trilogy of comedy films. The exploration of how Christian iconography is constructed in this Malayalam horror-comedy will uncover the process of the 'other' and the marginalisation of Christianity. The film uses comedy throughout, with scenes portraying Christianity as something to be mocked. It does depict spiritual entities but uses Christian imagery to create fear and ridicule amongst the audience.

The film opens with a flashback to an incident in Dorothy's bungalow seventy years ago, when Madam Dorothy Fernandez, an Anglo-Indian, murdered her driver and hid a bloody trunk containing the bodies of her husband and his girlfriend. She murdered her driver because he wanted to cheat on his wife with her, not knowing that she was a psychopath who had murdered her husband and his mistress.

In the film the antagonist is a paranormal researcher who stages scenes of supposed supernatural activity in order to swindle and scare the residents of the Inn. Aiyappan explains that the film fuses comedy with horror within a specifically Malayalam context:

> Juxtaposing horror and comedy through cinema aid a culture-specific reading, moving beyond the obvious assertion of humour mitigating the trauma of horror. The film interweaves horror and comedy with the portrayal of ghosts to concurrently evoke trauma and relief. The depiction of ghosts with reference to their recognised roles is closely aligned to patriarchal ideology prevailing in Kerala. (Aiyappan, 2022)

The use of comedy in *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) calms the audience after jump scares and provides relief. For example, the pretend ghost of Dorothy is seen by Mahadevan as he tries closing the window, with effects of lightning and thunder to enhance the scene, but his reaction through his comical acting skills makes one laugh as well as jump. This use of comedy means that the film can even be viewed by children. Although the patriarchal ideology of male dominance is shown in *In Ghost House Inn,* the wives of the main

characters are considered as sinners when they indulge in sexual intercourse, despite Father Dominic advising otherwise. This was to perform the exorcism ritual without hindrance, but because they disobeyed the consequences were shown to be severe, whereas in reality it was just a hoax.

As discussed in the analysis of *Devadoothan* above, *In Ghost House Inn* affirms all derogatory Anglo-Indian stereotypes. For example, in the scene where an Anglo-Indian lady, Dorothy, is driven to her Victorian bungalow in Kerala, the driver, a local Keralite, is curious about her and finds out that she is staying alone. His immediate thought was to have a sexual relationship with her as many people like him have stereotyped Anglo-Indian women as available and open-minded for casual romantic relationships, thus they have been labelled by men as 'romantic outsiders' and the women are considered promiscuous by the vast majority because of the way they dress and their free lifestyle.

The Anglo-Indian lady murders the driver because he disrespected her and had found out that she committed two other murders. A Christian woman is represented as murderous, such portrayal emphasises the prevailing conservative and belittling attitude in Malayalam films toward the Anglo-Indian community (Wright,1971), which can be noted in *In Ghost House Inn* (2010), with its portrayal of evil, villainous Christians.

In Ghost House Inn, as mentioned before, is the last part of the famous comedy trilogy, which also includes *In Harihar Nagar* (Siddique, Lal, 1990) and *2 Harihar Nagar* (Lal, 1990). The previous two films have no horror or supernatural elements and are coming-of-age comedies about four men. The last part of the trilogy, *In Ghost House Inn*, is the only one to be classified as a horror comedy. But although the plot is predominately comedic, it does have horror elements related to Christianity.

In India, horror comedies are arguably the most popular adaptations of the genre. In his book *Horror and Horror Film*, Bruce Kawin clearly distinguishes between horror comedies and humour in horror films. He writes: 'When comedy is blended in a conventional horror film, comedy becomes a comic relief, but the horror comedy is a sub-genre for laughter in the dark when comedy becomes dominating' (Kawin, p.203). It is to be noted that *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) is a horror comedy and not a horror film with comedy, unlike most Malayalam horror films, thus making it the first of its kind among Malayalam horror films. It uses elements of Christianity, such as the Anglo-Indian community and haunted houses with Victorian-style architecture and artefacts, to create a horrific environment presented comically by the characters.

The film is entertaining and succeeded at the box office. References to Western horror films are present in the film, such as in the scene where Grace's body climbs out of a well, which is similar to a scene in *The Ring* (Gore Verbinski, 2002). In *The Ring,* the girl climbs out creepily through a television screen wearing a white gown, while in *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) she climbs out of the well wearing a white gown, which is popular Anglo-Indian attire.

Thomas Kutty purchases Dorothy's bungalow to convert it into a resort without knowing that the seller is a team of conmen. The con artists use a ghost story to scare the residents, who eventually make the buyers sell back the property to them for half the purchase price. Thomas Kutty invites his friends Mahadevan, Appukuttan and Govindan Kutty to stay at his bungalow, stating that the property is haunted but assuring them that he had spent several days alone there. He also demonstrates that humans can recreate paranormal activities and ghosts with certain practical effects, strategies and tactics. Believing the words of Thomas Kutty, the friends bring their families along with them.

Thomas Kutty admits that he lied about his story, which frightened his friends, who then turn to a Christian priest, Father Dominic, and seek his help. Father Dominic agrees but then reveals that he is not affiliated with a Church and is involved in paranormal research. Before leaving the house, the Father warns them that one of their spouses is in imminent danger of being burned. That same evening, Thomas Kutty's wife meets with such an accident but is rescued.

Father Dominic is then nailed to the wall by his left hand by an unknown force. The house's maid is possessed by the spirit of Grace, whom Dorothy murdered. She needs to be exorcised, and Father Dominic prepares for it, but during the exorcism he suffers a heart attack and is declared dead. Thomas Kutty decides to sell the bungalow back to Dorothy at a cheap price, suffering a loss.

But the climax has a twist: Mahadevan and his friends get a call from Father Dominic, who mocks and ridicules them for being scammed after revealing the conmen and fake stories. He is a fraud, and he confesses to lying to them by using the maid, doctor and other staff to cheat them. Mahadevan shuts Dominic out by stating they were not scammed, but Dominic was. Dominic's bandage from his left hand was loose, and he accidentally ties it to his right hand, thus giving them clues that he lied. Mahadevan explains that they noticed it, and it was God's way of helping them. He then mocks Dominic by telling him that the suitcase with money has no money in it but just a few books as they have cleverly swapped the bags. The document they signed was fake, as they bribed the registrar. The con artists get conned, and the friends happily proceed to Dorothy's bungalow. As they enter the premises, the gates close by themselves, symbolising the presence of supernatural and paranormal activity.

The 'Ghost House', dubbed as such by the locals, is an Anglo-Indian bungalow designed by the British during the colonial period. The Christian Dorothy lives in a distinctly Anglo-Indian environment, with Victorian-era architecture, costume, furniture, paintings and décor. The gothic decorations and architecture were set up mainly in mansions built by the colonisers and owned mostly by Anglo-Indians. Thus, the locals viewed them differently and this led them to view Christians differently, causing the community to be seen as 'other'.

Grafius mentions in *Reading the Bible with Horror* that the haunted house narrative deeply underlines a connection between space and mental geography, meaning that perceptions of an individual are mapped onto their environment and surroundings. In the film, Dorothy's bungalow is situated in an isolated part of the town, separating her from the rest of the community, and turning her and her house into a place that is feared. As Barry Curtis points out, a haunted house is where the past is still alive (Curtis, 2008; 82). While the haunted house narrative is not new to Malayalam film, haunted spaces exist primarily in Anglo-Saxon literary traditions.

In the case of an Anglo-Indian space, the haunted house narratives with gothic architecture are applicable due to British colonialism and its influence on Indian culture and traditions and ways of living. The emergence of gothic spaces and their visual display in Indian cinema is due to colonialism and their contribution to the development of the nation's architecture (houses, bungalows), engineering (railways, roads) and communication systems (postal service, telegram, telephones).

The antagonist, a paranormal scientist, claims the house is haunted, and the naïve local community believes it and they spread the rumour. He does this to scare people away in order to thrive in the real-estate market. He uses Christian beliefs and faith to scam the buyers. For instance, he claims that the ghost that haunts the house was murdered by Dorothy, who is a Christian, and he states that the evil spirit can only be contained through an

exorcism performed as per the Christian faith. Thus, this character is used to defame the Christian religion.

The con artists in the film use elements of Christianity and Anglo-Indian culture to scare their victims. For example, in one scene, Thomas Kutty and his friends shout and scream in fear at the sight of suddenly seeing an Indian girl dressed up in a bridal dress with a fascinator hat, which is usually worn by Western women. The use of sound and lighting to enhance the fear worked well for the filmmakers.

After being helpless, Mahadevan and his friends visit Father Dominic, who is later revealed to not be a priest but a paranormal scientist. Mahadevan, a Hindu, asks the scientist why he is wearing a robe and cross if he does not believe. He answers by saying that it is not a robe, it is just attire to keep him warm, while the cross is used as a weapon to keep evil forces away. Mahadevan, a Hindu, says, "The cross must not be misused as per the Christian belief". A Hindu having such knowledge of the Christian faith and portraying it positively shows the possibility of mutual coexistence of Hindus and Christians in Kerala. The Hindu Mahadevan shows some respect for Christian practices.

The scientist's dog, Lucifer, references the fallen angel Lucifer, also known as the devil. Many people mistakenly believe that Lucifer is another name for Satan from the Hebrew Bible. The comparison of a priest with a dog named Lucifer is comical and signals that he is not genuine.

Mahadevan fears Dominic is right about the haunting and approaches him whilst praying on a hill, after which Dominic then fabricates a story to scare Thomas and his friends and convince them that what they see is true. He lies right after praying, another disgraceful act towards the Christian religion, which presents Christians as untrustworthy and hypocritical.

Dominic advises Thomas and his friends to prepare for an exorcism. The scientist, whilst preparing, claims his hand was struck by a nail, which signifies crucifixion, a punishment that Jesus endured to cover the sins of humankind. In the film, Mahadevan and his friends and family sin by disobeying Father Dominic and, in turn, he claims to have suffered because of them. Again, we see elements of Christianity used negatively to trick people for money.

The exorcism, which occurs during the film's climax, is filmed in a clichéd Hollywood style with candles, crosses, the Bible and the possessed lady tied to a chair, which is similar to an exorcism scene from *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (Scott Derrickson, 2005). But in *In Ghost House Inn,* they recreate a similar exorcism scene to bring forth the Western tradition into a household that is surrounded by Hindu characters. This invokes fear amongst the Hindu characters on seeing such a setting, which is portrayed by the actors' facial expressions as they hold each other.

Thomas sells back the property to Dorothy. However, the truth is revealed, after exchanging the documents, that there is no Dorothy. Dominic made up the tale to con them. Dominic and his team of conmen even tried to kill a pregnant woman to achieve their aims. They misused Bible quotes and references and many other elements of Christianity to create fear in the community. Thomas mentions that, "You are ruining the names of Christians like me by doing such deeds". Thomas is the only Christian among his group of friends who is shown positively at the end when Father Dominic, the antagonist, is defeated. Mahadevan ends the call by saying, "In the name of God, in the name of Almighty, go to bloody hell".

Central to the narrative in *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) are Christian rituals, images, iconography and practices. Though there are many unexplained aspects of the religious dimension of the film, these are generally used as a source of mockery. This film is an

example of how the representation of Anglo-Indian people, places and Christian traditions are looked upon differently, and Christians are mocked and portrayed as people with evil motives, thus Christianity is represented as 'other'.

3.4. *The Priest* (Jofin T Chacko, 2021)

(Video Part 2, 16:44min-19:25min)

The Priest is a horror film directed by Jofin T. Chacko and starring Mammooty, Manju Warrier and Nikhila Vimal. Father Benedict is a priest, but he is also a paranormal investigator who helps the police solve supernatural cases. The film combines elements of techno-horror, parapsychology and Christianity, with the film depicting exorcisms done by using technologically advanced gadgets, which were new to the Malayalam film audience.

Father Benedict often spends time at night in cemeteries with only his dog for company and drives around in a modified jeep, helping the police in solving crimes and murder investigations. He has a unique, flamboyant style that is atypical of priests, as he wears an Irish Country hat, dark jacket, jeans and capuchin robe, carries a walking stick and an old leather satchel bag, and has round frame glasses a thick beard and a larger than normal sized rosary hung around his neck. Slow-motion scenes of him walking emphasise his heroism, with punchy dialogue and background music making him look all the more exceptional and extravagant.

The film's plot begins when Diya (Saniya Iyappan) demands that the mystery behind the untimely deaths of the numerous Alatt family members be solved. Benedict unravels the enigma behind the deaths, even though they were deemed to be suicides. While doing this study he discovers the existence of a young woman named Ameya.

He observes that she is acting with supernatural power and alerts her teacher, Jessie Cherian (Nikhila Vimal). She takes Ameya to her place despite cautions being given. Soon

she begins to notice Ameya's strange behaviour, and then Father Benedict shows up to assist her. Benedict realises that the child has been possessed by Jessie's older sister Susan, so he takes the first steps to control the spirit in her body. She desires to be with her sister and to exact retribution on those responsible for her death. To expel Susan's control of Ameya's body, Father Benedict leads an exorcism.

The film uses Western methods of exorcising demonically possessed humans, rather than traditional methods seen in other Malayalam horror films. For example, in the first exorcism scene where Ameya lies on the table she is exorcised using holographic projection and low radio frequency, along with biblical quotes and chants. Low radio frequencies are used to detect unseen forces such as spirits and ghosts, which we see in *The Conjuring* where the team of ghost hunters use radio transmission and microphones to record voices from spirits that cannot be seen by the human eye.

The lead character, Mammooty, is a renowned actor from the Indian film industry. In his first horror film, *Adharvam* (1989)*, he played a Hindu Priest who practiced Black magic and tantras, as discussed in Chapter 2. He has played multiple characters in various horror films. Twenty-two years after *Adharvam* (1989)*, in which he acted as a Hindu sorcerer who sexualises women, in this film he now plays a devout Christian priest who is heroic and trustworthy. *The Priest* is one of the few examples where a Christian character is shown in this way.

The filmmakers explored multiple topics for the film, such as reincarnation, coulrophobia, holograms, parapsychology, occult investigation, clairvoyance and mediumship. A Hollywood style of filmmaking is employed in terms of colour grade, lighting and exorcism strategies. For example, the concept of demonic possession on a weak human being, in this case the child Ameya, is similar to the demon-possessed by the character

of Janet in *The Conjuring 2* (James Wan, 2016). The similarity lies in the use of a girl as the possessed, as they are seen as easy targets for ghosts or demons to possess. Their character traits vary, but the traits of the demons are similar. In *The Priest* Ameya is possessed by Susan, while in *The Conjuring 2* Janet is possessed by an old man. Susan and the old man showcase traits of not welcoming guests to their home but also showing immense love for their families. Another example is that Father Benedict can be compared to Ed Warren and Loraine Warren, who are spiritual and live to comfort those troubled by evil spirits.

The low-key lighting complies with horror film norms to create a tense environment. Low torch light, crimson key lights and dark blue and yellow tints give viewers the impression that the stories are mysterious, horrifying and surreal. To give an example, the location where the exorcism takes place is an old Victorian-designed house with minimal lights and circuits, the building depends mostly on daylight with many windows and glass ceilings. During the night it is dark and the lights are destroyed by the supernatural entity. The Priest uses a flashlight to see the surroundings and when the light rays are shown through a POV shot, the ghost appears, creating a jump scare. Exorcisms are conducted in dark environments, lit only by a ray of white torch light, light from the computer screen and the moonlight. Combined with the dark colour grade, another horror film convention, this lighting creates a creepy atmosphere for the exorcisms, which are the main horror set pieces throughout the film. There were two main exorcism scenes in *The Priest.* The first one was unsuccessful as the girl was in too much pain and Father Benedict didn't want to hurt her further. The second exorcism scene was undertaken after a thorough investigation of who could have possibly possessed Ameya, wherein he found that it was Susan. His aim from then on was to save both Ameya and Susan without harming anyone.

The character of Father Benedict is depicted in this exorcism scene as the hero/saviour, and therefore Christianity is being depicted here as heroic. This film marks a

turning point in depictions of Christianity and Christian characters. Here we have a Christian hero, with exorcism shown in a serious way. The priest here is not afraid to combine tradition with modern advanced methods of exorcism, because it is all for the greater good of saving Ameya and also helping Susan rest in peace.

A scene where he sits on the grave of Diya, places a bouquet and walks away in slow motion aims to let the audience know that he can see the dead. The concept of occult investigation, clairvoyance and mediumship delivered by Father Carmen Benedict can be compared to that of Ed and Lorraine Warren, who are well-known paranormal investigators at the centre of *The Conjuring Universe* series of films by James Wan. Similar styles are used in *The Conjuring* (James Wan, 2013), where the investigators use low-frequency radio waves from technical devices to detect the ghosts, spirits and souls or, as Father Carmen Benedict claimed, just energy. Use of these methods is less painful to the victim when compared to the traditional methods of using fire, beating the possessed victim and hurting the person so the ghost would not have a healthy host to live off of. These methods and techniques are applied to a cultural context where Christianity is a minority in Kerala and the results are the opposite of Hollywood, where Christianity is accepted as a force of good. The Conjuring films, for instance, have been accused of being Christian propaganda.

Father Carmen Benedict uses new technological methods, as shown in *The Conjuring Universe*. Father Benedict can be compared to the Warrens, who are the kind of Christian religious characters mostly seen in Hollywood horror films. Their faith in Christianity is what keeps them strong whilst handling evil forces and facing supernatural demonic activities. Father Benedict does what he can for the Kerala community by helping with murder investigations that the police are unable to solve, using para-investigation, as he has the ability to see and speak with spirits, which he uses for the well-being of others.

A distinctive approach in *The Priest* (2021) is the portrayal of St. Mary's statues and paintings throughout the film. Even the prayers that Father Benedict recites contain her name. The school where Ameya studies and the orphanage where she lives are called St. Mary, the Mother of Jesus. The use of St. Mary depicts the love a mother has for her child as the film begins with a scene of the death of Ameya's mother during childbirth and the death of Susan, who raised Jessie after the death of their parents. St. Mary is a Christian symbol that unites women in the film, especially the Nuns from the orphanage and its young girl inmates. During their prayer sessions we see the statue of St. Mary. However, Ameya, who is raised as Christian, does not express belief in religion and is separated from the other girls; she has no friends and her lack of faith at such a young age is an act of rebellion against Christianity.

In comparison to the other films analysed in this chapter - the Priest in *Devadoothan* (2000) is comical and humorous, the Priests in *Meghasandesham* (2001) are insolent and arrogant, and the Priest in *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) is villainous and treacherous - Father Benedict is heroic and defeats forces of evil and the supernatural, which makes the film distinct from the previous examples. *The Priest* therefore marks a turning point in the depiction of Christian characters, as Father Benedict uses his faith to help others and uncover injustices.

3.5. Conclusion

As discussed earlier, twentieth-century Malayalam horror film narratives centred on elements related to the *Yakshi*, black magic, myth, superstition and rape-revenge, which are representative of the dominant religious community, Hinduism. In analysing the post-2000 generation of Malayalam horror films, we see an increased use of narratives centring around Christian beliefs and faith.

Religion, like fear, sees death as a serious issue for human life, and we need to think about what this implies (Grafius, 2019, p.145). Religion provides structure in a troubled environment, giving solace to us that there is life after death. However, when disputes across religions arise, certain religions become demonised and 'other', which can lead to real world consequences, such as riots and acrimony, which is seen in a location like Kerala, where Hinduism and Islam are dominant.

4.Thesis Conclusion

Malayalam cinema is undergoing fundamental changes in its production methods and its depictions of social reality. Emerging in 2010 was the spectacular development of a brand-new film sub-genre known as 'New Generation' Malayalam cinema. Filmmakers such as Aashiq Abu, Anwar Rasheed, Rajesh Pillai, Lijo Jose Pellissery, Mahesh Narayan, Sameer Thaheer and Dileesh Pothen, and many others, are the face of this film movement.

The producers of these films pride themselves on the originality of their subjects and production methods. They assert that they speak for the Malayalam audience, which is attempting to deal with the effects of globalisation. The unusual ways these films represent their female leads, while still adhering to the standard Malayalam film tropes of femininity, make them notable. Narratives focus predominantly on the lives of individuals, depicting life in Kerala society through the use of realism, without melodramatic tropes. According to Meena T Pillai, Malayalam Cinema is now situated within interstices, frequently attempting to deal with the complexities of these spaces and learning to position itself to their hybridity (Pillai, 2017). Nevertheless, it is still challenging to define this modern new wave. The absence of any major film stars, the presence of young, up-and-coming actors both on and off-screen, and colloquial dialogue, including profane language, are all characteristics that signal a departure from traditional patterns of narration.

New Generation Films claim to innovate in both form and content by moving to a more urban setting and speaking to an audience interacting with a quickly changing global environment. However, these characteristics are by no means shared by all New Generation Films. The portrayal of female characters has changed, though only subtly; female characters still wear contemporary clothing and look at ease as Indian women. Their presence is evident and prominent in the film's marketing. They rejoice in their financial freedom, which allows

them to travel at night and partake in alcohol. The freedom that almost all of the female protagonists experience, due to shifting social dynamics brought on by globalisation, is expressed in their vocabulary, clothes, and gestures. However, the careers available to them are stereotypes: nurse, software engineer, fashion designer, or any occupation that integrates them into an urban and global environment. The typical Indian male spectator is likely to be shocked by the female characters' use of expletives and sexually explicit language. However, New Generation cinema appears to stumble when confronted with patriarchal and hegemonic patterns, seemingly attempting to adopt a new form while retaining the content of films of an older generation.

Nonetheless, with their urban-centric settings, portrayals of crumbling interpersonal relationships and an open and honest treatment of sexuality, this genre of films caters to the needs of a globalised society (Raj, 2015). The lives portrayed are those of the growing middle class and the stories are set in urban areas. Gender identity is reinterpreted as a result of globalisation to account for modified societal norms, raising the question of whether or not the films give women a voice in India's shifting social, political, economic and cultural landscape.

In the West, postmodernism is essentially an engagement with form. However, Malayalam authors and poets appear to be reintroducing some absurdities and tribalism that modernism struggled to eradicate. This fashion is, in many respects, a continuation of social postmodernity. Conflicts between communities are common in India. Many studies have been done to understand this phenomenon in its economic, political and cultural contexts. A variety of explanations have been put forward to explain its existence.

Roji argues that television news viewers have been led to believe that proselytising Christians are to blame for acts of violence against them. The notion that 'religious

conversion is the source of violence' implies to audiences that 'Christians are engaged in proselytisation' and that 'Christians are converters' in general (Roji, 2015). This notion can be considered to be commonly used by Malayalam films during the last thirty years, contributing to the development of an anti-Christian atmosphere. It is crucial to stress that this analysis does not support the idea that viewers are indifferent to and uninvolved in how films are perceived. The audience's cultural and social ties, historical worldviews and political allegiances appear to be essential factors in the elaboration and explanation of film studies.

Factors that have not yet fully manifested themselves include the persistence of caste consciousness, the perplexing coexistence of tribalism and individualism, the rise of consumerism and the liberalisation of capitalist enterprise, the rise of religious fundamentalism, the demise of the left, and various anxieties regarding the future of modernity and nationalism, all of which are observed from the region, ie from Kerala's peripheral position.

However, the adoption of contemporary literary forms has been the immediate trajectory for postmodernist writing and the use of social realism. There has been an overall decline in idealism, through the excesses of political groups such as the Marxist Party and Naxalites, and the growth of communal and fascist organisations (Thomas, 1996). This chapter has highlighted several contributions to the production and promotion of Malayalam cinema that have been derived from political issues, communal conflicts, caste issues, gender problems and religious expansion. Thus, the Christian culture and tradition, particularly within Malayalam filmmaking activity, has undoubtedly been 0thered and influenced by significant changes in the country's socio-cultural, political and historical aspects.

Scholarly discussions on Malayalam horror cinema in relation to Christianity are scarce. Although various academic contributions on Malayalam horror cinema have arisen in the past few years, the topic of Christian imagery used in an industry dominated by a Hindu majority has not been previously explored at a doctoral level of study. This study examined how Christianity was portrayed in a number of Malayalam horror films from 1964 to 2021. The study is based on the idea of historical and religious representation in Malayalam cinema, specifically through looking at how the horror genre has been used in affecting how Christianity is othered in the Malayalam environment.

Specifically, I addressed these questions:

1. What is the production history of horror films made in Kerala and what is the

position of these films within the local film industry?

2. What are the styles, techniques, and strategies that filmmakers use in Malayalam

horror films and for what purpose?

3. What are the sources for the use of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror films and what is the historical and film-industrial context of these stories?

4. How do Malayalam horror films relate to the history of Christianity in Kerala and its

connections to colonialism and nationalism?

Spread across the 4 chapters, the thesis has enabled me to explore and enhance these questions effectively. In the thesis, I was able to contend that the shifts in South Indian society and Indian politics over the previous 20 to 30 years can account for the rise of Christian iconography in Malayalam horror films and the alterations in how Christianity is viewed. Christianity has historically served as a haven from Hinduism's restrictions and the class- and gender-based oppression (casteism and misogyny in particular) that has existed in

India since at least the 1910s. As a result, Christianity is frequently both positively and adversely associated with moderate libertarianism in regard to the representation of women and class in Indian films.

Through the research, I was able to contend that (a) the rise of Hindutva and Hindu fundamentalism in India over the last 20–30 years, and the overt persecution of (and assaults on) Christians in South India; and (b) the rising popularity of horror films in Indian cinema, where Christianity also serves as a spectacular selling point, are all factors in the increased use of Christian subjects and iconography in Malayalam horror films. Crosses, angelology, songs, metaphors, scriptural references and church architecture are just a few examples of Christian allusions. The written thesis was based on my examination of the films and it looks closely at the modalities and purposes of Christian imagery in Malayalam horror films and makes claims about potential links between those generic changes and the historical contexts that the films explore.

Chapter 1 dwelled on literature reviews regarding the representation of the repressed/'other' in Malayalam horror films and how Robin Wood demonstrated that the theory of the return of the repressed is present in horror cinema. Tzvetan Todorov examines how these hierarchies are maintained in literature, where structuralism and the fantastic in Indian horror films were discussed, and it proved that Christian iconography in Indian horror films demonstrates hybridity in religion and culture, where Christianity is 'other' and used as a sensational device. Another topic reviewed was the historical and political context of India, seen through Achin Vanaik's literature, which proved that the political changes in India eventually impacted on religious identity; and I would argue that this is reflected in Malayalam horror films. In the final chapter, I reviewed the works of Priya Alphonsa Mathew and Rajesh James, who state stereotypical viewpoints about Christianity, Anglo Indians in Kerala and their portrayal in Malayalam cinema.

The birth of Malayalam horror cinema and its subsequent growth has been methodically examined with the use of historical changes, such as India post-independence, the rise of Hindutva and how the socio-political changes affected Malayalam cinema. In Chapter 2, through analysing the horror films *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), *Yakshi* (1968), *Yaakshaganam* (1976), *Vayanadan Thamban* (1978), *Lisa* (1979), *Karimpoocha* (1981), *Veendum Lisa* (1987), *Adharvam* (1989), *Aayushkalam* (1992), *Manichithrathazhu* (1993), *Devadoothan* (2000), *Meghansandesham* (2001), *In Ghost House Inn* (2010) and *The Priest* (2021)*, I was able to highlight topics that served as a basis for othering the Christian religion in Kerala films through the use of horror. Each chapter followed a chronological time frame pattern to dissect the changes in cultural and social contexts across India which affected the Christian minority. Through the chronological time frame pattern, I was able to point out how Malayalam cinema grew, in terms of techniques and narrative, and the influence that various film movements, soft pornography, globalisation, education and the caste system have had on the horror genre.

In Chapter 3 I wrote an in-depth analysis of Malayalam horror films, post-2000, that use Christian imagery and iconography to prove that Christianity is othered. Discussions of caste, religion and depictions of women are used to advance the plot in these horror films which frequently portray women in traditional ways as passive and as fallen or as whores or monsters, or as mothers or bearers of moral principles, as is revealed when studying the intersection of religion and the horror genre in Malayalam cinema. The discussed themes emphasise how closely related genre, caste, historical and social context are in the repression and othering of Christianity. I discuss various socio-political changes for Malayalam cinema, post-independence, and the rise of Hindutva. I also discussed how Christianity was repressed because of the Caste system, gender roles and political changes that gave reasons to 'other' Christianity in Malayalam horror cinema.

This thesis is an example of how such space may be taken by examining the film-makers' choices to adapt to and be influenced by Western cinema practices. It is not a definitive answer to the question of how to concretely adapt international stories and it is not enough to just be of one perspective, as demonstrated by the practical component of my thesis and visual collage of imagery. But having come from a religious minority, raised in a caste discriminated and repressed part of the society, my experience and thoughts on this topic have been shared through each chapter in this thesis. The discussions with cinephiles and their perspectives deepened my research into proving the connection between caste, Christianity and horror in Kerala.

Furthermore, analysing the origins and causes of current representations, or the motivations behind the decisions made by filmmakers fell beyond the horizon of this research. On that note, a research study of this kind might provide fresh perspectives to film studies and aspiring scholars who dwell to examine Malayalam Cinema, the horror genre in Kerala and religious studies within a broader academic body. It would be intriguing for future studies to investigate further into how Christians are portrayed in the Malayalam film industry, with a focus on the implementation and influence of horror. This would enhance the overall exploration and growth of culture and film studies about Malayalam cinema on a global scale.

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6.Filmography

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