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The Priest Movie Review: Mammootty Plays Sherlock Holmes in a Bad Script



It is actually funny to see a Mammootty wearing an impeccable hat going around with a magnifying glass, and his questions to the cops about forensic reports and the like seem more like a joke than any attempt at serious sleuthing.

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GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

The Priest

The Priest
Director: Jofin T Chacko

Cast: Mammootty, Manju Warriar, Nikhila Vimal, Saniya Iyappan, Venkitesh VP, Baby Monica

Jofin T Chacko attempts a convoluted plot in The Priest in his very first outing with the megaphone. The film in Malayalam has Mammootty essaying the title role as Father Carmen Benedict. Now imagine him as the hooded character from a Dan Brown thriller, and top this up by giving him the characteristics of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. Yes, Benedict does not live in London's 221 Baker Street, but in a remote place in Kerala. He, unlike Holmes, does not have Watson as his sounding-board, but moves around with his pet dog, which looks mean and menacing.

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Benedict in the true Holmes' style helps the local police, headed by Deputy Superintendent Shekhar (Sivadas Kannur), crack crimes. This man (much like Inspector Lestrade in Sherlockian stories) follows the Father faithfully, always a step behind, meek and obedient. After all, Benedict does not take credit for solving cases,

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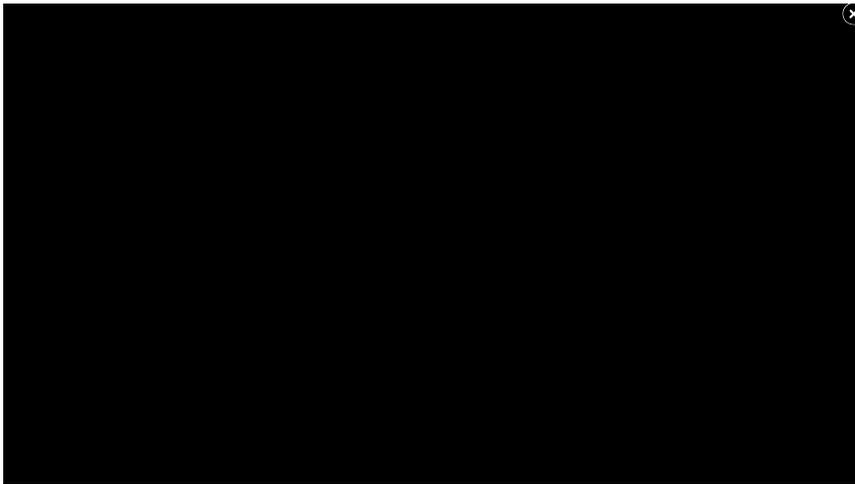
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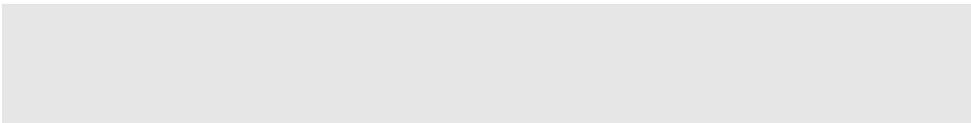
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gifting this honour to the men in khaki.



But Benedict is no ordinary sleuth, like Holmes, who relied on his unbelievable powers of scientific deduction. The priest does make use of science, but goes beyond it, firmly convinced that logic and reason cannot explain everything that happens in this world. He says spirits do exist, and some can get vengeful, like that of Susan Cherian (Manju Warriar in first ever collaboration with Mammooty, and in an extended cameo).

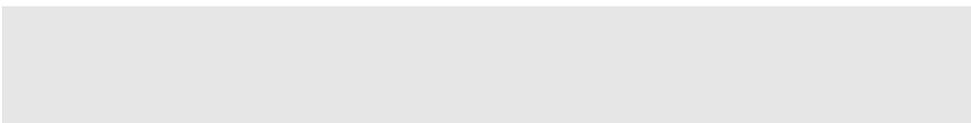
When Susan dies in a road accident on a dark night with a car driven by her sister, Jessy Cherian's (Nikhila Vimal) boyfriend, Siddharth (Venkitesh V P), a supernatural story is set in motion. What began as a murder plot – with several members of a rich business family committing suicide – slips into the world of evil forces with an orphan girl, Ameya Gabriel (Baby Monica), studying in a school run by nuns, exhibiting strange symptoms. At first, these appear like mental trauma, and the only person she warms up to is her teacher, Jessy. An unusually grumpy and even aggressive girl, who makes no friends at school or the orphanage she is growing up in, has a smile playing on her face the moment she comes across Jessy.



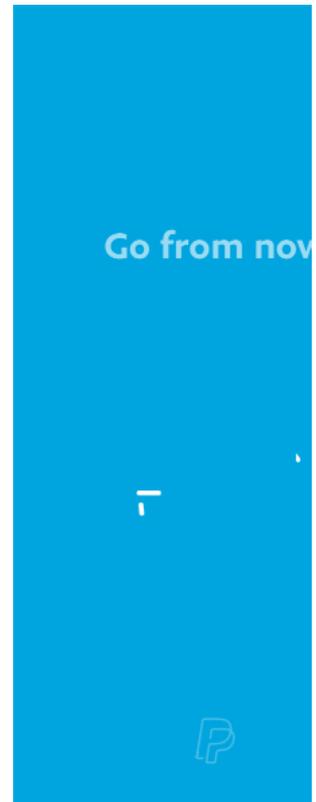
Things turn alarming when Jessy goes to her ancestral home on a holiday with Ameya, who becomes inexplicably violent the moment Siddharth arrives. Seeking the help of Benedict, whom Jessy had met earlier and who says in no uncertain terms that the girl needs an exorcist not a psychiatrist, the teacher helplessly watches the priest going about his mumbo-jumbo, only that he uses modern-looking gadgets which monitor the girl's vital parameters.

Honestly, I do not understand why a superb actor like Mammooty (with some great movies, including some helmed by Adoor Gopalakrishnan) ought to have stepped into the shoes of Father Benedict, transforming himself from a priest to a prober!

The story penned by Chacko and scripted by Shyam Menon and Deepu Pradeep, is pure hotchpotch. and by the end of the over 120-minute long work, we remain confused about the initial suicides and how these relate to Ameya's condition. In short, the narrative is unclear.



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Monica seems to copy The Exorcist (1973) child, who is possessed by an evil entity. Others like Nikhila and Venkitesh make little impression, and even Manju pales as Susan, a character written in such an slipshod manner.

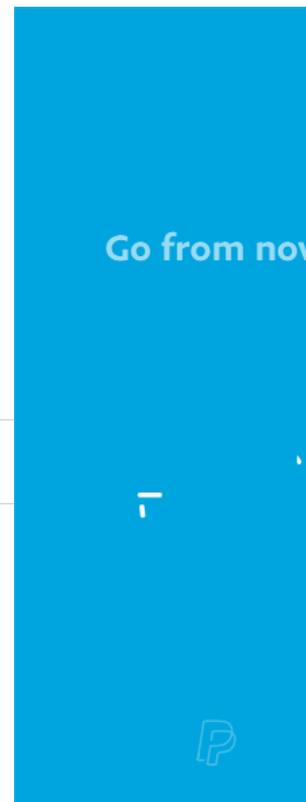
It is a pity that Chacko despite excellent actors like Mammootty and Manju could only come up with such a lopsided plot.

Rating: 1/5

(Gautaman Bhaskaran is movie critic and author of a biography of Adoor Gopalakrishnan)

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