Chapter 5

Man and Madness

Among the many experiences which one lives through, the most tragic and terrifying is, undoubtedly, losing control of one’s own mind because with this, the world in which one lives, starts being perceived in a completely different manner thereby forcing one to undertake distressing, discomforting, and somber journeys through the unknown and untrodden path to places bereft of any hope. Human beings are endowed with the unique capacity of getting acclimatised to and actualising living circumstances which they consider optimal, leading to a situation where both desirable and un-desirable outcomes emerge in the process. In these varied living conditions and the various situations in which their life progresses, experiencing a plethora of negative emotions including anger, stress, strain, and anxiety becomes inevitable, and the interplay of these, in different degrees, leads some persons to behave in a strange way which is not in conformity with the accepted societal norms. This abnormal behavioural pattern which can be called as a psychic disorder, in the broad sense of the term, has invariably caught the attention of clinical practitioners and it has also crept its way into the so-called themes in literary works.

Madness can be considered to be a type of psychic disorder and when it comes to talking about madness, irrespective of whether it is being referred to in the medical sense or in the literary sense, it is a dynamic term circumscribing a broad area of meanings and having scope for a wide range of interpretations irrespective of whether it is clinical or literary. Lillian Feder in his book *Madness in Literature* defines, “…madness as a state in which unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones to the extent that they
control them and determine perceptions of and responses to experience that, judged by prevailing standards of logical thought and relevant emotion, are confused and inappropriate” (5).

The scope of the present chapter is limited to the analysis of the concept of madness in works of art including literature in general and cinema in particular. Here, an attempt is made to map the trajectory of how madness which is being used as a theme in literary works started being used as a theme in cinema as well. When it is used in literature, madness can broadly have three connotations:

To date, literary madness has been used as a critical device in three ways:

1) the "mad" writer; 2) the "mad" characters of writers; and 3) the critical method by which psychological terms from the field of medical madness are applied to literary madness. Each approach has some validity in literary application, ... . (Rieger 5)

The first viewpoint, which has been proposed by the writers like Plato, who belong to the classical period, perceives an artist as a ‘mad’ person whose creative genius can be primarily attributed to his or her madness; some of the prominent examples being Nathaniel Lee, Jonathan Swift, Ezra Pound, Virginia Woolf, and Sylvia Plath.

The second characteristic presentation style in which madness is portrayed in literary works is through the creation of ‘mad’ characters by the writers themselves and this itself can be divided into three subtypes. The first subtype involves the creation of a scenario where the protagonist becomes mentally unstable in due course of time as the story progresses and this transition of the protagonist from normal to abnormal becomes food for thought as far as the writer is concerned and also provides him with an
opportunity to probe deep into the conditions which are responsible for this degradation of the character’s mental state, a case in point being the character Ophelia in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The second type of characters, created by the writers, are the ones who fail to adjust with the rules and norms of society which they feel are oppressive as well as suppressive and succumbing to these pressures, either become truly insane or else pretend to be one. Edgar in *King Lear* is a classic example of this type of a character who pretends to be insane. Characters of the third type, experience a kind of rootlessness, lack of identity and purpose in life which can be directly correlated with the interference and the influence of society on them resulting in a situation where they become somewhat alienated from the human community as in the case of Emma in *Madame Bovary*.

The third method in which madness can be represented in literary works is as follows:

Psychological terminology can be borrowed from Freud, Jung, Horney or other modern theorists, or may be from actual descriptions, such as those from the DSM-III categories. Literature and psychology are complementary disciplines, for each contributes to an understanding of personality. As such, studying the specialized topic of “madness in literature” might actually contribute to our knowledge of human behavior.

(Rieger 9)

Many a time, madness is used as a device in the narrative structure, but as a matter of fact, its scope is not limited to that of simply being a narrative device because it possesses the wherewithal to probe deep into and touch upon various issues, be it social, psychological or the formation and conception of selfhood. Arts, including literature and
films employ the theme of madness because it serves as a tool to critique societal aspects in the context of the representation of man and woman, and in the context of reality and its constructs. Also, the representation of the behaviour and the working of the mental faculty of the mentally ill individuals, through the medium of varied forms of artistic creations, help the common folk, who normally do not get much chance to mingle with such sort of people, gain insight into these aspects. Thus, it becomes compelling to analyse the constitutive relation of art with madness, which culture has excluded as an abnormal pattern of behaviour, all this while.

Madness has been depicted in myths and legends since the ancient times and this serves as an indicator to the fact that man himself has been quite fascinated and involved in understanding the functioning of his own mind and his psychic experiences.

“The treatment of madness in literature reflects human ambivalence towards the mind itself; madness comprising its strangest manifestations, is also familiar, a fascinating and repellent exposure of the structures of dream and fantasy, of irrational fears and bizarre desires ordinarily hidden from the world and the conscious self” (Feder 4).

Madness being a complex area, involving the study of a group of interrelated ideas, a single theoretical exploration will not suffice, if one intends to understand its nuances and various dimensions. This is where a comprehensive approach, adopting psychoanalytical theories and the theories of Michel Foucault, is desirable so that justice will be done to the study. Michel Foucault is one of the prominent theorists who has made valuable and lasting contributions to the studies of mental illness, crime and punishment, the role of judiciary and other normalisation techniques to deal with abnormal people. In his seminal work, History of Madness (2006) gives a detailed
account of the concept of madness commencing from the ancient age onwards and in its introductory chapter, Jean Khalfa opines that:

When comparing the conceptions of madness prevailing in different civilisations, Foucault realised that there could be a history of madness itself, in other words that it was a ‘phenomenon of civilisation, as variable, as floating as any other phenomenon of culture’ and, as a consequence, that ‘curing the mad is not the only possible reaction to the phenomenon of madness’… Foucault does not look at madness from the point of view of the classical historian of a scientific discipline, here psychiatry, who would trace the development of a science from inchoate early notions towards its modern, rational state. Rather he is interested in decisions, limits and exclusions which took place at particular points in time and indicate shifts in the way certain phenomena were experienced. (xiv- xv)

In History of Madness, Foucault identifies three distinct periods and analyses the connection and relationship between madness and reason in each of these:

First, the Renaissance when the conversation between reason and madness which dominated in the Middle Ages is subtly transformed into a reflection on wisdom; then the radical separation of reason and madness in what he calls the Classical Age, that is, roughly, the seventeenth century and a large part of the eighteenth, when most of the social institutions of confinement are created – a period he calls tragic because it stages a contradiction without any hope of a reconciliation; and finally the modern experience of madness where madness is now perceived as factual or
positive, an object of science, as a disease or a series of diseases, a period which starts at the end of the eighteenth century and which, Foucault indicates, has already been transformed in some respects by a new, literary experience of madness, obvious in late romantic works (Nerval) and in some of the avant-garde of the twentieth century (Roussel, Artaud). (xv-xvi)

The period from 1800 till the present saw the psychiatric discourse becoming hegemonic and this has played a great role in defining and understanding the modern and postmodern self. Even though the terms madness and mental illness are akin to each other, conveying more or less the same idea, the latter term is commonly used because of its preferred usage in the branch of medicine called psychiatry which, instead of being solely concerned with curing the abnormal individual, also protects the society from the dangers meted out by these type of people.

In Abnormal (1999), Foucault traces, “the emergence of an abnormal individual in the nineteenth century” (Davidson xvii) and according to him the individual to be corrected, who has been placed within the framework of the family and the other institutions linked to it, is one of the basic figures that constitute the realm of the abnormal which is controlled and guided by the concept of power in the society (xx). Foucault, observes that it is possible for the juridical and psychiatric discourses to come together in order to establish a system of punishment as well as correction and he further speaks of a new power which is quite different from the psychiatric and judicial power; the power of normalisation which separates the crime from the criminal and the disease from the diseased (xix).
Film, even from its silent days in the 1920s, has proven to be an art form particularly suitable for handling intimate psychological subjects. It is a medium of observation, the almost clinical recording of human behavior, with every nuance of expression and gesture enhanced in the close-up. As a highly controlled flow of images, film is uniquely able to reflect the flux of mental and emotional experience. And madness, which raises basic questions about the nature of these experiences, has been a very popular subject for filmmakers. (Fleming and Manvell 49)

From the early stages of Malayalam cinema, the Malayalam film directors, have been successful in portraying social issues like identity crises, anxieties, dilemmas, and confusions using mentally aberrant male and female protagonists as tools and some of the prominent films woven around the central theme of madness are *Anantaram* (1987) and *Elipathayam* (1981) by Adoor, and *Thaniyavaran* (1987) by Sibi Malayil in which the male hero becomes a victim of mental illness of varying natures. In *Anantaram*, the protagonist Ajayan’s (Asokan) reason for mental illness is the loneliness, isolation and rejection he experiences in his life which is compounded by the fact that he is an orphan. The lack of a mother’s love in his childhood is the primary cause for his insecurity and aberration and he sees this love in his step brother’s wife, but ultimately fails to distinguish between fact, fantasy, reality, and dream, making him a mental wreck. In *Elipathayam*, the protagonist Unni (Karamana Janardhanan) becomes a paranoiac due to his inability to cope up with the changing societal situations and at the end of the film he is left alone without any company except his paranoia. The film *Thaniyavaran* is based on the belief that a curse has befallen the hero’s ancestral house, according to
which a male member of the family from each generation will become mad. Balan (Mammootty) is a school teacher who lives in a joint family leading a peaceful life. His uncle becomes mad and as soon as he dies, the question of whether Balan or his brother Gopi (Mukesh) will become the next victim of the curse, arises in the family. Even though Balan does not really become mad, he starts doubting himself because of the peculiar approach of the other people including his kith and kin towards him. Finally, unable to bear the thought of the consequences which her son will have to face if the society brands him as mentally unsound, his own mother poisons him to death. Some of the notable films in which women have been portrayed as insane are Novemberinte Nashtam (1982) and Manichitrathazhu (1993). The heroine of Novemberinte Nashtam becomes demented when she is deceived by her lover whereas in Manichitrathazhu, Ganga (Sobhana) is portrayed as one having a dual personality after being possessed by the spirit of a deceased dancer.

Swapnadanam (1976) and Irakal (1985) are best rated films which form a part of George’s filmic canon and the unique manner in which he has treated the theme of madness in these films is exceptionally noteworthy. Swapnadanam characterises the abnormal life, caused by the lack of love and sexuality, of the male protagonist.

Human beings tend to fall mentally ill and using psychoanalysis, propounded by Sigmund Freud, it is possible to decipher and diagnose the underlying psychiatric anomaly. He gives a detailed account of sexuality, neurosis and dream work in individuals, which in fact paves the way for many psychoanalysts to further probe deep into the unconscious mind and its manifestations in the conscious one. It is he, who postulates that the extensive range of human behaviours and actions can be clearly
explained through the mental processes and states which are hidden. This proposal indeed has provided an insight to the way in which neurotic symptoms as a behavioural pattern, like obsessive behaviour, slip of the tongue, and dreams, can be explained, which, for many centuries were thought of by practitioners and theorists as inexplicable. The normal state of mental health tends to get distorted when something upsets the happy state of mind, which can be due to a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, lack of sexuality and/or changes in the external world like the loss of a thing or that of a loved one and in some individuals, when the intensity of distortion exceeds the tolerance level, madness tends to manifest itself in him or her.

Sexuality is often regarded as a complex phenomenon involving powerful feelings that influence the social life and behavioural patterns of human beings. “One important feature of the present interest in sexuality is its linkage with a parallel concern with questions of family, kinship and household organization” (Hamilton viii). Sexuality plays a tangible and evident social role in moulding the private lives of human beings and since the time of Freud, it has been a central area of investigation and interrogation as far as psychoanalysis is concerned. The interpretation of Malayalam films from a psychological point of view, many a time, gives rise to questions on sexuality which becomes a prominent topic of interrogation, especially with the emergence of the notion of gender as a construct. In this background, I am making an attempt to analyse how the protagonist in Swapnadanam conducts himself in society with reference to Freud’s statement, “if the vita sexualis [sexual life] is normal, there can be no neurosis [medical term for mental disorder]” (Sharpe and Faulkner 37).
George’s Swapnadanam is one of the best films in cinematic history which studies the working of the unconscious mind and how it gets manifested in the conscious mental faculty. Even though, on the face of it, the story line, which narrates the life of a recently married couple, seems to be quite simple, the theme and the narrative technique get more and more complicated as the film progresses. Upon, a close analysis of the film, one can appreciate that this film actually deals with several layers of themes, the lack of harmony in the family life of a newly married couple, Gopinathan (Dr. Mohandas), a doctor by profession, and his wife Sumitra (Rani Chandra), the discordant life gradually leading to the unravelling of the protagonist’s mind, happenings in his life and the way he negotiates with the reality in the end.

The film begins with a rather unusual scene where, “the back portion of a person’s head lying on his stomach on a river bank, tightly grasping the grains of sand is shown. He raises his head slowly and is seen getting up with sand on his face. He stares at the deserted place around him for a moment and starts walking slowly.” (Venu 16). Seeing this, undoubtedly, a curiosity tends to develop in the minds of the viewers as to who this person is, what has made him lie down on the sand and finally where is he walking to. The shot progresses from medium close up to a long shot where this person is shown walking insouciantly, apparently without any aim or destination and on the screen, the words mentioning that this man has disappeared from the northern district of Kerala on one morning in the month of September in 1974 appear. His whereabouts are unknown for a couple of weeks and suddenly he reappears in the city of Chennai. He is shown as a homeless man wandering through the streets of Chennai during day and spending the night sitting in the verandah of the closed shops by the roadside.
One day he reaches a hospital saying that he has stomach pain. Dr. Ramachandran examines him and does not notice anything wrong with his stomach. However, he feels that this man could be mentally deranged and refers this case to his psychiatrist colleague, Dr. Venu. The attending nurse briefs Dr. Venu that he has been admitted in the hospital for stomach pain and that he has not spoken anything about who he is or about his whereabouts for the past one week. Dr. Venu scrutinises his medical report and reads out his name as Parameswaran and it is from this instance that the viewers come to know that this man has got admitted in the hospital under this name. Dr. Venu asks him where he is coming from and even though his initial reaction is that of complete silence, after repeated interrogation he replies that he is from Ernakulam. The doctor probes further asking him how long he has been in Chennai and whether he is married or not. The patient replies quite disinterestedly that he reached Chennai several days back and that he is single.

In the next scene, the psychiatric ward, where Parameswaran is now admitted, is shown. He is now placed under the treatment of a senior doctor, Dr. Isaac Thomas who is Dr. Venu’s superior. Dr. Isaac examines Parameswaran and as a part of the treatment, starts talking to him in a very friendly manner inquiring whether he likes this place and suggests that it will be better if he trims his overgrown hair. Subsequently Dr. Isaac discusses this case with Dr. Venu and the two doctors feel that some more observation and study are required for a couple of more days before they can decide on the future course of treatment. Dr. Isaac does not believe that what Parameswaran has told to be fully true and he also doubts Parameswaran’s details as per the existing medical records in the hospital. Further, since there is no organic disorder in the patient, this case is more
complicated than expected in the view of these doctors. It is in this very same hospital that Parameswaran’s past, his true identity, and the problems he faces in his life get disclosed to the viewers in a series of gripping scenes which form the heart of the movie *Swapnadanam*. Dr. Venu prescribes certain psychological tests and after the patient undergoes these tests, Dr. Isaac studies the report and concludes that Parameswaran is suffering from a mental ailment which is very much curable by analysing the past of the patient and this is precisely where the challenge lies because the hospital, by virtue of not knowing any of the patient’s relatives, has to get the information about his past from the patient himself.

In the majority of films, a person who is thought to be or is mentally unsound is brought to the treatment centre or hospital for diagnosis and treatment only during the latter part of the film. However, with Georges’s superb directorial skills, this film has been presented in a different way, in the sense that, the opening of the film itself shows the mentally unstable protagonist undergoing a course of treatment and the cause for his instability and the other aspects pertaining to him, all become known during the treatment procedure only. Another characteristic feature of this film is the realistic portrayal of the troubles which a mental patient has to undergo and the methods of treatments employed to cure a mental illness.

After mutual discussion, the doctors decide to conduct a narco analysis test on the patient in an attempt to find out about his past. A narco analysis test is conducted on a person who may have the tendency to suppress the truth when he is in a state of complete consciousness. The test involves asking a series of questions to the person after injecting a special chemical which makes the subject semi-conscious and relaxed. His responses
along with the questions posed are recorded and played back to him once the effect of the chemical wanes away after a pre-determined period of time. As the test gets underway, the first revelation which the patient makes is that his actual name is Gopinathan Nair. Next, Dr. Isaac asks him what his profession is and he replies that he is a doctor who practices in a place near Kollam. During this time, the audience is shown a stethoscope lying on a table. When the patient says something in response to the doctor’s question, the viewers are simultaneously shown a relevant scene and in this manner the director makes sure that the viewers get to appreciate fully what the corresponding thoughts are in the mind of the psychiatric patient.

The doctor subsequently asks the patient about the location of his house and the doctor elicits a reply that his house is in Trivandrum and the viewers are shown a scene where the patient’s mother is seen sitting in the portico of the house. The following question about his marriage can be construed to be the crucial one since it highlights the central problem of the protagonist and the director very precisely conveys the underlying issue to the audience with a single shot flashback:

(Gopi and Sumitra are in their bedroom. Gopi is about to leave the room.

Sumitra is standing in the room covering her nakedness using a blanket).

SUMITRA. (Angrily). Then go. Wherever you want you go.

(Gopi comes outside the room without looking at Sumitra).

(Swapnadanam)

Suspecting that Gopi’s marriage is in the doldrums, the doctor determines that it would be prudent to deep probe this aspect of his life. Gopi, on his part, reveals to the
doctor that he is a married man and it is almost one year after his marriage. Dr. Isaac asks whether his married life was a happy one and he says:

   GOPI. Happy, happy ... (In a confused and doubtful manner).

   DOCTOR. Tell me, did you like this marriage

   GOPI. Yes, but … but… (Swapnadanam)

He continues, saying that his spouse, Sumitra, is his maternal uncle’s daughter and that they tied the nuptial knot in December 1973.

George narrates the rest of Gopi’s story through a flashback by taking the narrative account back in time. Gopi and Sumitra belong to two different strata of the society. On the one hand, Gopi is born and brought up in a poor family and in fact it is Sumitra’s father who helps him financially to complete his education, whereas on the other hand, Sumitra’s family background is starkly different and she has been born and brought up in the midst of wealth and luxury. Her father likes Gopi and it is already pre-decided that Gopi and Sumitra will be married. Apart from the social status, the mindsets of the newlyweds are also quite different. Gopi is an introvert and a workaholic, whereas Sumitra is a happy-go-lucky person accustomed to living a luxurious life in a city. It is in this situation that the marriage of Gopi and Sumitra takes place. The discordance between the husband and the wife, marred their married life right from the beginning itself and over time, instead of narrowing down, the gap widened so immensely that it led to Gopi losing his mental stability and becoming insane. The well thought of sequence of events carefully put in place, coupled with the world class directorial skills of George, makes the depiction so very realistic that this film deserves to be called a gem of a film and undoubtedly is a thought-provoking treat for the film viewers.
On the day following their marriage, Sumitra’s family members and Gopi are seen sitting around the dining table having breakfast and talking to one another. During his conversation with Gopi, Sumitra’s father mentions to him that he wants to gift him a car the following year and in the meantime he should learn car driving. It is possible that Gopi’s father-in-law loves him and is offering this out of his genuine affection for his son-in-law, but be that as it may, Gopi pays scant attention to his words and is not interested in the conversation too. Looking at this instantaneous reaction of Gopi, it may not be wrong to think that such words are actually doing more harm than good as far as the relationship between Gopi and Sumitra goes, because it is highly plausible that these words are triggering an inferiority complex in the protagonist’s mind. Not seeing his daughter at the dining table, her father calls her and asks whether she has become ready to go to her husband’s house. Sumitra, knowing that Gopi’s house, which is in a village, lacks the comforts she is used to, expresses her dislike by asking her father whether it is alright if she goes after two more days. Her father admonishes her and tells her that she must leave on that day itself because Gopi’s mother is waiting for them.

The next scene shows Gopi and his wife travelling in a car to his house. The viewers get to read from Sumitra’s explicit facial expression that she is not very happy to go to Gopi’s house and probably does not want to stay there for a long time. After reaching his house, as if as an excuse to escape from his house, she asks him when they will go for their honeymoon. Gopi, for whom his mother and his work are more important than their honeymoon trip, somewhat disinterestedly tells her that he only has three days leave. His answer disappoints Sumitra, but in order to raise her spirits, he
informs her that after reaching his place of work, he will take her for a honeymoon trip and in the meantime will take her for a walk to a hilltop in his village.

With a lot of zeal, Gopi takes Sumitra to the hilltop, which he says, en route, was his favourite haunt during the times when he was free. As a matter of fact, this throws light on his character, that he is basically an introvert; a person who does not have many friends with whom he can share his feelings and anxieties, and a person who prefers to seclude himself. Sumitra, on the other hand, being one having a diametrically opposite nature, does not consider this walk in the lap of nature to be a romantic one and instead starts wondering why he is taking her there because she finds nothing interesting. On the hilltop he advises her to talk freely to everyone in the house, including his mother, without any inhibitions whatsoever. He says that there may be many things which she may not like, but it is in the best interest of both of them that she takes these things in stride so that all can lead a happy and peaceful life. He further goes on to mention that his mother loves her very much and that she has been eagerly waiting for this day of their marriage from the day of Sumitra’s birth onwards. Sumitra responds that she is aware of all these aspects and that she has behaved as a responsible lady so far and it is in fact Gopi who seems to have forgotten everything; the latter remark being a subtle hint to remind Gopi about his love affair when he was in college. Sumitra does not approve of this love affair and looks at him with contempt for this action of his. Gopi confesses that he is a weak minded person and overcome by emotions, he was unable to reject the love shown towards him. This statement from Gopi himself indicates that unlike other men, he is not a very strong man. Finally, just before they begin returning back home from the hilltop Sumitra kisses Gopi on his forehead and this act of hers instills hope in the
viewers that everything will be alright and they will lead a happy married life. However, the story takes a twist at this juncture and Gopi’s love affair which haunts him even after his marriage and Sumitra’s persistent doubt about his extra marital relationship create havoc in their lives ending up in Gopi becoming mentally ill.

After a short stay for a few days in Gopi’s house, the couple reaches the town where Gopi works. They directly go to Sumitra’s college friend Rosie’s (Mallika Sukumaran) house where they are planning to stay in the ground floor on rent. Rosie is working as a college lecturer, is unmarried and stays with her brother Mohan (M.G. Soman) in a palatial bungalow which is quite near Gopi’s workplace. Sumitra is quite happy to meet Rosie and stay in her house. Rosie and her brother’s life style is also a luxurious one and since both these young women are of the same wave length, Sumitra finds Rosie to be a good company for her. Rosie conveys to Sumitra that her father came the previous day and purchased a lot of vessels and furnishings for their new house, which he felt would be necessary for them to start their married life. Sumitra’s father, being fully aware of the comforts in which his daughter has been brought up and becoming a bit concerned about whether she will face any difficulties in setting up her family, decides to send a servant Kalyani Amma (Prema Menon) within a week’s time to help his daughter.

Life starts normally for Gopi and Sumitra and with Rosie around, Sumitra gets a kind of consolation and relief which she wants. Gopi, being a workaholic and unmindful of his young bride at home, starts concentrating more on his profession and spends most of the time with his patients. Being an extrovert and modern in her outlook, Sumitra has certain pre-conceived notions about how her life as well as husband should be and the
fact that Gopi is not raising up to her expectations coupled with the monotonous life which she is being subjected to, becomes a cause for her frustration which soon gets the better of her.

In due course of time, Sumitra once again reminds her husband about their honeymoon trip to Kovalam for which she has been waiting so very eagerly. Gopi, being a more realistic person and one who understands the value of money, asks her whether there is really a need to undertake this trip. Finally, Gopi, in order to satisfy Sumitra, agrees, and both of them go to Kovalam for their honeymoon. But, unfortunately, the trip to Kovalam does not turn out to be as happy as it should have been. Gopi’s disinterest annoys Sumitra and since they had not done any pre-planning like booking a room and the like, they end up spending time searching for a good hotel. Sumitra starts blaming Gopi for not booking the hotel room early and by the time they find a suitable hotel room, Sumitra loses her interest in this whole affair. She thinks Gopi’s laziness is because of the lack of love towards her, she assumes that he has come for this honeymoon trip just to fulfill some responsibility of his and finally she vents out her frustration by saying that he still loves the earlier woman who had come in his life and that his love for Sumitra is merely superficial:

(Inside the hotel room).

GOPI. What are you thinking?

SUMITRA. We will go back tomorrow itself.

GOPI. Why? It was you who were so adamant. (That we come for this honeymoon trip).

SUMITRA. Gopi is not interested (in this honeymoon trip). Right?
GOPI. Your interest is my interest.

SUMITRA. You talk like this just to make me happy. I know that. This is like taking a revenge on me. It is because of me that you did not get what you had desired. A revenge for that.

GOPI. See, taking revenge is not in my blood. I do not hurt anybody intentionally. If there is any drawback in my behaviour, do not take it seriously. And, do not think that I cannot love you because I loved someone else during my college days. (*Swapnadanam*)

The viewers get to see that on the seashore, Sumitra is walking and Gopi is just mechanically following her. From this, it becomes quite clear that both of them are in their own individual worlds. After a short time, Gopi lies down on the sand and starts dreaming of his lover and in the following shot, Sumitra is seen sitting alone watching the playful waves of the ocean. Sumitra’s doubt, sadness and confusion keep her aloof mentally from Gopi and their stay in Kovalam is not at all a happy one. In this scene, George delineates how separated they are mentally, even though they are together physically. In the hotel room, Gopi consumes alcoholic drinks and even though Sumitra does not specifically dislike people who drink, she feels appalled because she gets the feeling that Gopi is trying to escape from her by drinking. Though Gopi yearns to be a father, Sumitra does not plan to have children immediately and this becomes another serious bone of contention in the life of this young couple. Subsequent to this trip, explicit changes in the mindset of Gopi are noticed. He starts dreaming about his college lover constantly and gradually he starts losing control over his mind.
One day Sumitra’s father pays a visit to their house and Sumitra becomes very happy. She complains to her father that Gopi has no interest in going out anywhere even for shopping. Her father, who is fully aware of the earning capacity of his son-in-law and his daughter’s nature, puts two and two together and assuming that Gopi’s reluctance to go out with Sumitra is financial distress, asks Gopi whether he needs any financial assistance. This offer hurts Gopi’s self respect and pride and he rejects the offer outright mentioning that he has enough money to support his family. Gradually, in order to escape from the monotony, Sumitra starts spending time with Rosie and Mohan playing cards and going out more and more with them. She starts neglecting her husband and instead delegates the maid, Kalyani Amma to serve Gopi. Gopi starts withdrawing more and more which is quite evident during the party hosted by Mohan celebrating his business achievement. Along with Gopi and Sumitra, the engineer Mr. Menon and his wife are all invited on this occasion. As the party progresses, Mohan compels Sumitra to consume alcohol. Gopi, completely lost in oblivion and unmindful of the happenings simply dozes off and does not even make any attempt to prevent Mohan and it is Rosie who stops Mohan from forcing Sumitra to have drinks. His mannerisms and actions are all clear pointers to the reliable generality that he is completely disinterested to be a part of this company.

The rift between Gopi and his wife further deepens when his mother comes on a sojourn to their house during the time when Kalyani Amma is away on leave for ten days. Gopi, a fatherless child, has been brought up by his mother with complete dedication and care and he also reciprocates by being an obedient and very much attached son. For him, there is no body else in whom he could confide because he always felt that his mother
was the only person who was capable of understanding things from his perspective. It is solely for his mother’s happiness and to ensure that the words given by his mother to his uncle are not broken, that he marries Sumitra. During the night, Gopi spends time with his mother, talking and catching up on all the happenings in his village. Sumitra, with nothing much to contribute to this conversation between a mother and her son, gets bored very soon and says that she is feeling sleepy. Gopi asks her to retire for the day and he continues the tête-à-tête with his mother.

Gopi’s mother notices that Sumitra is not showing the kind of love and affection which a wife would normally show to her husband, sees that Gopi is deliberately trying to avoid his wife by coming home late and in short she senses that their family life is not so smooth as it should be. In an attempt to straighten out the affairs in her son’s home, she coaxes her daughter-in-law to take care of Gopi by serving him good and tasty food and assures her that once she starts doing so, he will automatically start coming home on time. His mother enquires whether Sumitra is in the family way and Gopi replies that she does not want to be a mother soon and hence is taking tablets to prevent pregnancy:

MOTHER. The very moment I entered, I could feel that there is something lacking in this house. Tell me the truth; have both of you been truly loving each other?

GOPI. That is just a feeling in your mind.

MOTHER. It is not a mere feeling. You may talk something while keeping something else in your mind, but your mother has the capacity to understand what is there in your mind even though you do not tell it explicitly. But she will not understand that. She was born and brought
up in different circumstances. You should adjust accordingly.

(Swapnadanam)

She also advises her son to forget everything about the past including his love affair in the college with Kamalam (Sonia Isaac Thomas) because she feels that Gopi is not able to love Sumitra because of his love for Kamalam. With a dual objective of consoling her son and substantiating her earlier statement, she informs him that Kamalam has got a job and is now well settled in Madras (Present day Chennai). Sumitra sees a marked change in Gopi’s behaviour when his mother is around and Sumitra starts getting a feeling that her husband accords more importance and priority in his life to his mother rather than his wife. She conveys this feeling of hers to Gopi frankly and overhearing this conversation of theirs, Gopi’s mother, feeling that it is not right to continue staying in her son’s house, decides to leave.

Without any reconciliation in sight, Sumitra leaves Gopi and goes to her father’s house after the incident where both of them quarrel and Gopi leaves the house and returns late at night in an inebriated condition. During every quarrel, be it petty or otherwise, Sumitra keeps mentioning about Gopi’s earlier relationship with another woman. This, without any doubt, affects his psychological well-being, because even if he wants to forget the episode, he is unable to do so, with every reference made by Sumitra triggering a fresh wave of thoughts in his mental faculty. This is an error which Sumitra keeps committing time and again, and even though she feels that this action of hers will help improve the relationship between the couple, it has an exactly opposite effect and instead of improving, the relationship keeps deteriorating.
Due to a worsening mental state, Gopi’s dependency on alcoholic drinks goes up significantly and also he starts dreaming more frequently. There is a marked change in the nature of his dreams as well. Earlier his dreams were about his lover, but now he starts seeing more dangerous and fearful dreams like Sumitra’s dead body lying in a mortuary and Sumitra attempting suicide by jumping into the sea. Besieged by negative thoughts and emotions, Gopi now starts doubting Sumitra’s relation with Mohan.

After two days, Sumitra’s father brings Sumitra back to Gopi and feeling that there is something which is disturbing his son-in-law, enquires whether Gopi has any financial problem and Gopi replies that there is no such problem. Her father also mentions that he requires a break from his work and advises that they go to Kanyakumari for a week to rejuvenate themselves. However, Gopi is in no mood to hear to her father and replying that he is not in a position to take any leave, goes away from the room.

In the night after drinking more than usual, he falls asleep and in the middle of the night is haunted by a terrible nightmare. Shell-shocked, he gets up crying and Sumitra, who is sleeping in the next room, rushes to his side to console him. He apologetically tells her that he has no grudge against her whatsoever but only pure and unadulterated love and that he feels guilty whenever he sees her. He confesses to her that his mind gets out of his control and however hard he tries to bring it back into control, it slips off. For a brief time period he feels that everything has become alright and both Gopi and Sumitra become very happy, but regrettably, it turns out to be an illusion in Gopi’s failing mental health. One night when the man and wife are in bed, Gopi receives a telephone call, shortly after midnight, from the hospital and even though Sumitra tries her level best to prevent him from going at such an odd hour of the night, Gopi does not heed to what his
wife says and putting duty before family, proceeds to his workplace. Thoroughly upset with this sort of behaviour, neither Sumitra opens the door for him, nor does she allow Kalyani Amma to do so, when he returns back. Gopi becomes a shattered soul and decides to leave his family and home for good and on that very same fateful night, he leaves the place riding his scooter without any destination in mind and finally falls on the seashore. He gets up and walks through the sand, staring at the waves pounding the shore and then ebbing. Subsequently, he becomes a victim of hallucination and sees all his near and dear ones including Sumitra, her father, his mother, Rosie, Mohan, and others wearing a black robe approaching him slowly as if to engulf him. Unable to bear the trauma, he falls on his stomach with his face buried in sand. This is exactly the scene which is shown to the viewers at the opening of the film and George, using his superb directorial skills completes the full circle so skillfully using flashback.

With Gopi narrating his past in detail, the whole picture becomes crystal clear to the doctors and they deduce that the whole purpose of Gopi reaching Madras (present day Chennai) is to pursue his dream of meeting his beloved Kamalam. Further, Dr. Venu tells Dr. Isaac that he very well knows the woman whom Gopi loved and that it is none other than his own wife. Dr. Venu breaks this news to Kamalam and informs her that it is doubtful whether Gopi will identify her at this point of time, because now he is Parameswaran who is hiding all his painful past in a shell and only if he is successful in coming out of that shell, will he become the normal Gopi. Dr. Venu feels that it will be now reasonable to focus on how to make Gopi forget his past, come out of his self made shell and become his normal self once again. He takes Kamalam to Dr. Isaac and here Kamalam divulges all that happened in their college days.
George presents the story of the love relationship between Gopi and Kamalam through Kamalam’s flashback. Gopi is an introvert and a studious student. Kamalam and Gopi are friends and soon their friendship blossoms into love. When Gopi discloses his love affair to his mother, she reproves it and reminds him of their obligation. George’s directorial and script writing genius comes to the forefront in the following dialogue where Gopi expresses his genuine and passionate love to his sweetheart in very powerful overtones:

KAMALAM. How is your mother?

GOPI. Fine. I informed mother about you.

KAMALAM. What did she say?

GOPI. When your letter came, she asked whose letter was it. Then I told her about you. After that I felt like there was no need of mentioning about you to her.

KAMALAM. Why?

GOPI. She scolded me a lot and cried a lot. At last she told that I am a thankless person …

KAMALAM. I feel guilty.

GOPI. I should feel guilty. I have tortured you knowingly.

KAMALAM. I am going.

GOPI. We will talk something else.

KAMALAM. If there is nothing to expect, then why talk?

GOPI. See, the most meaningful moments in my life, which I felt, are the moments when you sit near me and if I lose that … (*Swapnadanam*)
Knowing that Gopi is deeply in love with Kamalam, Gopi’s mother comes to meet her and requests her to move away from Gopi’s life. Kamalam, a very much cultured girl, heeds to the request and parts way with Gopi. Gopi too, never bothers her again and their love relationship thus ends. Dr. Isaac, after carefully evaluating all the known facts, pronounces that Gopi changing his identity and becoming Parameswaran is a kind of escapism in order to get away from the torturous and unbearable family life existing in reality. It is not uncommon that weak minded persons like Gopi choose this route in order to deal with and overcome their existential crisis. He further says that even though outwardly Gopi has donned the garb of Parameswaran, inwardly, in his heart of hearts, Kamalam still exists and that is specifically the reason why he has reached Madras.

Once Kamalam concludes her narration, Dr. Isaac summons Gopi to his chamber. At the first instance, Gopi is unable to identify Kamalam and seeing this, the doctor, in order to stimulate his cognition, hands over an old photograph to Gopi. Gopi stares at the photograph for sometime and then all of a sudden the old faces including his mother’s, Sumitra’s and her father’s come to his mind and he regains normalcy.

In the next scene, the viewers get to see Sumitra’s father bringing Gopi to his house. Gopi’s mother, Sumitra, and Kalyani Amma are all there waiting for him and as soon as Gopi’s mother sees him, she asks him with concern as to what happened to him and where has he been all these days. Gopi does not utter a single word in reply to any of these questions asked by his mother and instead proceeds to enter his house. Just before entering, he sees his scooter parked in front, gazes at it for a few moments, and then unexpectedly, to the surprise of everyone present, starts it and rides away.
The main reasons for the instability of his mind are the love for his lover Kamalam, the discordant relationship with his wife, and his complete obedience to his mother. In his conscious mind he is trying to love Sumitra but in his unconscious mind he still loves Kamalam. He is haunted by the thought of discarding Kamalam for the sake of his mother and his indebtedness to his uncle, Sumitra’s father. He may not have become mentally ill if Sumitra had tried to understand him and if she had been a bit more patient, loving, and caring, things would have been different. We can see that it is Sumitra who behaves violently and arrogantly to Gopi. The lack of sexual love, happiness, and satisfaction, as in Freudian terms, make Gopi mentally ill.

Even though in both Irakal and Swapnadanam, the plot of the film is woven around the theme of madness, upon a close examination, one gets to see that there is a considerable difference between them, as the former is a cinematic representation of the state of criminal madness in the protagonist, whereas the latter is not. Historical testimony shows that the tendency to perpetrate acts of a criminal nature is directly connected with the deviant condition of the mind and that is why the demarcation between madness and crime is obscure making the existent relationship between the two quite complex. It has been quite common in early Hollywood films to depict those with criminal tendencies as physically grotesque in the form of monsters, but with the dawn of the twentieth century, this approach changed and the criminal acts of the protagonist, the tortured and confused individual who resorts to crime in order to negotiate his position in the society as well as the meaning of his existence, were being explained using psychological tools.
Crimes committed by an individual can be broadly classified into violent and non-violent crimes and in *Irakal*, the protagonist is shown as a psychopath committing violent crimes. It is quite difficult to give a precise definition for the term, ‘violence’ because its meaning changes with contexts and the people involved:

We must also recognize that everyone perceives and understands violence in their own way, based on their individual history and the context of their current life. Many people only use the term in reference to physical acts of aggression and harm, while others include emotional or psychological acts as well. For some, violence refers solely to human-perpetrated acts, while for others it includes other destructive natural forces such as tornadoes, storms, earthquakes, and hurricanes. (Alvarez and Bachman 6)

Generally it is considered that an act of violence is a result of behavioural problems and abnormal intentions. However, in order to understand its nuances an in depth probe of the mind of the perpetrator should be attempted so that it becomes possible to understand the various conflicting tendencies therein. “Violence, then, can be regarded as both intersubjective and context-dependent - as the behavioral bridge that inexorably links two or more people, but whose meaning and significance may vary both within and between subjects” (Hatty 53).

Power, strength, force, authority, and violence are key words in relevant branches of knowledge and are interrelated as well as associated with one another in the sense that it is possible, with a clever interplay of these words, to depict the ways and means by which one human being or a group of them rule others. Hanna Arendt in *On Violence* explicates the significance of these key words, explains the instrumental character of
violence, associates violence with strength and uses the means-end analytical approach to elucidate the various means of performing a certain act of violence and also the culmination of this act (4). Though Arendt uses the term violence in a politically loaded context and in the war front the usage of this approach is not limited to war only and it is very well possible to extrapolate this to the area of gender studies as well.

Violence, power, gender, identity and masculinity are often considered to be closely associated with each other and in this context, some of the relevant catechisms which intrigue a researcher include, how are violence and gender associated with each other, why do men commit acts of violence, why is it important to focus on men committing acts of violence, and what are the different types of violence. In contemporary gender studies, when talking about men and masculinities, it becomes imperative to focus and explore these aspects in order to analyse how men deploy violence as a tool to express their troubled self and also to understand the ramifications of such violent acts. Many times, it is taken for granted that the prevailing patriarchal society and the hierarchical superiority which men are conferred upon therein, automatically bestow upon them a certain degree of power to exercise their control over others, which in certain cases, leads them to commit acts of violence that could be in various forms and there are many theories which explore as well as investigate this relationship between violence and masculinity.

The earlier comprehension about the self, its surroundings, society, and in a broader sense about the world was greatly shaped by principles of the enlightenment fabric of the eighteenth century. The enlightenment principles consider human beings to be a modern self having the ability to think and use reasoning power, thereby creating an
autonomous, stable, independent and coherent self. Reason is often associated with masculine subjectivity and anything that deviates from it, be it in the form of madness or confused thought is considered to be deviant from the hetero normal masculinity. Many theoreticians like Hobbes and Freud argue that reason emerge from a masculine self only. “The modern self is concerned with the preservation of autonomy not only as a personal goal, but also as a manifestation of the self's allegiance to the order-imposing, self-determining spirit of modernity” (Hatty 10).

With the emergence of postmodernism, the autonomous self loses its centrality and its independent nature, gets placed in a state of flux and undergoes continuous change, thereby getting constructed, deconstructed, and finally reconstructed. This situation necessitates positioning masculine subjectivity at the centre of inquiry, thereby speaking about the relationship between violence and masculinity which cause men resorting to violent acts by asserting their power springing from their identity crisis in the postmodern era. In this scenario, it becomes quite relevant to understand and analyse violence in the post modern world and the influences which the ideological state apparatuses like school, family, and religion have on the individual, with a special emphasis on social, political, historical, and cultural aspects and also from a gendered perspective, thereby going beyond the scope of examining the interrelationship existing between violence and the individual self. The above thoughts about violence in multifarious contexts clearly indicate that violence is not one dimensional and unilateral, but is multidimensional in nature making it all the more important. Many times, violence plays a significant role in determining the inter and intra personal relationships existing in
the lives of people and is represented in mass media as one of the major themes, film being one such media which represents violence in its varied forms.

The Malayalam film *Irakal* by K. G. George is a rare and complex film in the sense that it amalgamates three serious issues, madness, crime, and violence in one single film, very brilliantly. In this film, the protagonist is a violent psychopath who kills people and due to this reason, *Irakal* is considered to be a slasher movie which is in itself a subgenre of horror films. K. B. Venu observes that, “The director is analysing the violent mind of a Malayali through the perspective of a young man who understands the language of violence only” (71).

Unlike George’s *Swapnadanam*, Adoor’s *Anantaram* and Sibi Malayil’s *Thaniyavarthanam*, this film portrays criminal madness using the tool of violence. George’s craftsmanship is amply visible in the way he very adeptly and brilliantly uses the same theme of madness in two different manners in his films *Swapnadanam* and *Irakal*; the former portraying madness as a mental aberration and the latter portraying madness with a criminal mindset.

In *Irakal*, through the story of a rich Christian rubber baron Mathews (Tilakan) and his family living in the Travancore region, the director shows the reasons which make the protagonists exhibit various degrees of violence in their private and public lives. Upon probing deeper, one gets to fathom that this film is actually a deep analysis of the psychology of men. The protagonist Palakunnel Baby (Ganesh Kumar) and the other male characters committing acts of violence can be interpreted as negotiating their own identity crisis in the public and private domains and the viewers get to see that this film is
a combination of varied acts of violence, each having different intensities and performed by different characters.

The superb directorial skills of George once again come to the forefront as seen from the fact that the director has been able to convey the idea, of how violence can be used to depict the identity crisis of an individual, vociferously with substantial gravity, but at the same time without depicting any apparent bloodshed which one gets to see in war films or other horror films, and this is one of the aspects which makes this film unprecedented. In many of the films which use violence as their theme, this form of abuse is commonly associated with men who use it as a strategy to let loose their power over the weak, however George uses violence very differently and uniquely in the sense that in this film the very same theme is employed to depict the crisis of a teenager, who, in his later years goes on to become a psychopath.

The mise-en-scene in the beginning sets the tone for the film which begins with a scene showing Baby sitting in a room engulfed in darkness preparing for ragging the new comers to the hostel. He makes a hangman’s noose with a red nylon rope and ties it around his waist, then he pierces his finger with a compass letting blood ooze out from his finger, puts a bloody dot in the centre of the forehead on a photo hanging on the wall and after all these actions leaves the room.

Baby is the leader of a gang of students and these seniors wake up the juniors of one room in the hostel, take them to the play ground in front and begin ragging them. The juniors are first asked by Baby and his friends to unclothe themselves and any of them who show even the slightest resistance are forced by the seniors to obey their orders. One of the juniors, Gopan does not act in accordance with the orders of the senior boys and he
refuses to get up from bed and go outside for the ragging session at midnight. This catches the attention of Baby and Baby starts talking to Gopan in a rough manner. One of Baby’s friends intervene and try to convince Gopan that during this ragging period these are normal activities in the college hostel and that he should become a part of it instead of trying to oppose it. Next, all these juniors are asked to drink a bitter liquid which the seniors call as *Kaipuneeru* (bitter liquid) which is actually urine. The juniors refuse to consume this and when Gopan prevents the seniors including Baby from exercising their authority, a commotion ensues which finally wakes up the warden of the hostel. The warden’s interference helps all the juniors but one, to escape from this menace of ragging. Baby, unable to come to terms with the fact that a junior had the audacity to oppose him, catches hold of Gopan, drags him to a nearby place and almost murders him by strangling him with the very noose which he had fabricated. He does not stop there and goes ahead to make a scar on the nearly dead body’s face and puts the body under a tap of running water so that water can fall on the face. This extreme act of violence clearly shows that an instinctively criminal mentality of an alarming degree is present in the mind of the teenager, and the director, through these well thought of sequence of events, in the name of ragging and the unusual manner of preparing for it, makes the audience get a feel of the protagonist’s mind which is infested with sadism, barbarism, and ruthlessness in aggressive proportions.

In order to pacify the heightened emotions of the viewers, the next scene captures nature’s pristine glory by showing beautiful greenery on the following day’s morning when Baby, concerned about the repercussions of his attempted homicidal actions of the previous night, is seen in a bus en route to his home. Baby reaches his house by afternoon
and then the viewers are introduced to Baby’s father, Mathews (Thilakan), a well known rich man in his place, an arrogant and authoritarian estate owner and a family man who exercises control over the entire family comprising of his wife, three sons, and a daughter. Anian Pillai (Innocent) helps him in account related matters whereas his two elder sons Koshy (P. C. George) and Sunny (Sukumaran) help him take care of his estates. Baby is his third son and his daughter is Annie (Srividya) who is married off to a respectable person, Andrews (Nedumudi Venu). When Baby reaches home, Mathews is seen talking to Anian Pillai about his business related matters and upon seeing Baby he casually asks him why he has come home, to which his son replies disinterestedly that there is no class in the college. The sitting posture of Mathews and the tone of his voice show the power as well as authority he commands in his house and without paying much heed to his son’s reply, he continues his business discussion. The manner in which Mathews negotiates with the representatives of labour unions and lays down the labour issue to rest by bribing the leaders of the proletariat clearly portrays the weight of his authority and his ability to use the power of money to quash the voices of anyone who stands against him.

Baby’s mother Achamma (Salma George) is presented as a conventional homemaker, who, with the typical motherly affection serves him lunch and in fact she is the first person to notice the bruises on her son’s right hand which have occurred due to the strife the previous night. When Baby meets his sister-in-law, Roseline (Kannur Sreelatha), he inquires about his elder brother Sunny and she replies that he has gone to one of their estates to sort out a labour problem. Baby, who is quite indifferent as far as these matters are concerned, retreats to his room.
His eldest son Koshy is also an arrogant person just like Mathews. Even though Sunny is a drunkard, he is the only son of Mathews who is presented as a caring and affectionate person, desiring to lead a peaceful life unlike his father and elder brother who will not hesitate to go to any extent or adopt any means in order to accumulate wealth. He, knowing Baby’s character very well is not ready to believe that there is a strike in the college and suspects that his younger brother has returned home after creating some problem in the college.

George presents Baby as a confused teenager having several vices like smoking and consuming drugs. He loves Nirmala (Radha), a girl living near his house and goes to meet her. When she asks why he has returned back home within one week of going to college, he answers that he has brutally beaten a student and the college has placed him under suspension. The director very ingeniously brings out the protagonist’s attitude towards education and also his inherent violent nature in the conversation with his girlfriend where Baby is shown as saying that he feels there is no use in him studying and that he is doing so just because his father has secured a seat for him in the college by paying money. His innate violent nature becomes quite evident from his comment that he will murder whosoever comes to marry her when she informs him that her mother has started searching for a suitable marriage alliance for her. Unaware of his criminal tendencies, she takes this comment of his lightly. With nothing else to do, Baby simply idles away his time roaming around the whole day and coming back home only at night.

Baby’s grandfather, a bedridden man, is looked after by the male servant Unnoonni (Mohan Jose) and nobody, including his own son Mathews, pays any attention to the old man. Throughout the film the grandfather is seen uttering lines from the Bible,
but nobody has any time to listen to him and they all continue with their misdeeds. Baby is the only person who shows some sympathy towards his grandfather and spends some time with him. Baby is thoroughly dissatisfied with the conditions prevailing in his family and he expresses this to his grandfather by mentioning that in this house everyone is busy doing their own work and nobody has the time to even talk to one another. It is quite possible that this sort of circumstances prevailing in the family has affected the teenager mentally, which could be one of the reasons for his criminal tendencies.

Mathews’ attitude that using his money and power he can hush up any matter is evident from the incident where he bribes the police man who comes inquiring about the ragging case in which Baby is involved. Even though Baby does not spill the beans, the news of his suspension because of being involved in a ragging incident appears in the newspaper the following day. Sunny sees this and lets all the other family members know this real reason of what has made Baby return home in the middle of the college session.

Very much upset with this development, Mathews calls his eldest son Koshy to discuss this matter with him. Even though Mathews reprimands Baby for indulging in such activities, he makes all efforts to save him and asks him why he did not inform this on the previous day itself so that something could have been done to prevent the police from filing the case. Baby replies, rather emotionlessly, that there is no use in telling all this to them. Without wasting any further time, Mathews immediately directs Sunny to call up the minister so that he can do the needful to efface all the proofs in this case. Mathews is more concerned about protecting his name and fame rather than correcting his son’s wrong deeds and that is why he accords such a high priority to this matter. Mathews’ arrogant demeanour towards the police officer who comes to his house in
search of Baby once again shows his scant respect for the rules and laws of the land and he wants things to be done only the way he desires. Not only that Mathews speaks very rudely and harshly, Koshy even tries to physically assault the police officer and it is in fact Sunny who intervenes and stops the duo from misbehaving with the public servant. Subsequently, Mathews meets the police officer in his guest house and covers up the whole issue by paying him a bribe of twenty five thousand rupees. The police officer advises Mathews not to send his son to the college immediately and then the father and his two elder sons decide that Baby need not continue his studies. Koshy opines that Baby can be given the responsibility of any one of the estates and may be get him married so that there will be a change in his character. Sunny disagrees with this idea and Mathews says that Baby is not grown up enough to take charge of any of the estates. This again shows Mathews’ authority over his family and that he has the final say in all matters. The cardinal of the church who also happens to be Achamma’s brother, after reading the news about Baby in the local newspaper, comes to Mathews house and advises that he and his sons should desist from doing wrong deeds. But, Mathews, blinded by arrogance, brushes off his advice saying that as such there is no problem in the Palakunnel family and that everyone is leading a peaceful life.

Without any freedom and independence in his own house, Sunny starts feeling suffocated by the dominion of his father and expresses his desire to Koshy that he would like to part ways and start his own business in the city. Koshy says that he does not feel his father would let Sunny go after giving him his share, all the more because there are plenty of business opportunities existing here itself. But Sunny is of a different nature and says that drugs as well as timber business is not his cup of tea. Basically, Sunny is
portrayed as a good person, but the fact that he has nothing to do except going to the
estates as and when instructed by his father makes him feel very frustrated and as time
passes by this frustration makes him increase his dependence on alcohol.

Quite worried about her youngest son, Achamma takes Baby to the church and
they meet the cardinal. This particular scene is a well structured one and it throws light
on the present mental condition of Baby. From the conversation ensuing between the
cardinal and Baby, it becomes amply clear that the latter’s life is totally out of gear
because he does not love anybody and even expresses doubt as to whether God loves him
or not. He is totally in a perplexed state and neither sees any worth in living nor the
purpose of living:

CARDINAL. Son, I am not talking to you as a cardinal. You are my
nephew. Do you know that when my sister cries in front of me, I too
feel sad like any other brother? With great expectations, they have sent
you to study. Do not make your parents sad. Don’t you love them?

BABY. No.

(Achamma is crying).

CARDINAL. Achamma, please sit there for sometime.

(Cardinal gets up, comes near Baby and sits next to him).

CARDINAL. Son, there are some things that are disturbing you. Tell me
frankly what they are. Why did you say that you do not love your
father and mother?

BABY. Nobody loves anybody else in that house. I too do not love
anyone.
CARDINAL. Why do you feel so?

BABY. How can I answer that? That is how I feel.

CARDINAL. If nobody else loves you, God loves you.

BABY. I am not sure about that also.

CARDINAL. Do you pray?

BABY. No.

CARDINAL. There is no shortage of anything in your house.

BABY. Everything is in abundance.

CARDINAL. (Getting up). Yes, nothing should be in abundance. (Irakal)

After this conversation, the cardinal addresses Achamma and says that there is some mistake in the way the children have been brought up by them. He says that proper care, love and affection should be given to children during their formative stages. Only the cardinal and Baby’s grandfather identify that the fundamental problem in Palakunnel house is the lack of love and ultimately it is precisely this reason which leads Baby to become a psychopath.

Other than his girlfriend Nirmala, the only other person with whom Baby interacts normally is his friend Raghavan (Asokan) who works in the rubber estate. During one of his meetings with Raghavan, Baby starts talking to him in an abnormal manner and remarks that the rubber sap oozing out from the rubber tree is red in colour just like human blood. Raghavan dismisses his remark as a bout of hallucination due to the drugs which he had just consumed, but in reality it is the abnormal criminal mind of Baby rearing its ugly head.
Another aspect in Baby’s family that affects him is his sister Annie’s life and her misconduct. Baby finds the illegitimate relationship between Annie and Unnoonni, which no one else in the house is aware of, quite disappointing and finds it difficult to digest the lies which Annie keeps saying about her husband Andrews. Andrews hails from a middle class family, is a government employee and is an ordinary man who lives life according to the accepted social rules. He finds it difficult to adjust with Annie’s habit of roaming around with friends as well as her drinking habits and he unequivocally voices out his opinion saying that in our society there is a limit for the freedom a woman can exercise. He specifically dislikes his wife going out with a lady named Thara Nair, whom Annie calls as her friend, but he feels is a prostitute. She quarrels with Andrews very often and then comes to her father’s home and seeing this action of hers, Sunny sarcastically remarks that every three months Annie comes home for ten days.

Fed up with his wife’s behaviour, Andrews comes to Mathews’ residence along with Annie and informs Mathews that he is going to divorce her. Even though Mathews asks Andrews to come inside the house so that they can talk about this matter, Andrews is not willing to do so and he maintains that he does not want to live with a woman who is not morally sound. Without even bothering to ascertain the truth about Andrews’ allegations, Mathews refuses to believe that his daughter would have committed any misdeeds and threatens him with dire consequences if he proceeds to file a divorce petition.

The second half of the film focusses on how Baby graduates to become a full-fledged psychopath, the various murders committed by him and finally how he himself gets murdered at the hands of his own father. Baby’s mental depression, lack of goal in
life, and the totalitarian approach of his father and brothers make him demented, and manifest themselves in variegated emotional and psychological ailments, eventually making him a murderer. One of the important scenes which shows Baby’s present mental state is the one where he picks up a gun kept in his father’s room and points it at his father himself when he was asleep and at this point it becomes quite clear to the viewers that Baby’s condition has deteriorated to such a deplorable condition that a son no longer considers his own father to be one.

Baby starts dreaming of killing Annie, but ends up killing the servant Unnoonni with whom Annie has an illegal relationship and this is the first in the series of murders which Baby commits. He comes to know that Nirmala is going to get married to a shop owner, Balan and subsequently starts dreaming of killing her. Ultimately he murders Balan inside his shop and after killing Balan, he starts crying which shows the perplexity prevailing in his mind. In a bid to mislead the investigating authorities, Baby removes the money, wrist watch and a gold ring from Balan’s dead body and throws it into the river after tying them in a handkerchief. He believes that by doing so, the police will be misled into believing that the intention of the murder is robbery and in this process he will not figure in the list of suspects since it is a known fact that he is from a well-to-do family. Nirmala is quite certain that Baby is the culprit and mentions this to him during her subsequent meeting with him.

Day by day, Baby’s mental health condition deteriorates and no one in the family is able to identify his psychotic attitude. Soon, he reaches the verge of becoming a complete lunatic with an ever growing tendency to murder people around him. Raghavan tells Baby that he is going to marry Nirmala and soon after that, the latter makes an
attempt to murder the former. Luckily, Raghavan escapes from the murderer’s clutches and when he dislodges the face mask he finds Baby’s face behind it. He lodges a complaint in the police station and the police officer comes to Palakunnel house in search of Baby. Upon questioning about the whereabouts of Baby on the previous night, Mathews emphatically declares to the police officer that Baby was very much present at home only. The father summons Baby through Roseline, but is unable to find him in his room. Mathews informs the police officer that he will send Baby to the police station as soon as he comes back home. After the officer leaves, Mathews asks Roseline whether Baby was there at home the previous night and she replies that Baby had reached home very late in the night and that when she had asked him where he had been all this while, he had said that that he had gone to kill someone. After hearing Roseline, Mathews becomes a bit confused and he calls Koshy. Meanwhile Baby hides in the outhouse and he cuts his vein in the hand with a knife and sits there till night. After it becomes sufficiently dark, he moves towards his house and sees Mathews sitting and Koshy walking in the sit out, both in a pensive mood. Koshy sees Baby and calls him but without answering anything, Baby fires at Mathews. Mathews escapes the bullet and goes inside his house and a fight ensues between Koshy and Baby in which the former receives a bullet injury. In the meantime, Mathews returns with his gun and fires at Baby, thus putting an end to the life of his own son.

An analysis of Irakal presents three different types of men in the film. Mathews and Koshy, who belong to the first type, are the ones who are ready to do anything and everything for their welfare and progress without the slightest concern of whether it is legal or not. Through out the movie, Mathews is presented as a dictator who has built up
his own empire by hook or by crook and he finds no regret in the ways and methods he has adopted to reach this position. His pride, prejudice and lack of faith in religious beliefs are clearly highlighted in the conversation with the cardinal who comes to meet Mathews and his family and hopes to correct the Palakunnel family with his advice. Koshy is the obedient son of Mathews who follows the same path of his father. He is also involved in illegal business and does not hesitate in resorting to physical brutality in order to get his work done. Sunny, on the other hand, is quite different from Mathews and Koshy and he doesn’t possess the domineering nature of his father and brother. He belongs to the second type of men depicted in the film. Venu opines that, “Sunny, unable to adjust with the overbearing nature of his father and brother, lives as a drunkard in a prison which has been created by his autocratic father” (71).

Baby can be seen as having inherited the aggressive nature of Mathews and Koshy and the self torturing and escapist nature of Sunny, and this deadly combination of several negative virtues makes him a completely shattered self gradually and by the end of the film, a psychopath, with violent tendencies as his only possession. He represents the third type of men in the film.

There is a striking similarity between the families of Mammachan in Adaminte Variyellu and Mathews. For Mammachan, just like Mathews, making money is the highest priority in life leaving him in a situation where he has no time to spend with his son and daughter and there is a high probability that Tony also will end up in a similar situation like Baby due to similar familial conditions.

As usual, in his own distinctive style, George gives a unique to both these films. In Swapnadanam, each and every viewer, depending on his mental makeup, is given the
option to draw his own interpretation to the ending. The pessimists may infer the protagonist riding away his scooter without uttering a single word at the time of reunion, to be symbolic of his escape from the arduous family life so that he does not face the risk of going mad again. Whereas for the optimists, this very same action of the protagonist could indicate his desire to enter the lap of nature for a short while in order to forget all the past, get rejuvenated in its freshness and then return home to start a new life with Sumitra afresh. In Irakal, the film concludes with Baby’s father killing Baby, thus denying Baby the scope for a treatment and thereby the cure for his mental aberration, unlike the hero of Swapnadanam.