

Critique

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Don Palathara's *Family* (2023) is More complex than Usual



French Philosopher Michel Foucault, in his book "The History of Sexuality", discusses the family primarily in the context of the question of power. He said, "The family is the formative place where desire arises, and 'the family has become an obligatory place of affects, of feelings, of love; sexuality has its privileged development in the family.' The family is given a unique place in the history of the transition from the ancient regime to modernity; the family has played a significant role in the construction of bourgeois life; it has been involved in the identification of each human subject as possessing a personal identity; it has entered a complicated and constitutive relationship with modern psycho disciplines.

The same was experienced in the film 'Family' (2023), directed by Don Palathara. It premiered at the 52nd International Film Festival, Rotterdam (IFFR), in February 2023. This is not the first time Don Palathara has dealt with the complex theme of the family and its interpersonal relationships. In his films *Shavam* (The Corpse) 2023, *Vith* (2017) and *Joyful Mystery* (2022), he has explored the family as

a unit, sometimes depicting it in shades of grey. "Family" is written by Palathara and Sherin Catherine and is produced by Anto Chittilappilly for Newton Cinema,

In this new film, he focuses on a village with a Christian community. This village is portrayed as a family; all is not well in the community. It is not an ideal community. He uses the metaphor of the leopard to show the predator in the community. In an interview after the world premiere of *Family* at IFFR, Don said, "In my village in Idukki, Kerala district, I was surrounded by orthodox and religious people. Early exposure to religious texts gave me ideas about morality and Christian ways of thinking. Later, I observed the contrast between what we believed and practised. Then, as an individual, I began to ask initially answered questions, but eventually, they ran out of answers, and I had to find my answers."

Furthermore, he said, "The church was always the elephant in the room. As a child, I felt under the constant supervision of the Church and the Christian God Himself. It forced you to constantly question all

your actions and words" The film's focus, however, is not on the church. Instead, it is about certain aspects of character in the close-knit Christian community.

He also said, "I imagined Family like a horror movie. To me, it's like an elliptical unfolding of horror before the viewer's eyes. I didn't want the camera to draw attention to itself, hence the static shots. Also, the characters don't have individual voices and play their ascribed societal roles. Their lives aren't authentic and seem staged. A still camera seemed to me the best choice to give the experience of watching a play."

The protagonist of the film Sony, played by the well-known actor Vinay Forrt, is an ordinary, lovable person from the village. They get upset with his actions. But the village community helps him and gives him a chance to find his way in life. Then the audience slowly gets to know the true face of Sony. A freeze-frame at the end shows that he is the one who was held captive by the village community.

In one of the scenes, a nun, who is supposed to be neutral and unworldly, protects Sony, who is the talk of the town because of all his misdeeds. This brings to mind a dialogue from the movie The Godfather: 'A man who does not spend time with his family can never be a real man.'

There are similarities between Don Palathara's "Family (2023) and Pablo Larrain's The Club (2015). One possible commonality between the two films is their examination of complex social issues and taboo topics. "The Club" addresses the issue of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church, while "Family" explores the dynamics of community and its efforts to hide the misadventures of family members. The Club deals with themes of guilt, redemption, and the struggle to reconcile one's beliefs with one's actions. It also explores the Catholic Church's history of covering up sexual abuse by its clergy and its devastating impact on both the victims and the

perpetrators. Palathara highlighted the importance of empathy and understanding in these relationships and emphasised that the film strives for a nuanced and realistic portrayal of family dynamics. The family takes a slow and minimalist approach, with long takes and muted performances by the actors. The camerawork and sound design also contribute to the film's atmosphere, creating a sense of intimacy and tension.

It is worth noting, however, that these two films differ in style, tone, and narrative structure. "The Club" is a more intense and politically charged film, while "Family" is a slower and introspective drama. Nonetheless, both films showcase their respective directors' talent for exploring complex themes with nuance and sensitivity. Palathara also spoke about his experience working with the actors in "Family." He said about his preference for restrained and naturalistic performances, noting that he wanted the actors to feel like real people, not characters in a film.

One of the film's strengths is its exploration of complex emotions and human psychology. The characters are flawed and have problems, making them relatable and realistic. The film also raises thought-provoking questions about the nature of parenthood, family and personal identity.

Family is a gentle, incisive, carefully crafted film that critiques the human obsession with self-preservation, no matter the moral cost. It is an impressive achievement as a film and as a chronicle of the leopards that lurk in our midst. Overall, "Family" is a well-made and thought-provoking film that explores complex themes with sensitivity and nuance. Due to its slow pace and restrained cast, it may not be for everyone, but for those who appreciate this type of filmmaking, it will likely be a rewarding experience.

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