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Kuruthi Movie Review: A Haunting Look at Inclusiveness in Society Divided By Religious Bigotry

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Prithviraj Sukumaran in a still from his upcoming film Kuruthi.

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...certainly remain with a viewer for a long time.

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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Kuruthi
Director: Manu Warriar

Cast: Prithviraj Sukumaran, Roshan Mathew, Murali Gopi, Shine Tom Chacko, Srindaa, Manikandan



Manu Warriar's first foray into Malayalam cinema with Kuruthi after her earlier tryst with the Hindi language, bitter-sweet Coffee Bloom, is a no-holds-barred look at the communal tension that has gripped India. The country's rapid slide into divisiveness from the Constitution-envisioned inclusiveness has been examined in the course of a dark and depressing night in an isolated Kerala village surrounded by rubber plantations. Emerging from Prithviraj Productions, the film gives Warriar and writer Anish Pallyal hundred per cent freedom to narrate a heart-rending story of not just religious bigotry but also a kind of humanism mostly seen during the days of India's Partition – when despite all the hatred and bloodshed, communities helped each other to survive.

The film opens with a shot of a goat about to be ritually sacrificed (and Kuruthi means that) by plantation worker Ibrahim (Roshan Mathew), when his young daughter, who has grown fond of the animal, implores him not to kill it. It is not clear whether Ibrahim does that ultimately, but it certainly lets us into his character that has a wee bit of kindness and consideration tempered with a sense of justice.

A terrible landslide kills his wife and child leaving him with his aged father and younger brother. His Hindu neighbour, Sumathi (played by Srindaa, the only woman in the ensemble of men), cooks for them and makes sure that the bereaved family's needs are taken care of. She is also in love with Ibrahim and says that she is even willing to convert. But he is hesitant.



One night as the family is waiting for Sumathi and dinner, there is a knock on the door, and in barges a cop (Murali Gopi) with a Hindu prisoner, who has been accused of accidentally killing a Muslim in the chaos that followed the desecration of a temple. Later, when things get hot and tense, Sumathi would ask Ibrahim whether he would remain unmoved if a mosque were to have been ravished.

What follows is a cat-and-mouse game with Liaq (essayed by Prithviraj Sukumaran) and his friend trying to get into the house to kill the prisoner. The sequences have been edited well to keep us on the edge — as we watch tables turning and the battle resembling a see-saw. Littered with dead bodies, the screenplay forcefully nudges us to a climax that has a hauntingly divine message of inclusiveness.

The film's hero, if I may say so, is Mathew, who gives an excellent performance as a man torn between religious fanaticism and a sense of humanism. His years of religious indoctrination is ruffled by Sumathi's advice of peaceful co-existence, something today's India needs to seriously think about. Sukumaran is well, Prithviraj, the star he has to be, the image and the halo he has to carry and nurture. I do not think that there was anything out of the way in his performance, but yes, one must give him credit for producing a movie of this sort, which may not be a great hit but will certainly remain with a viewer for a long time.

Kuruthi is streaming now on Amazon Prime.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is author and movie critic)

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