

Research Article

Archetype Analysis of the Cinematic Representation of Rajinikanth, the Tamil Film Hero

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A B S T R A C T

The tropes used by Rajinikanth, the famous Indian Tamil film hero in his films *Baasha* to *Kaala*, were analyzed in this research paper. Carl Gustav Jung's archetypes were used to analyze the heroic representation. The cinematic representation of Rajinikanth in these movies is deliberate and purposeful. He used dual archetypes to attract the attention of the audience. Erel Shallit's *Enemy, Cripple and Beggar: Shadows in the Hero's Path* is used as a model to analyze the archetype adopted by Rajinikanth in his films *Baasha* to *Kaala*. He was able to gain political leverage through these depictions.

Keywords: Tropes, Carl Gustav Jung, Archetypes, Cinematic representation, Erel Shallit, Enemy, Beggar & Cripple archetypes

Introduction

Rajinikanth is an Indian Tamil hero who has appeared in over 160 films. He made his cinematic debut in 1975 through the film *Apoorva Raagangal*. He started his film career by playing antagonist roles. He experimented with a positive role in the film *Bhuvana oru Kelvikkuri* in 1977 as a failed lover. It was the film *Mullum Mallarum* that opened the gates of success as a protagonist for him. In 1990, he entered the commercial stardom. From 1975 to 1990, his cinematic representation in films was as an antagonist, supporting actor, antagonist-turned protagonist. His cinematic representation in films after 1990s helped him rise from the image of 'yet another hero' to 'demigod'. This transformation was possible because of his careful selection and cinematic representation of his character. So the cinematic representations of Rajinikanth in films during this period were chosen for the study.

The cinematic representation of Rajinikanth, the famous Tamil film hero, in his films from *Baasha* to *Kaala* helped him construct a grandiose identity, which he encashed in the political arena. The depiction of his character in these

movies 'affects' the spectator and helps them connect with the moving images of Rajinikanth. This cinematic representation of Rajini gives rise to emotional cinematic experience to his fans, who in turn offered him veneration

Representation of Rajinikanth in the movies from *Baasha* to *Kaala* was desperate and purposeful. It becomes cliché in his movies from *Baasha* to have "punch dialogue" political metaphor and other figurative speeches which allured the audience and it also had semantic and pragmatic effects on them.

Rajini's entry into politics was much debated by people of Tamil Nadu from the release of his film *Baasha*. It was assumed that the films of Rajinikanth after *Baasha* carried clues about his political entry. So the plot, story, screenplay, dialogues were all decoded and looked for political messages. The elements of film were used to kindle the curiosity of the audience.

He used political satire in his dialogues to attract the attention of the audience. He was able to make his movies "box office hits" while he created space in the political platform as well. This dual success was made possible

because of the construction of his “hero character” in these films. The construction of “hero Rajinikanth” in the movies *Baasha* to *Kaala* was analyzed in this research paper with theoretical support of Erel Shalit’s *Enemy, Cripple and Beggar: Shadows in the Hero’s Path* archetypes.

It was Carl Gustav Jung who proposed the theory of archetype, persona, inner self, and collective unconsciousness.

Archetypes

It was Carl Gustav Jung who proposed the theory of “Archetypes”. According to Jung “The human mind has innate characteristics imprinted on it; as a result of evolution, these universal predispositions stem from our ancestral past.” To quote Samuel’s words from his book *Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*, “The archetype is a psychosomatic concept linking body psyche, instinct, and image. Although there are many different types of archetypes, Jung defined 12 primary types that symbolize basic human personalities. Each type has its own set of values, meaning, and personality traits. These 12 types can be classified under “id, ego, and super ego”.

Persona and Inner Self

Jung also posits the concepts of *persona* and *inner self*. Persona is the image of oneself which they present to the world but they also have a true inner self. A film hero should satisfy these two traits of human psyche so that the audience adulates the hero. The persona and the inner self may be complementary or contrast to each other.

Collective Unconsciousness

Jung proposes the idea of collective unconsciousness. Collective unconsciousness lies at the deep level of unconscious mind of human being universally. Human beings are born with inherited elements. They are stimulated by instincts and archetypes. Collective unconsciousness has profound influence on the lives of individuals.

Erel Shalit, an Israeli Jungian psychoanalyst, authored the book *Enemy, Cripple and Beggar: Shadows in the Hero’s Path*. According to him, the modern hero possesses the psychological courage to venture into the dangerous part of the psyche and to face the shadows of fear, anxiety and other weaknesses. To quote his words, “the hero myth is the central myth of Jungian psychoanalysis” because for Jung the hero’s “grand opus” concerns the relations with the unconscious; the hero goes further into the nether world of the shadow in spite of being threatened by the monster that lurks in the darkness of the unconscious...”

Using Erel Shalit’s concept of path of hero as enemy, cripple and the beggar, this research paper analyzed the tropes adopted by the famous Tamil film hero Rajinikanth in his movies *Baasha* to *Kaala* which helped him construct “the willing hero” image among the audience.

Literature Review

Applying Jung’s philosophy many researches were conducted; to quote a few Christopher Hauk’s work on *Jung and the Postmodern* was a notable work, which argued that Jung’s “thought is compatible with postmodern thinking.”

Chris Willem Broodyk applied Jungian concept of Alchemy, Individualization and Amplification in his research work *the moving Image: Contemporary film analysis and analytical psychology*.

In Frederickson work *Jung and Film*, he did a subjective assessment of the films that are perceived as potentially meaningful.

John Brosnan applied Jungian theory in analyzing Shayamalan’s films. These were some of the international studies which applied Jung’s philosophy in analyzing elements of films.

Limited literature was available in applying Jung’s theory in analyzing South Indian movies.

Sona Varghese and Arumugam Balasubramanian analyzed the Malayalam movie *Urumi* using Jung’s archetypes. They identified the hero archetype, the mentor archetype, the trickster archetype, the shadow, the anima and the animus archetypes in the film *Urumi*.

Shervin Rizwan and Raghu Menon applied Jung’s concept of collective unconsciousness and analyzed Tamil Science Fiction Cinema.

Research about Rajinikanth films was also limited. S.V. Srinivas analyzed the career growth of Rajini from his beginning.

Dhamu Pongiyarvan researched about ‘Cinematic Charisma Served as a Political Gateway in South India.’

Literature review helped the researcher frame the research objective, research questions, and the methodology.

Objective

The main objective of this study is to analyze the type of archetypes used by the famous Tamil films hero Rajinikanth, in his films *Baasha* to *Kaala* and how the archetypes satisfied the ‘Persona’ and ‘inner self’ of the audience; which in turn induced collective unconsciousness among the public.

Research Questions

R1. What are the different types of archetypes used by the famous Tamil film hero Rajinikanth?

R2. How the archetypes deployed by Rajinikanth in his films *Baasha* to *Kaala* affect the audience?

Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was applied in this study to identify the archetypal role played by the Tamil film hero

Rajinikanth in his movies and how it 'affects' the audience. The archetypal symbols were identified in these movies and the symbols were decoded.

Findings and Discussion

Hero Archetype and Rajinikanth

Rajinikanth created populist identity through his archetype representation in cinema. He established an "angry young man" identity, who expressed wrath at the persistence of class distinctions, pride in the working class mannerism, and dislike for anything phoney. He remade many Amitabh Bachchan's films like *Billa*, *Thee*, *Padikathavan*, *Darmathin Thalaivan*, *Mr. Barath*, and *Pannakaran* to name a few, thereby naturally replicating the angry young man's identity which was established by Amitabh in the North.

Alongside, in most of his films, he played dual roles. Interjected flashbacks were also used to 'resolve an enigma'. He had dark past and equanimity present or the reverse; in this way, he adopted dual, contrary archetypes in his films. Rajinikanth's entry into politics was a much-debated topic since 1996 after the release of his film *Baasha*. So this study analyzes the filmic representation of Rajinikanth from *Baasha* to *Kaala*.

"There is no hero without a shadow," says Carl Kerenyi. He added that "The glory of the divine which falls on the figure of the hero is strangely combined with the shadow." From *Baasha* to *Kabali*, Rajinikanth used dual, contrary archetypes in his filmic representation. The archetypes used

are contrary to each other in most cases and complementary in a few. One character depicts the qualities of "id" and the other depicts the qualities of "super ego". Id represents the individual desire and Super ego represents the collective unconsciousness of the society. By the application of dual archetypes, Rajinikanth gratified the individual desire of the audience as well as the social need. Hence, he was able to strike a balance between both. And it helped him create an 'idealist' image. This dichotomous representation of Rajini in cinema facilitates his fans construct numinous feeling about the hero and that helped Rajini grow powerful in cinema.

According to Jungian psychoanalyst Erel Shalit, collective unconsciousness is the manifestation of super ego and the hero travels to the state of unconscious and explores the hidden areas of psyche. He used metaphorical images of *enemy*, *cripple*, and the *beggar* to evoke certain features of the unconscious.

The projection of hero with the shadow archetype helps the audience gratify their vicarious pleasure and they are able to get connected with the hero. To him, enemy is the manifestation of all our weaknesses. To fight out the enemy in a way is confronting our own weaknesses. Cripple is that part of shadow that carries our disabilities. The hero enters into shadow part of the psyche and confronts those crippled parts of ourselves that we break off from our consciousness. Metaphorically, beggar is the furthest part of the soul. Beggar turns towards something, holds, and stands at the gateway to the self.

Name of the Film and the Year	Character Played	Type of Archetype	Erel Shalit's Shadow in the Hero's Path
Baasha 1995	Masquerade as auto driver	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Enemy
Muthu 1995	Father and son	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Arunachalam 1997	Father and son	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Padayappa 1999	Powerful female lead	Anima and animus	Enemy
Baba 2002	Devine power and vagabond	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Chandramukhi 2005	King and psychiatrist	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Enemy
Sivaji 2007	Computer engineer and Don	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Enemy
Kusilan 2008	Cameo role; still there was dualism in his representation school boy and cinema hero	Yin yang (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Enthiran 2010	Engineer and the robot	Man and machine	Enemy
Kochadayan 2014	Father and son	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Linga 2014	Father and son	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Beggar
Kabali 2016	Past and present (old and young)	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Cripple
Kaala 2018	Past and present (old and young)	Shadow (Id vs super ego)	Cripple

The wholeness and the holiness of the character can be achieved through these shadow figures. According to Rauterberg, "Emotion is assumed as the mediator between two parallel processes: consciousness and unconsciousness."

The Latin meaning for the word complex is "Complectere" which means "to embrace". These hero archetypes help us look at our inabilities, sense of inferiority, and the "other person" within us. To look at the hero who projects this helps us unconsciously realize our weaknesses, accept the cripple within, and the emptiness. This helps viewers counterbalance their consciousness and help them maintain good relationship with the outer world. The dual representation archetypes stimulate the curiosity and dissuade the same simultaneously. They were used to subvert catharsis and were left unresolved intending to direct them on social action. The use of shadow archetypes in the films after *Baasha* "affects" the audience and helps them identify themselves with the moving images. These shadow archetypes gratify the persona and the inner self of the audience. Hence they adulate the hero Rajinikanth and start to believe him as their savior.

Jungian archetypes in Hockley's words, "Psychology of audience connects with film on two levels: one abstract intellectual and other personal emotional." These emotional experiences increase the consciousness of the spectators. The cinematic representation of Rajinikanth in the films from *Baasha* to *Kabali* helped him unify the collective unconsciousness of his fans. The deliberate framing of his character in these films helped him construct a grandiose image. The depiction of his character in these films 'affects' the spectator and help them connect with the moving image.

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