

Merry Christmas (2024 film)

Merry Christmas is a 2024 Indian neo-noir mystery thriller film directed by Sriram Raghavan and starring Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi. The film is produced by Ramesh Taurani, Jaya Taurani, Sanjay Routray and Kewal Garg under Tips Films and Matchbox Pictures. It is based on Frédéric Dard's French novel Le Monte-charge (Bird in a Cage). The 1962 French movie Paris Pick-Up was also based on the same novel.

The film was officially announced in December 2021. Principal photography commenced the same month in Mumbai along with a sporadic schedule in Uttar Pradesh, which was again followed with a schedule in the former location, and wrapped by mid-January 2023. The film has music composed by Pritam, cinematography handled by Madhu Neelakandan and editing by Pooja Ladha Surti.

After several postponements, Merry Christmas was released in theaters on 12 January 2024. Although the film received positive reviews, with the performances of Kaif and Sethupathi receiving praise, it was a box office failure.

Plot

In Bombay of the 1980s, Albert Arogyasami returns home after seven years, on Christmas Eve. Just outside his home, he is warmly welcomed by his elderly loving neighbor, who gifts him a bottle of his home-made wine [which he lovingly refers to as Yadhoom]. He also informs Albert that his mother is no more, and she died peacefully some time back. After inviting him for dinner, he leaves.

After surveying his long forlorn house, Albert goes to a restaurant/bar where he encounters a woman named Maria, who was supposed to be on a date with someone else. Her date had abandoned her because she had come with her mute daughter, Annie.

Coincidentally, after leaving the restaurant, he meets Maria and Annie at a cinema the same night, and they connect. Maria invites him to her apartment to celebrate Christmas Eve together. Albert introduces himself as an architect who has just returned from Dubai while Maria says she owns a bakery beneath her house. On reaching her home, Albert empties his pockets and hangs a "bird

Merry Christmas



Theatrical release poster

Directed by	Sriram Raghavan
Written by	Hindi Version: Sriram Raghavan Arijit Biswas Tamojit Das Pooja Ladha Surti Anukriti Pandey Tamil Version: Pratheep Kumar S Abdul Jabbar Prasanna Bala Natarajan Lata Karthikeyan
Based on	Le Monte-charge by Frédéric Dard
Produced by	Ramesh Taurani Jaya Taurani

in a cage" ornament that he had purchased earlier that evening onto Maria's Christmas tree. As they bond over wine and dancing, Maria reveals the problems she has with Jerome, her husband. Albert talks about Rosie, whom he had eloped to Goa with seven years ago and had passed away since. They decide to go out for a walk and Maria writes a note for her husband.

When they return to the apartment, they are shocked to find Jerome lying dead on the couch, with a gun in his hand. Maria suggests calling the police, but Albert says he does not want to be involved with the police again. He reveals that he had killed Rosie and had spent the last seven years in prison and had just been released that day. His presence could lead to unnecessary suspicion and tries to wipe off all his fingerprints from whatever he has touched. He is unable to find his toy bird cage before leaving.

Albert seeks solace with coffee at a stall nearby, but is surprised to see Maria walking down calmly with her child again. Intrigued, he follows Maria to midnight mass at the church. There, she pretends to faint and falls on Ronnie, a caterer. Albert intervenes to help and they soon end up at her home again, where Albert is surprised to find Jerome's body missing. When Maria goes away to put Annie to sleep, Ronnie reveals to Albert, his intentions to sleep with Maria. Albert notices that the toy bird cage is back on the tree again.

Maria asks Ronnie to drive her to the church again to find her lost watch. They drop off Albert on the way and head to the church. Albert however returns to Maria's home through a backdoor staircase and is shocked to discover Jerome's body in the exact same position again. When Ronnie and Maria return, Albert hears Maria ask Ronnie to call the police and report the body. As Maria comes to see Annie in her room, she finds Albert there and asks him to leave. As Albert climbs down the backdoor stairs, he sees the police. Scared, he tries to go back to Maria's home through the backdoor but finds it locked from the inside. Hence, he proceeds to go to the upper floor where he is flabbergasted at what he sees. Ronnie asks Maria to narrate all the events to the police but leave out Albert. The police, suspicious of Ronnie, take him to the station.

Maria goes to the upper floor, but is surprised to see Albert there. Albert reveals to her that he has found out that Maria had created a replica of her apartment as an alibi in the upper floor where she had taken him the first time and again the third time when he had come with Ronnie whereas the dead body was in the lower floor and she had taken him there the second time and also the final time when she came with Ronnie - thereby creating a situation as though Jerome was dead when she was away with a stranger - thus creating another alibi for her absence at the time of murder.

	Sanjay Routray <u>Kewal Garg</u> Anish Vikramaditya
Starring	<u>Katrina Kaif</u> <u>Vijay Sethupathi</u>
Cinematography	<u>Madhu</u> <u>Neelakandan</u>
Edited by	Pooja Ladha Surti
Music by	Songs: <u>Pritam</u> Score: Daniel B. George
Production companies	<u>Tips Films</u> <u>Matchbox</u> <u>Pictures</u>
Distributed by	<u>Pen Marudhar</u> <u>Entertainment</u> <u>UFO Moviez</u> (Hindi)
Release date	12 January 2024
Running time	144 minutes ^[2]
Country	India
Languages	Hindi Tamil
Budget	₹60 crore ^{[3][4]}
Box office	₹26.02 crore ^[5]

Maria breaks down and confesses to Albert that she killed Jerome. He was suspicious of her fidelity and abused her, and he also might have been abusing Annie, which has led to her being mute. She reveals how she spiked Jerome's drinks with his own drugs and killed him with his own gun in his own hand while loud music was playing upstairs when Albert came the first time. She also reveals how she took Annie to the lower floor through the backdoor stairs to put her in the bedroom, to avoid suspicion. Albert offers to help her. They decide to destroy the replica apartment. While doing so they find Ronnie's wallet hidden in the couch. Maria suggests that they destroy it, but when Albert sees Ronnie's happy family photo in the wallet, he holds on to it and decides to return it to "Lost & Found" section in the church the next day. He also asks Maria to give the toy bird cage to Annie as a gift from Santa and leaves for his apartment.

During the police interrogation, Ronnie talks about Albert and he was brought to the police station. As the postmortem report reveals it to be suicide, the police decides to let go of all the three - Ronnie, Albert, and Maria — and close the case. Just as they were about to leave, Ronnie admits that he couldn't find his wallet, which he had left at Maria's home so that he could have an excuse to come back. Ronnie puts forth a theory that a burglar might have killed Jerome and left with his wallet. Thus, the police deduces that whoever has the wallet might be the killer. Albert stands still as he knows the wallet is in his pocket. As everyone is about to leave, Annie reveals to the police that the bird cage was given to her by her "Santa" and points her finger at Albert - and speaks out the word "Santa". Everyone are glad that the child has started to speak again. But the police officials look at Maria with suspicion.

At this point, Albert knows that Annie would be left orphaned if Maria goes to jail. Albert quietly takes out Ronnie's wallet and hands it over to the police, implying that he stole the wallet. Albert takes out a diamond ring he carried around since the time he wanted to propose to Rosie, and proceeds to hand it over to Maria, implying that he stole that too. Maria realizes that he is turning himself in for the murder to save her. She tearfully implies that she is willing to marry him. Albert puts the ring on Maria's finger and turns himself in.

Cast

As per the film's closing credits:^[7]

Cast (Hindi)	Cast (Tamil)	Role (Hindi)	Role (Tamil)
<u>Vijay Sethupathi</u>		Albert	
<u>Katrina Kaif</u>		Maria	
<u>Ashwini Kalsekar</u>		Scarlett, Ronnie's Wife	
<u>Luke Kenny</u>		Jerome, Maria's husband	
<u>Pari Maheshwari Sharma</u>		Annie, Maria's daughter	
<u>Sanjay Kapoor</u>	<u>Kavin Jay Babu</u>	Ronnie Fernandes	
<u>Vinay Pathak</u>	<u>Shanmugarajan</u>	Police <u>Inspector</u> Paresh Kamdar	Police <u>Inspector</u> S. Devaraj
<u>Pratima Kazmi</u>	<u>Radhika Sarathkumar</u>	Police <u>Constable</u> Laxmi P.	
<u>Tinnu Anand</u>	<u>Rajesh</u>	"Yadhoom" Uncle	
<u>Radhika Apte</u>		Rosie (cameo)	
<u>Gayathrie</u>		Singer (cameo)	
<u>Sahil Vaid</u>		Maria's date (cameo)	

Production

Development

In January 2021, it was reported that director Sriram Raghavan had put his directorial venture *Ekkis*, starring Varun Dhawan, on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic and began working on a new project, which he reportedly approached Hindi actress Katrina Kaif and Saif Ali Khan to play the lead roles.^[8] Although Khan okayed the script, he was replaced by Tamil actor Vijay Sethupathi since the film required a fresh pairing.^{[8][9]} The film's launch was reported to be made in April, however, due to the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic and Kaif testing positive for COVID-19, the launch was delayed.^[10] On 25 December, the film was officially announced with Ramesh Taurani and Sanjay Routray as producers.^[11] The title "Merry Christmas" was suggested by Dinesh Vijan, when the director considered titles containing the word "raat" (night) such as *Raat Akeli Hai*, *Raat Ke Hamsafar* and *Baat Ek Raat Ki*.^[12]

Casting

Director Sriram Raghavan initially approached Saif Ali Khan for the role of Albert, since they had worked together in *Ek Hasina Thi* and *Agent Vinod*. Khan liked the subject of the movie and accepted the role, but later, the director changed his mind and selected Vijay Sethupathi for the lead role of Albert, thinking that Khan would not be the right fit for the role.^{[13][14]}

Producer Ramesh, while speaking to ETimes, said "Vijay suited the role perfectly so we approached him for this film." and "Katrina was always our only choice for the role right from the beginning."^[15] In early March 2022, Sanjay Kapoor was announced to play an important role in the Hindi version of the film.^[16] In April, Radhika Sarathkumar was also announced being a part of the cast of the Tamil version.^[17] Vinay

Pathak was announced as a part of the cast of the Hindi version in August. He was further more said to be playing a key role in the film.^[18] Shanmugarajan reprises Vinay Pathak's role in the Tamil version.^[19] In July 2023, Ashwini Kalsekar and Radhika Apte were announced to be playing a cameo in the film.^[20]

Filming

The principal photography began on 25 December 2021, with the first schedule in Mumbai.^[21] The shooting was put on hold in early January 2022, due to rising of COVID-cases.^[22] The shooting started again in early February in Filmistan Studio in Mumbai.^[23] Sanjay started filming his portions in March.^[16] Katrina continued filming her portions on 11 March.^[24] The first schedule concluded in March. The second schedule commenced on 19 March in a studio in Chitrakoot. The schedule was said to be 45-days long.^[25]

Raadhika Sarathkumar started filming her portions in April.^[17] Due to an fire incident in the district in August, the schedule was moved to a studio in Vrindavan.^[18] The second schedule finished in November. In the third schedule, which commenced in November in Mumbai, pictures of Katrina, Sethupathi and Kapoor from the sets were released on social media's by paparazzi's.^[26] Further more pictures were taken few more days after the former.^[27] The principal photography wrapped in January 2023, with an official confirmation on Sethupathi's birthday.^[28]

Post-production

Raghavan started the post-production works in mid November 2022, as the filming was in the last schedule.^[27] Raghavan, in May 2023, revealed that the film is a bilingual film, meaning that it was simultaneously shot in Hindi and Tamil languages.^[19] The film marks Raghavan's and Kaif's debut in Tamil cinema. Each version will reportedly have a different set of co-actors.^[29] Deepa Venkat dubbed for Katrina's character in the Tamil version of the film.

Music

The music is composed by Pritam, marking his Tamil debut.^[30] The audio rights were acquired by Tips Music.^[31] The first single titled "Merry Christmas Title Track" was released on 25 December 2023. The second single titled "Nazar Teri Toofan" was released on 4 January 2024.^[32] The third single titled "Raat Akeli Thi" was released on 10 January 2024.^[33]

All lyrics are written by Varun Grover

Hindi

No.	Title	Singer(s)	Length
1.	"Merry Christmas - Title Track"	Ash King	2:32
2.	"Nazar Teri Toofan"	Papon	4:03
3.	"Raat Akeli Thi"	Arijit Singh, Antara Mitra	4:24
4.	"Dil Ki Mez"	Shalmali Kholgade	3:37
Total length:			14:36

All lyrics are written by Yugabharathi

Tamil

No.	Title	Singer(s)	Length
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1.	"Merry Christmas - Title Track"	<u>Benny Dayal</u>	2:32
2.	"Anbe Vidai"	<u>Sreerama Chandra</u>	4:03
3.	"Kanadha Kadal"	<u>Karthik</u> , <u>Anusha Mani</u>	4:24
4.	"Neela Ravile"	<u>Jonita Gandhi</u>	3:37
Total length:			14:36

All lyrics are written by Chandra Bose

Telugu

No.	Title	Singer(s)	Length
1.	"Merry Christmas - Title Track"	<u>Sreerama Chandra</u>	2:32
2.	"Edhi Edhi"	<u>Sreerama Chandra</u>	4:03
3.	"Theliyade Theliyade"	<u>Sreerama Chandra</u> , <u>Anusha Mani</u>	4:24
4.	"Vedi Chenthane"	<u>Jonita Gandhi</u>	3:37
Total length:			14:36

<i>Merry Christmas</i>	
Soundtrack album by Pritam	
Released	24 January 2024
Recorded	2022-23
Genre	Feature film soundtrack
Length	14:36 (All Versions)
Language	Hindi <div>Telugu</div> <div>Tamil</div>
Label	<u>Tips Music</u>
Pritam chronology	
<i>Dunki</i> (2023)	<i>Merry Christmas</i> (2024)

Release

Theatrical

Merry Christmas was initially set to release in cinemas on 23 December 2022, but got delayed due to production delays.^[34] Then it was planned for a December 2023 release, before being rescheduled to 12 January 2024.^[35]

Home media

The streaming rights were bought by Netflix for ₹60 crore (US\$7.5 million)^{[36][3]} and premiered on 8 March 2024.^[37]

Reception

Critical response

On the review aggregator website Rotten Tomatoes, 89% of 18 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 6.5/10.^[38]

In Film Companion, Rahul Desai described the film as "exceptional and remarkably moving... a sublime deconstruction of the romantic thriller" and highlighted the "self-contained" chemistry between Kaif and Sethupathi. He praised the duo's performances and especially singled out Kaif for giving "a performance within a performance", in which she "nails the ambiguity of a mother disguised as a woman".^[39] Saibal Chatterjee of NDTV gave 3.5 stars out of 5 and hailed the film as "a delightfully inventive cinematic ride that employs a very 1980s Hindi cinema soundscape and an evocative and transportive colour palette". He

liked the contrast between Kaif and Sethupathi and opined that the former gave "one of most convincing screen performances of her career, portraying confusion and vulnerability cloaked in occasional flashes of steely determination".^[1] Shubhra Gupta of *The Indian Express* gave 3 stars out of 5 and felt that "Despite their unusual pairing, Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi manage to work together, as she once more demonstrates her acting prowess behind all the pancake and bump-and-grind."^[40] Monika Rawal Kukreja of *Hindustan Times* said that "You won't jump out of this Vijay Sethupathi and Katrina Kaif film when it comes to any major surprise or the conclusion, but you will enjoy excellent cinematography clever writing and an interesting movie that keeps you on the edge of your seat. Even if you only see it once, Sriram Raghavan's cinematic universe is worth watching."^{[41][42]}



Critics praised the performances of Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi.

Anuj Kumar of *The Hindu* called the movie "a sumptuous slice of crime" and said, "In this noirish story of a long night, Katrina Kaif and Vijay Sethupathi make a surprising duo that works well together. The story's crux is more interesting than the conclusion."^[43] Sukanya Verma of *Rediff.com* gave 4 stars out of 5 and praised the performance and direction, she wrote "You'll be sighing in Merry Christmas as you've never sighed in a Sriram Raghavan film before thanks to its amazing climax."^[44] Lachmi Deb Roy of *Firstpost* wrote in her review that "The movie is guaranteed to bring back fond memories for everyone who loves Bombay, particularly for those who adore the Regal theatre, Colaba's alleyways, and the ancient, architecturally stunning homes. The leisurely pacing of the film adds to its allure. Undoubtedly, a Merry Christmas is a unique experience."^[45] Giving the film 4 stars, Devesh Sharma of *Filmfare* summarised it as "a dark comedy that will make you smile and scratch your head at the same time... a noir that showcases the triumph of human spirit and compassion". He further praised Sethupathi for delivering "another solid performance" and Kaif for showing "she can stand and deliver... in perhaps, her first full-fledged dramatic role".^[46]

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