



PREMEDITATION AND PSYCHIC CONFLICT: A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING OF THE CHARACTER STANLEY DAS IN THE FILM KALAMKAVAL

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Abstract: This paper offers a psychoanalytical reading of the character Stanley Das from the film Kalamkaval, theoretically grounded in the paradoxical dynamic between premeditation and psychic conflict, as key factors that shape his persona and his *modus operandi*. Using Freud's "The Ego and the Id" (1923), a structural model of the character's psyche can be drawn, which formulates premeditation above the realms of mere calculation. It gives us a deeper understanding of the mental tug of war between instinctual drives (Id) and the conceptualized strictures of the superego. Stanley's heinous murders play at his compromised formations that stem from his lingering repressed tensions. Jacques Lacan's structural psychoanalysis is also used to decipher how Stanley's motifs are driven by language, law and social inscription. This paper takes inspiration from the works of Lacan and Freud to reveal the instability following Stanley Das's premeditated choices.

Index Terms: Psychoanalysis, Premeditation, Psychic Conflict, Freud, Lacan

INTRODUCTION

The Malayalam film Kalamkaval, a masterpiece by Jithin K Jose which features Mammooty as the lead antagonist named Stanley Das. He stands out from the contemporary and niche villains often portrayed in Malayalam films. Unlike other crime-thriller films that present a one-sided focus on the investigation leading up to the climax and then reveal the killer, this film shows the audience the progress of the investigation and the murder scenes, which reveal the killer's intentions and approach. The killer targets many bachelorette and divorced women who are easy prey and are overlooked by society which allows him to evade unnecessary attention. He stands out from the regular antagonists in Malayalam Cinema, where revenge and trauma are key driving factors. His targets are mainly those who catch his eye, he murders people for the pure thrill of it. His intentions behind the murders are purely internal, repetitive and as acts that derives pleasure. Stanley Das is showcased as a psychopathic serial killer, yet until it has been revealed that he is a police officer in charge of the investigation of murders that he has committed which brings a major change in perspective for the audience as it offers a new layer of depth and meaning to his character. His dual existence as a law enforcer and as a law violator creates a compelling tension between his institutional identity and hidden impulse. The contradictory elements associated with the dual existence he embodies paves the way for psychoanalytical interpretation, and also the serenity and the lack of regret in his actions invoke psychoanalytic scrutiny. This paper brings to light the unconscious

drives and symbolic tensions that shape his premeditated choices. Through Freudian and Lacanian frameworks, a theoretical understanding of psychic disturbance embedded within institutional power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Though the film *Kalamkaval* has gained much attention from mainstream medias like *The Film Fare* and *The Times of India*, the psychological intensity and its critical engagement is yet to be completely absorbed by the vast majority of the population. Though the character Stanley Das has received widespread attention purely on the basis of how well written and in sync the actor is in with the character, a theoretical explanation on how the psyche of said character works and what drives him forward is yet to be given.

Psychoanalysis and film theory has gone hand in hand for a very long time. Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (1923) give us the three-part model of the psyche, while *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) introduced the idea of the death drive (Thanatos). Lacan drew inspiration from Freud's work, stating that the unconscious is similar to a language and that idiosyncrasy is created within the Symbolic order.

Scholars like Christian Metz and Slavoj Žižek have employed the use of psychoanalysis to decode cinema, theorizing that film characters are often mirrored versions of repressed cultural anxieties. Key concepts of repression, masculinity, and authority have always been observed through a psychoanalytical lens, this paper aims at achieving a similar result for the film.

RESEARCH GAP

Kalamkaval, a film which has gained traction due to its exquisite performance, non-linear narrative and thrilling plot twists and earned a name amongst critics, has been tunnel visioned by many on the theoretical aspects surrounding the functioning of the main antagonist of the plot. Stanley Das, labelled as a typical psychopath by society, is subjected to a decreased and desensitized view on the entirety of the character. Labels such as this often undermine the narrative impact and the psychological complexity of the character. Though few studies have attempted to uncover the complexity and depth surrounding the character using the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan. Stanley's actions warrant questions regarding unconscious desire, moral limits, identity and authority – topic which are yet to be explored with the help of theories put forth by Freud and Lacan. Freud's Id, Ego, and Superego, or Lacan's Symbolic order and desire as lack, gives us a deeper understanding of Stanley's character. Consequently, there is an opportunity for a more detailed theoretical examination of the character. This paper targets to close the above mentioned gaps using a psychoanalytic study of Stanley Das, adding to detail to the narrative and director brilliance of the film, contributing to further the vastness of Malayalam Film Studies.

ANALYSIS

The concept of Death Drive in Stanley Das's persona

The opening scene sets out an example of Stanley Das's way of killing. In this scene, after an intimate moment, he casually strangles his partner to death without any visible struggle or external triggering factor, which showcases the dominance of his premeditated instinct over any relational attachment. That one moment of closeness turns into an array of violence that really questions Stanley's character. This can be answered through the psychoanalytic concept called the death drive, proposed by Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Freud, 1920/1961). In this work, he says "In so far as conscious impulses always have some relation to pleasure or unpleasure, pleasure and unpleasure too can be regarded as having a psycho-physical relation to conditions of stability and instability". In this particular scene, he had conversations about the thrill and pleasures in murder, in which he mentions the risk behind killing something is the thing that actually gives pleasure to the killing; "The Greater the Risk, the greater the satisfaction" and he mentions "The greatest pleasure is when you kill a human!" (*Kalamkaval* 00:09:00-00:09:38) which justifies the above statements. Thus, the actions of Stanley Das can be interpreted as something that comes without a second thought, as an instinctual drive.

The Ego as Mask and Strategy

Stanley's participation in the investigation of crimes he personally done shows the adaptive functioning of the Ego. In the Ego and the Id (Freud, 1923/1960) by Sigmund Freud, he explains "This ego includes consciousness and it controls the approaches to motility, *i.e.* to the discharge of excitations into the external world; it is this institution in the mind which regulates all its own constituent processes, and which goes to sleep at night, though even then it continues to exercise a censorship upon dreams". Like the actions we see of Stanley in the film, he is able to perform the duties of a police officer without raising any suspicions. He remains calm, composed and focused in his interactions with others. This doesn't mean he lacks behavioural structure rather it deploys his capability to use his knowledge and roles in a careful controlled way. His position within the system acts as a safety net and he has been able to double check his actions and easily hide which makes it difficult to catch him.

The Dysfunctional Superego

Freud, in his work states "Whereas the ego is essentially the representative of the external world, of reality, the super-ego stands in contrast to it as the representative of the internal world, of the id." (Freud, 1923/1960). Freud ascertains that in some cases of pathological conditions, the Superego fails to regulate aggression. Stanley's state is a perfect example of it. In multiple post-crime scenes, Stanley exhibits neither anxiety nor remorse. He lacks the basic emotion of guilt or tension after a murder, what follows him is a wave of pleasure, one which feels like natural to him. His lack of internal conflicts indicates a structurally weakened Superego. His psyche after the murders cater to that of a morally decayed one, blurring the lines connecting it to momentary impulses.

Lacanian Symbolic Order and Institutional Identity

Lacan says "Henceforth it is the symbolic, not the imaginary, that is seen to be the determining order of the subject, and its effects are radical: the subject, in Lacan's sense, is himself an effect of the symbolic." (Lacan, 1978). Stanley's position within the police institution situates him as a representative of the Law itself. However, his secret transgressions expose a rupture between symbolic authority and ethical integrity. His position as a legal enforcer allows him to walk the path of both an enforcer and a violator without any consequences. The rush he gets each time he gets past the clutches of the investigating officers by manipulating the evidence and taking advantage of his position as a police officer to roam free even after committing mass murders drives him forward. The uniform serves both as a signifier of legitimacy and a get out jail free card that ends up saving his life multiple times.

Desire and Lack

Conventional motives fail to explain the violent acts done by Stanley. Lacan's theory of the desire as lack, "Desire (fundamentally in the singular) is a perpetual effect of symbolic articulation. It is not an appetite: it is essentially excentric and insatiable." (Lacan, 1977) provides a more detailed view on how his actions are a result of an unarticulated void within. With each murder his lust and thirst grow more and more. His thirst for blood starts very early in the life, the first taste he has gotten of taking a life was of smaller animals, which grew in size after each kill, capping out at an all-time high after he murders a classmate which solidified his love for the hunt and the ecstasy derived from it. The power and authority he felt by taking the lives of many and getting away with it gives him a false sense of supremacy and the belief that the law is below him. Desire, according to Lacan is an endless cycle built through absence. The more he kills, the more the lack intensifies.

FINDINGS

- Freud's the Id and death drive helps explain what drives Stanley's persona
- His mental make is adaptive yet structurally void
- His Superego appears to be either absent or structurally unstable
- His standing as a police officer functions as a safety net that makes up for unprecedented risks while carrying out the murders
- According to Lacan, the violent acts done by him are a reflection of an endless pursuit of lack

Stanley stands apart from the usual genre of villains seen in Malayalam films as he operates as a representative of disfigured modern subjectivity within institutional systems of power.

CONCLUSION

A psychoanalytical reading of Stanley Das in Kalamkaval portrays a character driven by both violence and moral contradiction. Freud's structural model explains the lack of balance or instability between instinct and morality, while Lacan's structural psychoanalysis reveals the instability of identity created within institutional language. Stanley's calm demeanor and calculated moves add a new layer of depth to his menacing tone. He showcases the coexistence of brutality and social integration. Through psychoanalysis, we observe that the murders he committed are not simply narrative devices but creations of psychic disintegration. This study aids in Malayalam film criticism by emphasizing psychoanalytic interpretation and furthers studies of psychological complexity in Indian cinema.

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