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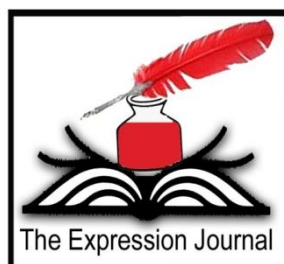
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Revolt of the Subdued: An Archetypical Reading of Domestic Abuse in *The Great Indian Kitchen* and *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*

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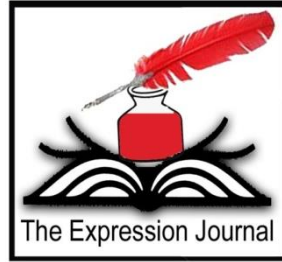
Abstract

Springing from the inherited collective unconscious, the archetypes influence the constitution of the psyche. They play a key role in shaping our personality and how we respond to challenges and possibilities in life. Carl Jung's theory of archetypes suggests the existence of the persona, shadow, self, and anima/animus. Moreover, their interplay produces different archetypical images that can better classify the human psyche into well-defined categories thus furnishing researchers with a useful tool in the analysis of different types of individuals, both real and fictional. This paper focuses on the victims of domestic abuse, whose subdued voices have found representation in literature and films worldwide. Choosing two films as the primary texts: *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) and *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022), the study probes into the personality of the victims and their modes of survival using the Jungian theory of archetypes and archetypical images. Both the films stand out from the rest of the Malayalam films on the theme as they present novel ways of revolt when the victims strike back. The unnamed protagonist of *The Great Indian Kitchen* and Jaya of *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* are both victims of a patriarchal society that expects them to find salvation in being the archetypical caregiver regardless of their dreams and desires. However, nothing they do is appreciated and the only reward is an abusive life. This forces them to discard their docile persona and unleash the fury of their dormant shadow thereby realigning with their natural archetypical image.

Keywords

Archetypes, Collective Unconscious, Domestic Abuse, Patriarchy, Persona, Psyche, Shadow.

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Domestic abuse or intimate partner violence as defined by the United Nations is a pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Such abuse thus inflicted can be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional or psychological. It also includes any behaviour that is aimed to intimidate, manipulate or humiliate the victim. Though, men and children also become victims of domestic abuse, it mostly is the horrid reality of many women the world over. Naturally, instances of domestic abuse have received its fair share of representation in films across different cultures. The current paper has chosen for study two recent Malayalam films on the theme: *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021) and *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey* (2022). The study employs the Jungian theory of archetypes as the primary tool for qualitative analysis of the treatment of the theme of domestic abuse in the aforementioned films.

The concept of the archetype was first made popular by the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung when he spoke of the primordial images that spring from the universal and inherited collective unconscious. In *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* he states that “As factors influencing human behaviour, archetypes play no small role. The total personality can be affected by them through a process of identification” (122). Like instincts, they shape the conscious contents of the psyche by intervention; their primary functions being regulation, modification, and motivation. In his work *On the Nature of the Psyche*, Jung stresses on the idea that “Confrontation with an archetype or instinct is an ethical problem of the first magnitude, the urgency of which is felt only by people who find themselves faced with the need to assimilate the unconscious and integrate their personalities” (118).

Referring to the archetypes as the contents of the collective unconscious, Jung predominantly classifies them into persona, shadow, self, and anima/animus. The persona is the mask we wear to conceal our true selves. In Jungian terms it is “that which in reality one is not” (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 123). Shadow, on the other hand, is our absolute true face that lies deep in the unconscious. Describing it as unpleasant, Jung observes

that it can neither be argued out of existence nor rationalized into harmlessness. "[If] we step through the door of the shadow we discover with terror that we are the objects of unseen factors. To know this is decidedly unpleasant.... It can even give rise to primitive panic" (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 23). Only by achieving a balance between the persona and the shadow, can we bring equilibrium to the self. Commenting on the anima and animus, Jung describes the anima as the magical feminine in the male unconscious and the animus, the masculine elements in the female unconscious.

[The] anima is fickle, capricious, moody, uncontrolled and emotional, sometimes gifted with daemonic intuitions, ruthless, malicious, untruthful, bitchy, double-faced, and mystical. The animus is obstinate, harping on principles, laying down the law, dogmatic, world-reforming, theoretic, word-mongering, argumentative, and domineering. Both alike have bad taste: the anima surrounds herself with inferior people, and the animus lets himself be taken in by second-rate thinking. (*The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 124).

In addition to these four primary archetypes, Jung speaks of a few archetypical images like the mother, the wise old man, the child, and the trickster that evolve out of the interplay of the primary archetypes. This was later elaborated by Pearson into a configuration of twelve archetypical images encompassing the innocent, orphan (everyman), warrior (hero), caregiver, seeker (explorer), destroyer (outlaw), lover, creator (artist), ruler, magician, sage, and fool (jester). Of these, the spiritual realm is populated by the innocent, who seeks safety; the sage, who embodies knowledge; and the seeker or explorer, who is engaged in a quest for freedom. The thirst to leave behind a legacy drives the destroyer or outlaw who aims to bring about liberation through disruption and rebellion; the magician who wields power; and the warrior or hero who personifies mastery. The desire to connect with others can be found in the orphan or everyman who yearns to belong; the lover who seeks intimacy; and the fool or jester who is fixated on the pursuit of pleasure. The caregiver, who offers selfless service; the ruler, who attempts to control; and the creator or artist, who strives to bring innovation into being, strive to provide structure.

In the films chosen for the study, both the protagonists are forced to renounce their natural archetypical images and appropriate to ones their personalities do not align with. The unnamed protagonist played by Nimisha Sajayan in the film *The Great Indian Kitchen*, is a young bride fresh in the household of her in-laws. Though a typical fish out of water, she is seen putting in her best efforts to fit in with the rhythm of the household. Things begin to go south when the mother-in-law, who is an archetypical mother or caregiver, temporarily leaves for her daughter's home and her legacy of service is entrusted with the young protagonist. This point forth begins the conflict between the archetypes at play.

As already shown at the beginning of the film, the unnamed young bride is a passionate dancer, who falls under the creator or artist archetypical image. Having been brought up in a traditional patriarchal society, her animus is attuned to its rules and regulations. Like all around her, she too considers it normal to get married to a stranger and get uprooted from her comfort zone. This prompts her to don the persona of a docile and pleasant wife who exists to ensure the comfort of others through her service. However, after the departure of her mother-in-law, she slowly turns into a victim of domestic abuse. Though the film does not depict any instance of physical abuse, she is made to suffer all other forms of domestic abuse as identified by the United Nations. She is refused the opportunity to secure a job as her husband's family needs her to be a stay-at-home wife. When she swallows her pride and tries to appease the

patriarchs, she is forced to do all the household chores the hard way. Her 'mild-mannered' father-in-law sweetly forbids her from cooking rice in the pressure cooker and washing his clothes in the washing machine.

As observed by Narayanan, an ideal wife is defined in the Vedic Indian tradition as "Karyeshu dasi, karanesu mantri, bhojeshu mata, shayaneshu Rambha, roopeshu Lakshmi, kshamayeshu Dharitri, shath dharmayukta kuladh armapatni." The unnamed young bride is forced to redefine her personality to suit this definition albeit without the privileges of the minister in the second description. Nobody listens to or respects her opinions. Even when she jokes about her husband's non-existent table manners at home, she is made to apologize. Her psychological turmoil boils over when the Supreme Court verdict concerning the temple entry of women is taken up in the social media as a declaration of women's freedom. However, she is denied even the freedom to share a post in this regard. Her spirit wanes as she gradually realises that her status in that household is just that of a glorified slave.

To make matters worse, her husband's family practices menstrual taboo; forcing her to live the life of an untouchable for a week. Even when she tries to help her husband to get up after he falls off the scooter, she is shouted upon for making him impure by touch as she is still on her period. When she asks for some foreplay before sex, her husband slut shames her for being knowledgeable about sexual intimacy. All these contribute to her frustration and alienation; not only in her husband's home but also in her own family, who classifies all her troubles as normal occurrences in marital life. Even at the end of the film when everyone is aware of her plight in her husband's home, her parents consider her the guilty party and advise her to seek forgiveness and return to her husband. She finds herself constantly under duress to retain her persona and suppress her shadow. Consequently, she is denied the opportunity to find the equilibrium her archetypical self craves for.

Things come to a head when her repugnance to the clogged kitchen sink her husband conveniently ignores becomes a metonym of conflict triggering her revolt. When she serves the patriarchy the waste water from the kitchen sink, instead of tea, we encounter her Jungian shadow. Though the act might seem inhuman and highly repugnant, it is not uncalled for. They had slowly been strangling her psyche; it was time to let the shadow out. Similar to the divine avatars in mythology, who take extremely vicious forms to confront evil, the unnamed protagonist in *The Great Indian Kitchen* unleashes her ruthless shadow. Finally, as she acknowledges her shadow, she takes down her docile persona and comes to terms with her true self. After the ultimate act of revenge, she does not choose a backdoor exit. Instead, she locks her tormentors in the kitchen and walks out of the front door towards freedom.

What is at play here is the confrontation of conflicting archetypical images. By putting on the persona of a submissive wife, the unnamed protagonist tries to assume the image of the mother or caregiver whose sole purpose in life is service. This does not sync with her natural instincts that favour the creator or artist image. Her story begins and ends with dance; evolving from the traditional to the contemporary style, reflecting her own life's path. When her body sways to music, she experiences the kind of fulfilment which is conspicuously absent in her life as a caregiver. In short, she is a misfit in her assumed archetypical image. The automated routine her mother-in-law seamlessly executes in providing care to the family, especially her father-in-law, becomes a dead albatross around her neck. Nevertheless, as a true artist cannot be caged for long, she decides to bring the battle to the home front. The patriarchal society will of course regard her a fool for forsaking such a prestigious alliance and pursuing art, but her psyche will heal and flourish again.

Jayabharathi aka Jaya in *Jaya Jaya Jaya Jaya Hey*, on the other hand, is an explorer or seeker. At the opening of the film, we discover her acute awareness of gender discrimination disguised as love and care at home. Her affair with the control freak Karthikeyan Sir is a quest for freedom as she initially believes him to be a progressive advocate of women's freedom. The fiasco the affair ends in results in her hasty marriage to Rajesh, a chauvinistic patriarch with anger management issues. The first half of the film plays like a documentary on domestic abuse wherein Jaya gets constantly beaten and shouted at by her husband. Like the unnamed protagonist of *The Great Indian Kitchen* she too tries to fade into the persona of the ideal wife but the physical and psychological abuse do not cease. Rajesh's aggressive behaviour only escalates with Jaya's silence and the intervention of his mother and sister also abysmally fails to bring her any relief. She becomes a joke among the employees of his poultry farm who casually remark that if he has hit her then all he has to do by way of penance is to buy her some idiyappam (steamed rice noodles) and chilli chicken and all will be well.

Like the unnamed protagonist of *The Great Indian Kitchen*, Jaya is also prevented from gaining economic independence. Her attempts at continuing her education and securing a job are constantly thwarted by Rajesh, who wants her to live under his thumb. His constant physical abuse is a clever tactic to scare her into submission. Though she too tries to get her family's help to escape the constant torture, they consider such abusive behaviour as part and parcel of marital life and advise her to adjust. Her decision to learn Taekwondo for self-defence is a direct outcome of her family's failure to provide the required support. When the system fails you, you have to fight your own battles. Like that of Vidya Bagchi in Sujoy Ghosh's *Kahaani* (2012), Jaya's is a battle for justice that the system fails to provide. True to the primordial explorer image, she is a trailblazer who wades through a tumultuous life to earn the right to freedom from abuse and suppression.

In Jaya we find yet another young bride who is forced to deny the true identity of her psyche. However, unlike her counterpart in *The Great Indian Kitchen*, the spirit of resistance has always been alive in her. Even as a child she was acutely aware of the freedom denied to her because of her gender identity. Like the Beast in Salman Rushdie's *Shame*, her shadow patiently bides its time. She trains in secret, working every household object and chore into a rigorous strength training and target practice regime. Even something as mundane as making idiyappam (which takes immense strength to squeeze) is turned into a strength training exercise. Unlike the unnamed bride in *The Great Indian Kitchen*, Jaya channels her animus, with all its regressive qualities, into a defensive armour. After the constant volley of slaps, when she finally delivers the well-aimed kick that sends Rajesh flying across the room, we witness the unleashing of her caged shadow. Her demure persona had given her nothing but suffering; her shadow, though violent and ruthless, ensures her safety.

Unfortunately, when Rajesh feigns remorse and lulls her into a false sense of security, she lets her guard down and reins in her shadow. She once again tries to don the persona of a dutiful wife. However, Rajesh's only intention is to subdue her through impregnation and subsequent responsibilities of motherhood: "the institution, which aims at ensuring that ... all women ... shall remain under male control" (Rich 13). When Jaya realises that it was yet another ruse to psychologically subdue her, she walks away. Her shadow lies dormant in this situation wherein she miscarries and become shunned by everyone. If she was an everyman or orphan archetype, she would have committed suicide at this point. Though she does consider it and stands on the ledge ready to jump, she does not. She is a seeker, an explorer for whom battles are a way of life and freedom, the spoils of war.

For someone whose predominant archetypal image is that of the seeker, confinement in a domestic scenario shall never bring peace. Bonaduce compares seekers to pilgrims consuming the miles, often unmindful of the destination. Like Tennyson's Ulysses they are driven by the thirst for adventure and "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" (line 70) is their mantra. They try to turn every commonplace situation in life into an engaging challenge. Jaya is all these. She turns not just the mundane but also extreme adversities into an adventure. Her decision to buy Rajesh's rival poultry farm and to offer him stiff competition in business is also a version of adventure. She refuses to yield though everyone finds fault with her for defending herself from constant physical abuse. She refuses to justify herself when her counter attack on Rajesh is discovered by the family and she is cast as the villain by everyone including the family court judge. Her refusal to sign the divorce papers does not stem from the desire to work things out but her psyche's refusal to yield. Her self finds its equilibrium when she tears away her persona and confront her shadow. She strives, seeks, finds, and lives her true archetypal destiny; that of the explorer.

Both Jaya and the unnamed bride are forced to be the caregiver even though their primordial archetypal image derived from the collective unconscious is not inclined to self-sacrificing service. They have the archetypal mother instinct and they do care, but that is not all they are. Their desires extend beyond the confines of the household where the services rendered by them are never acknowledged. The patriarchal society expects from them a constant denial of the self. They are always expected to put others before themselves; to cook, clean, and eat the leftovers of others without any complaint; to erase their true personality and desires; and to slowly fade away behind the mask of the archetypal mother, who encompasses "all that is benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility" (Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 82). Both try but fail to be the 'kuladharmapatni' as defined by the Indian Vedic tradition as they are unique individuals and not Stepford wives programmed with the mission statement of being completely submissive to their husbands.

If their families had recognized and nurtured their true passions, if they had stood with them when they talked of the abuse, both the protagonists might have escaped the plight of being victims of continued domestic abuse. Unfortunately, this does not happen, prompting the artist and the seeker to put on battle armour and defend themselves. It has to be understood that a persona is just a mask that we wear to make ourselves more agreeable to others in certain social situations. Nobody can and should wear it for life. Such an attempt, however successful it seems from the outside, will only lead to the annihilation of the self, which can have disastrous outcomes for the psyche. Both the films chosen for the study have artfully engaged with the theme of domestic abuse in all its myriad shades. Their protagonists, whether named or unnamed, are the representatives of countless women forced to give up their dreams and desires to fit into the conventional and universal archetypal image of the caregiver. Hence, their revolt is an assertion of individuality; an acknowledgement of their natural archetypal images stemming from the collective unconscious; and an acceptance of the true image of their psyche that has found equilibrium at the confluence of the persona and the shadow.

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