

Project Report

Submitted by

Aileen Grace Thomas (SB20CE002)

Under the guidance of

Ms. Annie Anthony

In partial fulfilment of requirements for award of the degree

Of Bachelor of Arts

St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam



College With Potential for

Excellence Accredited by NAAC with 'A++'

Grade

Affiliated to

Mahatma Gandhi University

Kottayam-686560

April 2023

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Declaration

I do affirm that the project “Exploring the Butterfly Effect and Rashomon Effect in Select Malayalam Films (2016-22)” submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the Bachelor of Arts degree in English Literature and Communication Studies has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Ernakulam

Aileen Grace Thomas

19 April 2023

SB20CE002

B.A. English Literature and Communication Studies

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Certificate

I hereby certify that this project entitled “Exploring the Butterfly Effect and Rashomon Effect in Select Malayalam Films (2016-22)” by Aileen Grace Thomas is a record of bonafide work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance.

Ernakulam

Annie Anthony

19 April 2023

Department of Communicative English

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Acknowledgement

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Aileen Grace Thomas

Abstract

New age Malayalam cinema has looked into many creative and innovative techniques and strategies of filmmaking and storytelling in the modern scenario. Such innovations have led to its widespread acceptance from the audience. New age Malayalam Cinema has looked into various themes such as Coming of Age, Gender Roles, Rawness of life. One such application in New Age Malayalam cinema is pertaining to the Chaos Theory, Rashomon Effect and Butterfly Effect. This study focuses on the key features of these theories, and attempts to draw a parallelism between these films. The Chaos Theory highlights the relevance and presence of unpredictable, irregular and non linear events or happenings. It holds the Butterfly Effect within, according to which the initial conditions, however minute, act as pivotal catalysts in the climax action or drastic happenings that ensue. The two films *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) and *Thallumaala* (2022) propound the verity that the initial and trivial happenings or nuances can potentially lead to chaos and its consequences. They also hold evident instances of the Rashomon effect as well. The multiple chaotic pathways in these films that result in deterministic chaos and their complex themes are explored in this research.

Key Words: Butterfly Effect, Chaos Theory, Rashomon effect, *Maheshinte Prathikaaram*, *Thallumaala*.

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Chapter- I

Introduction

Indian cinema is one of the most renowned film industries in the world. It has deployed a large influence and inspiration from world cinema, with its multi-lingual and open film art. Over the last decade, Indian cinema has mastered experimentations on themes and techniques; films like *RRR* (2022), *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), *Minnal Murali* (2021, Lightning Murali) and many more are evidence of this. Innovations and experimentations to produce better visually, rationally and emotionally rich films is indeed a commendable feature of South Indian cinema. Various techniques in storytelling and scriptwriting have begun to be employed in many notable films, particularly in Malayalam cinema. Malayalam cinema is one of the notable film industries in the world, known for its experimental nature and innovation in themes and concepts. In terms of content, form, music, depiction and conveyance of characters and scenarios or the medium, pioneers and novice directors have been following this revolutionary technique at length. A chief characteristic of such films is its profound relatability and the creative representation of the most commonplace of emotions and scenarios. “Films such as *The Great Indian Kitchen* (2021), with its striking storytelling and stellar performances, drew in audiences”, commented Indian film critic Anna M.M Vetticad (Vetticad, et al); as the success of any film is owed to the audience it serves. The extent to which films connected and related with the audience indeed added to their success.

Malayalam cinema has rendered many influential and memorable films in the past decades, exerting great effects on the economy, extent of technical advancement, political choices and relationships. A film is an equal depiction of joy in the eyes of its audiences and unveils the real essence of the political, sociological and economic nuances in our day-to-day lives. The year 2010 marks a pivotal turning point in the Malayalam film industry with the advent of new generation cinema- an era that focussed on employing various methods and innovative techniques to connect with their audiences better. Contemporary and ordinary issues and its extraordinary depictions helped such films gather more momentum and audiences. Among the many novelties used and applauded, one of the noted ones is the Butterfly effect. It states that small, apparently trivial events may ultimately result

in something with much greater consequences; they can potentially have non-linear impacts on very complex systems. For instance, when a butterfly flaps its wings in India, that tiny change in air pressure could eventually cause a tornado in Egypt. The Butterfly Effect is a theory that has been long debated and ultimately given solid furnishing by meteorologist Edward Lorenz, who coined the Chaos Theory. In an experiment to model a weather prediction, he entered the initial condition as 0.506, instead of 0.50612 and arrived at an intriguing result. From this, he deduced a tiny change in the initial conditions had enormous long-term effects.

Indian films like *Andha Naal* (That Day, 1954), *Virumandi* (2004), *Talwar* (Sword, 2015) are a few among the many films to have incorporated the emerging approach of providing multiple perspectives of the same story, thereby giving the audience an option to question the truth and arrive at perspectives of their own. This storytelling technique is known as the Rashomon effect. The Rashomon Effect is a technique of storytelling and writing, where contrasting and contradictory interpretations and descriptions of the same event or scenario are given, thereby providing multiple perspectives of the same event. The concept gained its name from the film 'Rashomon' by Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese filmmaker. Since then, countless films have portrayed this theory. This technique is used in the fields of cinema, law, science and psychology. The theory is pertinent in various societal aspects as well. The Butterfly effect and Rashomon theory can be evidently established in many scenarios and milieus in Kerala society; a situation or happening could have multiple viewpoints and perspectives, and can even be misleading. In the 56th Mahatma Gandhi boat race held at Alappuzha, the Kerala Police Team that rowed the Niranam Chundan, was accused of cheating their way towards the cup as they were team was found pushing an opponent oarsman from the Cheruthana Chundan into the water, leading the boat to capsize. But they claim that the opponent team was constantly pushing them to the corner and the action was in defence. However, visuals both favour and disfavour both the teams as videos captured and circulated in the media depict fault at both sides. This gave new dimensions to the scenario, providing it with multiple debatable perspectives and realities, evincing the influence of the Rashomon effect in the most common place scenarios of Kerala

society. Depiction of such emerging and unique concepts and utilising such storytelling techniques can indeed be a very relatable and engaging experience for the audience.

The controversy over the release of four films based on the life story of Variyamkunnath Kunjahammed Haji is yet another example of the Rashomon Effect in Kerala society. Award-winning filmmaker P. T. Kunju Muhammed announced a film named '*Shahid Vaariyamkunnan*'. It was during the same time that leading Malayalam actor Prithviraj announced a film titled '*Variyamkunnan*' which was to be released in 2021. The film, directed by Ashiq Abu, was in commemoration of the 100th year celebration of the Malabar rebellion. This announcement was immediately met with resistance from right winger supporters, who consider Haji as having massacred Hindus during the riot. It created a religious and political boundary to the issue. In the following days, three more films were announced by three different directors on the same person. The film titled '*The Great Vaariyamkunnan*', was announced by director Ibrahim Vengara. Ali Akbar announced a film with a different perspective and light, supporting the rightist views and opposing the perspectives and stands of the former films. Each of these announcements takes the subject and the plot in a different light, giving multiple interpretations to it.

The research project aims to elaborate on the application of Butterfly Effect and Rashomon effect in two Malayalam films, *Thallumala* (Ballad of Brawls, 2022) and *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (Mahesh's Revenge, 2016). In both these films, it can be closely perceived that minute and negligible occurrences ultimately arrive at drastic and dire results over time. The Butterfly Effect puts forward the realisation that small things pave the way to powerful impacts. These small initial conditions are or can be, very sensitive, owing to their governing nature, and they also act as catalysts for the gravity to follow. Further found relatively common and analogous in these films is the Rashomon effect, where contradictory interpretations of the same event are described by various characters in the film. The research method employed in this research is primarily visual analysis of the films, and subsequent collation of the concepts with it.

Jamie L. Vernon, in his research "Understanding the Butterfly Effect" published in American

Scientist expands on the scientific and rational nuances of the Butterfly effect. The article elucidates on how Lorenz challenged French scholar Pierre-Simon Laplace, who denied the existence of unpredictability in the universe, and how by knowing all the physical laws of nature, the past, present and future could be evidently determined. The study contains the scientific aspects of this theory explained well in detail, and the impact of Edward Lorenz's findings about the Butterfly effect on the scientific and philosophical world. These impacts that are propounded in this research are utilised in the project, and the characteristics of the Butterfly effect explained are put into practicality. Kyle Deguzman, in his article published in Studiobinder, illuminates the impact and importance of the film *Rashomon* (Dispute, 1950) in the storytelling aspect of filmmaking. The article speaks about the origin of the Rashomon Effect. "Kurosawa's exploration of truth and its expression in the film" is what, according to Deguzman, led to the germination and growth of this theory and its application. The article further expands on its influence on both film and culture, and the contribution of the film *Rashomon* (1950) to the theory; the life and innovative difference it has added to the realm of filmmaking. It also advances on how it can be employed in today's cinema, and the elements it withholds. (DeGuzman et al.)

There is immense importance for unreliability in scenarios, which is a common concept used in films today. This provides the audience a space and option to decide and clear the ambiguity and curiosity for themselves. There is ample amount of space for subjectivity in such stories and scenarios. *Gone Girl* (2014) *Hero* (2002) *Elephant* (2003) are a few films that Deguzman mentions to have effectively employed the Rashomon effect. The examples and instances quoted by Deguzman are taken for further comprehension and are interpreted for the project.

The research aims to substantiate the employment of the Butterfly effect and Rashomon effect and trace the trajectories followed with respect to it in the films *Thallumaala* (2022) and *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016). It intends to point out instances that demonstrate the application of the theories in the films and convey the importance these theories have in the success and impact the films won in the society.

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Chapter -II

Unwinding the Butterfly effect in '*Maheshinte Prathikaaram*'

"As with the butterfly, adversity is necessary to build character in people," - Joseph B. Wirthlin

The Butterfly effect and Rashomon effect have come into innovative and effective use in cinema for an incessant period of time. According to the Butterfly effect, even the smallest of changes can bring about drastic changes, owing to sensitive initial conditions, and the Rashomon effect points out the multiple interpretations that a single scenario can have, leading to multiple conclusions. These theories have evidently and notably brought about the impact and success of the film *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016, Mahesh's Revenge).

Dileesh Pothan's *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) is one of the most pronounced new-age Malayalam films. Among the many contributing factors, the storytelling techniques and screenplay methodologies employed are indeed mentionable. Two of such remarkable techniques used are the Butterfly effect and the Rashomon effect. The Butterfly effect is audibly visible as the story progresses. With each progressing key event, the story unfolds the Butterfly effect within it. The flow of events is quite judicious and interesting, with reference to the theory, as it blends with the realisation that small things pave the way to powerful impacts. The small initial conditions that foster the consequences are or can be, very sensitive, owing to their governing nature, and they also act as catalysts for the gravity to follow. The Butterfly effect is a trajectory of the Chaos Theory coined by Lorenz, which elaborates and states the vitality of the sensitive initial conditions. In the film, the initial conditions are projected with utmost vitality and it is clearly shown how they undergo a change. Additionally, there is chaos in the story, which unfolds into an ultimate resolution in the end.

The film can also be applauded for the diversification of opinions and perspectives it offers by way of its characters. The audience gains a different angle of thought each time this technique is applied. The Rashomon effect is used here, which gained popularity and widespread employment in filmmaking and came into relevance from the film *Rashomon* (1950) by Akira Kurosawa, a Japanese filmmaker. A single event or scenario could have contradictory interpretations and descriptions,

thereby providing multiple perspectives of the same event- state the theory.

The Butterfly effect can be seen throughout the progression of the story and is quite evident, upon close perusal and analysis. In the opening of the film, there appears a close-up shot of a slipper, which later on proceeds to be one of the central images of focus all through the film. The close-up shots of the slipper and the tight frame intends to give it due importance and focus and emphasize the image on the viewers' minds. The slipper itself serves as a motif in the story.

The song '*Malamele Thirivechu*', popularly known as '*Idukki*', extensively and charmingly



Fig 2.1: Close-up shot of the slipper

portrays the scenic and touristic beauty of the location that the whole film has been shot at, i.e, Idukki, Kerala and plays during the title sequence of the film. The wide and long shots in the film, especially shown in the song, effectively conveys the rawness and simplicity of the lives of the people, which serve as the initial conditions of the film. There is also a sense of unadulterated lyricism throughout the film, especially in the opening scenes. As visible in the opening scenes, these scenes convey the vitality of the initial conditions and its sensitivity, since these conditions and scenarios are to undergo drastic changes and alterations with life-altering impacts. The attention paid to these initial conditions help analyse the contrast that they have in the end and make it subject to distinction. The mirror in Mahesh's (Fahadh Faasil) dressing table plays yet another vital key as a sensitive and symbolic object, because in the onset of the film, when life was content and calm, he used to cheerfully and optimistically look at his reflection in the mirror. But, in the latter half, Mahesh can be seen breaking down in front of it; the initial condition undergoes a change to such an extent that it is contrasted and

plays the opposite effect. In the scene where the shot cuts from Baby hammering and tapping a wooden frame in his shop, to Mahesh tapping his lunchbox on the table where they have lunch daily, the makers vividly bring about the subtle yet notable day-to-day activities and conditions of the protagonist. This hints at the nature of his daily life, which is quite composed and ordinary in nature. Funerals are one of the recurring and important images throughout the film. The makers have used funerals as a stage and setting for important and catalytic events in the story to take place; for instance, Mahesh and Saumya (Anusree) reunite with each other at her grandfather's funeral. The first instance in the sequence of the Butterfly Effect triggered by Thahir takes place at a funeral as well. The split edit film editing technique of the J-Cut has been used in the scene that immediately follows the song, after displaying the title. In this sound bridging editing technique, the audio of a following scene overlaps the visuals of the scene preceding it. This is also called an Audio Advance or Audio Lead. In this scene, where Mahesh and Saumya are talking over the phone, the audio of that scene is heard over the title that is displayed before it. In the same scene, where Mahesh sets dinner, there is an indication to the initial conditions and the primary setting of the film as the setting, tone and ambience are very routine, untroubled and relaxed, with old and mellow music playing in the radio in the background. Further, in the scenes where Chaachan (Antony Kochi) goes missing, everyone has a different perspective and opinion about his disappearance and draws different conclusions about his "odd" behavior in the past few days. The Rashomon effect can be traced down here. For instance, Babychettan (Alencier Ley Lopez) and Panchayat Member Thahir (Achuthanandan) expresses how Chaachan very suddenly exclaims "*Ee lokam ethra sundaram aanu*" (how beautiful is this world) out to them, when none of them could see or spot anything that could have possibly made him say that. Baby wonders if Chaachan had gone insane- "*Vattayo?*" (has he gone mad?). Likewise, one day, while sitting in Baby's shop, Chaachan gazes at the illuminating LED lights hung around the picture of their late ancestors and one of God, he suddenly tells Baby that he wants to see the Cabaret, which Baby found very humorously odd and puzzling. They use the phrase "*Kili poyi*" (bird gone) (a colloquial slang usage used when someone has gone out of their mind) later, when they find Chaachan in the plantation right outside the house where he had gone to click the picture of a rare and exquisite bird,

being the exceptional photographer he is, Chaachan tells Mahesh “*Kili vanna ennu nokkan poyatha*” (I went to check if the bird had come). Mahesh doesn’t understand what he truly meant as he thinks of it in the sense of the slang. Another sharp instance of the Rashomon effect in terms of gestures, is when Mahesh walks up the pilgrimage hill with the heavy wooden cross as a ritualistic penance or offering. Saumya looks at him with pitiful eyes, while the latter considers this as a look of love and concern as he was all exhausted and fatigued, but in reality, Saumya’s look actually concealed her shame, guilt and helplessness as she was planning on ending their relationship, which Mahesh was not aware of. According to the Rashomon effect, such multiple interpretations and perspectives provide the viewers with the same option to think in various ways. Close-up shots and extreme close-up shots have been extensively employed in the film, and chiefly intent to project the subjects in a vital and emotional light. The symbols of ‘sight’ and ‘eyes’ have been effectively deployed here through the close-up shot. For instance, when Mahesh and Saumya hold sight of each other when she comes home for her grandfather’s funeral, the extreme close up shots of both their eyes audibly convey their affection and the joy they both have on seeing each other.

Upon keen perusal and observation, the butterfly effect and its trajectories have been traced along the following lines. The very first situation or event that proved to be one of the initial conditions was a funeral, where a disagreement and dispute arose between Tomy and Sabu, over whom Eldho had entrusted a homestead or plot. It all begins with Mahesh exclaiming to Thahir “*Robusta kollaale*” (How good is this Robusta banana). The quarrel arises when Sabu takes a bunch of bananas from Eldho’s plot, which according to him, Eldho had entrusted to him. Panchayat member Thahir unwantedly and uninvitedly interferes in the dispute and worsens it by involving Eldho (Dileesh Pothan) and his wife into it. The stressed medium close-up shots of the banana stresses on the pivotal role it has to induce this dispute. The stressed slow-motion medium shot of the phone rings also aggravates the situation, along with the background music. This is one of the inceptive conditions that lead the story, and the Butterfly effect within. When Sara (Unnimaya Prasad) exclaims “*Ningal oru mandan aayi poyallo*” (how can you be so foolish), the immediate next scene shifts to Tomy stressing at Sabu by saying “*Ente aliyan mandan alla*” (my brother-in-law is not a fool), the presence of the

Rashomon effect can be remotely sensed here. The exasperated Thahir speeds up on his cycle from the scene after the worsened dispute and collides with a gooseberry vendor and a man on his cycle on his way. The scene proceeds to an iconic comical scene, where the vendor and the man on the cycle stand humorously helpless when the national anthem is sung in the school opposite.



Fig. 2.2: Thahir collides with the gooseberry vendor and the man on the cycle.

This scene later establishes itself as an iconic and dynamic one. The gooseberry man who is vehemently furious and enraged, rushes home and releases all his anger on the neighboring women who had gathered in the house to watch the daily serial and on his wife Elsy (Manju Pathrose), who happens to be Baby's sister. The background score from the serial in the TV laughably adds on to the gravity of the situation. One of the neighboring women calls Baby and informs him about this happening. Baby is tense but is unable to call his brother-in-law due and rushes to recharge his phone. In the shop he gets into a bitter clash with an auto driver, which serves as the next leading event in the Butterfly effect chain. It is in this scene that Chrisbin (Soubin Shahir), an employee in Baby's shop who is also the comical lead in the film, is introduced as the major factor to worsen and thrust situations. He can be seen as the chaos catalyst. The Chaos theory slowly begins to unravel and prove here, as stability improves into instability, and later ends up in disorder. The fight turns into a melee and Mahesh interferes and events take a different turn altogether. The fight proceeds to become one between Mahesh and Jimson (Sujith Sankar), one of the men involved in the fight. The latter brutally hit and humiliate Mahesh in front of the whole town, and provokes his ego, upon which he decides firmly that he would only wear his sandals after he has hit Jimson back and had his revenge. The might and importance of the slippers in the establishing shot in the very first scene is completed here. Close up shots of the expressions and demeanor of the abusers convey that they are the antagonists. Their

eyes, smirks and movements evidently portray enmity and heroism. The extreme close-up tight shots when joined by tense background music conveys the gravity and graveness of the scene; especially the tight reverse angle shot where Mahesh turns over from the ground establishes the fact that this event has altered his otherwise calm and composed behavior and demeanor. Later in the film, when Mahesh asks Baby whether he has ever seen him ill-behaved or involved in any unruly behavior, this becomes evident. The initial condition of his behavior is altered here, owing to all the above mentioned contributing factors. When Chrisbin is portrayed as the aggravating element, Chaachan is depicted as the neutraliser and the resolving element when he intervenes and sends away the abusers. Throughout the story, it can be noticed that Chaachan always redeems the chaotic situation and acts as the regulating factor. As propounded by Lorenz in the Chaos Theory, chaos is not utterly and completely unpredictable and random; there lies a pattern of short term predictability which arises out of a repeated regularity. This can also be seen as the calm element amidst the chaos and hence, it can be concluded that Chaachan is the 'calm-in-chaos' in the film. For instance, when Chaachan finds the change in Mahesh after the fight, and his desperate and downhearted behavior after the fight, he intervenes. He also serves as a catalyst of change in Mahesh as a photographer, as he inspires in him the confidence and tells him about the importance of moments in photography. After the fight, the scene moves to the house, where they used to play melodious old mellow songs at night and the situation used to be relaxed. Quite contrastingly, it has turned grim and tense and the news of Saumya ending their relationship further adds to the misery. The close-up shot that slowly progresses adds graveness and sorrow, along with the melody "*Cherupunjiri*", sung by Nikhil Mathew. Their daily ambiences and moods are changed; initial conditions are undergoing alterations again. Mahesh's bare feet becomes a recurring image from this point in the film, which serves as a constant reminder of the revenge. In the approaching scenes, when Jimsy asks if she can wear her footwear inside the studio, it reminds the audience of the central situation.

The scene where Chrisbin triggers Mahesh and gets him to come along and hit Jimson back, he initiates the anti-climax where Mahesh is unable to find Jimson as the latter went abroad. The expected climax reaction is not achieved. The makers have effectively exploited the use of ambient light to

effectively convey and employ a natural and raw tone to the scenes. Ambient light along with the brown tones that have been employed has served the mood and setting of the film positively.



Fig.2.2: Mahesh's kitchen; representing ambient lighting, the initial conditions and primary setting.

The contrast between bright and rainy days drawn conveys the changes that have contrastingly altered the course of events. The initial tranquil and cheery events and scenes have bright and light tones, whereas rain is a frequently used symbolic element in the latter half of the story. Grey colouring is used more in the grim and depressing scenes to converse the mood evidently. Jimsy (Aparna Balamurali) serves as yet another inspiring element in the story, as her criticism for Mahesh's photography is what fuels him and inspires him to become a better photographer, in order to prove himself. The outstanding and unique photo that Chaachan clicked while he was in the plantation serves as a point of realization for Mahesh- the Anagnorisis of the story, and further galvanized him to click such pictures. This scene in the dark room also acts as a moment of Anagnorisis for the audience, as they realize why Chaachan said "*Kili vanna ennu nokkan poyatha*" in the earlier scene. This realization is indeed important and the background scores at this point accentuates the tone and mood of the scene in the dark room. The high angle long shots of Mahesh attempting to click Jimsy's picture for the magazine cover patently describes the efforts of the hero to do something outstanding, and the slow motion effects accentuates the scene. The high angle adds onto the power and might of the scene. The song "*Mounangal*" takes the audience on a journey through the places which were shown on a depressing angle earlier, like the pilgrimage centre. This contrast is vital

to analyze the changes brought about in the initial conditions.



Fig. 2.3 Mahesh attempting to click Jimsy's picture for the magazine. The story moves to the consequential finale of the Butterfly effect and the climax of the story, when Mahesh finally hits Jimson back and proves himself in front of the whole town and gets his revenge. This scene is the exact contrast to his initial conditions as a person- his calm and composed behaviour as an individual, and his values as a person. As the theory implies, the contributing and affecting factors need not be colossal and visually notable in size or proportion, but the end results and consequences are sure to be catastrophic.

The elements of stability, instability and ultimate disorder, conjoined with the Calm in Chaos propounded in the Chaos theory are visibly employed in the film *Maheshinte Prathikaaram*(2016), with *Chaachan*, Chrisbin, the slipper, the banana etc. serving as pivotal images. Through the above mentioned and elucidated symbols, images, filming and editing techniques, the Butterfly effect, Chaos theory and the Rashomon effect have been intelligently and creatively employed in the film.

The chain of events, starting from the scene where Thahir initially gets into an uninvited argument and ultimately ending on altering the protagonist's character and life conclusively and irrevocably draws a parallelism with this as well. The sagacious and intelligent use of such a concept has provided a fruitful experience for the viewers. The fight ends in a resolution when Mahesh visits Jimson in the hospital, and cordially ends things on an optimistic note. He conveys his love for Jimsy, who was Jimson's sister, and the ending is implied as a happy one with a slightly humorous tint.

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Chapter- III

Chaos in fragments- Analyzing Chaos in *Thallumaala*

"A touch of a hand might do it, the merest touch of a hand." - Ray Bradbury

Chaos can be defined as a state of complete disorder and confusion. To be in a state of chaos puts forth the understanding that the situation puts the people within it in a never-ending loop. Khalid Rahman's *Thallumaala*(2022) is a story of futile and egoistic brawls that take place in the lives of Wazim (Tovino Thomas) and his friends. The constant triggers between these friends and the society end up in chaos, forming the crux of the film.

"Odukkathe patti parayumbo thudakkathe pattiyum parayanallo. Sathyam paranja ath evideya ennu ariyilla" (When you talk about the end, you must talk about the beginning as well. Honestly speaking, I really don't recall the beginning), The opening of *Thallumaala* (2022) throws light on how once chaos has broken, tracking the origins is something difficult. Edward Lorenz's Chaos Theory talks about how chaos moves from a gradual state of stability to instability and ultimately ends in disorder. In *Thallumaala* (2022), the wedding scene Siyad (Naushad Ali) triggers Wazim's anger and ego by spraying the snow spray on him as he enters, triggering all of his controlled and building fury. This starts out as one of the first instances of chaos as narrated by the story.

The book *'Body Wisdom'* written by Ken Bausch, in the eleventh chapter *'Chaos and Ego'*, talks about the random and connected nature of egoistic chaos- "the ego flows along with the randomness of events producing its own pattern, intricately, beautifully, and uniquely organized. The ego is the strange attractor, par excellence, in the chaos of our unconscious. It plucks out of our myriad possibilities just those that fit our image of ourselves" (Bausch, 8). In the chapter, he talks about how the nature of ego changes chaotic and becomes a strange attractor over the unconscious mind. The same can be related to the fundamental nature of chaos that takes place in the film, as a large majority of it is triggered by futile human ego.

The story follows the fragmented narrative style, a literary practice of the post- modern literary era, in which the story or narrative is divided into various smaller segments and it deviates from the

traditional path. Fragmented or non-linear narrative styles are being extensively used in modern literature and cinema and have been chiefly employed in this film as well without hindering continuity. The story has been divided into nine chapters which happen in different timelines and shifts from one chapter to another in a free and non-orderly manner, owing to the fragmented narrative technique. Each chapter holds a significant event in the development of the plot that frames and formulates the friendship, fights and love in the film. In the present study, these techniques, styles and narratives are used to understand the application of chaos theory in the first scene of the film.

The opening chapter named ‘*Adisthana sowhrudam*’ (primary friendship) communicates how Jamshi (Lukman) and Wazim meet each other at the mosque through an egoistic and futile quarrel. Each fight in the film holds a significant and key element or image in it, like in the fight between Jamshi and Wazim, it appears to be Jamshi’s white shoe that Wazim stamps on.



Fig. 3.1: Wazim stamping on Jamshi’s white shoe.

The background music plays a pivotal role in the success of the film, and the presence and eminence of the music shows clearly from this opening chapter. The ‘Grudge Song’ from the film is the original background score and the song ‘*Thallumaala Paattu*’ gained widespread popularity, the curiosity of which undoubtedly positively contributed to the recognition received by the film. The music playing during the fight scenes throughout the film accentuates the mood and impact of the scene along with the tension being built up. “*The anxious score, by increasing the participants’ vigilance and state of alert greater attention to minor details. Results highlight the pervasive nature of the influence of music within the process of interpretation of visual scenes*” (Ansani et al.). The film in

general incorporates a generous amount of graphical effects, both in visuals and in audio. This graphic editing inculcates and underlines the drama and exertion in the scenes. They appear quite natural and realistic, with exceedingly innovative transitions as shown in the opening credits of the film.

Cross-cutting or Parallel editing is yet another editing and transition technique employed in the film, which has amplified the fragmented narrative style further. The cross-cut scenes convey the fact that the brawls between Jamshi and Wazim and Vikas (Adhri Joe) and Rajesh (Austin Dan) are happening simultaneously at different places at the same point of time in the story, and are made visually appealing by the usage of graphical texts and transitions. This technique has also been employed in the sixth chapter '*Adi Nirthal Prakhyaapanam*' (Declaration of Teetotalism), where the scenes switch between Wazim returning from Dubai, and a totally different scenario where Reji challenges Wazim to neutralise the score with another fight. The scenes appear quite puzzling as the viewers attempt to decipher the scenarios.

The presence of the Rashomon effect together comes into play in the scene where Jamshi and Wazim provide multi-faceted explanations to the Imam to defend themselves. There is Deterministic chaos in the scene as the outcome of this chaos could be quite known and predicted in the random behaviour. There is a multiplicity of interpretations and perceptions in the scene where Rajan (Gokulan) explains to Reji (Shine Tom Chacko), David (Binu Pappu) and the others as to why there arose a conflict between him and Wazim and his friends in the shopping mall. Rajan had only seen the conflict at the shop from a third person's angle, and hence the perspective and inference he drew from it was quite contradictory to the reality of what occurred. Many of the brawls in the film end on a comical resolution, like this one as it humorously led to Wazim and Jamshi finding true friendships in each other. The scene cuts to the fight between Rajesh and Vikas on the road, initiating an aberrant order of events.

The wedding scene holds paramount importance in the progression of events and acts as the epicentre of chaos and action in the film. This fight gives him the popular nickname 'Manavaalan Wazim'. The wedding song and the wedding scenario can be seen recurring in the chain of events;

each time it appears on the screen, a building tension is reinforced upon the viewers. The conga drums played in the wedding serve as an accessory to the chaotic atmosphere and the representation of the wedding and the song as chaotic images. Reverse Chronology is one of the vastly appreciated and engaged storytelling techniques in modern cinema. In reverse chronology, the plot is revealed in the reverse order, where the opening of the film shows the conclusion. *Slumdog Millionaire (2008)* is one of the notable films in the Indian milieu to have explored and employed this technique.



Fig. 3.3: Wazim and friends amidst the fight in the theatre.

Thallumaala (2022) also displays an extremely evident usage of this narrative technique. The opening scene- the fight between Wazim, his friends and Reji, and the wedding brawls, are actually the climax and concluding scenes of the film. The story proceeds to further explore and explain as to why these brawls took place and its leading and stimulating factors.

One of the most notable and common factors in the Butterfly effect is that the sensitive initial conditions undergo drastic and momentous changes owing to the factors that affect them. One of the striking instances that demonstrate this phenomenon is the scene where Reji and his wife take counsel from the priest to resolve issues between them; the wife complains about Reji's changed behaviour and accelerated arrogance, which is proven in the scene where he advises the school students about drug abuse; Reji appears to be utterly vexed and distracted by the fights he has had before which have altered his behavior gravely. He unheedingly slaps a person in the police station and his obsession with egocentric brawls are drawn evidently here.

Among the many key images used in the film, the cycle is one. The third chapter '*Adiyil Anandakaalam*' (frolicking in fights) begins with the scene where Wazim and Fathima Beevi chasing

each other on their cycles. The stunt scene is indeed one filled with a sense of escapade and riddle, where the narration and transitions used, along with the graphical representation of the cycle gives the image an energy from a video game. It marks the advent of the adventurous love story of Wazim and Fathima Beevi (Kalyani Priyadarshan). The song '*Kannil Pettole*' is one that entails great vigour and editing mastery and portrays the lifestyles of Wazim and Fathima Beevi precisely and drew a considerable amount of attention, especially among the youngsters, owing to its vibrancy of tune and visuals. There are multiple chaotic elements and recurring chaotic symbols used in the story.

Alongside, Sathaar serves as a minor chaos trigger in the story, as he can be seen supporting and fuelling Wazim at times when his ego is sparked and sets out. The eyes are additionally another image used in chapter five- '*Adijeevana Margangal*' (brawl-methods of survival). The extreme close-up shots of Wazim and Fathima Beevi's eyes pose as images that convey the strong feelings and instant connection they feel with one another. Likewise, Omega Babu is yet another pivotal chaos element of the film, portrayed in a sense of anonymity and mystery as to why Jamshi has a rivalry with him. The subtle presence of Omega Babu in crucial instances of the film add a different and inexplicable mood to the film. Siyad is another recurring symbol of chaotic triggers. The very first instance of unease between Siyad and Wazim starts at the theatre, when the former humiliates the latter by pulling off his Dhoti on a sarcastic note when Wazim asks him for the ticket. It is upon this initial egoistic trigger that Wazim beats Siyad on the night they targeted Omega Babu. A coincidence between the chaotic elements and symbols can be observed here. This also reinstates the fact that there are multiple elements and contributing factors that influence and induce chaos in the Butterfly effect. Siyad, Omega Babu (Chemban Vinod Jose), Sathaar. are a few of the chaotic elements in the film. The scene where the fight between Siyad and Wazim takes place in the theatre showcases the intensity and gravity of the fights in the film. This scene is visually, musically and graphically appealing as it displays the robustness and fierceness of the fight in the most engaging manner. Additionally, a union of multiple chaotic elements can be seen here, apart from Siyad, Wazim and their allies. Many of the elements are unrelated and completely discrete from one another, and get involved in the fight primarily due to the fight between Siyad and Wazim. These unrelated elements and their involvement were utterly

unpredictable, owing to the nature of the chaos. The elements of the Butterfly effect are reinforced here, as minute changes or actions can cause serious repercussions and consequences. The tendency of chaos to be unpredictable is evinced here.

The succeeding scenes steadily unveils the fragments that connect the initial scenarios of the film. The reverse chronology technique and fragmented narrative coincide here, in the sequence of scenes that begin with Fathima Beevi inviting Wazim to the inauguration of a shop with her. It is in this progression that Wazim meets with a fight with Jamshi at the mosque, simultaneously followed by the brawl between Rajesh and Vikas. Similarly, the same techniques have been used in the scenes where Fathima Beevi slaps Wazim at the shopping mall. This scene is one that has been mentioned before in the film, and its related fragments are solved here. In chapter six, Wazim, Vikas and their friends join for Vikas' bride seeing ceremony. In the car, Vikas complains that Wazim needs to change into other clothes and they all head to the mall, where they encounter Fathima Beevi. She slaps Wazim purely out of unexpected impulse and reflex, as they were about to collide. This is the only part of the situation that Rajan witnesses and creates havoc, informs Reji and his friends about this, and eventually leads to the fight between Reji, Wazim and their allies in the parking lot. All of these scenes were shown previously in the film as isolated fragments, and each of them gains sense and continuity at this point of time in the film. Such a method of unveiling the story in unrelated fragments gives the viewer a sense of exploration and discovery and nurtures a sense of unhindered involvement in the story. The scene where Fathima Beevi hits Wazim gathers multiple interpretations and responses from her fans and followers, as she is a renowned and popular social media influencer. The comments and reactions pose multiple perspectives and interpretations of the event, thus reinforcing the Butterfly effect.

One among the most evident instances of the Rashmon effect can be traced down to the scene where discussions about Wazim happen between the relatives of Fathima Beevi. One of the women recalls the instance when she witnesses Wazim slapping and harassing Siyad, while another speaks about how Wazim led to the downfall of his father's theatre franchisee. Another relative recalls how she saw Wazim beating up a son right in front of his mother. All these are glimpses

from various interrelated yet distinct happenings, which take place at different levels in the fragmented narrative. In the very next scene where Wazim, Fathima Beevi and friends sit together and regale each other's tales, these events and their realities come into visibility. "*Ee kadha ingane aano? Ith aake kadha maari poya oru kadha aanallo*" (is this how this story goes? This is different altogether) conveys the astute application of the Rashomon effect and the multiplicity in perspectives and various sides to the same story. "*Same kadha. Pakshe vathyasam und*" (it's the same story, but with differences).

Thallumaala (2022) is one pronounced Malayalam film to have authentically and accurately brought out the original regional dialect, slangs and usages of an area. The intelligent and creative use of puns and elements of the regional slang has added to its success, both in terms of regional and non native audience. The only element absent in *Thallumaala* (2022) soundtrack is melody, and it is the only 'Adi' (blow) missing in it. The song '*Ole Melody*' (her melody) is a visual and musical treat indeed, with versatility in music, lyrics, creative application of puns and slangs and implied meanings. The song conveys the true essence of Wazim's and Fathima Beevi's love story, and the inventive use of unrelated scenarios build up the newness. The music notes "*SaMa GaMa SaMa GaRiMa*" can also be read literally, which holds the meaning "Equal Pride, Equal Dignity". As the title translates, *Thallumaala* (2022) is indeed a 'Ballad of Brawls', and this concept has been evidently put forward through each and every element in the film; the songs, background scores and the detailing in every scene acknowledge this.

The denouement of the film is a puzzling parallel cut that switches between the scenarios of Reji challenging Wazim for a final fight-back or rebound to tally things between them, after the havoc created at Wazim's wedding. The chaos is triggered when Reji meets Wazim at the jewelry shop and unintentionally invites him to the wedding. A constant trigger of chaos can be seen from now, as Reji's unwanted interference with Wazim's wedding and related affairs do not please the former's friends and build the grudge. This builds the tension in the minds of the audience alongside. The subsequent scenes involve high and low angle close up shots that palpably display the friends' grudge and uneasiness towards each other. Their anger and emotions are transparently conveyed through these

tight shots. The snow spray becomes yet another pivotal chaotic image in the scene where Siyad sprays it on Wazim at his wedding reception, as a reciprocation of their unpleasant history. This scene focuses on the snow spray and Siyad is reinforced as a chaos trigger.



Fig 3.3 Siyad spraying snow spray on Wazim

The scene parallelly cuts to the final brawl between Reji and Wazim after the wedding, which is acted upon the former's challenge. Each of the fights reinstate the fact that egoistic blows never arrive at a tallied conclusion as with each succeeding fight, the ego is heightened further. The final scene, the one where they come across Omega Babu in Dubai, as they attempt to meet Fathima Beevi, hints at the formerly stated fact. The brawls in the lives of these friends are shown to be never ceasing and they often trap themselves into a whirlpool of fights.

The intelligent and innovative use of the Chaos theory, Butterfly effect and the Rashomon effect have indeed given new horizons and perspectives to this film, as *Thallumaala* (2022) emerged as an applauded, well received and engaging work of art in terms of visuals, music and the themes portrayed. The film provides a very comprehensive and innovative perspective to the concept of chaos and its profound implications, triggered by minute elements. Chaos, which is a conventionally serious topic, has been portrayed on multiple perspectives of comic, romance, affection, disorder etc. The many images used in the film serve as the subsidiaries to the chaos. Along with the visual and sensory appeal it offers, the film communicates how ego-centric triggers have recurring and unceasing repercussions. A majority of the brawls that occur in the film are triggered and fuelled by each one's ego and self-conceit, which drags the others into the loop eventually. The comical aspect given to the chaos in

the film provides it with a lighter and engaging tone, clubbed with human ego and its nuances.

The fragmented narrative technique, joined with reverse chronology, provides a new dimension to the Rashomon effect and its instances used in the film. These techniques have given an interlocked and distorted perspective to the Butterfly effect and itself serve as a chaotic narrative aspect. The fragments provide the audience a sense of illusion and a need to decipher this disillusionment by closely observing the various interlocked and interrelated trajectories in the maze. *Thallumaala* (2022) has effectively and creatively demonstrated the use and importance of egoistic chaos, the multi dimensional trajectories it follows and the profound implications it poses. The film is also an excellent demonstration of the multiple notions a single event can have, in light of chaotic happenings.

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Chapter- IV

Conclusion

Chaos and its trajectories which lead to drastic and dramatic alterations in lives has been explored and innovatively portrayed in the Malayalam films *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) and *Thallumaala* (2022). The Chaos Theory, Butterfly effect and the Rashomon effect have been effectively and ingeniously applied in these films. The applications of these theories and its nuances varies in both the films, owing to the screenplay requirements.

Maheshinte Prathikaaram (2016) offers an extremely lucid and coherent application of the Butterfly effect with respect to its event progressions. The Butterfly effect can be traced down from the initial scene in which member Thahir stirs up a brawl at the funeral and slowly progresses towards the substantial remodelling of Mahesh's life and behaviour. According to the Butterfly effect, the minor events that initially take place in a series of non-linear events accumulate chaos and lead towards the unexpected and unpredictable endings. The event progression in *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) indeed keeps at par with this statement as each minor event gradually and meticulously builds up and can be evidently traced. The society in which Mahesh was placed in represents a complex system, upon which the initial minor conditions inflicted the alterations. The Butterfly Effect is an element of chaos theory, which elaborates on the unpredictable nature of events, irrespective of its minority. Each event or occurrence which led to the apotheosis of the film has a certain amount of unpredictability associated with it, which makes *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) a stronger proprietor of the Butterfly effect. None of the events can be eliminated from the detected trail of events which denotes the significance of each initial condition. The imagery and visual elements employed in the film supports this.

Thallumaala (2022) on the other hand follows the fragmented narrative style, which makes tracing the Butterfly effect and its direct application more complex. Upon close deciphering, the chaotic elements and the involvement of chaos in it can be understood better. Deterministic chaos is a concept present in the chaos theory, which seeks to remove any randomness or surprise by unpredictability. However, a large majority of the events and its causes in *Thallumaala* (2022) owes a

great deal to unpredictability and occur out of random nothingness. Each brawl is an extension of a totally unimagined and unexpected instance of distress or slight unease, leaving little to no room for the viewers to fathom the succeeding event. The Butterfly effect supports this notion and the idea that non linear systems have non-linear triggers and thus, expels the philosophy of determinism.

Thallumaala (2022) is proof that complex systems are often affected by complex and non-deterministic factors, many of them minor. The fragmented narrative technique employed in *Thallumaala* (2022) braces this phenomenon; a non-linear style of narration, one that deviates from the conventional form of orderly and sequential storytelling, has aided in making the events seem more random and unrelated. In *Thallumaala* (2022), the various multi directional stances that led to the escalation of events points to the existence and application of the chaos theory and its plurality. The friends Wazim, Vikas, Rajesh, Jamshi and Sathaar come from unrelated backgrounds, which also arise from individual brawls, and contribute to unrelated chaotic triggers along the story. The randomness and unpredictable nature of chaos in the progression of events aligns with the chaos theory.

Consequences are another important element in the two films. The gravity of the consequences inflicted upon an initially uncomplicated scenario and the diminutiveness of the events that caused them form the crux of the analysis of the film. In *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016), Mahesh led an extremely ordinary and commonplace lifestyle in the onset of the film. However, the alterations in the initial conditions brought about life-altering repercussions to his life and the person he is. It even changed his outlooks and attitude towards life. The Butterfly effect, when propounded by Lorenz, ended up having great impacts on the politics and economics of the world., inspiring many great world leaders and events. This parallelism between the changes in initial conditions and the profound implications it could have in future has been evinced in *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016). Similarly in *Thallumaala* (2022), the climax brawl that takes place in the wedding is the contributing factor for the fame Wazim earned in the society, and the same fame contributed to many of the succeeding brawls in the story. Every element from the narrative is depicted to have a role in the finale of the film, culminating in chaos and triggering it further. As seen in the end, the chaos in the film does not end

there and is left open for further audience discretion. More importantly, the delicacy of the initial conditions and the seriousness of its consequences have been contrasted in the films *Thallumaala* (2022) and *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016). Multiplicity in events and perspectives is another feature of these films into the bargain. The Rashomon effect and its judicious application has contributed to the innovative aspect of the films, especially in *Thallumaala* (2022). Just like the characters who have multiple narrations and angles to the same event, the same phenomenon provides the audience with the same privilege and option. It is also an entertaining and intriguing element to the scenarios portrayed. Plurality in perspectives and multiplicity of angles in the same event is a commonplace phenomenon in any society; the '*Variyamkunnan*' film scenario and the occurrence at the Mahatma Gandhi boat race point to this. Upon debate in popular media platforms, these issues gained a different momentum. *Thallumaala* (2022) and *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) effectively convey the innovation and creative capacity of such unique perspectives. Along with this, these films also communicate the might and importance of the minor conditions in a scenario, which are habitually considered as trivial. As conveyed parallelly by the Butterfly Effect and the chaos theory, the complexity of the society and the backgrounds that the subject is in forms a non-linear or unrelated spectrum for the influential factors to perform. The various small and minor elements of the society, their importance and their contributions are vital for the effective and impactful functioning of the society. It can be inferred that these smaller elements and their contributions are not to be trivialised or undermined, when overshadowed by the powerful, influential and visibly immense forces of the society.

Thallumaala (2022) and *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016) are two notable new-age films from the Malayalam film industry to have exercised and communicated the impact of chaos on a complex system and the subsequent strength of the lesser conditions. It has also thrown light on the role of multiplicity of standpoints in a society and its vitality. These have been achieved upon drawing a parallelism with the Chaos theory, Butterfly effect and Rashomon effect.

Appendix

Synopsis- *Maheshinte Prathikaaram* (2016)

The film is a story of Mahesh (Fahadh Faasil) who runs a photography studio in his hometown and leads a very normal and simple life and is dearest to all. His life revolves around his father and his studio. He is in love with Saumya (Anusree) but eventually, their relationship comes to an end owing to an alliance that Saumya gets and agrees to. Parallel to this, Mahesh indirectly gets involved in a brawl that takes place between Baby (Alencier Ley Lopez) and Jimson (Sujith Sankar) and his friends, which is the aftermath of many minor and unrelated events that form a chain and lead to this. Mahesh is beaten up brutally by Jimson in front of the whole town and is left humiliated and dismayed. His ego is deeply hurt and alters his calm and composed behaviour very much and seeks to take revenge; he proclaims that he will not wear any footwear until he beats Jimson back. In the meanwhile, Mahesh encounters Jimsy (Aparna Balamurali) who comes to the studio to take a cover photo. But she is not impressed and this fuels Mahesh to prove his talent to her.



Fig. : Poster of the film

Eventually, they fall in love and Mahesh discovers that Jimsy is actually the sister of Jimson. In due course, Mahesh hits Jimson back and tallies the scores. The film concludes with Mahesh pronouncing his love for Jimsy. The film revolves around this quest for revenge and the changes inflicted in Mahesh's life.

Synopsis- *Thallumaala* (2022)

The film is the story of Wazim (Tovino Thomas) and his friends and their lives of fights and chain of futile brawls that they trigger and indulge in. The story revolves around the many series of connected fights that these friends are involved in, changing their lives one by one. The story is divided into nine chapters, each one narrating a different aspect of the interrelated fights in a non-linear fragmented style. On a late night cycle stroll along the streets, Wazim comes across Fathima Beevi (Kalyani Priyadarshan) and gets into a chase.



Fig. : Poster of the film.

He and his friends find out who she is, and eventually they fall in love. A series of connected and interrelated fights take place in between with Inspector Reji Mathew (Shine Tom Chacko) and his gang, with Omega Babu (Chemban Vinod Jose), Siyad (Noushad Ali) and other miscellaneous ones. Even though Wazim tries to steer clear of it, chaos and trouble finds its way to the gang. The story reaches its pinnacle with the fight at Wazim's and Fathima Beevi's wedding as the unease and grudge held by Wazim's friends for Reji and gang heats up. The wedding ends in utter chaos and owing to this, the wedding is called off. The film concludes with Wazim, Reji and friends trying to convince Fathima Beevi in Dubai.

Filmography

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