

MUNDROTHURUTH

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Cinema has been a part of our popular culture for more than a hundred years and is considered an important form of mass communication.¹ We have been enamored by the stories and characters the movies have portrayed, with the experience of watching a movie being described as a dissociative state of detaching ourselves from reality and immersing ourselves in the world the movie presents itself.² Psychological thrillers are a popular genre of films and the movie being reviewed in this article, *Mundrothuruth*, belongs to that category. Directed by the debutant P.S. Manu, the film garnered acclaim in various film festival circuits and also won 2016's John Abraham Award for the best film and the Aravindan Puraskaram for the best debutant director.

The movie, as the name suggests, takes place in the sparsely inhabited Munro Island or Mundrothuruth, located in the backwaters of Ashtamudi lake and Kallada river in Kollam, Kerala. Achumama (played by Indrans) is one of the inhabitants of the island, accompanied by his maid Kathu (played by Abhija Sivakala). Achumama's son (played by Anil Nedumangad) and grandson Keshu (played by newcomer Jason Chacko) are visiting their ancestral home on the island after many years. Achumama is eager to meet his grandson, a young adult, whom he had last met when the grandson was seven years of age.

Keshu has stopped going to college for a year and half and has been creating problems due to his behavior, including being impulsive and aggressive. Not believing in formal education, he rationalizes that college education is for those who can't teach themselves and that he wants to be self-taught.

Without remorse, he claims to have injected his neighbor's dog with a poisonous concoction as a part of his experiments on canine euthanasia. He also threatens his neighbours when questioned about his actions, eventually landing him in legal trouble. Keshu's father hopes to take him to the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore for counseling. Appalled by the idea of his grandson undergoing psychological treatment, Achumama convinces Keshu's father to leave Keshu with him for a few days. Fending off his son's argument that he might not be able to handle Keshu's violent outbursts, Achumama hopes the serene waters of Munro Island would soothe Keshu's mind and help him plot his future plans.

Upon Keshu's father's departure, Achumama comes to understand more of his grandson. Keshu has a charismatic persona, but is devious in his ways. He is dominating and attempts to be superior in intelligence to others. Stubborn and flouting social norms, Keshu even boasts to Achumama that he has raped a minor girl and that his psychiatrist has diagnosed him with "paranoid schizophrenia caused due to some alkaloids like tetrahydrocannabinol". It is neither known whether Keshu is lying nor does he show any signs of psychosis. However, Achumama is worried about Keshu's behavior and consults the local Ayurveda physician (played by Alancier Ley Lopez) for medications to calm Keshu's mind. But things don't go as per the way Achumama had hoped to. When Achumama comes to know Keshu has sexually abused his maid, Achumama is further appalled by Keshu's lack of remorse and rationalization of his manipulative ways. Unable to comprehend Keshu's actions and having had

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enough of it, Achumama calls Keshu a “Pranthan” (a colloquial expression for a madman in Malayalam) and vows to put Keshu in a mental asylum. This ultimately leads to a cat and mouse game between Keshu and Achumama. The film ends on a profound note with Achumama in a dilemma of facing life or death based on a riddle described earlier in the movie.

With his lack of remorse, disregard for social norms and feelings for others, low tolerance for frustration and bouts of aggression, Keshu displays dissocial personality disorder as per the 10th revision of the International Statistical Classification of diseases and health related problems. Psychopathy, a psychological construct of a personality disorder comprising of similar aforementioned symptoms along with propensity for lies and deceit, has been used interchangeably with dissocial personality disorder or antisocial personality disorder of 5th edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.³ Many a times, movies deal with stories related to good versus evil with the villains being predominantly portrayed as psychopaths. There have been memorable portrayal of psychopaths onscreen from Harry Lime in the *Third Man* (1949), Dr. Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the lambs* (1991) to the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008), with *Irakal* (1985) being a Malayalam film which had a central character with psychopathic traits.

The portrayal of the psychopath in films have been revolving around them being evil or being a “human monster” having deviant moral values and beliefs which disrupt social order.^{4,5} They are depicted to lack empathy and to be manipulative, cold blooded, calm and calculated but prone to aggression with a sense of entitlement and domination over others. In the film, Achumama’s inability to understand Keshu’s deviant behavior and aggressive outbursts makes him call Keshu a madman. Even though Keshu does not show signs of mental illness, violence has been a popular behavior portrayed to be indicative of mental illness.⁶ Leistadt et al., in their review on portrayal of the psychopath in movies, found the depictions as

exaggerated.⁷ However, those authors also emphasize that through the experience of watching a film, such portrayals help us in understanding some of the darker aspects of human behavior. Hesse has commented that the portrayals can be used in teaching psychopathy in the context of understanding the problems they create in their relationships, the challenges encountered while dealing with them and the difficulties in bringing about change in various aspects of their lives.⁵

With its runtime of just over ninety minutes, minimal characters, and absence of the usual song and dance routine, *Mundrothuruth* is not the usual commercial Indian cinema. It leaves its mark as an interesting character study in Indian cinema on the behavior of Keshu and the impact of his behavior on the people around him.

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