

**A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY CONNECTING CHILDHOOD TRAUMA AND  
SERIAL KILLING IN THE NOVEL *THE GIRL IN THE GLASS CASE* AND THE  
FILM *POR THOZHIL***



***Project submitted to St. Teresa's College (Autonomous) in partial fulfillment of  
the requirement for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS in  
English Language and Literature***

***By***

**JENET VALARIN GONSALVES**

**Register No. AM22ENG009**

**M.A. English**

**St. Teresa's College**

**Ernakulam**

***Supervisor***

**SAYOOJYA C S**

**Assistant Professor**

**Department of English**

**St. Teresa's College**

**Ernakulam**

**Kerala**

**March 2024**

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled “A Psychoanalytic Study Connecting Childhood Trauma and Serial Killing in the novel *The Girl in the Glass Case* and the film *Por Thozhil*”, is a record of bona fide work done by me under the supervision of Sayoojya C S, Assistant Professor, Department of English, and that no part of the dissertation has been presented earlier for the award of any degree, diploma, or any other similar title of recognition.

Jenet Valarin Gonsalves

Reg.No. AM22ENG009

MA English

St. Teresa’s College (Autonomous)

Ernakulam

March 2024

Ernakulam

## CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this project entitled “A Psychoanalytic Study Connecting Childhood Trauma and Serial Killing in the novel *The Girl in the Glass Case* and the film *Por Thozhil*”, is a record of bonafide work carried out by Jenet Valarin Gonsalves under my supervision and guidance.

Sayoojya C S

Assistant Professor

Department of English

St. Teresa's College

Ernakulam

Ernakulam

March 2024

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

I am deeply grateful to Mrs. Alphonsa Vijaya Joseph, Principal, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam for her help and support.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my Supervisor Mrs. Sayoojya C S, Department of English, St. Teresa's College, without whose guidance and encouragement this project would never have been completed.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Preeti Kumar, Head of the Department of English and the faculty members for their encouragement and support.

Jenet Valarin Gonsalves

## CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Childhood Trauma and Serial Killing: An Introduction	6
Chapter 2	A Study of Memory and Abuse in <i>Por Thozhil</i>	18
Chapter 3	A Study of Abuse and Trauma in <i>The Girl in the Glass Case</i>	31
Chapter 4	Comparative Analysis of <i>The Girl in the Glass Case</i> and <i>Por Thozhil</i>	48
	Conclusion	55
	Works Consulted	58

## Introduction

The traumatic event itself, however horrendous, had a beginning, a middle and an end.

–Bessel A. van der Kolk

Trauma has always had a place in the psychological sphere. Even though it has gained importance in the society it still remains hidden within the cracks found in the society. People are still against the concept of ‘mental health’ and remain ignorant about its importance in an individual’s life. When people go behind physical strength, giving more importance to the things one can see like the beauty of the skin or how fit one looks in clothes, they fail to understand that in order to live a normal life thing, one’s inner being is also important. It is important to take care of mental as well as emotional aspect of life to become successful in life. Even when ‘normality’ is something constructed by the society, the people inside the society themselves feel constructed by the conditions of being ‘normal’. Under the vast topic of trauma which consists of plethora of branches, the trauma which affects a child is dealt in this project. This project deals with the disastrous consequences of childhood trauma in an individual’s life. Trauma which has the power to make the affected individual stronger by giving them strength from their experiences or destroy their lives by the intense burden trauma provides to the individuals is dealt intensively especially from the angle of trauma that happens in childhood. The childhood days which is integral to the way in which a child progresses to become an adult living in the world is supposed to be happy. But when these days are filled with insults thrown around the child and when the child is made to feel inadequate about their existence, the way they deal with the emotions that these experiences provide may lead them to destroying others and in a way themselves. As they are unable to emote themselves in the normal way, they resorted to their own ways to get their point across. The survivors can even take to self-destructive behaviour and destroy their own lives.

Childhood trauma has different consequences as an adult. The adult can grow up as a normal human being or become, as this project deals with, a serial killer. The project tries to analyse childhood trauma in the film *Por Thozhil* (2023) directed by Vignesh Raja and distributed by Sakthi Film Factory and in the novel *The Girl in the Glass Case* (2022) written by Devashish Sardana published by Penguin Random House. It deals with the way in which childhood trauma festers itself into the child of the traumatic event that when they grow in a world which has proved itself to be not safe for them, they retaliate by projecting the anger of their unfair life by eradicating others. Most of the times the victims they choose have a close connection to their own trauma and they see the killings as a way to avenge themselves.

The study aims to provide insight how childhood days plays an important role in the way an individual turns out to be. It tries to draw the connection that exists between childhood trauma and serial killing, how a child abused by the father, a parent who was supposed to take care of them becomes the child's greatest nightmare. The way in which the child is treated in his young days leads him to take matters in his own hand and the way in which he treats others around him.

The study has made use of material from various works done on certain concepts dealing with it. *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History* by Cathy Caruth have provided the framework of analysing a text. Explaining the concept of trauma becomes an easier task with the help of Caruth's work. Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* has provided useful insights on the working of the mind of an individual. The psyche of an individual is controlled by different parts of the mind. These parts play a significant role in the behaviour of an individual. His *The Interpretation of Dreams* provided information on the difference that exists in the working of the subconscious to the conscious. Trauma exists in the subconscious, lying dormant until it reveals itself to the individual. It

provided information on the fact that dreams are interpretations of reality that lies outside human comprehension.

*Por Thozhil* deals with the police department trying to solve a series of murders of young girls that seem to happen in an alarming rate. Set in 2010, it follows how two police officers try to understand the psyche of the murderer as he kills young women. There appears to be no connection between the victims other than the fact that they belong to the same age group, in their early 20s and the fact that they were killed in the same manner. As the story progresses, they understand that the string of murders are copycat serial killings that took place between 1973 and 1979. However, there exists vast differences between the killings of the two periods. For example, in the old killings the victims belong to another age group, in their 40s while the killings of the present have its victims belonging to their 20s. They come to understand that both the killings are done by two different people having two different reasons for killing women. The old killings have its origin to a killer as a child who tries to escape his abusive father who was a police officer. However, the present killer kills to exert his superiority over the helpless women who are his victims.

*The Girl in the Glass Case* set in 2019 deals with a string of murders where the victims are boys under the age of five. The murdered children are dressed as girls and encased in glass cases. They are left at random places which proves to be an important place in the life of the child. The story also deals with another serial killer who kills transgenders to assert a control over their lives and because he revels in the attention paid to him by the media. Both the serial killers belong to two different genders and are named as 'The Doll Maker' and 'The Clipper' respectively by the media. The latter has been killing for the past nine years while the story starts from the first murder committed by the former. As the story progresses the readers are the one who has an omniscient presence in the book, the readers have information that the other characters in the book don't have. It becomes clear how both



the serial killers have become the way they are because of their childhood days. The readers get a glimpse of the way in which both were treated in their young days which led to be what they are in the present.

The project briefly explains the way in which childhood trauma affect the psyche of the people which leads them to take the lives of others. Chapter one deals with the theory part of project – it theorizes childhood trauma, serial killing and related aspects. The way in which trauma – the unexpected event, destroys the equilibrium of that individual's life. When they are made to live in a prolonged period in abusive environment, they tend to develop different methods to express themselves. The way these abused children's mind work is vastly different from a child who grow up in a loving environment. They take to killing people to vent the feelings which remained unnoticed throughout their childhood days and in some cases, they take to killing to escape. This chapter enumerates important aspects in the book *Unclaimed Experiences: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) by Cathy Caruth.

Chapter two provides an analysis of the childhood trauma in the film *Por Thozhil*. The way in which childhood trauma or rather trying escape from it leads to a child taking lives of several women. It tries to analyse the workings behind a murder and how a child who comes out from it leads a life quite differently from another child. Most of the times a child who lived in an abused household come out from it with their own mental problems. They are never quite normal, and they always have their own problems or as the society see a kind of 'deviant' behaviour. The chapter breaks down important scenes that provide useful insight to the way in which a person responds to trauma.

Chapter three deals with an intense analysis of the novel *The Girl in the Glass Case* which narrates the story of two serial killers. Both the killers had a traumatic childhood that led to their behaviour in the present day which the novel is set in. Even when they think they

are trying to escape from their past their actions seem to be chained to their trauma. Their trauma originates from the way in which they were treated by their father when they were young. Even when one of them was not physically abused and even when the abused was the mother, being a witness to the whole abusive acts leaves a deep imprint in the mind of the child.

Chapter four contains a comparative analysis of the film and the novel. This chapter deals with the portrayal of childhood trauma and the way in which it ultimately led to the affected child leading a life that is not considered as normal. Even when both are different works, they follow a pattern in the way they portray their story – children becoming villain because that is all they know of. They were always with people who never treated them right which in turn manifested into the way they treat others. This project also tries to bring in a comparison of the two genres of visual and narrative representation and tries to understand the advantages and disadvantages of both.

## Chapter 1

### Childhood Trauma and Serial Killing: An Introduction

Not every story has a happy ending

- Gabor Maté

Trauma remains one of the sought-out areas of studies. It remains a puzzle people try to decipher but somehow the whole picture remains out of their reach. Childhood is one of the most beautiful times in the life of a person. A child's childhood has the power to shape the rest of their life. In this period, if they are treated differently, then the way they act when they become adults can be traced back to these childhood days.

In *Unclaimed Experiences* (1996) trauma is described as the “response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena” (Caruth 91). The experience/experiences have profound effect on the individual's mind. It has the power to change the way in which the person views the world and distort their reality. Importance should be placed on the effects trauma on its victims rather than trying to come into a definition of the word. It becomes difficult in defining trauma because it is an umbrella term, there exists a plethora of things one must consider before defining it. Sexual trauma, mental trauma, physical trauma, emotional trauma, childhood trauma are all different categories present within the term trauma. Trauma affects the individual in different manners. A group of people who underwent the same trauma can have different reactions to it. ‘Overwhelming violent event’ is an underwhelming way of defining the events that forcefully changes the trajectory of the individual's life but at the same time there is something in it that is accurately presented.

Cathy Caruth refers to the repetitive quality of trauma, termed as ‘traumatic neuroses’ (Caruth 2). It refers to “the experience of a trauma [that] repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (Caruth 2). A situation where the person subconsciously goes through the event again and again without understanding the reason for it. “Traumatic neurosis—emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind” (Caruth 2). An important aspect of trauma is that the affected individual/individuals do not necessarily understand what is happening to them. They know they are going through something but to point out the exact details of their traumatic event is difficult for them. The incomplete comprehension of the affected individuals adds to the confusion they feel in the mind leading to mental deterioration and instability.

Caruth talks about “the parable of the wound and the voice” (Caruth 4). What the parable refers to:

is that trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 4)

The wound or the trauma has always in it, a voice that cries out. The voice is trying to make the person understand or realize that everything is not what it appears to be. By illustrating an example of Tancred and Clorinda of Tasso’s romantic epic *Gerusalemme Liberata* she makes the concept clear. Tancred kills his beloved in a duel without knowing her real identity as she was wearing the enemy knight’s armor. After this event, he proceeds to slash his sword in a tree in which Clorinda’s soul is residing. The tree bleeds and from the

wound a voice cries out to Tancred, who hurt his beloved twice. The first incident, the trauma is a quick action. Tancred's mind doesn't comprehend the depth of his actions. However, he is made to remember and comprehend the consequences of his actions when he slashes the tree. The voice that cries out from the wound reminds him of his actions, of his trauma.

Tancred's story thus represents traumatic experience not only as the enigma of a human agent's repeated and unknowing acts but also as the enigma of the otherness of a human voice that cries out from the wound, a voice that witnesses a truth that Tancred himself cannot fully know. (Caruth 3)

When the trauma occurs at an age period between 2-12 then it can be termed as childhood trauma. Childhood is the period of life between the ages of 2 to 12, and when the experience of the child is profoundly different and aggressively abusive, it can have lifelong consequences in the life of the child. Trauma experience is interested in the "complex relationship between knowing and not knowing" (Caruth 3). The event doesn't always stay in the conscious part of the individual. Freud's theory on unconscious mind, he gives three levels of the mind known as the conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. The victims usually try to forget the memory of their trauma, but they store it in their unconscious mind. It is always there. As a memory. As a scar. For example, a sexually assaulted person might get triggered when they come across the dress, they were wearing that day or the place where it occurred. By this trigger, they relive the experience once more and this process keep on repeating until they can come out of it. Trauma has the power to destroy and create, but the power to choose between these choices is in the hands of the victims. They can either be survivors or be victims.

Britannica defines serial killing or serial murders as "the unlawful homicide of at least two people carried out by the same person (or persons) in separate events occurring at

different times.” When a person kills more than two people intentionally the person is a serial killer. A normal person does not possess the mental stability or instability to go out in their way and take someone else’s life on purpose. According to Freud, writes Kendra Cherry in her article, personality is composed of three elements known as the id, the ego, and the superego (“Id, Ego, and Superego: Freud’s Elements of Personality”). The id is the primary component, the only element that is present from birth. It represents the unconscious part of the mind. Fueled by impulses, it requires every desire to be met immediately. Ego develops from id; it makes sure that the impulse of id is met in a non-destructive manner. Superego develops around the age of five, it refers to the internalized concepts of right and wrong. It provides guidelines for making judgements. The id is called the pleasure principle while the ego is called the reality principle. In most of the traumatized individuals, the boundaries of these three elements sometimes blend making it difficult for them to understand the reality to the hallucinations. When a child is made to go through events that distort his/her/their reality, it has profound repercussions in these elements. The moral principle or the superego fails to work in the correct manner. This principle which shows the right from wrong fails in its mechanism, making it difficult for these people who stray from normality to find their footing.

The question of what drives these people to kill in the first place remains the most frequently asked question. Dennis Relajo-Howell in his article lists out various factors that affect a serial killer, from the psychological and social factors to the brain structure and chemistry. The prominent reason for a person to divert the normality to become an anomaly is their childhood days. Research has found that those that were abused in their childhood have more affinity to violent behaviors and in this case serial killing. Killing becomes a kind of outlet for them, to show their repressed anger at the world that treated them unfair. They sometimes choose their victims according to the people who abused them. To showcase their anger upon similar people to get rid of their regret for not killing the actual perpetrator.

The journey from childhood abuse to serial killing is filled with confusions. The child is thrust into a constant state of confusion. They are unable to understand their situation nor are they able to understand the reason for it. The affected child/children constantly ask themselves what they did wrong. Days which are supposed to be filled with happiness and laughter are met with anxiety over the safety of their present. There exists a constant fear over the unpredictability of their situation.

“Personality disorders also play a role in the development of serial killers. Serial killers often display a range of personality disorders, including antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), narcissistic personality disorder, and borderline personality disorder.” Says Relajo-Howell in his article “The Dark Psychology of Serial Killers: Unpacking the Factors Behind their Brutal Behaviour”. Anti-social personality disorder refers to a complete disregard for the other person’s feelings. “Antisocial personality disorder, sometimes called sociopathy, is a mental health condition in which a person consistently shows no regard for right and wrong and ignores the rights and feelings of others. People with antisocial personality disorder tend to purposely make others angry or upset and manipulate or treat others harshly or with cruel indifference. They lack remorse or do not regret their behavior.” (“Antisocial Personality Disorder”). Narcissistic personality disorder refers to when the person has high regards for himself. “Narcissistic personality disorder is a mental health condition in which people have unreasonably high sense of their own importance. They need and seek too much attention and want people to admire them. People with this disorder may lack the ability to understand or care about the feelings of others. But behind this mask of extreme confidence, they are not sure of their self-worth and are easily upset by the slightest criticism.” (“Narcissistic Personality Disorder”). “Borderline personality disorder is a mental health condition that affects the way people feel about themselves and others, making it hard to function in everyday life. It includes a pattern of unstable, intense relationships, as well as impulsiveness

and an unhealthy way of seeing themselves. Impulsiveness involves having extreme emotions and acting or doing things without thinking about them first.” (“Borderline Personality Disorder”). These are just a few among the plethora of disorders that one can find among childhood abused survivors.

These abused also have differences in their brain structure compared to normal people. Amygdala, a complex structure part of the limbic system, “plays a key role in processing emotions and emotional reactions” writes Olivia Guy-Evans in her article “Amygdala: What it is and its functions”. They have malfunctioning amygdala which makes them unable to understand emotions in others. People show their emotions often through their expressions, not using words. A person’s expression can tell several things more than the words coming out of their mouth. This malfunctioning becomes an obstacle for them in understanding the nuances in expressions of people. Thereby making them feel incompetent and often irritable. Another factor relating to the chemical composition of the body is serotonin, a neurotransmitter which regulates mood. Such people have low level of serotonin in their body which leads to aggressive behaviours.

Serial killers often keep souvenirs of their murders to remind them of what they felt while taking the lives of their victims. Torturers keep their tools to remind them of the tortures they did on others. “A trophy is in essence a souvenir. In the context of violent behavior or murder, keeping a part of the victim as a trophy represents power over that individual. When the offender keeps this kind of souvenir, it serves as a way to preserve the memory of the victim and the experience of his or her death. The most common trophies for violent offenders are body parts but also include photographs of the crime scene and jewelry or clothing from the victim. Offenders use the trophies as memorabilia, but also to reenact their fantasies. They often masturbate or use the trophies as props in sexual acts. Their exaggerated fear of rejection is quelled in front of inanimate trophies. Ritualistic trophy



taking, as is found with serial offenders, acts as a signature. A signature is similar to a *modus operandi* (a similar act ritualistically performed in virtually all crimes of one offender), yet it is an act that is not necessary to complete the crime.” (*Encyclopedia of Murder and Violent Crime*)

There are several serial killers who have kept an assorting variety of souvenirs as a reminder of their crimes. Ted Bundy, an American serial killer who had killed almost 30 women, kept the heads of his victims on display in his apartment and have slept next to their headless corpses. Charles Albright, called the Eyeball Killer kept as his trophy, the eyeballs of his victims. The list of this morbidity goes on. Souvenirs helps them relive the experience where they might have felt free, or in control of their life. This memento keeps them going until the urge to kill another emerges. Killing becomes an addiction for them. A drug they want to consume again and again. After the high of a murder dissipates, they go in search for another hit of euphoria they get while taking someone’s life. In some cases, they might be projecting the anger they feel towards someone else onto the victims. *Ek Villian; There’s One in Every Love Story*, is a 2014 Hindi-thriller film which has as its antagonist a serial killer. He is constantly ridiculed and taunted by his wife, because he loves his wife, he vents out his anger by killing women who speak rudely to him. Almost projecting the anger, he feels on his wife to other women who had the courage to speak rudely to him.

trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (Caruth 4).

To uncover the truth behind these childhood abuse survivors who turned to serial killers, one requires the ability to understand what they are trying to say to the world. To look for their wounds and trying to heal them from the trauma which will always remain a memory in their life is the most important thing society can do for them. To understand a serial killer, one must learn his crimes but more importantly one must know his life. There always exists a reason for their actions however unreasonable it may appear to normal society. The way their mind works is quite different from a person who grew up in a safe, stable, and happy family. The connection between childhood days and adulthood is so significant, that it has the power to shape how the person is when he/she/they are an adult.

An abuser never abuses someone without reason. “One’s own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another, the way in which trauma may lead, therefore, to the encounter with another, through the very possibility and surprise of listening to another’s wound” (Caruth 8). A traumatic experience becomes a foundation for somebody else’s trauma. A person who has come out of a traumatic experience can be the origin of inflicting trauma upon another person, thereby entering a cycle of events which includes passing trauma, not the same kind, but different kinds to other people. Only when a member of this cycle takes a decision to stop the cycle with him/her/them, will this end.

There always exists the notion of ‘not understanding’ someone else’s trauma. Caruth in her book *Unclaimed Experiences* has analyzed *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, a 1959 French film by Alain Resnais and Marguerite Duras. A story of a French woman and a Japanese man who met in Hiroshima. The opening scene shows two different pairs of interlocking arms, first one to show the victims of atomic bombing and the second one signifying an intimate encounter. Both the man and the woman are haunted by their own demons. The man constantly repeats “You saw nothing” (Caruth 28) in reply to the woman’s claim of seeing “Everything” (Caruth 28). This is significant because how much does a person understand the trauma of another

person. The man had to live through the horrific experience of Hiroshima bombing where he lost everything, and the woman claims it to be a place of peace. The disparity between these two people's perspective on a single event point to the way people view the world differently. The woman herself is going through her own trauma. She was supposed to run away with her German lover at the end of the war, however, he is shot right in front of her. She is taken away and tortured by her own people. What is significant is that she remembers how she sat with the cold body of her lover and reached a point where she was unable to understand the difference between her and the body. Trauma affects the mind in such a profound manner that the boundary between reality and illusion fades into nothing. She was living, her lover was dead and yet she was unable to find the difference between both. Lost in the myriad of hopelessness and sadness, she fails to find herself in the real world. When she recounts this experience to her Japanese man, she asks forgiveness from her German lover to have betrayed him. More than having sexual encounter with the man, she asks forgiveness for recounting their story of trauma. Here, trauma becomes a secret that one keeps close to their heart. A poison that has the power to slowly take the life of the individual and yet the individual holds onto it. Contrary to her is the trauma of the Japanese man, he constantly tries to make her believe she saw nothing, because she hasn't seen the ugliness, the darkness creeping and growing in the land. For her, the bombing in Hiroshima signifies the end of the war but to him it is the beginning of his end. He loses everything that there is to lose, and the place was never the same again. The land she calls peaceful is still gripped in the aftereffects of the horrendous bombing. In a span of minutes, the world became uglier and crueler for the people in Hiroshima. In a span of minutes, the bloody war came to an end for the other people in the world. Same situations have different ways of being viewed by different people but the ones that is affected by it is the one that must live through it.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD as it is more commonly referred to as, is also one of the aftermath symptoms of trauma. PTSD is a disorder that refers to what the person goes through after the traumatic experience. “PTSD seems to provide the most direct link between the psyche and external violence and to be the most destructive psychic disorder.” (Caruth 58). PTSD helps in understanding the depth in which trauma has affected the individual’s life.

Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, by illustrating the example of ‘fort-da’ game of a child, he analyses the repetitive quality of trauma. The game which consists of the child throwing a ball and retrieving it is compared to the sadness he feels over the departure of his mother and the joy he feels over her return. This process is repeated, and he compares it to the way in which traumatic experiences come back to haunt its individuals. Caruth puts forth an important question, “What does it mean to survive?” (Caruth 60). What does it mean to live after going through an event that knocked the person from the path of their normal life? She answers the question by saying that “the survival of trauma is not the fortunate passage beyond a violent event, a passage that is accidentally interrupted by reminders of it, but rather the endless inherent necessity of repetition, which ultimately may lead to destruction” (Caruth 62-63). Surviving or overcoming a traumatic experience is less about forgetting or overcoming the experience and more about trying to overcome the repetitive episodes of it that becomes a hindrance to the healing process. Overcoming an event that they are constantly being reminded of makes the healing process difficult.

“Traumatic experience, beyond the psychological dimension of suffering it involves, suggests a certain paradox: that the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it; that immediacy, paradoxically, may take the form of belatedness.” (Caruth 91-92). Caruth analyses Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* to get her point across. It involves how a father who has been taking care of his sick son dreams of

his child burning and asking him “Father, don’t you see I’m burning?”. He wakes up to find that a wrapping of his son’s arm caught fire by the candles and that he indeed has died. The dream can point to different things. It might be father’s subconscious talking to him, the phrase ‘I’m burning’ by his child might be uttered by the child in respect to his fever. But it can also be the guilt in his subconscious talking to him. Feeling tired of taking care of his child he might have unknowingly and quite unconsciously wished for his death which might point light towards the dream he saw.

Connecting childhood abuses to serial killing requires these different aspects to merge at a point to make sense. Even though both childhood abuses and serial killing are deviant behaviours, they are considered as normal by the ones that go through because for them it is quite normal. Childhood abuses can take different forms, from being physically abused by the parents to being sexually abused by someone close. It can take the form of emotional blackmailing, a kind of leverage with which parents sometimes try to make their children do what they want them to do. Not letting the child live the life they want, curbing their every need and desire are another form of abuse. Even when the people inflicting the abuses themselves had no idea about the everlasting mental damage they are making in the mind of the child. It leads to the child growing up with extreme mental disorders as mentioned before. They never feel loved even when they are loved which makes them difficult to be loved. Even when love is a capitalist idea which was created by the society, it has become something every individual craves. Human beings are social animals, and these abused victims find themselves in the periphery of the society unable to enter the circle and make themselves belong. The society themselves doesn’t allow them to belong. The most precarious of the people should have a safe space to turn into, when this is lost to the people, the question of their survival becomes doubtful. A child thinks of its family being the safe space and when this is taken away, the child loses his/her ability to trust anyone else.

When the child loses its sense of belonging and trust in the world and finds out fairy tales are just stories written on piece of paper and that paper can be burned, they turn bitter. This bitterness manifests itself into darker and chaotic forces that eventually destroys their life as well as others. But this is not to say that it always ends in tragedy. Trauma always changes the life of the individual it affects. There always exists a division between the life before trauma and after it. However, people can find strength in their trauma and use it to move forward. The initial part of the healing process is always difficult, and it becomes more difficult if one has to travel through it alone. But after this process, they can overcome their trauma, this again doesn't mean one can eradicate the traces of trauma. It always exists in the mind of the individual. But one can also succumb to their trauma because the healing process requires remembering an event they would rather forget. The people turn into drugs and alcohol to numb their ever-raging mind and to forget. These people usually find themselves drowning in their pain and the chaos of their mind, unable to find a stable ground to hold onto.

Understanding becomes the first step in helping the victims. Understanding something so profound and so far from normality is a difficult process but not as much as going through it. Surviving a traumatic experience showcases strength but trying to live with the trauma is where one can find actual strength of that person. No matter how much insignificant it may seem, the one who experienced is the one who felt the depth of its affects.

Most of the problem originates from the blatant disregard of people in considering the importance of trauma of any kind. Sexual abuses are dealt with the offhand remark "You were asking for it", physical and mental abuses with the belief that it is something that happens to everyone. Trauma remains a significant topic in the psychological field and yet it fails to enter the society and make people understand, what exactly is trauma is the question that comes up again and again. "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (Caruth 7)

## Chapter 2

### A Study of Memory and Abuse in *Por Thozhil*

Trauma isn't just the sadness that comes from being beaten, or neglected, or insulted. That's just one layer of it. Trauma also is mourning the childhood you could have had

– Stephanie Foo

In Indian context, disciplining children is often achieved with the use of physical force that leaves everlasting repercussions in the life of the child. People remain in the dark about the disastrous consequences of their actions. They sometimes close their eyes to the truth and atrocities before their eyes which lead to them destroying a child's life.

*Por Thozhil* is an Indian – Tamil language film released in the year 2023. It is a thriller film that follows the investigation of a string of murders committed in a peculiar manner. The film opens with two officers patrolling and finding a body in the secluded part of the forest. Set in 2010, it follows the investigation process of two police officers, SP Lognathan (played by R. Sarathkumar) and Prakash (played by Ashok Selvan), a newly appointed DSP trainee. The latter is assigned to work with the former in the case while Lognathan reluctantly agrees to mentor him. They are joined by a technical assistant Veena (played by Nikhila Vimal).

Set in 2010, the film opens with an inspector finding the body of a young woman while he was patrolling at night. The weather worsens into a storm, foreshadowing the storm that will take over the place. An important thing the scene shows to its audience is that it is the second murder of the killer. The police officer in charge, Ram Kumar (played by O. A. K. Sundar) appears apprehensive when the suspicion regarding the possibility of a serial killer

emerges. The present murder is committed in a similar manner to another that happened three days before. When the suspicion of the existence of a serial killer comes into the forefront, the situation becomes terrifying.

*Modus Operandi* of the killer is by strangling the victims. The victim's hair is tied behind her hands, and she is strangled from the front. Her eyes are open when the body is showcased in the film. The victim is made to kneel while the murderer strangles them, and their body is left in a forested area, away from civilization, left to be stumbled upon by a passer-by who might come across the area by chance.

Serial killing has always been looked by the law and order with fear. A person who has killed twice is likely to kill again. When similar kinds of murder happen within a span of time, it raises a kind of panic. The time between the first and second murder or from one to the next can lie between years, months, days and even hours. The unpredictable nature of the serial killer creates panic in the society and fear in the minds of who is supposed to catch him/her/them. Serial killers often follow a pattern in their killing spree, and once the investigating officers work it out, they become a step closer to finding them. Serial killing is always a threat to humanity because a person who is mentally instable creates panic.

*Por Thozhil* or translated as The Art of War follows the search for a killer who seems to be targeting women of the age between 20 and 30. There exists a dichotomy between the two investigating officers. As the film progresses it becomes clear that Lognathan is a survivor of childhood abuse while Prakash has always been supported by his loving family. He has become hard because of the experiences he had to face in life. Lognathan is a person who has gained knowledge from the life he has lived. His visit to the crime scene makes the audience understand the way in which a police investigation takes place. He comments that



catching a killer requires delving into the mind of the killer. It is important to understand the way in which the killer's mind works.

In cases like these, there isn't much you can do with mere physical evidence. There are a few things you cannot physically collect from a crime scene...like the killer's rage, his cravings, and his fetishes. How do you factor those things? To know about an artist's character, you need to study his painting. Similarly, to know about a killer's character...you have got to study the murder. (*Por Thozhil* 35:33 – 36:00)

He proceeds to visually teach the importance of getting into the mind of the killer. He arrives at the *modus operandi* of the killer. The act of tying the hair along with the hands behind puts the victim in an uncomfortable position. Putting them in a position where they are unable to turn their heads which means the killer wanted their eyes on him. The killer towers over them as he makes them kneel in front of him. Placement of the body is also important in understanding the psyche of the killer.

By asking Prakash to reenact the victims position it becomes clear about the inferiority complex of the killer. To Prakash, who is playing the victim, Lognathan appears to be massive while to Lognathan, playing the killer, Prakash appears to be small. This highlights the need of the killer to appear big in front of his helpless victims which highlights to his inferiority complex. "An inferiority complex is when a person has feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, whether real or imagined" ("What Is an Inferiority Complex?"). The need to belittle hapless women is to feel superior, because he wanted to feel dominant when he is made to feel inferior real life.

By using a steel wire to strangle the victims, which is done in front of them, highlights the need of the killer to witness the live ebbing out of their body. It requires immense strength to strangle a person and these victims had wounds caused by the wire around their neck. This

causes deep wounds by strangling them signifies that the killer is harboring intense hatred. His hatred runs deeper than the surface dislike one feels for things.

Lognathan notices the lack of common link between the victims. The first victim was a migrant worker, the second was pursuing her PhD (named Malavika). The only thing common between the two was that they were women who belonged to the age group between 20 and 30. The lack of connection points out the fact that the killer is projecting the anger he feels on someone else onto the victim. This becomes a motive. He claims the existence of a motive, however bizarre the murder may seem. Finding the motive behind the murders is a crucial part of the investigation process.

Analysing the fourth victim leads the investigating duo to question the expertise and ease with which the killer is murdering people. They try to find if similar murders have taken place in the past. There are instances where serial killers murder for a period and then stops, only to begin killing again after some time. As they feel as if the killer has experience, they take investigation in that direction. They soon find a connection in a string of murders that happened 20 to 30 years before. Prakash helps in finding this connection by providing vital information which he has read in books, where there are cases where the killers have stopped and started killing after 20 to 30 years. Here, Veena puts forth a question that arises in the mind of the audience to which Lognathan provides the answer.

VEENA: Why would they do that?

LOGNATHAN: Distraction. The emotional feedback they get from killing...they must have received it from something else or someone else. That's why they would have stopped it. And when this something or someone is taken away, they start again.

(58:50 – 59:10)

He highlights the importance to anticipating the moves the killer might make next. He infers the age group the killer might exist based on the age group the victims belong to. There always exists an origin of the crimes, a reason behind this deviancy in behavior.

To find out the culprit behind a murder, what helps us more than the evidence is the motive. If you are not able to ascertain why someone has been killed, how do you even begin the investigation? The killer could be anyone among us. But the guy we are looking for is not young. We are looking for a guy who is aged between 45 and 55. In certain crimes, you can ascertain the age of the offender from the age of the victim. In that way, serial killing, and chain snatching are similar. There is no relation between the victim and the offender. If you notice the guys who snatch chains, they always target older women. Because they won't come chasing, or shout and call for help. Low-risk victims. What's happening in our case is the exact opposite. All the victims are aged between 20 and 30. (47:26 – 48:22)

His ability to find the connection that exists between the victims and that of the killer shows the way in which one must think to solve a murder. He connects a serial killer's murder to that of artist in the initial part and as the film progresses make numerous comparisons to make the audience and other around him understand the art of serial killing. He highlights the addictive nature of killing. "Once you smoke a cigarette, you feel like smoking another one soon, right? It's very similar to the case of a serial killer. Killing is an addiction for him. Like a well that never goes dry, the water will keep getting replenished." (48:26 – 48:36)

They find a case of murders spanning from 1973 to 1979. The killer has nine murders to his name until he stops suddenly in 1979. The killer must have been in his 20s when he started murdering and the victims, he chose was low-risk victims, older women between the

ages 40 to 60. The peculiarity lies that these cases were reported separately, the only common link between them is that it was all investigated by John Sebastian (played by Santhosh Keezhattoor). This link proves to be an important turn of events in the film.

Lognathan tries to find more of John Sebastian and so he visits his house. He is met with the son of John Sebastian, Kennedy (played by Sarath Babu) from whom he comes to know about the death of John. Lognathan weaves a story to gain access to the house, of having been helped by his father in his childhood to enter a conversation with Kennedy. Here, he notices the peculiar nature in the behavior of Kennedy. He understands Kennedy suffers from obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). He wants certain things to be kept in the right places or he becomes irritated. From him, Lognathan understands that he married in the year 1979, when the killings suddenly stopped and that she recently died which gives him a reason to start again. He infers from his observation skills that Kennedy might be the serial killer.

At the same time, Prakash finds a suspicion mark on the neck of the victims in the photographs of their dead body. On enquiring about the mark to the doctor, he finds them to be haematoma. Haematoma refers to a mark that forms when blood escapes and collects outside the blood vessel under the surface of the skin because of an injury or trauma (here, it refers to a direct hit on the body). This information solves the mystery of how the killer can transport the victims 4 to 5 km away from the area of kidnapping. There exist certain pressure points in the body which if dealt with in a particular manner can give out effects. In this case, the killer strikes in the neck region which brings temporal fainting. Access to this information in 1970s is only through books in the library, Prakash scourges the library in search of books about pressure points and finds the person who had accessed the book during the time of 1970s murders to be Kennedy. This makes them direct their attention to him and he becomes the prime suspect in the murder case.

Lognathan's observation of Kennedy's intense obsession of placing things in their 'correct' places showcases his highly organized nature, like the way in which the murders have been committed. His age also places him in his 20s during the 1970s, choosing low-risk victims and in the present where he appears to be between 40 and 50 where the victims are of high-risk.

Soon they start their investigation into him. Prakash finds the photograph of a murdered victim in a past murder case in a room in Kennedy's house. Even though he is temporarily incapacitated, he is saved by Lognathan. Lognathan beats Kennedy when he is interrupted by Kennedy's son's phone call. In almost every scene where Kennedy is present, he receives a phone call from his son which highlights the love and care he has for his son. He then recounts his past, his childhood days.

The flashback focuses on the portrayal of his journey towards serial killing to escape his abusive father. John was a cop but as a father he was a failure. Alcoholic with low tolerance for patience, he pushed his son to extreme forms of abuses in the name of disciplining him. Beating him when he spills drinks on the table, making him shine his shoes even when they are clean, and abusing him when he scores low marks and even when he sleeps late in the morning. He abuses his child to mould him into his idea of discipline which makes Kennedy's life akin to hell. John is obsessed with order and cleanliness and wants everything to be perfect. Kennedy, even as an adult, is caught up in this cycle of abuse as he remains shackled to the idea of cleanliness his father had for him. Young Kennedy is constantly punished, made to go through intense physical trauma that leaves him bruised with bloody lips to such an extent that he finds himself unable to go to his own house. Even the most precarious people should have a space where they feel safe. For a child, it is usually their own home but, in this case, Kennedy feels safe anywhere else than his home. Young

Kennedy (played by Harish Kumar) is unable to voice out his sufferings and at the same cannot suffer any more. His father upholds his image as a dutiful police officer but the reality of how he is, stays hidden from the world.

Kennedy's first murder is an accidental murder. When a lady inspector finds him smoking instead of attending his classes, she threatens to reveal his recklessness to his father. He pleads and begs to her because he understands the consequences he will have to face from his father's hands. When she refuses to bulge, he in his helplessness finds a stone and smashes it on her head killing her instantly (1:43:06 – 1:43:40) Here, the pattern of abuses is repeated. Being powerless against his powerful father, Kennedy must experience abuses and beatings. The lady inspector being powerless against Kennedy loses her life because she did not give heed to his words. As he who is inferior to his father is abused and subjected to violence, is doing the same to another group of people, who according to the societal tradition belongs to the inferior gender. He recounts his first murder as an accident because he never tried to kill her but was trying to save himself.

By this murder, new opportunities arise for him. His father is made to investigate this murder, but he finds no link whatsoever to solve the case. He spends his time trying to investigate the murder but finds nothing. As the case has no motive or evidence to link to the killer, he becomes frustrated. Kennedy has already gotten rid of the murder weapon which eradicated his link to the murder. John finds little time to abuse his son as he tries to solve the case. Kennedy remembers how he slept peacefully for the first time in his life without being awakened to torture and abuses. But soon his days of happiness runs out because as soon as the case turns cold, his father turns his attention to his son. He reverts to being a monster who leaves his son bruised and bloody. While lying on his bed after an abusive episode Kennedy takes a decision to kill again to escape his father.

He does not want to be like his father and wants to keep his son away from his truth because he fears then there would exist no difference between his monster of a father and himself. He pleads the inspectors to make his death look like an accident so that his son gets the insurance money. This scene highlights how he turned out to be a good father despite his childhood trauma. He tries hard to not be his father and inflict the same trauma to his son. He breaks the cyclical nature of childhood trauma by being the last victim of it.

He narrates the memories still plaguing his mind because of the Intense guilt of taking lives of innocent women for his own safety. “And then my father started again. I couldn’t sleep. It was not so much the pain but the anger I harbored against my father. As long as they don’t find the evidence or witness to prove my presence at the crime spot... and cha I had no connection to the victims... I knew my father stood no chance of catching me!” (1:46:03 – 1:47:00)

This is how his mind works, the child so tormented by the abuses he had to suffer from his father, a person who is supposed to take care of him, takes drastic measures to keep himself safe. He forces himself to kill innocent women to feel safe in his own house. He changes his method of killing women because he hates getting their blood on his body and even takes photographs of them to remember them and ask for their forgiveness.

But I did not like the sight of blood. In fact, I did not like the act of killing. I felt disgusted by it. There’s nothing more horrific than looking into the eyes of someone just before they die. This way, I did not have to look into their eyes. There was always something I learned from every murder. I began to evolve. (1:47:12 -1:47:50)

Even while taking the lives of the victims, he tries to show kindness that he was never given in his life. A child is pushed into serial killing so that he can escape the brutality of his father’s abuses is highlighted in the film. His highly depressed mental state is highlighted

when he tries to ease their journey towards death. However, smashing a person's head and killing her instantly causes way less pain to the victims than strangling them to their death. Even when he feels the guilt of taking lives of innocent women, he finds himself in a position where he is unable to choose any other way to save himself from his father. His mental state has been affected in such a way he is ready to take lives of others to keep himself safe. This highlights the insecurity that haunts him throughout his life. He entertains the notions of killing his father, who is the actual criminal, instead of killing countless women but is unable to do so because he is scared of his father. His father, as a police officer, crumbles little by little when he is unable to solve the cold cases following him. He transfers from one place to another but he, as an abusive father never changes. Kennedy sees his father dying of a heart attack and gains the courage to let him die without calling for help. His need for killing others ends here, he gains control over his own life. From being a passive object who forced himself to take lives of innocent women because of his father's abuse and control over his life, he changes himself to be an active subject who is able to put an end to his killing and take control over his life.

Prakash makes an important discovery about the disparity between the present murders and past murders. Kennedy kills his victims from behind because he hates seeing the life ebbing away from their eyes, but the present killer wants to see the life fading away because he wants to feel superior to them and have control over their life. The present murders are copycat murders of the 1970s, where the killer has copied the pattern of killing as his own to divert the attention from himself.

Kennedy while narrating his story repeatedly asks the question, "Do you understand why I did all this?" (1:49:39 – 1:49:41). This dialogue forms the most important part of the film because the listeners don't understand why he did it. Loganathan himself comes from an



abused home as he claims during the film. His response to Prakash's statement of how childhood trauma survivors usually end up as murderers or if not in shadier part of society, is that survivors can also end up as people who catches such perpetrators. But Prakash supplies insight to the fact that even though he might have survived the trauma and became a police officer, he is not a normal human being. He has never been able to get rid of the darkness that has stained his soul. Despite being a childhood abuse survivor, he is unable to understand the perspective of Kennedy's actions.

Kennedy cannot make the others understand his perspective because they have lived a life different from his. This is what most of the trauma survivors do not find: people to understand them. The inability of an unaffected person to understand the trauma of an affected individual is profound. When a person who has never been in a near-death situation finds it extremely difficult to console a person who has been in one. A sexually assaulted individual will never feel like they belong, or they are being understood by someone who have never been touched without their consent. Similarly, Kennedy is unable to get his reality across the two officers.

Prakash has never had an abusive childhood while Lognathan survived his even though he lost a part of himself forever. Kennedy keeps his humanity but the price he pays for it is the guilt and blood of numerous innocent women in his heart and on his hands respectively. Lognathan lies on the other end of the spectrum of childhood survivors, a person who survived and didn't deviate into the darker forces in nature while Kennedy chose to deviate into the dark forces but later on able to pull himself back into reality and provide a loving home for his own son.

The second set of murders are revealed to be committed by a psychopath and sadistic killer; Muthu (played by Sunil Sukhada) who fits into the mental description given by

Lognathan. He targets women with dimples which remind him of his wife. It was his wife who always made him feel insecure and inferior and she even flaunts her extra-marital affair in front of him. He snaps and kills both his wife and her lover. From then he projects his intense hatred into the victims who had dimples when they smiled. As dimples can only be seen when the person is alive, it proves to be the missing link to the puzzle. A search at his house reveals his souvenirs as he keeps photographs of his victims before their death to relive the moment where he felt powerful. His hatred for her runs deeper than life that he imagines her to be every victim he murders.

Muthu had seen Kennedy's past murder where one of the victims was the former's maid. From then he kept close tabs on Kennedy. He ties Kennedy and expresses his awe in the latter's murder skills and asks on his methods. Kennedy comes to understand the reason behind his questioning only after it has been revealed to the world on the presence of a serial killer. Even though the film doesn't extensively deal with Muthu and his psyche, the curiosity he shows on witnessing a murder is not normal. While Kennedy had a reason to stop his crimes after the death of his father, Muthu doesn't have a reason to stop murdering women. He doesn't choose random woman to kill but rather searches for women who have dimples to re-enact the killing of his wife. He wants to feel power upon the victims representing his wife because he was unable to feel superior to her when she was alive. He was constantly made to feel inferior when compared to his beautiful wife. The reason for his inferiority complex might have its origin in his childhood days but the film has not portrayed it. One thing that stands out is the fact that he must have been Kennedy's age or younger when he first witnessed Kennedy murdering someone and yet he did not report this incident to the officials. He stalks Kennedy and even praises the latter's skills. He keeps close tabs upon Kennedy for 30 years and even witnesses other murders done by him and reveals himself on wanting to be a part of the criminal journey.

Kennedy kills by setting himself on fire in a gas leak blast while Muthu is killed by Prakash after he tries to make Veena his next victim. Kennedy's death become another testimony of how people failed once again to save someone who needed their help. He repented; he chose to kill others because he wanted to save himself. However irrational and degeneracy it may sound, it was just another effort of someone who wanted to save himself.

The last scene of the film portray an important message to its audience and is an important lesson to humanity. Prakash had noticed the chaos in the nearby house where the parents of the house seems to be always fighting. The kid from the house is seen to exit the noisy fight and tries to close his ears to prevent himself from hearing his abusive parents' fight. Prakash gives the child his iPod, which he uses throughout the film whenever he wants courage to face a situation. The child listens to the music momentarily cut off from the fights of his parents which was affecting his childhood. Prakash enters the house and is seen leaving after a while, he is followed by the mother of the child who embraces her child. Seeing this interaction, Lognathan is touched, and his eyes fill with tears. A broken part of his childhood heals with this interaction. The part of his heart which still years for reconciliation with his traumatic self, heals. He sees himself in that kid, receiving love and consolation he never did and never can.

When he asks Prakash on his conversation with the parents, he replies, "I told them, if they did their job well, our jobs would be a lot easier." (2:22:50 – 2:22:54). He reaffirms the fact that the way in which a child becomes an adult in this world is largely shaped by the childhood they have.

## Chapter 3

### A Study of Abuse and Trauma in *The Girl in the Glass Case*

The healthy man doesn't torture others; generally, it is the tortured who turn into torturers.

- Carl Gustav Jung

Serial killing remains a topic untouched by the society because of its deviancy from what is considered as normal. Childhood trauma continues to persist in the world without the abusers understanding the consequences of their action. The abused are left in a world that has provided them with no safety or love and hence they may project the unfairness of their situation in ways society may not be able to comprehend.

*The Girl in the Glass Case* is a psychological thriller written by Devanshish Sardana. Published in 2021, it follows the pursuit of two serial killers who have pushed society to panic, ensuring chaos. Set in 2019, the novel opens with two patrolling officers who stumble upon the first victim in the site of Bhopal Gas Tragedy. They are made to patrol the ground as it was the anniversary of the tragedy, second December of 2019. The readers are immediately plunged into the mysterious horrifying revelation of the body of a child encased in glass being found by one of the officers.

The Doll Maker and The Clipper are the two nicknames given by the mass to the serial killers representing their unique way of killing/presenting their murder victims. The investigating officers of the former are Simone Singh and Dr Zoya Barucha, partners in the case they form an unemotional-emotional duo. Irshad Hussain is the head detective of the latter. Karan Kapoor, a journalist and Pius, a hacker, are some of the major characters in the novel. These characters play an important role in the workings of the novel's episode.

The novel provides insights on the past and present lives of the serial killer which provides clarity for the way in which their mind works.

The Clipper whose real name is Ranveer has been killing for nine years. His *modus operandi* is that he kills every four months. To celebrate five years since he started killing, he murders extra four people which makes his total count to forty. He kills by targeting closeted transgenders and ripping off the thing that stands in their way of becoming who they want to be – their penis. “The modus operandi (MO) was the same for each kill. A male victim. No body found. A gift sent by the killer, wrapped in the day’s newspaper, to the investigating officer- Irshad. As if it was a game. And the killer only wanted to play with Irshad.” (Sardana 77)

Cambridge Dictionary defines *modus operandi* “a particular way of doing something.” A pattern taken by the killer to kill his victims. It lets the world know that it is his doing. Like a signature placed by the painter in his paintings, a killer’s *modus operandi* is the signature he places in his crimes.

The Doll Maker, whose name is Nalini, is a character in her twenties, described as thin and always seen by the others in the novel wearing sunglasses to hide her eyes. She wears pink lipstick. The first murder case in the novel is her handiwork. She murders a five-year old boy, dresses him as a Barbie and encases him in a glass case. She kills four children in four days. By killing boys and dressing them as girls, she is reliving her childhood trauma which becomes clear as the novel progresses.

She targets children from a single parent (father) household, kidnaps them and tries to reconcile them with their mothers by placing their dead bodies in the site where they lost their mothers. Her *modus operandi* can be traced back to her own childhood trauma. As a child,

she was loved by her mother and often became witness to her father abusing her mother. She considers the fathers as the epitome of evil and unhappiness and believes that the children are happy only with their mothers, due to the experiences that she had in her childhood. She places the fingerprint of the fathers in the children's forehead, like a tikka, after their death has occurred. The tikka which is seen as a symbol of auspicious and prosperity in Indian context becomes a reason with which the fathers are accused of killing their own children. By placing the tikka on the children, Nalini seals the fate of their father as it directly points to them as having a part in the murder.

ASP Simone Singh is dealing with her own demons when the story takes place. She has come back to the force after a forty-five-day suspension because of what she calls 'The Incident'. Simone is a cold and rude inspector, she almost behaves like a mechanical human being bereft of emotions and feelings, acting according to textbook rules. The reason for keeping her emotions at bay is that she was abandoned by her parents. They left her with her grandmother with a promise to return which they never kept. Showing emotions is a sign of weakness according to Simone which will lead to her getting hurt. So, she chooses to control her emotions and feelings to such an extent that she becomes a robot. It is not only the killers but rather almost all characters in the novel suffer from their own traumas which in a way keep them from being human. Simone has abandonment issues. Abandonment issues deal with those issues that are unmet. Her parents' departure to never return leads to a void in Simone's life where she questions her own existence. It makes her push people away and has no expectations of them because expectations lead to disappointment and heartache. "Simone felt alone, broken, hurt. Exactly how she had felt the night her parents left her with her Grandma and promised to return. They never did." (Sardana 85). Simone's behavior to the other officers in the department highlights the psychological consequence her parent's departure had on her psyche.

Zoya Barucha is her emotional counterpart, and it is her son that Nalini kidnaps towards the end of the novel. She lost the custody of her son to his father in a divorce case which is seen by Nalini as an appropriate situation to proceed with her crime.

Ranveer and Nalini are plagued by their childhood memories that are provided in the novel in snippets. The reasons for their killings are different from each other but rooted in their childhood trauma. Ranveer wants to feel the power and control over the people he murders – control and power which was taken from him in his childhood days. He revels in the fame he has gained with his murders. And when this fame gets undermined with the entry of the new serial killer, The Doll Maker, he discards his meticulous planning to gain upper hand in the fame game. A killer who has never provided the officers with the body of his victims, deviates from his *modus operandi* because he wants the attention. Ariel is the name of the transgender he chooses to kill and leaves her body to be seen by Irshad and Karan.

Ranveer is a person suffering from narcissistic personality disorder which stems because of his childhood abuse, the novel portrays instances where glimpses of his disorders become clear. The basement of his house is covered with mirrors which makes him feel as if the spotlight is on him. The basement then opens to a secret room beneath it to reveal the bodies of his victims, which he has kept embalmed as a reminder.

The basement was as big as the house above – one acre in size, about the size of a football field. And it was empty. Completely empty. There was nothing in it, no furniture, no carpet, no gym equipment. Just square, grey, stone tiles spanning the floor. And mirrors, lots, and lots of them, covering the four walls of the basement like wallpaper. It was a room of mirrors, reflecting light in so many directions that it seemed like every inch of space was a spotlight. Ranveer smiled smugly. This was his favourite part of the house. Made him feel like he was a celebrity musician in the

middle of a concert, thousands cheering him on. He liked fame. He liked the spotlight on him. Just him. (Sardana 92)

This is one extract from the novel showcasing the extreme love he has for himself. He kills for fame and for fame he is ready to provide a body, a first in his serial killing career, so that he gains more attention than *The Doll Maker*. He keeps the bodies of his victims in a crypt below his basement. Embalming them in chemical liquids to relive the control he felt while cutting their throat. By hoarding the bodies of his victims, he relives the dominancy he felt over their life which points to his deviant behavioural pattern. He calls the place where he keeps the bodies as his “crypt”.

The crypt, like the basement above, spanned the floor area of the house. There were rows and rows of white porcelain bathtubs filled with embalming liquids, each preserving a memory, a conquest, a body. Next to each bathtub stood a mannequin, depicting the female form. Each mannequin was dressed exactly the way it was like in his memory- the clothes and footwear of his conquests. It was a museum of his memories. His temple. (Sardana 93)

He finds sexual gratification in his conquests. He enjoys that he can ‘control’ the people he kills. The Clipper leaving a body for first time in his nine-year career is rooted in his need to be more famous than *The Doll Maker* and his thirst to control the narrative surrounding his mysterious persona. Without the bodies of the victims, Irshad was unable to find their identities, even when it was clear they were dead. Having been provided only a clipped body part of the victims, the officers were able to draw certain conclusions that were far from the actual truth. Even after extensive search for the identities of the victims by DNA, the link between the victims remained out of their reach. It is only when Ranveer, in his need to be more celebrated that the other serial killer provides them with information that will



eventually lead to his own downfall. The next day, he impatiently waits for the newspaper to arrive to read about himself. “He wanted to read about himself... He wanted to reclaim the glory that had been stolen by the Doll Maker. Most of all, he wanted to own the Doll Maker, like he owned his victims, maimed, and preserved, forever.” (Sardana 158). The need to control comes from his abused childhood, having lived with a father who abused him constantly led him to have no control over his own life. He controls the lives of his victims by setting them free, by cutting off their penises, he is giving them the life they wanted to live. As he targets closeted transgenders who have their own heterosexual family in different parts of the state, he is making it possible for them to live the life they wanted to live. “Sometimes, during sleepless nights, he would question whether it was purely the pleasure of killing or the irresistible pull of fame that ignited his passion. Both – he concluded.” (Sardana 91).

Nalini, a woman plagued by the death of her mother and the abuses her mother had from her father. When Ranveer murders for fame, Nalini does it for redemption. In a twisted way, she remembers her mother’s teaching of how one must perform seven good deeds to erase the sins they have committed. “Her mother used to say that one should perform seven good deeds to write off the sins one had committed in their lifetime. So, this was Nalini’s redemption plan. Seven good deeds in seven days. Seven good deeds before she embraced the light at the end of the tunnel and reunited with her mother. In heaven. Seven deeds to redeem herself for butchering her father” (Sardana 18). Nalini was assigned male in her birth, and she lived in an abusive household where her father projected the anger of his failings by constantly abusing her mother. She was dressed up as a girl by her mother and named Nalini. The duo play dress up whenever her father was away for a business meeting. On one such dress up day, which was also her birthday, unexpectedly he comes home. Nalini, being only five years old runs down to show her father the pretty dress she is wearing. This has dire

consequences as in his anger her father smashes her mother's head with a whiskey bottle.

Nalini becomes a witness to this murder of her mother.

Smash! The breaking of glass.

Crack! The breaking of skull.

Aieeee! The scream and the breaking of her heart. (Sardana 167)

She recounts the experience that shook her whole world. The one person who loved her was killed by her father. Parents who are supposed to love their children become two opposing forces which breaks the mental stability of Nalini. As soon as he kills his wife, he grabs Nalini's balls to remind her that he is a boy.

"Dad rushed over and slapped Nalini across the face. She had started weeping, more because of her mother's pain rather than the sting of the slap" (Sardana 170). Even when she is getting physically abused by her father, young Nalini can only think about her mother. Her young mind is unable to comprehend that her mother has died. She is thinking about the pain her mother might be feeling rather than the pain she feels while being hit by her father. A child in her age shows more maturity and emotional capability than her fully grown father. This extract is followed by the illustration of one of the abusive episodes Nalini had to face from her father's hands.

Dad seized Nalini by the throat, choking her. He yanked down her underwear, grabbed her balls, and squeezed them hard.

She had let out a loud, piercing scream.

'Do you feel the pain, boy?' Dad had asked her.

Nalini had bobbed her head vigorously, as much as his grip on her throat allowed her to, in the hope that Dad would let go of her balls.

Instead, he had squeezed harder, 'That's because you're a boy. You hear me? A boy!'  
(Sardana 170)

As she loses her mother at the tender age of five, the children she chooses for her 'redemption act' also belong to the same age group. Even when she claims to follow her mother's belief of seven good deeds for a sin, she unconsciously is trying to change her own past. She wishes and dreams for her mother to be alive and therefore tries to live through the children she kills because there exists no evidence in the novel that the murdered children were abused. The only thing common between Nalini and the kids were that after their mother's death they were taken care of by their father. She projects her own insecurities and experiences onto innocent fathers and robs them of their children. In every child that she kidnaps, the fathers appear to be concerned over the child. This indicates how she forms an illusion of a reality where she assumes that children who had lost their mothers have to be 'saved'.

Her first victim is Ankush Dixit, a five-year-old who lived with his father in Shanti Nagar, which translates to Peace Town. He was dressed up as a Barbie girl. In fact, Nalini dresses up every boy she kills up as female characters. This might be because she is reminiscing about her own life by dressing up the kids as girls, the way her mother dressed her up as a girl. Her crime becomes an extension of the tragedy in her life. She cross dresses the kids and then places their body at the site they lost their mother, highlighting her own trauma of losing her mother. Ankush, her first victim, lost his mother due to health complications brought by the Bhopal Gas Tragedy, so she places his body in the site where it occurred. Her second and third victims, twins named Vyan and Ayan Srinivas lost their

mother in a fall at DB Mall. She dresses them up as characters in the film *Frozen 2*, Elsa and Anna. The characters are siblings in the film, so Nalini might have chosen it to show the relation between the kids. Her fourth victim is a child with Down's syndrome, Kalpesh Goyal whose mother died in Birla Mandir where her pallu caught fire during 'Parikrama', offering well-being for their son. A child with Down syndrome is usually harder to placate than normal kids. And when he starts creating a ruckus, she reverts to her normal male voice and in a way into her father's temper to silent the child. To keep the child silent, she (he) strangles and kills him. The fragile control she has over her emotions is clearly depicted in this scene. The child is constantly crying over his father which irritates her because according to her all fathers are evil and mothers are the saviours of life.

'Daddy! Daddy!' the boy continued to cry. 'You little piece of shit!' Nalini drew her hand back and slapped the boy, tight and hard, across the face. The boy howled, covering his face with chubby arm. 'You want daddy, huh? You want daddy? Here I am!' Nalini's voice suddenly turned masculine- harsh and deep. The voice she had been born with. The voice of the man she didn't identify with. 'Your mommy gave birth to you, took care of you, and died protecting you. And what did Daddy do? He hit her. He killed her. But you still want your daddy?' (Sardana 166)

In the heat of the moment she projects the anger she feels on her father onto the child. Even when she claims it to be her 'redemption act', her crimes are fully rooted in her childhood trauma. The kid's father didn't hit her mother nor was he the reason for her death. She died because of an accident and yet in her anger she feels as if the child is being unfair. She sees herself as the child who lost her mother because her father killed her. A child who was abused, became witness to her mother's death and then proceeded to live with the

murderer of her mother. She projects her trauma onto the child and forces him to comply with her needs. Her wish to reconcile with her mother drives her to act in such a manner.

She realizes her mistake, and in this section one can see how trauma can pass from one generation to another. Unconscious embedding of the trauma becomes conscious only when the damage is already done. “In the heat of the moment, she had become her father, the very man she had despised all her life. The man who had killed her mother and gotten away with it. The man who had banished Nalini to fend for herself when she was just a fragile little girl. The man of her nightmares; his murder, the highlight of her fantasies” (Sardana 167). She considers her father’s murder to be a part of her fantasies, highlighting her intense hatred for her father.

Ranveer and Nalini, the two serial killers, are childhood friends. They live in the same compound as Ranveer renting his outhouse to Nalini. The common link between them is their abusive fathers. Nalini provides vital information on the abuses Ranveer had to go through in the hands of his father. Ranveer is a sociopath who has little regard for other people and their feelings. Dominant, aggressive, genius, cruel and a cutthroat killer, he is different from Nalini. Nalini is a person who lives in her own reality, a world she has created based on her fantasy. It almost feels like she has never grown up, stuck at being a five year when she lost her mother. She calls her clock ‘Snowy’ and often talks with it. She is an emotionally charged, non-aggressive killer who believes she is doing the right thing.

She understood the demons that drove Ranveer. After all, they both had one thing in common: violent, asshole fathers. The only difference was that his father tortured him, while her father had tortured her mom. The signs had been visible even as kids. She’d go to his house to play – his mom would invite Nalini only when his dad was away at work – and Nalini would find him in his room, sitting perfectly still, arms folded, chin

lowered to his chest, staring at the mirror on the dresser, as if in love with his own reflection. She would chatter non-stop to compensate for his silence. She would run around the room shouting, 'Catch me, Ranveer. Catch me!' hoping he would shoot up from his chair and run after her, giggling, laughing, the dimples in his cheeks sparkling. He never did. When nothing worked, which was always the case, she would sit cross legged on the dusty carpet – even though she hated grime – prop her chubby elbows on her knees, her chin resting in her palms and stare at him, like she was admiring the vivid colours of a painting. His swollen, crimson lips, chipped front tooth, strawberry – coloured welts on his arms and legs and the angry scorch marks on the backs of his hands. Cigarette burns. He had told her once, while boasting how brave and strong he was and how he never flinched as his father painted him red. (Sardana 164-165)

This description of how Ranveer was abused provides a link to the way in which he turned out to be as an adult. A shocking twist in the novel is when it is revealed that both these characters are the identities of a single person. A person who had to experience such abuses came up with multiple identities to save himself from the pain of living in his reality. Karan Kapoor, journalist in the novel, is the original identity of both the serial killers. Serial killers have 'types' they go for. Nalini goes for five-year-old boys who are living with their father having lost their mothers. Ranveer chooses out of town closeted transgenders as his victims. Nalini's murder instinct comes from what she considers to be a redemption act and Ranveer revels in the control he has over the life of his victims. The disparity would make sense if they were different individuals, however they are not. They both belong to the same person. Two identities in a single body with different murder instincts. Two different people who doesn't know the existence of the other identity present in a single body where one identity is trying to destroy another without understanding the truth of their reality.

Karan is Ranveer, who kills transgenders and embalms their body in his basement. Karan is Nalini, who kidnaps five-year-old, kills them and encases them in glass case. Karan is also the journalist who writes about both Ranveer and Nalini's murder game. After being made to experience abuses in his younger life, he comes out of it by having two identities other than his own.

“Dissociative disorders are mental health conditions that involve experiencing a loss of connection between thoughts, memories, feelings, surroundings, behaviour, and identity. Dissociative disorders usually arise as a reaction to shocking, distressing or painful events and help push away difficult memories. Symptoms depend in part on the type of dissociative disorder and can range from memory loss to disconnected identities” (“Dissociative Disorders”). Having been forced to live with his father who continues to abuse him throughout his life Karan loses his hold or rather he tries to forget his reality. Unable to face the pain and constant fear of his life, he chooses to ignore it and creates identities which would help him tide over an abusive episode. Nalini lives in her fantasy world, still in her childhood phase, she is stuck at a time when she was loved by her mother.

Ranveer and Nalini are two identities Karan creates because of his childhood trauma. “Dissociative identity disorder, formerly referred to as multiple personality disorder, is characterized by a person's identity fragmenting into two or more distinct personality states. People with this condition are often victims of severe abuses” (“Dissociative Identity Disorder (Multiple Personality Disorder)”). One he creates for his abusive father, second, he creates out of the love of his mother. Both Ranveer and Nalini shares an intense love for their mother. It is through which Nalini implores Ranveer's help when she asks for a place to live. Nalini was able coax Ranveer into making her stay in his house by using the love they both share for their mother. Ranveer comes in to protect Karan, to feel the wrath of his father's

anger. Nalini recalls the common link between them as abusive fathers but both identities have experienced the traumas differently. Ranveer is the direct abused in his life while Nalini sees herself being a side character in the abuses, in her reality, the abused is her mother. Ranveer is the one who has experienced the abuses, the cigarette burns and the belt pelting because his father wanted a son.

Whenever under duress, Karan, like a terrified puppy, would go and hide somewhere deep inside, shivering, panting, screaming for help. Ranveer would step up. After all, he was the strong one. The saviour. Sometimes it was to take a beating from the school bully. Mostly it was to take the belting from Father or kicks in the ribs or cigarette burns – whatever took his father's fancy on that particular day. (Sardana 310)

Ranveer is an alpha male, dominant and unflinching even when his father beats him. A person who undermines Zoya and Simone because he feels a man should be given the job. The reason for his abuse is because his mother cross dressed him as Nalini, therefore he might feel intense hatred towards transgenders which might be the reason he targets them. He might be unconsciously projecting the anger he feels on his father onto the transgenders. Another reading is that he might be setting them 'free', giving them freedom, which was taken away from him.

They exist in the same abusive society, his father was a part of a place where people wouldn't let a person be a part of their world, if they don't belong to the two genders constructed by society. An individual is unable to be themselves because society has the power to force people who don't belong to the boxes constructed by them, to their death. They feel suffocated and choke to their death without being helped. A person assigned male at birth but feels they are female in mind and spirit, who is forced to do things considered as 'manly' by society might feel like they are playing a role. A role which will soon drain their



life and leave them to die. So, Ranveer might be targeting these closeted trans people, to unconsciously letting them live a life he was kept away from having. A penis is always seen as the symbol for masculinity, and he clips them off, highlighting his anger towards his abusive father. Even when Ranveer and Nalini are two different identities, the trauma they faced are present in a single subconscious. Ranveer's act of clipping off the things that became an obstacle for transgenders to live their actual life have its origin in the abuse Nalini had to go through in her father's hands when he grabs her balls to make her feel the pain of being born a boy.

Nalini emerges from the love of her mother. Her mother who cross dresses her child unknowingly causes a dissociation of identity in her child. Karan received love only from one of his parents, his mother, who usually showed her love by cross dressing him and naming him Nalini. Karan identifies the love his mother has for him as another identity, as Nalini. This is so because Nalini is the one that receives his mother's love and not Karan. Nalini is so vastly different from Ranveer that she becomes a counterpart of Ranveer. If Ranveer is strong, capable man then Nalini takes up the feminine side of a person, she is soft spoken, her voice is described as a little girl's voice, she dresses as a woman, puts on lipstick, and even walks like a woman that the police department is unable to identify her as man adorning woman clothing and was able to do so only when Ranveer points it out.

Karan is drowning in his own demons. As a child he was constantly abused by cigarette burns and when he becomes an adult he is addicted to smoking. He brings in Nalini after being shocked by his wife Anuskha's affair with a forty something year old man. Ranveer comes in and kills both but unable to live with the guilt Karan calls Nalini to help him to kill himself. Anuskha became another tormentor in his life. An attention seeking actress who creates unwanted problems to attract the attention of the passerby, interests Karan.

Karan who is accustomed to abuses and being taunted, falls in love with an emotional abuser. After catching her in an intimate position with another man, Anuskha have little regard for his feeling. She calls him ‘slinky’ referring to his erectile dysfunction. “Erectile dysfunction (impotence) is the inability to get and keep an erection firm enough for sex” (“Erectile Dysfunction”). This dysfunction might be a consequence of his childhood trauma. His father who grabbed his balls to remind him of being a boy and his mother who constantly cross dressed him as girl had psychological effect on his mind thereby affecting his physical body. Nalini describes the happiness she felt by playing with her mother where her father was never present. They lived in such an unpredictable situation and yet tried to find snippets of happiness for themselves which were always short-lived.

She loved playing house, for it was in those moments that Nalini could pretend that she didn’t have a father. Even though her mother never mentioned it, Nalini knew it was the reason her mom loved the make – believe game too. For a few hours they were Mrs. Nalini and Mrs. Mom, attending tea parties, splurging Monopoly money, draping saris and slapping on make – up that made them look like clowns rather than the prim and proper aunties they thought they were portraying. There was no room for abuse in their fantasy house. No black eye. No purple bruises on the buttocks. No cracked ribs that hurt to touch. Mrs. Mom has plenty of those in her regular house. It was the reason Mr. Dad was not invited to their tea parties. You never knew when his switch would flip. (Sardana 101)

Nalini and Ranveer are two identities existing in Karan’s life. Both have their own story because they exist as separate entities in a single mind. Even when both had an abusive childhood, the abuses happened in different manners. The most interesting fact about these identities is that Ranveer doesn’t know Nalini is another alter-ego of Karan. Karan’s mind has

undergone his trauma to such an extent that one of his identities is trying to kill the other.

Ranveer on understanding Nalini being The Doll Maker, the serial killer who has been taking his attention tries to kill her, only to understand he is unable to do so because he is her. “You can’t kill me, Ranveer. At least not without killing yourself... I am you. And you are me. We’re different. And yet, we’re the same.” (Sardana 266)

Zoya Barucha comes close in her psychoanalysis of the serial killers.

‘Come to think of it, both the Doll Maker and the Clipper are two sides of the same coin, sharing one thing in common’.

‘Which is’ Asked Simone.

Zoya exhaled, ‘Transgenders. The Doll Maker demonstrates proclivity, while the Clipper shows aversion to trans people. One dresses up little boys as beautiful dolls, the other kills dressed up dolls. If you ask me, they are brothers. Probably both experienced severe trauma as kids. Tough to come out as transgender in a society that views it as a disease. (Sardana 300)

What Zoya tries to convey here is that there is a reason for their deviant behavior. Society plays an important role in the life of an individual, and family becomes an integral part in the development of a child into an adult. Karan was not given an opportunity to live in a place which was safe for him. He was not given a chance to be a child and chose to safeguard himself from the trauma by creating multiple identities. Both identities chose to control other people’s life in the same way his father tried to control his. But in the end, he failed in having a control over his own life.

Nalini chooses to not kill Simone in a fight between them because she felt seen when Simone calls her a “little girl”. “Just do it, you little girl! Simone spat the words through

gritted teeth. He stopped trembling, ‘You see me!’. There was relief and joy in his sweet voice. ‘You see me for who I am – a little girl’. He lowered his hand. And, without another word, walked away with Simone’s gun.” (Sardana 215-216)

Nalini becomes happy when Simone calls her a little girl because she felt recognized. Having lost her mother when she was little, stuck her into the role of a young girl who never grew up. She feels overjoyed when someone from the outside world recognized her femininity when society views her as a man because of the presence of the male sex organ.

The novel showcases how childhood plays an integral part in the way an individual turns out to be. If Karan was given love by both his parents and if his house was his safe place, then he might not have the need to create multiple identities to save himself. The identities came to save him because he was unable to save himself from his father, a person who was supposed to protect him. When parents fail to love their children and abuse them, the children themselves forget to be children. They grow up before their time and in some way or another their childhood days remain as a scar throughout their life.

## Chapter 4

### Comparative Analysis of *The Girl in the Glass Case* and *Por Thozhil*

Father, don't you see I'm burning?

- Sigmund Freud

Trauma can affect a person in multiple ways especially the ones that happen in their childhood days. Childhood plays a significant role in shaping of a person. In Indian context, the behaviour of an adult is usually associated with the way in which that person grew up. In most cases, it is associated with the parents. Indians place a prominent role in childhood behaviour programming, i.e., they usually try to discipline them, often resorting to violence. Even when some are required to make the child understand certain things, when the same disciplining process crosses the border of violence and becomes acute abuses everything changes. Children are never objects where the parents can project their wishes, failures, and anger. They never asked to be born rather the parents themselves took the decision to birth them. This doesn't mean they belong to them. The children are their own person and might require certain advice to navigate in the new world. But they are never to be subjected to intense traumatic experiences that take away their chance at normal life.

Parents themselves are often ignorant of the effects of their actions. Both *The Girl in the Glass Case* and *Por Thozhil* deals with the effect of childhood trauma that has on the affected individual's psyche. By connecting it with serial killing, the equation becomes clear. Richard Chase, Richard Ramirez, Albert Fish, Donald Gaskin are names of those who were neglected and abused in their childhood days that led to their acts in their adulthood. Some of them were abused in such a manner that they reconstruct the scene in their future murders. Most of them reach a mental state in which it becomes impossible to bring them back to reality.

*The Girl in the Glass Case* and *Por Thozhil* deals with how childhood trauma can lead to serial killing but they are presented in different ways. *The Girl in the Glass Case* is a novel set in 2019 whereas *Por Thozhil* is a film set in 2010. The former reaches its readers through written narrative and the latter allows its audience to view the episodes as it occurs. The novel is in written narrative whereas the film is presented in visual narrative. Narrative refers to a series of description of an event or a story, when it is presented in the written format it is called written narrative and when the story or the event is presented in form of visual media then it is referred to as visual narrative.

*The Girl in the Glass Case* with its presentation helps in increasing the imaginative power of its readers. The readers can imagine different appearance for its characters. For example, Simone is presented as a tall bald woman who has a no non-sense attitude whereas Zoya is portrayed as a chubby character who is dealing with her own demons. Readers can create the characters in their mind with the help of the description of the characteristics as provided in the novel by the author. Similarly, on describing the “crypt” of Ranveer, and to emphasize its largeness Sardana uses the image of a football field. By this one can understand the largeness of the crypt which consists of forty dead bodies embalmed in liquid. The book also provides an omniscient role to the reader. The readers come to know that Nalini and Ranveer are alter-egos of each other, an information that the inspectors themselves are unable to find. The most important link between these two people is that they are one person and two identities, without this link their association becomes confusing which is exactly what happens to the characters in the novel investigating the killers. It is fast paced and takes the reader along the journey. By providing an insight to the past and the abuses of the killers, the readers can understand the way they are in the present and emphasize with them to a level, which the investigating characters are unable to do. *Por Thozhil* being a visual narrative

doesn't allow for the imaginative part of its audience to work. The audience need not imagine how the characters might look like because they are presented with the characters in full figure. The audience are taken along the journey with the officers, there is no omniscient role to be played by the audience. They are in dark like the investigating officers trying to unearth the truth.

In the case of setting, both are set in India even though different states. Both the work has as its abusers the parental figure of the father. If the father in *The Girl in the Glass Case* starts abusing because he is projecting frustrations of his own failures onto his child, then the reason for the father in *Por Thozhil* to abuse his child is for disciplining him. The cross-dressing in the former leads to further angers in the father whereas in the latter, father finds fault in whatever Kennedy does. Both of their abuses origin from the need to ascertain control over their child. A kind of powerful-powerless dichotomy is being formed in the father-child relation. A relation which should be founded on love and happiness is being transformed to one of fear and darkness. Both the children in the work act towards an anger to their father.

Ranveer kills transgenders to gain control over their life because he was not given control over his own life. Nalini has killed his father and as penance tries to kill seven children who are being looked after by their fathers. For her, father is the ultimate villain. If one looks at the fathers of the children she murders, they are concerned about their child. She generalizes the idea that in every one's life, father is the villain whereas the mothers are the saviours. This is the reason why she puts the dressed-up bodies of the children at the site where they lost their mother. However, Kennedy of *Por Thozhil* kills to escape his father and he kills to keep his father busy so that he doesn't get abused. In Sardana's novel, the child is still living in the nightmare inflicted upon it by the father whereas in the film after the death of his father, Kennedy chooses another life altogether. He breaks the cycle and doesn't let the trauma destroy his life. He becomes a father which is extremely opposite to his own. He

became a father like the one he wanted when he was a child. He breaks the cycle of trauma so that his child doesn't go through the experiences he went through. Sardana's characters or characters, as they are two identities in a single person, is unable to live a normal life. They are still shackled to their father's memories and even when they act out in anger it is still connected with their father.

The novel and the film have two serial killers in it. The novel deals with the multiple identities of a person emerging and being two separate serial killers. In the film, there are two sets of murders, past and present. The present murderer is a copycat killer of the first and has attained the knowledge of killing from the past childhood abused killer. The second killer's reason for killing originate from his inferiority complex. Being constantly belittled by his wife led to a mental strain which snaps, and he goes onto a killing spree. In the film, the past killer, Kennedy is the one that has been dealt in this paper because of his childhood trauma.

The way other characters deal with these survivors is also important. Simone and Zoya have no link to the killer's childhood trauma which makes them ruthless. They think that they are investigating a cold-blooded murderer. Zoya does help in psychoanalysing the situation and tries to emphasise with the killers. But at the end, they are killers who killed forty people and four children. In the film, Prakash is the one who thinks more emotionally than Lognathan. Lognathan is a childhood abuse survivor and did not deviate into the darker path. But he is a person who doesn't allow anyone to come near him and therefore becomes a loner. It is only when Prakash tries to enter his life, does he become a bit more human. But how many people can have a person like Prakash in his life? Or someone like Zoya? Simone herself finds entering a friendship with Zoya. The previously friendless Simone finds a comradeship with Zoya. But the significant point in all this is those that remained in the periphery. Karan and Kennedy are the ones that lost themselves in the fight. Both kills themselves than trying to live in a society where they are not understood.



Simone was abandoned by her parents leading to abandonment issues in her life while Lognathan is shown to have been physically abused in his childhood days (*Por Thozhil* 30:00). Simone was affected mentally and emotionally but Lognathan was affected mentally, emotionally and physically. By understanding their traumas, their actions and behaviour gains clarity. They may have survived their abuses, but their trauma remained unsolved until they came across a person who could understand them (Zoya for Simone and Prakash for Lognathan).

Kennedy repeatedly asks the police officers if they understood the reason for what he did. If people do not try to understand the chaos in their mind, then they become lost in the society. Karan was a journalist, a person who loved his wife, but he resorts to shooting himself in the head because the world doesn't give him a chance to live his life. Kennedy is a loving father, a person who was able to stop the cycle of abuse. By his death, his son loses a father, he becomes orphan. But even in his death he was thinking about his son, he wanted the officers to write off his death as accidental so that his son receives the insurance. They are human beings whom the other people in the society fails to recognize. All they need is a listening ear and maybe an understanding mind.

In the film, one can see the visual representation of childhood trauma. The fear in the eyes of young Kennedy when he hears his father's voice, the frightened posture he takes when he finds himself spilling his father's drink and the tiredness he feels after being continuously made to shine a shoe. When his father beats him, the camera focuses on his face which one can see the passage of different emotions, from fear to resignation to his fate. As his father reverts to his monstrosity after his first accidental murder, his intense anger on his father forces him to take the decision to kill other women (*Por Thozhil* 1:46:09). His father snaps at him to gain his attention almost like signaling an animal to listen to him. In every scene where the father-son duo appears young Kennedy appears apprehensive, a child who

fears the unpredictability of his situation. A short scene showcases the trauma he had to go through because his father was a perfectionist, from scrubbing the floors, windows and cleaning the utensils and car, he was made to work for his father (*Por Thozhil* 1:41:46 – 1:42:15). The most frequently used phrase by his father, “Not enough! More!” (*Por Thozhil* 1:41:46), making him feel belittled in his own household. The background scores help in creating an anxiety filled scene whenever his father appears on screen. The music becomes sombre, inciting tension in the audience. And every time he is subjected to abuse; the lighting helps in highlighting his situation. It creates a mysterious dimmed perspective of his situation. The dim lighting showcases his life filled with darkness which he is unable to survive. Wearing clothes that washes out his appearance highlights his situation living with his abusive father. When he receives a breathing time to be a child, he is surrounded by trees and colors. He lives his life like a normal child, going to the movies and celebrating the nature. A soothing music fills the background when he is happy to indicate the short-lived peace he enjoys in his life.

This element cannot be seen in the novel, the readers create the world, the expression, the lighting in their own mind to experience the world the novel seems to be describing. Ariel, whose body is the first one Ranveer presents to the world is described as an exquisite woman. “Her long flowing hair was dyed a deep burgundy, matching her off-shoulder velvet blouse and low-waisted sari. A silver navel ring drew attention to her sleek, silken navel. Her gaunt face, textured with expensive but flawlessly applied make-up, matched her lean figure and small breasts.” (Sardana 125). Here, the readers can imagine the beauty of Ariel that smitten Ranveer but is unable to watch the expression in his face like that of Kennedy who is exhilarated on sleeping peacefully for the first time in his life (*Por Thozhil* 1:45:14). the readers are unable to see the nuances in expression present in the written narrative. The viewers are unable to make use of their creative power while viewing the film.

Written and visual narrative have their own advantages and disadvantages, here, both are successful in getting the lesson across to the people, the way in which childhood trauma affects the psyche of the child which makes it unable for them to live a normal life in society.

## Conclusion

Trauma comes back as a reaction, not a memory.

– Bessel Van Der Kolk

Most of the deviant behaviour of a person has its origin in the childhood. Childhood abuses are being studied in various contexts. The way they affect the physical, mental, emotional, and social life of the individual. Trauma is never something to be taken as a joke. Trauma has the power to destroy a person's life as it has repeatedly been illustrated in real life. Most, if not every deviant behaviour one sees in the society can be traced back to a childhood that was not filled with unicorns and glitters. When home becomes a fantasy and house becomes a building they fear, the society has failed to save one of its people. Everyone should have a safe space, a place where they truly feel safe and can be themselves. When this is lost to the children who find themselves trapped in a household where they must always look back to see if they are safe, it leads to them developing into adults who are distrustful to the world. When the world fails them will they want to save the world? No.

Villain in the fairy tales and superhero stories are people who didn't have a hero to save them, so they saved themselves. By saving themselves they lost a part of their humanity which they can never get back. They are broken people and society fails to understand that even broken people are humans. When they are constantly pushed to the periphery of the society, they retaliate to become a part of the society that rejected them, either by destroying it or by bringing chaos.

*The Girl in the Glass Case* was taken for analysis because it deals with two serial killers who come from a single identity. Both the identity has gone through the same trauma but remembers them in different manners. Ranveer and Nalini are two separate identities.

Ranveer remembers the abuses happening to him while Nalini remembers that it was her mother who had go through the abuses. It shows how childhood abuses has the potential to damage the psychological working of the mind. Karan chooses Ranveer whenever he needs strength to face his father's abuses and brings in Nalini because she was the one his mother loved. Nalini also becomes the strength he requires in wanting to kill himself. The novel shows how the childhood abuses have the power to evolve a person into a serial killer but above all how it leads to the destruction of the mind.

The film *Por Thozhil* also deals with a serial killer who was abused in the childhood, but the difference in the film is that he needs to kill to escape his father and after his father's death he completely stops killing people. He is in one way projecting his anger upon his father by killing innocent women, he blames his father as it is because of him he has to take other's life. He is constantly afraid of even breathing wrong in front of his father, which makes him take such dire steps to survive. He does survive and play a role in his father's death. He claims to have been unable to take his father's life instead of killing innocent women because he was that much afraid of his father. When he sees his father collapsing into the ground, clutching his chest, instead of calling for help, he stays there. He watches his father die and let himself free from his abusive ways.

These victims exist in a distorted reality which is inaccessible to those who lie outside the circle. This is also why a person with normal childhood is unable to understand their perspective on things and it may also be why they take such actions. When the world has failed them in not providing a safe space and not understanding them, then they resort to extremity to get their point across. The last scene of *Por Thozhil* becomes important because it shows how the action of a single person was able to break a cycle of childhood abuse. Prakash advice the parents of the child to do their job so that their job as police officers

would lessen. Indirectly saying to love the child because he deserves it or when he becomes an adult he'll go searching for love where it is not present.

Breaking the traumatic cycle of childhood abuse is difficult, especially when does not even recognize it being an abuse. Mental and emotional abuses are also significant because they are wounds that never show on the body but still hurt the same maybe even more. It is the duty of those in the society to extend a helping hand towards those who find themselves in the crossroads of life and death. Choosing the wrong option will always lead to a tragic end and people must stand together, to help them live the live they deserve.

## Works Consulted

“Antisocial Personality Disorder.” *Mayo Clinic*, [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/antisocial-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353928](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/antisocial-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20353928).

“Borderline Personality Disorder.” *Mayo Clinic*, [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/borderline-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20370237](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/borderline-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20370237).

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. The John Hopkins University Press, 2010.

Cherry, Kendra, MEd. “Id, Ego and Superego: Freud’s Elements of Personality: How Do the Three Work Together to Form Personality?” *Verywellmind*, 5 March 2024, [www.verywellmind.com/the-id-ego-and-superego-2795951#:~:text=In%20his%20famous%20psychoanalytic%20theory%2C%20Freud%20states%20that,that%20have%20a%20powerful%20influence%20on%20an%20individual](http://www.verywellmind.com/the-id-ego-and-superego-2795951#:~:text=In%20his%20famous%20psychoanalytic%20theory%2C%20Freud%20states%20that,that%20have%20a%20powerful%20influence%20on%20an%20individual.).

“Dissociative Disorders.” *Mayo Clinic*, [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dissociative-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20355215](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/dissociative-disorders/symptoms-causes/syc-20355215).

“Dissociative Identity Disorder (Multiple Personality Disorder).” *Psychology Today*, [www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/dissociative-identity-disorder-multiple-personality-disorder](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/dissociative-identity-disorder-multiple-personality-disorder).

Duras, Marguerite, et al. *Hiroshima Mon Amour*. Directed by Alain Resnais, Performed by Emmanuelle Riva and Eiji Okada, Cocinor, 8 May 1959.

“Erectile Dysfunction.” *Mayo Clinic*, [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/erectile-dysfunction/symptoms-causes/syc-20355776](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/erectile-dysfunction/symptoms-causes/syc-20355776).

Foo, Stephanie. *What My Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma*. Atlantic Books, 2022.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. 1920.

---. *Interpretation of Dreams*. Franz Deuticke, Leipzig and Vienna, 1889.

Guy-Evans, Olivia, MSc. "Amygdala: What It Is & Its Functions." *SimplyPsychology*,  
<http://www.simplypsychology.org/amygdala.html#:~:text=The%20main%20job%20of%20the,processing%2C%20and%20decision%2Dmaking>.

Hickey, Eric W. *Encyclopedia of Murder and Violent Crime*. Sage Publications, 2003.

Jenkins, John Philip. "Serial Murder" *Brittanica*, 17 February 2024,  
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/serial-murder>.

Jung, Carl G. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Vintage, 2011.

Mate, Gabor. *In The Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction*. Random House, 2018.

McLeod, Saul, PhD. "Freud's Theory Of The Unconscious Mind." *SimplyPsychology*, 25 January 2024,  
[www.simplypsychology.org/psyche.html#:~:text=Freud's%20Iceberg%20Model%20of%20the,in%20subtle%20and%20complex%20ways](http://www.simplypsychology.org/psyche.html#:~:text=Freud's%20Iceberg%20Model%20of%20the,in%20subtle%20and%20complex%20ways).

"Modus Operandi." *Cambridge Dictionary*,  
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/modus-operandi>.

"Narcissistic Personality Disorder." *Mayo Clinic*, [www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662](http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/narcissistic-personality-disorder/symptoms-causes/syc-20366662).



Prakash, Alfred, et al. *Por Thozhil*. Directed by Vignesh Raja, Performed by R. Sarathkumar and Ashok Selvan, Sakthi Film Factory, 9 June 2023.

Relajo-Howell, Dennis. "The Dark Psychology of Serial Killers: Unpacking the Factors Behind Their Brutal Behaviour." *Psychreg*, 5 February 2023, [www.psychreg.org/dark-psychology-serial-killers-unpacking-factors-behind-their-brutal-behaviour](http://www.psychreg.org/dark-psychology-serial-killers-unpacking-factors-behind-their-brutal-behaviour).

Van Der Kolk, Bessel, MD. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Penguin, 2014.

