

# Day of Wrath, Night of the Uncanny: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Rahul Sadasivan's *\_Diés Iraé\_* (2025)

Binoy Varakil

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Joseph's College Devagiri, Kozhikode*

**Abstract**—Rahul Sadasivan's 2025 Malayalam horror film *\_Diés Iraé\_* stages a cinematic confrontation between domestic intimacy and the spectral return of trauma. Through a psychoanalytic reading grounded in Freud's theories of the uncanny (Freud, "Uncanny" 227), repression, and repetition compulsion; Jung's archetype of the shadow and collective unconscious (Jung 284); and Lacan's concepts of the Real, the Symbolic, and the symptom (Lacan, *\_Four Concepts\_* 49), this article argues that the film constructs a multilayered psychic landscape where individual neurosis and cultural guilt intersect. The domestic spaces of the narrative become architectural metaphors for the unconscious, and the protagonist Rohan's gradual descent into dread reflects the erosion of ego stability under disavowed histories that resurface as spectral forms. Ultimately, *\_Diés Iraé\_* critiques Kerala's modernity by exposing suppressed social wounds, transforming horror into a mode of ethical and cultural inquiry.

**Index Terms**—Psychoanalysis, Freud, Jung, Lacan, Malayalam cinema, Horror studies, Uncanny, Repression, Shadow archetype, The Real, Symbolic order, Trauma theory, Domestic space, Spectrality, Repetition compulsion, Collective unconscious, Mirror stage, Cinematic architecture, Cultural guilt, Kerala modernity

## I. INTRODUCTION: HORROR AS A PSYCHOANALYTIC LANGUAGE

Malayalam horror cinema has increasingly embraced psychological and atmospheric approaches, and Rahul Sadasivan's *\_Diés Iraé\_* stands as one of its most nuanced examples. Freud's claim that the uncanny arises when the line between fantasy and reality becomes porous (Freud, "Uncanny" 230) offers a crucial framework for understanding the film's spectral tone. Rohan's seemingly stable domestic life becomes the principal site of psychic rupture, demonstrating how the home traditionally a symbol of

security may instead reveal the return of the repressed. Freud identifies the uncanny as "that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (220). In *\_Diés Iraé\_*, uncanny terror is rooted not in the supernatural alone but in the familiarity of the domestic. The film thus becomes a study in how horror can articulate unconscious tensions that exceed individual fear and gesture toward collective memory and guilt.

## I. Freudian Foundations: The Uncanny and The Return of The Repressed

The domestic architecture of Rohan's house participates in the Freudian uncanny. Long corridors create spatial doubling a hallmark of the uncanny (Freud, "Uncanny" 234). The film repeats scenes of Rohan awakening at precisely 3:00 a.m., invoking repetition compulsion, the Freudian mechanism through which trauma seeks reenactment rather than resolution (Freud, *\_Civilization\_* 43).

A spectral feminine figure glimpsed in silhouette recalls Freud's discussion of infantile complexes. The maternal presence becomes, paradoxically, a site of terror and longing. Its visibility through the frosted glass blurred, partial, and suggestive embodies what Freud calls "the return of the repressed" (245).

## II. JUNGIAN SHADOWS: ARCHETYPES AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

The ghostlike presence in *\_Diés Iraé\_* operates through Jung's archetype of the shadow, comprising the repressed elements of the psyche (Jung 284). The reversed fingerprints on the mirror, mirroring Rohan's own, signal the intrapsychic doubling that Jung describes as central to shadow projection. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious further illuminates how Kerala's cultural tensions appear in

the film. The trauma haunting Rohan's home does not belong solely to him; it implicates history, caste tensions, and silenced female suffering, aligning with Jung's view that archetypal symbols emerge when rational consciousness fails to contain psychic truth (Jung 301).

Traditional rituals in the film, such as burning camphor to ward off spirits, reflect archetypal attempts to symbolically regulate the uncontrollable. Yet these rituals fail, dramatizing the insufficiency of symbolic substitutes for genuine confrontation.

### III. LACANIAN DISRUPTIONS: THE REAL, SYMBOLIC FAILURE, AND EGO FRAGMENTATION

Lacan's concept of the Real the unsymbolizable kernel of experience appears forcefully in the film's sound design: rhythmic tapping without visible origin, disembodied voices, and the persistent drone that interrupts domestic quiet (Lacan, *Four Concepts* 55). These sounds function as "returns of the Real," disrupting symbolic stability.

In the mirror-delay sequence, Rohan's reflection moves after he has stopped, dramatizing the collapse of the Imaginary order, which Lacan identifies as foundational to ego formation (Lacan, *Écrits* 78). The delay signifies trauma's temporal dislocation, revealing the subject's fragmented psychic state.

The film's revelation of a concealed family crime aligns with Lacan's argument that symptoms are coded messages requiring interpretation (*Écrits* 246). The confession scene decodes the symptom yet, as Lacan warns, knowledge alone does not dissolve the symptom. Trauma persists.

### IV. ARCHITECTURE AS UNCONSCIOUS: SPATIAL PSYCHOANALYSIS

The house functions as a spatial metaphor for the unconscious. The attic, filled with forgotten belongings, plays the role of a repressed memory chamber. Muddy footprints appearing only at night symbolize fleeting traces of memory, what Freud calls "screen memories" (*Interpretation* 508).

Thresholds serve as liminal spaces where the Real intrudes into the Symbolic. When Rohan pauses before the prayer room while an unseen presence

looms behind him, the frame captures a moment of psychic exposure

### V. SCENE ANALYSIS: FIVE PSYCHOANALYTIC READINGS

1. The Whispering Corridor exemplifies Lacan's "voice-object," sound detached from source, destabilizing the subject.

2. Mirror Delay demonstrates Imaginary breakdown and temporal disruption linked to trauma.

3. Attic Confrontation scratched-out photographs symbolize attempted erasure of traumatic memory.

4. Confession Ritual exposes the limits of symbolic atonement.

5. Cyclical Ending the rocking chair signifies repetition compulsion (Freud) and the enduring shadow (Jung).

### VI. ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS

*Diés Iraé* reveals trauma not as an individual disorder but as a communal structure. The haunting operates as a symptom demanding moral recognition. Freud proposes that neurosis heals when the repressed becomes conscious, (*Interpretation* 554); Jung argues for shadow integration (Jung 90); Lacan insists on confronting the Real. The film's refusal of closure asserts that Kerala's modernity must likewise confront its buried histories.

### CONCLUSION

Through Freud's uncanny, Jung's archetypes, and Lacan's Real, *Diés Iraé* emerges as a cultural text that transforms horror into ethical inquiry. The film's haunted architecture becomes a map of collective psychic wounds. In exposing the fractures beneath Kerala's progressive image, the film demands recognition rather than resolution, demonstrating that horror can open pathways to cultural introspection and moral reckoning.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Carroll, Noël. *\*The Philosophy of Horror; or, Paradoxes of the Heart\**. Routledge, 1990.

- [2] Creed, Barbara. *\*The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis\**. Routledge, 1993.
- [3] Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *\*Standard Edition\**, vol. 17, Hogarth Press, 1955, pp. 217–256.
- [4] *Civilization and Its Discontents\**. Hogarth Press, 1961.
- [5] *The Interpretation of Dreams\**. Basic Books, 2010.
- [6] Jung, C. G. *\*Symbols of Transformation\**. Princeton UP, 1956.
- [7] *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious\**. Princeton UP, 1968.
- [8] Lacan, Jacques. *\*Écrits: A Selection\**. Translated by Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton, 1977.
- [9] *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis\**. W. W. Norton, 1981.
- [10] Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *\*Screen\**, vol. 16, no. 3, 1975, pp. 6–18.
- [11] Praveen, S. R. "‘Dies Irae’ Movie Review." *\*The Hindu\**, 31 Oct. 2025.
- [12] Sadasivan, Rahul, director. *\*Diés Iraé\**. Night Shift Studios & YNOT Studios, 2025.
- [13] Times of India. "‘Dies Irae Ending Explained.’" *\*The Times of India\**, Nov. 2025.
- [14] Žižek, Slavoj. *\*The Metastases of Enjoyment\**. Verso, 1994.