
The Shadow of Trauma: A Psychoanalytic Exploration of Criminal Psychopathy in *Anjaam Pathiraa*

Akhila Rahul

Independent Researcher, Kannur, Kerala – India,

Article Received: 02/08/2025**Article Accepted:** 04/09/2025**Published Online:** 04/09/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.09.68**Abstract:**

This study conducts a psychoanalytic analysis of the Malayalam film *Anjaam Pathiraa* (2020) to examine the psychological, symbolic, and moral dimensions of crime narratives in contemporary Malayalam cinema. Motivated by the limited application of psychoanalytic frameworks to regional crime thrillers, the research investigates how unconscious drives, trauma, and moral conflict shape character behavior and narrative structure. Applying Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian perspectives, the study analyzes the antagonist Benjamin Louis, the protagonist Anwar Hussain, and secondary characters, alongside recurring motifs. The study explores character development and the use of symbolic motifs, including numbers, reflections, and spatial configurations. The findings reveal that Benjamin embodies the Shadow, repetition compulsion, and a fragmented identity, while Anwar negotiates moral and rational constraints, highlighting ethical dilemmas within the narrative. Visual and auditory elements create a coded language that reflects unconscious desires and archetypal patterns, intensifying psychological tension and thematic depth.

This study combines psychoanalytic theory and cinematic analysis to demonstrate how regional crime thrillers reveal societal fears, moral conflicts, and human psychology, providing a comprehensive model for interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: psychoanalysis, Malayalam cinema, crime thriller, unconscious drives, archetypes

Introduction:

Contemporary Indian regional cinema has progressively adopted narratives that move beyond superficial storytelling, exploring the intricate psychological and moral dimensions of its characters. *Anjaam Pathiraa* (2020), directed by Midhun Manuel Thomas, exemplifies this evolution, presenting a crime thriller that interweaves serial murder investigations with nuanced psychological insight. Unlike conventional crime films, which often emphasize suspense, procedural investigation, or action, this film foregrounds the internal conflicts, repressed trauma, and ethical dilemmas of both criminals and investigators, offering rich material for psychoanalytic inquiry.

Psychoanalytic literary criticism, grounded in the work of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan, examines the unconscious, repressed desires, and internal psychological conflicts within texts. Freud's theories of repression, the Id-Ego-Superego triad, and the Oedipus complex provide a framework for understanding concealed motivations and ethical struggles. Jungian archetypes, particularly the Shadow, illuminate aspects of the psyche that are denied, repressed, or socially unacceptable. Lacan's theories extend this analysis by demonstrating how identity and desire are mediated through language and social structures.

Applying these frameworks to *Anjaam Pathiraa* enables a nuanced exploration of key characters, including the antagonist Benjamin Louis, profiler Anwar Hussain, and Rebecca, whose experiences embody hidden trauma and moral conflict. Through psychoanalytic analysis, this study examines how trauma, repression, and the unconscious shape both individual behavior and the moral landscape of the narrative. This research contributes to film studies and psychoanalytic criticism by offering an original examination of regional Indian cinema through the lens of deep psychological inquiry, a relatively underexplored perspective in contemporary scholarship.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyze the unconscious motivations and repressed trauma of the central characters.
2. To explore the symbolic and narrative elements of the film that reflect psychological conflicts.
3. To examine the interplay between trauma, morality, and vigilantism within the context of contemporary Indian society.

Literature Review:

Psychoanalytic literary criticism has long been employed in both literature and cinema to examine the unconscious mind, repressed desires, and human behavior. Sigmund Freud's foundational theories posit that human actions are often governed by unconscious drives, repressed memories, and unresolved conflicts originating in early life experiences (Freud, 1900; 1905). His framework of the Id, Ego, and Superego provides a useful lens for analyzing moral conflicts and instinctual impulses in characters, particularly within crime narratives where the tension between desire and societal norms is heightened.

Carl Jung enriched psychoanalytic theory with the concept of the collective unconscious and archetypes, including the Shadow, Hero, and Trickster, to account for recurring patterns in human behavior (Jung, 1959). The Shadow, representing the suppressed and socially unacceptable facets of the self, is particularly relevant for understanding criminal behavior in cinematic texts. In crime thrillers, the antagonist often embodies the Shadow, externalizing impulses that conscious society or the protagonist cannot confront directly.

Jacques Lacan further enriched psychoanalytic criticism by emphasizing the role of language, identity, and social constructs in shaping the unconscious (Lacan, 1973). His concept of the Mirror Stage elucidates the formation of self-perception and the tension

between reality and desire, a framework applicable to both protagonists and antagonists struggling with moral and psychological fragmentation.

In the context of Indian cinema, psychoanalytic approaches remain relatively underexplored, especially in regional films such as Malayalam thrillers. Although previous studies have investigated psychological complexity in mainstream Hindi (Gokulsing & Dissanayake, 2013) and Bengali cinema (Chakraborty, 2015), the application of psychoanalytic frameworks to crime narratives in Malayalam films remains scarce. *Anjaam Pathiraa* serves as a notable case study, merging the procedural aspects of serial crime investigation with intricately developed psychological characterization. Its depiction of trauma-driven motives, moral dilemmas, and criminal behavior offers fertile ground for applying psychoanalytic theory, thereby bridging global theoretical frameworks with regional cinematic expression.

This study integrates Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian perspectives with the narrative and character construction in *Anjaam Pathiraa* to make an original contribution to psychoanalytic film criticism in the Indian cinematic context.

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive approach, utilizing psychoanalytic literary criticism as the primary analytical framework. The research centers on the film *Anjaam Pathiraa* (2020), examining its narrative structure, character development, dialogues, and symbolic elements. A detailed scene-by-scene analysis was conducted to identify manifestations of repression, trauma, and unconscious motivation.

The analytical process consists of three principal steps:

1. **Character Analysis:** Central characters, including Benjamin Louis (antagonist), Anwar Hussain (protagonist), and Rebecca, were examined through Freudian and Jungian frameworks to uncover unconscious drives, moral conflicts, and archetypal representations.
2. **Symbolic and Narrative Analysis:** Visual and verbal symbols such as crime scenes, recurring motifs, and dialogues were interpreted psychoanalytically to reveal latent meanings and repressed desires.
3. **Thematic Interpretation:** Broader themes, including trauma, justice, vigilantism, and moral ambiguity, were analyzed to elucidate how the film portrays psychological and social realities.

Data sources comprise the film itself, its official screenplay, and secondary materials such as interviews with the director and cast, critical reviews, and scholarly literature on psychoanalytic criticism. Ethical considerations were observed by relying solely on publicly accessible materials, ensuring that all analyses adhered to copyright regulations.

This methodology facilitates a comprehensive examination of *Anjaam Pathiraa*, illuminating the interplay among trauma, unconscious drives, and morality within both characters and narrative structure. By integrating Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian

perspectives, the study offers a multidimensional understanding of crime, psychopathy, and psychological tension in Malayalam cinema.

Results and Discussion:

The psychoanalytic examination of *Anjaam Pathiraa* reveals multiple layers of psychological complexity, informed by Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian theory. The film's characters, narrative structure, and symbolic imagery provide insight into unconscious desires, repression, and trauma-driven behavior.

1. Freudian Analysis: Unconscious Drives and Repression

The antagonist, Benjamin Louis, exemplifies trauma-induced psychopathology. Freud's concept of repression explains his compulsive drive to commit serial murders. Early experiences of childhood abuse and social rejection provoke unresolved Oedipal conflicts and aggression, which manifest as meticulously planned crimes. His actions externalize unconscious guilt and rage, displacing internalized trauma onto society (Freud, 1920).

The protagonist, Anwar Hussain, embodies the Ego, mediating moral duty, emotional attachment, and professional obligation. His rational investigative methods contrast with Benjamin's instinctual drives (Id), highlighting the tension between reason and impulse. The Superego emerges through the ethical dilemmas faced by law enforcement, particularly in balancing justice and revenge.

Example Scene: Benjamin's meticulous preparation of crime scenes illustrates Freud's notion of repetition compulsion, wherein unresolved trauma is unconsciously reenacted in a controlled environment. Each murder symbolically replays childhood suffering and asserts psychological dominance over prior powerlessness. Benjamin's displacement of internal pain onto victims further underscores his fractured psyche, enhancing the film's psychological realism.

2. Jungian Analysis: Archetypes and the Shadow:

Jungian theory illuminates Benjamin as the Shadow archetype, representing the dark, repressed aspects of human nature. He externalizes societal fears and suppressed desires, serving as a counterpoint to Anwar's conscious, socially sanctioned persona.

Recurring motifs, such as the serial killer's coded numbers, function as Jungian symbols, embodying order within chaos and manifestations of the collective unconscious. The Hero (Anwar) versus Shadow (Benjamin) dynamic reflects the archetypal struggle between light and dark forces.

Example Scene: In the climactic confrontation, Anwar's decoding of Benjamin's code symbolizes the triumph of conscious understanding (Ego or Hero) over repressed darkness (Shadow/Id), demonstrating the integration of psychic opposites. Secondary characters, including victims, serve as manifestations of societal norms and collective fears, illustrating that the Shadow operates not only within the individual but also across social consciousness.

3. Lacanian Analysis: Language, Identity, and the Mirror Stage:

Lacan's Mirror Stage is reflected in Benjamin's disrupted self-perception, which originates from early failures of self-recognition and results in a fragile sense of identity. His ritualistic killings, coded messages, and obsessive attention to detail reflect a compulsive attempt to structure reality linguistically, consistent with Lacan's assertion that the unconscious is "structured like a language" (Lacan, 1973).

Anwar navigates social identity and professional competence, mediating between the Imaginary and Symbolic realms. Dialogues between Anwar and Benjamin reveal how language constructs and exposes unconscious desires, with the killer encoding motives in symbols and patterns, compelling both Anwar and the audience to confront moral and psychological ambiguity.

Cinematic motifs, including mirrors, shadows, and framing, serve as Lacanian metaphors, underscoring the fragmented identities of both predator and prey. Recurrent mirror imagery underscores the instability of selfhood and the constant negotiation between desire, perception, and reality.

4. Trauma and Psychological Tension:

The narrative structure parallels stages of trauma processing. Each murder evokes memory, guilt, and fear in both the protagonist and supporting characters. Benjamin projects internalized pain onto victims, while Anwar experiences countertransference, empathically absorbing trauma while seeking resolution.

Example Scene: Benjamin's return to his childhood home triggers flashbacks revealing the origins of his anger and repression. Cinematography through mirrored reflections, shadows, and distorted angles symbolically externalizes the fractured psyche and reinforces psychoanalytic interpretation. Color palettes further delineate psychic states, with cold tones in crime scenes contrasting with warm tones in Anwar's personal life, visually representing the split between repression, violence, and conscious reality.

5. Moral Ambiguity and Ethical Dilemmas:

Psychoanalytic theory clarifies the interplay between desire, morality, and social norms. Benjamin's actions challenge the Superego, whereas Anwar's pursuit reflects negotiation between ethical responsibility and instinctual understanding. This dynamic invites the audience into a psychoanalytic reflection, prompting consideration of justice, human nature, and the consequences of repressed trauma.

The film also explores guilt and catharsis: Benjamin experiences unconscious guilt driving his compulsions, while Anwar's moral introspection mirrors the audience's engagement with the tension between societal rules and personal ethics.

6. Cinematic Techniques and Psychoanalytic Symbolism:

Scene composition, editing, and sound design enhance the film's psychoanalytic depth. High-angle shots, close-ups, and rhythmic silences evoke psychological tension. Numbers, patterns, and ritualized behaviors serve as symbolic signifiers, establishing a coded language through which viewers interpret unconscious motives. The integration of narrative,

sound, and visual symbolism strengthens the depiction of repressed desires, trauma, and archetypal conflict.

Summary of Findings:

- Benjamin Louis embodies Freudian repression, the Jungian Shadow, and Lacanian fragmented identity.
- Anwar Hussain represents conscious moral reasoning, mediating Id, Ego, and Superego.
- Symbolism, including numbers, reflections, and spatial arrangements, communicates unconscious drives and archetypal patterns.
- Trauma, both personal and societal, drives character motivation and narrative tension, supporting psychoanalytic interpretation.
- Cinematic techniques such as camera angles, lighting, sound, and staging amplify psychoanalytic symbolism.

Anjaam Pathiraa integrates psychological realism with crime thriller conventions, providing a fertile site for interdisciplinary analysis and advancing understanding of trauma, psychopathy, and moral complexity in Malayalam cinema.

Conclusion:

The Malayalam film *Anjaam Pathiraa* offers a compelling case for psychoanalytic literary and cinematic analysis, illuminating the intricate dynamics of the human psyche through the interplay of crime and morality. The narrative illustrates how unresolved trauma, repressed desires, and unconscious drives influence the behavior of both the protagonist and antagonist. Benjamin Louis, the antagonist, can be interpreted as a manifestation of the Jungian Shadow, personifying suppressed anger, latent pain, and unacknowledged impulses. His methodical crimes reflect the operations of a deeply fractured unconscious, shaped by repetition compulsion and unresolved childhood experiences, thereby exemplifying Freudian concepts of repression and neurosis.

In contrast, Anwar Hussain, the investigative protagonist, embodies the rational and ethical ego, navigating a landscape of moral ambiguity and latent psychological threats. His analytical methodology, empathy, and ethical reasoning underscore the tension between conscious order and unconscious chaos, a central concern in psychoanalytic theory. The film's deployment of symbolic codes, numbers, reflections, and spatial configurations functions as a cinematic language that conveys hidden psychological patterns, resonating with Lacanian constructs of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real.

Cinematic techniques, including lighting, framing, and sound design, enhance the narrative's psychological depth, enabling the audience to perceive tension, fear, and empathy simultaneously. From this psychoanalytic perspective, *Anjaam Pathiraa* transcends the conventions of a typical crime thriller, emerging as a reflection of collective anxieties, ethical dilemmas, and the unconscious mind. By integrating Freudian, Jungian, and Lacanian frameworks, the film demonstrates how cinema can serve as a medium for examining identity, trauma, and moral complexity. This study contributes to interdisciplinary discourse on Indian cinema, highlighting the significance of psychoanalytic approaches in

understanding narrative structure, character development, and thematic resonance within psychological thrillers.

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