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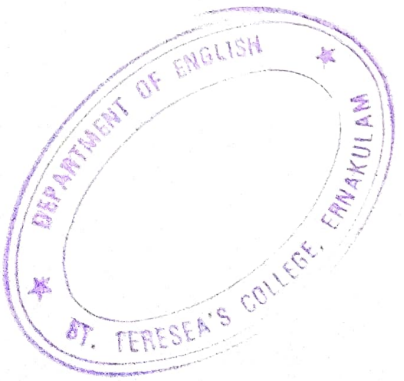

DREAMING IN CINEMA: ANALYSING THE DREAM SEQUENCE IN LIJO JOSE PELLISSERY'S *NANPAKAL NERATHU MAYAKKAM*

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

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Dreaming in Cinema:

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Filmmakers all around the world have always been challenging the conventional narrative techniques in the realm of cinema. Dream sequences have been a recurring element in films, captivating audience with their surreal, metaphorical and imaginative portrayal of the subconscious mind. They provide filmmakers and creators with oneiric combinations of light and shadow, and the ability to manipulate time and space. This project attempts to explore the significance of dream sequences in filmmaking, examining their visual, narrative, psychological and socio-cultural impact. The first part defines a dream sequence and the connection between dreams, personality, reality and film using theories and concepts of Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, Jean Baudrillard and Bert O. States. In the second part, the dream sequence in the movie *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* is analysed in relation to the compensatory and latent function of dreams. The transition of characters and development of specific scenes in the dream sequence are interpreted using dream theory. Further, the postmodern features of the movie are identified and examined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I take this opportunity to thank God Almighty for showering his abundant blessings and grace upon me during the course of my project.

I would like to place on record my sincere gratitude to Rev Dr Sr. Vinitha (CSST), Provincial Superior and Manager, St. Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam and Dr Alphonsa Vijaya Joseph, Principal, St Teresa's College (Autonomous), Ernakulam for their continued support throughout the course of my study in this institution.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to my supervisor Mrs. Athira Babu for guiding my thoughts in the right direction and for helping me to express them in the best possible manner.

I would also like to thank Dr Jeena Ann Joseph and Ms. Nikita John for instructing me to establish robust foundation in research methodology.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the Head of the Department, Dr Preeti Kumar and all the other teachers of the department without whose guidance this project could never have been completed.

Megha M B

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Introduction

"A dream that is not understood remains a mere occurrence; understood it becomes a living experience" says Carl Jung in his book *The Practice of Psychotherapy* (Jung, 123). The realm of film theory construes a dream sequence as a cinematic device which incorporates a narrative that briefly transcends the confines of mundane reality by relying on the philosophical musings of thinkers like André Bazin or Jean Baudrillard. Unravelling within the world of the subconscious, dream sequences magnify the facets of existentialism, symbolism and motifs between the conscious and the unconscious by etching surreal narratives in cinematic creations. These sequences employs dreams as a channel for expressing and exploring art, creativity, philosophy of life and intricacies of human experiences. Filmmakers try to delve deep into the 'iceberg' of the human psyche by examining the technique of dream narratives. Such novel modes of representation expand the horizons of narration and filmmaking. The basis of this exploration and experimentation is strictly rooted in traditional and evolving psychological theories and philosophical tenets. Thus, dreams become versatile, serving as a creative tool to heighten the process of interpretation. Dream sequences provide insight into a character's life, his/her inner thoughts, conflicts, desires, emotions, fears and aspirations. This is rudimentary to this narrative. However, modern cinema has witnessed perplexing and complicated plot scenarios in the past few years. The filmmaker or the author transports the audience or the readers into the character's dream world in order to untangle the twists and turns of the human psyche. Such psychological observations are realised through visual and auditory designs, symbolism, motifs and metaphorical

imagery etc. They necessarily would not be explicitly depicted in the film. In film theory, the essence of dream sequences or the dream narrative depends on the theories and ideologies of philosophers who have meditated on the nature of fantasy and reality, perception and the subconscious mind. Many filmmakers find inspiration in these foundations, using them to create dream sequences that push the boundaries of storytelling and connect with the audience on a profound emotional and intellectual level.

The surrealist movement significantly had an impact on the portrayal of dreams in cinema. Surrealism, which finds its roots in the creations of artists like Salvador Dalí and André Breton, seeks to traverse the irrational and subconscious facets of the human thought. Filmmakers like Luis Buñuel, who collaborated with Dalí on the film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), used dreamlike imagery to disrupt narrative expectations to provoke emotional responses from the viewers. This surrealistic influence can be unearthed in films like *Spellbound* (1945), directed by Alfred Hitchcock, where Dalí himself created a dream sequence that depicted the mental tribulations of the protagonist. Moreover, concepts of psychoanalysis, contributed by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, have played a key role in depicting dream sequences on screen. Freud’s theories and interpretation of dreams aim to understand the hidden aspects of a character. Archetypal concepts suggested by Jung add multiple layers into analysing a character, enabling a surrealistic depiction of universal themes and symbols that resonates with the collective experiences of an individual. The dream sequence found in Ingmar Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (1957) is a perfect example for this. The film utilises dream sequences to trace the introspective journey filled with unresolved conflicts and repressed memories initiated by an elderly professor. The

protagonist's inner psychological turmoil is depicted as dreams. These scenes are noteworthy of their surrealistic, fantastic and symbolic elements. In addition to being a form of psychological exploration, dream sequences often act as narrative devices in terms of foreshadowing and the exploration of other realities. Through the employment of dreams, filmmakers can provide hints about what will happen next, build suspense or introduce twists that defy audience's understanding of what is going on. Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) is a modern example where dreams within dreams blur the lines between reality and hyperreality.

Filmmakers can become innovative with dream sequences by amalgamating them with the sound design, cinematography, visuals, lighting and storytelling. Being unhinged from reality, creators can delve deeper into the fantastical and surreal features of postmodern narratives. Moreover, the presence of ambiguity and dilemma in the process of dreaming helps the audience to latch into the plethora of interpretations of such sequences in a movie. The real and the unreal or the hyperreal are questioned by the viewers and this active involvement ensures to help the growth of storytelling. A deconstruction of conventional storytelling, which is a characteristic of postmodern cinema can be re-established through dream sequences. However, this technique has disadvantages. Dream narratives can become clichéd and end up detached from the entire work if not executed efficiently. This may affect the coherence of the themes dealt in the movie, ultimately leaving the audience puzzled or disengaged. Therefore, proper integration of the elements in a film including the narratology is essential for an emotional response from the viewers.

The movie under study *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* directed by Lijo Jose Pellissery is a surrealistic movie that breaks the silver lining between dream and reality. As the title suggests, it all happens during a midday slumber. The movie raises questions about one's self, existence and identity through the techniques of filmmaking. The director criticizes the socially constructed life and makes the viewers reflects on the evolution of human life in the universe. The research tries to understand the essentiality of storytelling through dream sequences and how this phenomenon affects the formation of identity, opinion and consensus in varying cultural spaces of a society. This project is divided into two chapters. The first chapter discusses the theoretical framework utilized to explain how the entirety of the film becomes a dream to the audience. It explores the connection of one's self in the society and how dreams are created within their realms. The second chapter tries to solidify the thesis statement within the theoretical framework. Here, the major events in the movie are discussed and deconstructed with the selected concepts related to dreams, personality, identity crisis, culture and media. Dreams and personality are intricately linked to each other as well. This research is concerned with the various methods of dream interpretation as postulated by Carl Jung, Sigmund Freud, and Jean Baudrillard. According to Freud, who is considered the father of psychoanalysis, dreams provide a pathway to our unconscious minds where they often contain repressed desires and unresolved conflicts. He posits that dreams are an expression of unfulfilled wishes and as such, offers an account on their latent and manifest content. Expanding on the concepts of Freud's theory, Jung introduces the idea of collective unconscious arguing that dreams have symbolic archetypes shared by different cultures thus reflecting several human commonalties. Jungian philosophies enable people to understand their path towards self-improvement in life and unite their mind fragments.

Conversely, Baudrillard takes a postmodern approach stating that contemporary dreaming has been devalued in modern society by media and simulation, making illusionary lines between reality and imagination indistinguishable anymore. According to the essayist Bert O. States, dreams are intricately connected to storytelling. Both of them has common elements like symbolic imagery and narrative structure. Dream narratives are constructed to express thoughts by designating apt symbols to concepts equipping the audience to come up with multiple interpretations. The link between storytelling and dreams highlights the interconnection of the conscious and the unconscious. Writers and filmmakers depend on the philosophy grounded in the theories of thinkers such as Freud or Jung to transgress the borders of reality and skilfully construct a cinematic space for contemplation and introspection. Dreams strengthen the cinematic experience with a mirage of distorted images, emotions, ideas and meanings. Dream sequences will continue to evolve and dominate the cinematic space by proving its potential as an enduring tool to reconstruct and rewrite existing histories of human relationships.

Chapter 1

Dreams and Movies: A Theoretical Framework

In the world of cinema, there is an integration of dreams and narratives that transcends existing conventional modes of storytelling to become a fascinating premise for creativity. Dreams are not merely vague and ephemeral accounts of life. They transcends the boundaries of reality and break down the conventional forms of narration through natural depiction of emotions and imagination. Artists like filmmakers fuse dreams into the narration. The elusive ability of dreams often elevate the cinematic experience for the audience. This also allows the unravelling of meanings that are overlooked by viewers. Dream sequences in movies act as a distinct language that reflects reality, ultimately becoming a canvas for presenting visual aesthetics on screen. Thus, the subconscious contributes to extraordinary possibilities in narratology that filmmakers take leverage to represent the rawness and simplicity of human life.

Carl Jung is a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who has significantly contributed to dream interpretation. In his seminars, Jung has often concluded dreams as “messages sent up from the unconscious”. In his book *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (1928), Jung states that:

> …it is only in the modern times that the dream, this fleeting and insignificant looking product of the psyche, has met with such profound contempt. Formerly it was esteemed as a harbinger of fate, a portent and comforter, a messenger of the gods.

> Now we see it as the emissary of the unconscious, whose task is to reveal the secrets that are hidden from the conscious mind, and this it does with astounding completeness (Jung 43).

Jung's therapeutic interventions were principled on his research on dream interpretations. He has analysed over 80,000 dreams which conclusively led to his theoretical discoveries throughout his career.

A dream is the spontaneous and symbolic representation of the self. It can be considered as a narrative that is concealed in the unconscious. Observing dreams rewards us with worldly insights that are often overlooked or deliberately dismissed as absurdity in real life. At a conference in Zurich in 1933, Jung argued that the unconscious is "the dark" within us that hears what our conscious ears do not hear and, what our eyes do not see and this gives rise to images like a forgotten dream. Dreams can also be predictions of our own future. Jung says that dreams prepare, announce, or warn of certain situations, often long before they actually occur. This is not necessarily a miracle or a prior knowledge. The conscious mind is not aware of most of the crises or dangerous situations that manifest as dreams. Dreams can reveal secrets. The idea of 'compensatory dreams' is a brilliant concept propounded by Jung. According to Jung, these are dreams that counterbalance or compensate certain conscious attitudes, thoughts and perspectives of an individual in real life. Compensatory dreams restore equilibrium in an individual's life when he/she gets excessively fixated on certain aspects of life. It helps the individual to overcome such situations also. For instance, if one relies on transcendental logic in normal life then compensatory dreams can produce irrational or emotional outcomes. This will unify the mind in harmony. In *The Development of Personality,* Jung calls dreams 'compensatory' because

they contain ideas, feelings and thoughts whose absence from consciousness leaves a blank which is filled with fear instead of understanding (Jung, 101). Marie-Louise von Franz, a distinguished psychoanalyst says, “When we pay attention to our dreams a self-regulating tendency in the soul comes into play which counterbalances the one-sidedness of consciousness or completes it so that a kind of wholeness and a life’s optimum is achieved” (Franz, ch.2).

A few instances from real life can provide more insight into this concept. A man who is neglecting his fatherly duties will have dreams that his children hates him and this brings awareness to his problem of avoiding his duties. A woman living a noble life with a social personality might have dreams of herself engaging in crimes. Jung elaborates that the compensatory function of dreams offers assistance in psychotherapy. They illuminate the patient’s situation in such a way that it comes of immense help. Dreams offer insights, memories, experiences and hidden meanings within an individual’s personality by forcing power into one’s dormant qualities. This helps in the strengthening of human relationships. Those who invest time and effort in the exploration of dreams will undergo an emotional enrichment which widens one’s mental horizon. Dreams are fundamental to the creative process. This has been evidenced by the historical impact on various fields such as philosophy, science, art, and literature. Remarkable inventions, discoveries and innovations have been a result of dreams. Jung says this in the prologue to his work *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*:

> In the end, the only events in my life worth telling are…inner experiences, amongst which I include my dreams and visions. These form the prima material of my scientific work. They were the fiery magma out of which the stone that had to be worked was crystallized (Jung 53).

Dreams possess the potential to liberate us from overly restrictive worldviews and mundane daily routines. Jung refers to these as ‘big dreams’ (Jung, 53). These dreams are significant and are gradually engraved in memory for a lifetime, proving to be one of the most significant memories of human life. Big dreams contain religious or spiritual essence, offering wisdom into life’s questions on eternity and transforming one’s perspectives on life as a human and the world. At times, a dream may emerge profoundly distant from one’s life. It might be so peculiar and detached from the dreamer that it feels like a visit from the other side—a world of eternity, a world of the unknown, the subaltern domain of the unconscious.

While the enigmatic nature of dreams stems from the communication gap between the conscious and the unconscious mind, the lack of full comprehension doesn’t negate their influence on us. In *Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,* Jung says that it is often concluded that a dream is ineffective when it isn’t understood. This is not certain but we can enhance its effects by trying to understand and interpret it. Jung emphasizes on the collective unconscious underscoring the notion that certain symbols and themes in dreams are not just personal but also shared across cultures. Another pivotal concept is the representation of ‘shadow’ which stands for the unconscious, repressed aspects of the self. Dreams illuminate the shadow bringing too light facets of the individual’s personality. Jung asserts:

> “realization of the shadow,” the growing awareness of the inferior part of the personality, which should not be twisted into an intellectual activity, for it has far more the meaning of a suffering and a passion that implicate the whole man. The essence of that which has to be realized and assimilated has been expressed so trenchantly and so plastically in poetic language by the word “shadow” that it would be almost presumptuous not to avail oneself of this linguistic heritage. Even the term “inferior part of the personality” is inadequate and misleading, whereas “shadow”

> presumes nothing that would rigidly fix its content. The "man without a shadow" is statistically the commonest human type, one who imagines he actually is only what he cares to know about himself (Jung 270).

Sigmund Freud's seminal work titled *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) has laid down the foundation for dream analysis theory. In this work Freud distinguishes between the 'manifest' and 'latent' content of dreams (Freud, 33). Manifest content is an integral concept in dream analysis. This becomes a key constituent of the psychoanalytic theory proposed by Freud. According to him, manifest content of dreams can characterize the events and experiences that occur during an individual's dream. In conclusion, manifest content are the 'surface-level occurrences' in a dream. There is another set of content in dreams that is juxtaposed with this manifest content called the 'latent content'. Latent content reveals the 'deeper meaning concealed' in a dream. Freud argued that the manifest content theory on dreams were not random, irrational and arbitrary neurological events but rather the 'reflections of unfulfilled desires' in the psyche. The unconscious, to Freud, was a representation of the mysterious nature of the human mind that challenges comprehension. Therefore, dreams formed a pathway for gaining insight into the subconscious. This serves as an aid in the understanding of an individual's personal needs, thoughts, feelings and challenges. Freud's manifest content was constituted in the initial stage of dream analysis. This required a recollection of the surface-level components of a person's dreams. However, the latent content which revealed thoughts in a veiled manner became disadvantageous in independent analysis without guidance from an expert. Freud elaborated that the subconscious mind obscures the latent content of a dream as a defence mechanism against thoughts and emotions that are challenging to confront. He suggested that the latent content

contained hidden psychological meanings of a dream. This content is symbolically disguised and comprises elements kept away from conscious awareness, often due to their potentially distressing or traumatic nature. Another argument that Freud presents is that the thoughts, fears, desires and conflicts concealed in the subconscious and the unconscious mind influence the conscious thoughts, behaviours and actions of an individual. He believed that the elements of the unconscious mind could lead to dysfunctional issues in a person's mental and emotional well-being. Carl Jung's views on the manifest content was in contrast to Freud's concepts. Freud believed that the manifest content distorts the real nature or desire of a person. On the other hand, Jung argued that dreams can be literally interpreted. He asserts that understanding the manifest content of dreams helps us to gain a deeper insight into an individual's character and mind.

Dreams exist as a bridge between one's perceived reality and the extraordinary world filled with fantasy. They make parallel universes or multiverses a possibility. Jean Baudrillard, the French philosopher and thinker is often associated with postmodern and poststructuralist theory. *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) is a philosophical treatise by Baudrillard translated from French in which the theorist examines the relations between reality, symbols and society. This is on the basis of the significations and symbolism of media and cultural practices. The 'simulacrum' is often identified as the imitation or representation of an object or an idea. However, Baudrillard sees it as the truth itself and terms it as 'hyperreal'. According to him, it cannot be imitated as the original source is unable to locate. 'Simulation' is the imitation of the real world. Baudrillard asserts that in contemporary society, symbols and signs have supplanted genuine reality and significance, leading to a simulation of human experience. According to him, these simulacra go beyond

being mere representations or deceptive portrayals of reality. Instead, they lack a foundation in any reality and don't conceal a reality; rather, they obscure the fact that any semblance of reality is irrelevant to people's current comprehension of their lives. The simulacra, as described by Baudrillard, encompass the cultural and media symbols that shape the perceived reality, forming the acquired understanding through which human life and shared existence are comprehended. Baudrillard posited that society had become so immersed in these simulacra, and human life so intertwined with societal constructs, that all meaning was losing its significance by becoming endlessly malleable—a phenomenon he termed the 'precession of simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1-42).

The simulation of images in the signifying system occurs in four phases in Baudrillard's theory. Firstly, the images reflects the basic reality. In the second phase, the correlated images disguise and pervert this reality. This is followed by the concealment of the absence of reality in the third stage. Ultimately, the association to any reality is sequestered and a pure simulacrum is created. This concept can be applied on distorted dreams. Signs become reflections of other signs. Depiction of reality through symbols and signs depends immensely on the comparison of signifiers within a signifying system. An extensive case of correlation is thus formed. A gap exists between the signifier and the signified. What we perceive, shaped by our cultural context, is a sanitized version of the actual occurrences. It's as though everything we perceive or appear to perceive lacks a substantial foundation. It's akin to living in a dream within a dream. An individual's experiences in life are overwhelmingly artificial, to the extent that even declarations of reality are anticipated to be articulated in artificial, 'hyperreal' terms. 'Hyperreality' becomes a significant aspect in identifying and understanding dreams. Dreams, contrary to Freud's assertion, aren't merely about wish fulfilment. Ludwig Binswanger, in his work *Dream and*

Existence (1993), proposes an alternative perspective. Dreams can encapsulate the repetition of significant life moments, echoing through daydreams. Binswanger suggests that dreaming serves as an existential ascent towards a metaphorical 'heaven' deflecting the inevitable descent into the underworld of suffering, pain, and anxiety that touches us all.

The question arises: do we shape our dreams, or do they shape us? Being immersed in ‘hyperreality’ involves a complete erasure of the political forces that give rise to allencompassing crises, akin to the nature of dreaming. It is crucial to move beyond viewing dreams merely as hermeneutics of symbols. Instead, their meaning unfolds from the cipher of experience to the modalities of existence and back again. Dreams don't necessarily unveil a hidden kernel repressed within the latent subconscious, ready to manifest during sleep. Rather, they create a nexus of meanings where hermeneutical alignments from waking life can graft onto the nebulous partial objects of dreams. Dreams, in this sense, aren't symbolic premonitions of forthcoming events; rather, they emanate from a desire to bring order to chaos, align fragments, and restore a sense of coherence. The exploration of dreams extends beyond a search for hidden meanings; it encompasses the constant deployment of meaning, the interplay between experience and existence, and the intrinsic human desire to make sense of the disorder within our psyche.

Bert O. States, a playwright, critic and professor of dramatic arts takes up another approach. In the essay ‘Dreaming and Storytelling’, he discusses the prospect of innate similarities between dreaming and narration. The images present in a dream and the oral features of storytelling or narration share a resemblance that emphasizes the lucid and distorted nature of the realm of dreams. Dream images lack inherent relation to reality which is different for storytelling. For instance, one may envision scenarios like humans expanding

like balloons or animals dressed up like ordinary people going to work in offices within the dreamscape. Transitioning to the cinematic realm, States delves into the viewer's experience of watching a movie. Here, a heightened cognitive-visual alertness comes into play, where viewers instinctively introduce a mental filter—a form of resistance—that sieves out the literal interpretation of the visual image. This filter allows for an edited and nuanced version to materialize in the mind's eye. While awake and engaged with a film, individuals read through the imagery, appreciating its symbolic nature. However, the dream state presents a distinctive experience where individuals don't merely interpret the image but live within it, devoid of any external reality for comparative reference. This unique characteristic sets the dream experience apart, creating a space where the vivid and often surreal imagery takes precedence, unencumbered by the constraints of a waking reality.

Interpretation of dreams requires wide knowledge, experience and a set of authentic methodologies. Examining dream sequences on the basis of preconceived ideologies and conventional theories is not satisfactory. This may lead to unauthentic conclusions. Translating the elements of dreamscape through techniques like inversion, distortion, condensation and displacement will make such sequences in movies simple and comprehensible for viewers. Methods like these were utilized in deciphering hieroglyphs. It is significant to recognize the multiple layers of meaning hidden in dreams and a majority of them can be revealed through a thorough analysis. The inferences may not necessarily be connected to the attitudes of an individual in real life. It may not be in contradiction with his/her conscious attitudes also. Dreams could also act as a compensatory function. Sometimes, dreams defy interpretations and critics are compelled to take guesses. There is no fool proof method or theory to satisfactorily interpret dreams. A majority of the process depends on the intellect of the researcher and the experiences he/she has had in life.

Observation also plays a key role in analysing dreams. The Freudian hypothesis that explains that dreams are manifestations of fulfilment of our suppressed desires or wishes is heavily subjective. The irrationality and individuality of dreams adheres to this subjective and biased take on dreams. Not everything needs to be included in the realm of science because scientific reasoning is only one of many intellectual forces for understanding the world. Thinking of dreams more as artefacts than as merely observational statements might yield better results more in line with their essential nature. The ultimate goal is to overcome the limitations of unilateralism and cognitive inadequacy and to identify unfamiliar rewards when other teaching methods are effective, there is no need to rely on the unknown unless other methods eat failure. Attempts at unconscious research replace equivalent subjective methods as well. The analytical method should be reserved for cases where other methods prove ineffective and should be conducted by specialists or, when undertaken by nonspecialists, under specialist control and guidance.

Chapter 2

Analysis of the film *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*

"Death is sinking into slumbers deep. Birth again is waking out of sleep" (*Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*, 9:48-9:56).

Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam translated as "Like an Afternoon Dream" is a bilingual drama film released in 2022 via OTT platforms. Directed by filmmaker Lijo Jose Pellissery, the film is a collaboration between Malayalam and Tamil languages. The screenplay is penned by S. Hareesh based on a storyline by the director himself. The cast of the film includes stars like Mammootty, Ramya Suvi, Ramya Pandian and Ashokan. The film received critical acclaim and won two awards at the 53rd Kerala State Film Awards. The plot of the movie revolves around a group of Malayali tourists on their way back to Kerala after their visit to Velankanni shrine in Tamil Nadu. While the other tourists are asleep, James, the protagonist wakes up and steps out of the bus to enter a village. He finds a house and adopts the role of the patriarch in the family, behaving like a Tamilian and speaking in Tamil, confusing the other characters and viewers alike. It becomes apparent that James has taken on the persona of Sundaram, a family member who vanished two years earlier. Perplexed by the changes in the village, including a new temple not present when Sundaram disappeared, James' family and friends plan to administrate a sedative to facilitate his return to Kerala for presumed mental health treatment. However, upon waking, James reverts to his true self and willingly accompanies them back home. The narrative concludes with the revelation that

Sundaram's persona was a dream, and everyone, including James, was asleep inside the bus, leaving the ending open to interpretation.

The surrealistic experience in the movie is unlike any other projects of Pellissery. *Jallikattu* and *Churuli* are orchestrated with chaos and rawness of human life. But *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* is a trance-like cinematic experience. James is symbolic of the modern-day Malayali. He despises Tamil cuisine and complains every little thing about their culture. He doesn't like the noisy streets and their traditions. He is rather uptight about everything and gets agitated when they play a Tamil song on their way home (20:32). His demeanour exudes a pronounced pretentiousness, indicating a belief in his modern and evolved status in contrast to the perceived antiquity of Tamil. The dramatic turn of events begin with the afternoon slumber Sundaram stands in stark contrast to James, preferring sweeter tea and animated storytelling. Despite a familiar air, the village residents struggle to fully recognize him. Sundaram walks and talks like someone they knew, yet doesn't resemble them entirely. His diasporic Malayali experience, a theme explored by Pellissery and Hareesh, delves into the disconnection and alienation felt by those returning, leaving them feeling neither here nor there. As the group attempts to bring Sundaram home, he violently resists, questioning, "Isn't this my home?" with tears in his eyes (*Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*, 59:00-1:02:12). The film illustrates the Malayali's detachment from their origins. Despite the linguistic connection between Malayalam and Tamil, the Malayali group faces challenges adapting to a traditional Tamil village, criticizing its perceived backwardness. Sundaram, on a personal level, returns expecting familiarity but finds a transformed landscape: a temple replacing a forest, his barber deceased, and a stranger in the mirror. This metamorphosis severs his ties to cherished

places and people. Realizing he no longer belongs, Sundaram resigns to an afternoon nap, aware he won't awaken the same. Seeking home, Sundaram finds it elusive.

This situation of ambiguity can be interpreted as a dream using Carl Jung's dream theory. In *The Development of Personality*, Jung talks about dreams as a compensatory mechanism. This proves to be true for James in the film. His transformation into Sundaram can be observed as his rebirth. It can be the play of karma. The whole world is a stage and we are all mere players. The life of Sundaram acted as a compensation for his earlier actions and beliefs. The sudden change in behaviour and the fluency in speaking Tamil can only be possible while one is dreaming. James is a Malayali Christian. However, we see him as Sundaram praying to Hindu gods (29:36-40) and even visiting temples (39:58). This phenomenon almost seems absurd to us, viewers. For a specific span of time, Sundaram lived through James. This also leads us to the Jungian idea that not every dream we see is related to any of our realities. They should not be always the repressed emotions, desires, thoughts or aspirations like Freud proposed. A deconstruction of the Freudian theory on the interpretation of dreams is essential to widen our perspectives on dreaming. In the movie, James comes to realize his original identity while at the barber shop (1:31:05-1:31:19). He looks through the mirror to find a different man staring at him. This scene helps the viewers to discern that James is indeed in the middle of an identity crisis or he is actually dreaming. This predicament becomes transparent as the real James wakes up from his sleep (1:38:131:38:53). He leaves with his company as if nothing has happened. The narrative unfolds with a cosmic design seemingly guiding James' transformation into Sundaram. During this transformation, we see a play of shadows indicating that Sundaram has finally found his peace and left James. Here comes the Jungian idea of 'shadows' in dream

interpretation. Despite the head priest deeming it a divine intervention, villagers doubt him, branding him a fraudster. Ironically, only Sundaram's blind mother embraces him unquestioningly.

The film begins with the breaking of the dawn when everyone is asleep. There is a constant presence of sleep in the film that acts as major narrative technique. The unconscious reveals the unreal denouement of the protagonist to the viewers. As the travelling group begins to leave, we see James talking with the hotel manager how he couldn't sleep the night before. And the manager responds back with lines from *Tirukkural,* which is an ancient Tamil work that exhorts to the world the art of living (9:48-9:56). The lines explores how sleeping is equivalent to dying and waking up is a state of rebirth. This statement foreshadows what happened to James in the latter part of the movie that lead to his sudden change in his personality and identity. There is a scene in the film where the group watches *Parampara* (1990), a Mammootty movie which depicts him in double roles of a father and his son. This movie is deliberately chosen by the director to predict the future events as James ends up taking up another role as a son and father (Sundaram). The identity crisis and role-confusion begins here. Everyone drifts to sleep and suddenly the background sounds are muted (22:45). Tamil songs began to be played in the background and James wakes up as if he was summoned by them. He asks the driver to stop the bus (22:51-55). His dialogues here are vague and muffled as if he was talking to himself in his sleep. This is where the film takes a turn as James turns into Sundaram. James glimpses a fragmented Sundaram in dreams, emphasizing his blurred connection to the past. This signifies how sleep and dreams act as a narrative tool throughout the movie. The de-transition of Sundaram to James also

happens after a nap. The last shot of the movie is where we see James looking out of the bus towards Sundaram's village. The rest of the people with him are still sleeping. It is as if time had frozen for James. This ending can be used to interpret the entire experience of James as a dream. Freudian theory would state this as a manifestation of the 'latent content' of dreams. The latent content is often hidden in the unconscious and has a deeper aspect in delivering meaning. Likewise the dream here must be hidden by the unconscious to protect James from something he couldn't have handled in real life.

The simulation of Sundaram's life through James' dream shows us the binaries in the lives of Tamilians and Malayalis. The simplicity of slow life in the village, the manual work in the farms, selling milk to the villagers, engaging with people in the village square, dancing along to the beats of Tamil songs and enacting lines from old Tamil blockbusters are the realities of Sundaram. However as James comes into picture, it gets interlinked with his reality. To the viewers, the combination if the two entities- Sundaram and James is concealing the true reality of the abrupt personality switch. The relation to reality is cut off with the distortion of James' dreams. Baudrillard's concept of simulation helps us to breakdown the dilemma of the aforementioned characters well. The lines between reality and fantasy is thus blurred taking us into the realm of what Baudrillard terms it as the 'hyperreal'. In this state, there is a confusion of signs and symbols that already exists in the society and the direct perceptions of individuals are distorted.

As States posited, dreams act as a storytelling tool to visualize symbolic imagery in films. In this movie, the dream stands as a metaphor for the social hierarchy and the mundane human life. By examining the parallels between dreaming and storytelling, he taps into the

aspects of human imagination and experience which leads to a better understanding of the realities around us. The soundscape, manipulation of light and colour composition created by the director forms a visual language that resembles an inner voice from the subconscious. This elicits powerful emotions and responses from the viewers. Every nuance in the movie acts as a metaphor for James' predicament. In the same way James seamlessly adopts the persona of Sundaram without question. Our dreams often blur the lines of time, space, and logic, immersing us in experiences that feel eerily real despite their lack of coherence upon waking. Although dreams may seem inconsequential in the grand scheme of daily life, within their realm, emotions run high and the sense of urgency can be palpable. Similarly, the narrative unfolding for James/Sundaram exists outside the bounds of reality, yet its impact on him is profound. Just as the precise moment of James transforming into Sundaram eludes us, the onset of our dreams remains elusive. Cinema operates on a dreamlike logic, consciously bending spatial and narrative conventions to evoke emotional responses that transcend reality. Despite our awareness of the artifice, the most impactful films resonate with us on a subconscious level, leaving a lasting impression that reality alone cannot replicate. This is what Pellissery is trying to express through the art of cinema. Thus, the movie becomes an allegory for the art of filmmaking itself.

CONCLUSION

As Carl Jung says, “Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes”. This statement goes hand-in-hand with the protagonist of *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam*. Maybe the film serves as a moral obligation for us to embrace others not solely based on conscious perception but through diverse expressions of sensations. It urges humanity to move beyond exceptional spectacles and primal parochialism, commonly found in Pellissery themes, encouraging us to transcend narrow perspectives and welcome the ‘Other’. Pellissery is renowned for crafting eccentric and captivating characters rather than intricate narratives, a trait evident in this work. The film, like his others, thrives on unexplained simplicity, suggesting that this inherent mystery adds to its beauty. Functioning as a contemplative exploration of human nature, Pellissery deliberately leaves much to interpretation. In a symbolic scene, the village's gutter colours change subtly with infused water, carrying a deeper meaning within the broader context. *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* delves into the vulnerabilities of human existence, emphasizing that despite our diverse backgrounds in terms of caste, religion, or language, it is the unpredictable nature of humanity that unites us. What happened to the protagonist is not in the territory of credibility, but the writing and the direction convince viewers that this could happen to anyone someday. With its unique storytelling, the movie explores the experiences of mundane life through the narrative technique of a dream sequence. This sequence in the movie makes us contemplate whether miracles exist on earth. There is a balance between the real and the surreal as serendipitous moments are intentionally weaved with the natural life around the protagonist. Pellissery eschews theatrics, opting for a technical finesse that rejects traditional cinematic elements.

Sundaram is framed amidst objects, portraying him as a victim bound by fate. A metasensory impact is created with the inclusion of old songs and dialogues from classic Tamil movies. The absence of a dramatic background track elevates the experience. Theni Eshwar's cinematography, underlined by static shots, imparts a lifelike quality, casting the camera as an observer capturing the humour and tragedy of human existence.

The plot of the movie is deceptively simple and confusing at the same time. Observing Mammootty strolling through the village creates the impression of James undergoing a transformative experience, emerging anew as Sundaram. This spiritual metamorphosis into Sundaram signifies the demise of James, erasing all that once defined him- his familial love, religious convictions, and profound ties to the culture of Kerala. The film suggests that the distinctions and divisions constructed by the whole of human community are irrelevant in front of the eternal cycle of death and rebirth. It illustrates how individuals can undergo profound transformations, with an agnostic embracing religion and cultural identities shifting radically from one incarnation to the next. These contrasts are vividly portrayed through the distinct personalities of James and Sundaram, causing profound anguish for their respective wives. Sally, James's spouse, grapples with the disconcerting sight of her husband transforming into a stranger before her eyes. Meanwhile, Poongulazhi, Sundaram's wife, faces criticism from her daughter and brother-in-law for welcoming James into her home, believing him to be a reincarnation of Sundaram. Despite the belief by some that James's transformation is divinely ordained, scepticism pervades the village, with many viewing him as a fraud. However, amidst doubt and suspicion, Sundaram's blind mother unconditionally accepts him, reflecting a trust untouched by

scepticism. The film abounds with moments of serendipity, yet its narrative is deliberate and calculated in its structure.

Analysing *Nanpakal Nerathu Mayakkam* would be a confusing journey with its postmodern features. The fragmented realities, question of identity, multiple personalities and the unending search for truth and meaning serve as a catalyst for the dream sequence depicted in the film. In the beginning, the real purpose of this sequence is ambiguous to the audience. The transgression of the protagonist from James to Sundaram can have many interpretations. It could be a manifestation of the divine power on earth, intervening in James' life, leading to his salvation and absolution from earthly life. The director could have depicted the story of James and Sundaram without the personality switch as two different perspectives of life. A social commentary is what we see from a different perspective. The complex psychological states and inner conflicts of all the characters are distinctly pictured in the film, offering more insight into their actions. The basic instinct of human beings to label anything foreign to them as inferior and terrifying as well as the striking optimistic side of certain individuals in dealing with adversities in life are contrastingly portrayed through the dichotomy of the cultures. The strongest among all these interpretations would be equating the whole sequence to a dream, as explained in this project.

Dream sequences serve as a playground for filmmakers to experiment with visual storytelling and artistic expression. Unbound by reality's constraints, directors can craft visually striking landscapes that challenge viewers' perceptions and ignite their imaginations, employing lighting, colour and sound to evoke a wide array of emotions and sensations, thereby immersing audiences in a dream world's ambiance. Furthermore, dream sequences offer a platform to explore themes of uncertainty, ambiguity, and existentialism. By defying logic and rationality, dreams blur the lines between reality and fantasy, past and present,

prompting audiences to question their understanding of reality and identity. Incorporating dream sequences into films enables directors to confront viewers with the unpredictable and fluid nature of human consciousness, challenging them to contemplate deeper existential questions. Additionally, dream sequences can serve as narrative devices for foreshadowing future events, resolving conflicts, or symbolizing characters' psychological journeys. Through subtle clues and hints embedded within dream imagery, filmmakers can set up dramatic reveals or plot twists that drive the narrative forward, reinforcing overarching themes and motifs throughout the film.

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