

*Muni 2: Kanchana*  
Dir: Raghava Lawrence  
Tamil; 2011  
[Vyjayanti Vasanta Mogli]

*Kanchana* is a comedy horror flick that begins with the scene of a mother accompanying her little daughter to school. The mother is very worried as they walk beside a large plot of land with an open gate. One can feel and sense the eerie atmosphere of horror as the background effects build up. She pulls her daughter aside and away from the land. On being asked the reason for it by her little daughter, she avoids answering her and repeatedly prevents her from looking back at the land till they walk past it. The film then moves to another scene. The red stole of a young girl living beside the haunted open land falls off her clothesline into the adjoining haunted land. She risks going into it to bring it back despite her mother's warning and has a chilling nightmare of being brutally murdered there by an unseen force. Her mother throws that red stole back into the open land to wish away the unseen force. The film shows both the incidents to portend the presence of a spirit haunting that open land.

The film then swiftly moves to the life of the protagonist, Raghava, a happy-go-lucky and unemployed youth who mostly spends his time playing cricket with his friends. On a certain day, Raghava and his friends play cricket on the haunted land. His wicket stumps dig into a corpse buried underneath and get stained by it. The spirit of the corpse follows Raghava home. A series of unearthly phenomena follow; ranging from wailing noises at night, flashes of an apparition haunting his corridors, to Raghava ultimately getting possessed by it. Raghava's family seek help from an exorcist who pulls the spirit out of his body. The apparition reveals herself as Kanchana, a transgender woman who was brutally lynched to death by a criminal MLA, his wife and friend. They also hack her guardian Akber bhai and his son to death so as to illegally grab her.

At this stage, the film deepens into a moving narrative of the stigma faced by Kanchana as a transgender child; from being kicked out of her home by her very own father, to her eventually adopting and educating another transgirl, Geeta, to be a successful doctor. The film lays bare the ugliness of our society that perpetuates the social exclusion of transgender people in educational institutions and places of work. This comes to the fore as Kanchana narrates her hardships in getting Geeta admitted into a school. The film also denudes the perversity of our society that sexually taunts and objectifies transgender people with cuss words, expletives and profanity like *kojja* meaning eunuch, *chakka* meaning sissy or an effeminate guy and *point five/0.5*, a pejorative for a person who is neither male nor female in the eyes of society, among many other four letter words. The film tears into many such infamous stereotypes and trivializations of transgender people and shows them as individuals with enormous self respect, just as anyone else. Full marks to the director for showing the hijra and transgender community as separated from the others only by opportunity; actually by its denial. It also portrays that transgender

people are human beings like anyone else, but are gender dysphoric and shouldn't be stigmatised for it.

Some over-simplifications let the film down particularly when Kanchana during her speech at Geeta's college felicitation problematizes adults who choose to smoke, booze, gamble or loiter, insinuating that all such habits are social evils. The film on the whole gets full credit for being amongst the few of its kind that show transgender people in a fair light, as real people of aspirations, desires, strengths, inadequacies, insecurities and fears. Their views are not sensationalized and the film offers a responsible and a sensitive access to their lives and does justice to them. The director definitely deserves applause for this.