Myth and Metaphor in Contemporary Indian Fantasy and Superhero Cinema:

A Semiotic Analysis of *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of Kerala

in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of the Degree of

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in

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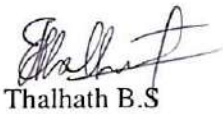
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Myth and Metaphor in Contemporary Indian Fantasy and Superhero Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis of *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*** submitted to the University of Kerala in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature is the original record of studies and research carried out by me during 2024-2026 under the guidance of **Gayatry S**, Assistant Professor of English, T.K.M College of Arts and Science, Kollam and it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, title or recognition.



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Preface

Cinema has always functioned as more than a medium of entertainment; it is a cultural text through which societies express their memories, beliefs, identities, and collective imagination. In contemporary Indian cinema, the revival and reinterpretation of mythology and folklore have created new possibilities for understanding the relationship between tradition and modern storytelling. Lokah: Chapter 1 – Chandra represents one such attempt to transform regional mythic elements into a modern cinematic narrative, where symbols, characters, and visual expressions carry deeper cultural meanings.

This project, titled "Myth and Metaphor in Contemporary Indian Fantasy and Superhero Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis of Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra," explores the film as a system of signs and meanings. It examines how mythological references, folklore-based characters, visual motifs, and symbolic structures contribute to the construction of a unique cultural universe. By applying the perspectives of semiotic and cultural theories, the project attempts to understand how elements within the narrative communicate ideas related to identity, memory, transformation, and the continuity of tradition.

The study focuses on how Lokah engages with Kerala's cultural imagination by reinterpreting familiar mythic symbols within the framework of contemporary fantasy cinema. Figures associated with folklore and mythology are analysed not merely as fictional characters but as representations of deeper cultural values and social meanings. The project also considers how cinematic elements such as colour, space, sound, and imagery function as symbolic languages that shape the audience's understanding of the narrative.

Through this exploration, the project aims to highlight the significance of regional mythology in shaping new forms of storytelling and to demonstrate how cinema can act as a bridge between ancestral knowledge and modern creative expression. The semiotic reading of Lokah reveals how cultural symbols continue to evolve, adapting to new contexts while preserving connections with collective memory and heritage.

Chapter One

Introduction

The rise of myth and metaphor in India's recent film renaissance suggests an evolving aesthetic but also, a more complicated cultural negotiation between tradition and modernity. Over the past two decades, many Indian filmmakers have used the idioms of mythic storytelling, constructed through the fantasy and superhero genres, to voice anxieties about identity, technology, ecology, and spirituality. This hybrid cinematic space, the embrace of mythic storytelling in response to modernity, is particularly evident in films such as *Krrish* (2006–2022), *Ra.One* (2011), *Brahmāstra* (2022), *Minnal Murali* (2021), and *Tumbbad* (2018). In these films, we see mythological archetypes and symbolic metaphors replace ideas related to the self, the nation, and the cosmic order in an age defined by globalization, digital media, and ecological crisis.

Unlike the superhero in the West, the Indian superhero is not solely an offspring of science or technology, but instead is a bearer of divine or cosmic energy, a modern avatar of mythic power. In this way, the fantasy and superhero genre in India can function as a modern mythopoesis, retelling traditional narratives in a postcolonial cinematic language.

Joseph Campbell's concept of monomyth or the hero's journey fits naturally with the Indian narrative framework seen in the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, and *Puranas*. Yet, in the Indian context, myth is seen not just as a narrative structure, but as a living cultural semiotic. The hero, we noticed, is often presented as representative of the parameters of dharma, with the hero's

journey indicating the reinstatement of cosmic (rita) equilibrium. This spiritual dimension provides Indian mythic cinema a stark contrast to the secular rationalism of Hollywood superhero narratives.

The *Krrish* series (2006–2022) illustrates this combination. Krishna Mehra, endowed with superhuman strength because of his father's mutation of genes, symbolizes both Krishna and the Promethean myth. His name, "Krrish," points to Krishna, and his duties as a protector of humanity from the scientific hubris of genetic engineering symbolize the tension between vidya (knowledge) and avidya (ignorance). The film's myth frame refashions genetic engineering into a contemporary form of divine gift and curse—a metaphor for the conflicted legacy of modern science in postcolonial India.

In *Ra.One* (2011), we observe a similar reworking of the Ramayana on a digital level. The villainous artificial intelligence "Ra.One" (for Ravan) escapes into the real world and is then vanquished by "G.One," a character in a video game that fashions itself as Ram. The film's digital battle reenacts the forced fight between good and evil, but oddly uses the form of virtual worlds, where the code and computation mediate mythic morality. This reenactment signals the movement of ancient myths into the electronic imagination of the 21st century.

Indian fantasy cinema is not confined to Bollywood's spectacle; regional film industries, particularly Malayalam, Tamil, and Kannada cinemas, have produced rich mythic reconstructions of local folklore.

Minnal Murali (2021), a Malayalam superhero film, foregrounds a subaltern reimagining of mythic power. Jaison, a tailor from a small town,

receives lightning powers after a supernatural lightning bolt strikes him; a mythic variant of Indra's vajra (thunderbolt). However, the film localizes divine energy within a social realist framework: Jaison's heroic 'becoming' does not occur through divine sanction, but rather through ethical choice and compassion. A secondary antagonist, Shibu, serves as the dark other, presenting Jaison's potentiality, while embodying the mythic polarity of deva and asura within an ordinary village landscape. Thus, the lightning becomes a metaphor for power and transformation; destructive and redemptive, within Kerala's folk cosmology.

Ponniyin Selvan (2022–23), a Tamil film, uses mythic allegory to reinterpret Chola history. The film establishes the Chola dynasty as divine, while figures like Aditya Karikalan and Arulmozhi Varman project solar and oceanic archetypes - poignant of Surya and Varuna. The film's visual grammar; symbolism of fire, water, and celestial beings, creates a mythic festival of kingship and destiny out of realism.

Rangi Taranga (2015), a Kannada film, crafts a narrative through folk myth and ghost tales to explore memory, regret, and identity. The haunted village serves as a metaphor for the regional collective unconscious; forgotten myths emerge as psychological hauntings. The supernatural is not an outside fantasy here but an allegorical syntax of past histories and ongoing traumas.

In contemporary Indian fantasy films, there has been growing interest in ecological retelling of myth. *Tumbbad* (2018), *Eega* (2012), and *Kantara* (2022) visualize a sacred relationship between human beings and nature.

In Kantara, the myth of Bhoota Kola (a ceremonial dance yielding to local spirits) becomes a narrative of ecological justice and indigenous resistance. The forest god's anger at the desecration of a sacred site; his ultimatum for environmental justice, reimagines ecological equilibrium as the moral order. The protagonist's eventual conversion into the incarnation of the god brings about reconciliation between human insatiability, and universal law. Similarly, Eega converts reincarnation as an ecological metaphor: the protagonist is reincarnated as a fly who seizes his chance at revenge after he is murdered, suggesting that life follows the world's massively small somatic life. An insect's narrative point of view literalizes the *sarvam khalvidam* brahma principle (everything is Brahman), uniting mythic spirituality with ecological imagination.

Myth and metaphor in contemporary Indian fantasy and superhero cinema illustrate the persistent presence of India's mythic imagination in the digital age. These films are not simply re-telling ancient myth; they are translating these narratives into metaphors whose messages address technological anxiety, ecological crisis, national identity, and moral crisis. The terms of *Krrish's* genetic divinity, *Minnal Murali's* lightning justice, *Tumbbad's* subterranean greed, and *Kantara's* sacred ecology mean that myth serves as a semiotic reservoir through which Indian cinema engages with the contradictions of modernity.

The Indian superhero is not just a savior figure, but also a seeker figure - a cinematic extension of the mythic journey towards self-realization. Ultimately, the metaphoric language of fire, light, thunder, and earth connects the divine and human, the material and the metaphysical. Contemporary Indian

fantasy cinema, then, performs a cultural alchemy; in this process of reimagining ancient myth, culture is redesigned to work as modern metaphor, confirming that in India's cinematic imagination, mythic and modern representation are not opposites, but mirror images of the same cosmic story.

Contemporary Indian fantasy films often use the mythic past as a way to show how people feel about their worries and hopes in the present. *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra* (dir. Arun Dominic, 2025), a new Malayalam-language fantasy movie, is a great example of this trend because it has so many different meanings. The film's symbolic universe is heavily influenced by Kerala's extensive mythological reservoir, most notably represented in *Aithihyamala* (1997, originally serialized 1909–1934), the nineteenth-century anthology of local legends and divine-human interactions compiled by Kottarathil Sankunni. In *Lokah*, myth transcends mere narrative context, evolving into a dynamic grammar of meaning that translates the archetypes, metaphors, and semiotic frameworks of folk cosmology into a postmodern cinematic language. While there is a gap in time and the communication medium, both works build off the rich metaphoric vocabulary that is deeply embedded in Kerala's cultural semiotics. *Aithihyamala* operates as a mythographic repository of local belief systems, supernatural happenings, and divine-human encounters, while *Lokah*, alongside many other post-modern speculative projects, rearticulates similar mythic codes using a speculative futurity. The metaphoric connections between both demonstrate how Kerala, and its symbolic imagination has endured, showing myths as a naturally occurring semiotic system, producing meaning and translating spiritual truths into contemporary vernacular.

Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra (2025) has conclusively been recognized as a milestone Indian Malayalam-language superhero film and a true starting point for the planned five-film Lokah Cinematic Universe (LCU). It was written and directed by Dominic Arun, with Dulquer Salmaan's Wayfarer Films producing it. The film's release on August 28, 2025, was a turning point for regional Indian cinema, demonstrating the tremendous viability of high-concept and culturally entrenched genre-based filmmaking.

The film was a historic commercial success. It broke box office records and quickly became the highest-grossing Malayalam film of all time with over Rs. 300 crore in global revenue. This was a new financial pivot for regional, concept-driven genre cinema in India that also fulfilled the Lokah Cinematic Universe's ambitions.

Actor-producer Dulquer Salmaan's involvement through his company Wayfarer Films promised to be a vital strategic investment in Malayalam cinema. By choosing to finance a high-budget female-driven fantasy film, Salmaan blatantly challenged the "conventional wisdom" that relegated such films as a "risky proposition" that perhaps would not attract a mainstream audience. Salmaan's engagement offered the assurance and the creative team the confidence to pursue an ambitious and distinctive artistic vision. The success of this vision was fundamentally attached to the writing collaboration between director Dominic Arun and co-writer Santhy Balachandran. Santhy Balachandran, who was credited with additional screenplay and dramaturgy, crafted a thoughtful and layered story that offered the necessary "imprint of a woman's voice". These contributions were vital in constructing both the intensity of Chandra and the complicated mythology behind her story while

allowing our main character to avoid the superficiality endemic in regional genre attempts. The overall production was organized well, as pre-production started in September 2024, principal photography lasted 94 days, and the film was released on August 28, 2025. The film exhibited extraordinary market penetration, performing well not only in Kerala, but also across the pan-Indian markets of Telugu and Tamil. The performance reinforced the fact that the Lokah Cinematic Universe concept, which has universal appeal with local mythology blended with international genre expectations, can have a broader appeal. This commercial threshold provides clear evidence that regional industries can apply franchise models that can compete "on a global scale and narrative sophistication" with Hollywood. The financial success provides the necessary validation for the decision to invest so heavily in the high-concept, non-formulaic Indian genre cinema.

According to the film's plot, Chandra (Neeli), who moved to Bengaluru from Sweden "on the orders of a mysterious organization," works the night shift at a café while putting on a front of seclusion. Her secret life is swiftly entwined with the grim reality of the city - a vicious criminal gang engaged in the trafficking of human organs. The fantasy elements are effectively anchored in a gritty urban landscape through the entanglement of an ancient supernatural entity with a contemporary, disgusting crime thread.

The antagonist chosen for the movie has a strong thematic connection. Inspector Nachiyappa Gowda (Sandy Master) is portrayed as both a self-appointed "moral police" and a corrupt police officer who participated in the organ racket. As the ideological opposite of Chandra, Nachiyappa represents poisonous, backward social ideals. He despises "cosmopolitan women,"

vehemently turns down Bengaluru's marriage proposals, and bases his sense of superiority on his religious birthright and the poisonous ideals his late father instilled. By purposefully contrasting this localized manifestation of patriarchal social injustice with the strong, oppressed female anti-hero, the film serves as a potent, if subdued, critique that consciously steers clear of the "male bravado and hyper-nationalism" that are common in rival pan-India blockbusters.

By combining gore, high-stakes action, and dark fantasy with natural, modern Malayalam humor drawn from the neighborhood trio of Sunny (Naslen K. Gafoor) and his friends Venu and Naijil, the movie tried to traverse a challenging tonal landscape. This blend, however, caused a great deal of critical debate. The use of Naslen's character, who is characterized as the "likeable bumbling idiot," was often criticized for feeling like an overuse of a humorous cliché, resulting in "tonal confusion" that frequently diminished the seriousness of Chandra's journey. It was believed that this misguided humour sacrificed the emphasis on character development and narrative. The film's structural coherence drew a lot of criticism. Many people referred to the plot as a "non-existent story line," "half baked," or hurried. A primary structural flaw was the antagonist, Nachiyappa, who was described as a "pathetic wimp on a power trip" who was easily defeated and thought to be too unimportant for a superhero story. Because of this shortcoming, it was determined that the movie serves more as a "proof of concept" for the wider universe than as a comprehensive story. The production seemed to place more emphasis on cameos and extensive lore-dropping; both of which are essential for franchise setup, than on making sure Chapter 1 told a coherent, emotionally compelling, and self-contained tale. It has been confirmed that the Lokah Cinematic Universe is a planned,

structured cinematic universe that will consist of five parts. The in-universe novel They Live Among Us, in which every chapter is a representation of a distinct mythic being, serves as the foundation for the continuity framework. Neeli is the subject of *Lokah Chapter 1*, and other significant figures from Kerala folklore will be examined in the upcoming movies. A clear road map for expansive storytelling is provided by this structural approach. The strategic decision to use an anthology model for the Lokah Cinematic Universe is made clear by the confirmation of the sequel, *Lokah Chapter 2 - When Legends Chill*; Michael and Charlie. Tovino Thomas, who plays Michael, the Chaathan, takes over as the main character right away from Kalyani Priyadarshan's Chandra. At the same time, producer Dulquer Salmaan intensifies his role by co-starring as Charlie, the Odiyan, who is described in the promotional materials as a ninja-like character. This switch to an anthology format accomplishes several strategic goals: (1) It lessens the creative load observed in Chapter 1 by preventing the franchise from becoming narratively limited by a single main character. (2) It instantly broadens the mythological landscape by enabling quick and varied exploration of the extensive *Aitheehyamala* source material. (3) By utilizing Tovino Thomas and Dulquer Salmaan's immediate star power together, it establishes the commercial viability and fan anticipation required for a developing universe. Thus, rather than being characterized by the continuous presence of a single dominant superhero figure, the Lokah Cinematic Universe is defined by its common mythological ecosystem and Dominic Arun's constant creative control. Importantly, the main creative team - which includes writer/director Dominic Arun, cinematographer Nimish Ravi, musician Jakes Bejoy, and additional screenwriter Santhy Balachandran, has been confirmed

for the follow-up, ensuring visual and aural coherence throughout the shifting character focus. However, the analysis indicates that the film, while technically magnificent and ideologically strong, suffered from a structural dilemma inherent to franchise genesis: it prioritized its function as a universe prologue over a completely satisfying, self-contained story. The weaknesses in narrative coherence, pacing, and the underwhelming antagonist suggest that the film leaned too heavily on its world-building premise. For the Lokah Cinematic Universe to sustain its long-term success, future chapters must resolve this tension. The anthology model, shifting the spotlight to Michael (Chaathan) and Charlie (Odiyan) in Chapter 2, offers significant creative flexibility. This strategic diversification should be utilized to ensure that each individual film delivers compelling, high-stakes localized conflicts and developed antagonists who pose a credible threat, moving the Lokah Cinematic Universe beyond the 'Proof of Concept' stage established by Chapter 1 toward long-term narrative consistency and profound audience connection across its planned five-part arc.

The essence of the Lokah Cinematic Universe's narrative power is anchored in the deep tradition of Kerala folklore, the film was also critically successful, due in part to its sophisticated adaptation of the same, particularly figures documented in texts such as *Aithihyamala*. Chandra is revealed to be the present-day incarnation of Neeli, the Kalliyankaattu Neeli Yakshi. The film begins by announcing to its audience "Some legends have an element of truth," allowing for belief in an adjacent supernatural shadow world to exist. The character of Neeli is a complex blend of the local myth of a vengeful female spirit (Yakshi) and more recognizable supernatural conventions, especially vampirism. Combining these elements makes the character comprehensible to

a pan-Indian audience and possibly global without losing indigenous cultural insight. Neeli has a variety of classic vampiric traits: she has superior senses, strength, and immortality; she follows the 'invitation rule' for entering a house; she avoids sunlight, as evidenced by her night job and newspapers taped up over the windows; and her dying requires a stake and fire. Importantly, the film leverages this mythological frame to make a progressive social critique. While the original Neeli myth often depicts her as a murderous seductress ultimately contained by the sorcerer-priest Kadamattathu Kathanar. *Lokah* makes a momentous recontextualization, altering her origin story. Neeli is discovered to be a tribal girl from rural Kerala who was "turned" into a vampire as a result of a bat bite while escaping a king who had ordered the slaughter of her parents after the tribe had entered a royal temple without permission. This origin transforms her into a justified anti-heroine who is driven by "centuries of oppression, trauma and isolation," and recontextualizes her rage and violence into an act of historical injustice and persecution. Additionally, it was notable for focusing on a powerful female anti-heroine (Chandra, played by Kalyani Priyadarshan) and for avoiding the popular trends of toxic masculinity and hyper-nationalism found in many contemporary Indian blockbusters. Folk legends and contemporary myths of the fantastical often share a symbolic language that stretches across both time and form. In Kerala's mythic imagination, *Kalliyankaatu Neeli* from *Aithihyamala* presents itself as one of the strongest tales of vengeance, femininity, and transformation. In *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra*, a contemporary cinematic telling inspired by myth and metaphor, the character Neeli suggests an entry into a new modality, while still engaging the same semiotic codes of female rage, spirit possession, and

ambivalence of existence between life and death. The contrasts of the symbolic layers of the folkloric Neeli with the contemporary Neeli as represented in *Lokah* provide a glimpse into how the archetype of the vengeful woman has and continues to change, while remaining mythic in resonance in Kerala's cultural consciousness.

Kalliyankaatu Neeli's story can be found in *Aithihyamala*, the renowned collection of Kerala legends compiled by Kottarathil Sankunni in the early twentieth century. Neeli, a woman who was betrayed and murdered by her husband, returns to haunt the forests of Kalliyankad as a female spirit seeking vengeance. She is both seductive and terrifying, an amalgamation of desire and horror. The tale of Neeli has been transcribed in many versions, as a ghost story, a moral warning, and as a representation of feminine power that has been wronged by patriarchy. In contrast, *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* grounds Neeli in a mythic fantasy world populated by gods, mortals, and cosmic energies. Nevertheless, Neeli in *Lokah* reflects the emotion and symbolism of Neeli in folklore: Neeli is a woman who has transformed through pain, living as both human and supernatural, players in myth and modernity in conjunction.

In both versions of Neeli, she is symbolically presented as shakti, the feminine force that can both nurture and destroy. In *Aithihyamala*, the rage of Neeli is more than personal revenge; it is the release of an imbalance in the cosmos brought on by betrayal and injustice. When Neeli haunts the Kalliyankad forest, we see nature working in conjunction with her power, where she now claims dominion. The forest becomes a metaphorical symbol as it embodies the ancient Indian axiom; that the forest is outside social order, and it is here that emotions are released, and archetypal patterns of behavior become

a reality and spiritual forces awakened. In *Lokah*, this symbol is re-envisioned both visually and emotionally. The forest is again metaphorical space, but instead of the emergence of suppressed emotions and mythic repetitions, the forest embodies memory and trauma. Neeli's spirit challenges the boundaries between life and death, myth and reality. Neeli's spectral image invokes a cultural continuity — that the silenced and wronged (female) woman, while she is muted by death, finds immortal voice in the mythic representation. The character of Neeli functions as a signifier of resistance in patriarchal narratives. *Aithihyamala* portrays her as both feared and revered. The story dramatizes her destructiveness but acknowledges her power as a spirit who will not be subordinated. The tension between destructiveness and agency is key to her mythic life in the story. In *Lokah*, the same semiotic code emerges through cinematic codes - dark colors, moonlit scenes, and the relatively "haunted" echoes of lament permeating Neeli's scenes in particular. Her ghostly form operates as a signifier of both the history of violence and the potential for agency. While *Aithihyamala* locates her in the moral dimension of folklore, *Lokah* situates Neeli in a psychological, mythopoetic domain, as a signifier of collective trauma and transformation.

This essay conducts an extensive semiotic and mythopoetic analysis of *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra*, contextualising it in relation to the mythic consciousness preserved in *Aithihyamala*. The goal is to find out how the movie changes Kerala's mythical imagination through a postmodern lens, turning well-known cultural symbols into reflections on identity, divinity, and modern subjectivity. Utilising theoretical frameworks from Roland Barthes, Mircea Eliade, and Northrop Frye, alongside Joseph Campbell's structuralist

perspective on myth, the analysis will examine the film's reconstruction of mythic archetypes - the hero, the divine feminine, the trickster, and the cosmic cycle; as cinematic metaphors for psychological and cultural rejuvenation.

The argument unfolds in multiple phases. First, it talks about the theoretical bases of myth and metaphor as semiotic systems and how symbols move from sacred stories to popular media. Next, it places *Aithihyamala* in the context of Kerala's folk epistemology, interpreting it as structured repository of cultural symbols. Then it looks at the mythic and semiotic structure of *Lokah*: Chandra, finding the movie's main symbols and archetypes. Lastly, it looks at the movie as a postmodern retelling of Kerala's mythical imagination - one that both honours and shakes up the traditions it comes from.

This essay argues that *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* does two things at once: it brings myth back to the centre of modern cinematic storytelling and questions its continued relevance in a secular, technology-driven world. The outcome is a cinematic text that reflects the semiotic diversity of Kerala's cultural imagination; simultaneously devotional and ironic, traditional and speculative, regional and universal.

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Chapter Two

The Mythic Archetypes and Metaphoric Parallels

Kottarathil Sankunni's *Aithihyamala* memorialized the legendary figure of Kalliyankattu Neeli as one of Kerala's most compelling and terrifying versions of female power. The more recent cinematic adaptation, *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra*, purposely invokes Neeli's myth, but completely reinvents the archetypal spirit. Both stories feature a "Wronged Woman" who is transformed into an immortal figure. While this is helpful in designing comparisons between of the two related stories, it highlights an important metaphoric change: Neeli becomes an agent of justice for unrighted wrongs, while Kalliyankattu Neeli is an embodiment of personal demonic retribution, but in contemporary female fandom one begins to desire female agency through a superheroic metatext.

The strongest comparison lies within the Archetype of the Wronged Woman, in which power derives from a patriarchal and social betrayal. In *Aithihyamala*, Neeli's suffering stems from her human life as Alli, the daughter of a Devadasi, who is denied autonomy based on her social status. She is killed by her husband, Nambi, for her wealth - a brutally personal act of selfishness that emerges from his own patriarchal entitlement. On the flipside, *Lokah* transforms Chandra (Neeli) into a tribal girl whose family and community are savagely slaughtered by agents of a king for breaking regressive, caste-like cultural restrictions. The transformation is rich with metaphor: the betrayal evolves from a private, financial crime to a state-driven, social crime. Both originations firmly locate the character's power in an inescapable trauma based

on social hierarchical injustice, framing her as an immutable image of the oppressed.

This common traumatic history then leads to significant differences in the Expression of Power. The conventional Kalliyankattu Neeli is the original Demonic Temptress. Her main action is using her divine beauty and seductiveness to entice and deceive men, specifically the reincarnation of her betrayer, Nambi, and the seventy men who pledged to protect him. Her power, a combination of beauty and terror, is directed entirely to personal revenge and devourment of men's lives, and she serves as a cautionary figure meant to reinforce the necessity of restraining dangerous female sexuality. Chandra abandons this trope entirely, and instead, she moves into an Immoral Protector. Like a vampire vigilante, she uses her super-speed and strength not on personal vengeance, but to fight organized crime and organ trafficking, and misogynist violence in contemporary Bangalore. The film repurposes her ancestral rage by means of righteous fury, moves her from a figure to be feared to a protector of the vulnerable, especially women, and reminds us that she was once powerful; and in doing so reclaimed the power of the Kalliyankattu Neeli from the male gaze.

In transforming an initial injustice from individual crime to social repression, and her power gesture from seductive consumption to embodied protection, the film successfully adapts an antiquated horror figure into a contemporary feminist superhero proving that our oldest myths and stories often echo our most contemporary social hopes and dreams.

Ultimately, the narrative difference also serves as an expressive and meaningful metaphor for reappropriating female agency. Often the endings of *Aithihyamala* involve the taming of Neeli's rage, usually by the male priest, Kadamattathu Kathanar, reaffirming traditional notions of moral and social order. Such acts of domination depict female might as always disorderly, requiring engagement from men. *Lokah* acts in an oppositional manner, depicting Kathanar not as Neeli's dominator but as a recruiter who recognizes Neeli, and unleashes her to serve greater purposes. Indicating that Chandra is a superhero from centuries ago, fighting new facets of global evil, provides a trans-regional story of resistance that elevates Neeli's story from local ghost story to a storied fight against evil as "Moothon" leads. The *Lokah* Neeli is not avenging a past wrong. She is preventing the wrongs of the future. Therefore, the fearless woman in folklore does not lose agency, nor does she act as a means to control her rage. Instead, her rage will always be benevolent and eternal, not finite and frightening. This cinematic universe makes some critical use of significant figures in the folklore of Kerala. The Lokah Cinematic Universe introduces the idea of a hidden, organized world through Moothon, meaning "The Elder," who is voiced by Mammootty. Moothon is not a fighter, he is a "guardian" who holds the history, events, and traditions of a world and offers structure and organization for the gleaming legion of superhumans. As such, he stands in for the functional supervisor of the Lokah Cinematic Universe, maintaining coherence and a mythic, ordered society within the narrative.

Further is already confirmed to be organized around other figures of folklore. The sequel will centre on the Chaathan, a trickster spirit similar to a goblin or minor god, known for being playful and dangerous. Tovino Thomas

will portray the Chaathan, Michael. The Odiyan a form traditionally described in Kerala folklore as a shape-shifter or assassin (and often animal forms like bull and wolf), who attacked its target under the cover of night (currently represented in the form of Dulquer Salmaan's character Charlie). Finally, Kadamattathu Kathanar, the ghost-fighting sorcerer-priest, is mentioned as a historical rival to Neeli and is presumed to be next up as the lead in the following films or chapters to follow. Through the reimagined characters of Moothon, Odiyan, and Chaththan, *Lokah* creates a symbolic pantheon of characters that combines folklore, metaphysics and modern fantasy storytelling.

The term Moothon (meaning "the elder in Malayalam") implies ancestral authority, wisdom, and mystery. Moothon in a mythic sense, goes much deeper into Kerala's folk consciousness. Moothon is understood-both in the film and here-as a cosmic wanderer who metaphorically travels through time and space rather than literally as a singular human being. It reminds one of the eternal pilgrim archetypes, found in mythologies around the world, from Shiva's ascetic wanderings to Odysseus's odyssey, if you recall Joseph Campbell's "The Hero with a Thousand Faces" (Campbell 34).

In the context of *Lokah*, the Moothon archetype becomes a metaphor of mythic continuity of humanity's search for meaning amid fragmentation. He bridges the worldly and big worlds-of gods and mortals, and of myth and memory. Thematically, he is a cinematic echo of Kerala's own mythic progenitor, Parasurama, who, according to legend, wrested the land of Kerala from the ocean. Parasurama's creative and penitent act is echoed in Moothon's ongoing wandering, as a circular story of redemption for remembering. Here, Moothon operates as what Roland Barthes refers to as a mythic signifier - a

condensation of cultural memory through symbols (Barthes 118). He serves as a continuation of mythic consciousness in a postmodern context, where myths live not within temples, but within the cinematic frame itself. Thus, the "elder one" becomes a corporeal sign of mythic persistence in secular spaces.

While Moothon represents memory, Odiyan represents transformation. The Odiyan myth has a distinct and complicated meaning in Kerala's folklore. The historical model of the Odiyan said that these sorcerers mastered elements of occult practices that enabled them to transform into animals or shadows to deceive or attack. The myth arose out of tensions in feudal Kerala, where power, servitude, and superstition intersect. In 2018, the popular culture myth regained its fame with the film Odiyan, a Mohanlal movie that depicted the Odiyan myth from the perspective of tragedy: as a man plagued by myths that surround him.

The term "Odiyan" or "Odian" used to be applied in the rural regions of Kerala, as a title for some individuals who professed that they had the power to frighten people to death, by way of Odividya. An Odiyan is a mythical entity who lived amongst the people of Kerala, appearing as half man, half beastlike creatures that would lurk in alleyways at night. Odiyans would apply various herbs to specific parts of their body and recite spells, which, it is said, magically shape shifted them into a bull, buffalo, wolf, jackal, or any other shape they desired. The existence of Odiyans is a dark moment in history, but people of Kerala still insist that they were not fictitious, because of their allegiance to the most marginalized of communities, the Paraya. It has been reported that Odiyans were a reality in the 1950s and 60s, at a time when the Caste System was at the height of Kerala social fabric. There was a common belief that Odiyans practiced some form of black magic which was popularly referred to

as Odi, and practiced by the oppressed people of society, but was frequently employed by the Paraya community, as a measure of defense and survival against their oppressors.

The analogy of the Odiyan in *Lokah* encapsulates power's ambiguous, dual capacity as generative and destructive, human and supernatural. The Odiyan's shape-shifting can be interpreted through perspectives of postcolonial shape-shifting, in which cultural identities themselves shape-shift and adapt, commingle with dominant identities and narratives, surviving the violence of imposed identity. The Odiyan, marked a cultural resistance to the historical transition in Kerala from feudalism to modernity, through cultural shape-shifting.

The Odiyan serves an Indigenous specificity, similar to the Western werewolf or changeling. The shapes and powers of the Odiyan do not come from divine blessing, but from esoteric, body-based, ritualistic action, and lunatic practices - a situated mythology in Dravidian ontology calls upon the body and the earth. Consequently, the Odiyan is an antidote to Sanskritic deities: a reminder that mythic possibility in Kerala springs not only from above (heaven) but also from below (soil, sweat and shadow).

In *Lokah*, the Odiyan is not simply folklore, but rather an allegory for identity itself. The Odiyan's shapeshifting is more than trickery or fear; it becomes an allegory for the fluid nature of selfhood in a postmodern sense. The Odiyan can take on multiple forms, which can correspond and parallel the cinematic act of transformation, where myth becomes spectacle and art becomes illusion. He is the liminal figure described by Barthes, existing in the "zone of

transformation" between moments as meaning is always reconstituting (Barthes 132).

Chaththan or Kuttichathan is the most transformative figure in the pantheon, creating the most radical mythic energy. Originating out of the ritual traditions of North Kerala, especially in Theyyam performances, Chaththan embodies both fear and reverence - he is a divine child with demonic fire. The myth is typically unfolded as one of a boy who has been wronged and then is reborn as a deity of vengeance - a kind of folk theology of resistance. Chaththan symbolizes, in contrast to the Brahmanical gods, disorder. He is the god of chaos; a divine incarnation of the marginalized.

The Kuttichathan Theyyam rituals perform this reversal: the divine from injustice, the god who punishes the oppressor so the oppressed can be protected. As K. Ayyappa Paniker and A. K. Ramanujan points out, such folk myths serve as counter-myths to the elite Sanskritic mythology; an expropriation of the divine by the subaltern voice. In *Lokah*, Chaththan inherits the legacy of defiance to objecting authority, as a film, he becomes a cinematic representation of anti-heroic divinity, enacting his conflicting burdens and fire. His flaming iconography; half-human, half-divine, transposed from ritual performance into digital spectacle, retains this ethical power: divinity as rebellion.

From a symbolic viewpoint, Chaththan functions as the sign of inversion. In mythic language, inversion represents the reversal of hierarchy and the restoration of equilibrium; in cinema, it becomes metaphor. Through Chaththan, *Lokah* dramatizes the politics of representation: who deserves to be divine? The Chaththan figure inverts the antiseptic heroism of global superhero

cinema and presents a folk superhero whose powers are derived from suffering and not privilege. In some ways, Chaththan is more like the ritual performer rather than the caped savior: a theophany of resistance.

Chaththan also indicates Kerala's cultural pluralism since he elevates worship to all castes and communities by blurring the boundaries between divine and demonic and sacred and profane. His laughter, fire, and dance are the resonance of the existential energy of the Theyyam stage—now reimagined under mise-en-scène. Therefore, Chaththan in *Lokah* is not a myth remembered, but a myth reborn through resistance

When combined, Moothon, Odiyan, and Chaththan form a triadic pantheon that represents the mythic consciousness of Kerala. Each stand for a distinct aspect of life: The guardianship and memory myth of Moothon, the liminal and metamorphic myth of Odiyan and the resistance and divine insurgency myth of Chaththan.

Despite its regional roots, this pantheon is a part of a global cinematic movement that combines modernity and myth. *Lokah* reclaims Kerala's folk deities for the big screen, much like Marvel's Thor reimagines Norse myth and DC's Wonder Woman reimagines Greek legend. However, *Lokah* gives its mythic characters ritual depth and semiotic density, in contrast to Western superhero stories that frequently reduce myth to spectacle.

Mircea Eliade's theory of "the eternal return" - the notion that mythic time continuously renews itself through reenactment - resonates with the mythic architecture of the movie (Eliade 21). In this way, the film medium itself transforms into a ceremonial setting where old myths are given new life. The

reenactment of cosmic drama in modern language is the symbolic function that *Lokah* fulfills through montage, light, and narrative rhythm, just as Theyyam or Kathakali did in the past.

Additionally, these characters together dramatize what Northrop Frye refers to as the mythic mode, a mode in which characters are symbols of being rather than just individuals (Frye 136). Odiyan is the shape-shifter, Chaththan is the spirit rebel, and Moothon is the protector of myth. They bridge Kerala's oral memory and digital imagination by re-creating myth as a living semiotic system. In *Lokah*, myth serves as both a backdrop for the story and a metaphor for ontology, the language that the movie uses to examine existence, identity, and power. Every character in this pantheon can be interpreted as a mythic metaphor for a philosophical concept, in accordance with Barthes's idea that contemporary myth is a "second-order semiological system". Moothon metaphorizes the search for meaning, a mythic memory of the lost cosmos, Odiyan metaphorizes the instability of identity, reflecting the postmodern subject and Chaththan metaphorizes the politics of resistance, the divine reclamation of the oppressed voice. These metaphors use imagery, color, and rhythm to function both at the diegetic and cinematic levels. The timeless quality of myth is evoked by Moothon's scenes, which are frequently bathed in dusk-like shades of blue and gold. Odiyan emphasizes flux by framing his transformations with movement and shadow. The ritual energy of rebellion is embodied in Chaththan's world, which is ablaze with fire and red. By converting mythology into visual semiotics, *Lokah* creates a contemporary mythopoesis that combines the symbolic and the sensory. *Lokah* also places Indian fantasy film in a global mythic discourse by doing this. While Western superhero

movies use biblical or classical imagery, *Lokah* presents an indigenous semiotics in which the ghosts of Odiyan and the gods of Theyyam coexist with science-fictional technology and cosmic mythology. Keralan folklore becomes a living metaphor for cultural hybridity as a result of the blending of ancient myth and futuristic imagination.

These characters are based in oral and ritual traditions from Kerala, and they do not exist simply as tools for narration; rather they are metaphoric mediators - symbols that convey greater truths as they relate to culture, identity and the human condition. Each character articulates a distinct mythic function, within the film's symbolic order, Moothon as the archetype of the seeker and the guardian of cosmic memory, Odiyan as the shapeshifter, representing liminality and fear, Chaththan as the subaltern deity, representing rebellion and divine justice; collectively these characters affirm a triadic pantheon, reconstructing the local mythic through the aesthetics of fantasy cinema, combining the metaphoric with the modern.

The central theme of *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra* presents the archetype of the cosmic hero; an individual whose journey spans the realm of human beings and the realm of divine beings. One insight into the phase of the protagonist's journey is Joseph Campbell's classic monomyth structure of the hero's journey: the call to adventure, descent into the abyss, and return with knowledge (Campbell, 1949). Yet, *Lokah* revises the heroic template to represent the postmodern condition: the hero's journey is disjointed, recursive, and mediated by screens and simulations.

This re-imagining of the hero archetype has a parallel in Linda Hutcheon's concept of postmodern parody: a "repetition with critical distance" (Hutcheon 32). *Lokah* does not dispel the mythic hero: it recalls him for an age of fragmented subjectivity. Through Chandra, the film affirms that mythic consciousness is necessary, even against the technological web of modernity. The hero's enlightenment is thus both epistemological and ethical: a sense of rediscovering myth as the language the cosmos still uses to speak.

In *Aithihyamala*, heroism is defined by some sense of imminence and willingness to sacrifice. Characters "transcend" their position in the story and assert some form of divine service through their renunciation. In *Lokah*, however, heroism is a matter of perception: to discern the truth within the illusion of the moon and beyond. The protagonist's journey may or may not externally signify victory, but rather signifies semiotic recognition or semiotic receiving - a matter of reading the world at or for what it is. Therefore, the climactic vision of the reassembled moon represents not the end of a literal battle but rather the end-point of consciousness-when mythological representation and reality merge.

To comprehend *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* as a semiotic structure, it is imperative to first outline the theoretical framework that defines myth as a system of signs. In his 1957 book Mythologies, Roland Barthes famously said that myth is a "second-order semiological system" in which every day cultural events take on the appearance of eternal truths. In this framework, myth operates as a language, converting historical significance into what seems to be a universal essence. Like advertising or literature, movies become one of the most powerful ways to do this. When *Lokah* talks about the moon, snakes, temples,

and fire, it's not just for fun; it's also bringing to life hundreds of years of semiotic resonance that is built into Kerala's collective consciousness.

Mircea Eliade's idea of "mythic time" adds to this by seeing myth not as a lie but as a way of experiencing sacred time; a return to the beginning. For Eliade, the mythic hero's journey is a cyclical reenactment of cosmogony, where every act of renewal is like the first act of creation (Eliade, 1963). In *Lokah*, this cyclical sense of time is clear in the story's back-and-forth between the past and the future, the holy and the technological. The main character's journey, which is often shown through moonlight, ritual, and dreamlike scenes, takes them back to Kerala's mythical landscape as both a memory and a prophecy.

Semiotic analysis of myth also requires one to confront metaphor as the structuring principle at the center of their conceptions. As Paul Ricoeur suggests, metaphor is more than just a decorative figure of speech, it is also a "semantic innovation," and leads to new meanings through the conjunction of disparate domains of experience (Ricoeur 98). In *Lokah*, metaphors from *Aithihyamala* - serpent worship, divination, alignment with the cosmos—are transposed into a postmodern visual lexicon. The moon (Chandra) thus acts as the focal point: as both a celestial body and symbol of cyclic rebirth, and at the same time, a metaphor for the human mind's "enlightened" experience, as made manifest through myth.

In the mythical culture of Kerala, metaphor and myth are combined so that they cannot be separated. In *Aithihyamala*, the stories work often through a symbolic condensation of drama: a village god symbolizes the fertility of the landscape; a curse exemplifies the moral law of the cosmos, an ascetic's penance

implies the tension between human desire and the divine law. These same situations/structures are repeated in *Lokah*, but re-imagined through new sensibilities. The digital images and non-linear style of storytelling can demonstrate the polysemic quality of myth itself, where signs multiply and meanings remain indefinitely deferred.

Kerala's mythic imagination emerges from an atypical amalgamation of Dravidian cosmology, Hindu puranic mythology, and local animist traditions. The *Aithihyamala*, which was originally serialized between 1909 and 1933, codified this oral culture into a literary form, reshaping local myths into a coherent mythological geography. Each narrative, from the early tale of *Parayi Petta Panthirukulam* to the divine acts of Guruvayurappan, serves as a kind of node in a vast semiotic network that bridges the human, the divine, and the material world.

What sets Kerala's mythic corpus apart from the broader tradition of Sanskritic literature is its immanent spirituality, or divinity located in the landscape and the community rather than in far-away hierarchies of heavenly bodies. Rivers, groves, and ancestral houses are semiotic sites of divine being. The *Aithihyamala's* language of wonder and miracles participates in an ecological semiotics in which myth functions as both environmental narrative and moral allegory.

This mythic ecology has deep relevance for *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*. The film's setting, lush, liminal, and mediated by ancestral memory, translates the *Aithihyamala's* topography into cinematic space. The moonlit forest, the sacred grove, and the abandoned temple exist not simply as locations, but as

semiotic landscapes where human and divine meanings collapse. It is here that the camera becomes a ritual instrument, building bridges between visible and invisible worlds.

In this way, *Lokah's* connections to Kerala's mythic consciousness engages in what scholars such as A. K. Ramanujan has called the "context-sensitive" quality of Indian narrative; each myth retold is not a throwback to the past, but a renewal of its usefulness. The postmodern rereading of myth in the cinema is not a subversion, but a continuation of this living tradition.

To understand the mythic connections which inform *Lokah*: Chandra we must first understand the structural logic of *Aithihyamala* itself. Sankunni's collection does not function as a linear narrative but rather as a constellation of micro-myths, every tale a semiotic fragment that represents the collective unconscious of Kerala. Throughout the work, we see the return of archetypes popularized by Jung: the righteous king who must learn to be humble, the wife who is transformed by divine intervention, the ascetic who transcends human ability, and the serpent as a symbol of both curse and fertility.

Mythic archetypes are fundamental elements of collective consciousness. As Carl Jung put it in the mid-20th century, these archetypes - hero, mother, shadow, trickster - are all part of what Jung called the "psychic residue" of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959). Both works can be analyzed through this lens of archetypal work, albeit through different methods of expression: one is an oral and devotional one, the other is visual and cinematic.

These archetypes operate as Frye would say, "mythoi" - narrative structures or patterns that recur and operate as pre-figurements of cultural imagination (Frye,

1957). The serpent and the moon in *Aithihyamala* work frequently as paired metaphors of cyclical regeneration: the shedding of its skin by the snake and the cyclical regeneration of the moon. The cacophony of levels of symbolic pairing is picked up and used in *Lokah*: Chandra in the imaginations of a futuristic allegory of consciousness and ecological restoration.

Furthermore, *Aithihyamala's* narrative voice exemplifies what Barthes would call a "mythic code" - a discourse that naturalizes the miraculous. Miracles are narrated with ethnographic details that make the fantastic believable. In *Lokah*, this same approach emerges through cinematic realism: mythic events occur in a technologically advanced world but signal mythic meaning.

So, *Aithihyamala* offers *Lokah* not just narrative elements but a semiotic framework; a grammar through which the film expresses its postmodern mythology. A reading of *Lokah* through this mythic grammar begins to show us how traditional myths from Kerala are not only cited but re-signified, enabling us to think about technology, identity, and transcendence in present-day contexts.

In *Aithihyamala*, the hero figure occurs quite often as a paradoxical figure as a human imbued with divine potential but fallible in terms of morality. Characters such as Vilwamangalam Swamiyar and Pakkanar illustrate this tension of the human striving to be spiritual in the world.

Their stories dramatize the location of the human self between the divine and physical realms. In *Lokah*, the protagonist engages in a similar archetype dilemma, both seeker and sceptic, warrior and penitent, human and cosmic. The

film visualizes this existential struggle through recurrent images of light and darkness, moon and eclipse, as metaphors for sound and consciousness revealed and concealed.

The archetype of the divine feminine creates a bridge between *Aithihyamala* and *Lokah*. The epitome goddesses of this duality can be seen in the folklore of Bhadrakali, Durga, and Bhagavathi, who embody both creating and destroying potential, reminding us of the inherent duality of creation itself. The folktales develop feminine divinity as the primary energy (Shakti) that induces potential into the cosmos. Similarly, *Lokah* remakes this myth with Chandra's experience of an enigmatic woman who serves as muse, oracle, transmitting cosmic energy in continuous flux. Chandra's inquiry about the woman exposes her identity and role, what Campbell would term the "goddess of the threshold," as she steers the hero toward self-actualization (Campbell, 1949).

A core archetype linking the two traditions is the serpent—serpents in the *Aithihyamala* are both sacred and foreboding, mediating life through fertility, protection and vengeance. The sacred grove of the serpents (*Sarpakkavu*) depicts the mediation of the sacred over the profane and the tense relationship between human transgressions and ecological sacredness. Conversely, in *Lokah*, the serpent is transformed into a digital totem, and serpentine movement is depicted through computer-generated visuals, representing the continuous chain of being across biodiverse and synthetic worlds. The transformation of serpents from biological to technological sign is a prime example of the film's postmodern reworking of mythical semiotics; the sacred code remains, yet the signifier has changed.

Aithihyamala and *Lokah* operate on dualities in myth. The sacred and profane live in tension with one another, each defining the other. Throughout Sankunni's narrative, divine presence is often articulated through interruption: a god punishes excessive pride; a ghost reveals an underlying virtue; a curse restores order. Here, myth dramatizes the instability of the world created through tension and the efforts to maintain cosmic balance.

Chandra retains this dialectic but re-shapes it in a distinctive postmodern idiom. The film's visual representation juxtaposes radiant ritual sequences with a post-apocalyptic darkness as a metaphor for the metaphysical struggle between creation and entropy. The hero's journey is articulated as oscillation along the spectrum of light and shadow, knowledge and ignorance. Through the oscillation, the film subsequently visualizes the "eternal return," as Eliade would say, to redeem sacred order through chaos (Eliade, 1954).

Similarly, the film's usage of technology encapsulates this dualism: machines, drones, and holographic interfaces sit side-by-side with mantras, yantras, and ancient scripts. This side-by-side outlook dissolves the binary for the modern and traditional, proposing that they are both forms of the same cosmic force. Technology, in this case, becomes mythic: the digital world is reimagined as a modern form of the sacred.

In semiotic terms of the sacred and the profane, this structure exemplifies Barthes' "mythic speech" of the modern: mundane objects become vessels of spiritual meaning. In the moment where *Lokah* integrates artificial intelligence with divine consciousness, it points toward a posthuman myth

where silicon and spirit co-mingle. The mythic imagination does not die but rather advances through the path of technology.

One of the most fascinating elements of *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra* is how it visually translates metaphors from *Aithihyamala*. In Sankunni's text, myths often unfold in moments of condensed symbolic episodes moments of divine intervention, transformation, or revelation capturing moral and cosmic truths. Cinema reinterprets these same symbolic acts in mise-en-scène, color, and sound.

For example, both the text and the film are exemplified by the repeated imagery of water. In the folktales of *Aithihyamala*, rivers and ponds often serve as sites of divine manifestation through the appearance of a deity, through a curse, or through washing away sin. In *Lokah*, reflective surfaces of water turn into literal mirrors of consciousness. In the fantastical moments of the protagonist's persistence to access his own reflection in water, the parallel between *Aithihyamala* occurrences of self-recognition is reiterated, whereby glimpses of the divine occur through the reflective and mediated natural world. Thus, water, as a metonym of self, quality of revelation, and purification processes time, body, and identity.

In the same way, multiple occurrences of serpents and moon imagery in both texts demonstrate a shared semiotic logic of cyclical regeneration. Snakes are markers of ancestral memory and ecological integrity in *Aithihyamala*, and, in *Lokah*, are reconstituted digitally as holographic patterns, flowing across the screen in interconnected, e-energy circuits. The snake as a sign shift from biological meaning to metaphor for data and consciousness, thus linking the

organic to algorithmic semiotics. This transition is exemplary of the postmodern translation of myth, where signs are not abandoned but remade within new technological grammars.

Light and darkness also present a metaphorical continuity between *Lokah* and Sankunni's stories. In Sankunni's writings, encounters with divine beings are frequently preceded by an instantaneous luminosity—an everlasting lamp, a vision in moonlight, or light radiating from a divine idol. In *Lokah*, this luminosity is translated through visualities that summon both the transcendental and digital spectres: shafts of light that transform into the code, glints of light that reconstitute into pixels. In this way, the film represents the continued embodiment of the sacred, through time.

The mythic imagination in Kerala is characterized not only by a variety of deities and spirits but also by its fluid adaptability. As anthropologists of culture M. N. Srinivas and A. K. Ramanujan has written, these "little traditions" of localized folklore are in constant back-and-forth with the "great traditions" of Indian Hinduism, resulting in a living, dynamic mythic tradition (Ramanujan 158). *Aithihyamala* exemplifies this dialectical process, a text that intentionally weds localized myths and legends of villages and temples as a continual collective memory.

This imaginative continuum is resuscitated with vivid clarity in *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*. The film does not simply revive Kerala's mythologies; it translates them into a future idiom, holding onto their emotional aspects, while changing the semiotic code dance. The sacred landscape of Kerala will then be redesigned as a digital universe, an interconnected network of existence like

Indra's Net: a metaphor from the Atharva Veda that signifies interdependence among all existence.

One can comprehend this transition through Stuart Hall's concept of cultural encoding and decoding (Hall, 1980). The filmmakers "encode" myths of Kerala into the technological lexicon of contemporary cinema, while readers "decode" cultural sign systems through their own cultural competencies. A viewer informed by local myth may see visual conventions of serpent groves or ceremonial lunar offerings, while others may assert some reference to science fiction. In doing so, *Lokah* creates a polysemic text that speaks to sacred nostalgia, and a speculation, of the future.

The mythic imagination of Kerala also speaks to an ecological consciousness. In *Aithihyamala*, divinity is often associated with natural phenomena: the whispers of trees, the water flow of rivers, the dance of rains. Environmental ethics appear in a deeply sedimented way; ethics of the environment is still grafted in these tales. *Lokah* seeks to realise an ecological spirituality in a posthuman world. He refers to a world where human invention can or cannot coexist with the balance of the planet. The decimation of the moon serves as a powerful allegory of the deterioration of the natural world, while its restoration provides an open possibility of the conjunction of human strands with the natural world.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of "simulacrum" provides an interesting lens through which to read *Lokah's* postmodern mythopoesis. In a world dominated by digital images, Baudrillard argues that signs no longer refer to a stable reality, but to other signs: that is to say, we live in a state of "hyperreality" (Baudrillard,

1981). *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*, is working precisely in this hyperreal register. The myths it invokes are simulations of ancient stories, reenacted through digital effects and visual abstraction. But at the same time, these simulations activate the emotional authenticity of the myth itself.

In a significant scene, Chandra journeys through a space featuring ancient temples suspended in virtuality. While the spectator discerns these as digital copies, the representational power of the temples remains intact. In this way, the film ultimately creates what Fredric Jameson might call "the nostalgia for the present" (Jameson, 1991), desiring a mythic fullness of the past while grounding its realization within a mediated process. Here, myth means both memory and projection—a virtual remnant brought back to life via technology. The postmodernism of *Lokah* is not, therefore, ironic distancing, but a rejuvenation of faith in narrative. It shows, as Robert Segal notes, that myth continues to function as a "living model of meaning" even when its symbols are shifted into another context (Segal, 1999). The moon, the serpent, and the sacred grove have not lost their meaning through their digitisation; rather, they gain new layers of resonance in meaning. Paradoxically, the visual hyperreality of the film returns a metaphysical dimension to the myth.

The movie's self-reflexivity; its awareness of myth as myth, resembles Linda Hutcheon's term, "historiographic metafiction." *Lokah* is a narrative about narratives; it depicts myth not as a passive legacy but as a semiotic system that evolves. This meta-mythic awareness illustrates the cultural condition of modern Kerala in which tradition and modernity are in an uneasy dialogue.

Myths, according to Joseph Campbell, "are public dreams" (Campbell 42); in *Lokah*, these dreams are portrayed on screen, reshaping Kerala's cultural memory via the prism of postmodern fantasy. Thus, the movie renews the sacred within the profane, engaging in what Eliade called the "reactualization of myth." Indian cinema's ability to appropriate regional mythologies and transform them into metaphors for the common human experience is demonstrated by the pantheon of *Lokah*. Through Chandra aka Neeli, Moothon, Odiyan, and Chaththan, myth not only endures but also changes, taking on new shapes, meanings, and worlds.

Chapter Three

Semiotic Interpretation and Cultural Symbolism

As the focal point of the movie and the mythological source it is based on, the moon (Chandra) serves as a multifaceted symbol. According to Hindu mythology, the moon controls cyclical time, emotion, and fertility. It also has additional meanings of melancholy and divine vigilance in Kerala folklore. In stories about penance, pilgrimage, and revelation under the moonlight, the *Aithihyamala* often uses lunar imagery to evoke the rhythm of ritual and the recurrence of divine grace.

The moon serves as the primary semiotic axis that the entire story of *Lokah* revolves around. It represents illusion, enlightenment, and the recurring renewal of consciousness. Both cosmic disjunction and personal fragmentation are evoked by the film's recurrent scene of the protagonist staring at a broken moon. The restoration of unity; the mythic return to wholeness is visually enacted when the broken moon is later reconstituted in the movie's climax.

Keralan temple rites, especially those connected to Thiruvathira and Chandrayana Vrata, where moonlight serves as an artistic and spiritual medium, are also in harmony with this lunar semiotics. *Lokah* places its futuristic story within an old symbolic continuum by evoking these ritual associations. Intricate digital cinematography is used to depict the moon's light, which functions as both an aesthetic motif and a metaphorical "language of the divine," reiterating Barthes' idea that myth is a kind of speech.

The moon's symbolism also reflects what Umberto Eco refers to as "the open work" (Eco, 1962), in which the audience continually reinterprets the meaning of the work. The moon may be interpreted by some viewers as an ecological metaphor, highlighting the vulnerability of Earth's biosphere, while others see it as a psychological representation of the disintegration of humanity in the digital age. *Lokah* is a deeply postmodern text because of its semiotic openness, which encourages polyphonic readings as opposed to doctrinal closure.

In *Aithihyamala*, space is sacred topography rather than neutral geography. Every site, whether it be a forest clearing, riverbank, or temple, is infused with narrative memory. The mythic sedimentation that permeates Kerala's landscape serves as a living story archive. The land itself "remembers" through its stones, trees, and rituals, as noted by Elwin and Thurston in early ethnographies (Elwin, 1949).

Lokah: This spatial semiotics is passed down to Chandra, who expands it into a futuristic fantasy. The futuristic ruins and ancient temples that make up the film's settings help to depict Kerala's cultural memory's palimpsest quality. The camera frequently switches between holographic cities and dilapidated shrines, implying that the sacred endures despite the destruction of technology. Michel Foucault's idea of "heterotopia" spaces that contrast various temporalities and meanings—is echoed by this dialectical spatiality (Foucault, 1986).

Recurring in *Aithihyamala*, the sacred grove (kavu) resurfaces in *Lokah* as a space that straddles the boundaries of technology and ecology. Data streams

are like rivers of light, and drones float like ceremonial lamps. The way *Lokah* reimagines the mythic landscape as a metaphor for the ecological crisis of modernity is demonstrated by such imagery. Originally a place of worship, the grove now represents threatened equilibrium. Thus, the movie's environmental message is consistent with Keralan folklore's eco-mythic sensibility, which views nature as a god in constant communication with humans rather than merely a setting.

In addition, the mythic motif of transition is reiterated through the use of thresholds, such as water surfaces, bridges, and doors. Characters frequently traverse transitional areas in *Aithihyamala* in order to meet the divine. The liminal becomes digital in *Lokah*, where interfaces, dream sequences, and light portals serve as metaphorical dividers between the material and spiritual worlds. By redefining transcendence through the idiom of the screen, this translation of the sacred threshold into cinematic technology perfectly captures the film's semiotic genius.

The mythic traditions of Kerala are highly performative. In the ritual enactment cultures of Theyyam, Mudiyettu, and Koodiyattam, where myth was personified through gesture, rhythm, and costume, the *Aithihyamala* itself developed. Victor Turner refers to these performances as "social dramas," in which the universe and community come together in symbolic action (Turner, 1969).

In *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* incorporates this performative element into the choreography of the film. The gestural semiotics of Kerala's ritual arts are echoed in the film's ritual sequences, which include synchronized

movement, dance-like combat, and trance states. The metamorphosis of the protagonist is depicted through embodied performance rather than speech. Her slow, circular motions in the moonlight in a number of scenes are reminiscent of the Theyyam performer's dance around a sacred fire.

The film's treatment of gender is likewise influenced by this corporeal semiotics. In Kerala's ritual imagination, the feminine divine takes the form of embodied presence rather than abstract symbolism. The enigmatic woman who mentors Chandra is the quintessential Bhagavathi; cosmic, erotic, and maternal all at once. Similar to the Devi Mahatmya, in which the goddess' body becomes the text of the universe, her gestures and gaze convey a semiotic density. The film challenges the disembodiment of contemporary digital culture by reviving the goddess myth's performative vitality through her.

The body frequently serves as the location of divine inscription in *Aithihyamala*, where visions, possession, and transformation occur through somatic experience. *Lokah* reimagines this concept in terms of post humanity, where the body is now technologically enhanced and hybridized. The body as the link between the worlds of the mortal and the divine, however, is still a myth. A climactic scene depicts the merging of cosmic and biological energies as Chandra's skin glows with veins of light that resemble circuitry. The sacred body reborn in light is the image that best embodies Kerala's mythic imagination translated into digital semiotics.

Sound serves as a sacred and mnemonic device in traditional Keralan storytelling. Auditory pathways into mythic consciousness consist of the recitations of *Thottam Pattu*, the chants of *Aithihyamala*, and the resonant beats

of Chenda drums. These sounds enact stories rather than just accompanying them.

Sound design in *Lokah* develops into a distinct semiotic domain. The soundtrack of the movie creates an aural fusion of the past and the future by combining electronic harmonics with traditional instruments. What could be referred to as a "technological *Thottam*" is created when the hum of machines and the rhythm of drums combine. As a reminder that sound is an invocation of presence in Kerala's imagination, this synthesis turns auditory space into ritual space.

Silence is also very important. *Lokah* uses abrupt silences to indicate the shift from secular to religious perception at significant points in the story. These scenes are reminiscent of the narrative pauses in *Aithihyamala*, which are the silent moments between revelation and speech during which divine truth is inferred rather than expressed. Silence serves as the negative space of meaning in semiotics, the signifier that is absent and makes the sacred inexpressible.

Lokah shows how cinema can replicate the ritualistic, immersive nature of oral myth through its aural semiotics. Together, sound and silence produce a mythic rhythm that connects the digital present with the textual past. The end product is a cinematic *Aithihyamala* that uses sound and light instead of pen and paper to convey a sensory theology.

The concept of intertextuality is best illustrated by the interaction between *Aithihyamala* and *Lokah*. In *Lokah's* visual design, fragments of ancient symbols are reassembled into new contexts, literally expressing Julia Kristeva's assertion that every text is "a mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva, 1980).

For example, temple murals change into animated projections, and inscriptions that resemble Vattezhuthu script appear as holographic code. *Aithihyamala's* textual mythology is transformed into cinematic semiotics through these intermedial citations.

According to Benjamin, this process is a "carrying over" that transforms and renews meaning, not just adaptation (Benjamin, 1923). Kerala's mythic codes are translated by *Lokah* into the audiovisual language of viewers in the twenty-first century. Walter Benjamin himself might have found it paradoxical that the sacred transforms into the spectacular while the spectacle maintains its aura.

Additionally, *Lokah* takes part in the "global flow" of media cultures, as defined by Arjun Appadurai (Appadurai, 1996). From Miyazaki's ecological deities to Marvel's mythological superheroes, it places Kerala's local imagination within the universal grammar of mythic cinema by incorporating regional myth into a globally recognizable cinematic idiom. *Lokah*, however, reminds viewers that mythic universality need not obliterate regional particularity by preserving its specificity through language, music, and iconography.

Character design also exhibits intertextual echoes of *Aithihyamala*. The female oracle, the cursed guardian, and the wise hermit all evoke archetypes from Sankunni's stories, but their portrayals represent modern sensibilities - gender fluidity, moral ambiguity, and environmental consciousness. Instead of being repeated, these reinterpretations show how myth changes through cultural negotiation.

We can interpret *Lokah* as a text in which myth serves as a communication system thanks to Barthes' semiotic theory. Barthes contends in Mythologies that myth normalizes history and transforms cultural constructs into timeless realities. However, *Lokah* goes the other way, de-naturalizing myth by exposing its manufactured nature while maintaining its emotional veracity. The spectator is simultaneously conscious of the holographic idols' spiritual charge and their artificiality as digital serpents coil around them. Thus, rather than being diminished, the sacred is mediated.

Here, too, Eliade's observations on sacred time are relevant. According to Eliade, myth restores the cyclical order of cosmic renewal and eliminates linear temporality. *Lokah* uses temporal disjunctions and a non-linear narrative structure to illustrate this. The ancient gods reappear as virtual avatars as the past intrudes into the future. Eliade refers to this circular temporality as "the eternal return," which is the reactivation of sacred origins in each act of remembrance (Eliade, 1954).

The combination of Barthesian and Eliadean viewpoints highlights *Lokah's* twofold accomplishment: it reveals the semiotic mechanisms of myth while using mythic affect to enchant the audience. Thus, Kerala's mythic imagination endures in the digital age as semiotic energy - a language that allows human consciousness to continue expressing the sacred, rather than as superstition. The moon (Chandra) is a palimpsest of metaphors in *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra*, and it is more than just a celestial body. The moon is traditionally seen in *Aithihyamala* as a cultural symbol of fertility, rhythm, and cyclical temporality, with its waxing and waning representing the human experience of loss and rebirth. This symbolic core is maintained in the movie,

but it is set within a cosmic fragmentation story: human hubris breaks Chandra, and human faith is required to put her back together.

From a semiotic perspective, Chandra turns into a "floating signifier" (Lévi-Strauss, 1958), a node that allows for the circulation of several meanings. Within the diegesis of the film, it symbolizes technological failure for the scientist, divine withdrawal for the devotee, and personal redemption for the protagonist. Barthes' concept of myth as "a language chosen by history" (Mythologies 109); a discourse that rearticulates collective anxieties in symbolic form, is embodied in this multiplicity.

Chandra's introspection in the film's climactic scene serves as a metaphor for the balancing of opposites: spirituality and science, tradition and modernity, and human and cosmic. Thus, the language of digital light finds a new expression in Kerala's mythic imagination, which is rooted in the sacred and the ecological. The moon used to reflect the splendor of the sun, but these days it reflects the light from screens. However, the feelings it arouses - awe, humility, and transcendence - remains unchanged.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The ability of postmodern art to evoke "re-enchantment" in the face of technological mediation is one of its paradoxes. Films like *Lokah* imply that aura can be restored through affective immersion, despite Walter Benjamin's concern that mechanical reproduction would destroy the sacred object's "aura". Instead of defiling the sacred, the combination of digital spectacle and mythic imagery creates a new kind of presence, a digital aura that is shared through cinema.

The study of *Lokah Chapter 1- Chandra* reveals that cinema is not merely a visual form of storytelling but a space where memories, traditions and identities continue to negotiate with the present. The film demonstrates how myths and cultural symbols remain meaningful even when they are removed from their traditional settings and placed within a modern cinematic framework. Rather than presenting folklore as something belonging to the past, *Lokah* transforms it into a living language this communicates contemporary concerns, emotions and human experiences.

One of the most significant aspects of *Lokah* is its ability to connect the personal with the collective. The symbols present within the narrative are not limited to fantasy elements; they reflect deeper questions about belonging, transformation, power and the human search for meaning. Mythological figures and cultural references function as reflections of society's relationship with its own history. They represent memories carried through generations, where stories become vessels of cultural knowledge. Through this perspective, the film

becomes more than a fictional universe; it becomes a representation of how communities preserve and reinterpret their identities.

As we look at the world of *Lokah* we're seeing a play out of the concept of "techno-spirituality". A concept that was coined by scholars R. Radhakrishnan and N.S. Rajaram, who said that Indian modernity has a tendency to merge the divine and the technological. Well-known in *Lokah*, the traditional mantras are essentially turned into a form of code, and ghostly apparitions appear as holograms, and this is exactly what we would expect, according to Marshall McLuhan who said that each new medium is just an extension of our human senses. Coming hotfooting into the picture, the screen has become the modern-day equivalent of a temple wall, with a brand-new generation of people worshipping there.

Ultimately, *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* can be understood as an example of how contemporary cinema creates new forms of cultural expression. It shows that tradition and modernity do not necessarily exist as opposing forces; instead, they can interact and produce new meanings. Through its symbols, characters, and narrative structures, the film creates a dialogue between ancestral imagination and present-day creativity.

From a humanistic perspective, *Lokah* reflects universal themes that exist beyond cultural boundaries. The struggle between light and darkness, the search for identity, the conflict between memory and change, and the desire to understand one's place in the world are experiences shared by humanity. Although the film is deeply connected to Kerala's cultural landscape, its symbolic language allows audiences to recognize broader human concerns. This

ability to move between the local and the universal is what gives the narrative its significance.

The symbolic world of *Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra* demonstrates that myths continue to live because human beings continue to search for meaning. Cultural symbols survive not because they remain unchanged, but because they adapt, transform, and find new expressions. Through its fusion of mythology, fantasy, and contemporary cinema, *Lokah* represents the enduring relationship between storytelling and human identity. It reminds us that every culture carries within itself a vast universe of symbols, and cinema provides a powerful medium through which these universes can be rediscovered, reimagined, and shared. Kerala's epic stories, which have been passed down through the ages via oral performances, paintings and ritual theatre, are still very much alive in the world of *Lokah* cinema. By re-telling the stories of Kathakali and Theyyam in a film, the makers of *Lokah* are re-capturing the breathtaking beauty of these traditional art forms, and putting them into a brand-new movement that knocks down genre boundaries. And basically, this film is a reminder that the heart of mythology is not about its age, but its ability to transform itself. Furthermore, the film highlights the changing nature of mythology itself. Myths are not fixed stories preserved only through ancient texts or rituals; they continue to evolve through new forms of expressions. Every generation interprets myths according to its own experiences and social realities. The transformation of folklore into cinematic storytelling represents this continuous process of reinterpretations. The symbols may change their appearance, but the emotions and ideas behind them continue to remain relevant, because human beings are in a constant search for meanings.

Lokah Chapter 1 - Chandra shows us how myth is not a quaint relic of premodernity but rather a continuing semiotic practice. In re-animated motifs from *Aithihyamala* - the moon's cyclic death and rebirth, the serpentine guardian, violence as an outcome of struggle between divine justice and human folly - we have a bridge that spans Kerala's mythic past to its digital present. By deploying cinematic language, *Lokah* reinvests the idea of Barthes that myth is "a kind of speech in which the things and the roles (the individuals) awake and remember themselves". It is in *Lokah* that the digital image has emerged as a new carrier for myth, translating Kerala's universe of signs and symbols into the language of global cinema now.

Thanks to this, the public are drawn into Mircea Eliade's concept of sacred time: in which historical order disappears into a cycle of repetitions, allowing one to participate in the mythical present-materializations of an eternal now when both gods and men coexist. Farewell to the peculiar conceptual kinematics of life as unilinear progress now comes in some new, incongruous guise: Once again Kerala's cultural tenacity proves itself with these hybrid aesthetics, affirming the very idea of "postmodern."

On top of translating Kerala's acuity to adult contemporary, *Lokah* also invites audiences to read myths not as recollection but as potentiality capable of shaping the masses' imagination. Following in its footsteps, the film transforms memory into metaphor while letting the people of Kerala spread their myths: enabling a continuation and development of storytelling that shines across time, across languages and across technology.

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