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THE 'TWIST' IN THE TRANSCULTURAL ADAPTATION OF TENNESSEE WILLIAMS'S PLAY *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* (1944) INTO SHYAMAPRASAD'S FILM *AKALE* (2004)

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ABSTRACT

The award-winning Malayalam film Akale (2004), directed by Shyamaprasad, exemplifies the transformative power of transcultural adaptation, adding a distinctive twist to The Glass Menagerie (1944), the memory play by Tennessee Williams, a luminary in American literature. The twist in Akale (2004) lies in i) its cultural adaptation to the fading stereotyped Anglo-Indian community of Kerala metaphorically symbolised as 'glass menageries', and ii) the stylistic shift from 'telling' their story to 'showing' or representing them on the big screen. While both texts delve into human tragedy, the cultural and cinematic adaptation explores layers of reinterpretation, shaped by and resonating with the socio-cultural and historical contexts of mid-20th-century America, in the case of The Glass Menagerie (1944) and that of the 21st-century Kerala in Akale (2004). Drawing from Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation, this study posits that Shyamaprasad's creative process goes beyond mere replication; instead, it establishes a site of intercultural dialogue. By reimagining Williams's work for a new cultural and temporal setting, the film highlights the universality and adaptability of the art of storytelling.

Keywords: Anglo-Indians, transcultural adaptation, twist, human tragedy, stereotype

FROM SHEAF TO SCREEN: CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS AS LEGITIMATE ADOPTIONS

The cultural and temporal nuances of society shape how tales are received, emphasising the dynamic interplay between stories and the evolving contexts they encounter. Storytelling enables the transmission of ideas across cultures; however, plots get twisted not merely to suit the cultural milieu but also to suit the adaptor's intent. When stories draw inspiration from one cultural background and are transposed into an entirely different cultural context, adaptation comes into play. Linda Hutcheon, a renowned Canadian literary theorist and cultural critic, explores this process in her seminal work, *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), offering insights into how adaptations function. Her observations on the Victorian's tendency to adapt all forms of art—painting, poetry, stories, music, and more—illustrate how artistic endeavours can transcend disciplines. Similarly, in *Screenwriting and the Potentials of Cinema* (1991), William Burrough writes, "just because somebody else has an idea doesn't mean you can't take that idea and develop a new twist for it. Adaptations may become quite legitimate adoptions" (Burrough, 1991, as cited in Hutcheon, 2006, p. 3). Rather than simply transposing a story, adaptation transforms it into "legitimate adoptions", offering fresh meanings and cultural relevance that respond to new audiences. Furthermore, adaptation allows stories to cross cultural boundaries, where new interpretations engage with the original while reshaping it and opening up new possibilities of interpretations.

This paper explores the transcultural adaptation of Tennessee Williams's play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) into Shyamaprasad's Malayalam film *Akale* (2004), focusing on the nuanced narrative transformation and cultural reinterpretation. Thomas Lanier Williams III (26 March 1911 – 25 February 1983), popularly known by his pen name Tennessee Williams, was an American playwright and screenwriter who became a literary giant, notably receiving the Pulitzer Prize for drama twice. His magnum opuses, including *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), garnered critical acclaim and cemented his legacy in the history of American theatre. In 1979, the American Theatre Hall of Fame inducted Williams in recognition of his exceptional talent.

Shyamaprasad, an acclaimed Malayalam director, is celebrated for his distinctive approach to storytelling, blending Kerala-centric themes with adaptations of renowned works. His films have earned him numerous accolades, with *Agni Sakshi* (1999) and *Akale* (2004) both winning the Kerala State Film Award for Best Film and Best Director. The former also received the Gollapudi Srinivas Award for Best Debut Director. Notable among his adaptations are *Ore Kadal* (2007), *Elektra* (2010), *Agni Sakshi* (1999), and *Akale* (2004), each showcasing his ability to reinterpret source material—ranging from literary works to classical tragedies—within the Malayalam cinematic tradition.

The Glass Menagerie (1944) is a memory play set in St. Louis in 1937, narrated by Tom Wingfield, an aspiring poet who works in a shoe warehouse to support his family. The story reflects on his life with his mother Amanda, a former Southern belle obsessed with her past, and his sister Laura, whose physical and emotional frailty are shaped by her childhood illness, pleurosis. Laura, withdrawn and shy, spends her time caring for her delicate collection of glass animals. Amanda, concerned about Laura's future, enrols her in business college, hoping to secure her independence. However, Laura's anxiety causes her to abandon the course without telling her family. Determined to find a suitable husband, Amanda persuades Tom to invite a gentleman caller. He chooses Jim O'Connor, a colleague who turns out to be Laura's former high school acquaintance. Much like the audience, this incidental connection with the past comes as a revelation for Laura, who is suddenly transported to her adolescence and recalls that long ago, this gentleman had nicknamed her 'blue Rose'. During Jim's visit, he accidentally breaks Laura's favourite glass figurine, a unicorn, which she interprets as the unicorn becoming more like other horses—a symbol of her own struggles with normalcy. It is ironic to note that just as Laura, fascinated by Jim's warm and encouraging demeanour, begins to break out of her shackles and emerge as a confident woman, he abruptly reveals that he is engaged to another woman, leaving Laura devastated. This moment emphasises the fragility of the family's hopes and the tension between their dreams and reality.

The universal themes of *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) have inspired reinterpretations in various cultural contexts, such as Shyamaprasad's *Akale* (2004), a Malayalam adaptation set within an Anglo-Indian family in 1970s Kerala, India. The film examines

the isolation and aspirations of a family constrained by societal expectations and personal struggles. Margaret D'Costa (Sheela), an overbearing mother, is determined to secure a stable future for her children while navigating the limitations of her conservative environment. Rosemary D'Costa (Geethu Mohandas), her shy and physically impaired daughter, reflects Laura's fragility and sense of alienation. Neil D'Costa (Prithviraj Sukumaran), the son and narrator, is a writer torn between his artistic aspirations and familial obligations.

Departing from the characters presented in the play, Shyamaprasad, in the opening scene introduces a new character, Kamala, Neil's wife, which adds depth to the story, offering a unique perspective to the narrative by complicating Neil's internal conflict. Yielding to the constant pestering by Margaret to find a suitable husband for Rose, Neil invites Freddy Evans (Tom George Kolath), his colleague at the warehouse, to join them for dinner. Freddy symbolises both the family's fleeting hope and their ultimate disillusionment, highlighting the universal clash between dreams and harsh realities. The denouement becomes complete toward the end of the movie where Freddy is seen visiting Margaret with his wife and children.

While the play features a young disturbed Tom in conflict with his mother, the movie gives the audience a peek into the inner turmoil of an older Neil who breaks away from his wife Kamala. The narrative comes full circle when at the end of the film, Freddy with his wife and children appears at Neil's home to meet Margaret. With Kamala at one end symbolising the lacerated open wound, and Betty at the other end embodying a sutured wound, the narrative thus oscillates between the snapping of the volatile family ties to the adhesive reunion in the end.

The play ends with Tom leaving the house, whereas the ending of the film depicts the union of Freddy's family with Neil and his mother, paving the way for the process of healing and the possibility of a final resolution of the conflict and the scope for reconciliation. Betty's role signifies the mending of fractured bonds and the beginning of healing for the family. Diverging from the play's darker, unresolved conclusion, the resolution in the movie harks on familial unity thereby vouching for the importance of emotional catharsis.

This paper introduces the concept of the 'twist' to describe how the adaptation shifts both culturally—from a Depression-era St. Louis apartment to the setting of a marginalised Anglo-Indian family in Kerala—and structurally, from the 'telling' nature of theatre to the 'showing' medium of film. Through these narrative 'twists', *Akale* (2004) effectively bridges Western and Indian contexts, offering the Malayali audience a story that deeply aligns with their multicultural sensibilities. This analysis offers a new interpretation of *Akale* (2004), suggesting that the Anglo-Indian family functions as a 'glass menagerie': a fragile, often invisible community at risk of fading away, much like the delicate glass figurines. Although the film itself does not explicitly state this, the paper argues that *Akale* (2004) invites viewers to see the isolation of Anglo-Indian families not merely as economic hardship, as in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), but as a distinct form of cultural marginalisation and social invisibility within Kerala. Each character embodies a different facet of this fragile cultural legacy, subtly evoking the image of a 'glass menagerie' in their vulnerability to social pressures. This 'twist' reimagines the Anglo-Indian community as a symbol of vulnerability and endurance, a group whose unique heritage is precious yet constantly threatened by the pressures of social invisibility and cultural assimilation. According to a report in *The New Indian Express* (Rahul, 2024), Anglo-Indians in Kerala have expressed concerns about marginalisation, citing the erosion of cultural identity and reduced opportunities following the removal of electoral reservations.

The 'twist' in *Akale* (2004) extends to its visual and auditory elements. By shifting the setting from a confined American apartment to the expansive Kerala home, Shyamaprasad retains the play's sense of claustrophobia while evoking the unique atmosphere of Kerala's Anglo-Indian community. Cinematographic choices, such as the depiction of Kerala landscapes, symbolic colour palettes, and the use of Western music, enhance the emotional resonance, creating a cultural immersion that deepens the themes of identity, isolation, and resilience. Ultimately, *Akale* (2004) exemplifies how adaptation can transcend simple transposition, instead reshaping a story to reflect distinct social and cultural nuances. *Akale* (2004) reinforces and reimagines Williams's themes of fragile identity, isolation, and cultural survival. This analysis of adaptation as a 'twist' illustrates how stories can bridge diverse cultural landscapes, allowing them to resonate with new audiences while preserving universal themes.

Although *Akale* (2004) achieved only limited commercial success, the film is widely regarded as a masterpiece, earning significant awards, including the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in Malayalam. Though not extensively studied, *Akale* (2004) invites deeper exploration, especially given how Anglo-Indians are portrayed in Malayalam cinema.

INSIGHTS FROM EXISTING LITERATURE ON *AKALE* (2004)

Mathew and James (2018) critically address the recurring stereotypes and marginalisation of the Anglo-Indian community in Malayalam films. They argue that such representations lack depth, often portraying the community through negative or limiting stereotypes. Mathew and James thus call for an authentic portrayal that respects the diversity within the Anglo-Indian identity.

Smart (2018) explores the challenges of the film adaptation. She suggests that adaptations should be valued as an art form distinct from novels or plays, with *Akale* (2004) carefully crafted to retain the essence of Tennessee Williams's play while allowing for creative freedom.

Another study of the film, "*Akale* (2004): An Analysis of the Adaptation of Tennessee Williams's Play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) by Shyama Prasad" (Devika, n.d.), analyses the adaptation and suggests that the movie has done justice to the play.

Chemmanam (2021) provides a comprehensive overview of *Akale* (2004) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), offering insights into various cinematic elements such as music, cinematography, and costumes which they claim are crucial in enhancing the emotional resonance of the adaptation.

Similarly, in his blog, Ratheesh highlights a key scene, suggesting that Neil's inward journey creates a more introspective, nuanced climax than the play's decisive break. However, I would argue that Shyamaprasad's approach in *Akale* (2004) reinterprets Williams's themes through a Malayali lens, where Neil's internal struggle mirrors the cultural tension within Kerala's Anglo-Indian community. While Tom's departure in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) represents a literal escape, Neil's story explores a quieter conflict between family loyalty and the desire for freedom, reflecting the values of

familial duty and restraint of Kerala. This choice shifts the focus to the emotional landscapes and unspoken tensions within the Anglo-Indian community, as Shyamaprasad adapts the universal themes of identity and belonging to Kerala's cultural context.

The analysis by Nadira (2011) emphasises how the film's characters inhabit dreamlike spaces, capturing *Akale*'s introspective tone. According to her, the narrative is a poignant reminder that human lives extend beyond personal boundaries. The depth of human connections, whether familial, friendly, or even distant, intricately entangles them. Furthermore, she posits that well-crafted stories, like *Akale* (2004), possess the power to transcend the imaginary realm, leaving a lasting imprint on emotions.

The review of literature reveals a critical gap in studies addressing the Anglo-Indian community's lived experience in Kerala. Although these studies touch on adaptation, gender, and cultural identity, they fall short of a detailed examination of Anglo-Indian life as depicted in *Akale* (2004), overlooking the community's broader historical and social context within Malayalam cinema. The absence of such representation hinders a full understanding of the Anglo-Indian narrative and its cultural significance in Kerala, leaving the community's intricate heritage largely unexplored. In this context, this paper moves beyond the cinematic adaptation itself, proposing a view of the glass menagerie presented in *Akale* (2004) as a symbol of Kerala's Anglo-Indian community and the complexity of their position within the Malayali cultural landscape.

THE TRANSCULTURAL TWIST: REPRESENTATION AND ADAPTATION OF GLASS MENAGERIES

The representation of Anglo-Indians in Malayalam cinema has evolved significantly over time. Earlier films, such as *Chattakkari* (1974), often relied on exotic and stereotypical portrayals, framing Anglo-Indians as 'outsiders' within Indian society. However, subsequent films, including *Daivathinte Vikrithikal* (1992), and *Akale* (2004), began exploring themes of displacement, familial struggles, and psychological depth. This progression culminates in contemporary works like *Hey Jude* (2018), which portrays Jude, a character with Asperger's syndrome, on a journey of self-discovery as he navigates personal relationships and societal norms. This shift reflects a growing cinematic interest in capturing the nuanced Anglo-Indian experience, although some

stereotypical portrayals persist. Notably, Anglo-Indian characters are still often cast with a degree of 'otherness', referred to mockingly by local characters as 'sayippu' and 'madamma' (Malayalam variants of 'Sahib' and 'Madam'), revealing underlying social perceptions that have changed little over time.

Shyamaprasad's meticulous adaptation of Tennessee Williams' play, *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), into the film *Akale* (2004) showcases a nuanced preservation of original dialogues and narration while introducing a distinct interpretation of the film's beginning and end. Notably, Shyamaprasad, with his Malayalee background, shifts the cultural context to Kerala in the film, specifically focusing on the Anglo-Indian community. Shyamaprasad's choice offers a unique perspective on the intersection in particular cultures. This deliberate choice raises an intriguing research question: Why did Shyamaprasad choose to depict the Anglo-Indian community amidst the vibrant cultural fabric of Kerala? Did his portrayal do justice to the community's representation? This inquiry is a pivotal aspect of this scholarly exploration, prompting an in-depth analysis of the director's motives and the cultural implications embedded in this cinematic decision. Unravelling the rationale behind selecting the Anglo-Indian community as the backdrop unveils a complex interplay of cultural dynamics, narrative choices, and the director's artistic vision.

What differentiates *Akale* (2004) is its focus on the interiority of its characters rather than their external 'otherness'. The film portrays Margaret, Rose, and Neil not just as Anglo-Indians but as individuals grappling with universal issues such as unfulfilled dreams, emotional isolation, and the weight of familial obligations. The community's cultural markers, such as the colonial-style furniture and lace curtains in their home or the frequent use of English alongside Malayalam enriches the narrative by reflecting their Anglo-Indian heritage. However, these elements remain as contextual details, enhancing the setting without overshadowing the characters' psychological depth. Similarly, the film uses the family's environment—an old house—as a metaphor for their stagnation and marginalisation, rather than romanticising it as a quaint Anglo-Indian setting. *Akale* (2004) situates its characters in a more intimate psychological framework. Shyamaprasad refrains from overt melodrama, instead opting for subtle, character-driven storytelling. Margaret's overbearing nature and Rose's fragility are rooted in their personal circumstances rather than being caricatured as traits tied to

their Anglo-Indian identity. The addition of Kamala, Neil's wife—a character absent in the play—introduces a grounded, contrasting perspective to the narrative, challenging Neil's decisions, particularly regarding family responsibilities and cultural identity. This reflects changing societal dynamics, such as evolving gender roles, the increasing emphasis on cultural integration, and a growing critique of patriarchal decision-making. Kamala's inclusion enriches the story, adding depth to themes of personal accountability and moral conflict, which were less explored in earlier portrayals of Anglo-Indians.

In *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006), Linda Hutcheon challenges the conventional view that adaptation is limited to novels and films. She explores the Victorian practice of adapting across various media, emphasising the transition from literature to visualisation. She also questions the perception of adaptation as a "wilfully inferior form of cognition" (as cited in Hutcheon, 2006, p. 3), highlighting the bias towards literature over visual representation. She notes a belief in literature's superiority, drawing from Robert Stam, leading to iconophobia and logophilia (as cited in Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4).

Hutcheon raises thought-provoking questions about the prevalence of adaptations despite their often perceived inferiority. She explores the historical roots of adaptation, citing examples like Shakespeare's transformation of popular stories for the stage. Approximately 85% of Oscar-winning movies, she notes, are adaptations, challenging the perception of them as secondary creations (2006, p. 4). Adaptations, according to Hutcheon, are not a modern phenomenon. At the inception of Hollywood cinema, scripts drew inspiration from literature. The early era encompassed black-and-white films, silent productions, and subsequent talkies, all heavily leaning on adaptations from well-known novels, short stories, and dramatic works.

In her self-reflection, Hutcheon posits, "part of this pleasure, I want to argue, comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with piquancy of surprise" (2006, p. 4). Engaging with adaptations, the sparks of "recognition" and "remembrance" awaken this pleasure (2006, p. 4). She remarks, "art is derived from other art; stories are born of other stories" (2006, p. 2). This paper explores this dynamic, specifically scrutinising the repetition of a memory play with a unique 'twist'

in the adaptation to a film. The focus is on unravelling the twist in this cross-cultural adaptation.

AKALE (2004): REDEFINING ANGLO-INDIAN NARRATIVES

Shyamaprasad's choice of the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala as the cultural context for his film adaptation, *Akale* (2004), can be attributed to various factors. The community's unique blend of European and Indian heritage provides a rich and distinctive backdrop for storytelling. Known for his nuanced narratives, Shyamaprasad likely found the cultural dynamics, historical context, and marginalisation of the Anglo-Indian community within the larger societal framework to be compelling elements for his adaptation. A notable feature of *Akale* (2004) is the bilingual fluency of its characters, who alternate seamlessly between Malayalam and English. This linguistic duality reflects the Anglo-Indian identity and serves as a narrative device underscoring the cultural hybridity central to the film. By retaining much of the original dialogue from the play while integrating it into Kerala's cultural and linguistic fabric, the adaptation achieves both authenticity and emotional resonance. This creative reinterpretation departs from the norms of Malayalam cinema, aligning with Hutcheon's idea of adaptations involving a fusion of cultures.

In *Akale* (2004), the D'Costa family—Neil D'Costa, Rosemary D'Costa, Margaret D'Costa, and Freddy Evans—is portrayed as Anglo-Indian. The film's setting draws on references to Goa, which contributes to an Anglo-Indian atmosphere but also adds a layer of ambiguity. Goa is historically linked to Portuguese colonial influence, and without explicitly connecting the D'Costas to the Anglo-Indian community, their cultural identity feels less defined. By using a surname like 'D'Costa' in a Kerala setting, the film risks simplifying the complex histories of different communities and presenting them through generalised stereotypes.

The portrayal of Anglo-Indians in media frequently oscillates between romanticised nostalgia and reductive stereotypes, often framing them as relics of a colonial past. For instance, films like *Chattakkari* (1974) lampoon the community's perceived Westernised demeanour, emphasising traits such as their English-speaking proficiency and supposed cultural detachment from Indian norms. While such representations may appear to celebrate their distinctiveness, they often reinforce

reductive perceptions, positioning Anglo-Indians as perpetual outsiders within the Indian socio-cultural landscape. This lampooning is problematic because it reduces the Anglo-Indian experience to superficial traits, ignoring the community's nuanced struggles with identity, inclusion, and systemic marginalisation. In contrast, *Akale* (2004) attempts to challenge these tropes by embedding the Anglo-Indian D'Costa family's narrative within Kerala's broader socio-cultural fabric.

By engaging with these stereotypes, *Akale* (2004) both critiques and perpetuates them, urging viewers to question whether such portrayals genuinely reflect the community's lived realities or merely reinforce their marginalisation through an exoticized lens. This duality in representation—celebratory yet reductive—illustrates the broader issue with media narratives that prioritise aesthetic romanticism over an authentic exploration of identity. As such, while *Akale* (2004) strives for depth, it also exposes the challenges of transcending entrenched stereotypes in cinematic adaptations. Thus, *Akale* (2004) distinguishes itself among Malayalam films by prominently featuring Anglo-Indian characters and centring its narrative around the lives of this community.

AS FRAGILE AS A GLASS: THE 'GLASS MENAGERIES' AND THE ANGLO-INDIAN COMMUNITY

The term 'akale' in Malayalam translates to 'at a distance.' Thus, the title chosen by Shyamaprasad for his film, which reimagines the canvas of *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) by Williams, is replete with multiple layers of meaning. At one level, it hints at how each of the characters is distanced from their reality. Neil constantly attempts to walk away from his home, distancing himself from his mother and sister; Margaret is perennially yearning to relive her past glory, unable to come to terms with her present reality; and Laura, too, is distanced from her current life. The characters' distancing from each other, as well as from their lived realities, also seems to suggest that the Anglo-Indians, as a community depicted in the narrative, are distanced from tangible reality. Within this contextual interpretation, the analysis suggests that the Anglo-Indian life and community depicted in the narrative are perceptibly removed from tangible reality. This portrayal underscores the community's continued detachment, encapsulated by a perceived "ghetto mentality" (Mathew & James, p. 32), signifying a psychological and sociocultural distance from mainstream societal integration. The

sense of distance connects deeply to themes of fragility, detachment, and the isolation explored in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) and its adaptation in *Akale* (2004).

It can be argued that the 'glass menagerie' that serves as a metaphor for the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala can also be paralleled with human life that can be broken at any time, falling to its ultimate demise. The human tragedy, emotions, catharsis, and themes of love, fear, betrayal, and escape from responsibility capture the attention of the audience through *Akale* (2004), highlighting universal experiences that provoke reflection on personal and collective struggles. This is exemplified through a medium close-up shot of Margaret and Rose, portraying fear and lost hope, and serving as a visual full stop to their togetherness. These moments reflect Neil's memory of leaving home and convey his uncertainty through the visual distortion.

Figure 1: A medium close-up of Margaret and Rose soon after Neil leaves the house.
Source: Akale (2004), (1:21:26)

Their shared gaze into the distance, as depicted in Figure 1, suggests contemplation of the future, perhaps filled with uncertainty and anticipation. The mixture of hope and fear in their eyes indicates the complexity of their emotions as they navigate difficult circumstances. It symbolises the unknown future, the dreams they aspire to achieve, or even the obstacles they must overcome. The fact that they face this together underscores the strength of their bond and reliance on each other for support.

At the end of the play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), Tom bids farewell to his overbearing mother Amanda and fragile sister Laura. He abandons his family and the

apartment, seeking a new life to pursue his dreams. The play concludes with Tom delivering a poignant monologue:

> I didn't go to the moon, I went much further... I turn around and look into her eyes... Oh, Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me, but I am more faithful than I intended to be! I reach for a cigarette, I cross the street, I run into the movies or a bar, I buy a drink, I speak to the nearest stranger—anything that can blow your candles out!
>
> [LAURA bends over the candles.] - for nowadays the world is lit by lightning! Blow out your candles, Laura - and so good-bye...[She blows the candles out.] (Williams, 1944, pp. 114-115)

Tom has been wandering for ages, searching for something he can't even explain. But no matter how far he goes, something always reminds him of his sister Laura. Maybe it's a glint of light or a broken piece of something, but she's always there. The constant play with the concept of 'light' is heightened in the last act of the play, where Tom tells Laura to blow out the candles, plunging them both into darkness.

However, in *Akale* (2004), Neil angrily leaves, abandoning his mother, Margaret, and sister, Rose, behind glass windows, with a poignant melody underscoring the departure. Shyamaprasad extends the plot with an adaptational twist, transitioning to Neil typing and bringing the narrative to the present, where he meets Freddy Evans on a bus. Freddy later visits Neil with his wife, Betty, and children. Margaret shares a photo album of Rose's later life—a significant addition by Shyamaprasad that departs from the plot of Williams' play. This aligns with Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation as "pleasure of repetition with variation" (2006, p. 4), where familiar narratives gain depth through reinterpretation. The album, symbolising memory and nostalgia, echoes themes in both *Akale* (2004) and *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), highlighting memory's role in preserving identity and connections, with a resonance in the Indian cultural context. This visual and narrative framing contrasts with the play's conclusion, adding a tangible reckoning with loss while highlighting the enduring power of memory. In the next shot, Rose, secluded and withdrawn, is shown with a nurse in a sanatorium in Madurai. In the next shot, her mother, Margaret, makes a passing reference to her daughter's unfulfilled wish to return home and pursue missionary work—a dream thwarted by financial struggles that forced them to sell their home. As Rose's condition worsened, Margaret recounts her emotional decline, her voice trembling as she says, "she was sinking" (1:20:54).

At the end of the film, Rose is snuffing out the candles one by one. There are three candles in the holder. She is seen a little away from Neil in front of a door. Rose, with candles in hand, blows them out, symbolising a quiet release. It's a point-of-view shot from Neil's room, featuring books, a picture—probably of Neil receiving some award—a table, and Rose at the centre. Back in the present, Neil is at his table when his mother calls for dinner. Margaret and Neil, Freddy Evans, Betty, and their two daughters gather around the dining table. Together, they say grace and share a meal. The scene transitions to an old photograph of Rose, with a white scarf gently moving in the air.

While in *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) Tom wanders through life burdened by the intangible memories of Laura, in *Akale* (2004) Neil's encounter with Freddy and the subsequent family visit introduce an opportunity for reconnection. The film concludes with Neil's contemplative words, "There is nothing eternal in this world, Rose, but there is love, gentleness, and life. That is enough. That is enough for me" (1:23:37-1:23:48). This suggests that Neil is ensnared in the cyclical nature of life's tragic phases, much like any other individual. The title of the film appears, accompanied by the song "Roses Are Red (My Love)" (Byron & Evans, 1962), sung by Jim Reeves', bringing a bittersweet end to the narrative. Even after Rose's passing, Neil finds himself unable to move forward in life. The memories of Rose linger, tightly woven into the fabric of his existence.

PLOT TWIST AS PERSPECTIVE: SHYAMAPRASAD'S *AKALE* (2004)

Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation suggests that adaptations are not mere replicas of their source material but involve a creative reimagining that allows for interpretation and transformation. She puts forth the idea of "treating adaptations as adaptations", (2006, p. 14), emphasising treating adaptations independently, free from constant comparison to their source texts. The central question posed about how *Akale* (2004) sets itself apart suggests a conscious effort to adapt and reinterpret the narrative. The narrative focus on Anglo-Indian characters brings a unique perspective, challenging the conventional themes seen in Malayalam films. *Akale* (2004) exemplifies this through its 'twist' on *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), where the story is reinterpreted

within a totally different cultural and linguistic framework, highlighting the universality of the human condition.

The film's Anglo-Indian characters, who speak English as their first language but also converse in Malayalam, are an attempt at maintaining cultural authenticity and reflecting the director's fidelity to the play's dialogue, aligning with Hutcheon's concept that adaptations engage with their sources while transforming them. This choice has enabled the director to retain the original dialogues of the play since Anglo-Indians typically speak English as their mother tongue. However, the seamless incorporation of Malayalam into the characters' interactions serves as a profound marker of transcultural interaction. It showcases the socio-linguistic reality of Anglo-Indians in Kerala, who navigate dual linguistic plurality. Malayalam, adopted naturally within the framework of their lives, enriches the narrative by symbolising their integration into Kerala's multicultural environment while preserving their distinctiveness. By incorporating Malayalam, Shyamaprasad acknowledges and reinforces the Anglo-Indian legacy in Kerala, situating the community within the broader linguistic and cultural fabric of the region. This transcultural representation demonstrates how Malayalam is embraced alongside English, reflecting a lived hybridity that resonates with the community's identity. Thus, *Akale* (2004) successfully intertwines language, legacy, and transcultural interaction to craft an adaptation that is both faithful to its source and uniquely rooted in the Malayalam-Anglo-Indian experience. This deliberate approach highlights Shyamaprasad's creative reimagining of *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), transforming it into a narrative that resonates deeply within its new cultural context. Thus, the choice of Shyamaprasad to feature Anglo-Indians helped him with the work of appropriating and adapting Williams' play to Malayalam using these English-speaking characters as the bridge.

In contrast to the typical portrayal of women in Malayalam cinema, where female characters are often objectified or reduced to mere subjects of scrutiny, *Akale* (2004) departs from this norm by presenting its female characters with greater depth and agency. This approach both conforms to and challenges existing stereotypes within the Anglo-Indian community. While *Akale* (2004) aligns with certain stereotypes regarding Anglo-Indian men, it distinctly contests those typically associated with Anglo-Indian women, highlighting Shyamaprasad's nuanced representation. His

choice to set the film within the Anglo-Indian milieu amplifies the adaptation's effectiveness, allowing the film to explore themes of identity and isolation. Unlike typical representations in Malayalam cinema, where Anglo-Indian women are frequently subject to objectification, *Akale* (2004) offers a more complex portrayal. Both Rose and Margaret are crafted with unique and layered personalities that set them apart. A comparative analysis with other young Anglo-Indian characters depicted in Malayalam cinema such as Julie in *Chattakari* (1974), Elsie in *Daivathinte Vikruthikal* (1992), Elizabeth D'Cruz in *Madanolsavam* (1978), and Angel in *Violin* (2011), reveals how Rose's distinctive style, characterised by loose, flowing dresses, is contrasted with the conventional, tight-fitting, glamorous attire often seen in portrayals of Anglo-Indian women in Malayalam films. This deliberate aesthetic choice enriches the narrative, offering a fresh perspective on the representation of Anglo-Indian women.

Rose's character is also marked by shyness and a slight limp, which contributes to her fragile mental state and sense of self-consciousness. Geethu Mohandas, who portrays Rose, brings depth and sensitivity to the character. She effectively conveys her emotional nuances through precise body language, facial expressions, and restrained movements, despite minimal dialogue. This sensitive portrayal not only does justice to Rose's character but also challenges stereotypes by offering a nuanced and thoughtful representation of Anglo-Indian women in Malayalam cinema. Rose, like her favourite unicorn glass figurine, is fragile and different; she lives in her own imaginary world, finding peace and life in the glass menagerie.

Figure 2: A close-up shot of Rose with her glass menagerie.
Source: Akale (2004), (14:15)

She spends time looking at them and arranging them, as demonstrated in figure 2, using them as a form of escape from reality. The glass menagerie serves as her coping mechanism for her inferiorities, insecurities, and fears. The limp prevents her from mingling with people, and she labels herself as good for nothing. However, she finds hope in Freddy Evans, who visits with Neil. Freddy's presence uplifts her; she dances with him, reminiscing about her school days when he, as one of her seniors, had captured her attention. Freddy stands out as the most grounded and practical character in the film. Focused on his future, he pursues evening classes in electronics after working all day at a warehouse, showing his dedication to learning and a practical view of the future.

Margaret, the maternal figure, is filled with enthusiasm and hope, desiring gentleman callers for her daughter. She also reflects on her own youth and past in Goa, dressing in plain, light-coloured, and faded attire—a wardrobe choice likely shaped by limited options rather than personal preference. This modest style contrasts with the glamorous, tight-fitted or bodycon clothing often seen on Anglo-Indian female characters in Malayalam cinema, such as Julie in *Chattakari* or Angel in *Violin*. However, Margaret's style wasn't always so simple. In one scene, she nostalgically reveals a vibrant dress from her youth in Goa, crafted by her mother for the carnival. She fondly recalls attending the carnival aged seventeen, even while unwell, and proudly mentions receiving seventeen marriage proposals, ultimately choosing a sailor as her husband. Margaret's character goes beyond that of a doting, anxious mother; she actively engages with her community, selling items to neighbours, likely fellow Anglo-Indians, as suggested by their attire. This scene highlights Anglo-Indian cultural distinctions, particularly the tradition of financial independence for women. Unlike most Malayali women of that era, Anglo-Indian women like Margaret often contributed economically, reflecting a greater degree of independence within their community. This cultural difference underscores Margaret's resilience and self-sufficiency, further enriching her portrayal.

Music plays a pivotal role in establishing the film's mood. The composer has aimed to create a fusion of Western and Indian classical influences, enhancing the depth of *Akale* (2004). While nine original melodies are recorded for *Akale* (2004), the film version incorporates background music and songs from English albums. All the songs

are crafted to evoke a sense of enjoyment in solitude, with the instruments delicately orchestrated, suggesting the fragility akin to a glass menagerie. The compositions are deliberately slow-paced, demanding patience for their full appreciation. Two songs, namely “Akale” (At a distance) and “Nee Januvariyil Viriyumo” (Will you bloom in January?), have garnered significant acclaim from the audience. The latter, featuring a chorus of “Blue rose”, draws inspiration from Beethoven’s *Fur Elise*, released in 1867.

Building on its unique narrative lens, *Akale* (2004) also employs distinct visual and cinematic techniques to create an atmosphere that resonates with the film’s dramatic core. S. Kumar’s cinematography incorporates sepia-toned and softly glowing visuals, evoking a sense of nostalgia and suggesting an era lost in memory. This visual choice is not merely stylistic but serves to deepen the emotional impact, allowing viewers to experience the story’s reflective and dreamlike quality. By adapting its visual style in this way, *Akale* (2004) reverberates with Hutcheon’s idea that adaptations transform artistic forms, using cinematography to enrich the story’s mood and set it apart from typical Malayalam cinema.

Shyamaprasad creatively adapts *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) into a 1970s Kerala setting, highlighting the Anglo-Indian community through visual storytelling. He uses architecture, music, and character body language to depict this marginal community, skillfully blending realism with narrative. Elements like curtained arched doorways, dining tables set with Western-style utensils, and characters speaking in English reflect Anglo-Indian traditions and blur the lines between reality and fiction. These visual cues immerse the audience in a lifelike world that feels both familiar and constructed, enhancing the narrative’s authenticity.

In its genre, too, *Akale* (2004) diverges by leaning heavily into drama. This marks a shift from the prominent genres in Malayalam cinema, such as action, family-centred narratives, and melodramatic romance. This genre adaptation allows *Akale* (2004) to explore themes of psychological depth and internal conflict, emphasising character introspection over conventional plot-driven elements. Such a choice embodies Hutcheon’s notion that adaptations involve a negotiation of artistic forms, as the film

reinterprets *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) through a dramatic lens that feels distinct and culturally resonant.

In transforming this play into a realistic portrayal, the film relies on the skilful performances of its actors in the film—Prithviraj, Sheela, Geethu, and Tom George—who bring the script's characters to life. Much like musical scores or dance notations, scripts serve as guides, providing dialogue and stage directions that actors interpret and embody on screen. Performers play a vital role in adapting these written guides into memorable presentations, using language, movement, and expression to transform the text into an engaging, expressive experience. In *Akale* (2004), this collaborative adaptation of script and performance allows the film's thematic and visual richness to fully resonate with audiences, creating a lasting impact that honours its source material while establishing its own distinct artistic identity. Hutcheon (2006) reflects on this insight as:

> In a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance. The text of a play does not necessarily tell an actor about such matters as the gestures, expressions, and tones of voice to use in converting words on a page into a convincing performance; it is up to the director and actors to actualize the text and to interpret and then recreate it, thereby, in a sense, adapting it for the stage. (p. 39)

A script does not dictate gestures, expressions, or vocal tones, leaving it to the creative team to actualise, interpret, and recreate the text for the stage, effectively adapting it anew with each performance. Each audience member, in turn, interprets the performance through their own perspective, engaging in a personal adaptation of the story.

In *Akale* (2004), the process of adaptation begins with a distinctive 'twist' in the narration, which Hutcheon would describe as an interpretive act of appropriation or salvaging (2006, p. 9). The film opens in Calcutta with a scene featuring Neil and Kamala in a taxi. The background score in the opening scene, which is the song "Moon River" (Mercer & Mancini, 1963), sung by Pat Boone, conveys longing and aspiration, resonating with the characters of *Akale* (2004) and the emotional tone of their journeys. This contrasts with the American setting of *The Glass Menagerie* (1944), as

Akale (2004) introduces a uniquely Indian context through the characters' casual conversation in the taxi. Neil tells Kamala about a film he recently watched, describing

> I have seen in a film that there is a city beneath a city—a secret city with underground paths, shops, houses, and numerous people residing there. Unaware that there exists a world above them, they live in their own air-conditioned apartments, in peace and happiness. Without glimpses of the sky, trees, or mountains, and in fact, without seeing anything. They never see anything; I remember it so well, you know. There are only a few who know about the world above, but they... (0.49–1.35).

This narrative not only sets the scene but also subtly foreshadows the hidden desires and unfulfilled dreams of the film's characters, aligning with Linda Hutcheon's view that adaptations transform and contemporise source material while preserving its core emotional essence. Neil's story about the hidden city serves as a metaphor for his own struggles, symbolising the insular mindset often associated with Anglo-Indians and their reluctance to fully engage with the broader Indian world. Kamala's apparent disinterest in Neil's story introduces an emotional disconnect between them, suggesting underlying tensions in their relationship. After the taxi ride, Neil bids farewell to Kamala, who wishes him success in his writing. Traditionally, Anglo-Indians have been depicted as maintaining close-knit, culturally insular circles. By pairing Neil with a non-Anglo-Indian, Shyamaprasad challenges this stereotype, encouraging viewers to see Neil as more than his cultural identity.

Figure 3: Kamala bids farewell to Neil.
Source: Akale (2004), (5:00)

As shown in figure 3, this farewell exchange also lays the groundwork for the couple's relationship, as Kamala accuses Neil of selfishness, attributing their daughter Rakhi's withdrawal to him. Her question, "Do you hate yourself?" prompts Neil's poignant reply, "always, really, all the time" (5:32), revealing the depth of his internal struggle. This opening interaction sets a reflective tone for Neil's journey, foreshadowing the film's exploration of isolation, belonging, and self-acceptance.

Mathew and James (2018) argue that "Anglo-Indian men have been typified in Malayalam filmic discourses as capricious, mendacious, and lazy, which culminates in them being represented as the 'other', securing the 'centre' for the men of elite castes" (p. 28). Both Tom and Neil attempt to escape the responsibilities of their family, seeking to evade the burdens of a shy and disabled sister and a pestering mother. The absence of a father figure looms large, and the fear of abandonment shapes their lives. Neil decides to follow in his father's footsteps by leaving the family. At a certain point, Neil acknowledges this connection, stating, "I am like my father; we are wanderers" (00:48:54-57). This portrayal reinforces the stereotype associated with Anglo-Indian men, which includes escapism from responsibilities, a tendency to live in illusions and distorted realities, shattered dreams, and struggles with alcoholism. Neil exemplifies this portrayal, feeling disillusioned with life and constantly mourning his unfulfilled aspirations. His struggles with familial responsibilities and societal stereotypes reflect a deeper yearning for a meaningful existence, while his escapism underscores the weight of cultural expectations and the difficulty of adaptation in a rapidly changing world.

CONCLUSION

In *Akale* (2004), Shyamaprasad reimagines Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) through the cultural lens of the Anglo-Indian community in Kerala, a group often associated with a fading cultural identity. The adaptation incorporates a 'double twist' by simultaneously recontextualizing the play to reflect the community's transitions and shifting from the play's narrative mode of 'telling' to a cinematic approach of 'showing'. While deeply rooted in this cultural milieu, the film captures universal themes of familial disintegration and personal longing, emphasizing the fragility of individual lives without reducing the narrative to a sweeping communal

claim. This layered approach highlights the transformational power of cultural re-imagination.

This analysis draws from Linda Hutcheon's *A Theory of Adaptation* (2006) to posit that Shyamaprasad's act of creative re-conceptualisation elevated his work beyond mere replication, transforming the adaptation process into a regenerative space of conversation. The intercultural interplay between two creators separated by culture and time reflects the malleability and universality of storytelling. A comparison of the two versions fosters the possibility for not just a new appreciation for the original story but also looks at what inspired its re-interpretation. Therefore, *Akale* (2004) is a testament to the dynamics of story-telling and its re-telling in a different cultural setting and a different mode of expression navigating the challenges of translating intricate character dynamics and symbolic elements into a visual narrative.

Shyamaprasad strategically places the Anglo-Indian community amidst Kerala's vibrant cultural fabric. The light, cinematography, music, choreography, art direction, costumes, acting, and every other element have made *Akale* (2004) a fabulous piece of art. It is rooted in the unique cultural fusion and diversity found in the region, using the Anglo-Indian community's Western-influenced lifestyle as a compelling storytelling canvas. The film thus delves into the cultural intersections between traditional Kerala and Western influences. Shyamaprasad's interpretation, despite its innovative narrative choices, appears to align with the prevalent negative stereotypes regarding the Anglo-Indian community within Malayalam cinema, potentially perpetuating existing stereotyping. While Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) portrays human tragedy, Shyamprasad's *Akale* (2004) focuses on the human tragedy further aggravated by the forces of stereotyping within the Anglo-Indian community of Kerala. This intentional departure aims to inject novelty into the cinematic landscape while preserving the essence of the play *The Glass Menagerie* (1944).

The adaptation in *Akale* (2004) demonstrates a notable shift from typical approaches, moving beyond simple replication of source material or the usual norms of Malayalam cinema. Although *Akale* (2004) does, in part, align with certain Anglo-Indian stereotypes prevalent in Malayalam cinema such as such as an emphasis on their Westernised mannerisms or otherness—it simultaneously challenges alternative

stereotypes by portraying the nuances and complexities of the characters' inner lives. Shyamaprasad's creative reimagining of the cultural and narrative elements gives the film a distinctive identity, balancing between conventional genre expectations and fresh, introspective storytelling.

However, the film's portrayal of Anglo-Indian culture raises questions about its authenticity, prompting reflection on whether it adequately captures the community's diversity and intricacies. This research calls for greater awareness of the inherent contradictions in identity portrayal and the importance of amplifying marginalised voices within cultural narratives. The inferences gathered through this study underscores the need for a more nuanced understanding of identity in artistic representations, particularly in contexts marked by cultural diversity and historical legacies of colonialism. By challenging simplistic narratives and embracing the complexity of cultural identities, filmmakers can contribute to a more inclusive and representative cinematic landscape.

Akale (2004) reimagines the play's themes, bridging cultures and evoking both universal and culturally distinct experiences of loss, duty, and identity, while honouring the timeless resonance of Williams' work. The film maintains the core elements of the play, the filmmaker Shyamprasad adapts it to the Anglo-Indian community of Kerala who speak English but also converse fluently in the local language, Malayalam. This is in line with Hutcheon's idea that adaptations involve a dialogue with the source material, acknowledging and transforming its essence. The film therefore suggests a form of intertextuality and affirms Linda Hutcheon's idea that adaptations involve a negotiation of different artistic forms. The paper concludes by reaffirming the idea that adaptations may become quite legitimate adoptions.

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