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## A Postcolonial Reading Of The Movie '*Kumbalangi Nights*'

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**Abstract:** Analyzing the legacies of postcolonialism is still very important in the present modern era because of the continuing influence of cultural structures in the postcolonial societies. In the present scenario, Kumbalangi is a village attracting multitude due to the beautiful and magnificent phenomenon of bioluminescence. A movie set in the same village also becomes popular, assimilating itself into culture.

'Postcolonial literature might be broadly defined as what which critically or subversively scrutinizes the colonial relationship, and offers a reshaping or rewriting of the dominant meanings pertaining to race, authority, space and identity prevalent under colonial and decolonizing conditions' (Harvey, 795).

The existing research and theories related to postcolonialism include the study of power dynamics, cultural hybridity, resistance and the construction of identity in post-colonial contexts. The question is, is the branch of cultural studies successfully representing the different phases the postcolonial societies go through, their power struggles, their resistance and their construction of identities. I chose this particular method of studying the phases, power hierarchy, resistance as well as their identity because it provides context for my research, exemplifies the connection between my research question and my chosen approach, and

foregrounds the potential benefits and constrains of my method.

The movie *Kumbalangi Nights* disputes with the colonial discourses by giving a critical discussion about the ideology of colonization and is successful in representing the issues of colonization by its exploration of indigenous, colonized peoples.

**Keywords:** Colonialism, postcolonialism, identity, hybridity, power, discourse, decolonization, mimicry, contrapuntal, eurocentrism, ambivalence, imperialism, orientalism

### INTRODUCTION

Canary Islands, Caribbean islands and the Pacific islands are some examples of islands vanquished for colonization. Wherever colonialism was palpable in this world, it has been met with a fierce storm of resistance. Throughout civilization, indigenous people have flown high and successfully overthrown colonial powers. They established that while colonizers may steal land, they can never rip off the dignity of a people anxious to be free. The annihilation of natives, land, culture, languages, values, ways of being and thinking has been persisting for centuries.



Fig. 1: Scene from a historical map of Cochin, showing its colonized past.

The British left the subcontinent in 1947, but the remnants of colonisation still persist in different fields. The geological exhibition of the colonial power is hidden in the modern social world. Identifying the colonial legacy in the digital age can help us question it. India's former president Pranab Mukherjee points out "If the rise of European colonisation began in 18<sup>th</sup> century India, then the rallying cry of 'Jai Hind!' also signalled its end in 1947" (Times of India, August 14, 2012).

All postcolonial literatures, it might be said, seem to make this transition. They begin with an unquestioning acceptance of the authority of European models (especially in the novel) and with the ambition of writing works that will be masterpieces entirely in this tradition. This can be called the "Adapt" phase of colonial literature, since the writer's ambition is to adopt the form as it stands, the assumption being that it has universal validity. The second stage can be called the 'Adapt' phase, since it aims to adapt the European form to African subject matter, thus assuming partial rights of intervention in the genre. In the final phase there is, so to speak, a declaration of cultural independence whereby African writers remakes the form to their own specification, without reference to European norms. This might be called the 'Adept' phase, since its characteristic is the assumption that the colonial writer is an independent 'adept' in the form, not a humble apprentice, as in the first phase, or a mere licensee, as in the second. This stress on 'cross-cultural' interactions is a fourth characteristic of post colonialist criticism (Barry, 195).

Contrapuntal reading, as explained by literary scholar George M. Wilson, is "meant to interweave, mutually qualify, and above all, superimpose the legitimate claims of internal or intrinsic readings of a work, on the one hand, and the claims of various formal of external critique, on the other" (Wilson 265).

Orientalists are thereafter shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome Hattery," intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race (Said, 38-39).

*Kumbalangi Nights* is an Indian Malayalam-language movie released in the year 2019 by director Madhu C. Narayanan. The directorial debut was written by Shyam Pushkaran. The cinematography and editing were handled by Shayju Khalid and Saiju Sreedharan. Set in the eponymous fishing village of Kumbalangi, in Kochi, Kerala. The film centres on the weary relationship between four brothers living together in a dysfunctional home, and how they ultimately stand for each other as a family.

*Kumbalangi Nights* has been listed by several publications as one of the best Malayalam films of the decade. The research is valuable because the film achieved commercial success at the box office, grossing thirty-nine crores worldwide and gained cult film status. It was premiered on 2019 at the Habitat International Film Festival in Delhi and also at the International Film Festival of Kerala where it won the NETPAC Award for Best Malayalam Film and four Kerala State Film Awards. Fahad Fazil's character 'Shammi' developed a cult following with many of his dialogues becoming popular.

Is *Kumbalangi Nights* an ordinary commercial piece of cinema or does it have layers of meanings to it? If yes, is the director successfully presenting his politics through his art of cinema? Edward Said's contrapuntal reading comprehends the interlaced stories and perspectives. As Said says about the concept of contrapuntal reading, "we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others" (Said, 32).

Kumbalangi, the first eco-friendly tourist village in India is situated on the western part of the city. It is about 30 minutes' drive from fort Kochi.

Kumbalangi is a fine example of utilisation of natural resources for tourism, without damaging the environment” (Keralatourism.org, 2025).

Kumbanalgi is also the first tourist village in India, acknowledged for being the first to have a website. A hunt for the colonial elements of *Kumbalangi Nights* through a contrapuntal lens involves understanding the intertwined perspectives, considering both the dominant narrative and the marginalized voices. The structure of the movie’s narrative is connected to the ideas, concepts and experiences that support it, including those that are often brushed aside. A postcolonial reading of *Kumbalangi Nights* can be seen as a specific area of inquiry within the broader field of cultural studies.

By applying Peter Barry’s Postcolonial theory, we get a clear solution to the research question mentioned above. The research targets to be read by researchers, film reviewers, content writers, faculty, students, and practitioners working in various fields, particularly in English Language and Literature studies.

## Chapter 1 – The Adopt Phase Reminiscent in the Colonial Landscape of Kumbalangi

Kumbalangi is an island village situated in the outskirts of Kochi city in the state of Kerala. The picturesque village is renowned for its eco-tourism activities and natural beauty. In the movie, Kumbalangi brothers live in an unpainted house that is partially broken, dilapidated and is surrounded by water from all sides. The islet and house remain detached from the rest of the village. Saji is the elder among them, who has lost both his parents. Bonnie, Bobby and Frankie are the brothers born from step-mother Leelamma, the only parent to remain alive in a divine center afar.

The island provides a home to people hailing from various ethno-racial and linguistic groups who remain divergent from the people of Kumbalangi village. Saji’s friend Murugan who is a Tamil descent, runs his own ironing business in the island. He came many years ago and became a settler. People like Nyla, Bonnie’s American girlfriend reach the island as a tourist. The island shelters everyone equally just like a prototype of a civilization. The island provides a home to abandoned kitten and dogs.



Fig. 2: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing the house of the brothers, implying its archipelago, islandic themes.

The demolished aquarium where Saji deposits the lotteries shows the economically impoverished conditions, instability and lethargy that dawns upon a people post colonization.



Fig. 3: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing the broken fishtank and broken hopes of the brothers.

Saji compares his dad to a Murrel fish. He believes that the brothers are the cause of their father’s demise. If we look closer, we can see that the brothers have placed the portrait of their father in-between the picture of a saint and the picture of Jesus Christ. It is because they see their father as a martyr who has died for them. Saji is a proud son, who says “Dad was a good guy who had many dreams...When Bonnie’s father deserted his mom, my dad took them home. Bobby and the little one were born later. He was a good worker” (Narayanan, 1:19:33). This is a deliberate attempt by the filmmaker to give us an evocation of the people who have become martyrs for gaining freedom and independence.



Fig. 4: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing Saji remembering his father, indicating his emotional burdens.



Shammi's character becomes an embodiment of colonizer in both his culture and practice. The encounter between the brothers and Shammi, the hair salon owner gives us a glimpse of the socio-economic drift between the colonizer and the colonized. It is a depiction of the universal reality of power struggle which could still exist between the former colonizers and the colonized. When Shammi asks "How can we send a girl to a lodge-like house?" (Narayanan, 59:12). he is again imposing his prejudices because he always sees the brothers as inferior to him and his community.

When Saji and Bobby approach Shammi for marriage proposal, Shammi insults them: "Mr. Saji, you know, legally a girl can marry any scoundrel she wants (Narayanan, 59:32). When Shammi asks "Bro, the Ramayan was written by a forest-dweller, right?" (Narayanan, 59:54). He is comparing the brothers to forest dwellers, expressing his deep hatred and detestation towards them. By indirectly calling him a scoundrel, he means that the brothers are devoid of any morals, values or virtues. He becomes a colonizer here by projecting his ideas about the colonized as savages, uncouth and uncivilized. The power of the ruling class to persuade other classes and their interests can be seen through the economic and political control exerted by characters like Shammi. By hurting them, he is again reconstructing the narrative that they are inferior and not good enough. Shammi accuses them of being unworthy just like the colonizer accuses the colonizer as the uncivilized.

Franky's colonial mimicry is evident in his desire to merge with the colonizer's world while Bobby is dominated by a thought that Western culture is better and superior. Though Saji and Bonnie are not related, they share a very strong bond. Though the third among the brothers Bonnie cannot speak, his body and performing actions define him. His expression of resistance finds voice in his music, dance and love. He escapes from reality by engrossing himself in video-games. He always relies on his gang of friends for communication. In a film full of internal chaos, his silence speaks the loudest.

Bobby is often dominated by the idea that the colonizer is great. He makes his entry into the colonial world of privilege using the medium of language. He is symbolic of a mimic man who assimilates into the world of the colonizer outside. He is always ashamed to go for fishing, a manual labor which the colonizer sees as a recreational sport or as the exotic.

Frankie is the youngest of the brothers who hide resistance behind his colonial mimicry. He looks at his home and is weigh down by shame (Narayanan, 4:54). In the beginning, Saji criticizes Frankie for learning

the colonizers manners and language. He looks at a photo of mother Mary for comfort, as if she is his own mother (Narayanan, 5:19).



Fig. 5: Scene from "Kumbalangi Nights" showing mother Mary, illustrating the film's imperialist themes.

Frankie says "This is the worst house in the entire village" (1:02:30). This is because he is most rooted in reality, among all the brothers. Saji remain disillusioned to this reality, kicking Frankie's football to the lake.

Frankie says "This house lost its life when our mom walked out" (1:02:42).

Saji replies "you are the reason why she left" (1:02:47).

Frankie says "it's because of you only, everyone does now (1:02:54). After this conversation, Saji slaps Frankie. Bonnie enters seeing this and attacks Saji with a paddle. Frankie believes that his biological mother has left them because of Saji, his half-brother. They are naive enough to believe that the conflicts root from the inside of their family.

Frankie says: "This house is nothing but hell" (Narayanan, 12:29). His mimicry is manifested in his love for the world outside his village. Frankie tries to camouflage among his peers as an aftermath of his mimicry. Firstly, he adopts the cultural model of the empire, speaking their language and playing their game, football, a game that originated in England. Frankie goes through a state of ambivalence because he embraces aspects of the colonizer's culture while simultaneously fighting to maintain his own identity.

Bobby compares his parents to Murrel fish when he says "They die because of their little ones" (1:18:50). This is metaphoric of the guilt, shame and regret carried by the young generation of every previously colonized land. For example, a Sri Lankan political scientist has once mentioned about colonialism: "Many Singhalese feel extremely ashamed about it. That is one reason why they don't want to recall it – a collective shame" (Uyangoda). This collective shame can be traced among the brother's acts and deeds. Frankie also suffers from shame and is not ready to

invite his friends to his house. Shame is the reason he lies to his friends; “Nazim, everybody at home is down with chickenpox, that’s the problem” (3:59).

Bobby attempts to mimic the colonizer’s society. He would not go for work and tries to prove that he looks like a colonizer (the outside world) than a colonized (the brothers). But all that he possesses is his swag and hippie style. He heavily relies on music, taking the speaker with him wherever he goes, even in bars. Bobby says “Out of sheer luck you got admission somewhere, now you feel ill of us, fishermen” (Narayanan, 12:39). Frankie replies with “absolutely” (Narayanan, 12:44). Frankie agrees with the colonizer that this is the worst house in the entire village. This is because they have adopted the idea that they are subservient to the world outside, a narrative constructed by the colonizer.

According to Indian scholar and literary critic Homi K. Bhabha, “colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable ‘Other’, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 126). This colonial mimicry comes into play in the life of Frankie.

Bobby, the carefree lad feels ambivalence towards his lover Babymol. His complex and contradictory feelings towards her is often experienced as a mixed sense of attraction and repulsion. He wants to breakup with her but also desires her. His emotions towards her evolves from the hybrid nature of colonial relationships. The colonized (Bobby) admires aspects of the colonizer’s (Babymol) culture, but he also feels a sense of resentment and a need to dominate her. He says, “Our families don’t match, neither do we. Find someone who suits you” (Narayanan, 1:42:54). He thinks he is not up to the mark because Babymol hails from a better part of the village, he is always disturbed by the fact that she is superior to him in terms of family, finance and emotional stability.

Indian scholar and literary critic Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybrid identity comes into play in Bobby’s life. For example, Saleem Seenai from Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* grapples with a mixed Pakistani, Indian and British heritage resulting in a complex blending of cultures. Similarly, Bobby struggles with the conflicting elements of multiple cultures and social identities leading to feelings of alienation and estrangement. This crisis arises from Bobby’s exposure to different social contexts and intergenerational traumas.

If we observe the brother’s life carefully, we can see that their struggle actually initiates from the narrative that they are abandoned by their parents and that they are not good enough. They adopted this narrative into the deepest cave of their subconscious. The brothers go

through extreme struggle during the colonial adopt phase of their life. Saji deals with depression, Bonny deals with procrastination and pride, Bonnie goes totally invisible and mute because he always sees Bobby and Saji fight. Frankie the youngest struggles from the lack of parental figures to love, nurture and support him. The backdrop of the film tells us that the village sees the brothers as the ‘other’.

## Chapter 2 – Eroding of Colonialist Ideology through a Search for Identity in the Adapt Phase

Eurocentric attitude has often portrayed colonized lands as playgrounds of superstitious or evil. Saji’s perseverance to consult a doctor, overthrows the colonial bias that he is a man of superstition. His journey towards self-actualization receives a breakthrough when he talks to his therapist, “Yes, it hurts, when somebody calls us fatherless, it really hurts me. Not only for me but for all of us” (1:21:28). Here, he is using his language and voice for the first time to articulate his pain. This is a milestone in his journey towards self-realization. Following this, he weeps like a toddler. To become emotionally vulnerable is a great act of courage in our cultural context.

Saji and Sunny are step-brothers, which creates more tension and conflict. Amidst the rivalries between the elder brothers, the young brothers Frankie and Bonnie still manages to build rapport and inseparability. They are often brought together by their need for money and other resources, just like how different tribes in a colony are strengthened by unity. The rapport between the brothers Frankie and Bony is also expressed through their common interests in fishing and swimming.

Bobby the dysregulated and demotivated young man is often found in the beach with only a mellow music to accompany him. Bobby tries to cope with trauma and disillusionment with the help of music. He listens to soft mellow music tracks when he feels lethargic but listens to metallic, rock genre of music during his working environment. We can see him listen to specifically English music and breathe heavily while the music track continues. A music that hails from the language of the colonizer is a form of resistance because he is using the very same language of the colonizer to (resist) soothe himself. In the beginning of the movie, he listens to soft mellow music but his taste in music transitions to rock, punk style.

When Bobby tries to approach Saji for asking Babymol’s hand in marriage, Bobby says, “Near Anjilathara there is an islet towards the south” (Narayanan, 58:12). Shammi’s brother describes it an “an islet near Thekkummuri where dogs and cats are

abandoned” (58:16). Saji’s brother tries to humiliate them by asking “Isn’t it an ally way besides the shit-land?” (58:25). Bobby immediately resists by saying, “we only own the path way, shit-land is public” (58:31). This is how Bobby uses his native language as a tool to fight against the colonizer’s predisposed attacks.

Bobby confronts Frankie and says “There is nothing left here to be ruined. For you, this is the worst house in the village, isn’t it Frankie? Yes, this is a dumping yard.” (2:01:18). Here, ‘ruin’ metaphorically refers to the severe economic impoverishment that was endured by every nation after the brutalities of colonialism. All that is left are ruins. The following lines by Indian author Shashi Tharoor illustrates the depth of colonization in the Indian soil.

The little court disappears – trade languishes – the capital decays – the people are impoverished – the Englishman flourishes, and acts like a sponge, drawing up riches from the banks of the Ganges, and squeezing them down upon the banks of the Thames (Tharoor, 2017).

While the colonizer has used Christianity as a tool for their imperialism, the colonized here is using it as a symbol of hope. Saji gazes at the portrait of Jesus pasted on the iron box cart of his late friend. He is often accompanied by the image or statue of baby Jesus and mother Mary.

Colonizers had always believed in their legal and religious obligation to control indigenous people in order to portray them as the ‘uncivilized’, ‘barbaric’ or ‘savage’ population. Imperialism, through the means of Christianity is always playing a huge role in their lives. The following excerpts show an example of Christianity used as a tool of imperialism.

Historically, church leaders both encouraged and participated in the takeover and exploitation of foreign lands and labour, most often in the name of Christian conversion. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Catholic popes laid out a religious justification for colonization, issuing a series of papal bulls now known as the Doctrine of Discovery that asserted colonization was necessary to save souls and seize lands for the growth of the Church. Often, Christian missionaries were among the first to make inroads into new lands. Inspired by the belief that they must convert as many Indigenous people to Christianity as possible, they imported both religious and cultural customs and a paternalistic attitude toward the colonies’ Native inhabitants (Blakemore).

Then, the colonizer used Christianity as an apparatus to outspread imperialism. But now, the brothers use the same apparatus to heal their trauma by providing themselves a sense of community, purpose and meaning along with spiritual comfort. Especially in the case of Saji, who is entirely dependent on mother Mary and sees her as his own mother. This is a strong affirmation of his journey towards decolonization.

Babymol, Bobby’s lover is involved in homestay business which significantly promotes tourism. Tourism can be a tool against colonialism because she uses it as a tool for her financial growth, empowering her community and fostering cultural exchange among her customers. Her refusal to obey the tradition restraints imposed by her mother, sister and brother-in-law is a milestone to her resistance against patriarchy and colonialism in general.

However, coercion and forced assimilation often accompanied those gains, and scholars still debate colonialism’s many legacies. Colonialism’s impacts include environmental degradation, the spread of disease, economic instability, ethnic rivalries, and human rights violations—issues that can long outlast one group’s colonial rule (National Geographic, 2025).

Babymol is also in search of an equal partner. When Bobby asks her to break up with him, she resists while also being aware of the vulnerable eco-life that surrounded them. She says “Let’s go. Don’t leave the plastic bottle behind” (1:43:34). She makes these men awareness about the environmental degradation. She makes Babby get rid of his insecurities regarding the fishermen job as low-profile.

For Frankie, mother is the synonym of life itself although every memory associated with her brings him pain, fear and loneliness. He thinks the absence of a mother is responsible for their present low socio-economic status in the neighbourhood. Frankie’s involvement with football shows the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. In the initial phase of the movie, Frankie plays football only at his school. But as the movie progresses, he and his friends make an attempt to play in their native village. But the colonizer strongly tries to stop this.





Fig. 6: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing Shammi’s hatred to football, he destroys it and stamps chewing gum on it.

The movie itself begins with a scene where Frankie is playing football at his school. Destroying Frankie and his friend’s football is a deliberate act made by Shammi (the colonizer) to stop their game. The colonizer feels threatened, intimidated, and unsettled by the football game because football is a game of resistance. For example, historian Hilary Beckles writes,

“West Indies cricket, was born, raised, and socialized within the fiery cauldron of colonial oppression and social protest. In its mature form it is essentially an ideological and politicized species and knows no world better than that of liberation struggle.’ To players and supporters in the mid-seventies, West Indian cricket symbolized self-determination” (Jacobin, 2021).

Just like how West Indies cricketers use their game to resist colonization, Frankie is using football game for resisting them and thereby protecting his identity.

The brothers attempt to bring back their mother is symbolic of them trying hard to revive their past when the brothers lived in better conditions. The brother’s visit to see their mother can be seen as their way of adapting to the barriers created by colonization. They believe that the only way they can regain their identity and dignity is by bringing back their mother to the house. This was a way of imitating the ways of a colonizer, an image of a family where a mother becomes a necessary factor.



Fig. 7: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing Murugan’s wife arriving at the house, shifting the masculine energy of the place.

We can say that the house is a microcosm of any community where they speak in different language but are trying to find meaning through their search for identity. Earlier, they used to adopt how the colonizer saw them but now they slowly start to acknowledge their past. The struggle to free oneself from the shackles of colonial darkness is used as a metaphor throughout the movie. They no longer want to be seen the way the colonizer sees them, that is, inferior, lesser and subservient.

### Chapter 3 – the Indestructible Adept phase of Colonial Resistance

Towards the end of the movie, the brothers realize that bringing back their mother is not the right way to resuscitate their past. After this visit, a realization dawns upon them that they must stand in solidarity with each other. When the mother refuses to come, the brothers accept the situation. Instead of creating more conflict, they reverse the situation by bringing their respective women to their house. When Bobby complains about the mother, Saji becomes the mature elder brother and comforts him “Don’t curse her. She’d suffered a lot for you” (1:37:33).

Saji’s stigma of being a bastard son haunts and humiliates him wherever he goes. Even when depressed, Saji never fails to ask for help. He never fails and is evolving as an embodiment of hope towards the end of the movie. Saji is a man of chaotic identity on his mission to heal his colonial trauma. His first step to heal from colonization is to acknowledge the traumatic history of his family and taking time to grieve. This is followed by his genuine apology for his wrongdoings and focusing on an improved life. His ignorant nature, lethargy and depression is replaced by his decision to get therapy and to become a healthy, responsible, accountable man.

The death of his friend and the policeman who beats him gives him an epiphany about life. He resembles the savage who reigns in darkness, brought to civilization. His journey towards his thriving mental health is rooted in his belief in modern science. By his conscious effort to consult a therapist, he tries to shed off the darkness and degradation that surrounds him. The colonized natives were deprived of science and civilization in the past, but his resolution to search for his identity makes him a beacon of civilization. He asserts that he is not a savage, like the colonizer says.

Saji's deepest strength comes from his act of preventing himself from committing suicide again. As a person suffering from depression and suicidal tendencies, this was his paramount enactment of finding beauty and meaning in his own life. He not only not takes his own life, but also provides shelter to Murugan's baby, thereby transforming into a non-biological guardian figure. He is a supreme example of humanity, empathy and self-sacrifice.

In a culture where men are taught to suppress emotions and to appear masculine at all costs, *Kumbalangi Nights* gave us a rare gem of a cinema. Saji is allowing himself to be soft, vulnerable and transparent is his resistance. In a culture where mental health conversations are seen as shameful, Saji carry on an enormous step of courage.

Bonny initially faces identity crisis just like his brothers, he is seen transforming into a singer and dancer who works for local and foreign audiences. Bonnie explores his resistance by loving a woman of Afro-American descent, which can be seen as a form of subversion, challenging the traditional norms and expectations. He also challenges the strict rules and norms of the village by living with her before marriage. By doing so, he poses a challenge to the existing social order, particularly where race is a rigid and influential part of social structure. Also, he does not embrace masculine ideals of life, exposing a soft, vulnerable sides and challenging traditional manhood ideals.

Bonnie's inability to speak is symbolic of the voiceless people hailing from previously colonized nations. The only way he can express his pain, anger, frustration is by his actions, music and dance. He is protective of Frankie when Saji attacks Frankie out of his mental anguish and suffering. But he also is protective of his woman Nyla when Shammi verbally abuses her. His ability to love and protect in the midst of chaos makes him a strong personality who pull of resistance.

Bobby saw fishing as a menial job but later embraces it as a part of his identity, existence, essence and nature. Earlier, he was shameful of mentioning the name of the local fish he ate but now he has transformed into a strong man who would provide for his woman. He possesses his own unique style of catching fish, using his toe alone. He is now a man of pride, no longer roaming the islets with his mellow music. Though he finds it very difficult to change, he finds will to go through the painful process to bring change and meaning in his life.

The brothers unite to meet their mother and this act is a culmination and proof of their solidarity. They now

realize that they must rely on each other for strength, survival and support.

Even the youngest brother Frankie suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. The abandonment faced from his mother is similar to that of a nation who must rely on itself for survival. His flashbacks about his mother, anxiety and overthinking about the traumatic past are symptoms of his mental health issues. In the movie's beginning, Frankie gets a flashback of him drowning in the water while his mother was nearby. He also suffers from overthinking, because he is always found on a hammock, staring at the stars in the sky.

## CONCLUSION

The islandic home in Kumbalangi harbors a historical tale of trauma. Diseases related to mental health are omnipresent in their island. Ghosts of their traumatic past still haunt their unfurnished rooms. The house and the island are totally isolated. The increased level of psychological distress among the natives of Kumbalangi stresses upon the intergenerational trauma inflicted by more than four-hundred years of colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch and British in India and around the world in general.

The micro island where the brother's house is situated in the village of Kumbalangi symbolically represents the indigenous, colonized people inhabited in every continent all over the world. The movie is a testament that India's history of colonization continues to impact on the overall health of our people. The intergenerational trauma inflicted upon the island's former generations continue to impact the brother's current health.

The historical trauma and socio-economic disparity the brothers face is due to the continuous, profound and lasting negative impact of colonization. Colonization is the cause behind their exacerbated mental health issues.

"Individuals who lived through the atrocities of colonialism, such as wars of independence and genocides, often suffer from PTSD. Symptoms can include flashbacks, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the traumatic events" (Past, 2024).





Fig. 8: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” illustrating Bobby’s natural endowment for fishing.

Postcolonial resistance is omnipresent in *Kumbalangi Nights*. The brothers make their way through the adopt, adapt and adept phases to become successful in their life. The brothers saw the world outside as the norm.

It is believed that the brothers are unable to function properly because of the absence of their biological mother Leelamma. Saji’s relationship with his stepmother is rather complicated. The brothers redefine their insecure relationship with their mother by each of them inviting different women into their lives. Saji brings home his friend’s wife Sathi, his brotherly relationship with her is platonic and spiritual.



Fig. 8: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” illustrating Saji replacing his mother with Sati, she resembling mother Mary.

In the case of Bobby, as soon as they start taking their relationship seriously, Bobby transforms into a proud fisherman. In the midst of multiple challenges, Bonnie comes to support his brother when Bobby was in trouble. The rusted sewing machine, the partially broken fish tank, the color faded trophy collection, the adult magazines, broken mosquito nets, or even the emaciated flora represents the past glory and present degradation and dilapidated economic condition of past colonies. The moss imbued, partially broken house becomes a metaphor for the condition of men living in previously colonized nations.

Mother Leelamma remains an unseen character throughout the movie. The reason why mother she remains aloof from her family is a mystery. Bobby always defines her as wretched. She likes to be the deviant female. It is after this encounter with mother

the brother’s life changes. Saji enters a native company for processing fish. He gives his word to his lover Babymol meanwhile realizing his potential as a fisherman by catching a Pearl spot using his toe.

The brothers start to behave as a normal healthy family, talking and sharing things with each other. The yellow cactus flowers start to bloom as the destructive energies surrounding the house slowly ceases. Just like the cactus flower blooming in every desert, the brothers prove that growth can be slow, non-linear but it is always consistent and beautiful.

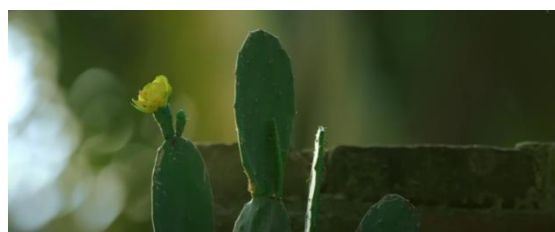


Fig. 9: Scene from “Kumbalangi Nights” showing a bloomed cactus, illustrating the replaced balance, peace and tranquil atmosphere.

*Kumbalangi Nights* disputes with the colonial discourses by giving a critical discussion about the ideology of colonization and represents the issue of colonization by its exploration of indigenous, colonized peoples. Although the brothers bear wounds of abandonment, they progress from passivity to emancipation. The slow pace where the story is set adds to the slow transformation of the brothers from darkness towards light. The visual style of the movie is poetic.

The identity of the brothers are double and heterogenous. Just like Peter Barry’s three stages of postcolonial theory, the brothers go through the three stages in their journey of resistance against colonialism. Firstly, they adopt the European standards, which gradually resulting in them adopting these standards to meet their own needs and in the final adept phase, they become autonomous and independent from the clutches of colonial influence.

*Kumbalangi Nights* must be widely encouraged to be studied not only from a cinematic perspective but also deserves an in-depth close reading. A careful and detailed analysis of *Kumbalangi Nights* visual style, audio, pacing, and narrative choices uncovers the deeper meanings of the film. The visual style used in *Kumbalangi Nights* is aesthetically delightful and poetic in nature. The character-driven narrative of the movie successfully captures the emotional

vulnerability of the brothers. The audio style in the movie features a blend of pop, jazz, electronic dance, trance, gospel and melancholy genres. The movie employs a 'spirited' pacing style.

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