



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Interpretation Of Fear & Silence: Psychoanalysis Of "Manichitrathazhu" And "Bhoothakaalam"

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Abstract

Just like how the youngsters go fan craze on romantic comedies, some love the idea of getting thrilled by watching horror films. Such viewers crave all kinds of frightening experiences. The most looked at factor in horror films is the idea of fear. Fear is never a positive feeling. It causes the inevitable depth of distress and tension. The element of fear and silence is unavoidable in the genre of horror and thrillers. This paper looks at how the genre of horror is connected with the psychology of a person, and how the elements of fear and silence are being portrayed in horror films by analyzing 'Manichitrathazhu' (1993) and 'Bhoothakaalam' (2022). Though the fear and silence inculcate anxiety and uneasiness in the viewers, still there are people who prefer watching horror movies over other genres.

The Malayalam film industry witnessed prominent script writers, directors, and cinematographers from the film *Manichitrathazhu* (1993) to *Bhoothakaalam* (2022) and also to the most recent film in the genre of horror, *Romancham* (2023). It was a common misunderstanding that the Malayalam film industry lacks prestige in horror genres. But the recent *Bhoothakaalam* and *Romancham* change their fate. No matter how distorted, disgusting, or scary the film portrays, some people still prefer to enjoy watching a horror film than the rest. Back in time, horror stories were just narrative tales said by grandparents to children. Even before the Malayalam film industry brought out horrific, yet outstanding characters like *Ganga in Manichitrathazhu* (1993), *Ganga in Aakashaganga* (1994), *Rosy Samuel in Meghasandesham* (2001), *Indu in Vellinakshatram* (2004), *Aathira in Yakshiyum Njanum* (2010), Malayalam audience could never forget the impact the characters like *Kathanar in Kadamattathu Kathanar* (2004) and *Neeli in Kalliyankattu Neeli* (1979) had on them.

They were called 'Yakshis' in common who awaits to feed on travelers in the dark forests. Yakshis belonged to Indian folklore. Stories when narrated have a setting of a moonlit blue shade, a beautiful long-haired woman in white, with the heavy tinkling of her anklets, bloodshot eyes, yet the eyes are perfect in shape, long and sharp cuspids, her long sari pallu flying in the air. Narratives always portray them to be seated in silhouette palm trees, whistling away, awaiting to suck blood from people. This was seen as the typical characteristic given to such horrific characters in most horror films of Malayalam. (Shahbaz)

In *Manichitrathazhu*, directed by Fazil, when Unnithan (Innocent) and Dasappan Kutty (K. B. Ganesh Kumar) revisit Madampally at night, the audience is shown they get scared to hear the anklet sound, which is followed by a spotlighting, foggy scene of a woman in her saree, with long hair walking around. This particular scene itself gives chills to the viewers and Unnithan and Dasappan, which makes them run from Madampally. But later it is understood that it was Ganga (Shobana) who was just wandering around in Madampally house (Fazil 6:54-7:35). Whereas in *Bhoothakaalam*, directed by Rahul Sadasivan, even though the movie itself is categorized as a drama, one could expect scary scenes and literal nightmares. Following the death of their family member, Asha (Revati) and her son Vinu (Shane Nigam) experience a few mysterious events which shake their sense of living and question their sanity. Though the movie from the beginning portrays few supernatural energy in their house, it is only towards the end of the film that the image of the supernatural is shown in complete darkness, we

the audience, and Asha and Vinu could only see a silhouette of them, except the young girl (Sadasivan 1:35:11 - 1:40:51). Both the directors of the films leaves it to us to interpret the films. Both appear as psychological thrillers, where in *Manichitrathazhu*, Ganga moves to a house that is filled with grand tellings and mysterious stories of supernatural energy. It is Dr. Sunny Joseph (Mohanlal) who realizes that Ganga has a history of a psychotic disorder (dual personality). Ganga was welcomed into a house of old stories of paranormal energy and superstitious beliefs. The sympathy Ganga felt for the oppressed character of Nagavalli, slowed turns into empathy. Ganga was herself imagining to be Nagavalli. Her subconscious mind was slowly turning into the character of Nagavalli. In *Bhoothakaalam*, we see Asha who has a history of clinical depression. The unemployed situation of Vinu makes Asha emotionally, and physically drained. This is a film about psychological disorders in connection with the element of fear. When Vinu is encountered with the horrific happenings in the house, all believe that there is something not right about him. It was only towards the end Asha too realises the truth of the paranormal energy in that house. But rather than a psychological drama, one could also see these films as pure horror films. In *Manichitrathazhu* even before Ganga gets to know the actual story of Nagavalli, and the prohibited *Thekini* room, just when she opens *Thekini*, Sridevi (Vinaya Prasad) comes to Ganga to let her know that since she opened the lock, few accidents had occurred to their dear ones. Ganga who has this psychic disorder has eminent powers within herself as she is seen breaking things and setting objects to fire unconsciously. In *Bhoothakaalam*, Asha's neighbor tells the counselor, George (Saiju Kurup) who comes to talk to Vinu regarding his problems that there has been a suicidal history in that house. People hung up for an unknown reason. This information leads the counselor to investigate more about people who rented in that house, and by the end of the film, everyone realizes that the house did have paranormal energy within. (Sadasivan 1:04:01 - 1:06:17)

The usage of extreme close-up shots of the subject's face can make the viewers relate to the emotions and terror faced. In horror films, an extreme close-up shot is shown to express emotions without words. Shots of Ganga's eyes when she unknowingly turns into Nagavalli, and the element of fear seen in the face of Vinu, when he gets locked inside his grandmother's room are extreme close-up shots.

The term for silence used in films is called "filmic silence". Filmic silence is defined as the lack of sound in a scene where only a quiet ambient track is present. Dr. Mark Griffiths, psychologist and Director of the International Gaming Research Unit in the Psychology Division at Nottingham Trent University, wrote for *Psychology Today*, saying:

According to a 2004 paper in the *Journal of Media Psychology* by Dr. Glenn Walters, the three primary factors that make horror films alluring are tension (generated by suspense, mystery, terror, shock, and gore), relevance (that may relate to personal relevance, cultural meaningfulness, the fear of death, etc.), and (somewhat paradoxically given the second factor) unrealism. (Griffiths)

Sigmund Freud contributed much to the field of psychoanalysis. According to Freud, the human mind consists of three parts; the conscious, the subconscious, and the unconscious. The conscious mind is that which is within the awareness of any given individual. Sub-conscious on the other hand can be called a depository, where memories that need to be recalled quickly are saved. As far as Freud is concerned, the events that happen in one's childhood are of utmost importance. Any neurological symptoms expressed by an individual often date back to some events that happened earlier in their life. An incident that took place in childhood which is either shameful, guilty, or painful is repressed by the mind (Freud). This is reflected in *Manichitrathazhu*, where we see Ganga falls into an utter state of loneliness and sadness when her parents leave her with her grandmother and leave for Calcutta. This incident plants roots in Ganga's mind which is later discovered by Dr. Sunny. Further, this paper analyses the film *Manichitrathazhu* using Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory.

The plotline of *Manichitrathazhu* revolves around an old house called Madampally, which is said and believed to be haunted. The newly married Calcutta couples Nakulan (Suresh Gopi) and Ganga visit their relatives in Kerala. They decide to stay at Madampally despite their relative's warnings. Ganga is fascinated by the stories told by Bhasura (K. P. A. C. Lalitha) and the superstitious beliefs that come along with these stories of Nagavalli and *Thekkini*. As the plot moves forward, with the help of Dr. Sunny we realize that it is Ganga who has unconsciously taken up the character of Nagavalli. The psychoanalytic theory believes that human behavior is deterministic. It is driven by the unconscious as well as biological drives. Freud's initial cases of psychopathology led him to conclude that abnormal behavior could be associated with traumatic childhood experiences that were long forgotten. Though after Ganga's initial mental breakdown, the possibility of another psychic breakdown still

remained strong in her. After coming to Madampally, Ganga is so taken up by the tragic character of Nagavalli. Towards the end, when Ganga fully develops into the character of Nagavalli, who is seeking revenge, sees her husband Nakulan as Sankaran Thampi, the one that killed her. The non-diegetic sounds throughout the film play an important role. Freud said that it is the unconscious that exposes the true feelings, emotions, and thoughts of the individual. Dr. Sunny uses hypnosis at the end of the movie to cure Ganga completely of her mental disorder.

In *Bhoothakaalam*, the movie revolves around the distorted relationship between Asha and Vinu. The director Sadasivan creates a scary filter with a static frame, as we see the sleeplessness of Vinu's grandmother. On whole, the film is happening at a slow pace, which makes out the brilliance of the cinematography. Static shots and the element of silence throughout the film make the scenes more horrific. As silence is majorly observed in shots each sudden increase of the sound, and the minimal dialogue itself make one scared. This is the brilliance of the cinematographer Shehnad Jalal. The counselor suggesting his experience could be a sign of his hallucinations makes the audience question whether the film discusses psychological issues or paranormal ones. People suggesting this could all be happening in the mind of Vinu is the exact reaction of how people react to such situations. The setting of the house in a common, busy surrounding which completely looks normal from the outside, to the ghostly happenings in the film makes *Bhoothakaalam* a unique horror story. (“*Bhoothakaalam Is A Stand-Out Psychological Horror Film*”)

Thus, both the films *Manichitrathazhu* and *Bhoothakaalam* can be seen as horror films and also psychological dramas or thrillers. The elements of fear and silence themselves are seen as separate characters from the plotline, which makes the make more intrigued to the audience. Freud's repression, return, revictimization, and reconnection theory is stretched out in the film *Manichitrathazhu*. If the element of silence did not have much impact, the film *Bhoothakaalam* would have lost its horror element.

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