Hero's Journey of Mahendran's Kaali (Mullum Mallarum, 1978)

M. Arjun

M.Sc. Student, Department of Visual Communication, Loyola College, Chennai, India

Abstract: **This is an attempt to deconstruct various layers of narrative embellishments that builds the foundation of the narrative structure of Mahendran's Mullum Malarum with the utilization of logical and chronological buildup of hero's journey to understand the character arc of kaali. The findings hint that there is a huge influence social angst that stems from the pristine and traditional portrayal of the protagonist's behaviour, but deeper is the huge gashes of egoism we tend to witness throughout the film in the form of obsessive matriarchic behaviour and wrongly translates as affection and love. Kaali is portrayed as an "angry young man with a kind heart" who does not admit mistakes, despite having committed acts such as breaking car headlights and allowing people to ride the trolley, in violation of the powerhouse's rules. Trying to uphold a false moral righteousness Kaali's protectiveness of Valli to the brink of obsession. Kaali throughout the film has utilized his affection as a false projection to channel his inner egotistical drive to maintain and enhance favorable views of himself and other characters, and throughout the film he features to carry an inflated opinion of his's personal features and self-importance, includes intellectual, physical, social and other overestimations of self over others.**

Keywords: **Narrative structure, Character arc, Hero's journey, Monomyth.**

1. Introduction

J. Alexander, known professionally as Mahendran, who was an Indian film director, screenwriter and actor, known for his work in the Tamil film industry. Mahendran is regarded as one of the greatest film makers of Tamil cinema and has influenced several filmmakers of the generations followed. His debut film mullum malarum has been considered as a modern classic of tamil cinema and also one of the first few films to understand the nature of film as a language and established that a film could be treated less a talkie, maximising on the visual grammar creating a unique experience among the viewers, gathering accolades calling him the satyajit ray of tamil cinema and the film is being taught in film schools across the globe.

Mahendran read only part of the novel, and developed the screenplay as he wanted, making a visually-focused film without formulaic Tamil cinema conventions he disliked such as melodrama, overacting, excessive usage of dialogue deciding to make this film as his directorial debut, and cinematographer Balu Mahendra, who was already an established director, assisted him. Principal photography lasted for about 30 days, taking place primarily in Sringeri, Karnataka, though some

scenes were also filmed in Ooty, Tamil Nadu. Although it opened to tepid box-office earnings, positive reviews from critics and favourable word of mouth in later weeks helped make it a success with a theatrical run of The film was noted and we'll received for the protagonist's performance, cinematography, music, and mainly Mahendran's screenplay proving that cinema is a "visual medium". Mahendran's kaali is considered to be one of the greatest characters ever penned in the history of tamil cinema. It won the Filmfare Award for Best Film – Tamil, the Tamil Nadu State Film Award for Best Film and Rajinikanth won the Tamil Nadu State Film Award Special, he continued following this style throughout in all his later films.

2. Review of literature

A study on the narrative structure of art films by ria Micheal showed that The reflection on film are going to be placed at intervals the framework of popular culture and lived faith as recognized themes inside the discipline of sensible theology. it's argued that the angle of viewers is of importance among the method of meaning-making. By focusing on the experience and meaning-making through the act of film-watching the stress isn't most on the message that the producer desires to convey however rather on the experience that's created within the viewer. experience isn't viewed as solely emotional, however rather that, at least, Inclusive of the psychological feature and emotional are key within the act of looking at a movie. it's so argued that this experience that's rarely mirrored on by viewers might function a fruitful platform for meaning-making by the viewer. in an exceedingly context wherever there looks to be a decline in institutionalized styles of faith, it's vital to research rising styles of faith. moreover, the In site the self additionally makes people's experiences and practices in standard of living valuable resources for system reflection. This reflection might give a theoretical framework for particularly enquiry on however film as specific kind of media is a non-secular resource and plays a task within the construction of meaning and spiritual identity.

A study by Celina Zeller on how the arc of characters influence the narrative structure of a text shows that Examining beginnings and endings in the genre of 'multi-story' (or portmanteau) movies, Perkins elucidated the various methods used to make the author the focus of these multi-stranded

International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management
Volume-2, Issue-10, October-2019
www.ijresm.com | ISSN (Online): 2581-5792

509

narratives. Drawing on the literary cachet of their source texts, Quartet, Full House and Le Plaisir make Maugham, O. Henry and Maupassant the respective loci around which their stories revolve. Pointing out that authorial intrusions were, with the exception of Le Plaisir, used only at the beginnings of such films, Perkins suggested the possibility of a largely unexplored narrative technique available in returning to the author at the close of a film. However, it was Professor Perkin's call for, 'an aesthetics of the quite good, of the satisfactorily effective, as well as the extremes: the abject and the sublime,' that seemed to resonate most with the audience.

Linda seger in her study on film narrative found out that the rearrangement of the filmic apparatus produce these isolated and concentrated transformations that affects filmic perception and signifying processes ,As reference points to our visual experience over our lifetimes, outside of film, they become a device through which the film taps an association with non filmic vision; yet, what is avoided is the mere reproduction and reconstruction of the visual impression the eye would receive if it were a direct witness to the locality at which the camera was placed. Through the readjustments of the camera apparatus mentioned earlier, the image is transformed into a decoy, as marked a pastiche as are the sculpture boxes.

Joseph devine in his study to find a separation of the functioning of visual dynamics and representational coding in films, says that the conception of the figuration of nothingness in the image of the remains raises in a very new and intriguing manner the matter of force and significance. no longer the audience have a tendency to percieve the realm of composition bordering on the nonfigurative context, but however they tend to still approach a kind of death, a silence of signification, in the image of death. "To signify but nothing" is to signify the worry of the force through the lack of objective significance. Narrative pictures for the most part contain a circulation of human bodies, that even at times delineated in static framings are caught within the thick of actions. These pictures within the Gates of Death present dead and decaying bodies which are typically troublesome to acknowledge as traces of once living humans, but the camera circulates around these but human object/remains, making activity, movement look dellusional. The paradigmatic oppositions life/death, active/passive, erotic/morbid, seen/hidden are transgressed by the structuration of the film. The audience is forced again and again to Regress, with its eyes, the untouchable dead flesh.

3. Methodology

Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie in their publication Analysis of Film propose many key points concerning film analysis. The general methodology of film analysis points out that film analysis can never be concluded objectively, as there'll invariably be something more to explore and it's necessary for one to possess information concerning film history so as to perform a movie analysis. They acknowledge varied sorts of approaches:

1) Text-based film analysis (structural approach)
2) topic based mostly analysis (narrative approach)
3) image and sound approach (iconic analysis)
4) psychoanalytic approach and
5) historical approach.

I have chosen topic based analysis approach and find that to be the most appropriate method using joseph Campbell's hero's journey. Analysis of narrative structure is qualitative by nature. The film is analyzed frame by frame to track the character arc of the protagonist's character kaali in the film using joseph campbells's framework of monomyth mentioned in his Hero with a thousand faces.

4. Summary of mullum malarum

The film fades in to a closeup of kaali, angrily starring at her sister, who is dangling mid air thirty feet above the ground as they are involved in street trickery, followed by a social commentary of the state of orphans, the montage cuts to the title "mullum mallarum" in blood red that acts as a connotation ("thorn and flower" or "A thorn can blossom too"). Both kaali and vaali begin their life as orphans, growing up on the streets, tending to menial performances to support their lives, who later escapes from their master, searching for new paths.

Years later, we see kaali again grown up, but with the same social angst as he witnesses humiliation of a financially deprived porter. Valli encounters a young women manga on the river banks who has travelled all the way from a drought-stricken town along with her mother, sitting astray as they inform her that they are parched and famished.

Kaali works for a private powerhouse in the valley below, acting as a winch operator from a shed in the village through a cable trolley that ferries workers. The powerhouses newly appointed divisional engineer, who is strict and bound by rules has arrived earlier by a day in town, notices that kaali is offering rides freely for the villagers who has to travel across min an unauthorised manner. He asks kaali to immediately vacate the villagers from the winch, kaali who frequently gets angry at people who lacks empathy towards the socially deprived, stops the trolley mid-way asking the division officer to walk the rest of the way, so that he can understand the people's difficulties.

Valli with the help of her brother feeds and shelters the couple for the night and asks kaali about allowing them to use the vacant house next door, further providing her mother with a job security. Meanwhile, Kali roughs up his fellow employees whom he suspects of snitching on him to Kumaran.

Kali is given a final warning by Kumaran as a prelude to serious disciplinary action. While Kali is at work, Manga appears, picks up his watch and teasingly declares she will run away with it. A chase ensues, taking them through the woods and into the river. Waist-deep in the water, Kali retrieves the watch and rushes back to the shed. During his absence, a child living in the valley has needed medical attention. After the emergency alarm at the shed has rung for several minutes, a passerby steps in to operate the winch. The child is transported

510

International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management
Volume-2, Issue-10, October-2019
www.ijresm.com | ISSN (Online): 2581-5792

back in the trolley and dispatched to a hospital.The following day, Kumaran suspends Kali from his job for ten days for gross misconduct.

The following night, in order to put off the grave mood kaali ventures into the mullimalai forest, singing and dancing inebriated with the local bandagas. While staggering back home drunk, Kali passes out on an unlit street. A truck drives over his left arm, which is amputated at a city hospital. As a result, Kumaran fires Kali since he can no longer perform his job adequately with one arm. At Valli's prompting, Kali and Manga agree to marry; they have a simple wedding ceremony held at the local temple. Kumaran attends and brings a present of cash, which Kali spurns, but Manga accepts. After determining her willingness for marriage, he requests permission from Kali who asks him to return the following day. Later that day, Kali corners local grocer Murgesa, who is a good for nothing simpleton, known for flirtatious behaviour, and offers him his sister's hand in marriage.

An engagement ceremony for Murgesa and Valli is arranged. During the engagement ceremony manga abruptly interferes stopping the ceremony, making kaali furious. He physically assaults her repeatedly, but Manga remains firm in her opposition. The next day, Manga convinces Kumaran and Valli to marry without Kali's knowledge, but he accosts their wedding party on its way to the temple. Kali accuses his sister of abandoning him because of his handicap. Valli is filled with guilt and rushes into his arms. Kali reminds the onlookers that he remains the most important man in his sister's life. Although he still dislikes Kumaran, Kali's self-esteem is restored, and he offers his blessings for the marriage.

5. Data interpretation

The ordinary world: The Hero is introduced. Here he's shown in his normal World, that is nothing special adding an entire distinction to the Special World that he Would later venture into. That includes an unhappy, boring life inorder to get the readers to sympathize and determine with him. Where KAALI is introduced as he ventures to his work in daily routine, encountering various characters that play an eminent role in the film, on the way to his work. His ordinary world is filled with poverty, self-righteousness and social angst, where his awareness of problem is limited.

The call to adventure: Within his standard World, the Hero receives some kind of data that shakes up matters and acts like a cue the decisive call. The Hero is being prompted to go away from the normal World for the Special World. this can be wherever he's starting acting like a replacement stage in his life. The call to the adventure is when he encounters the new divisional operator, who disturbs his daily routine and that of the locals, asking him to abide by rules and not to provide the locals with a free ride into the town, providing an increased awareness pushing him to change.

Refusal of the call: The Hero opts out to a choice of refusal to answer the call and switch aloof from the journey, due to

feelings of insecurity, obligation, or worry of the unknown. Kaali ignores the presence of the divisional operator acting rebellious towards his calls, displaying resistance and fear to change.

Meeting the mentor: The Hero meets a guide or defender or some kind of witching helper—often a seasoned traveler—who provide the Hero coaching, knowledge, confidence, advice, and the specified can facilitate the Hero on his journey. The key word is that the Mentor offers to facilitate and steer the journey whereas the Hero is the sole responsible person to participate in and complete the journey, where both manga and valli both act as kaali's mentor, who ultimately help him to overcome his fear.

Crossing the first threshold: At the tip of this initial half, the Departure, the Hero commits to steer away from the normal World and sailing into the journey and also the Special World. This new unknown and dangerous world contains rules the Hero isn't at home with. whereas the Mentor lead the Hero to the brink, the Hero must cross it on his own. the brink is additionally guarded by a Guardian or Gatekeeper, which suggests the Hero should persuade be worthy so as to pass the brink. This is where people create a bad reputation and a tainted image about kaali to the supervisor that at last leads to a direct confrontation and a warning, followed by a street brawl with the clerk, committing himself to change.

Tests, allies and enemies: The Hero explores this new and unknown world and goes through tests and trials at intervals during this unknown setting. He learns new things and skills which will prepare him for the Ordeal that's to return. The Hero shouldn't succeed at each check, he ought to understand what failure sounds like because this can make him grow). He also will encounter new characters which will help him out friends from foes. His new companions can facilitate him with the tests and trials. Where kaali encounters new characters like the supervisor and the division office clerk who tries to create him a bad reputation, and have a grab at his job, even though he wins the smaller trials like the game of uri he loses his test when he gets suspended from his main job for a lack of conscience and for his behaviour thats declared reckless, eploring and experimenting with new conditions.

Approach to the innermost cave: The hero prepares for the main challenge within the special world—together with his friends—by facing bigger challenges and tougher obstacles and guardians. this can be the simplest way to prove himself worthy to have bigger challenges and also the final battle. Hero battles his innermost fear that materializes when he loses his hand in a lorry accident, which acts as a symbolic emasculation of his ego, preparing for a major change.

The ordeal: The Hero faces his greatest challenge from the Antagonist, with the data and skills he has obtained up till now. He confronts death or his deepest worry. He then experiences death and rebirth either literal or symbolic. Kaali is declared unfit for his job and even though he appears to have blind faith in himself and his family, he is rendered to not be of much use

International Journal of Research in Engineering, Science and Management
Volume-2, Issue-10, October-2019
www.ijresm.com | ISSN (Online): 2581-5792

511

to the materialistic society, and finding a right bride for his sister becomes the biggest challenge that he faces, with a feeling of life or death situation.

The Reward: Kaali takes possession of the reward/treasure he won by facing his greatest challenge, marking his power to overcome the Antagonist. This reward/treasure is what the Hero went on the journey to induce mental/physical strength or materialistic power, where he attempts over again the game of uri and also tries to redeem a social life after marrying manga, further accepting the new life and consequences as such.

The Road back: Kaali is driven to complete the journey by going back to the normal World with the reward/treasure he won. It will typically be as dangerous to come back from the journey because it was perilous enough to begin with in the first place. there's typically a chase scene that signals the urgency and danger of the mission, or the defeated Antagonist could also be rallying for a second spherical, when kumaran is found not to be of a suitable match by kaali, resorting out to a new change and rededication.

The Ressurection: Kaali is once more tested on the brink going back to the normal World this could also be caused by a rebounding Antagonist should be conquered once more. The Hero experiences a final moment of death and resurrection that's on a better and additional level than the previous one, so he's pure once he re-enters the normal World. This resurrection might either be literal or symbolical, and he wakes to a brand-new world and remodeled life, where manga stops the engagement ceremony beyond the control of kaali. Where he encounters the last minute danger.

Return with the elixir: Kaali returns home with some part of the reward/treasure which will facilitate him improve the normal World it will even as otherwise be a motivating factor as a bigger insight into himself as a person. Usually, the elixir/treasure is supposed to assist somebody apart from the Hero—what the Hero gained on his journey can profit others on the far side himself, that is none other than his self-esteem redeemed by his sister as she rejects the marriage without kaali's consent, attaining mastery over self.

6. Findings and conclusion

There is a huge influence social angst that stems from the pristine and traditional portrayal of the protagonist's behaviour, but deeper is the huge gashes of egoism we tend to witness throughout the film in the form of obsessive matriarchic behaviour and wrongly translates as affection and love. Kaali is portrayed as an "angry young man with a kind heart" who does not admit mistakes, despite having committed acts such as breaking car headlights and allowing people to ride the trolley, in violation of the powerhouse's rules. Trying to uphold a false moral righteousness Kaali's protectiveness of Valli to the brink of obsession.

Egotism is one of Mullum Malarum's central themes, identifying Kali as the alpha male of his community central themes, identifying Kali as the alpha male of his community when Kali's arm is amputated, he feels helpless and emasculated, and Kumaran becomes an easy target.

The transformation back to the ordinary worlds allows Kaali to undergo a gradual reconciliation to a more realistic view of his's own place in the society – creating a lessening illusion of his egotistical swollen mind. His Less adequate adjustment may later lead to what has been called defensive egotism where he agrees to the societies call on his personal life, serving to overcompensate for the fragility of the underlying concept of self.

Kali refuses to see the benefits of his sister marrying a wealthy and educated man, even when Manga asks for his consent, but sees the error of his ways when Valli abandons her wedding party to join her brother: "My sister has shown all of you that I am the most important person in her life. I need only that happiness for the rest of my life. And it is with that pride and arrogance that I give my permission for my sister to marry". that the film ends with Kali relenting to Valli's desire to marry the man she wishes but not before he tells Kumaran that he still dislikes him but agrees so only because his self-respect is redeemed.

Kaali throughout the film has utilized his affection as a false projection to channel his inner egotistical drive to maintain and enhance favorable views of himself and other characters, and throughout the film he features to carry an inflated opinion of his's personal features and self-importance, includes intellectual, physical, social and other overestimations of self over others.

References

[1] Arnheim, R. 2004. Art and visual perception: A psychology of the creative eye. Berkeley, University of California Press, 518 p.
[2] Aumont, J.; Bergala, A.; Marie, M.; Vernet, M. 1992. Aesthetics of film. Austin, University of Texas Press, 288 p.
[3] Barthes, R. 1982. Camera Lucida: Reflections on photography. London, Jonathan Cape, 119 p.
[4] Baudrillard, J. 1997. The system of objects. London, Verso, 224 p.
[5] Bazin, A. 1976. Qu'est-ce que le cinéma? Paris, Éditions du Cerf, 372 p.
[6] BOTTON, A. de. 2006. The architecture of happiness. London, Penguin Books, 288 p.
[7] Eisenstein, S. M. 1988. Selected Works. Vol. I: Writings, 1922-34. London, British Film Institute, 334 p.
[8] Eisenstein, S. M. 1991. Selected Works. Vol. II: Towards a Theory of Montage. London, British Film Institute, 448 p.
[9] Gambarato, R. R.; Malaguti, S. 2006. Objects of desire: Methodology for film analysis in the sense of Peircean semiotics and intermedial studies.
[10] Bibekananda Ray; Naveen Joshi; India. Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. Publications Division (1 January 2005). Conscience of the race: India's offbeat cinema. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India. p. 122.
[11] https://www.deccanchronicle.com/entertainment/kollywood/030419/veteran-writer-director-mahendran-passes-away.html
[12] "cinemanewstoday.com". June 2016.