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S. T. HINDU COLLEGE, NAGERCOIL-2, Tamilnadu, India



### On Lunatics and Delirium: A Study of Madness in Select Malayalam

#### Films

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**Abstract:** Malayalam films have never hesitated to bring out Multi layered complex characters on the Silver screen. *Kumbalangi Nights* (2019), *Mundrothuruth* (2016) and *Munnariyippu* (2014) are some of the bold attempts Directors have made, to redefine the conventional portrayal of effortless characters. So, this paper analyses three major Malayalam films featuring Mad-men as Protagonists, applying Michael Foucault's concept of Delirium. Delirium is a Latin word, meaning to deviate from the normal path. Foucault's archaeology of insanity in his groundbreaking work, *Madness and Civilization* can be read along with these films to have an in depth understanding of the delirious state of the central characters.

**Keywords:** Foucault, Malayalam Films, Delirium, Complexity

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Recently, three Malayalam films have premiered in Toronto International Film Festival marking the Industries' name among world class films. Malayalam films stand a step ahead of any other Indian language films, when it comes to experimentation with Realistic story lines. From Ganga of *Manichithrathazhu* to Shammi of *Kumbalangi Nights*, Malayalam films have always been daring to portray the complexity of human psyche in its truest forms. In this study, the three films, *Kumbalangi Nights*,

*Mundrothuruth* and *Munnariyippu* are worth a thorough interpretation, using Foucauldian ideas on madness. Michael Foucault is one of the most influential and radical French Philosophers of all time. He has a distinguished status among the Late twentieth century luminaries like Sartre and Camus. Foucault believed that instead of analyzing a discourse in its



raw form, we should trace its History and Connections. Most of his writings deal with the concept of Madness, Sexuality, Discipline, Punishment and its relationship with power system. His highly acclaimed critical treatise is *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* appeared in 1961, as the reworking of Foucault's doctoral dissertation.

*Passion and Delirium* is one of the significant chapters in the work. Madness occurs when the unity of body and soul disperses as the result of Passion. Illusion, hallucination and delirium are the result of this state. Intensity of Madness rises when reality is veiled by dream like images. Foucault's central idea is that, "Self- attachment is the first sign of madness, but it is because man is attached to himself, that he accepts errors as truth, lies as reality, violence and ugliness as Beauty and Justice" (85) can be used to analyze the central characters of the three films.

Cinematographer Venu proved his directorial brilliance through his second film *Munnariyippu* (Warning) in 2014. Featuring Mammooty and Aparna Gopinath as lead, the film is one of the milestones in the Malayalam genre of mystery thriller. The story revolves around C. K. Raghavan (Mammooty) who has been serving a 20 years life sentence for murdering his wife and the daughter of his employer, a middle aged prisoner who refuses to leave the prison even after his official term in jail. Freelance writer Anjali Arakkal (Aparna Gopinath) happens to meet Raghavan in one of her field trips to the jail.

Raghavan who claims his innocence every now and then turns out to be an interesting subject for a write up for Anjali. Anjali's curiosity increases when she finds out the philosophical notes and poems scribbled by Raghavan who has not even got primary education. The film develops when an acclaimed publishing house approaches Anjali to publish Raghavan's biography after reading her feature on him. Anjali brings Raghavan out of the jail in her care and accommodates him in a rented house, compelling him to write the biography. Once, a frustrated Anjali scolds him in front of her colleagues as he hesitates to write before the deadline. As a last step, Anjali shifts Raghavan to a secluded home away from all the distractions. Anjali pays a last visit to Raghavan as she decides to repudiate the plan of publishing. To her bewilderment,



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Raghavan gives her a full manuscript. Fear creeps over her as she read the script till Raghavan with a smile smashes her head and kills. The film ends with the scene, in which, Raghavan peacefully sleeps in the prison along with the photos of those who he has murdered on the wall.

Raghavan is an epitome of the delirious state Foucault has described. He plays with the discourse of delirium which is exotic for the “normal” people, including Anjali. His highly philosophical thoughts on freedom in life indicate the complexity of his mind. Raghavan is a delirious body that is immersed in his own world of imagination. Even though his term in the jail is over, he refuses to go out since he believes that the only place he can be liberated is inside the jail. Anjali is the only person who disturbs Raghavan from his happy place of tranquility and pesters him to act according to her will. He is a tempest with the mask of calmness. The turmoil of his mind is obvious from this dialogue; “the concept of freedom differs for one to another. We sometimes need to remove the obstacles that come in the way of freedom. If such an incidence happens at home, it is domestic abuse. If it happens in society, it is revolution. Wherever it is, if revolution happens blood will be spiled” (1:46:22).

*Mundrothuruth* (Munroe Island) is a Malayalam feature film directed by Manu in 2016. This low budget film bagged many prestigious awards in the same year. *Mundrothuruth* depicts the story of a teenager (Jason Chacko) who has serious Psychological disorder, visiting his grandfather (Indrans) who is living in the Munroe Island. Soon Keshu starts exploring the island taking photos and asking disturbing questions to his grandfather. He even says that both his grandfather and father had a relationship with the maid, Kathu, which smears anger and fear on the grandfather. A helpless grandfather witnesses Keshu’s attraction to the same maid. Keshu haunts the island with his unusual riddles and crooked smile, which sometimes turns into spine chilling scenes. In one of the scenes Keshu playfully reveals he has raped a ten years old girl some years back. His behavior changes every now and then leaving grandfather in doubt of whether to love him or hate him. Towards the climax he tries to rape Kathu and defend himself telling that he is doing the same thing that his father and grandfather have done. He kicks his grandfather and runs away and later comes and apologizes for his actions. All these instances show that Keshu has no



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control over his body and mind. He floats in his delirious state. Keshu's inappropriate confessions and untimely dialogues show his delirious state. It doesn't even take a minute to change his behavior from complete rudeness to childishness as result of his incoherent delirious cognition.

When coming to the third film, *Kumbalangi Nights* is one of the blockbusters of 2019. Though it was a debutant direction of Madhu C. Narayanan, the film received an exhilarating support from the moviegoers and critics. *Kumbalangi Nights* narrates the lives of four brothers namely Saji (Soubin Shahir), Bobby (Shane Nigam), Boney (Sreenath Bhasi) and Franky (Mathew) and their stormy relationship with each other. Babby, a wayward dreamer who lives in his fantasies fall in love with the smart and shrewd Bobby Mol (Anna Ben) and soon their relationship is hindered by Bobby Mol's brother-in-law Shammi (Fahad Faasil), a barber. Shammi is a control freak whose need for order and neatness is almost creepy. The first time we see him; he looks at himself in the mirror and declares with great pride that he is the complete man. A complete narcissist who pays great care in maintaining his immaculate mustache and flawless skin, Shammi in deed is an inferior version of Mary Harron's *American Psycho*. When his sister-in-law falls in love with Bobby who has a complicated family history, Shammi couldn't hide the other side of his personality.

Shammi is a self-proclaimed perfect man who plays with a lot of dramatic dialogues, for instance, 'Reynolds, a complete man', "Shammi hero aada" (Shammi is a hero), etc. His delirious state is obvious from his harsh and straight forward behavior to everyone including the local children and his family members. After the marriage Shammi soon takes the role of the head of the family, controlling his wife and in-laws with threatening words coating in a crooked smile. His madness comes out only when Bobby Mol questions his version of truth and reality which is erroneous for others.

All these characters, namely, Raghavan, Keshu and Shammi have exquisitely layered personas and they validate that there is no big distance from sanity to insanity. Just like the islands they live in, these three characters develop hostility for any kind of foreign interference.



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As Foucault inferred, Madness is structured as language. Mad men break the rules of language and logic. They develop a discourse of delirium which is vague and incoherent. Keshu's riddles, Raghavan's philosophy and Shammi's exaggerated dialogues show the delirious discourse of the characters. As Foucault opined these three characters are blinded from understanding what is right and wrong or reality and imaginary because of the intense self-attachment. The performance of all these three characters is nothing less than astounding perfection. The locations of these films are perfect mise-en-scene that polishes the madness. The serene Kumbalangi Island, the clam Munroe Island and the prison stand in direct contrast to the storm raging mental state of the characters make the films more disturbing and arouse a kind of fear among the viewers.

These three films truthfully portray the different contours of human psyche. As Sigmund Freud said, "strictly speaking, we don't know what we are laughing at" (240), these three iconic characters laugh and deceive the world, which is foreign for their delirious discourse.

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