

THE HAUNTING OF HISTORICAL MEMORY: MARKING COLONIAL TRAUMA IN *TALES OF ATHIRANIPPADAM*

Sethuparvathy S.^{1*}

Dr. Smita Jha^{1**}

¹Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee, India

Abstract

Manifestations of memory of a place are oftentimes rooted in the culture of the space the memory originates from and the identity of the place it becomes part of. Even though there are various ways in which these manifestations occur, in the context of Indian narratives, reproductions of cultural myths hold their power over the places of memory, where a collective memory of a myth is rewritten according to the kind of memory the place has. The myth also later takes on a Gothic nature in reinterpretation of it. This paper will study how the myth of Yakshi, a female figure in Indian mythology often portrayed as the diabolical feminine, is reproduced by a place of memory. It will analyze the translated novel *Tales of Athiranippadam*, initially written in Malayalam by S.K.Pottekatt, to understand how sites witnessing female trauma significantly impact the literature written about them. The cultural, historical, and emotional memories of a place relating to the colonial period, taking a material form and intertwining with the Gothic and local mythology, are among the primary ideas this article will examine. The symbolic nature of the Yakshi and its interplay with the history of Indian women, its real-world implications, etc., will also be studied. The article will also address how the phenomenon of Gothic haunting lends hands to criticizing history and written narratives.

Keywords: Gothic; Haunting; Memory; Colonization; Place.

* **Sethuparvathy S.** is a research scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. Her research focuses on narratology in regional Indian literature and branches out to themes of literary cartography, resistance, representation, subversion, and translation studies. Email: sethuparvathy_s@hs.iitr.ac.in. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5491-9942>.

** **Dr Smita Jha** is a Professor of English at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, India. Her research interests include Indian Writing in English, Diasporic literature, Linguistics and ELT, Postcolonial writings, Commonwealth literature, and Gender and Cultural Studies. Email: smitta.jha@hs.iitr.ac.in. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6064-5482>.



‘Yakshi’ in early Indian mythology is a female goddess related to earth’s fertility, love, and beauty. The concept that likely began with the early Dravidians of South India has since been incorporated into the symbolism of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. The earthenware and ivory statuettes highlighting the bejeweled female Yakshi figures were created and gradually circulated throughout India. Figures were also designed in stone and put on walls, entryways, and railings of Buddhist landmarks all around the Indian subcontinent. The acknowledgment of Yakshi as a deity in the primary sanctuaries and temples of middle age Kerala, a Southernmost state of India, focuses on how the famous faction of Yakshi has been obliged and absorbed into the first-class Sanskrit custom. Worshipped initially, the characteristics and role of this goddess have gone through significant changes across Kerala. Natives who trusted the world to be inhabited by many spirits believed them to be the reason for every strange occurrence, particularly illnesses and fiascos. The nature of the collective understanding around the character or the being of the Yakshi saw significant changes, especially in the 19th century. Yakshi was demoted from her status of a worshipped goddess to that of a sinister female spirit who caused woes to befall the people. Subsequently, the people’s objective changed to appeasing these incalculable spirits, including the Yakshi. Strings of folklore, legends, prevalent views, customs, and ceremonies in Kerala wind around the surface of the past, where the Yakshi began to be construed as the spirit of a woman who died unfairly, who should be appeased for the locals to live peacefully. Thus, in mythology, the Yakshi became a terrifying entity, her nature changing from that of the divine to a more Gothic aspect.

In the mythology of Kerala, the Yakshi and everything associated with her came to have Gothic characteristics added to them. The ideal place for her dwelling became the top of a Palmyra tree in a desolate area. She became a monstrous female who, in the disguise of a beautiful woman in peril, seduced wayfarers only to kill them later. In later narratives, women who died an unfair death started to return to the everyday life of their acquaintances in the form of a Yakshi. In such instances, she started haunting architectural structures and other spaces where she lived or unfairly died. The space of her existence became feared by the others, who then did not dare to transverse it. The myth of the Yakshi then slowly started to be reflected in the cultural productions of Kerala, like Malayalam literature - Malayalam being the spoken language of the state. Kottarathil Shankunni, a scholar in Sanskrit and Malayalam, was one of the first to document such stories in his collection called *Aithihyamala*, where he narrates native lores and myths. In his accounts, the Yakshi is “a female ethereal spirit, very often evil” (Sankunni 2015, 684), associated with a lot of evil in the land. In one of his stories, he narrates: “The yakshi would look up young men of those regions to sleep with at night and even harass them in many ways. Several youths thus possessed met with untimely death, and many others became sick due to the excessive desire and physical prowess of the evil spirit” (Sankunni 2015, 452). In another, he shows that the Yakshi came to have a significant impact as the diabolical female in the cultural psychology of the people:

If the devotees are children, they may fall sick with a fever and have to discontinue. Adult men have another problem; they usually dream of wrong thoughts while sleeping, and thus, their minds become impure and are forced to break the course. People have come to blame it all on the yakshi. (Sankunni 2015, 588).

Myths are conceived out of collective and cultural constructions, which are influenced by archetypes. They are more than the expression of a singular mind or an individual. Shared imaginations impact the individual. Such imaginations fuel fantasies, and at whatever point they work out, they produce odd and radiant thoughts surprising for their magnificence, demoniacal frightfulness, or perplexing insight. The world of literature develops a matrix of various spaces both paradigmatically and syntagmatically, where distortion of myths, the denotative implications of which frequently achieve obvious meanings in individual cognizance, can be found. While myth works on a collective unconscious, literature is a fascinating encounter where every individual develops his/her snare of thoughts to make their very own fictional universe. It illuminates how and why the idea of the Yakshi continues in the medium in developing the possibility of a monstrous feminine. A deep analysis of such works in Malayalam literature can show that the Yakshi, or the monstrous female, is always the 'other' in a society whose identity cannot be fathomed or acknowledged by those in the upper rungs of the social hierarchy. Writers in Malayalam use this notion to set off a different tangent in literature, where the Yakshi myth sheds light on the unheard histories of Kerala. As Fred Botting (1996) puts it, the Gothic was used as a subversion of different crises the state has witnessed (6). The real and the fantastic were brought together to claim the past and the present of different spaces in various works of literature in Malayalam, among which is the *Tales of Athiranippadam* written by S. K. Pottekkatt, the novel studied in this article for its portrayal of the Gothic through the Yakshi, involved in the process of reclaiming a forgotten cultural and historical memory.

Pottekkatt, a writer awarded the Jnanpith, the highest literary award in India, was also a member of the Indian Parliament and a world traveler. He was among the first writers to introduce travel writing to the Indian audience. Having traveled the world over, he still chose to write about his home, the small villages and cities of Malabar, the Northern province of the South Indian state of Kerala. His travels seemed to confirm that his culture should be told to the world. *Tales of Athiranippadam* is a novel about the village of Athiranippadam. It is a bildungsroman in nature, narrating the life and experiences of its protagonist, Sreedharan, from birth to adulthood. The culture of Malayalees is well imbibed into the weft of the story, which presents local traditions and mythologies.

The reason writers conjure the specters of the past into the narrative's present is worth analyzing. Apart from unearthing unspoken histories, these specters can also cement a place's ideologies and political stances in the present and the reasons for them. There are a few reasons for authors incorporating the supernatural element in their narratives. One of the primary reasons is that

the mood of the story's setting will be established with the presence of such an element- the Gothic, in the specific case of *Tales of Athiranippadam*. It also helps incorporate complicated details and suspense into the plot. It can also portray alternative experiences that a realist text cannot comprehend. Moreover, they also help expose forgotten stories and enable personal narratives that do not have to adhere to an "acceptable" behavior that society prescribes, especially in the cases of women living in patriarchal societies. Attributing such behaviors to the nature of the Gothic helps mitigate the fear of the destruction of social structures, as it would seem like something supernatural, which can never be controlled by humans and exists in a world outside of the society. The cultural memories exorcised by written history are thus brought back into the pages. It is also this reinscription of history through spectrality that postcolonial theory studies.

S. K. Pottekkatt has given a Gothic texture to the description of the story of the Yakshi, rigorously giving an account of her space of existence and nature. He dedicates an entire chapter of the novel to the same, familiarizing the readers with the character so that later on in the novel, the historical implication of the being hits harder. The Yakshi in the novel lives in a place called Ghost Ground, an eerie place invoking fear, starting from its name. It is a space that the protagonist of the novel, Sreedharan, has to traverse to get to his destination and is afraid to. The writer gives a detailed description of the area in the chapter "The Yakshi" of the novel, when the main character arrives at the place, finally ready to travel through it:

Walking along Chathankavu, climbing up the Ghost Ground, and crossing a hillock would take him to Velalur fields. It was almost noon when he reached the narrow lane to the Ghost Gound. That narrow path was difficult to traverse. It was strewn all over with big boulders and old roots of huge trees. To go along that way, one had to use both hands and legs skillfully. The place was infested with snakes as well. When he reached the boundaries of that infernal region, he stood for a while and looked around. The Ghost Ground was a vast strip of level ground, two or three miles in circumference. It encompassed small flat lawns, a few rough hills, two or three thickets, and clusters of trees like the Palmyra and Kanjira. In the flames of the bright mid-noon sun, the weird, dark forest took on a bizarre hue and looked like a huge pyre that had been set ablaze (Pottekkatt 2014, 159).

The description of the place itself sets up the aesthetic of the Gothic - one of fear and haunting. This environment of fear is solidified by other descriptions, like that of the stifling silence of the place, where nothing, not even an ant, can be seen. The air is described as being very still, without even a breeze, and the earth is shown to be peculiar, shaking when people walk over it. Thus, the place alone sets the backdrop of the Gothic, but the writer does not stop at that. He gives a detailed account of the Yakshi, the mythical being in this space, to show her supernatural features and the threat she poses, which fits into an important aspect of the Gothic. He writes:

At night, the whole place mysteriously got transformed into the frightening arena of ghosts and devils. Yakshis descended from the tops of black Palmyra trees and mesmerized simple passersby who happened to pass by in the late evenings. To the men who fell under the yakshi's spell, the top of the Palmyra tree appeared to be a heavenly mansion, with wide stairs leading up to it... Their bodies, sucked dry of all blood by the yakshi, would lie lifeless at the foot of the tree the next morning... (Pottekkatt 2014, 160).

Besides the Yakshi, he includes beings like the Kuttichathan, a goblin who can transform into a bat at will and, if crossed, make roads endless for wayfarers. Hence, the place Ghost Ground has all the Gothic elements attached to it. Pottekkatt could have stopped with the descriptions of the place and the marvelous beings. But the history of Kerala demanded him to go further and add other meanings to what the Yakshi in Ghost Grounds meant in the postcolonial era, much different from its mythological backstory. This also becomes an essential aspect of the Gothic, one of the primary characteristics of which is the intrusion of the past upon the present. Apart from the settings, this haunting of the past in the form of the Yakshi gives the novel multiple meanings and various levels of reading.

Gothic texts, with their iconographies established in cultural practices, reverberate with the audience of that particular culture and the trauma that they may have experienced. As opposed to the lay trauma hypothesis, which proposes the idea that trauma occurs naturally, trauma in the Gothic is perceived as socioculturally established, spiraling through various portrayals (Mubarki 2016, 22). It re-establishes, for instance, the significance of perusing the Yakshi inside the circle of literature from Kerala, its culture, and social design. Captivating as it might appear, the concept of the mythical being rules over an average Malayalee's social cognizance, which this novel activates to the degree of inciting cultural trauma. Investigating this social symbol requires a comprehension of Yakshi's situation in the novel. As David Punter and Glennis Byron (2004) posit, the "Gothic is more about specific moments, tropes, repeated motifs that can be found scattered, or disseminated" (xviii).

The Yakshi on the Ghost Ground is of global significance. The reproduction of the myth in *Tales of Athiranippadam* reflects a small fraction of world history. The novel helps open avenues to different perspectives and histories surrounding the Gothic Yakshi, especially the colonial trauma that Ghost Ground has witnessed concerning its women. The colonial past of the place is invoked in the postcolonial present in the novel, where the protagonist lives, to bring forth forgotten memories of atrocities that the colonies have had to endure. This invocation is done by making the space haunted by a ghost, a Yakshi, who has stories to tell. Specifically, it brings into consideration the trauma of the phenomenon of colonization that needs to be recognized and restituted. During colonization, Ghost Ground served as a practice shooting range and golf course for the British. The place was fenced off by the natives, alienating them from their lands. Pottekkatt, in the novel, gives a detailed account of how the white soldiers who camped at the Karakunnu barracks four

miles away from the place started coming there regularly for shooting practice. Details of how massive mud walls were erected along one side of the open ground, where lying on their stomachs, some three hundred or four hundred yards away, the soldiers fired one bullet after another at the targets set against the mud walls are also given. The sport of golf, which the natives were seeing for the first time, is also described with the same curiosity- of how small holes that resembled those made by crabs were dug at equal distances, of how white men tried to make small balls shaped like birds' eggs fall into each of those holes using a long slender stick bent at one end like an ear-cleaner, and how it was amazing to see them hit the ball, and then walk slowly towards the hole, with the stick tucked under the arm. Thus, what happened in the place during the colonial era, in the presence of the British, is detailed by the writer.

Oftentimes, in the case of postcolonial literature, places in the Orient are portrayed with emphasis on their relation and significance to the West. The Occident and its gaze give meaning to the population's being in these places. Without their gaze, only silence emerges from these spaces. In the case of Ghost Grounds, the presence of the West leads to the place being attributed a Gothic aspect. The cultural relevance of the place gets silenced or is rendered horrific so that there is the least engagement with it on the part of the natives. The significance of the place, culturally, before the historical arrival of the Western forces is thus lost. Pottakkatt writes about how the pungent smell of the gunpowder must have got on the nerves of the Yakshis and demons, driving them to other peaceful places, far away from Ghost Ground. Indirectly, this is a critique of how indigenous mythology vanished with the arrival of the British. The old Gothic gives way to newer kinds of hauntings with the arrival of the West on Indian soil.

The existence of the people in this space is also erased from native history. The totalizing narratives of world history conveniently forget all specific details of the people inhabiting such spaces, and the writer brings it back to be told to the audience. He frees history from the ignorance of both Western and native historians. As Walter Benjamin (2016) states in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, the writer "blasts a specific era and life out of the homogeneous course of history. As a result of this method, the life is preserved in this work and at the same time canceled in others" (23). The purpose of haunting by the Yakshi in such a narrative is the strategic recovery of occulted history. It is also very self-reflexive of the history and its cultural effects on people to react to the specters in such terms. In the novel, the Yakshi that the protagonist Sreedharan finally encounters, who is feared by all the locals, is revealed to be the child that a white man had with a woman of a local lower caste, an untouchable. Her identity alienates the natives, as she looks different from them and the colonizers. In fear of her, they attribute her – the 'unknown other' – to the identity of the Yakshi. It is through her haunting of the Ghost Ground that the readers avail a complete insight into the atrocities that the whites committed against the natives, especially the unprotected and helpless lower caste women. The girl who is the Yakshi is the remnant of the violence committed, lending light to unwritten local histories through Gothic storytelling.

Thus, Benjamin's theory that specific lives are preserved in some narratives while they get canceled out from others is evidenced here, as the rest of the narratives about the Yakshi in mainstream literature only talk about the mythological being. At the same time, Pottekkatt makes sure that the sect of a society that is sidelined and attributed the features of the diabolical female is also written about.

The haunting of the girl belonging to a hybrid race, the Yakshi, gives the novel's Gothic nature different levels of meaning. The return of the past to the present, one of the primary characteristics of the Gothic, has been talked about by Jacques Derrida (2006) in his work *Specters of Marx*, where he combines the words haunting and ontology to coin the new word "hauntology" (10). This haunting needs not necessarily be by just a ghost; it can also be by time. It is his idea that this intruding past forms a threat to the ontology of the present that gave rise to the spectral turn in cultural studies. This theory also led to the idea that what disrupts the present is the past that has not been dealt with yet or gained closure from. The Nordic academia's folklorists propose a 'mythscape,' where the narrative of a specific place is used to contemplate the past and present. It is a concept in which the physical terrain intertwines with narratives, beliefs, and practices, creating a culturally meaningful space. For example, Terry Gunnell discusses how legends provide "maps" of local geographical, mental, social, and spiritual surroundings (Gunnell 2009). Thus, in the case of narratives with spectral appearances based on mythology, hauntology proves a good framework to shed light on the problematic past through encountering something strange in the familiar landscapes of the present. The haunting past should also have social and cultural importance in the narrative, which Avery F. Gordon (2008) discusses in her *Ghostly Matters*. She suggests that haunting is a form of social configuration that problematizes knowledge production by accessing and giving voice to the "marginalized, trivialized, denied, disqualified, taxed and aggrieved and a matter of redistributing respect, authority" (xviii). In *Tales of Athiranippadam*, this idea of producing knowledge about the overlooked layers of society is critical in understanding why the past comes to haunt the place as a form of criticizing the historical consciousness of the characters. As Gelder and Jacobs (1998) point out, "haunted sites of ghost stories may appear empty or uninhabited – but they are always more than what they appear to be" (37).

Haunting has something to do with the place in which it happens. Michael Mayerfeld Bell (1997) notes, "Ghosts have good reasons to haunt the specific places they do" (814). Apart from giving the place a characteristic identity, it also opens the doors to its history, resisting its homogenization, as it has more to tell than the other places and spaces about the effects of a particular time. To bring forth occulted histories of a place, it is essential to narrate it again, which heavily depends on the associated stories. The spectrality of the place can influence how readers understand the traumatic memory of it. This is mainly because, in such cases, the place and the subject of the trauma are parallel. The name "Ghost Ground" itself alludes to the presence of the specter, which in turn refers to the colonial history of the space. The usage of the term *site* concerning the memory

of trauma testifies to the “tension between conflating place with trauma” (Till 2005, 13). *Site* is different from *place*. It is of existence between places and denotes a liminal space simultaneously incomplete and undergoing a transition process. Hence, *site* is a better word for cultural areas that have undergone trauma. Ghosts appearing in these sites, or a Gothic set of motifs getting attributed to these sites, is critical to the sociological imagination, as Avery Gordon (2008) notes, as this is how injustices that have taken place in that particular site are represented. Ghosts here are not necessarily reminders of something that the colonizers caused; they also indicate that the natives are involved in marginalizing and alienating someone. Thus, the ghost or the Yakshi in Ghost Grounds is found to have her politics—she is the victim of both a colonial past as well as marginalized untouchable castes of Kerala. Her haunting the space reminds the readers of both injustices committed against her and her ancestors. S.K. Pottekkatt thus distances himself from the politics of the written history of colonialism.

To understand what role haunting in a Gothic setting plays in uncovering hidden histories, it is essential to look at what specters and spectrality do. As Derrida (2006) has written in *Spectres of Marx*, the specter “de-synchronizes, it recalls us to anachrony” (6). It also becomes a representation of ethical consciousness. Spectrality challenges, Fredric Jameson (2008) argues in his reading of Derrida’s work, reality’s assumed power in the presence and its ability to answer “what is” (38). Emmanuel Levinas also writes about how the spectral becomes the witness of history, later haunting the site of memory, which he also describes as a “twilight existence of the aesthetic image” that creates more meanings (Bhabha 1994, 452). The specters are also what Marianne Hirsch (2016) calls “post-memory” (66). They are what Derrida (1988) considers “the concept of the other in the same, the dead other alive in me” (267). In works like *Tales of Athiranippadam*, the dead other is the forgotten memory still alive in the minds of the oppressed. Unlike legends, the appearance of a ghost does not necessarily challenge the official history of a place; instead, like in the case of the Yakshi on the Ghost Ground, it can be used to corroborate it. Thus, the specters, in Gothic fiction, can be used as support in narratives about history, but at the same time, they can be used to challenge the actants of the history they are telling.

In using the concept of colonial haunting, Pottekkatt defers colonial temporality by using territoriality and transcends time to reproduce newer issues caused by the older problem, the plight of colonial offspring, including their alienation. In the case of the Yakshi of the Ghost Ground, it is the new cultural hybridity that poses a challenge to the place and the people that is brought to the fore. As Ali Behdad (2000) has suggested, this haunting or the fear of the Yakshi helps use the historical consciousness to criticize the discrimination that continues to exist in the culture due to historical memory (72). The contemporary embodiment of the historical moment and the effect it has on society and the natives are supportive of McClintock’s (1992) ideas that “colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance” (86). They are also parts of unresolved memories.

Another fact to consider is that once the specter becomes the memory of a place, the place of colonial memory is liberated from the reification of colonialism.

The appearance of the ghost or the Yakshi is also a testimony that leads to the recovery of a historical moment experienced by an “irretrievable subject position,” according to Gyan Prakash (1992, 14). These hauntings have a disruptive quality on the present time in the narrative, which Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as the “furious emergence of the projective past” (254). He argues that such portrayals “impel the past, project it, give its dead symbols the circulatory life the sign of the present” (254). He also says that places are important for returning forgotten or hidden colonial memories in a postcolonial era that goes beyond just appropriation. Thus, the Yakshi in *Ghost Ground* becomes a device the writer uses to represent colonial violence and its aftereffects. Postcolonial theory studies this occurrence of spectrality in narratives as a method of reinscription of history. Such studies then lead to the concept of how the cultural memory about the colonizers evolves into ghost stories because the natives become unable to come to terms with the ‘other’ and the destruction they have caused in their land. In considering the white as the ‘other,’ their children also acquire the same status, especially if the mother is also an ‘other’ who has existed in the space before the arrival of the white. The case of the Yakshi of *Ghost Ground* also shows how some ideologies of the natives continue into the present, based on the site of memory, whether race-based or caste-based.

The Ghost or the portrayal of the mixed-race woman as the Yakshi alludes to the materiality of colonized abject bodies. The woman, who is construed as the Yakshi, occupies the position of the “sublime object,” a concept proposed by Slavoj Žižek (1989, 135). He marks the site of trauma in the colonial history of the land that has not yet gained closure from the experience. It puts pressure on the present, which changes this female history into a sort of haunting that permeates the entire novel, bringing Gothic elements into it. These elements include the sense of dread, mysterious and dark settings, and the perceived presence of a supernatural being. Hence, it becomes impossible to ignore the ghost or the Yakshi, and talking to the ghost about it becomes crucial, bringing the forgotten history back into the folds of the written one. The natives living with the ghost and the Yakshi are intrinsically connected to the politics of memory. The politics here are the challenges that the hegemonic nature of official histories faces when an untold past appears in the form of a haunting.

The politics of memory of the place also become a cause in the presentation of the women as Gothic Yakshi. The character of Yakshi in *The Ghost Ground* draws attention to a historical trauma that women of the indigenous community of Kerala have had to go through under the British. This alternative history is thus brought to light. Pottekkatt writes about the fatherless generation that grew up in Kerala after the colonial period, using the analogy of a foreign flowering plant. He writes:

They were not local flowers, but had sprung from foreign seeds. A long while ago, an Englishman who lived in that area had brought the seeds from his native land and scattered them on the virgin soil of the Ghost Ground. They sprouted and bore flowers and multiplied in no time. (Pottekkatt 2014, 161)

Thus, even after India attained independence, the hybrid generation living there has existed without a proper identity for long, experiencing an existential crisis due to the trauma faced by their ancestors. According to Cathy Caruth (1995), trauma is the loss of an event and not the meaning of it (5). Hence, the significance of colonial atrocities is never erased, but the event of the emergence of a hybrid generation itself is displaced. In the case of the novel, therefore, remembering the women involved helps conjure specters of a traumatic past, with the help of the mythology about the Yakshi. In *Tales of Athiranippadam*, the female body is also central to the haunting and the place of memory where she is enclosed. The Yakshi of Ghost Ground, the next generation of colonized women abandoned by white men, is described by Pottekkatt in terms of her appearance. He says, “A very fair face with long hair loose over the breasts... Its complexion was that of solidified moonlight... Eyes like pebbles...” (Pottekkatt 2014, 162). It is apparent from the description itself that the natives find her alien, both in appearance and in existence. The woman and her body are, hence, a site of resistance that is bounded by a place where the act of oppression has happened, where she appears to be a belated, haunting specter: a resistant body that has lost its mobility and voice due to colonial history. The writer then gives her back her voice and lets her story be heard by returning to her space through his characters. She becomes a postcolonial monument that he revisits.

In real terms, the haunting of the Yakshi talks about the marginalized subject position of the hybrid generation and a new politics of victimization. Surprisingly, even though the British caused the event, the natives caused this marginalization. They have had nothing happen to them because of the Yakshi. Because of this, the place remains in a time lag, unable to move further, reversing the conflicts of its colonial past and now alienating the women. Since it is the subject position of the women that becomes the reason they are considered the Yakshi, it also leads to self-liberation of bodies and of the feminine, as a ghostly figure is etched onto the memory of the place. Now, once the body has been liberated, or the self has been liberated, it is as much visible to others as to itself. Thus, it goes beyond the notion of just being a specter of memory and moves towards an identity of its own, as can be seen in *Tales of Athiranippadam*, in which the protagonist Sreedharan understands the identity of the Yakshi and the reason why she looks different from the rest of them.

The place and position of the Yakshi in the novel should be studied side by side. While the place Ghost Ground specifies the site where the forgotten memory of the colonizers is born, the position of the female in a rather patriarchal society that ensnares her makes it so that she is bound to that place and can never leave or be ‘visible.’ Often, the subject’s position directly relates to how much of their story

has to be recovered from history. The writers carry out the process in various cultures, including Kerala. Stuart Hall (1991) has proposed that “the historical recovery underscores the importance of the subject’s position and agency in negotiating with ideological positions of the past” (184). Then, only the reading of the place and the position together gives a history closer to the truth. Bringing up the very local past can lead to conflicts with the known history and memory of the natives. Still, the process is essential to commemorate the sects of the society that have been oppressed or ignored by history. Here is where the position of the Yakshi becomes important. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1993) talks about “a historical critique of your position as the investigating person” (197), which goes deep into the strategies for writing the history of colonized spaces. In this regard, Pottekkatt is studied in how he portrays the postcolonial haunting, combining it with regional mythology and Gothic aesthetic to bring into light the memory of a place and a place of memory that are otherwise forgotten. It is his subjective position that helps him do it successfully.

The memories of the individuals in the novel are what cause the narratives to tangent off from the dead ends of history. The stories that are lost from the larger narrative of history are recollected by the characters. These stories are not alternatives for written history but supplement their linear narratives. The various little glimpses of the memory of the woman behind the myth allude to a trauma that is never uncovered. They cause the character or the myth woven around her to give multiple interpretations. Thus, the narrative puts forth a history that appears all in its verisimilitude, haunted by the unsung songs of characters.

The place engages with personal and historical trauma. The Hegelian concept that history is a linear movement that erases things to reach a point that has already been decided is challenged here. The erased subjects come to light in the present, thus fulfilling the totality of history, disrupting the Hegelian linear narrative already written about the history of the place. The Yakshi never goes out of her allocated geographical coordinates, establishing the importance of the place of memory not being generic. Even though the space is supposed to be ‘haunted’ in the narratives, the place and the subject are both liberated from the confined memory of the past. The writers thus make it impossible for the ‘yakshi’ figures in their narratives to be expelled as mere native mythological reiteration. In *Athiranippadam*, the hauntings point to personal memories and collective histories. Even though these ghosts signify something from the past, they make their meaning in the present by engaging with the others living in the present.

The narratives of *Tales of Athiranippadam* portray a traumatic connection between the myth of the Yakshi, the place, and the woman. The haunting is caused by the power struggle where a woman wants to be in control, trying to voice out their stories and thereby writing off their insignificance. Reclaiming forgotten histories is done by bringing the female experience of that specific history to light. These women’s stories then challenge the written narratives about historical events. By implementing the concept of hauntology, this narrative points to different beings coexisting in the world and different worlds, rupturing

the curtain of time with pasts existing in the present material places. It happens as a part of what Homi Bhabha (1994) calls the concept of “postcolonial time-lag,” stating that “a belated temporality impels the ‘past,’ projects it, enabling colonial history and its repressed subjects to claim agency” (254). It helps displaced colonial subjects reclaim their voices and ‘hybridize’ the present world by bringing in traces of the past. Even though the trauma is present in the novel, there is no clarity about what happened in the past. The specific event remains on the margins of the narrative and is not assimilated into it. Still, the event is not ignored; its ghosts permeate the novel, engaging in memories and dread in other characters. In doing so, S. K. Pottekkatt does not dismiss the importance of written history. But he looks into its limitations. He, through the story of the Yakshi, thus projects an alternate historiography. It is not just the trauma that the women of the place have had to go through that is brought into light here; it is also the trauma of the history of having to struggle between occulted and erased stories. As Cathy Caruth (1995) asserts, “The attempt to gain access to a traumatic history, then, is also the project of listening beyond the pathology of individual suffering, to the reality of a history that in its crises can only be perceived unassimilable forms” (156). In approaching the unknown history by giving it Gothic elements, the novel does not try to rewrite the known history or explain the events that have transpired for the specter to appear and make an impression on the people’s minds. Instead, it makes clear that there is no one cohesive linear narrative in history.

References

- Behdad, Ali. “Une Pratique Sauvage: Postcolonial Belatedness and Cultural Politics.” *The Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies*, edited by Fawzia Afzal-Khan and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks, Durham, Duke UP, 2000, pp. 71–85.
- Bell, Michael Mayerfeld. “The Ghosts of Place.” *Theory and Society*, vol. 26, no. 6, 1997, pp. 813–36. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/657936>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2024.
- Benjamin, Walter. *On the Concept of History*. CreateSpace, 2016.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London, Routledge, 1994.
- Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. Routledge, 1996.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. “The Deaths of Roland Barthes.” *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*, edited by Hugh J. Silverman, London, Routledge, 1988, pp. 259–96.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Spectres of Marx*. trans. Peggy Kamuf. Routledge, 2006.
- Gelder, Ken, and Jane M Jacobs. *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*. Carlton South, Vic., Australia, Melbourne University Press, 1998.
- Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis, University Of Minnesota Press, 2008.

- Gunnell, Terry. "Legends and Landscape in the Nordic Countries." *Cultural and Social History*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2009, pp. 305-322. <https://doi.org/10.2752/147800409X445932>.
- Hall, Stuart. "The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity". 1991.
- Hirsch, Marianne, and Harvard University Press. *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, Harvard University Press, Dr, 2016.
- Jameson, Fredric. "Marx's Purloined Letter." *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, edited by Michael Sprinker, London, Verso, 2008.
- Laclau, Ernesto. "Preface." *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Slavoj Zizek, New York, Verso, 1989, pp. ix-xv.
- McClintock, Anne. "The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism."" *Social Text*, vol. 31/32, no. 31/32, 1992, pp. 84-98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466219>.
- Mubarki, Meraj Ahmed. "Literatureing Horror: Hindi Cinema, Ghosts and Ideologies." *Filming Horror*. Sage Publications Pvt. Limited, 29 Apr. 2016
- Prakash, Gyan. "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography." *Social Text*, no. 31/32, 1992, pp. 8-19. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466216>. Accessed 20 Apr. 2024.
- Punter, David; Glennis Byron. *The Gothic*. Blackwell Publishing, 2004.
- Pottekatt, S. K. *Tales of Athiranippadam*. Translated by Sreedevi K. Nair and Radhika P. Menon, Orient BlackSwan, 2014.
- Sankunni, Kottaaraththil. *Aithiyamala*. Translated by Leela James, Hachette India, 2015.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Univ. Press, 1999.
- Till, Karen E. *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place*. Minneapolis, Minn. Univ. Of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Zizek, Slavoj. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. Verso, 1989.

Submission date: 30/04/2024

Acceptance date: 31/12/2024