

An Insight into Human Animality through Psychoanalysis in Jallikattu

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Abstract

An individual, in most cases, functions according to norms and rules favoured by society. Armed with herd consciousness, society often asserts a sense of primal superiority over the rest of the earthly inhabitants. Lijo Jose Pellissery's (LJP from this point) masterpiece "Jallikattu" is a one-of-a-kind venture into the animalistic Id buried under the ego topsoil of civilisation and modesty. It uncovers the animality within humanity. In this paper, we endeavour to seek out the manifestations and consequences of primal capability in man when the instincts are waved a green flag. Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1917) is used as loci for an in-depth understanding of the reasons behind the actions of the characters. The psyche must be fully understood as it is clear that the director intends a more profound meaning when the fringe between humans and animal blurs. Human ego, domination, insatiable greed and fading ethics are examined based on the events portrayed in the movie. Flamboyant exhibition of masculinity is broken down in the film, all the while when the hero-centric tradition of popular cinema is side-lined as well in due course of the progress in the narrative. The film explored how ritual leads to conditioned reality. The current venture lays psychoanalytical strain at these stages to establish a ritual-bestial sphere of analysis. According to Freud, civilisation arises from man's drive to achieve individual needs and aims. The present research investigates Freud's perspective on civilisation as a result of aggressiveness in the film.

Keywords: Jallikattu, psychoanalysis, animal, Freudian, unconscious

I. INTRODUCTION

When the cinema works its way into the mind, when catharsis in full motion, the fringe between viewed and viewer may get blurred. Lijo Jose Pellissery's "Jallikattu" is such a film where the cinematography immerses its audience into the setting, especially in the second half. The film rehashes its name from the controversial nevertheless popular bull-taming event from the South India and draws themes from S. Hareesh's Malayalam short story *Maoist*.

The first major scene starts with the buffalo's owner giving the slip (for the preparation to kill it) to Kalan Varkey, the only butcher in the rural village. The beast escapes its imminent death, the butcher enlists locals subdue it and

we come across a series of ingrained aversions tear apart the pursuers in due time. A deconstructed experiment of the male Id is visible when the rising action commences in the story. Hubris books a place in hell for the people as their bull-sacrifice themed festival turns into an act of savagery. The plot entails around a buffalo that escapes from the altar of ritualistic slaughter and runs deliriously through a rural Kerala community. However, the extensive destruction of property and decimation of status quo is in a certain order; this can be divided into the three major runs of bull. Each run challenges and decimates a particular social convention or class structure; a fatal blow is dealt to the masculinity vouched by tradition. Every person in the nook and cranny of the village wants a piece of meat of

the buffalo regardless of the frenzied extravaganzas. As a result, no one even gives a moment to consider the animal with a taint of ethical concern.

The narrative of the water buffalo's escape from the butcher is intertwined with scenes from the villagers' life; this in turn reveals (collective) man's bestial side. As the narrative unfolds, the village's young people form their factions and go on their hunt for the buffalo; this gives way for tussle amongst these groups. This posits collective effort of humans against the strength and will to survive of a single animal. As experienced by the viewer, we can assume that man felt vulnerable in one or more places. Here, a question arises: how come the previously sacrificed animals succumb to the blade whereas a particular water buffalo, now, has overwhelmed the executioners? Why did the animal revolt instead of yielding to the villagers' will? The answers may lie in the grey area where human Id and animality coincides; the Id of the animal is full with life when life is valued (by the animal). Animality is powerful but flawed by fatality to the mortal. This is why we can see the men raging into deathlike primal emancipation in the final scene of the film. Animal nature prioritises domination over survival; men started piling up on one another despite knowing that the buffalo is dead.

Ego wars pull the string of the subplots. The different groups that are blinded by personal vendetta come to the forefront to restrain the buffalo. We can see a young couple run an escape attempt, but they get caught the moment when the boy's two-wheeler beaks down. Her father decrees her back home. Meanwhile, an old-timer suffers in his death bed in another part of the village, accompanied by a weary middle-aged man. A few kilometres away, a family reception for thirty now faces a threat on the scarcity of beef for the promised treat. The hilly jungle might seem like a maze for the beast to the audience. However, various raw manifestations of the Id of particular man reveal that the maze functions as an anvil upon which humanity is purged of its moral superegos; the characters break the chains of ethics of

brotherhood and communal harmony eventually. Soon after, a monumental haystack is set aflame and the men point fingers at the beast; the village wakes up in collective to douse the flames. But, can the flames of pure Id – say man and beast – be put away that easily?

In the eerie opening scene, the Christian village of berserk men evolves into a band of predators fixated on their next flesh feast as the border between humanity and animality blurs. One may allude magical realism in the scenes where people leave everything else what they were doing then and preps their houses and hobbies in line with the prospects of killing the animal. It is notable that the consensus between the characters include pork and beef – the two products – that are frowned upon in Hindu and Muslim communities of India. However, by not addressing this rift (that of religious bans) in the narrative, the director brilliantly narrowed the audience's eyes to the great hunt. The cutlasses are stained by blood and red meat dangle provocatively on the hooks in Kalan Varkey's open-air shop. When the large bull buffalo flees and runs rampant through cultivated fields, the villagers are questioned of their place in the food chain.

Each scene represents each stage of human history. At first, humans were animals that made sense of how nature can be bent to their will – such as for making tools. Then they ignite their will and find the fire (the bull burns objects), then understand that the soil yields to agriculture (bull destroys the human plantations), and civilization raises bigger houses (bull breaks public property). Religion invades their hearts (bull destroys the church's property), and political parties are sought for allocating power (bull breaks the flag of a political party). Finally, the bull breaks a man; this crescendo signifies the fall of man. The bull may be the Id, and in this light, man is indeed the most fearsome predator in the present Earth. There are clear examples that can be counted as substitutes of a bigger picture. Kaalan Varkey calls his assistant Anthony 'Pothu' (bull buffalo) to highlight his inhuman feats. A Police Inspector resort to calling his wife

'Pothu' for her sheer lack of calm and non-cooperative behaviour over phone. The District Collector approves Paul's shoot order for killing the buffalo and the petition writer uses the word 'mahisham', the euphemistic and sanskritised name of 'pothu'. These instances hint that everybody has an animal Id inside them.

II. NODE OF LOSS OF HUMANITY: INDIVIDUALITY'S EXTINCTION

To define the collective psyche of the villagers in the film, the basic idea of Freud's thesis in *Civilization and its Discontents* can be considered: civilization, which is considered as a human advance, comes at the price of (human) instinctual life. A traditional viewer might search for a central actor or actress; however, even if a human hero can wake into cognition as the hero, the village – once a jungle – insist that he must repress and sublimate his individuality in the altar of collective human progress. Regardless of the banality of the death drive portrayed by the raging mob in the final scene of the film, the nature of man is understandable. The reason can be seen evident in Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*:

The first requisite of civilization, therefore, is that of justice – that is, the assurance that a law once made will not be broken in favour of an individual. This implies nothing as to the ethical value of such a law. The further course of cultural development seems to tend towards making the law no longer an expression of the will of a small community – a caste or a stratum of the population or a racial group – which, in its turn, behaves like a violent individual towards other, and perhaps more numerous, collections of people. The final outcome should be a rule of law to which all – except those who are not capable of entering a community – have contributed by a sacrifice of their instincts, and which leaves no one – again with the same exception – at the mercy of brute force. (Freud, 21)

In the light of Freudian thought, the above collective community drive thwarts the 'other' whoever or whatever that comes in their way. In "Jallikattu," Lijo Jose places the beast in the podium of 'other' and reduces herd mentality to simplistic yet ancestral death drive. A notable question surfaces here: is individual liberty a gift of community or civilization? The answer reaches the shore of somewhere where the individual in the village cannot even fathom the concept of individuality. The need for validation of the self from the community drives some of the young male characters, but community is divided into sections where each sect harbours shrines of vengeance. Everybody got some reason to be angry and it all came out when the bull was unleashed. Justice of the land has demanded that no one shall escape the restrictions and find the treasure of individuality; when the self is found, community dissolves and this scares the latter. Say, a certain injustice plagues the land and the community joins hands against it; this can be deemed a humane and positive advance in civilization. Thus, the touchstone for right and wrong can be righteously set. Corrupt the touchstone and you will be corroding the hitching stone, and it will not take too long for the herd to go astray with mania. Id may manifest original personality of an individual or of the community in dire situations; the film suggests that both are the same at one juncture. The muscular pursuer Antony Varghese is adept on catching the beast. For added safety, the butcher made sure that he has summoned Kuttachan (played by Sabumon Abdusamad), who despises Antony's guts. The final frenzied mob vaults into carnage and the imminent showdown is a call far from the far cry for human brotherhood. Through the immersive audio experience, the little village nestled in a forestland is evidently more memorable than its residents. Their roles – the butcher, the priest, the wife-beater, the exile, etc. – dissolved any chance for attaining individuality. Such a paradigm is prevalent in the village and it cuts the pie for the assumption that the director

wants to show the animal side (of the characters) entailing a common conflict.

We could ask a few questions here. Who determines what to live? With the best evolved brain, does the human species been bestowed by that privilege? From the common assumption of hierarchy in the animal kingdom, we acknowledge that the most advanced life form distances from the lowest ones by a long mile; however, there are simple forms at different milestones of evolution. Dinosaurs has perished but a living representative of it, the crocodile, is way less strong and uncomplicated. If the same Nature has weakened the evolutionary link of dinosaurs (through KT extinction), does man necessarily be crowned as the king of all species? Lijo Pellisserry's film answers this question with a critical negative. The ancestors and predecessors behaved as fitting to their times and no one may be 'better' by default. This can further mean that there might had been an advanced species to the human link, but they died off and strength in numbers populated the intermediately evolved sapiens to form the current era. This brute strength in number bawls throughout the widescreen in the case of "Jallikattu."

The word is utterly foreign to Paul, and he insists on rewriting it as 'pothu,' as it corresponds to crude animalistic behaviour. Lijo Pellisserry employs this metonymy to instil the concept of beastliness in the minds of the audience. In the film, art is approached by highlighting perspectives of the village's resources for constructing and classifying the animals around them to make them significant and evocative to humans. The Id is slowly dragged to the borderline through them gradually.

In the film, the transformation of the nonhuman form into comparable and figurative planes of untamed cave dwellings, stone-club wielding human signification is an unavoidable epitaph. The underlying beastliness willingly verbalises the human subject's growth fundamentals and the disciplinary exercises of men turning wild, all set to assert themselves over others. Lijo J

Pellisserry gives symbolic and material dominance by imagining the following conditions that can incite violence from them: being controlled, addicted, obsessed, imperilled, and slain. This beastliness imposed on the animal has parallels with lewdness, megalomania, sexual frustration, and aggression in human animals of the same world, though the latter do not exercise them for existential reasons. At some point, it becomes clear that the problems are caused less by the buffalo's rampage and more by the scheming jealousies and petty enmities that divide the villagers. Challenge, by default, generates aggression/violence over resources. "Jallikattu" presents its first major challenge in the form of a feral buffalo unleashing beastly mayhem, whose capture is the only way to restore respect. This is in turn, amplified the men's vexed masculinity, putting their capacity for brutality to the test. The presence of a same-sex adult in one's territory is a challenge for most animal species. The other challenge that emerges in the narrative amidst the pursuit of the buffalo becomes a proxy mission for establishing alpha male status for most men who run after the animal, especially between Antony and Kuttachan, who are wooing the same lady, is along the same line. Most animal species' access to available resources is determined by combative fighting behaviour and offensive aggression. As with humans and nonhuman animals, manufacturing relationships between individuals of a species establishes their relative access priority in advance. Thus, the central basis of human aggression is similar to the stimuli that cause unpleasant assault in nonhuman animals, namely a challenge to the annoyed individual's ego image.

III. SYMBOLS, MOTIFS AND WANING HUMANITY

The buffalo's violent chase to maintain its independence becomes aggressive in the same way that the chaotic hunters turn uninvited opportunists dressed up to falsify evolutionary advancement over mind-melting brutality. A close-up shot shows a combination of animal and human footprints as a single entity. At the

same time, people chase the buffalo, revealing to viewers the similarity of impressions both humans and animals make on the ground in reality. We identify animals by their footprints in modern times, whereas humans are determined individually by their fingerprints rather than collectively as animals are. During the capture of buffalo from an abandoned well, an old man character informs the younger generation that these men are beasts with two feet and possess beastly characteristics. This is a stark revelation on the true nature of the Id in every man. The film also employs effective diegetic and non-diegetic sounds to convey the film's theme. The film begins with diegetic sounds, such as animal sounds, to convey the pristine beauty of nature. The later background score (non-diegetic) by Prasanth Pillai, which is an acapella-based background score with "Jeeji Jeeji" and "Ufff" sounds associated with primitive or tribal human lives.

Furthermore, in the film's opening scenes and when people band together to capture the escaped buffalo, the director skilfully employs hypnotic repetition of ticking clock sound to image stereotypical and mechanised human lives. This feature is spread particularly across those men in the hill town with their daily chores: meat consumption, wild frenzies, sensuality, violence, megalomania, male chauvinism, aggression, gluttony, etc. Visual motifs are thus revealed in this manner, and instinctive impulses of man take form from this point.

A motif is a repeated narrative element that supports a theme. Lijo Pellisserry employs these motifs to improve the visual narrative significance of transforming a local story into a universal account of human nature. These visual metaphors can function to transfer certain qualities from one sign to another. The filmmaker has predominately used the metonym 'pothu' as a motif to bestow a grounded experience by visualizing how the characters attribute beastliness to human beings and make these traits inseparable from their forefathers.

Sigmund Freud proposed that humans have two instincts: Eros, or life instinct, and Thanatos, or death instinct. Furthermore, he believed that humans have a basic instinct for destruction, which manifested itself in aggression toward others. He categorises aggression as an innate biological drive, similar to hunger and sex drives. Sigmund Freud coined the term libido to describe sexual desires. He explained that it could refer to any need satisfying pleasure-oriented urge:

It was not easy, however, to demonstrate the activities of this supposed death instinct. The manifestations of Eros were conspicuous and noisy enough. It might be assumed that the death instinct operated silently within the organism towards its dissolution, but that, of course, was no proof. A more fruitful idea was that a portion of the instinct is diverted towards the external world and comes to light as an instinct of aggressiveness and destructiveness. In this way the instinct itself could be pressed into the service of Eros, in that the organism was destroying some other thing, whether animate or inanimate, instead of destroying its own self. Conversely, any restriction of this aggressiveness directed outwards would be bound to increase the self-destruction, which is in any case proceeding. (Freud, 35)

IV. CONCLUSION

Blood, meat, and fire are recurring images in the film that represent the lifestyle of primitive men who were primarily into animal hunting. Hunting wasn't just for satisfying their hunger but was also a form of recreation to satiate their beastliness – the true id. To emphasize the cruelty to animals, the slaughter attempt on buffalo highlights a slow fade out to black. In visual grammar, the most dramatic transition is fade to black, which symbolises completion, implying that a narrative thought is complete. In practice, this usually means fading to black at the end of a dramatic scene. The final sequence in the film's narrative segment, in which all of the men pounce on the innocent animal to form a surrealistic human pyramid, trying to grab a

pound of flesh not to satiate their hunger but to demonstrate their dominance, and even wants a share in killing to satiate their male ego. The final shots of the film are linked to an animated video of primitive cave dwellers celebrating hunting with cacophonous traits and infighting, displaying hyper masculinity, which reinforces the fact that humanity has evolved from its crude beginnings and that these traits are still present in humans as atavistic features.

The final fright takes form when the cast merges into a mob and the plot gathers pace, making it hard to discern who is attacking whom or who is trotting onward with torches in hands. For some audience, the lack of subtlety might make them criticize the rush to portray the animality in man. The obvious depravity in humans onscreen makes the viewing eyes root for the bull, who is more honourable at this juncture. Renganaath Ravee's sound design goes a long way to achieve this feat of catharsis: the natural sounds, drumbeats and even the underlying cave man's heartbeat are enough to send a man in query for his savage roots.

The film adamantly insists the viewer be afraid of humans, not because natural disasters are less overwhelming than the Anthropocene, but man is capable of absolute and unexpected mayhem. It is a fact that wildlife has been culled to its half since 1970. The beast within every being is linked to the racialised unconscious rather than the individual unconscious. The movie's depiction of the intensity of carnal passions exemplifies this. However, quite intriguingly, humans do have moral superiority due to their ability to control instinctual desires. The animal's backstory in the cinema is one of constant battle, and certainly not of a free buffalo frolicking in the countryside or in some tranquil wilderness. The buffalo may have been subjected to a number of deprivations. The animal's living conditions are those given by humans. This should be read in conjunction with the subaltern's living standards as defined by the privileged elite. The enslaved will retaliate when the oppression reaches a certain threshold. The resultant rebuttal is depicted in

the film. The animal attempts to liberate itself and flees. This should be viewed as an act of resistance to injustice. The animal becomes a symbol for every underprivileged population across the world. The metaphorical breaking off ties can be used to relate the act of voluntarily negating the tradition and culture of society.

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