

Irony in Victimisation: Psychological Trauma and Sexual Delinquency on the Anti-Heroic Characters of the Movies *Orphan* and *Ratsasan*

Ann Mary Joju

Assistant Professor

Department of Functional English

Little Flower College, Guruvayoor, Kerala, India

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

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Abstract

Psycho-thriller movies are not just mere representations of mentally disabled or deranged people, but a true expression of their inner feelings and emotions on a higher degree of impact. The movies *Orphan* and *Ratsasan* exhibit a sense of otherness, which the major characters named Esther and Christopher as they are excluded from their ease and comforts of life, right from their childhood by people accusing them as insane or criminals. This paper thoroughly examines their characters to excavate the major hidden reasons behind their crimes that are portrayed in these movies. This study explores the social contexts of traumatic experiences and the narrative strategies writers employ in fictions of trauma to engage readers in the ethical dilemmas of trauma.

Keywords: Trauma, Psycho-thrillers, Victimization, Self, Childhood, identity crisis

Contribution/Originality: This study explores the social contexts of traumatic experiences and the narrative strategies writers/directors employ in fictions/movies on trauma to engage readers in the ethical dilemmas of trauma.

Introduction

A movie is a genre of entertainment which is a recording of moving images that tells a story. People watch them on a screen or television. Psychological Thrillers are the subgenre of thriller movies which portray the delusional or unstable psychological perceptions of people through mystery, murder, drama, action and paranoia. As equal as thrillers, psychological thrillers also arouse excitement, tension, fear, suspense in the minds of audience in which the story is told through the viewpoint of the psychologically stressed character. The protagonists of the movies will have serious and rare mental illness and a tendency to harm others through eerie and unpredictable actions. They stand powerful by their unusual appearance and unnatural deeds. This genre of thrillers has a serious differentiation from psychological horror movies which depict supernatural elements more than reality.

Peter Hutchings states that varied films have been labelled psychological thrillers, but it usually refers to “narratives with domesticated settings in which action is suppressed and where thrills are provided instead via investigations of the psychologies of the principal characters” (Hutchings 253). The consistent themes of psychological thrillers are death, existence, purpose, identity mind, perception and reality.

The field of Trauma Studies in literary criticism gained special attention in 1996 with the publication Cathy Caruth’s “Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History and Kali Tal’s Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma.” Trauma is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and character. Cathy, through her notion of trauma contends whereby we come to a new understanding that permits history to arise where immediate understanding is impossible.

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing, and it is at this specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the

psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience and the language of literature meet.
(Caruth 1)

The methodology used in the given study is an analytical approach towards the psychological impact of traumatic experiences faced by humans from their families and society, and a sense of 'Othering' which makes them evolve into serial killers, in the two movies: *Orphan* and *Ratsasan*. This study tries to explain how rejection or lack of a good caretaker leads to the traumatic experiences and to unfold the past of the protagonists of the chosen movies as the sole cause of their traumatic experiences.

Orphan (2009), a movie directed by Jaume Collet-Serra, a Spanish film director and producer. It is a highly thrilling movie which visualizes the central character Esther (Leena Klammer) who is affected by Hypopituitarism, a disease which diminishes hormone secretion by the pituitary gland, causing dwarfism in children and premature ageing in adults. Kate and John Coleman adopt a 9 years old girl from St. Marina Orphanage to rebuild their devastated life after the death of their baby. They get charmed by Esther very soon because of her intelligent mannerisms and she was soon welcomed by their deaf and muted younger daughter Max but not by their son Daniel. As the plot develops Esther shows some unusual reactions and talks something more than a child about the love making between Kate and John. Shocked by this Kate investigates about her past life from the previous institutions and finds that she is a 33 years old woman who is affected by the disease. Meanwhile, Esther kills the principal of her orphanage, Sister Abigail who visits their home for revealing her true past. Max and Daniel get afraid of her and she threatens them for hiding this act. Finally, she attempts to kill Daniel at the hospital but he falls into a coma and then she tries to seduce John by making him drunk. She stabs John as he refuses and scolds her for behaving like this. Returning from the hospital Kate wrathfully attempts to chase and kill her, and at last Esther drowns into the ice water as Kate does not give a hand.

In this movie one minor character Dr. Varava plays an important role in making Kate realize the truth about Esther's past. Dr. Varava reveals on phone:

My name is Dr. Varava. I'm calling from the Saarne Institute. I've just seen the picture that you sent to us. She has a rare hormonal disorder. It's called Hypopituitarism. It causes proportional dwarfism. She only looks like a child. According to our records, Leena Klammer was born in 1976. She's 33 years old! (Orphan 01:12:11)

The second movie that has been chosen for the study is *Ratsasan* (2018). This Tamil psychological thriller movie is directed by Ram Kumar, an Indian film director and writer. This movie is all about a serial killer murdering school girls. In the beginning of the movie, we get to see the corpse of a teenage girl who was brutally murdered. Arun Kumar (Vishnu Vishal), an aspiring filmmaker wants to make a movie based on a serial killer. However, the rejections that he faced in every step of his life and the pressure from his family force him to become a Sub Inspector of Police. The plot kicks in when Amutha, a teenage school girl is found murdered. Her parents find a mutilated doll's head in a gift box that was attached to their dog's collar. Arun finds out that the murder of Amutha is connected to the murder of Samyuktha, who was killed a few days prior to this incident. The researches that he had done for his script help him to realize that it was a psycho at work. Soon, another couple of murders occur and one being his personal loss increased his resolve to catch the murderer. Later the identity of the murderer was revealed to be Mary Fernandez. Arun finds more information about the case from Rajamanickkam, the investigating officer. When Rajamanickkam finds a clue about the psycho in the files, he is killed by Mary. Arun later discovers that Rajamanickkam was trying to tell him that the serial killer was not Mary, but her son Christopher who had been affected with Werner syndrome that caused him to look like an old man. He was rejected by everyone in the school except Sofiya, who took pity on him. Later she rejects him when he proposed her and tells him that he is impotent. Christopher was heartbroken and ridiculed at school. He with the help of Mary abducts and kills Sofiya. Towards the end of the movie, Arun kills Christopher after a prolonged fight. The movie ends with the media reporting that Christopher was the psycho behind this chain of murders. And also, Arun gets a chance to make a movie about a psycho.

Normally people consider disabled individuals as 'the other' and thus these individuals face a lot of rejection in their daily lives. They lose their love and care from other people and therefore might anxiously overreact to such rejections with anger and vengeance. But not all

mental illnesses will cause harm to others. This study tries to explore how people are marginalized due to their different ability. It also tries to find out how rejection and attachment play crucial roles in one's life.

This paper attempts to explain how rejection and attachment can affect one's life. Both attachment and rejection come under the psychological genre that describes the nature of emotional attachment between humans. This research mainly focuses on the rejection faced by people due to some or the other disabilities. The people who experience such a condition endure severe emotional pain. They might react to the rejections that they face with rage and violence.

O'Kearney R and his crew of critics have reviewed on the 'Theory of Trauma' in their article named "Trauma Narratives in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review" which was published in 2006. It focuses on nineteen empirical studies that are providing evidence about the nature of trauma narratives in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Selected studies had participants with a diagnosis of PTSD or with PTSD symptoms. The studies used either linguistic indices or participant's rating of narrative quality. "Dissociation in Children's Trauma Narratives: An Exploratory Investigation" by Kenardy J, examines the themes and concurrent and future trauma symptoms in children's trauma narratives. A diagnostic interview was conducted among children belonging to different age groups. Children in trauma narratives were more likely to show symptoms of hyper arousal, but not other symptoms of PTSD, at 6 months post-trauma.

Esther Coleman/Leena Clammer is the main character and antagonist in the movie *Orphan*. She is a woman who can be defined as a violent psychopath. The trauma that she faces in her entire life causes irreversible damage to her psyche. Esther is very intelligent, highly manipulative and extremely charming when necessary and lacks regret when she commits crime. She has the power to induce fear, empathy and admiration. Esther/Leena suffers from a pituitary disorder that causes her to be a proportional dwarf. She is neither a physically grown woman, nor quite a child. This can be considered as the first and foremost reason behind her trauma when she started to pile up a matured girl's physical desires as it was hard for her to have an adult relationship with a "normal" man, which she really yearns for.

Esther was sexually abused by her father since infancy. He informed her that she would never be a real woman when he took on a new sexual partner. It pushed her into insanity and she killed her father and his girlfriend. Subsequently, she was caught and placed in a mental institution named 'Saarne Institute'. Esther became one of the most violent patients in Saarne Institute and continued struggling against her restraints causing scars on her wrist and neck by herself. She wears ribbons to cover these marks. Then she escaped from the hospital and attracted an American family into adopting her. She tried to seduce her adoptive father and killed him and his family and set fire to the house when her attempt failed. The story runs as a back-story which never displayed in the real course of the movie until she met Coleman's at an American orphanage.

At first glance we see Esther as a quiet, peaceful and kind girl with many talents. But her dark days of infancy made her grow up as an evil, psychotic and manipulative character who would do anything to satisfy her lust for other men, to threaten and to attack and even to murder. She had been repeatedly raped as a child by her own father for many years and destroys any chance that Leena could ever have her own children, and sexualizes her at a young age. After escaping from the Saarne, she worked as a prostitute in Estonia for many years, mostly for pedophiles.

Esther/ Leena is a woman who suffered the sexual abuse from her father during her infancy. She became a mere flesh when she was seeking true love and care. She had never received a sincere parental relationship with her father and also faced terrible circumstances in her age of blooming. Leena loses her identity as she gets into the trauma and loses her childhood fun with her peer groups. She became a mere tool to be used to quench her father's sexual desires and was denied a caretaker's affection and protection at the very young age, while other children of her own age enjoyed every single moment of happiness with their families. Thus, she faces the dilemma of identity crisis of being her dad's sex mate as well as a daughter. Her heart shatters when her father tells her that she could not become a real grown-up woman and she confronts the major shocking reality which becomes the main reason behind her subsequent acts of violence. The rejection experienced from her own father shoves her into an utter despair to hate every

single person she meets and tries to destroy their peaceful family life by intense desire to have sex with her immature body. Rejection and lack of attachment or a perfect caregiver makes her a little prostitute who yearns for pedophiles. Her never-ending desire for sex makes her a killer and violent antagonist in the movie when men refuse to satisfy her as John does at the movie's end. She acts as a highly talented child in music, painting and speaking, to attract the Coleman family. They feel very contented with her nature and quiet behavior. We cannot say that at first Esther was eager to have sex with John, but it can be her innocent wish to get a true parental relationship with him that she missed during her childhood.

The caregiver shapes a child's personality. This would be the reason for Esther's evil acts that we come across in the movie. For her, sex was everything she could do to save her life. She was being rejected and alienated in her house. Thus, she yearns for a true care and protection from Kate and John that she received in the initial days. But, the lovemaking moment of her adoptive parents witnessed by Esther awakens her dormant sexual desires and a thought of her actual age. It evokes physical attraction towards John in her. The word 'f***k' from a nine-year old child shocks Kate who finds something unusual about her character and upbringing. The dark days of her childhood made her to misinterpret a true relationship just as 'sex' or physical intercourse.

The main plot of the movie *Ratsasan* is about a serial killer murdering teenage girls. The movie begins with the murder of a girl followed by a number of other murders of the girls belong to the same age group. Christopher has been affected with Werner syndrome which is also known as adult progeria, a rare autosomal recessive disorder that is characterized by the appearance of premature aging. Usually, the victims of such disorders are rejected by others in our society.

The situation is the same in the case of Christopher too. The trauma of rejection is basically distressing. The feeling that others do not accept them as much as they expect, makes them upset. In this movie, Christopher, who is a victim of Werner syndrome develops sadness, anxiety, embarrassment, guilt in his mind. When he was rejected by others, he was filled with shame, hurt and loneliness which are purely the social emotions that arise in response to such

events. When Christopher was taken to school, he was rejected by all the students. No one was even ready to sit with him. When he was rejected by his classmates, he felt very bad about himself as the peer group can influence one's life greatly. But a girl named Sofiya took pity on him and befriended him.

Subsequently, Christopher falls in love with Sofiya, as she was the only person who had shown him affection apart from his mother. But she rejects his proposal as he was a victim of Werner Syndrome. He never expected such a response from Sofiya and became heartbroken. Soon after, the whole school knew that Christopher was suffering from Werner Syndrome that made him look aged. Students started to mock him calling him "impotent" (Ratsasan 2018), which made him mentally weak and caused him to run out of the school.

Later in the movie we see Christopher breaking the head of a doll which was gifted to him by Sofiya, with a hammer. Here, Christopher becomes extremely angry towards Sofiya because he was devalued by others and also felt that Sofia was not taking his genuine wants and needs seriously. Besides, he believes that it was Sofiya who told everyone in his class that he was impotent which gave others a chance to ridicule him. At first Christopher expressed his anger towards Sofiya by breaking the doll's head with a hammer. But later, he kills Sofiya as he does to the doll with the help of his mother, Mary. He then develops an extreme hatred towards all the teenage girls as each of them reminded him of Sofiya and later becomes a serial killer in rest of his life.

These two movies depict various aspects of traumatic instances of real life in different sections of people. The theoretically appealing quality of this revelation raise larger questions about the relationship between violence experienced by individuals and cultural groups, or the relationships between victim, perpetrator, and witness. Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature, the way it is precisely not known in the first instance returns to haunt the survivor later on. The central idea behind these unravelled past lives of the main two characters (Esther, Christopher) is an extreme experience which directly produces a dissociative consciousness wherein the truth of the past is hidden, history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence. It is

evident from the instances that these people who are going through such a dilemma or suffering, or the people who had already gone through such a life would have damaged mentally to a higher degree. These dark days were rarely come out to the people who played major or minor roles in making them dangerous and violent.

Conclusion

There are two major segments of psycho-thriller movies. First, the protagonist would turn to be killer or anti-social who then tries to destroy others. Second, the protagonist would destroy himself/herself after a long period of dilemma and depression by committing suicide. The major themes of this genre include death, existence or purpose, identity, mind, perception and reality. In this narrative, the characters often have to battle an inner struggle. Jeffrey C. Alexander states:

Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (Alexander 6)

Cultural trauma can also be seen in these characters too. These chosen characters had personally a messed up helter-skelter childhood, including stints in foster care, bad relationships, early exposure to sex and drugs and various other things, that have honestly made them who they are. The study asserts that Trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity of a physically weak person. This field of learning gets much more importance due to the notion of trauma's irreversible damage to the psyche is heavy as these movies reflect.

It is a general concept that becoming a victim or being victimized is based on social perception or judgment. Here, the two movies give a totally confusing idea about the real victims. There will be a sure question aroused on the ambiguity that if the murderer or the murdered occupies the qualities of a real victim. It is not easy to differentiate between the killer's painful past and the painful present of the killed. Both situations evoke sympathy and affection in the minds of the audience. Though the people who are killed by these characters are innocents, the murderer's dark days and unbearable experiences gets more focus in these movies which

construct the plot. The powerlessness they needed to endure throughout their past life itself makes them powerful in the present though they are continued to be alienated from their aspired conditions of life they did lack before. Thus, the question of victimization is clearly answered here that the real victims are the characters themselves who commit crimes and murders.

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