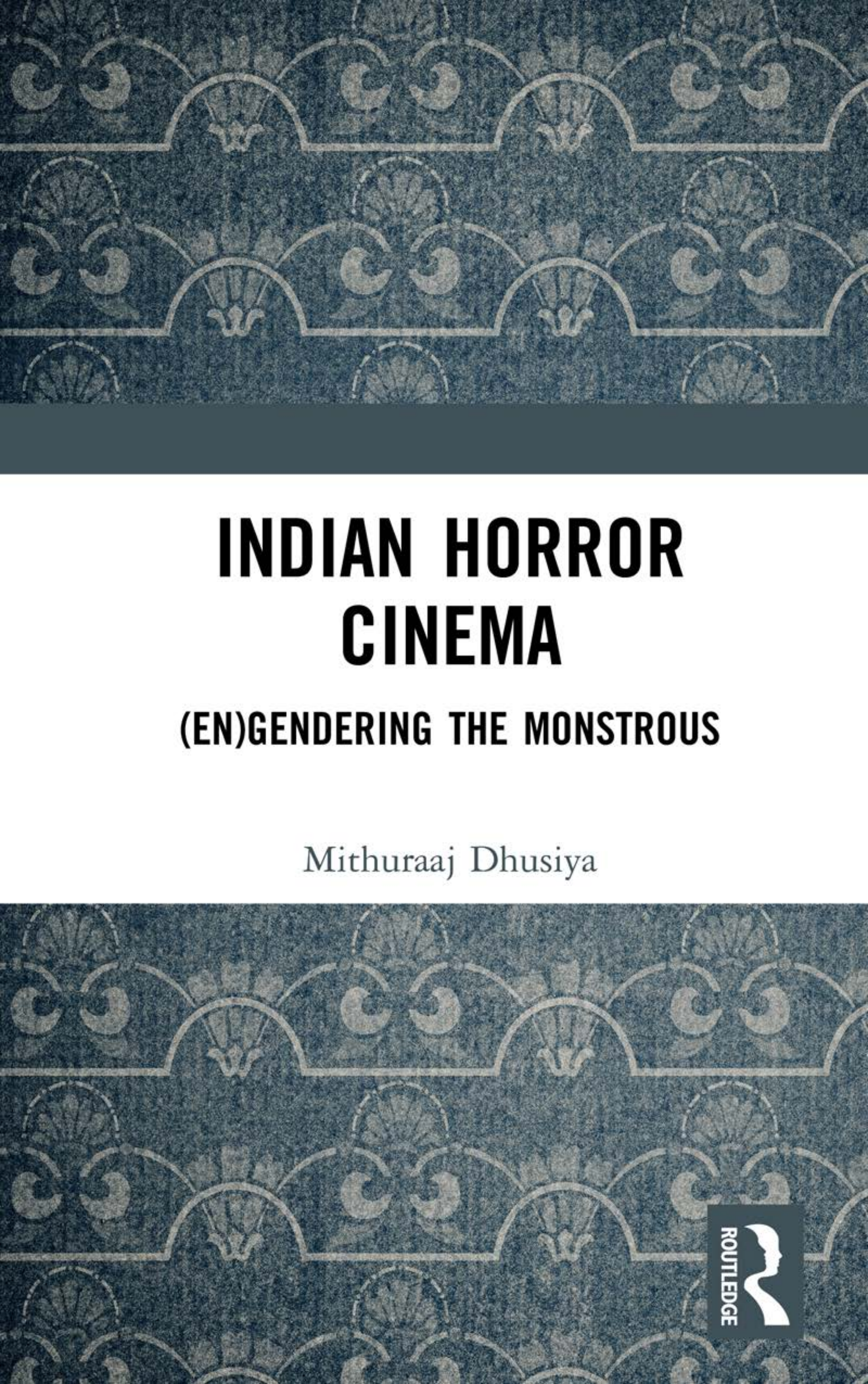

INDIAN HORROR CINEMA

(EN)GENDERING THE MONSTROUS

Mithuraaj Dhusiya

ROUTLEDGE

INDIAN HORROR CINEMA

This book studies the hitherto overlooked genre of horror cinema in India. It uncovers some unique and diverse themes that these films deal with, including the fear of the unknown, the supernatural, occult practices, communication with spirits of the deceased, ghosts, reincarnation, figures of vampires, zombies, witches and transmutations of human beings into non-human forms such as werewolves. It focusses on the construction of feminine and masculine subjectivities in select horror films across seven major languages – Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Bangla, Marathi and Malayalam.

The author shows that the alienation of the body and bodily functions through the medium of the horror film serves to deconstruct stereotypes of caste, class, gender and anthropocentrism. Some riveting insights emerge thus, such as the masculinist undertow of the possession narrative and how complex structures of resistance accompany the anxieties of culture via the dread of laughter.

This original account of Indian cinematic history is accessible yet strongly analytical and includes an exhaustive filmography. The book will interest scholars and researchers in film studies, media and cultural studies, art, popular culture and performance, literature, gender, sociology, South Asian studies, practitioners, filmmakers as well as cinephiles.

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(En)gendering the Monstrous

Mithuraaj Dhusiya

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements vi

Introduction: horror in Indian cinema: an afterthought? 1

1 The masculinist economy of possession narratives 35

2 Vampirism as structures of resistance 65

3 The ghastly gendered narrative of animal transformation 92

4 Zombies and witches and the anxieties of culture 119

5 Do we fear laughter? The genre of horror-comedy 141

6 There are no ghosts, only ghostly tales: Indian horror and the 'uncanny' 172

Epilogue: fear, are we there yet? 195

Appendix: annotated filmography of horror films in India 209
Glossary 269
Bibliography 272
Filmography 286
Index 303

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INTRODUCTION

Horror in Indian cinema: an afterthought?

> I might mention the case, let us say, of what are called 'horror comics' and the like. Well, I have read about them and recently I saw some of these things. In fact, a very mild – exceedingly mild – type happened to be sent as a birthday gift to my grandson. I was horrified looking at it that anyone, much less my grandson should have that kind of literature to read, and this is literature and not the comic part. The horror comics undoubtedly are something which I am absolutely clear in my mind should be supressed ruthlessly (*applause*). There is no question of freedom of the individual. That is something which is bad, hundred per cent bad – something which is causing, in some countries all kinds of developments of all kinds of sadistic impulses, murder – children just murdering for murder's sake, to have the pleasure of seeing a person killed. All this is through this kind of horror comic business. Now, obviously, we cannot allow that kind of thing; no Government or society ought to allow that kind of thing to flourish. Therefore, it is clear that the Government must take action to prevent something which it considers and society considers evil from spreading too much.
>
> (Nehru 2009: 26)

Retrospectively, one can argue that Jawaharlal Nehru's address to a seminar on Indian Film in 1955 paves the way for what would prove to be a bumpy ride for Indian horror films thereafter. Nehru was not alone in his criticism of 'horror comics'. His apprehensions that 'all kinds of sadistic impulses' generated by these comics would bring about moral and cultural degradation of the society were shared by an influential section of American intelligentsia. Horror comics like *Tales from the Crypt* (1950–55), *The Vault of Horror* (1950–54) and *The Haunt of Fear* (1950–54) were rising steadily on popularity charts. By 1953, horror-based comics accounted for approximately a quarter of the total comics-industry output as more and more Americans were reading them than were reading *Reader's Digest* or *The Saturday Evening Post* (Skal 1993: 230). To curb the growing popularity of these comics, the Comics Magazine Association of America introduced the 'Comics Code Authority' which banned their production and distribution. But while socio-cultural associations of horror began to be manifested through the enduring popularity of horror films in America, the Indian film industry for a very long time saw no such impact. Horror films had to battle the successive Indian governments' negative attitude, perhaps best explained by Nehru's own words: careful 'to prevent something which it considers and society considers evil from spreading too much' (Nehru 2009: 26). Whether society considered horror films evil or not is debatable going by the popular reception of foreign horror films, including those belonging to Hammer productions, in India. But the stepmotherly treatment meted out to Indian horror films by successive post-independence governments is evident from very intermittent productions of horror films in India and prolonged court cases that producers of films like *Jaani Dushman* (dir. Rajkumar Kohli, 1979) had to fight against government censorship. For the record, box-office reports show that *Jaani Dushman* with a gross of Rs 9,00,00,000 was the second highest grossing film of the year, getting the better of then-reigning superstar Amitabh Bachchan starrers *Mr. Natwarlal* (dir. Rakesh Kumar, 1979), *Kala Patthar* (dir. Yash Chopra, 1979) and *The Great Gambler* (dir. Shakti Samanta, 1979). Faced with a hostile censor board and high costs for making horror films, most film producers were naturally discouraged and preferred other safer genres. However, as one explores the archival history of Indian horror films, one is elated to discover the rich, heterogeneously sourced aesthetic traditions that these films have managed to achieve despite encountering manifold obstacles.

The Hindi film *Mahal* (dir. Kamal Amrohi, 1949), arguably the first post-independence Indian horror film, foreshadows some basic questions about thematic and formal elements of horror that would continue to haunt Indian horror films thereafter. *Mahal* narrates the story of a young and handsome lawyer Shankar (Ashok Kumar) who goes to an old palatial mansion *Shabnam Mahal* to claim his inheritance. He is surprised to observe that a portrait of the former owner closely resembles him. The housekeeper recounts the sad tale of the owner and his beloved who had to end their lives under tragic circumstances. He begins seeing a girl singing and swinging in the garden swing during nights. But whenever he tried to approach her, she would disappear. This pattern continued for some days before the girl finally disclosed to him that she was the spirit of the dead Kamini (Madhubala), the former owner's beloved. She beckons him to either die or marry her incarnation, a servant's daughter named Asha (Madhubala) living in the same palatial premises. Shankar becomes so obsessed with the ghostly apparition that his friend Srinath (Kanu Roy) deems it wise to forcibly marry him off to a lady named Ranjana (Vijayalaxmi). But he keeps on neglecting his wife, confining her to live in a vermin-infested shack. Unable to withstand torture, Ranjana commits suicide, accusing Ashok as she was dying. He is arrested and sent off to jail. Later Asha, now married to Srinath, confesses that she had been masquerading as Kamini to gain Ashok's attention. Meanwhile, a suicide note left by Ranjana is recovered and as a result Ashok is acquitted of murder charge and released. The story ends with Ashok, still very obsessed with the apparition, on his way back to the *Mahal*. It has several motifs common to horror cinema: an ancient haunted palatial building, the bat, the snake, an ominous looking black cat and the suggestion of 'uncanny'. The audio-visual impact created by the banging doors and a woman clad in white clothes carrying a lighted candle with her and singing at night, with frequent references to death, facilitate the creation of a brooding horrific setting. However, a section of modern critical studies refuses to see it as a horror film. Rachel Dwyer, for example, argues that the film should not be seen as belonging to the horror genre:

> Yet *Mahal* is not a horror film; nor it is a ghost film. It is mysterious, it is haunting, it is eerie but bar a few items . . . there is no ghost, there is little that is very disturbing apart from Ranjana's suicide and the off-screen death of the tribal woman. Nevertheless the audience remembers it as a ghost film, as a film about a haunted house, and a dark and mysterious film.
>
> (Dwyer 2011: 150)

While the film might to other historians be the 'first' Indian horror film, Dwyer's placement of the film in other genres suggests she is using another set of generic and historical criteria to arrive at the determinations she does. This warrants a comparative exploration of the history of genre formation in both Western and Indian cinematic narratives.

The politics of genre formation

Fissures riddle the map of Indian horror cinema. Unlike Hollywood cinema, which has a relatively well-defined horror genre, Indian cinema with its diverse production centres, not to mention linguistic varieties, poses a challenge to any homogeneous categorisation of horror cinema. How is one to categorise a genre that is as diverse as the Bengali new-wave *Khudito Pashan* (dir. Tapan Sinha, 1960), the Malayalam melodrama *Bhargavi Nilayam* (dir. A. Vincent, 1964) or the Marathi horror comic *Pachadlela* (dir. Mahesh Kothare, 2004) or the more conventionally horrific run-of-the-mill Hindi Ramsay films? An exhumation of 'genre' itself presents several questions: Is genre a stable category? Where lies the origin of genre? Who defines genre industry, audience or the text itself? Why do some genres suddenly disappear? Is genre culture-specific? Is genre period-specific? What is the nature of relationship between literary and filmic genres? Can they coexist together? How does one take into account hybridity within genres? And perhaps, most important of all, how do we define genre? It is thus imperative to study the conceptualisation of genre in the history of film scholarship.

To say that genres are vital to films would be an understatement, as more often than not they are a primary mode of initiation into the filmic world. In almost every video rental library or store throughout the world, VCDs and DVDs are arranged according to generic classifications: comedy, thriller, action, horror, science fiction, gangster films, musicals, blockbusters etc. Broadly speaking, genres can be defined as the structuring principles of expectation and convention, around which individual films mark repetitions and differences (Neale 2003: 161). It is widely considered that genre criticism began in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a response to auteurism. Though Andre Bazin and Robert Warshow could be seen as precursors of genre theory with their influential works on the Western and gangster films in the 1940s and 1950s, yet it was only in the late 1960s that proper studies on genre formation began to develop. The auteuristic model of cinematic authorship, while upholding classics as examples of auteur's brilliance and charisma in portraying the unfamiliar, looked down upon genre films as manifestations of clichéd plots depicting the everyday familiar world. This prejudice can be traced back to the late eighteenth century:

> The modern prejudice against genre in art can be traced to the aesthetic theories of the Romantic period . . . Poetic 'limitation', the building of creativity on the achievements of the past, began to fade as the standard of personal vision became more important. . . . The English and German Romantic writers consolidated this trend by establishing originality not only as a criterion of art, but, in their crudest statements, the only criterion of art. Art could owe nothing to tradition or the past because that debt qualified the power and originality of the individual creator.
>
> (Braudy 2004: 664)

Genres like the Western have often been read as ‘an art form for connoisseurs, where the spectator derives his pleasure from the appreciation of minor variations within the working out of a pre-established order’(Warshow 1979: 480).

Contemporary film scholarship has devised a number of approaches to address Hollywood’s generic structures:

> First, the taxonomic view of genre, which attempts to map the boundaries between generic classes; second, the view of genre as an economic strategy for organising film production schedules; and third, the view of genre as cognition, as a contract between producers and consumers which renders films intelligible on some level.
>
> (Watson 2003: 154)

The taxonomic approach, according to Paul Watson, could be either theoretical, historical or visual. One genre can be differentiated from the other through visual icons:

> Since we are dealing with a visual medium we ought surely to look for our defining criteria in what we actually see on the screen. It is immediately apparent that there before our eyes is a whole range of outer forms.
>
> (Buscombe 2003: 15)

He delineates four outer forms: setting, appearance, tools and other miscellaneous physical objects that keep on recurring. While different forms of taxonomic approach to genre formation have been very useful for the reception of films, it is not without its share of problems: ‘if genre criticism were simply a matter of constructing taxonomies and allocating films to their places in the system, then the intellectual basis of the exercise would certainly be open to doubt’ (Ryall 1998: 336). For how would one categorise animation films? Or what is the role played by the film industry in generic representations which might be different from the more theory-oriented taxonomic approach? And what about generic hybridity? The same visual iconography might be present in more than one genre. Thus, one can see guns and gun-toting men in Westerns, crime thrillers and gangster films besides film noir. It becomes increasingly difficult to rely solely on taxonomic generification.

Genre also serves an important role in safeguarding the economics of the film industry, as the site of ‘crystallization of a negotiated encounter between film-maker and audience, a way of recording the stability of an industry with the excitement of an evolving popular art' (Stam 2000: 127). Filmmakers find it convenient to invest in secure genres which have a history of good box-office collections. It also helps them to advertise their products in a public-friendly manner, as genres necessitate pre-established expectations and pleasures in the audience. However, sometimes industrial definitions of genre – especially in cases of sequels, prequels or seriality – might be misleading:

> Seriality is akin to genre . . . and yet it is subtly different from it. The serial mode appears to operate and organise – in the first instance at any rate – at a more general or inclusive level than does genre, whilst at the same time being more precise and prescriptive in terms of the processes it defines. Lacking the more open (and involved) character of genre, it appears to be tied as much to the demarcation and regulation of forms and modes within material production processes as to the distinguishing of types or kinds (along with their aesthetic delineation) in aesthetic ones. It seems thereby, to be more intimately bound to the standardisation involved in commodification itself.
>
> (Darley 2002: 126)

Apart from taxonomic and economic approaches to genre formation, Watson asserts that the cognitive assessment of genre has also been a very useful method in categorising films where genre is to be seen 'not as a corpus of approximate films, but as provisional and malleable conceptual environments: a cognitive repository of images, sounds, characters, events, stories, scenarios, expectations and so on. Genre can thus be seen as part of a cognitive process which delimits the number of possible meanings of any individual film by activating certain conceptual constellations while leaving others dormant' (Watson 2003: 160). However, it has also been pointed out as follows:

> If the genre texts of the 1960s are distinguished by their increasing self-reflexivity about their antecedents in the Golden Age of Hollywood, the genre texts of the late 1980s–early 1990s demonstrate even more sophisticated hyperconsciousness concerning not just narrative formulae, but the conditions of their own circulation and reception in the present, which has a massive impact on the nature of popular entertainment.
>
> (Collins 1993: 247–8)

This intertextuality has led to the rise of hybrid genres addressing the target audience rather than the mass audience.

One of the major contributors to the growing analyses of the Hollywood generic system has been semiotic film theory. Film theorists have applied the principles of semiotics to explore the fluidity and malleability of genres: ‘If we extend these ideas into genre studies, we might think of the *film genre* as a specific grammar or system of rules of expression and construction and the individual genre films as a manifestation of these rules’ (Schaltz 2009: 566). Thomas Schaltz argues that it is the transformative ability of film conventions that endows genres with both ‘static’ as well as ‘dynamic’ attributes. Another semiotician, Rick Altman, makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the growth of genres in films through his assertion that the formation of genre is essentially a product of the interplay of the semantic meaning and syntactic organisation of elements that contribute towards that meaning: ‘genres arise in one or two fundamental ways: either a relatively stable set of semantic givens is developed through syntactic experimentation into a coherent or durable syntax, or an already existing syntax adopts a new set of semantic elements’ (Altman 2003: 35).

Genre in twenty-first-century Hollywood cinema attains viability by reinvesting in its metaphorical level as opposed to its more literal level. Instead of stagnating within the classical paradigm, genre delimits itself into a potent cultural expression of the time:

> For metaphors in themselves do not tell us anything, but rather draw attention to a *relationship* between things and prompt us to start looking for ways of making meaning. Indeed the basis of metaphor is a process of *transference*: the transference of aspects of one object to another object so that the second object has an *implied resemblance* to the first object, yet is an original expression.
> (Watson 2003: 162)

This ‘transference-implied resemblance’ plays a pivotal role in building cognitive relationships with the audience as well as acknowledging the industrial aspects of cinematic conceptions. However, the nature of these relationships is quite different from what they were in the twentieth century: ‘the increasingly transgeneric tendency in twenty-first-century Hollywood film may represent not the breakdown of “classical” genre traditions, but the more visible enactment, in transformed institutional contexts, of those “post-classica” impulses that have always been present in the system of genres’ (Langford 2005: 278).

In the context of Indian cinema, genre formation has adopted trajectories that are vastly different from its Western counterparts. Even when films made in this part of the world resonate models of Western generification, they are nevertheless deeply rooted within the socio-cultural diversities of

India. Genre reformulations and their aesthetic practices irrespective of their origin are culture-specific: ‘genre terms seem best employed in the analysis of the relations between groups of films, the cultures in which they are made, and the cultures in which they are exhibited’ (Tudor 2003: 10). Thus, it is but natural that what was suggested by the generic label ‘horror’ in the West would be different from Indian horror cinema, and the same applies to most other genric productions in India. However, what sounds thus obvious unfortunately took a long time to permeate into public consciousness, both inside and outside India. Going by generic expectations from the audience, this process is far from complete. For example, the instinctive revulsion for most Indian horror films on the pretext of the superiority of their Western or even other South Asian counterparts fails to acknowledge the unique formulations of Indian horror. Admittedly, some horror films have been bad productions, not fit to stand the test of time. However, films like *Mahal*, *Bhargavi Nilayam* or *Bhoot* (dir. Ram Gopal Varma, 2003) are of cultural significance akin to *The Exorcist* (dir. William Friedkin, 1973), not to mention that they are equally well made, if not better. The critical apparatus of Indian film scholarship for a long time, just like its other non-Hollywood counterparts, failed to evolve Indian cinema–specific genres:

> As a result, generic characteristics attached to specific Hollywood genres become normative, universalising and often prescriptive categories. It is evident that an application of genre criticism for the study of popular Indian cinema needs to re-define the frame of reference of such criticism within a specific national context.
> (Eleftheriotis 2006: 273)

Film scholarship in the West tends to evaluate Indian cinema in terms of its otherness to Hollywood films, thereby limiting its multifaceted characteristics. Rather than appreciating the various hybridised film cultures that country’s many film industries produce, Western media and film circles have largely ignored the potential in Indian cinema, always presenting it as an also-ran amongst other cinematic traditions:

> However, this is a cinema which, in the Indian context, is an overridingly dominant, mainstream form, and is itself opposed by an ‘Other’: the ‘new’, ‘parallel’, ‘art’ (or often simply ‘other’) cinema which ranges from the works of Satyajit Ray, Shyam Benegal and various regional filmmakers, to Mani Kaul’s ‘avant-garde’ or Anand Patwardhan’s ‘agitational’ political practice. In these terms Indian popular cinema is neither alternative nor a minority form.
> (Thomas 2006: 280)

Rosie Thomas also points towards the existence of certain genres specific to Indian cinema like social, family social, devotional, stunt and multi-starrer which would hardly make sense to the canonical Hollywood generic formulations. Generic categories can also reveal or encode sociological practices underlying them: Indian film genres show the propensity to depict mythological films as 'Brahmin' (priest/sage), historical films as 'Kshatriyas' (warrior/aristocrat) and action-packed stunt films as 'Shudras' (serf/manual labour) (Kakar 1989: 25). Though such broad generalisations might be anaemic in comparison to more exhaustive analyses of films, yet the presence of such subtexts can hardly be ignored.

Genre criticism in India took a new turn with Madhava Prasad's socio-political readings of genre formation in Hindi films. He notes the differences between the industrial organisations of the Hollywood and the Bombay film industry. While a typical Hollywood film implies an integrated internal hierarchical set-up with primacy given to the tightly organised narrative among its constituent elements, Bombay films, he argues, have a relatively more autonomous existence with different constitutive elements like songs, dialogues and the star-image having independent standings. Thus, Hindi films act as sites of multiple representations of individual skills and collective socio-economic processes. However, Prasad links these production processes to the propagation of the state ideology:

> The evidence points to two conflicting answers: on the one hand, there is the perceived failure of the attempt to gain mastery over the production process, to make it serve a determinate ideological project; on the other hand, the very impediments placed in the way of such consolidation by the powerful financiers may be said to have contributed (with whatever degree of 'intention') to the perpetuation of a backward capitalism in production and pre-capitalist ideologies in which relationships based on loyalty, servitude, the honour of the *khandaan* (clan) and institutionalized Hindu religious practices form the core cultural content. Thus a state of affairs that appears to be the result of a series of 'failures' may well be the one that the particular state form obtaining in India makes it possible.
>
> (1998: 49)

He attributes the dominance of 'musical-social' in the post-mythological Hindi film industry to such covert mechanisms of the state ideology:

> Its function, on the other hand, is to *resist* genre formation of any kind, particularly of the type constituted by the segmentation of

> the contemporary. This ideological function is imposed on it by the nature of political power in the modernizing state. The segmentation or the disaggregation of the 'social' is prevented by the very mode of combination of the aesthetic of the signifier (music, choreographed fights, parallel narrative tracks, etc) with that of the signified (or realism, which requires continuity, a serial track and subordination of music to a narrative function.
>
> (ibid.: 136)

Prasad also brings to attention the genesis of three generic tendencies specific to Hindi cinema in the India Gandhi era, a very turbulent phase in Indian politics: the new cinema, the middle-class cinema and the reformed social.

If Prasad sees articulations of socio-political ideologies behind the heterogeneous format of popular Hindi films, Ravi Vasudevan persuades us that this heterogeneity is a marker of the multiple discourses that films have to offer:

> The persistence of the disaggregated, heterogeneous dimensions of this narrative form, a heterogeneity defined not only by a loose assemblage of attractions – action, comedy, romance – but also by the sense that the world of the fiction is not singular and may be articulated through different sites, styles and discursive forms, ranging from the comedic to the socially pedagogic or allegorical.
>
> (2010: 39)

Vasudevan is one of the first Indian film scholars to elaborate on the importance of melodrama in Indian films. Rather than focussing on the influence of extradiegetic elements in shaping the narrative, he instead explores the melodrama as a site of transgressive problematisation of socio-political issues not accessible to the realist genre of filmmaking in India:

> Undertake a narrative and performative operation which allows for forbidden, transgressives spaces to be opened. . . . Often very important to this operation of transgression and denial is the manipulation of knowledge within the narrative. . . . These gaps in knowledge in the fiction (misrecognition, misunderstanding in the relation between characters) effect vertiginious displacements in the narrative. Spaces are created – of misrecognition, of displacement of that of which would be if knowledge were full. It is these spaces that characters enter in order to work out their transgressive functions.
>
> (Vasudevan 1989: 39)

This is generally achieved through acts of wish-fulfilment by the character/s concerned. Thus, while critics of melodrama see it as a loose, fragmented type of cinema, which more often than not serves as opium for unsuspecting masses, Vasudevan shows that it is a highly organised and intelligible genre that can sometimes challenge the hegemony of the heteronormative patriarchal institutions of the establishment. However, it is important to know that the melodrama produced in Indian cinema is vastly different from its Western counterparts: ‘Indian film melodramas deploy a creatively invigorating interplay among western form, classical Indian theatre, folk plays, and the more modern Parsi theatre . . . one has to understand the significance of such sedimentations’ (Dissanayake 1993: 5). Lalitha Gopalan locates two major interruptions unique to Indian melodrama – song and dance sequences within the narrative and the intermission during film screenings in cinema theatres – as sites of negotiations between the Eastern and the Western filmic traditions. Terming these interruptions as ‘constellations of interruptions’, she argues:

> Both song and dance sequences and the interval attune us to their structural function in popular Indian films, particularly their play on spatial and temporal disjunctions. Their articulation in specific texts highlights how films imbibe both global and local conventions: genre films adjust to song and dance sequences, and the interval doubles the structuring of anticipation and pleasure found in genre films.
>
> (Gopalan 2002: 20)

Ashish Rajadhyaksha explores possibilities of synthesising the realist and the melodrama modes of cinematic productions in India: ‘for a great deal of narrative cinema, realism is the theory, melodrama the practice’ (2009: 41). Melodrama examines the existence of what he calls the ‘marginal data’ that lies on the periphery of realism but remains inaccessible to the critical conventions of realism. This marginal data records multiple histories of subalternity in society – whether this is of refugee narratives or non-heteronormative sexualities. According to him, ‘All of this collectively contextualizes celluloid technology’s self-nomination as a full-fledged apparatus for social organisation’ (ibid.: 43).

Brief overview of academic scholarship on horror films

A good corpus of academic work on Western horror films generated by Western writers/theorists exists, and it offers many useful points of departure in this project. Studies have largely centred on psychoanalysis, cognitivism, postmodernism and queer schools of thought.

Psychoanalysis and horror films

Psychoanalysis undoubtedly has been one of the most thriving modes of exploring horror films. Limiting herself to American horror films from 1970s to mid-1980s, Carol J. Clover produces exhaustive readings of how the low-budget and yet very popular genre of independent horror films permit feminist readings in the narrative. Her perspicacious hypothesis of the 'final girl' in most American slasher films of that period posits the figure of this 'female victim-hero' as

> boyish, in a word. Just as the killer is not fully masculine, she is not fully feminine – not, in any case, feminine in the ways of her friends. Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself.
>
> (Clover 1992: 40)

Clover argues that an average adolescent male viewer is, perhaps, able to identify with this character without feeling threatened off with regard to his own male competence and sexuality. This in turn leads him to emotionally identify, howsoever temporarily, with the 'final girl's' fear, suffering and pain, and eventually with her relief in the end when she finally manages to kill the killer.

Where Clover examines subcategories within the general rubric of horror, Barbara Creed looks for psychoanalytical explanations for the relevance of horror films to Western societies. Creed uses Julia Kristeva's conceptualisation of the 'abject' to show why horror films can be seen as examples of 'abjection'. Kristeva defines 'abjection' as something which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules', that which 'disturbs identity, system, order' (Kristeva 1982: 4). Creed theorises the representation of the woman as monstrous in horror films as a modern defilement rite which ensues the purification of the abject for both the protagonists on-screen and the audience watching those films. She presents a detailed analysis of several horror films tracing the representation of monstrous femininity through five basic manifestations: the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire and the possessed woman. She argues that whenever women are represented as monstrous in horror films, it is almost always in relation to their maternal and reproductive functions (Creed 1993).

The cognitivist approach to horror films

The cognitivist school of thought furnishes another viable mode of exploring horror films.

Noël Carroll, for example, argues that while people are afraid of natural horror, they are not averse to the 'art-horror' commonly produced in horror films. At least some people seem to experience profound joy in watching these films. He describes art-horror as the emotive response that works of the horror genre are designed to elicit from audiences. He argues that this emotional state consisting of physical and cognitive components is occurrent in nature rather than a dispositional one. He elaborates:

> Assume that 'I-as-audience-member' am in an analogous emotional state to that which fictional characters beset by monsters are described to be in, then: I am occurently art-horrified by some monster X, say Dracula, if and only, if 1) I am in some state of abnormal physically felt agitation (shuddering, tinkling, screaming, etc.) which 2) has been caused by a) the thought: that Dracula is a possible being; and by the evaluative thoughts: that b) said Dracula has the property of being physically (and perhaps morally and socially) threatening in the ways portrayed in the fiction and that c) said Dracula has the property of being impure, where 3) such thoughts are usually accompanied by the desire to avoid the touch of things like Dracula.
>
> (Carroll 1990: 27)

Drawing on the work of anthropologist and cultural theorist Mary Douglas, who in her highly acclaimed book *Purity and Danger* shows that society terms those things interstitial that transgress cultural categorisation – thus a creature like a lobster would be considered impure since it crawls even though it resides in the sea, crawling being an attribute generally associated with earthbound creatures and so the lobster 'others' itself with its ability to crawl (Douglas 1966) – Carroll notes that most monsters in horror films like ghosts, zombies and vampires are also categorically impure because they are both living as well as dead. The horror film audience finds it thrilling to decode mysteries about these 'impure' or 'interstitial' monsters along with the other characters within the narrative: herein lies the source of the paradoxical pleasure of horror films.

Torben Grodal expands Carroll's prescribed cognitive approach to horror films from the 'interstitial' monster to human autonomy itself. Grodal argues that the paradoxical enjoyment in watching horror films arises out of certain situational insights where the characters within the narrative fight for their freedom in the face of invading evil forces. This fight mirrors the viewer's own struggle to assert his autonomy in the outside world which might be challenged by repressive forces in different manifestations. Distinguishing the horror genre from its close cousin, the suspense genre, he observes:

> Often horror fiction also deals with cognitive control, but, whereas the motivation in detection fiction is primarily cognitive gratification, in horror fiction the effort to get cognitive control is mostly derived from a motivation to maintain personal body and mind autonomy, which is under severe attack from uncontrollable phenomena.
>
> (Grodal 1999: 236)

This cognitive control is achieved in a high-stakes battle where several empirical knowledge-based models clash within the viewer's mind. The battle is primarily between rationalist and non-rationalist forces. The intensity of the battle differs, depending on whether the film is a thriller or horror, leading to degrees of what Grodal calls as 'cognitive dissonance'.

Cynthia A. Freeland adapts the cognitivist approach to horror films to a feminist point of view. She reads horror films as an assemblage of various disturbing questions about patriarchal society and the manner in which it runs its gender hegemony in and through institutions such as religion, science, the law and the nuclear family. Sigmund Freud defines 'uncanny' as something familiar yet foreign at the same time: 'for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (Freud 1955: 240). Freeland relates this to the Kantian notion of the 'sublime', finding similarity in the intense inner psychological conflicts within both. Immanuel Kant describes the sublime as something so vast and infinite that compels our mental faculties to be divided, on one hand overwhelmed with awe, and at the same time exalted with the experience of such vastness:

> For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does not admit of sensuous presentation.
>
> (Kant 1957: 41)

However, she points out the difference between the two: while the sublime exhilarates, the uncanny threatens. Freeland therefore likens the uncanny to what she calls the ‘anti-sublime’:

> By contrast, the forces of the uncanny dwarf us in a way that simply threatens a dissolution of the self, meaning and morality. The uncanny as an *antisublime* involves the opposite outcome of these paradoxes or a failure to disarm them: We cannot adequately conceptualize a representation, we lose our sense of self, we are frightened by something unexplained, and we feel the loss of morality or death of the self in the face of a very great evil.
>
> (Freeland 2000: 37)

She thus explores horror films as sites of the crises (dissolution) of stereotyped masculinities.

Postmodernist cultural readings of horror films

Horror films have also been explored in relation to contemporary socio-political and -cultural events, developments and crises in society. David J. Skal examines American horror films through the cultural history of America, locating, for example, the origin of 1950s horror films to the different crises that America was undergoing during that decade. Americans were still recuperating from the global hazards caused by the Second World War, including the threats attendant upon nuclear armament and bombings, besides anxieties related to UFOs. Skal argues that all of these led to the rise of not only horror films but also horror comics:

> Most Americans found it easier not to face invasion/annihilation anxieties directly; they found indirect expression in McCarthyism, UFO hysteria, and, perhaps most pointedly, in the popular medium of lurid and sensational comic books that had been growing steadily in circulation since the end of World War II.
>
> (Skal 1993: 230)

Monsters of the 1950s, he adds, personified the gigantic monstrous nature of the atomic bomb as well as the Cold War. He also focusses on the role of television and media in that decade. According to him, the growth of the media, specifically television, had led to increase in mental trauma among those exposed to the first commercialised television screenings (in the early 1950s). Skal makes parallels between this trauma and the growing depiction of the bulging eyes and brains in the horror films of those times.

Isabel Cristina Pinedo explores the contemporary horror film from a postmodernist perspective. The postmodern world for her is an

> unstable one in which traditional (dichotomous) categories break down, boundaries blur, institutions fall into question, Enlightenment narratives collapse, the inevitability of progress crumbles, and the master status of the universal (read male, white, moneyed, heterosexual) subject deteriorates. Consensus in the possibility of mastery is lost, universalizing grand theory is discredited, and the stable, unified, coherent self acquires the status of a fiction.
>
> (Pinedo 1997: 11)

She attempts to locate horror films within the social universe of this contemporary world. Asking why these films are popular, Pinedo wonders how, if as correctly pointed out by several critics that horror films are full of violence, this genre has such a huge fan base. She likens the experience of watching horror films to that of a roller-coaster ride where the riders are assured of a safe exit and this permits them to have a simulated experience of the thrills associated with danger. This according to her is a form of 'recreational terror' which

> provides the framework that allows viewers to pleasurably submit to the tension and fear provoked by the highly conventionalized spectacle of violence . . . fans derive pleasure from the genre's rehearsal of the fear of injury and death in a world where safety is, in every sense of the term, a fiction.
>
> (ibid.: 134)

This recreational terror works through the dialectic of 'showing' and 'not showing', 'seeing' and 'not seeing'. For example, the audience has a choice of seeing or not seeing a dreadful scene. Similarly, through the solitary reaction shot and the unclaimed point-of-view shot, when the scene concentrates on the victim's terrified reactions, the terror in the form of the monster/supernatural is not shown. Instances like these give ample opportunity to the viewer to claw back into the protection zone of simulated action.

Horror films and the critique of heteronormativity

An important, yet often neglected area of scholastic exploration is queer readings of horror films. Robin Wood was one of the first film scholars to study horror films as examples of aesthetic presentation of 'othered', often 'repressed' sexualities, including LGBT ones. Horror films present an alternative to the tightly knit patriarchal ideologue of heterosexuality through their depiction of variant sexualities. Talking about bisexuality, Wood observes:

> Bisexuality represents the most obvious and direct affront to the principal of monogamy and its supportive romantic myth of 'one right person'; the homosexual impulse in both men and women represents the most obvious threat to the norm of sexuality as reproductive and restricted by the ideal of family.
>
> (Wood 2002: 26)

He locates repressed homosexuality overtones behind the construction of monsters in old horror films and interprets them as potent critiques of the bourgeois-capitalist ideology of masculinities and femininities based on the biological sexual differentiation.

Bonnie Zimmerman articulates the first proper analysis of the theme of lesbianism in vampire films. She constructs a brief filmography of lesbian vampire films since the release of Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932). She argues that most of these films project stereotypes about lesbians: 'lesbianism is sterile and morbid; lesbians are rich, decadent women who seduce the young and powerless' (Zimmerman 1996: 381). In fact, so strong has been the cultural policing that Dreyer's *Vampyr* – based on Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (2000), a novella which recounts the story of the countess Milarca Karnstein living eternally by vampirising young girls – has no traces of lesbianism left in the film's narrative. Then, some films, which do explore lesbianism, do so more from the class perspective rather than in terms of sexual inclination. The post-1970s female vampire film, Zimmerman argues, moved beyond the standard treatment of the lesbian theme: while some stereotypes were still present, newer thematic developments were streaming out too. She notes that the post-1970s vampire films too had their share of problems. For example, most of these films, in their own way, manifest stereotypical notions of lesbians as narcissists captivated in love with their own image. She also locates a disturbing trend of linking violence with sex in most lesbian vampire films after the 1970s.

Harry M. Benshoff argues that the horror film is the most fertile territory for the development of non-normative queer sexualities. He notes that there is a tendency to read those films as gay or lesbian that are either written, produced or directed by gay or lesbian personalities even though there might not be any overt queer plot in the film. This approach, though not without its limitations, cannot be underrated as cinematic authorship forms an integral part of film appreciation. The films of James Whale and Ed Wood gain importance in this regard. He further points out that 'a variation in the homo-horror auteur approach is that in which a gay or lesbian film star (whether "actually" homosexual or culturally perceived as such) brings his/her persona to a horror film' (Benshoff 1997: 14). Thus, actors like Eric Blore, Franklin Pangborn, Robert Walker, George Sander, Judith Anderson and Greta Garbo have often been regarded as cultural icons of queer sexualities. He also points out that different films over the ages have portrayed queer sexualities at the subtextual or connotative level. This has been the most popular presentation of marginalised sexualities in almost all film genres starting from film noir to action films. The horror film is no exception. At one level, one can argue that such presentations help in institutionalising heteronormative hierarchy over subaltern sexualities. But on the other hand, it becomes the most viable mode of giving voice to the queer community without inviting state hostility. Benshoff describes it as the most important exploration of horror films from the LGBT perspective. This approach moves beyond the canonical straight readings of the horror film to elicit multiple sites of queerness located within them.

The Indian context

Horror has long been one of the most obscure genres of Indian cinema in terms of scholarly studies. But happily, this situation is now changing, and there is a growing body of serious scholarship on horror cinema from India. And yet, most of these academic works is largely limited to the study of Hindi horror films. In one of the very early mentions of Indian horror films in global scholarship, Peter Tombs explores the lack of critical recognition of Indian horror film:

> The problem in many ways lies with the term 'horror' itself. In India the word carries so much baggage. To bring up the subject in film circles is almost the same as announcing that you are a half-wit. It just isn't taken seriously. It conjures up images of bad acting, lumpy faced monsters, wind machines, and the producer's girlfriend in a bikini. It is the equivalent of the term 'Z movie,' and carries all the same negative connotations.
>
> (Tombs 2003: 253–4)

Most of the early scholarship on Indian horror revolved primarily around Ramsay horror films. Attempts have been made to relate these films to the existing socio-economic conditions: 'The political turmoil and the economic changes at the end of the 1980s created a specific platform for fears and anxieties that were articulated through the deformed monsters of the western gothic tradition' (Valanciunas 2011: 47). It has also been shown how

> these horror films can be read as historical material – as a moment of Indian history when the vacuum left open by the collapse of the ground upon which the Congress as the ideological core of modern, secular India had built its legitimacy was being filled by the certainties of regressive and religious ideologies. The Ramsay's films took off, and borrowed unashamedly from these discourses, as they did from a range of other sources.
>
> (Vitali 2011: 96)

Fighting against the big banner productions throughout the 1970s and 1980s, 'the Ramsay Brothers were seen as holding out against the industry's march to cultural legitimacy, the profane icons of an imagined attack from below on abstract ideas of white-collar respectability, aesthetic accomplishment, and economic transparency' (K. Nair 2012: 139). My own research on Ramsay films explores 'how these low-budget, intellectually discredited films depict marginalised and forbidden issues of non-normative sexualities such as necrophilia and incest' (Dhusiya 2014b: 175). Interesting research has emerged with respect to 'Bollywood's recent romance with the horror genre especially in terms of the figuration of nuclear families, children and teenagers' (Sen 2011: 197). It has been argued that the 'centrality of the couple to the emergence of New Bollywood cinema is perhaps most sharply illustrated by the way horror films were reinvented at the beginning of the nineties' (Gopal 2012: 91). It has also been demonstrated that the Hindi horror genre 'reveals three major strands with varying forms of narration and style: the secular conscious, the traditional-cultural, and the Hindutva ideologic, each corresponding to the way the nation has been imagined at various times' (Mubarki 2016: 44). But while they have offered very interesting and persuasive accounts of various facets of Hindi horror films, a serious comparative study of the horror film produced in various Indian languages has yet to emerge. Indian horror films, with the many unsuspected transgressive and subversive potentials they carry, however, deserve full-length study, and this book proposes to take up this task in a concerted way.

Indian horror films

However, for the purposes of my book, I would like to limit myself to those Indian films which depict exclusively, at length, the fear of unknown, supernatural elements, occult elements, communication with the spirits of the deceased, reincarnation, figures of vampires and zombies and other similar transmutations of human beings into non-human forms like werewolves. That is rather than pursue elements of horror in general within films, I concentrate on those Indian films that make it their primary business to generate horripilation in their audiences. This would also include such films which portray, to borrow a term from Tzevetan Todorov, the 'uncanny'. While elucidating the 'fantastic' in some works of literary fiction, Todorov calls those moments fantastic when character/s and, thus, the reader are genuinely puzzled about the occurrence of some events in the narrative that belie the laws of the familiar world, bordering instead on the supernatural. He describes all such narratives which end with the acceptance of the supernatural as 'fantastic-marvellous'. He uses the term 'uncanny' to explain all such narratives which do not end with the supernatural as a resolution.

> [Instead,] events are related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which are, in one way or the another, incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected, and which thereby provoke in the character and in the reader a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar.
> (Todorov 1975: 46)

Thus, in some narratives, we see such characters in the end realise that either they had gone mad or they have just woken up from sleep. Such occurrences are also applicable to some of the film narratives which are promoted as 'thriller' or 'mystery-suspense' films by the industry. Though Todorov describes the generic formulations for literary work, yet some of his conceptualisations are also significant for some film narratives which I seek to employ for a detailed study of such films. The existing body of critical work both in the Western and the Indian film scholarship would find resonance in my book. Besides, I of course further my analysis of these primary texts with any other theoretical or creative output that is relevant or pertinent. This research balances theoretical generalisations with close readings of films and discussion of figures associated with the horror genre. I focus on the narrative, point of view, plot construction, setting and other technical and formal features such as editing, lighting, sound and costumes that play an instrumental role in shaping and defining gender within the film.

By Indian cinema, I focus in the main upon films in Hindi, Malayalam, Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada, in most of which a significant corpus worthy of closer analysis exists.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines horror as 'an intense feeling of fear, shock or disgust'. Etymologically, the word 'horror' can be traced back to the Middle English *horrour* or the Latin *horrere* or the twelfth-century French word *horreur*. In Latin, the word *horrere* means to 'bristle; shudder; dread; shrink from'. The French word *horreur* signifies 'awful; loathing'. In Sanskrit, the word *harsate* meaning 'bristles' bears a close resemblance to horror, while *bhibatsa* more generally signified the horrific; while in Hindi, the corresponding words are *darr* and *vibhishika*, in Malayalam *bhayankarathwam*, in Telugu *bhayamu* and in Bangla *atankajanita kampan*. The term 'monstrous' in the title of this book, *The Indian Horror Cinema: (En)gendering the Monstrous*, carries with it a host of associations including evil, ugliness, viciousness, wickedness, hate, the horrible, the dreadful, the brutal and the cruel, besides dislike, apprehension or even abnormality. The phrase 'engendering the monstrous', seen in this light, would signify the creation of the horrific effects of the monstrous within the horror film. However, I tap another meaning that engendering suggests by my use of parenthesis: (en)gendering can work as a mode of interrogation to examine the grammar of the sexual and gendered politics that the evocation and production of the monstrous in Indian horror films is underwritten by. The engendering, that is the production, of the monstrous in the horror film can be interrogated to better study the potent agential role that (en)gendering, that is the normalisation or routinisation of gendered identities, has to impart and impose a set of values that creates and conditions our perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards the target object/s the monstrosities of the films signify. I propose that in Indian horror films, this normalisation of gender emerges as a major force to reckon with as the plot gains impetus from the focalisation of this agency through a monster (actual or psychological). This book explores how different constitutive processes operating within a community – social, political, economic, religious, psychological and cultural – act through this agential monstrosity, so that it manifests itself finally in the construction of 'normal' femininities and masculinities. These hegemonic femininities and masculinities, in turn, resist the growth of alternative gender and sexuality discourses. In this sense, the adjective monstrous is not passive but active. It actively genders the sensibilities of the characters within the film, the production cast and crew as well as the intended audience.

The Indian horror film industries

Hindi horror

The late 1940s–1960s, often considered as the golden period of Hindi cinematic history, saw the release of some unforgettable horror films like *Mahal*, *Bees Saal Baad* (dir. Biren Nag, 1962) and *Gumnaam* (dir. Raja Nawathe, 1965). While *Bees Saal Baad* portrays the uncanny, *Gumnaam* was the first instance of slasher films in Indian cinema. The next wave of Hindi horror films surfaced in the mid-1970s with Rajkumar Kohli's *Nagin* (1976) and *Jaani Dushman* based on human-to-animal transformation themes. This decade, along with the next, records a prolific number of horror films produced in Hindi. This was the time when foreign horror films started circulating in the Indian market. Films like *Jadu Tona* (dir. Ravikant Nagaich, 1977) and *Gehrayee* (dir. Vikas Desai and Aruna Raje, 1980) were heavily inspired from *The Exorcist* and other possession films. It was also the time of the Ramsay Brothers productions which so strongly dominated Hindi horror industry that most people even today identify Indian horror films through Ramsay films. They defined the Bollywood B movie genre with films like *Sannata* (dir. Shyam Ramsay and Tulsi Ramsay, 1981), *Purana Mandir* (dir. Shyam Ramsay and Tulsi Ramsay, 1984) and *Veerana* (dir. Shyam Ramsay and Tulsi Ramsay, 1988). A typical Ramsay film would be a low-budget, mediocre star-cast vampire/monster fare drawing heavily upon Hollywood and other European horror film conventions, with the rural hinterland of India as its target audience. Due to relatively low cost of productions, these films would not only be able to recover their expenditure quickly, but also make profit at the same time. They were never a part of mainstream Hindi cinema, with their focus primarily on the B-category audience. Mohan Bhakri and Kanti Shah directed C-grade horror films also flooded the market during the 1980s and 1990s. These films dished out a mix of horror and soft-core porn films.

The 1990s witnessed efforts made by the film industry to make horror a part of mainstream Hindi cinema. Ram Gopal Varma's *Raat* (1992) and Mahesh Bhatt's *Junoon* (1992) point towards this direction. While *Raat* was a possession film, *Junoon* belonged to the category of werewolf films. Unfortunately, horror films could not make sufficient inroads in the decade that was dominated by family-centric romantic films like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun. . . !* (dir. Sooraj R. Barjatya, 1994) and *Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge* (dir. Aditya Chopra, 1995) in the early half and gangster films like *Satya* (dir. Ram Gopal Varma, 1998) in the later half. The 2000s brought joy to horror film lovers, as many films like *Raaz* (dir. Vikram Bhatt, 2002), *Bhoot* (dir. Ram Gopal Varma, 2003), *Darna Mana Hai* (dir. Prawaal Raman, 2003) and *Darna Zaroori Hai* (dir. Ram Gopal Varma, Sajid Khan, Prawaal Raman, Jiji Philip, Manish Gupta and J.D. Chakravarthy, 2006) made good profits in the mainstream Hindi film market. Of late, with films like *Go Goa Gone* (dir. Raj Nidimoru and Krishna D.K., 2013), *Ragini MMS 2* (dir. Bhushan Patel, 2014) and *1920 London* (dir. Tinu Suresh Desai, 2016), Hindi horror films are perhaps enjoying their best phase with a prolific number flooding the market each year.

Malayalam horror

The Malayalam film industry is the second largest horror film producing market in India after the Hindi film industry. Ranging from moderate to big productions, Malayalam horror films have managed to attract big names like Prem Nazir, Madhu, Kamal Hassan, Mohanlal, Mammootty, Suresh Gopi and Jayaram over the years. *Bhargavi Nilayam* is generally regarded as the first Malayalam horror film. The film starred Prem Nazir and Madhu, two all-time big stars of Malayalam cinema. It was also the debut film of A. Vincent, who was to become one of the most popular cinematographers and directors of both Malayalam and Hindi films. Literature played a major role in the evolution of Malayalam cinema in the 1950s and 1960s. *Bhargavi Nilayam* was adapted from a collage of Vaikom Muhammed Basheer's writings, primarily his short story 'Neela Velicham'. The film depicts a compassionate relationship between a talented novelist and the spirit of a beautiful lady who had been murdered. The novelist is writing the story of this lady, into whose house he has moved in as tenant. The film mirrors in a meta-cinematic fashion the close and often symbiotic relationships between Malayalam filmmakers and writers in depicting a writer at work, collaborating with an intangible agency in the form of the eponymous Bhargavi.

The late 1970s saw the rise of horror films like *Lisa* (dir. Baby, 1978), *Vayanadan Thampan* (dir. A. Vincent, 1978) and *Kalliyankattu Neeli* (dir. M. Krishnan Nair, 1979), which were based on ancient myths and folklores of Kerala. The decade of the 1970s is considered to be the decade of modernity in Malayalam cinema with the division between the 'art' (*kala*) and the 'popular' (*kachavada*) cinema, conveniently the binary of 'high' and 'low' films, becoming explicit in market terms. Horror films like *Vayanadan Thampan* and *Kalliyankattu Neeli* cut across these different categorisations as they utilise the vast richness of Malayali folklores and myths to interpret the workings of the modern mind. Taking several contemporary European and American treatments of the horror genre as precedent, these films combine horror and melodrama to explore the subterranean desires of human psyche. In the 1980s, Malayalam horror films began exploring the occult and tantric practices of Kerala. Thus, Mohanlal in *Sreekrishna Parunthu* (dir. A. Vincent, 1984) and Mammootty in *Adharvam* (dir. Dennis Joseph, 1989) lent their superstar charm to cinematic explorations of these mystic tantric rituals. The focus of these films would inevitably be the male protagonist. But this was nothing new in the history of Malayalam films as P.K. Nair rightly questions the paucity of women-oriented films in Malayalam cinema: 'Where are the women's films?' (Nair 2010: 36). It has been pointed out that

> Femininity is also marked by its isolation from its own gender, especially in the last three decades of Malayalam cinema, which has seen a gradual diminishment in the roles given to female

> protagonists, a diminishment that may be said to have begun in the 1970s. Through the last three decades in particular, Malayalam cinema has proved to be stringently conservative in its representations of femininity, belying its reputation for radicalism among regional cinemas.
>
> (Rajendran 2015: 23)

Jenny Rowena observes that these films are very much steeped in normative enough masculinities in their denial of space for the representation of femininities:

> The non-hegemonic male grouping avoided the path to real and radical change, choosing instead to create a cinema to play out their own masculinities – to become kings without crowns. Thus was born a cinema saturated with aggressive masculine values, inspiring non-hegemonic male locations to obsessively seek the same male identities that culture denied them.
>
> (2010: 148)

In contrast, horror films of the 1990s like *Manichitrathazhu* (dir. Fazil, 1993) and *Ennu Swantham Janakikutty* (dir. T. Hariharan, 1998) provide ample scope for wider representations of feminine subjectivities. These films depict a sensitive portrayal of feminine protagonists – a trend that continues even in the 2000s with the exploration of female adolescence in films like *Kana Kanmani* (dir. Akku Akbar, 2009) and *Winter* (dir. Deepu Karunakaran, 2009). 'Horror narratives can expose the patriarchal male hegemonic discourse of demonising female sexuality' (Nair 2013). Recent horror film made in Malayalam has tended to experiment with its form – the portmanteau film in *Kerala Cafe* (dir. Lal Jose, 2009), comedy in *In Ghost House Inn* (dir. Lal, 2010) or the 3D digital technology in *Dracula 3D* (dir. Vinayan, 2012) – hitherto unseen in the history of Malayalam horror cinema.

Bangla horror

Horror films have never been a very popular genre with the Bengali film industry. But what makes the exploration of these films such a rewarding experience is the fact that some of the best brains behind the rise of the modern Bengali literature and films like Premendra Mitra, Satyajit Ray and Tapan Sinha were involved in the making of these films. Mitra wrote and directed *Hanabari* (1952), Ray directed *Teen Kanya* (1961; a collection of three short films, one of which, *Monihara*, has elements of horror) and