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Remembering 'Differently': Amnesia and the Female Body in South Indian Cinema

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Abstract: As a recurring trope in Indian Cinema, amnesia is more than a psychological condition; it functions as a cinematic device that allows filmmakers to navigate the waters of memory, identity, and agency. Though the representation of amnesia in Hollywood movies, with a special focus on the questions of authenticity and medical accuracy, is analysed, the portrayal of amnesia, especially in South Indian cinema is yet to be explored. This paper identifies amnesia as a site where body image, cultural norms, and power is negotiated. The representation of memory loss is specifically taken for study, given its centrality in disciplines like Disability studies and Medical Humanities. The study closely observes the construction of amnesia and related cognitive impairments like memory loss, and the way in which it is differently experienced by male and female characters. Despite the fact that the representation of amnesia deviate significantly from established medical knowledge, the study places amnesia within the broader discourse on gender and subjectivity. The analysis brings to light the fact that the treatment of the illness is not purely on medical grounds but is rather aligned with the cultural expectations on how gender roles are performed. The research reveals an asymmetry in the portrayal of the recovery narratives. While amnesia grants agency to male characters, female amnesiacs reinforce the tropes of vulnerability. In most of the movies chosen for analysis, male characters typically embark on an active journey of self-recovery, while female recovery is a passive act, which is often mediated by the characters around them. The research will be based on a qualitative analysis of the mainstream South Indian commercial movies, which will be situated within the field of medical humanities, Feminist film theory, and psychoanalytic framework. The representation of the male and female bodies onscreen is evaluated, to look at how the female body is presented in such a manner it evokes pity and grief and intensifies melodrama. The male body, on the other hand, is aligned with action, agency, and heroic recovery. Through a thorough examination of the data, the study aims to uncover certain recurring narrative patterns across the chosen movies, thereby contributing to the larger discourse on women and illness.

Keywords: *Amnesia, South Indian Cinema, Gender, Memory, Identity, Agency, Female Body*

Introduction: Memory and Gender

In cinema, the female body occupies a unique position. A female body affected by illness becomes a spectacle and an object of medical scrutiny. When illness intersects with gender, especially in the context of cinema, profound questions about identity, subjectivity, and agency are revealed. Havi Carel's distinction between disease as a physiological interruption and illness as a subjective experience is crucial in the case of amnesia, as it renders an individual incapable of narrating his/her/their illness ("Phenomenology"). While there exist huge discrepancies between the cultural representation of disease and the actual bodily experiences, amnesia as an illness provides ample opportunities for exploring gender and bodily disruption. Amnesia is often employed as a narrative strategy by filmmakers, as it enables them to explore issues related to identity. In movies featuring amnesia, we find individuals trying to find coherence amidst their fragmentary experiences. Yet, when posed through a female body, these questions acquire a higher meaning. Elisabeth Bronfen argues in *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, "the feminine body is culturally constructed as the superlative site of alterity" (xi), and is therefore, made available for narrative manipulation. Considering how the female body has been historically treated as fragile, unstable, and hysterical, any attempts at narrative self-construction would become challenging for a woman.

Cinematic ability to represent subjective experiences through fragments, editing, and the like, makes it an appropriate tool for exploring memory loss. Vivian Sobchack argues in *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*, "film has the capacity and competence to signify, to not only have sense but also to make sense through a unique and systemic form of communication" (6). What is presented on screen becomes intelligible because of the shared terrain of embodied experiences of the filmmaker and the spectator alike. This is particularly true in the case of films featuring female protagonists affected by amnesia. Filmmakers deploy certain cinematic techniques to arrive at a consensus between external observations and subjective experiences. As a result, there emerges a significant difference in the visual representation of woman as object of observation and woman as a lived subject. Thus, even without experiencing this cognitive disruption, the spectator understands the confusion, fragmentary experiences, and the disorientation experienced by the body in illness. Quoting Habermas, Sobchack argues that movies "reflect the universality of specific scopes of experience" (6). However, the varied gender dimensions of illness resist such attempts at universalisation. This corresponds to what Susan Wendell identifies in her work *The Rejected Body: Feminist Philosophical Reflections on Disability*. Wendell contends that illness makes visible the social and cultural construction of the body by exposing how bodily norms and expectations shape medical treatment and self-recognition (36). In movies, we find the persistence of vulnerability for women, even in the absence of memory. Laura Mulvey's concept of scopophilia, as elaborated in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," becomes relevant here. Mulvey argues that "women are

simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (11). A female body experiencing illness is doubly marginalized as an object of pleasure and as a disabled body. A woman, while struggling against objectification, is in a pursuit of truth. However, there is an active effort to restrain the woman from retrieving the fragments of memory.

As historians have documented, women's complaints have historically been devalued, dismissed, and relegated. Given the fact that there exists a desire to control the female body, both patriarchy and medical institutions exert their power on the woman experiencing illness. Women, while grappling with patriarchal control, have to simultaneously understand the physical and psychological changes their bodies undergo. Unlike any other illnesses portrayed onscreen, amnesia affects the faculty of memory; rendering the affected individual (and the narrative) incoherent and disrupted. As a result, when a character loses memory, the narrative itself crumbles. The filmmaker has to represent this narrative reconstruction without compromising medical accuracy.

Literature Review

The intersection of amnesia and cinema offers ample opportunity for the exploration of neurological conditions, narrative construction, and cultural implications. A detailed review of films produced from 1962 to the present helps understand how memory loss has fascinated filmmakers across the globe. It was John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) that established memory loss within the political thriller genre, associating it with larger political issues like Cold War, linking erasure of memory to ideological control and manipulation. *36 Hours*, released in the same year, was yet another movie that presents amnesia against the backdrop of war. *Total Recall* was a 1990 sci-fi film directed by Paul Verhoeven that dealt with fabricated memories, thus questioning the reliability of memory. *American Dreamer* (1984), *Blackout* (1985), *The Addams Family* (1991), *Clean Slate* (1994), *Amateur* (1994), Alex Proyas' *Dark City* (1998), were some movies that depicted amnesia, irrespective of generic differences (“Films about Amnesia”). Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) exemplifies the depiction of anterograde amnesia through the character Leonard Shelby, through a fragmented narrative structure that mirrors the character's cognitive confusion. Nolan's focus was not simply on the depiction of the illness, but was also on the construction of an amnesiac narrative. While David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001) takes amnesia into the surrealist territory, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004) becomes a meditation on whether a person should choose to forget painful experiences or continue to live bearing pain.

Though less experimental when compared to films like *Memento* and *Mulholland Drive*, Doug Liman's *The Bourne Identity* (2002) presented amnesia as a core element driving an entire action film series. Following the Bourne franchise, several filmmakers appropriated amnesia as a narrative device

to represent the systematic erasure of a past constituting morally questionable action. Pixar's *Finding Nemo* (2003) and its 2016 sequel *Finding Dory* brought amnesia to children's cinema through a fish named Dory with severe memory loss. Though director Andrew Stanton's movies introduced disability to children, it was criticized for the inaccuracy in its depiction.

Peter Segal's *50 First Dates* (2004) adapted amnesia to the genre of romantic comedy. The movie was later remade into Malayalam as *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* (2014). Michael Sucaskey's *The Vow* (2012) is a movie based on true events and it explores the nature of love and marriage by employing amnesia. Martin Scorsese's *Shutter Island* (2010) features the central character Laeddis as mentally unstable, yet his condition is characterized by dissociative amnesia. *Pig* (2011), Rowan Joffé's *Before I Go to Sleep* (2014), *Overboard* (2018), and *The Actor* (2025) are some recent movies that deal with amnesia ("Films about Amnesia").

In the context of Indian cinema, there is indeed a considerable amount of movies dealing with amnesia, especially in Bollywood. Compared to the Western approaches to memory loss, Indian filmmakers depict amnesia in culturally distinct ways. More than a neurological condition, amnesia is framed as a tool to discuss ideas like 'karma', love, and fate. Amnesia became a favourite narrative device in romantic genres featuring characters separated by tragic accident and eventual memory loss, heightening the melodramatic experience. Unlike the Western films that appropriated memory loss to discuss identity and existential crisis, amnesia enabled Indian directors to incorporate extended emotional sequences in their movies. In regional movies, amnesia facilitated the exploration of traditional familial bonds. The 1983 Hindi movie *Coolie* resolves amnesia through divine intervention. *Do Anjaane* (1976), *Yaarana* (1981), *Bade Dilwala* (1983), *Sailaab* (1990), *Henna* (1991), *Ek Ladka Ek Ladki* (1992), *Salaam-e-Ishq* (2007), *Ghajini* (2008), *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (2012), *Bob Biswas* (2021), and *Kadak Singh* (2023) are some mainstream movies that deal with amnesia ("When Bollywood Lost Its Memory!"). In the Indian scenario, the emphasis is on the depiction of cultural values rather than on medical accuracy.

A review of the critical studies on memory loss reveals how representation of amnesia, despite its prevalence, is yet to be explored. Raquel Medina's *Cinematic Representations of Alzheimer's Disease* is an in-depth exploration of the visual representation of the disease. "Exploring Disease Representation in Movies" by Antonio Perciaccante et.al, is a comprehensive study and subsequent enquiry on the diseases that get represented more in movies. "Mental health in Tamil cinema" by R. Mangala and R. Thara, "Malayalam cinema and mental health" are some other articles that deal with the depiction of mental health in cinema. In the article "Memories aren't made of this: amnesia at the movies", Sallie Baxendale observes the cinematic representation of amnesia and concludes that the portrayal deviates significantly from what patients with amnesia experience. "Amnesia in Bollywood movies" posits amnesia as a common occurrence in Bollywood movies. As the blog

suggests, when it comes to the cinematic representation of amnesia, the actual medical conditions or causes are ignored in favour of the narrative. A recent article, “Cinematic Healing: The Psychology of Memory, Trauma, and Recovery in Balu Mahendra’s Films” employs a psychological framework to analyse the depiction of mental health in the movies of the director Balu Mahendra.

Rationale of the Study

This study looks into the representation of amnesia (the medical term for memory loss) in mainstream South Indian cinema across genres. The movies are chosen from Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, and Telugu film industry based on their depiction of anterograde and retrograde amnesia. Anterograde amnesia refers to the medical condition where a person is unable to form new memories following a tragic accident or injury, while retrograde amnesia is characterised by the inability to retain older memories (Cuncic). Amnesia proves as a valuable lens to analyse questions related to identity, consciousness, and subjectivity. Unlike other illnesses that affect memory like dementia and Alzheimer’s, amnesia causes a sudden, often dramatic alteration in the life of an individual. While the other diseases are gradual in progression and affect older people, the sudden onset of amnesia, radically affect the lives of individuals, causing a dramatic upheaval. The depiction of Alzheimer’s and dementia has received significant academic attention, but the study of amnesia in Indian cinema remains largely unexplored.

Theoretical Framework

The study derives its theoretical foundations from Feminist film theory, particularly Laura Mulvey’s concept of ‘male gaze’ where Mulvey analyses the role played by women in cinema- as objects providing visual pleasure. The female body affected by illness suffers the same fate. This male gaze not only determines the narrative role, but also the agency of the women depicted onscreen. The analysis also draws insights from Disability studies and the medical humanities framework which theorizes the body suffering from illness. From this perspective, the ill body experiences gaze which surpasses real embodied experiences, favouring authoritative narratives.

Methodology

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does amnesia function differently across genres?
- How do gender dynamics affect the representation of amnesia?
- How is the body with illness filmed?
- What mechanisms facilitate amnesia recovery in South Indian cinema?

In order to find answers to the following research questions, this study examines a corpus of fourteen South Indian films spanning a period of forty years across Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada language cinemas based on the order of release (from 1982 to 2024). Though the study initially claimed to cover the movies across South Indian industry, upon comprehensive search it was revealed that Kannada language offers only one movie—*Simple Agi Ondh Love Story* (2013). Since the movie scarcely contains sequences of memory loss, it is excluded from consideration. As the list suggests, six movies from Malayalam, five from Tamil, and three from Telugu are chosen. *Moondram Pirai* (1982), *Vetri Vizha* (1989), *Adikkurippu* (1989), *Innale* (1990), *Kannukkul Nilavu* (2000), *Ghajini* (2005), *Nenu Meeku Telusa?* (2008), *Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha Kaanom* (2012), *Mumbai Police* (2013), *Ormayundo Ee Mukham* (2014), *Premam* (2015), *Padi Padi Leche Manasu* (2018), *Hi Nanna* (2023), and *Bougainvillea* (2024) are the movies selected for analysis.

The study follows a mixed model of analysis. The movies chosen are subjected to a close textual analysis in order to examine the visual representation, narrative structure, and character development. A qualitative approach is utilized to examine the representation of amnesia, its recovery patterns, and the broader cultural implications. Out of the fourteen films, seven movies feature female amnesiac characters.

Memory and Identity: A Critical Discussion

As mentioned above, this section follows a detailed discussion of the films selected for study. Depending on the nature of amnesia portrayed in the films, it can be noticed that filmmakers present female characters in an empathetic light, while male experiences and actions are prioritised.

Moondram Pirai is a movie in Tamil language which was released in 1982 featuring Kamal Haasan and Sridevi in lead roles. The movie is about a young woman Bhagyalakshmi who develops retrograde amnesia after a car accident and regresses to a childlike state. She gets a new name Vijaya and is sold to a brothel. While visiting the brothel, Cheenu meets Vijaya and assumes that she might have been forced into prostitution because of her mental state. Cheenu affectionately calls her Viji and takes her to his residence. The rest of the movie presents the bond they gradually develop. Cheenu protects her from attacks and take care of her. Vijaya undergoes an Ayurvedic treatment resulting in a complete recovery; however, she forgets her relationship with Cheenu. In the movie, Bhagyalakshmi becomes extremely vulnerable and is presented as one who requires male protection. She is unable to process any information. With an age regression, her innocence is highlighted. Her recovery erases the memory of her brief period as ‘Viji’. The movie is a typical rescue narrative.

The 1989 Tamil movie *Vetri Vizha* is about Vetrivel, a police officer entrusted with the task of capturing a criminal Zinda. When the movie begins, Vetrivel is washed ashore and rescued by Shirley. He is diagnosed with amnesia. In the flashes of memory he has, he sees a blast, sees himself in Karate

outfit and recollects some sculptures he had once seen somewhere. Later, he sets out to find the truth about himself and the plot unfolds. Here, amnesia erases his biographical details while his capabilities remain intact. His intelligence and efficiency as an officer is unaffected. Vetrivel's social identity is erased, but his masculine agency and potential is unaltered. He initiates new romantic relationships and demonstrates his physical prowess. Vetrivel actively drives his own narrative of recovery. Rather than waiting for memory to return, he pursues each fragmentary clues like sculptures and karate class. He makes deductions from evidence available to him like bank locker contents, his bank account details and so on. He takes initiative in every dangerous situation and safeguards others from attacks. The illness creates no change in his disposition.

Directed by K. Madhu, *Adikkurippu* (1989) is a Malayalam movie that depicts the life of Basheer, who after being thrown overboard, suffers from amnesia. Basher remembers nothing but his name. He is rescued by the captain of the ship and with the help of Adv. Bhaskara Pillai, he is deported after much tension, which eventually reveals a scam involving the ruling party. Basheer is vulnerable, as he is unable to defend himself from the antagonists, but his selective memory is questionable. He retains his name and cultural identity (that he is a Malayali). The recovery here is associated with justice. When finally presented before the court, Basheer is able to recollect the events all of a sudden. There are no memory gaps or difficulty involved in memory recovery. All the events are narrated chronologically in the last twelve minutes of the movie and the testimony is accepted by the court without any doubt. The movie includes close-up shots of Basheer with dishevelled hair, tired face, and teary eyes. This image is repeated occasionally. The narrative is male dominated and involves a team of members like Adv. Pillai, Inspector Rajendran, Captain John, Adv. Menon, etc. The recovery of memory is framed through a legal and investigative lens. The emotional and domestic aspect is eliminated here. Basheer undergoes a medical process which is similar to hypnotism, but the procedure is a failure. The actual recollection happens much later without any medical intervention. Basheer's memories are valuable and dangerous because it has the power to threaten and destabilize the existing power structures.

Innale (1990) is a Malayalam movie directed by P. Padmarajan. It revolves around a woman who loses memory following a tragic accident and is admitted to a hospital. She is taken care of by Dr. Sandhya and her son Dr. Sharath. Sharath names her Maya and it is declared that she suffers from amnesia. Unable to recall anything from the past, Maya totally depends on the people around her. She becomes an 'object' receiving care and empathy from others. People take advantage of her vulnerability and claim to be her relatives. Sharath's love for Maya prompts him to manipulate situations. He even wishes she never retrieves her memory. It is later revealed that she was Gauri, married to Dr. Narendran. Maya/Gauri is confined to spaces of medical surveillance. Her amnesia is visually represented, that is, she is represented as gazing outside the window, with a weary face. She is

also presented in a way that emphasises her beauty and innocence. She occasionally dreams of rushing down a corridor, repeatedly banging on doors that never open. The information about her past and her current medical condition is not fully revealed and everything is doled out by the male figure Sharath. There are no deliberate efforts to reconstruct memory. The movie does not end with recovery of amnesia of the female protagonist, indicating the impossibility of return to the past.

Kannukkul Nilavu is a 2000 Tamil movie, featuring Vijay and Shalini in the lead. The plot presents Gautham, a man with amnesia following an episode where he is hit on the head with an axe. Under the care of Dr. Rajashekar, Gautham recuperates, while falling in love with Hema. The narrative primarily focuses on his masculinity, which remains intact even after the incident. It is shown that Gautham was attacked during the attempt to rescue a girl Gayathri. After falling ill, his urge to demonstrate masculine power turns into a violent obsession, often involving brief episodes where Gautham becomes aggressive. In one of the scenes, the doctor speaks to Gautham who is in a hypnotic state where the latter shouts and murmurs that he would kill his attackers. When he receives a flash of memory, he takes out weapons and a gun from his bag, turning into a villain. The protective Gautham transforms to the 'destructive' Gautham in the latter half of the movie. He terrorises the female characters and is presented as having uncontrollable energy. The movie ends in Gautham's complete recovery and the indication that his masculine energy is finally contained.

The 2005 Tamil movie *Ghajini* is loosely based on *Memento* by Christopher Nolan. The movie is about Sanjay Ramaswamy who is diagnosed with amnesia. The movie is about Sanjay's true identity as a business tycoon avenging the death of his girlfriend. Sanjay records the events of the past in two separate diaries, each labelled by the year of its composition and depends on external objects like photographs and tattoos on his body, which urges him to 'find and kill' his enemies. Without seeking help from anyone, Sanjay pieces information together, hunts down, and eventually kills the perpetrators. Unlike the other movies discussed in the study, this movie intensifies the gender dynamics. The narrative does not examine the medical condition, but amnesia is used as a device to portray the unfailing power of masculinity and agency. His use of tattoos, notes, and photographs does not act as compensation for lost memory rather; it helps him to fulfill his desire for retribution. The narrative gives Sanjay complete moral authority and justifies the serialised murders.

Nenu Meeku Telusa (2008) is a Telugu movie that deals with amnesia through its protagonist Aditya, who experience severe memory loss after an accident. In order to continue his daily routine, he records his voice which he repeatedly plays. The movie shows how Madhumitha pretends to be his girlfriend to exploit him and how this conspiracy is finally brought to light. The protagonist solves problems and tracks down manipulators based on his instincts, which never go wrong. Aditya has to stay awake to remember the past events. So, even though his cognitive power fails, he races against his own body to stay awake. He depends on Anjali (who is his romantic interest) who is a police officer.

She initially investigates the case and later, marries him. The film uniquely places Aditya as a person vulnerable to exploitation, yet he is not completely emasculated. Complete recovery is not offered to the protagonist. He chooses his wife as the external memory as he hopes to depend on her for orientation.

Naduvula Konjam Pakkatha Kaanom, released in 2012, is a Tamil movie that features Prem Kumar who is diagnosed with amnesia after accidentally hitting his head while playing cricket. The movie portrays amnesia in a humorous light. Prem loses his memory a day prior to his wedding and the rest of the movie shows how his friends try to get him married to Dhanalakshmi without disclosing the secret about his memory loss. Unlike the action model of *Vetri Vizha*, this movie offers a different representation of amnesia. Prem loses his autonomy and agency and is completely taken care of by his friends. He is not informed about his condition and is forced to obey the instructions of his friend Saras blindly. Prem's inability to perform expected masculine roles creates humor. More than a medical condition, his amnesia emerges as a social problem because it leads to chaos and embarrassment. He cannot recognise the bride, calls her awful and refuses to tie the wedding knot. Though a ritual designed to emphasise masculine identity, Prem marries Dhanalakshmi without being aware of it. The social expectation about gender performance is subverted here. At the end, the filmmaker reveals that the plot was inspired by an actual incident that happened to the cinematographer of the movie. There is a sudden recovery at the end of the movie without any medical intervention, which prompts us to question the medial accuracy of the representation.

The Malayalam movie *Mumbai Police* (2013) features a police officer Antony Moses who experience severe amnesia following an accident. He had been investigating the murder of his colleague and friend Aaryan. Despite being gravely injured, his brother-in-law Farhan (who is the Police Commissioner) urges Moses to investigate the murder, which reveals Moses himself as the murderer. Antony actively receives help from his team members. Farhan reminds Moses everything and it seems as if memory is externalised. Antony Moses is shown reading letters, talking to other officers, etc., which actively help him reconstruct the events leading to the accident. Farhan does not doubt Antony's potential because it is presented as if the latter's authority remains intact. For Antony, amnesia is a temporary obstacle. Therefore, he is an active agent who gathers information, reexamines witnesses, and in the process, reassembles his identity. Antony's suppressed homosexual interaction with a friend was discovered by Aaryan which led to the murder. Interestingly, Antony Moses occupies a space where every memory is externalised into documents, letters, and video tapes. In fact, the investigator's journey of self-exploration parallels the actual investigation of his friend's murder. Amnesia is rarely visualised in the movie. Rather, he is seen in action. There are no scenes of repeated medical examinations. Memory fragments return to Moses through active investigation and he is able to maintain his rank or position regardless of his medical condition. The analysis of the portrayal of

amnesia in *Mumbai Police* parallels Raquel Medina's observation about the movies *Cortex* (2008) and *The Memory of a Killer* (2003). Medina argues that both the movies, "propose a notion of memory loss that reverts its medicalised definition as a nullifier of personhood" ("Agency and Masculinity" 135).

Ormayundo Ee Mukham (2014) is a Malayalam movie loosely based on the 2004 movie *50 First Dates*. The protagonist Nithya, a sand artist, develops a rare case of amnesia after an accident due to which she is unable to retain memories after a period of 24 hours. She keeps a diary to remind herself of the daily life events. She meets Gautham, a man with short-term memory loss, and become friends. The movie depicts Gautham's efforts to court Nithya anew. The movie ends with Nithya realising that she has found her soul mate in Gautham and they get married. The movie presents amnesia as a plot device to inquire into the nature of love and identity. In the movie, amnesia becomes both an obstacle and an opportunity for the young protagonists to explore love and relationships. Nithya is presented as a girl with agency as she decides what memories are to be written down and what should be erased. She depends on her sister for navigating her relationships. When she decides not to be romantically involved, she tears pages of the diary in which she mentioned about Gautham. Gautham's memory problems are less severe and he becomes the active pursuer in the movie. While male amnesiacs lead a normal love life, the same is not granted to women. At the end of the movie, Nithya draws his pictures without conscious memory suggesting that she retains certain things that her conscious mind cannot. This romanticizes the idea that true love transcends cognitive function, but also raises questions about autonomous choices. The movie concludes with the idea of love offering a magical cure for amnesia.

The Malayalam movie *Premam* (2015) depicts the life of George who navigates his romantic relationships with three different women. Malar is a guest lecturer from Tamil Nadu and she develops a romantic relationship with George. Malar meets with an accident and subsequently leaves her job. She develops amnesia and is unable to remember George when he meets her at her home, which leaves George devastated. At a later point, Malar marries her cousin. The storyline involving Malar emerges as the scene with the most emotional impact. Amnesia is framed as a narrative device that brings to an end a significant chapter of the protagonist's life. Malar exists as an object of George's affection. More than looking at what Malar might have felt after the accident, the movie is about George's emotional journey. In fact, multiple male characters like Vimal compete for her attention. Malar is unable to choose George because she cannot remember him. So, her ill body becomes an obstacle. Her suffering strengthens the growth and emotional maturity of the male protagonist.

Another Telugu film that depicts amnesia is the 2018 movie *Padi Padi Leche Manasu*. The movie explores the romance between Vaishali and Surya and how Vaishali's amnesia strains their relationship. She gets injured during an earthquake and has to navigate her life amidst chaos. Even though the movie features a female character with amnesia, the illness is treated in a trivial manner,

only to create narrative tension. Rather than engaging with amnesia as a solid subject, it is presented to portray the emotional imbalances experienced by the hero. The continuous male pursuit leaves the female character with no choice but to love him. The male emotional experience is centralised, pushing the female experiences to the margin. This is yet another movie that relies on the trope of love as cure. The amnesia plot feels forced into the movie and is not treated with gravity.

Hi Nanna is a Telugu film released in 2023 that tells the story of Viraj and his daughter Mahi who is diagnosed with cystic fibrosis. The movie is about Mahi's attempts to find her mother Varsha whom she has never seen. In a non-linear narrative, the film shows Mahi recounting the story about her mother to Yashna, a woman Mahi meets randomly. In a turn of events, it is shown that Yashna is Varsha, who met with an accident resulting in memory loss. The movie ends with the family's reunion. Amnesia provides Yashna an opportunity to reconsider her estranged relationship with her husband Viraj. The movie is primarily concerned with the guilt Yashna experiences for abandoning her daughter following a scuffle with Viraj. The movie neither looks at the physical discomfort of amnesia nor portrays Yashna as a woman with amnesia. The reactivation of maternal instincts, the experience of grief, and profound guilt becomes the matter of exploration.

The 2024 Malayalam movie *Bougainvillea* is about Reethu, a woman with amnesia. She lives with her husband Royce. As the plot progresses, it turns out that Royce is a murderer who had kidnapped and killed several women, using Reethu as an accomplice. She is Esther, rechristened by Royce as Reethu. She occasionally remembers drowning herself and gets fragments of memory where she sees bougainvillea flowers. Her amnesia is a systematic erasure of her past because each time she tries to recollect something Royce forcefully drowns her. To cope with the present, Reethu creates a world in which she imagines having two kids Emma and Ryan. It proves that even her fantasy life is socially scripted, as her subjectivity is framed through her reproductive identity. Even though she writes down what she remembers, Royce removes the papers, making it almost impossible for Reethu to recollect. Reethu simply remembers what was done to her, but not who did it. People around her (the police officers) interpret things to her. In the end, partial agency is granted to Reethu as she shoots her perpetrator, but this action is initiated when her maternal instincts are activated. The movie reiterates the trope of female vulnerability.

Conclusion

Through a detailed examination of the movies, it can be inferred that female identity, before and after diagnosis, alters drastically and is shown as unstable and fluctuating. Irrespective of the situation, male agency and identity is unaffected and remains the same except in a few cases. Despite the failure to adhere to medical authenticity, amnesia often emerges as an element forced into the movies to create narrative tension. Interestingly, out of the seven films featuring female characters, four films have

female characters with two distinct names as in the case of Bhagyalakshmi/Viji in *Moondram Pirai*, Gauri/Maya in *Innale*, Varsha/Yashna in *Hi Nanna*, and Reethu/Esther in *Bougainvillea* because women either assume or are assigned false names. In movies with male amnesia, the focus is on external action and investigation, more than on the emotional aspect. The identity crisis of the hero is dealt with violence and aggression. Women become recipients of care, protection, and medical assistance. They experience a significant disruption in their domestic lives or romantic relationships and their depiction conforms to traditional gender roles.

The study shows that South Indian cinema has developed a distinct approach to amnesia narratives, when compared to Western narratives, while the gender patterns remain largely unaffected. Unlike the predominant action narratives of male amnesia, female amnesia is narrated from an emotional lens. This gender divide proves how South Indian cinema, while examining illness, conforms to social and cultural expectations of gender.

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