

Ego's Favour and the Suppression of Id: A Reading of the Short Film *Kanyaka* (2013)

Directed by Christo Tomy

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Abstract

Kanyaka (virgin) directed by Christo Tomy, released in 2013 is a short feature film which tells the story of a nun, Nirmala. She waits for the school anniversary to meet the chief guest, the famous celebrity, Urvashi, but, since the senior sister named Philomina's health condition worsens, she is forced to stay with her instead of going to the anniversary. At that moment, she bursts out her feelings and Philomina sister dies. The short film tries to portray the grief and guilt of the young sister.

Sigmund Freud's work *The Ego and the Id* (1923) explains the elements of the human mind. This paper titled "Ego's Favour and the Suppression of Id: A Reading of the Short Film *Kanyaka* (2013) Directed by Christo Tomy" tries to read the film in the light of Freud's concept of id, ego and superego. The paper attempts to show that the short film shows the elements of a human mind symbolically whereby, the 'ego', which is the balancing principle always tries to suppress the 'id', showing partiality towards the 'superego'.

The paper tries to interpret the short film and attempts to show the way people are trained to suppress their feelings and emotions to such a level that people cannot withstand.

Keywords: symbolism- id-superego- ego- suppression-society.

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The short film *Kanyaka (Virgin)* (2013) directed by Christo Tomy narrates the plight of a young nun who wishes to meet her friend Urvashi, a celebrity at the school anniversary function and gets shattered when not able to fulfil her wish since she is compelled to stay with the sick sister, Philomina. The short film has won many awards including the award for Best Debut Film of a Director in non- feature section at the 61st National Film Awards, 2014.

On a peripheral level, the short film tries to show the struggle of the protagonist, Sr. Nirmala, a young nun. When the nun is forced to stay with the sick and elder sister on the day of the school anniversary celebration, her dream to meet the famous actress Urvashi, the chief guest for the programme and her childhood friend shatters. In her rage, she ends up throwing away all the things from the secret box of her memories with her childhood friend Urvashi and her act becomes the reason for Sr. Philomina's sudden death. Later Sr. Nirmala cries and prays out of guilt.

Cambridge Dictionary defines symbolism as the use of symbols in art, literature and films to represent ideas. Keeping the idea of symbolism in mind, the short film can be analysed in a different way too. Sigmund Freud had explained about the components of the human mind, Id, Ego and Superego in the 1920s. Freud proposed that the human psyche could be divided into three parts: Id, ego and super-ego. Freud discussed this model in the 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and fully elaborated upon it in *The Ego and the Id* first published in 1923.

Here, the entire things take place inside the walls of the convent which could be considered as the human mind. Through the conversations between the sisters arranging the prizes for the kids, viewers get to know that the school anniversary is getting closer and

‘Urvashi’ is going to be the chief guest. The viewers understand that the protagonist is so happy to meet her old friend, the one she secretly adores a lot, keeping her pictures inside a box, underneath the bed. The box is always placed under the bed which means it is always hidden under the surface level of the mind. The box stands for the desires in the human mind, kept underneath.

By that time, the health condition of Sr. Philomina, a senior nun gets worse. Sr. Philomina could be considered as the Superego which is the morality principle that gets suffocated when the date of the anniversary becomes closer, which means the superego cannot allow the meeting of ‘Urvashi’ and Sr. Nirmala.

When Sr. Nirmala talks to Sr. Philomina about the anniversary celebration at School, she says “I don’t remember Urvashi studying in our convent” where the superego tries to reinstate that the desires have no place in the mind and life. While she says so, Sr. Nirmala says “Nowadays you don’t remember a lot of things, sister”. This shows that she knows the truth that ‘Urvashi’ had stayed and studied there, which means the superego deliberately tries to forget that certain things are innate desires in the human mind. Here, one can find that the sister Philomina has forgotten about the old student but Urvashi was a student at the convent. The protagonist remembers because Urvashi is very important to her. “How does a thing become preconscious?” And the answer would be: ‘By coming into connection with the verbal images that correspond to it’ (Freud 21). This shows that repressed ideas in Sr. Nirmala’s mind have started coming to the surface with the news that ‘Urvashi’ is coming and Sister Philomina has long way forgotten about it.

‘Urvashi’ is not merely a person. It symbolically represents the forbidden desire in the human mind. The conversation among the sisters while sitting at the table having food shows the conflict in the protagonist's mind. The sisters sitting around are the different voices in her

own mind which tries to modify her thoughts. When one sister, who could be seen as one voice inside Sr. Nirmala, supports the meeting and says to eat well so that she can spend time with 'Urvashi' energetically, the other sister, the other voice says 'Urvashi' doesn't have a good reputation. The mother superior who is the ego, the balancing principle of the convent or the mind tells her to stop such talks. Initially, we get to know that the same mother did not say that the guest is Urvashi to the sisters though she knew it before and says only when she feels that it is the right time to get prepared for the anniversary function. This shows that though she is the balancing principle and though a balancing principle needs to be more objective, she is biased and tries to hide the information as it would make Sister Nirmala happy to meet 'Urvashi'. In one way the short film tries to show that the ego has some partiality towards the superego without letting the repressed emotions come to the surface. The ego is not the balancing principle it is a modifying agent.

Later, the same mother, the balancing principle, tells Sr. Nirmala to go to Sr. Philomina's room instead of going to meet Urvashi.

From another point of view it may be said that this transformation of an erotic object-choice into modification of the ego is also a method by which the ego can obtain control over the id and deepen its relations with it- at the cost, it is true, of acquiescing to a large extent in the id's experiences. (37)

The reason for giving her the duty to look after the sister is that she always takes care of her and she knows about her medicines well. Freud has also mentioned the close relationship between the super-ego and the Id.

Thus the super-ego is always in close touch with the id and can act as its representative in relation to the ego. It reaches deep down into the id and is for that reason farther from consciousness than the ego. (70)

A viewer definitely had noted in the scenes before that Sr. Nirmala is the one who is always with Sr. Philomina and taking care of her. They both are close and the mother superior intervenes in their relationship when a complicated situation arises. One can see that the ego is the one who is the reality principle and has constant contact with reality. Here too it is the mother from whom the information from outside is delivered to other sisters.

The protagonist feels sad and shattered and enters the room and angrily takes out the box in front of Sr. Philomina. She takes out all the things inside the box and the box lies open. Also, the place where she takes the box, is the bathroom, the most private space in a building where every person's real personality is revealed as it is. Sr. Philomina, sees this, as the bathroom door is open and unable to tolerate this, dies. This shows that though ego tried to make her abandon the idea of meeting 'Urvashi', and though she followed the orders, inside her mind, she couldn't accept it and thus the id dominated and came to the surface killing the superego. Also when Sr. Nirmala realises that Sr. Philomina has died, there is the stage announcement in the background inviting 'Urvashi' to the stage. This reinstates that the passions have come to the surface (stage), box kept underneath was taken to the surface, killing the 'superego'.

Finally, after these things happened, we see the sisters cleaning the room where Sr. Philomina's belongings like prayer books, small sculptures of god and other spiritual items are taken and put into the box. This reinstates that in the mind, after the incident, the id dominated and the superego and its principle went to the box, which is placed underneath the bed.

The convent is a place where ordinary human beings are advised and spiritually given classes to be away from the materialistic world and stay close to God with a mind to do service. It is a place where people voluntarily decides to dedicate their life for service and are

groomed for that. A normal human being is of course modified into a moral, 'good', social person. This can be seen symbolically, the modification of the id into a more moral or ideal form, with the help of egos who are the other sisters. Regarding the id and ego, Sigmund Freud says thus in the book:

Thus in its relation to the id it is like a horseback, who has to hold in check the superior strength of the horse; with this difference, that the rider seeks to do so with his own strength while the ego uses borrowed forces. The illustration may be carried further. Often a rider, if he is not to be parted from his horse, is obliged to guide it where it wants to go; so in the same way the ego constantly carries into action the wishes of the id as if they were its own. (30)

One can understand that the ego tries to modify the id based on the reality principle, which means the 'pure id' is not allowed to express itself. It is always neglected by the ego. The dress of the nuns can be seen as a symbol of this modification. The scene where the guilty protagonist cries without her veil over her head shows that she failed in being modified by the ego. This happens after the opening up of the box. Just after the announcement that 'Urvashi' is invited to the stage, the nun without the veil on her head embraces the superego's leg as she is guilty enough for being the cause of the death of the superego.

In the final scene, Sr. Nirmala is sitting at the funeral of Sr. Philomina. While everyone stands, she sits. This shows she is unable to be with the others. This could also be the depiction of voices in minds where the author tries to show that most of the voices in our minds have an alignment towards the superego because of society's constructs. Even in our minds, the voices and the ego show partiality towards the superego and neglect the feelings of the Id. Still, other sisters pull her to stand up - that is the ego again tortures the id to be with

the superego. Thus the short film tries to show that the Id in the mind is always being suppressed by the ego.

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