

Studying Freud's Notion of Repressed Mind and It's Portrayal in Fazil's Manichitrathazhu

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Abstract: Human mind is a complex entity. It is not just a domicile of emotions, but also contains innumerable images and codes as well. Psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan classified the mind into distinctive segments. Freud named it as Conscious, Sub-conscious and Unconscious. Besides, these Sigmund Freud, the Austrian psychoanalyst also formed a state of mind which he named as repression. He described the state of repression as *Verdrangung*, in German which means pushing away or casting aside. He called the theory of repression as the corner stone of psychoanalysis. According to him, the memories which an individual finds traumatic or painful and at times guilty and shameful are prevented from entering the conscious mind, or they are repressed. Repression is an unconscious act, accomplished by the 'ego' unlike suppression which is a deliberate one. Freud states that, the memories which are repressed for a long time gradually transform into neurotic symptoms, the expression of which will be considered as illogical and psychologically improper by the society. Fazil's magnum opus, 'Manichitrathazhu' can be considered as an exploration of Freud's theory of repression. The character of Ganga and her past is the key to understand her transformation into Nagavalli. Upon a detailed analysis, one can understand that it is not just a case of expressing empathy but that of a repressed mind. The film thus proves to be an effective guide in studying Freud's theory of repression.

Introduction

Manichitrathazhu, the antecedent born from the mind of Promethean director Fazil was released on 23 December 1993. The movie bagged accolades after accolades including two National Awards and three Kerala State Awards. The movie with its unprecedented theme became the highest grossing Malayalam film ever and also received widespread appreciation and critical acclaim.

Ganga and Nakulan played by Shobhana and Suresh Gopi comes to the latter's native land and his ancestral home called Madampalli Tharavadu for a brief holiday from Calcutta. The house is considered as haunted by all members of the family as a murder is said to have took place in the 'thekkini' of the mansion. Paying no heed to his uncle, who is the present head of the family, Nakulan and Ganga move into the mansion with servants. Over the course of time, Ganga, an intelligent and educated girl develops an interest for the thekkini room which is locked from outside using an ornate and enchanted lock after Pooja or prayers. Ganga with the help of Chandu, son of Nakulan's uncle makes a duplicate of the key and breaks entry into the room.

The room is said to be the used by a dancer named Nagavalli, who was brought from Thanjavoor by the then head of the mansion named 'Karanavar.' She was in a relationship with another dancer Ramanathan who lived nearby. Karanavar, furious at the news of the relationship, enters the thekkini one night and murders Nagavalli. The ghost of Nagavalli started haunting the mansion and later the Karanavar kills himself by taking poison. The story greatly attracts Ganga, who starts behaving like Nagavalli and begins to haunt the mansion.

Dr.Sunny, the psychiatrist which is played by Mohanlal, who is a friend of Nakulan arrives at the mansion and with difficulty finds out the patient that resides within Ganga and brings her back to old life.

The movie holds larger themes than mere expression of empathy. When analysed under literary and psychoanalytic light, the movie goes hand in hand with Freud's thoery of repression. The childhood and the incidents which happened then in the life of Ganga plays a crucial role in the movie. The memories which she remained repressed in her mind was vented out and found an expression whenever she became Nagavalli. The movie reveals itself in more detail when studied under the light of the theory.

Freud's Theory of Repression

Sigmund Freud is of deep interest for anyone in the pursuit of psychoanalysis. He contributed much into the field and wrote down his findings in several volumes of books, namely 'Studies.' He along with his mentor, Joseph Breuer did keen studies on the complexities of human mind. He became a pioneer in the field, whose tracks is followed by modern psychologists even today.

According to Freud, human mind consists of three parts; the conscious, sub-conscious 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 as a depository, where memories which need to be recalled quickly are saved. For example, the phone number and other such day to day life facts. Out of all three, the part that appealed most to Freud was the unconscious. It created great interest in him and he devoted much time to study its intricacies.

As far as Freud is concerned, the events that happen in one's childhood is of utmost importance. Any neurological symptoms expressed by an individual often dates back to some events that happened earlier in his/her life. An incident that took place in childhood which is either shameful, guilty or painful is repressed by the mind. In other words, it is prevented from entering the conscious mind. This is a mechanization of ego and is done unconsciously. It is more like a secret kept by oneself from one's own mind and body. There are basically two types of unconscious thoughts; one he called as 'pre-conscious beliefs' and the other as 'repressed thoughts'. Pre-conscious beliefs according to Freud, could become conscious easily and thereby, it didn't attract his interest much. The other he stated, "cannot become conscious because 'a certain force opposes them'" (Billing, Michael 16). Repression can also be defined as;

A complex is an idea with emotions grouped around it and attached to it, and may consist of painful memories which are banished into the unconscious, but not really forgotten, since such complexes may appear in dreams, symptomatic actions or form the underlying mechanism of a neurosis. This species of forgetting is purposeful, in order to defend the mind from painful memories. Such purposeful forgetting is termed repression (Spenser McDonald Henry).

They are constantly chased away from the conscious mind and thereby repressed by the system. Repression is part of the self defence mechanism of the mind. Both the concept and idea of repressed mind is of prime importance in the field of neurosis. These memories which has been repressed for long duration of life, at certain interval finds its expression and this is in most cases in the form of hysteria or a state of mind in which one's emotions are so strong that he starts behaving in an uncontrolled way. He may react or behave in an extreme way because of fear, anger etc.

It is only during the times of extreme emotions, that one reflects on repressed emotions and thoughts and starts acting upon it. The idea may be repressed due to fear of judgement by the society or the fear of estrangement.

Freud draws upon an experience of his with a patient named Elisabeth von R to describe the connection between repressed emotions and hysteria. She came to Freud complaining of pain in her legs. She consulted several doctors but none of them could get her out of it. She complained of pain while walking and even standing and she became tired quite fast. Freud was convinced that the pain was part of hysteria and was not a physical concern in all respect. He after much difficulty gathered information about her past. He understood that she at once possessed deep interest and passion for her brother in law (sister's husband) and later became guilty of it when her sister died. It was only when she saw the body of her dead sister whom she loved much, that she realized the interest she had for her brother-in-law. When she was at the peak of agony, the repressed thoughts inside her sprang into consciousness. Her mind was constantly chasing away the thoughts of her erotic desire for the person but on that day she came the full realization of it and this tormented her to great extent making her confined to her own little space, and cut her off from her friends and family.

Ganga and the Cause of Her Hysteria

Ganga enters the movie as the newly wed wife of Nakulan. Educated and intelligent she is showcased as a voracious reader. She is a graduate in archaeology and has an affinity towards past and old artefacts. Nakulan's mother, had filled her with intriguing tales of the mansion and the valuable things that rests within it. The ultimate intention of Ganga upon her arrival is to find out these things and pile her already rich knowledge regarding antique things. After several days of search, she is unable to find anything in the mansion and is convinced that all of it stored inside the thekkini and the haunted story is only a bait to keep people away from looting it. She opens the room and at once she is in a daze. She is ecstatic upon discovering boxes of old jewellery, garments and other valuables inside the room. In other words, she is in the paramount state of happiness. From here, begins the journey of repressed emotions, all that remained repressed inside her mind for all the years, quickly resurface.

She quickly identifies with Nagavalli as her. She feels a deep connection with the ill fated dancer and starts acting behalf of her, as an attempt to bring her justice. She puts on Nagavalli's anklets and garments and dance in a frenzy inside thekkini at nights. She also starts creating ruckus and chaos inside the mansion, by breaking things, by lighting her own saree and so on. All these actions hint at the expression of her repressed mind which has turned into neurotic symptoms rather than out of empathy for the unfortunate dancer. She is raising voice for the misfortunate dancer which she couldn't do herself.

Exploring the life of Ganga, viewers can see that she faced a huge trauma in life during her childhood days. She was a typical village girl living with her grandmother in a tharavadu. Her parents had left her in the custody of grandmother when she was too little and went to Calcutta for job. Little Ganga awaited their return but they never came in search for her. She grew up hearing folk tales, mythical stories and legends from her grandmother. While she was preparing for her tenth standard board examination, a studious Ganga is troubled to hear that her parents are coming to take her to Calcutta with them after her examination. This made her restless and she is not able to focus in her studies. Soon she became hysteric and is taken away by her parents to Calcutta where they must have treated her. Later she married Nakulan and starts leading a happy life.

All these years, this particular incident was repressed by her mind. It must have been painful, shameful and the guilt of Ganga, that her ego kept pushing it away from her conscious mind. The incident was frightening to Ganga. The alienation from her grandmother petrified her and this element of fear, made the ego to repress the memory from entering her conscious mind. When she overcame with happiness and reached the pinnacle of emotions, the repressed emotions such as loneliness and pain resurfaced. As Freud explained it, "unexpressed emotions will never die. They are buried alive and will come forth later in uglier ways" (Goodreads).

This made her identify herself with Nagavalli who like her had a traumatic life despite being talented. She aligned with her and danced according to the tunes of her repressed mind. The anxiety that originated from the events that happened in her childhood thus started creating problems in her adulthood in the form of hysteria and neurosis. All the while, her mind has been casting the feelings away, but realized it and aligned with it when she was emotionally excited.

Repression is in fact a method of mind to wriggle free from conflicts. It forces the forgetfulness of these disturbing images from the consciousness. However, the repressed elements find an outlet and it can be called as projection. It was this projection that changed Ganga into Nagavalli. Projection can make one behave neurotically and may possess delusions and hallucinations. As a result of which Ganga identified herself as Nagavalli and sets out to seek vengeance against the family. In short, Nagavalli was only a vehicle for the outburst of Ganga's repressed mind rather than a trigger as portrayed in the movie.

Conclusion

Human unconscious is pivotal in controlling human behaviour and pattern. It as Freud puts it the tip of the iceberg. It is the most crucial of all three. It erases the painful memories though not completely, from conscious mind and stops it from entering it. Repression is a defence mechanism and it is a vice and virtue in disguise. It is a key factor to study cases of hysteria as it is the corner stone upon which the entire fort of psychoanalysis is built.

Works Cited

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Myself, Fidha Nazlin P.K. I'm a final year master's student. I'm a blogger and a freelance writer. I aspire to become a professor. I have presented papers in several national and international seminars. I have also been qualified for the Quarterly Franklin Membership of London Journals Press. My areas of interest include, literature, history, psychology and art.