

Paper

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***Bramayugam: Caste, Power and Cinematic Metaphor***Abstract

This paper seeks to look at the various ways in which Socialities are constructed within the film's representation of the caste system as operational in 17th Century Malabar. As a greater commentary on power, caste, and the nexus between knowledge and power, the film is an excellent undertaking in understanding how situational horror as a cinematic medium can sometimes be far more effective in communicating historical fact and circumstance than realist reproductions of caste violence and discrimination. This paper looks at several techniques that the film uses to communicate its commentary on the nature of power and caste, and analyses various plot devices and choices that enhance the power of its story.

Introduction

Released on 15th February 2024, the black-and-white Malayalam-language film *Bramayugam* (translated loosely to 'Age of Madness') was an immediate success at the box-office, making it the third-highest grossing Malayalam film of 2024 as of the writing of this review. It garnered considerable critical acclaim for its performances, script, cinematography, score and sound-design. Classified plumbly as a horror/folk-horror flick everywhere it was screened, hyped-up and discussed, the highly-anticipated film was directed by Rahul Sadasivan (who previously directed the horror success *Bhoothakaalam* in 2022) while starring Mammooty at the height of his experimental best. *Bramayugam* was accompanied simultaneously and rather ironically by a single piece of advice repeated across its promotional interviews and events - "Do not walk in with the expectation of watching a horror film."

Considering the precision and careful intent with which the script, cinematography and dialogue unfolds, along with the extremely intentional piecing-together of the structures of caste and power that play out in its unique setting of a 17th-Century Malabar, it is entirely fair for those creatively involved in *Bramayugam* to have assumed that the metaphorical and interrogative intent of this film would be obscured by common-place, entirely understandable pre-conceptions of what it means to walk into a horror film. You will find no jump scares in *Bramayugam*. For it is not the simple, arcing plot - repeated in various iterations across the region in its deep-rooted oral folk traditions - that holds the key to the interrogation of power that is being attempted in this project, but rather the rich, metaphorical juice that underlies its skin, communicated through dialogue, narrative choice, and the language of cinema. The utilisation of situational horror as technique and medium serves as the functional foundation for *Bramayugam's* commentary, reproducing far

better the vice-like hold that caste can have on sociality, conceptions of selfhood and the traversing of time and space, than numbing realist takes that reproduce linear, almost voyeuristic narrations of violent caste atrocities for the screen.

### **Building a Social World**

*Bramayugam* begins with an establishment of the mythical world it throws its characters into. As two men travel through a 17th Century Malabar forest at night, one of them is seduced and killed by a *Yakshi* - a vengeful female nature spirit. Representing an unbridled, uncontrolled form of an aggressively 'natural' female sexuality lying outside of the organised, intelligible patriarchy - still processed, however, through a standard, heteronormative cinematic lens - the *Yakshi* presents us with a metaphorical quandary which we will return to towards the end of our review. The other man - our protagonist - who is spared, makes it to the day, continuing through the forest, until he comes across a river. Slaking his thirst briefly, he attempts to cross the river, but the currents prove too strong for him. One of the most powerful shots of the film follows - a grand, sweeping visual of the river and the massive, towering waterfall it feeds. An intense zoom-out shows the insurmountability of this natural force, as the score swells.

Defeated by the river, our protagonist turns back, and comes across a gateway to a *mana*. Entering through a crumbling gateway and finding the *mana*'s verandah deserted, he takes a coconut from a pile by the side of the house. He is instantly spotted by the cook - one of the three central characters that constitute the power dynamic in *Bramayugam* - who reprimands him for stealing. A voice from inside the house overhears their conversation, calling out for identification. This is the point where the visuality of *Bramayugam* breaks through, with its

cinematography, sound design and ominous score working in tandem to establish an important feature of the *Mana* as a social space - in terms of both its forbidden 'interiority' and naturally extended, yet conditionally permissible 'exteriority'.

Barred from entering the inside, the experience of moving from the exterior of the *mana* to the interior for someone who does not fit the required caste requirements is one filled with fear, uncertainty and outright terror. The thick, heavysset doorway to the *mana* looms menacingly as just such a social portal in several scenes in the movie. Psychologically, the establishing shots of the *mana* are framed from the fear-filled point of view of an eerily unfamiliar, forbidden space being traversed by someone violating a deeply-entrenched social-moral code. Even later on in the film, when our protagonist gains access to the interior of the *mana*, the strange, unfamiliar sounds of alien, unintelligible social processes that clink around; as well as the eerily disconcerting rooms, delivered on the sonic and visual platters of horror respectively, are an excellent way of reading the scene as a lower-caste individual entering the unfamiliar, frightening space of a house owned and populated by individuals on the higher side of this caste hierarchy.

Thevan, when he eventually enters the house later on - after Mammooty's character permits him - is instructed by the cook to keep his head down and ignore these unfamiliar noises. There is a demarcated, 'safe' path that he must follow and not stray anywhere else in fulfilling his function in the house. The horror, if metaphorically translated into psychological fear, very effectively transports the viewer into precisely the same shoes that attempt to traverse spaces demarcated by the prevailing socio-historical context of the time.

Almost every interaction between the three characters in *Bramayugam* is a grand event

in and of itself, where each dialogue written by the novelist T.D. Ramakrishnan is carefully attempting to reflect one power-play or the other, or some psychological trickery or one-upping. It is through constructed, continually-performed socialities that power reproduces itself, as (Alexander, 2020) and other works on the Anthropology of Performance theorise. The narrative set-ups, as well as dialogues in this film reflect this idea of power.

Mammooty's entry is not the standard 'mass entry', though it could well be assumed to be one on the surface. With our protagonist immediately lowering his eyes, the sonic frontier is filled with the reverberating thump of a cane traversing the *mana's* verandah. The camera follows suit, refusing to reveal Kodumon Potti's face even as the powerful, land-owning Brahmin speaks down from the verandah and enquires about our protagonist, who is revealed to be a *paanan* (caste) by the name of Thevan. Once more, cinematography follows suit to create such an empathetic lens for the viewer, the camera fully immersed in the same power dynamic reflected in Thevan craning his neck up to Potti on the verandah - only after he is given permission to look up, of course. Visual spaces and shots are consciously utilised to reflect notches in the hierarchy.

Potti speaks of himself as being "unconventional", quoting Sanskritic scripture to demonstrate how forward-thinking he is to the newcomer. He thus draws Thevan unawares into his web of power (communicated through close-up shots of a spider web later on in the film). Ignoring Thevan's protests at it being improper, he asks Thevan to sing him a devotional hymn - a task restricted to the Brahmins at the court that Thevan comes from. The cook stands in the corner of the scene - up on the verandah, by the side of the Master, evidently restless; as a new dynamic - a new player - is introduced to 'their' structure. Indeed, Thevan and the cook have their

own power dynamic going on between themselves, as Thevan is drawn into servitude at Potti's beck-and-call through a combination of adhering to the social code and an active assertion of the same by Potti. With both Thevan and the cook subjugated under Potti, yet sniping at each other, their relationship is crucial to the unwinding of the plot, representing how even equals under subjugation seek to dominate the other, and seek affirmation of these attempts in various ways. (Gledhill, 2000)

Close attention should also be paid to the dialects of Malayalam in operation through various scenes and across dialogues. The difference between the "higher" formal Sanskritised form as well as the "lower" form, and the communicative functions they serve, is indicative of a deeper sociolinguistic context, as summarised in (Brady, 2015). It is not a coincidence that Sanskrit is turned to when scripture is sought to be cited, or that Thevan switches between forms while talking about "the master" as opposed to arguing with the cook. The same apparently progressive Potti, when his authority is challenged, does not hesitate to use "low" slurs and insults to remind Thevan and the cook of their place. The progressiveness serves its own function, causing wary newcomers to lower their social defenses and get drawn deeper into the web of power which finally rules with an iron fist. It can thus be read as a kindly, conveniently-performed diffusal of power, that reorganises and centralises swiftly when in distress, a concept demonstrated in (Gledhill, 2000)'s Chapter on 'The Political Anthropology of Colonialism'. The power-holding entity is ideally understood by the pacified subject as flexible steel, and not brittle iron.

The first shot of Potti in *Bramayugam* is of his hand at the gate, adorned with a ring - an important motif representing an icon of power through the film. His cane, with which he thumps around the house signaling his presence, can also

be read as an instrument of power, existing both as a source of support to the one wielding it, while serving also as a reminder of an ever-present, implicit threat of violence. Potti's very presence screams power and authority - accomplished through a tight combination of shots, sound design, dialogue, score and charisma.

### Defining the Rules

As Thevan stays at the *mana*, singing for Kodumon Potti, he is invited to a game of *pakida* (dice). It is metaphorically meant to represent the game of dice that is birth, the cards for which fate deals one from the very start in the form of a caste identity or generational advantage. Thevan is forced into gambling away his time to Potti, and remaining his slave for life. Just as Kodumon uses supernatural trickery to turn the dice in his favour, so too is 'the game' of life rigged in favour of those in power, slyly breaking rules and constructing a social reality that keeps them in the win. The way that Kodumon is capable of using illusory tricks to shape the very material spaces around Thevan and the cook can be read as a striking metaphor for how discourses of knowledge relate to power. (Foucault, 2020)

The Brahmin had complete monopoly over 'official' knowledge production at the height of the caste system. This monopoly can be utilised to shape the very way in which material realities are conceptualised by those who are deliberately excluded from participating in the same discourses.

This is a recurring theme in the movie - for all intents and purposes, the Brahmin as landlord might as well have been an all-knowing wizard, which Thevan begins to suspect him of being - operating in a world far beyond his own, with complete divine authority and fore-knowledge of everything that has been, is happening, and is going to come. The wizard-like supernatural powers of Potti must be read throughout

*Bramayugam* as the advanced, almost-magical reach that individuals higher up in the power hierarchy seem to have, which is uniquely transformed in the context of caste, cosmology and divine knowledge. The situational horror of "everything" being pre-determined this way, which we will return to, is communicated fantastically throughout the film. The conversation that Potti and Thevan have before the game of dice, over whether it is a game of luck or of *buddhi* right before the game, serves as an ironic narrative foundation to the outcome, covering a breadth of themes, from the irreverent cynicism of power and conformity, to religious interpretations of the game of dice in the *Mahabharata*.

The way the game of dice itself is shot visually once more ties into the way it is spoken of in the movie. It is once more a collaboration between dialogue, cinematography, sound design and score. Described as the best cure to "boredom", the shots of Thevan and Potti playing dice are interspersed - montage-like - with shots of the cook putting in a hard day's work into his daily routine. One heavily taxing chore after the other is depicted, showing the difference in the lives led by the server and the served. Where one is a life of leisure, the other is one of back-breaking physical labour. Yet this divide is cloaked with a veneer of functionality and social "efficiency" as an appropriate means of organising labour divisions. The irony is thus visually communicated.

After the game of dice, Thevan has a face-off with the cook, who slyly makes a comment about a "lowly *paanan*" playing dice with the master. They continue to jostle around in their own power dynamic. It is interesting that the resentment of the cook is directed at Thevan instead of at the Master for breaking the expected categories of functionality and "placeholdering." It is almost as if a fundamental solidarity, or mutual understanding has been broken. Thevan fires

back at the cook by saying he is a guest of the master's, thus using the legitimacy of the master to assert his own authority, an interesting example of how forms of governmentality can be used as a language, or substratum for resistance, as in (Foucault, 2020). Later, Thevan and Potti are having dinner, and Potti asks Thevan about the cook, subtly turning one against the other through cleverly framed falsehoods and psychological tricks - yet another way of maintaining his control against his divided subordinates, outlined also in (Gledhill, 2000)'s chapter on "The Political Anthropology of Colonialism", and reminiscent of the 'divide and rule' strategies used by the colonising British all over the world and in Palestine, described in (Brownson, 2014). The cook enters as they converse, and talks back churlishly to Potti in front of Thevan. Potti, who is enraged that his authority has been challenged in front of the "guest", curses at the cook with slurs, and openly uses his supernatural powers to assault the cook. After the cook has been subdued, Potti turns menacingly to Thevan and harshly orders him to sing, thus firmly putting both back 'in their places.' Enraged that an example of resistance may have been set to the newcomer, Potti thus quickly and firmly ensures that the newcomer is demonstrated the punishment that awaits such dissent, a common strategy of states and other structures of power responding to dissent, outlined in (Davenport and Loyle, 2012). The state - especially the post-colonial state - cannot be shown to demonstrate vulnerability, for further advantage to be taken of it.

Our panicked protagonist then talks to the cook after this incident, who relates to him the lore of the *Mana*, and informs a horrified Thevan that Potti is actually a *chaathan* (loosely related to the concept of a goblin/poltergeist) in disguise, taking on the human form of Kodumon Potti. What follows in the film is an attempt by Thevan and the cook to reverse the monopoly that the

*chaathan* has over the *Mana*. A complicated narrative arc emerges, wherein Thevan and the cook together collaborate to defeat the *chaathan*. The corporeal form of the *chaathan* is defeated, but the ring, which represents subjugation and an icon of the holder of power, continues to be passed onto the *chaathan*'s possession of Thevan's corporeal form, as he and the cook quarrel over what must be done with it in the ensuing power vacuum. Thus both the cook, as well as Thevan meet their respective demises - the cook at the hands of a Portuguese soldier crossing the river, and Thevan to the *chaathan*, who finds a new vessel in Thevan's corpse. We will come back to a few scenes across this arc in detail. The setting being crucial to establish in a chronological manner for the purposes of our review, there are now several scenes in the plot which we will discuss thematically.

### Of Performances, Structures and Boxes

The use of the *chaathan* in *Bramayugam*, who is essentially staging a mimicry of Potti's Brahmin identity to feed its quest for dominance, is a deliberate metaphor for the performativity of power and caste. Through accumulated behaviours and prescribed "tasks" that form a symbiotic relationship with a web of social codes that are continuously performed within a veneer of constructed "functionality", the *chaathan*'s powers are exerted over the piece of land in question. The operation of the piece of land is stripped down almost to a summary of its essentials in the power games of this specific socio-politico-historical context. A gaping hole in *Bramayugam*'s power analysis is the absence of the gender dynamic - all the main characters are male, and there is no examination of the lower-caste or upper-caste woman's contribution to the dynamic, or indeed the presence of any other genders. We will return to this when we examine the portrayal of the *Yakshi* in the film.

Even so, this “summary” of 17th-century caste socialities in the Malabar gets several things right about landholding practices by Brahmins in the Malabar, especially with regards to the stories passed down orally among the other castes in the area about the times when they were tied to such landlords - though there is little scholarship in this regard. (This statement draws from the author’s own personal experiences and observations, being someone brought up in the region, and in these social spaces.)

The idea of the Brahmin as sweet-tongued verbal trickster and the finder of loopholes, as holding a divine right to knowledge beyond Earthly bounds, as an unprincipled hypocrite who scrutinisingly practices untouchability yet is fine with violating women from the same caste. These are of course extremely problematic stereotypes to hold today, but parallels can definitely be drawn between the apparently progressive Potti who quotes caste-blind shlokas from Hindu scripture yet resorts to slurs the second inconvenient opposition arises, and the modern “liberal” savarna.

For it is not simply a coercive force from above that regulates the behaviour of the subject, but a certain “conduct of self” among those subjugated that also pervades the social structure, described in (Foucault, 2020). Thevan speaks admiringly of the Master even when he is not around, getting laughed at by the cook for this, who calls him an impostor. Thevan thus reproduces these relations in his speech, speakingly admiringly and fearfully of Potti:

“His world goes beyond what we can even imagine!”

But for Thevan, trapped on this piece of land like any other historical indentured labourer, isn’t the hurdle to his freedom very simple? Just leave! The supernatural forces and tricks of Potti’s can be read as the organised violence that an upper-caste landlord could meet out to a lower-caste labourer, and also as a larger

representation of the feudal caste ties which tie them down. The “master’s favour” serves almost as a foundation for Thevan and the cook to distrust each other, each with different reactions to it, yet both nonetheless tied to it.

In fact, the sense of loneliness that Thevan feels even though he should feel a “natural” solidarity with the cook, is a part of the system which succeeds in crushing such natural notions of solidarity. Once it begins to start raining, trapping Thevan in the *mana*, the loneliness that Thevan feels in being trapped thus is visually shown, with him sitting in a cramped doorway. The material world itself is capable of being manipulated by the *chaathan*, closely related to how the Brahmin in this context is capable of influencing perception of the material world, which is not self-evident in a world where knowledge is monopolised, and these relations themselves cloaked in a “functional” logic. Potti is not averse to reminding the others of their position in the hierarchy, for that is what his position of power depends on as well. He growls:

“The dancer should know how to dance. The singer should sing. Otherwise, no one should exist as a mere burden upon this Earth.”

It is also demonstrated in the contempt he shows for those below him, which circularly helps construct his own identity in the dynamic - the self gaining definition through the defining of the other. (Sawant, 2011)

“I thought you were different from the rest. But it seems that all of you seem to share only one emotion - *Bhayam* (fear)”, he snarls disappointedly at Thevan, after he begs to be freed.

Even when Thevan attempts to escape - an important scene in the movie, as a long winding set of shots show him running away - he is unable to do so, vomiting blood and collapsing at the gateway to the *Mana*. He has to grope his way back to the Master, falling at his feet. Two readings can be drawn from this, both related to

each other. Thevan has to return to the system in order to gain a chance at meaning, categorisation and purpose - a fatal attraction. Another reading relates to the question of facing an untamed nature all alone. It is the social structure that has tamed nature - not the individual. Thevan is thus helpless in the face of the endless rain; helpless in the face of nature. The rain itself could be an illusion by the *chaathan*, convincing him that there is no possibility outside, no form of meaning beyond the structure. There is both a material and ideological intertwining in the significance that is gained from staying within the structure, and “returning” to it, which can be given further context through the study of ideology and materialisation, as in (DeMarrais, Castillo and Earle, 1996).

As the cook succinctly puts it, while explaining the logic of the *mana* to Thevan:

“This is a trap. The more you try to leave it, the tighter the noose becomes. A mystical knot that gradually wipes away memories over time.”

And indeed, Thevan’s memories do end up being wiped over time, with him barely being able to remember his own mother’s name. The same name which a cunning, seemingly-all knowing Potti surprises him with at the start of the movie by knowing. It is this very same aspect of the ‘all-knowledge’ that bewilders and suppresses dissent - a theme which we will return to again.

The cook’s explanation of Potti also attempts to bring into it an explanation of the performativity of caste, and of power itself:

“[He is] a wolf in sheep’s clothing!”

In much the same way that Thevan is forced to cling to the structure of the system, so is Potti as the *chaathan*, as the cook explains:

“The *chaathan* is both master and prisoner of this realm.”

The choice of the *chaathan* as a mythological parallel is thus a carefully considered narrative decision in Bramayugam,

with multiple connotations that must constantly be considered while analysing the film.

In a desperate final gamble, Thevan asks Potti to join him for another game of dice - an offer which Potti summarily dismisses, saying “You cannot gamble with fate twice.” The analogy of birth is thus reiterated. In a desperate final gamble, Thevan meekly asks to see the *chaathan*’s true form. The *chaathan*, caught off-guard, fixes the *paanan* with a menacing stare and says, “Everything has been predetermined. No one can alter it now.” This interaction later breaks Thevan, as he is dismissed to his quarters to weep in fear. The sheer futility of even the mere beginnings of his dissent is hammered into him. To think of the ideological effect of these words, filtered through the systems of power and knowledge that justify it is very interesting. Was this not how the dogma of caste also worked? In essence: Everything has been pre-determined in line with the sacred scriptures. To think of an alternative, or to defy such an obvious, self-evident cosmology is delusional. The all-knowing Brahmin, through his readings, intimately understands this cosmology. Listen to the one who has read.

Thevan weeps, because even as he is planning resistance, the fundamental reminder of the system - that all is futile within a grander order beyond his understanding - crushes him.

Another way that the film explores dissent being quashed is through the question of intoxicating substances. The cook offers Thevan alcohol from Potti’s cellar at a point, giving him a way to drown his misery, an offer that Thevan readily takes up. While he relaxes for a bit and opens up to the cook, he offers the alcohol back to the cook, who refuses to partake. “I will not make that mistake. I will not forget.” This throws up a very particular strand of cultural discourse, in which alcohol and intoxicating substances are generally seen as ways to quell dissent and keep the masses “occupied”. It can be drawn further,

and indeed has been in various medical conspiracy theories, as reviewed in (Andrade, 2020), in the way that the ‘heavily-medicated masses’ fail to realise their oppression by distracting themselves with such “wasteful” pursuits.

### **Power Unveiled**

The collaboration between Thevan and the cook results in a final showdown with Potti, who uses his supernatural powers to play illusory tricks on the two of them - manipulating the physical world around them to make them panic.

Somehow, the two manage to wound Potti, initiating the waning of the *chaathan*'s powers. The final desperate gamble of the *chaathan* is a very interesting one, which can draw broader conclusions to the way power is wielded within the ambit of the state. The *chaathan* appeals to the cook as a benevolent father, transforming into a younger, gentler, kinder version of Potti, who regretfully speaks of all that he could not do for the cook, thus invoking the affective potential of the idea of the benevolent patriarch, and of the affectionate shepherd. The final defense of the man in power is an attempt to be a kindly father figure, which is a very telling choice. It is precisely how we very often see wielders of power in the state being framed, as affirmed in (Connel, 1990). At almost its rawest, most distressed form, this is how power seems to justify itself in *Bramayugam* - as an elder advising the clan, as a father protecting the child.

When it becomes clear that the cook is not going to be tricked this way, Potti screams:

“You have no right to acquire this power! This power will be nothing but a curse for you! You will be struck by lightning’s wrath!”

Thevan and the cook persist in spite of this attempt to put them in their places, and finally manage to mortally wound Potti. His corporeal

form burns away, and the *chaathan* reveals itself as the pure personification of power, its performance now concluded. A disturbing image fills the screen - of a sickly, inhuman, goblin-like monster that crawls on all fours, birthed from Potti’s corpse. It scurries into the shadows as Thevan and the cook fight over what must be done with Potti’s ring. The goblin peers out at the aftermath of this power vacuum, as the two attempt to kill each other by any means possible. The cook sees the ring as his birthright, while Thevan wants it to be destroyed, pleading with the cook: “Commoners like me are always its victims.” We see two different approaches “after the revolution” here: Must the same rubrics of power - the same categorisations, the same forms, the same methods and the same impositions - simply be reversed, or should the pattern of power (the ring) be destroyed entirely as a category in and of itself? We see in effective operation here the tossup between (Scott, 2020)’s characterisation of the administrative and ideological choices that Lenin made after the Bolshevik Revolution, and criticisms in anarchist literature in the line of Rosa Luxemburg, of reproducing similarly problematic categories of power in the pursuance of desirable political and social goals. (Levy, 2010)

In the penultimate scene of *Bramayugam*, just after the cook has seemed to escape from the horror of the *mana* and the now-possessioned Thevan, he is suddenly shot dead by a Portuguese soldier, who is crossing the same river at the beginning of the movie - though he does it at ease, atop a horse. Once insurmountable, now the river seems nothing but a brook by comparison. This introduction of the soldier can be metaphorically read as the sudden entrance of Colonialism to the subcontinent. Nature is tamed with far more success. New social rules, as well as ways of being are introduced to those ‘natives’ who lived in a world that did not live by such rigidly ‘scientific’ rules and concerns, but which could



essentially be understood by us now as a land which was not yet disenchanted, but was filled, for all intents and purposes, with *yakshis*, *bhoothas* and *chaathans*. I am reminded of the way that several ‘conducts of self’ were restructured alongside colonial entry into British Bengal as described in (Chakrabarty, 1993)’s chapter on colonial modernity. A new sense of space and time - a cosmology, even - has arrived.

It is a brilliant depiction of this ‘moment’, and the suddenness of this scene is very impactful.

The final scene shows Thevan, now “possessed” by the *chaathan*, walking into the forest, smiling. The *chaathan* has realised that a new understanding of power, superior to caste has arrived. It is eager to exploit the opportunities that this new power structure presents it with.

### **Drawbacks and Concluding Remarks**

The film does suffer from a serious drawback in the presentation of the *Yakshi*. Overall, there is a conspicuous absence of a gendered account of the socio-historical power dynamic in *Bramayugam* which factors in the positions of women. The opportunity to examine forms of resistance within a matrix of caste that also takes gender into account could have proved to be very interesting. Even if the *Yakshi* is meant to be a representation of an ‘untamed’ female sexuality that lies beyond the logic of the *mana*, she is still portrayed only as a sexual being, who draws power only from her sexuality. In one scene early on in the movie, she is seen making love to Potti while Thevan spies on them from a doorway. This scene provides a platform for competing masculinities to be established in a hierarchy. First, the *Yakshi* is used as a device to establish the supernatural, mythical world of *Bramayugam*. Now, in the midst of yet another mythological entanglement, she is used again to establish the power hierarchy

between Thevan and Potti. This use of the *Yakshi*’s character only compounds the absence of a gendered account all the more, leaving a sizeable gap in its analysis.

The scene of Thevan spying on Potti and the *Yakshi*, in the context of competing masculinities, can be read as yet another account of power. A common lament in oral histories of the Malabar region speaks of the violation of the lower-caste woman. The hypocrisy of the Brahmin, who carefully practices untouchability by day and yet violates women of the same caste by night is a common refrain. This scene can be read in just the same way. The world over, the violation of women from subjugated communities and peoples has been seen as a way of confirming power and authority, as outlined in (Saadawi, 2008). Whether consensually or not, the power of initiating sexual relations with women from another community (whose men are supposed to ‘own’ them) is understood within the patriarchal context as a symbol of dominance and power for the ‘victors’, and as one of humiliation to those who have been thus subjugated. In relation to the earlier observation we made, of the final face of power being the benevolent patriarch, *Bramayugam* can hold some very interesting insights into the connection between the patriarchy and power. In fact, within the context of the film, we can even go on to claim the patriarchy as the underlying condition to such horrific circumstances of power and domination, as some feminist scholars do. (Connel, 1997)

*Bramayugam* thus proves itself to be a fascinating dissection of power, covering an immense panorama of themes. The film also does well to ground itself in the cultural and historical setting it sets out to define, broadly remaining faithful to the voices of those subjugated suchly for centuries, and taking into account the histories they have passed down. From the grounded mythical folklore, to the stories of the violation of women, to its particular historical and cultural

understanding of the Brahmin at the top of the hierarchy - as trickster, as an all-knowing, sly entity that anticipates dissent and thought, while upholding divine wrath and power via knowledge, *Bramayugam* stands a head above the rest. A greater example of Foucault's attempts to understand the relationship between knowledge and power need not be looked for -

the caste system and its justifications exemplify it.

This same connection between cosmology, knowledge and power is reflected brilliantly in the historical and cultural reconstruction of caste in *Bramayugam*, and so is the sheer horror of subjugation in this system.

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