RESEARCH ARTICLE

GENDERING CINEMATIC SUCCESS: DECONSTRUCTING MASCULINITIES IN SIBI MALAYIL'S *DEVADOOTHAN* (2000)

ARYA M. P.[1], Dr. BETSY PAUL C.[2]
[1,2]Postgraduate Department of English
St. Aloysius College, Elthuruth, Thrissur, Kerala, India

ABSTRACT

Though the representation of women in Malayalam cinema has been under constant theoretical scrutiny, their male counterparts have not been endowed with much attention. Masculinities, being an offshoot of feminist theoretical undertakings, have proved to be a profound area of research that has brought forth innovative perspectives of understanding the men on (and off) screen. This research paper is an attempt to read the nature of masculinities portrayed in the fantasy musical Malayalam film *Devadoothan* (2000) to study the influence that the gendering process has in deciding the success of a film. The theoretical framework is informed by the defining theories of hegemonic masculinity suggested by Raewyn Connell and the theory of the abject given by Julia Kristeva. The major findings of the paper suggest how ideal masculinity is ideologically constructed and accepted as the norm depending on a given cultural context, and any deviation from the norm has existence only in relation with it. *Devadoothan* exemplifies the negative impact that the dominance of deviant masculinity may induce in defining the success of a film. It also traces the effect that the cinematic masculine identity creates on the star persona (and vice versa) of Mohanlal, the actor who enacts Vishal Krishnamurthy, one of the male protagonists in the film. The scope of the research lies in exploring how culturally dictated gender ideologies can influence an entire entertainment industry's commercial success.

Key Words: Horror, Masculinities, Monstrous Masculinity, Abject, Hegemonic Masculinity, Stardom

Describing the perfect formula for the success of a motion picture, award-winning script-writer Frank Cottrell-Boyce suggests, "Suspense is the hidden energy that holds a story together. It connects two points and sends a charge between them. But it doesn't have to be all action. Emotions create their own suspense." A Malayalam film that held to this description by proportionally mixing emotion with suspense was *Devadoothan* (2000), directed by Sibi Malayil and scripted by Raghunath Paleri. The film was a fantasy musical that narrated the love story of Aleena (enacted by Jayapradha) and Maheshwar (enacted by Vineeth Kumar), mediated by Vishal Krishnamurthy (enacted by Mohanlal).

Vishal, a student expelled from Holy Father College run by Madam Angelina Ignatius, returns years later to direct a play for the students at the request of the present principal. The reason behind his expulsion was that he apparently played the Seven Bells, a musical instrument preserved in the college chapel by Angelina. Though a talented musician, Vishal had been struggling with life after his expulsion, unable to settle down. After he returns to the college and starts directing the play for students, he is drawn once more to the Seven Bells, to find that it plays a melody by itself. In spite of being accused by Angelina for playing the instrument again, he stays to find the truth.

The play that the students put up vaguely resembles the life story of Angelina. William Ignatius (Angelina's father and founder of the college) brings a blind musician –Maheshwar- from Agra to play the Seven Bells. Angelina, affectionately called Aleena, falls in love with him. After six years of romance, Maheshwar leaves to Agra to seek his parents' permission for their wedding, but never returns. Aleena spends the rest of her life awaiting his return. This story begins to alter at the hands of Vishal, and through certain changes that he brings in through his strange insights, it completely transforms into Aleena's life story.

Through a series of intuitions that is revealed through the course of the film, Vishal understands that he is being guided by an invisible force (Angelina's lover Maheshwar) for an unknown purpose. Vishal's investigations lead him to unearth the mystery behind Maheshwar's death. William Ignatius had murdered Maheshwar with the aid of his coachman Alberto to prevent him marrying Aleena. Aleena, who is unaware of Maheshwar's tragic death, had been awaiting his return for the past several years. When the film ends, Aleena recognizes the truth with the aid of Vishal, and is reunited with Maheshwar's soul, leaving behind her dead body.
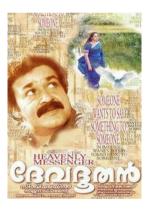

Fig. 1: *Devadoothan*'s Poster

Though the film boasted a celebrated star cast comprising Mohanlal and Jayapradha, and won the Kerala State Film Award for the Best Film with Popular Appeal and Aesthetic Value, it failed miserably at the box office. Akhila Menon notes in her article "Mohanlal's Ten Underrated Movies" that "the movie earned huge critical acclaim but did an average performance at the box office. The saddest part is, *Devadoothan* went largely unnoticed by the media and audience." The major reason for its mishap was dismissed quoting *Devadoothan*'s mysterious nature that probably deemed it to be "way ahead of its time" (as reviewed in the IMDb website). But as an experimental horror musical that followed a novel way of presentation, reasons for *Devadoothan*'s failure may be accounted to deeper causes that are even applicable to the Malayalam film industry at large.

The context of this research paper may be located in the renewed attention that *Devadoothan* has received in the contemporary years, that is, around twenty years after its release. The platform for its discussion has been social media, with websites hosted by Malayalam film enthusiasts like filmibeat.com, filmelon.com, etc., and YouTube being a few examples. For instance, a YouTube Channel titled *The Mallu Analysts*, in a video titled "Mohanlal's *Devadoothan* Movie: Why Did It Fail?" explains that Devadoothan had been "an untimely classic" in Malayalam cinema (00:00:29), which failed due to the confusing and unique patterns of its presentation. *Filmelon.com*, an entertainment website, observes, "Though the film was not at all a success, it is now considered one of the cult films in Malayalam."

This research paper is an investigation into certain invisible factors that contribute to a film's success/failure at the box office, quoting *Devadoothan* as an example. *Devadoothan*'s difference from the other Malayalam horror films, its time of release, its connection with stardom, and the role played by culturally imbibed ideologies –specifically gender- in deciding its success are interrogated in detail. Masculinities and its manifestations in the film are scrutinized to study its effect on the marketing of *Devadoothan*. The paper throws light on understanding a film as an artistic entity with cultural implications, and not a lone product manufactured for mere profit.

Studying Kracauer's observations about the realistic film, Barry Keith Grant suggests that "horror films, like most genre movies, are more about the time and place in which they were made than when their plots are set, and they reflect the values and ideology of the culture that produced them" (6). Though classified under the horror genre, *Devadoothan* differs from the conventional Malayalam horror films right from its basic elements of production. In her newspaper article titled "Mollywood Ghost Gets a Makeover", Elizabeth Thomas writes:

Mollywood horror flicks have been cliché-laden for a very long period. From a haunted house in a remote area where the ghost wanders in darkness to the typical wardrobe of white sarees, the creepy figures would wait for a passerby on the street, ask him slaked lime, seduce him and suck blood out of his body and wreak vengeance. If not any of these, a group of people would visit a haunted house, set the spirit free, and eventually a priest would walk in to recapture the spirit. ("Mollywood Ghost")

The millennial year films included three horror films, *Indriyam*, *Summer Palace* and *Devadoothan*. Though *Summer Palace* went unnoticed, *Indriyam* played reasonably well in the theatres. Both *Indriyam* and *Summer Palace* followed the cliché script of a group of people visiting a haunted place, the crisis involving a ghostly presence, and the resolution being sought in an exorcist. These films may be observed to be following the same thread of the former horror films in Malayalam, whereas *Devadoothan*'s presentation was unique and new. A horror film that also was a musical was a novel experience to the spectators.

Unlike the clichéd narrative models, *Devadoothan* introduced a ghostly presence and an ambience that was totally unconventional to the Malayalee spectators. The film's location is a romantic western-modelled milieu, with doves, Victorian bungalows, meadows, mist, and abandoned cemeteries providing an eerie backdrop for a perfect love story. This is in stark contrast with the conformist horror films that use haunted mansions built in traditional Kerala architectural style, sartorial sensibility that favours white saree/costume, and finally, the customary exorcism that saves other characters from the spirit. One of the film's reviews suggests that the role played by *Devadoothan*'s background location (that resembles a Hollywood locale) has an unignorable part in deciding its doom ("Sibi Malayil").

The absence of a physical human person as the spirit is one crucial factor that throws the spectators into confusion. This is particularly because it is only towards the end that the suspense regarding the identity of the spirit is revealed. Instead of the traditional *yakshi* figure with pronounced physical features and blood-stained backdrops, *Devadoothan* presents an invisible force that is very subtle, and sensed only by Vishal. Maheshwar, who is the supernatural presence in the film, is shown in person only in flashbacks. Aleena reminisces about him in a song sequence, she shows Maheshwar's photograph to Vishal, and Alberto describes his murder scene. Except for these instances, Maheshwar doesn't appear in an unnerving costume to terrify the other characters in the film.

Deduced directly from the above observation is the fact that the invisible spirit of *Devadoothan* is a man, and not a woman. Of course, there were earlier horror films where the supernatural presence adorned a male identity. Examples are *My Dear Kuttichathan* (1984) and *Sakshal Sreeman Chathunni* (1993), both of which depicted Aladdin-genie modelled horror stories. But both of them recounted the lore of the entrapped genie/*chaathan*, which were familiar to the spectators through existent literature, like *Aithihyamala* by Kottarathil Shankunni and *Aithihya Kadhakal* by Neelakadanunni K. S. *Njan Gandharvan* (1991), which narrated the mythical tale of a celestial being falling for a human woman, was another film that showcased a male spirit. But the concepts of *gandharva* and *yakshi* are also figments of the collective unconscious of Malayalee imagination; in other words, these spirits were not that of human beings.

The only exception seems to be *Ayushkalam* (1993), which narrates the tale of a male spirit trying to find the mystery behind his own death. But *Ayushkalam* is different from *Devadoothan* in many respects. The spirit in *Ayushkalam* is clad in white formals, present as a character throughout the film, and related to the only man to whom he was visible (his heart was transplanted to this man, and hence the visibility). Moreover, the spirit was powerless to the extent of depending on this particular man for fulfilling his purpose. The masculinity of the spirit is presented as subservient to the human being to whom he is visible. It is in this context that the masculinities in *Devadoothan* -that of Maheshwar and of Vishal Krishnamurthy- require a detailed interrogation.

Theoretical Framework: Masculinities

In the hullaballoo of feminism, post-feminism, and anti-feminism that appeared in various guises in films, masculinities is one parallel aspect that has often been taken for granted. However, the end of the twentieth century deemed masculinities as a budding branch of investigation, which resulted in the production of a huge corpus of research areas within itself. Feminist mode of thinking and writing did play a major role in bringing forth similar modes of research in masculinities as well (Chodorow 1). Thus, gender studies may be considered to have earned a wholesome nature by the inclusion of the studies on femininities, masculinities, and hitherto unexplored queer identities.

In the Introduction to *The Masculinities Reader* (2001), Stephen Whitehead and Frank Barrett define masculinities as "those behaviours, languages, and practices existing in specific cultural and organizational locations, which are commonly associated with males and thus culturally defined as not feminine" (1). They stress on the socially and contextually constructed nature of masculinities, and hence underline its plural existence. Many kinds of masculinities have been outlined by various researchers, like Joanna Bourke and Robert Morrell; each differing from the other depending on the kind of research conducted.

Among the many varieties of masculinity, the most popular version is hegemonic masculinity. R. W. Connell defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). Expanding Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity further, Michael Kimmel argues that "hegemonic masculinity is always constructed in relation to various subordinated masculinities as well as in relation to women" (2). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is a monolith against which other masculinities –and femininities- are defined and described. This research article further investigates how the hegemonic masculinity in *Devadoothan* is comprehended with reference to the monstrous masculinity of Maheshwar. Maheshwar's masculinity is understood in comparison with Aleena's femininity and a subservient version of masculinity. This would in turn, throw light on the influence that gendered identities play in deciding the success of a film.

The Hegemonic versus the Monstrous: Analyzing Masculinities in *Devadoothan*

Analyzing masculinities in *Devadoothan* requires exploring the character sketches of the three protagonists, Aleena, Vishal Krishnamurthy, and Maheshwar, in detail. It is Maheshwar who brings in the concept of 'abject' to the context of the film. To explain Maheshwar's super-reality, and to compare it with his mortal counterparts, Julia Kristeva's ideas about the concept of 'abject' needs to be incorporated contextually into the text. In her seminal work *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva defines the abject as being opposite to the concrete, fathomable object or "I" (1). The abject is that which "disturbs the identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4).

In *Devadoothan*, Maheshwar does not appear as a human presence. His existence is mysterious, something that opposes the concrete realities around him. It is established only through the fluttering voices of doves' feathers, barks of dogs, the jingle played by the Seven Bells, lights that turn on and off by themselves, and windows that open and close on their own. Though one of the priests (enacted by Jagathi Sreekumar) tries to explain the lights' working as loose contact, windows' closing as wind in action, and chases the voices of the

dogs, the story reveals to the spectator that these logical justifications are not the real reasons behind these strange events.

Maheshwar exists in the in-between void separating life and death. His presence disturbs the natural order of the college and peaceful rehearsals of the play. Through the consecutive accidents that happen to the director and some of the actors, and through the intuitions that Vishal perceives, Maheshwar interrupts the rules of normativity and makes himself felt; though it is only Vishal who recognizes the reason behind the happenings as a supernatural entity. In fact, Maheshwar is in charge of the crisis in the film, he is the driving force behind the clues that Vishal receives; his skeleton that Vishal finally finds in the college library is the answer to the pains Vishal suffers till then.

Maheshwar's masculinity may be defined as 'monstrous masculinity', owing to the reasons described above. In the paper titled "The Monstrous Masculine: Abjection and Todd Solondz's *Happiness*", Adam P. Wadenius discusses the concept of monstrous masculinity. Quoting David J. Russell's study on the "deviant" masculinities being termed as "monstrous", Wadenius suggests that "these deviant monsters threaten normality through acts of abnormality and transgression, challenging socially constructed rules of accepted behavior" (3). The abject nature of Maheshwar's existence deems his masculinity to be monstrous. To understand more about the nature of Maheshwar's monstrous masculinity in terms of the concept of hegemonic masculinity, it needs to be compared with Aleena's femininity and Vishal's masculinity.

Initially, Aleena is showcased as Madam Angelina Ignatius, the patron of Holy Father College. She is depicted as a very agentic woman with a strong commanding power over the management, staff, and students. But as the plot progresses, Angelina's sad story is revealed to the spectators. The very fact that her past revolves around her love affair with Maheshwar, and her present is a continuation of it, makes her existence meaningful only with reference to the personality of Maheshwar. In many instances in the film, Angelina is evidently upset when Maheshwar's name is mentioned in casual terms. The students' play demonstrates how Angelina's (Aleena's) life is torn between a colourful love life and a second phase of mourning, as exemplified in the following mise-en-scene:

Fig. 2: A scene from the students' play depicting Aleena's transition from happiness to mourning

Aleena expels Vishal from the college just because she suspects him to have played the Seven Bells, an instrument she preserves in memory of Maheshwar. Even after eight years, when Vishal returns to college to direct the students' play, Aleena shouts at him with the same vigour for playing the Seven Bells once more. When Vishal finds out about Maheshwar's blindness, Aleena is reluctant to admit it, as she refuses to feel that Maheshwar was a physically challenged person. It is only when Vishal shows her the paper where she noted down the music played on the Seven Bells, asking how he can possibly play a symphony known only to Maheshwar that Aleena comes to her senses. These instances reveal the passionate feelings she still has for Maheshwar.

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Aleena says, "Love is a belief. A belief that I'm there for Maheshwar, and he's there for me. When that belief is lost, then we too would not exist anymore" (*Devadoothan* 01:30:50-01:31:05, translation mine). Aleena's life is only that of a fairy tale princess who patiently awaits her prince's return. Thus, Aleena's femininity is definitely subservient to Maheshwar, even though Maheshwar is not even an existing element of Aleena's present.

The real test of Maheshwar's masculinity arises when it is compared with that of Vishal Krishnamurthy. Both of their masculine performances are irrevocably intertwined, that it is not an easy task to re-imagine the narrative by avoiding any one. If Maheshwar is an invisible force that controls the course of the plot, Vishal is the instrument who fulfills Maheshwar's intentions. The story showcases how both of them cannot become complete without complimenting each other. Though vague, Maheshwar's reason for choosing Vishal over others is justified by the same wavelengths that both of them share in the musical slant. Only a detailed analysis of their masculinities can reveal whose masculinity may be defined hegemonic.

The film begins with an interview that Vishal Krishnamurthy, a musician who has recently been awarded an international award in music, gives to the media. Throughout the interview, Vishal keeps repeating that the prize he received is a tribute to a great musician, whom he deems to be the king of music. "This award is my tribute to an invisible force who made me what I'm today", says Vishal, going on to explain that without that guiding force, he wouldn't have reached the heights that he adorns (*Devadoothan* 00:06:50-00:09:55). Thus, it is through Vishal that Maheshwar is introduced to the spectators. When the interview ends, the camera zooms into the picture of the Seven Bells, and this zooming in takes the spectators to the past, where Maheshwar's story begins as a flashback.

Maheshwar's physical absence throughout the flashback is compensated by the unnatural sounds and music that is used very carefully in many scenes. In an interview given for *The Hindu*, Devadoothan's music director Vidyasagar says,

> The writer and director created a music instrument called Seven Bells and told me the story and its connection with the instrument. When I saw what they had created, I realized that it was not just a musical instrument but a living soul, a living organism. I created the music of the bells, which is obviously the seven notes, with the sound of an organ but something like it was breathing. This created a creepy effect.

But mostly his presence is represented by a white dove, and the sound of its fluttering feathers. This begins from the picture of the white dove that is drawn as sitting on the Seven Bells from which the story begins (*Devadoothan* 00:10:30). It is the presence of a dove in a number of significant scenes that gives the spectator a clue as to the supernatural presence behind the events. The accompanying fluttering sound also adds to an eerie ambience, enabling the spectators to understand that it is not just Vishal's physical and intellectual capability that is in action.

The presence of a dove (indicating Maheshwar in action) is reiterated when the initial director (a priest) is injured, creating the need for a new director, thus paving the way for Vishal's entry. When the principal says that they needed somebody really brilliant to direct the play, a dancing doll on his table miraculously begins playing "Black Memories", a symphony done by Vishal Krishnamurthy. One of the students suddenly recognizes the tune, and suggest Vishal's name and it is accepted without dissent (*Devadoothan* 00:17:10-00:17:30). Later, when Vishal comes to college, and each time he hears the Seven Bells play by itself (Fig.3), the peculiar presence of a dove points towards a non-human force that directs Vishal. Vishal tells the students, "You asked me to come; I have come. Now you must tell me what to do" (*Devadoothan* 00:32:00-00:32:08-translation mine). At this juncture, a dove is shown flying, and its feathers flutter, signifying the force that has called him back to college would also dictate to him about what has to be done.

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Fig. 3: Vishal witnesses the Seven Bells playing by itself

Vishal's involvement in the play brings a lot of changes to it. What makes these changes noteworthy is that it is not Vishal's intelligence or talent that makes him modify the work; instead it is Maheshwar's intervention. Most changes occur through intuitions that Vishal receives while the rehearsals are carried out. The first alteration that Vishal suggests is the change in the heroine's name from Mary to Aleena. He intuitively guesses the name from the symphony that he hears in the Seven Bells. Later when Aleena asks him about it, he doesn't give her a satisfactory answer; he says that it is his mind which told him the name.

The next intervention that Maheshwar makes in the play is seen when Vishal's hand is pulled while he writes the play. Vishal suspects that it is his assistant Ithakk who pulls his hand. But the camera reveals to the spectators that it is an unnatural occurrence. It may be deduced from the scene that Maheshwar tries to change the play's script to transform the play into their love story. At another point, when Vishal cycles to Aleena's house with Sneha, his eyesight blurs, and they fall after hitting the gate to her house. This reveals to Vishal that Maheshwar was blind. Again, during the rehearsal, Vishal instinctively cuts Maheshwar's (Manoj's) fingers, enlightening him about Aleena's father William Ignatius, who had cut Maheshwar's fingers while he was playing the Seven Bells. Thus, Vishal understands that Maheshwar's music was taken from him by Aleena's father as a means to end their relationship.

When Vishal remains confused about Maheshwar's disappearance, a strange light from the library guides him. Vishal's insight tells him that the skeleton displayed in the library is that of Maheshwar. This later is proved to be the truth. A crucial turning point in the plot occurs with the dream that Vishal has about a horse carriage. When he enquires about the dream to Aleena, she shows him the same carriage that he dreamt of, also introducing him to Alberto, the former coachman of William Ignatius. When Alberto, who had an executor's role to play in Maheshwar's murder, tries to attack Vishal in a pine forest, a dove magically assists Vishal, and saves him from the attackers. Alberto asks him at a later stage, "From where did you find this truth?" (*Devadoothan* 02:23:30). Vishal has a conflict with Alberto, and after a fight, Alberto tells him the truth about Maheshwar's murder just before he drowns into a marsh. The dream and the dove are symbolic presences of Maheshwar, aiding Vishal towards uncovering the truth.

Vishal, in spite of being used as an instrument by Maheshwar, does take a conscious effort in unravelling the mysterious happenings around him. He enquires to the principal about Aleena's past, meets Fr. Stheva (an old priest who knew Aleena as a child), does a thorough research in the library to find clues to Maheshwar's music and past records. He also engages in physical conflict with local coachmen to try find who had tried to endanger him. After a few strange occurrences in the beginning, apart from Maheshwar's aid, it is also Vishal's resolution to stay back and find the truth that solves the mystery. At the end, when Aleena walks into the library as if in a trance, Vishal tries his best to stop her, lest she lose her life.

Vishal's inability to stop Aleena from entering the library is noteworthy, especially since he is a physically strong person who dealt with Alberto's goons. The steps of the library catch fire, and Vishal falls back, unable to

reach Aleena. But after a few moments, the fire dies off by itself, and Vishal (along with Sneha) enters the library only to find Aleena's dead body. While Sneha cries, Vishal hears the fluttering of doves' feathers, and raises his eyes to see two doves flying away (Fig. 4). Metaphorically, these doves are the symbolic souls of Maheshwar and Aleena, reunited in death, thanks to the assistance of Vishal. The film ends by the shot of Vishal placing his international award on the Seven Bells.

Fig. 4: Vishal witnesses Aleena's and Maheshwar's souls metaphorically represented as doves

The aforementioned incidents indicate how the masculinity of Vishal is proven submissive to the monstrous masculinity of Maheshwar. Aleena's femininity is subservient to both of their masculinities; but there is a visible graded difference between Vishal's and Maheshwar's masculinities, where Maheshwar has an upper hand. At many junctures in *Devadoothan*, Vishal accepts Maheshwar as his guide and patron, and the reason behind his success as a renowned musician. As the film ends, even Aleena accepts the supremacy that Maheshwar gives Vishal, thereby placing Vishal second only to Maheshwar. She says, "There is some power in you that I cannot fathom. Or Maheshwar wouldn't have come in search of you" (*Devadoothan* 02:30:40-02:30:50). Maheshwar's monstrous masculinity may be considered equivalent to hegemonic masculinity operating in the film.

Fig. 5: Vishal looks at Maheshwar's photograph that Aleena shows him

To comprehend how the hegemonic masculinity of Maheshwar in *Devadoothan* affected the film's success, it needs to be read in the light of the concept of stardom. For this, the film should be placed in the sociological context of its production and release. *Devadoothan* was advertised primarily in the name of its star cast comprising Mohanlal (Vishal Krishnamurthy), Vineeth Kumar (Maheshwar), and Jayapradha (Aleena).

Considering the fact that Jayapradha was a new face in Malayalam film industry, and Vineeth Kumar only a budding actor, the film was chiefly marketed as a Mohanlal starrer.

Richard Dyer, who has studied stardom in depth, considers a star to be a "structured polysemy", indicating that the star image is the result of many factors including the films themselves, publicity, promotion, and criticism and commentary (72). Marketed with Mohanlal as the male lead, *Devadoothan* did not prove itself to be a star buster. With its supernatural presence that overrides the character of Mohanlal, the spectators did not receive a masala film as expected. *Devadoothan* was also affected by the success of the Mammooty block buster *Dada Sahib*, and a rom-com *Thengashi Pattanam*, both Christmas releases of 2000. To study the impact of Mohanlal's stardom on Devadoothan, the course of his stardom needs to be traced.

If from the 1980s and early 1990s Mohanlal films focused on the story more than the cast, the late nineties shifted the trajectory of his films to include more macho-male films. Films like *Devasuram* (1993) and *Sphadikam* (1995) balanced the role of the star and the plot in the film's success; this slowly paved the path to films like *Aaram Thamburan* (1997), *Usthad* (1999), *Narasimham* (2000), and *Shradha* (2000), where the star value overran the story. Echoing the aesthetics of the alpha male films, the article "What Makes Malayalam Cinema, the Fan or the Buff?" reflects,

> The spring of real money-making superstardom arrived in the Malayalam film industry in the late 1990s. Around this time, several fan clubs mushroomed in different parts of Kerala. However, the life-span of the superstar wave in Kerala was short. Around 2000, Mohanlal began repeating himself so often as the superhuman feudal rowdy that the actor, once touted the most versatile star in the State, fell into an image trap. "Give us our old Lal back," the fans roared, referring to his acting persona in the '80s — likeable and relatable ordinary layman, laced with humour. (Parshathy)

The macho-male films focused on the hyper-masculine protagonist who appeared on screen as the be all and end all of all crises that the film proposed. "The portrayal of a hypermasculine male has potential consequences for socialization of audience members into roles and for the learning of aggression from exposure, due to the frequent correlation between exaggerated expressions of masculinity and aggression" (Scharrer).

The macho-male films of Mohanlal did make a social impact on the spectators, and their huge success at the box office earned both economic profit to the producers, and a "superstar" label for the actor. It is in this context that *Devadoothan* was released in 2000, the same year as *Narasimham* and *Shradha*, both depicting hyper-masculine attributes of the actor. Apart from the fact that *Devadoothan* did not narrate a macho-male story, it also represented Mohanlal in a role that tainted Mohanlal's masculine performance to that of another man (Maheshwar). Vishal (Mohanlal) proved to be a mere instrument in the hands of Maheshwar, obeying his commands, and owing his abilities and success to him. This was very unlike a hyper-masculine hero of the times, as constructed by similar-timed films in the spectators' minds.

The macho-male phenomenon in Malayalam film industry has given way to more realistic and gender-sensitive films. Reflecting on the era of the creation of macho-male films, *Devadoothan*'s failure owes much to the wrong timing of the film's production and release. Even post *Devadoothan*, a long list of Mohanlal's hyper-masculine films {say *Ravanaprabhu* (2001), *Onnaman* (2001), *Praja* (2001), *Thandavam* (2002), *Mr. Brahmachari* (2003), *Natturajavu* (2004), *Naran* (2005), *Ali Bhai* (2007),etc.} continued to hold the spectators' attention and win markets for almost a decade. The hyper-masculinity portrayed in these films incorporated physical competency, intellectual prowess, linguistic proficiency, and emotional control. "These films also reconfigure the public space as exclusively male and the woman interloper is firmly relegated to the margins" (Kumar 35).

The earlier amongst these films portrayed Mohanlal in a hero role that encompassed a well-educated, upper middle-class Hindu, whom the society wronged. The hero comes back to reclaim his space and place, and to rescue his dependent subordinates, both men and women. The Malayalam film industry's outdated obsession with the *savarna* class, caste, religion, etc. may be found underlined in these characters. As the first decade of the twenty-first century draws to a close, this trend slowly gives way to the hero who springs from a lowly

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background, but physically and intellectually superior. By around 2010, these "superstar" films came to a gradual fall, and more realistic films and characters are found to be on the rise.

"Once they became superstars, the rare films which featured them struggled to level their star image", writes Neelima Menon in her article "The Evolution of Superstardom in Malayalam Cinema". One of the major causes of *Devadoothan*'s failure at the box office was its positioning amidst Mohanlal's other star buster films. *Devadoothan*, when compared to other Mohanlal films that marketed themselves in his name, depicted him as a subsidiary male character whose actions, consequences, and success depended on another superior male character. The hyper-masculine figure of Mohanlal is overridden by the monstrous and hegemonic masculinity of Vineeth Kumar (Maheshwar). In other words, in *Devadoothan*, hegemonic masculinity is not an attribute of Vishal (Mohanlal), but Maheshwar, which had a role in causing its downfall.

Conclusion

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity is studied further by Demetrakis Z. Demetriou to divide the Gramscian concept of class hegemony into "internal hegemony" and "external hegemony". Adopting these divisions of hegemony into a social construction of masculinity, Demetriou reads internal hegemony as the "hegemony over subordinated masculinities" and external hegemony as "hegemony over women". This research paper explores how the sociological concepts of internal and external hegemony in masculinities indirectly affect the success of a film.

A study of *Devadoothan*'s failure at the box office reveals the impact that cultural constructions of gendered identities and ideologies have in deciding monetary success of the entertainment industry. Apart from the visible reasons like the film's western setting, the novelty of the horror musical genre, the success of the similarly timed films, and the absence of an active ghostly presence, *Devadoothan* points towards the role of masculinity and stardom that sealed the film's fate. This paper explains the role of sociological factors in deciding commercial success of an entire industry.

Unlike the other horror films produced in Malayalam, this film subverts the patriarchally accepted norms of hyper-masculine competency, placing the control of action with a ghostly presence rather than a human being (an actor who has earned stardom). Hyper-masculinity is replaced by monstrous masculinity, which in *Devadoothan* is also proven to be the hegemonic masculinity. Internally, Maheshwar's hegemonic masculinity overrides Vishal's subordinate masculinity. Externally, it controls Aleena's pronounced femininity. Thus, *Devadoothan* may be read as a welcome experiment in the narrative and thematic approaches to masculinities in film, but produced and released during an unwelcome period of hyper-masculine star buster films; hence the reason for its doom.

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