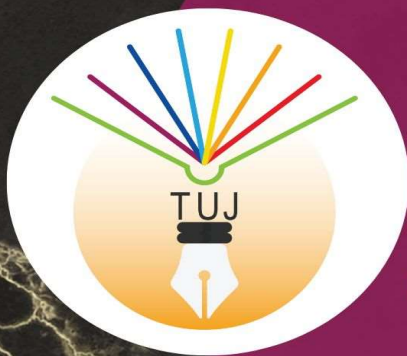


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The Lovers of Death Drive

Rituparna Mitra

The concept of *death drive* was originally proposed by Sabina Spielmann in her paper titled "Destruction as the Cause of Coming into Being." However, the credit of popularizing it lies with Sigmund Freud- a name that needs no introduction. In simple terms, *death drive* is associated with the self-destructive urges residing inside every individual and an undeniable urge to indulge and persist in those. This theory is founded on the principle "The aim of all life is death."

Despite posing an indelible danger to life, such activities are oft repeated for these add a sense of thrill and excitement to the otherwise dull and monotonous life. They cut through the stagnancy and stability of life reminding us we're born to play and not rest. Something similar to what Ranbir Kapoor's character says in "Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani:"

Main udna chahta hun, daudna chahta hun. Girna bhi chahta hun.

Bas, rukna nahi chahta. (Courtesy: Google)

One might think only fools or artists would partake in anything that embodies even the slightest injury to one's safety. For didn't the megastar Amitabh Bachchan alter his voice for *Agneepath* going against the doctor's advice and, that too, after he had but beat Death by the margin of an inch while shooting for another of his movies- *Coolie*?

And what about those "methodical actors" who lock themselves inside rooms to "get into the skin of a character?" While the entire world is busy looking for one way or other to escape depression and loneliness, such eccentric species are handing

out invitation cards to all things disturbing and unsettling. No wonder Plato asked for a ban.

Almost every day an artist or other is grilled for playing that one character society doesn't approve of. Think about the infamous *Kabir Singh* played by the "underdog" Shahid Kapoor. We do acknowledge his frustrations at remaining an "underdog" even after more than a decade and half in Bollywood. But to go to such extents! Can he really hold not getting enough credit accountable in transforming from a lovable chocolaty hero into a woman-bashing, fat-shamer of a lover!? Did he really think it would help in alleviating in status!?

How toxic his brand of masculinity is! How puke-inducing the director's idea of romance is! But when you hear your professor mention his name to make Ted Hughes' "Pike" more understandable to you, you're forced to mute the feminist in you and think:

Can there be something of worth in it?

Only because the feminist inside you has been muted, you decide not to jump the bandwagon and boycott *Kabir Singh*. And that leads you to a man who pees his pants after holding a knife to some infidel woman's throat and wonder how is that even manly. Of course, your wonder doesn't end there. Rather it just marks the beginning of a philosophical set of questions. And you can ask yourself such questions because the feminist inside you has been duct-taped now.

At this point, you are free to ask yourself has the woman learnt her lesson? Will she ever invite another man inside her bedroom in the absence of her husband? Or, will she put her life at risk one more time-under the influence of the titillating *death drive*-knowing very well another attack on her life will go unreported for infidelity is a crime too?

Because the movie won't be answering such line of questions you'll turn to other such tales and stories for answers. Because one thing leads to another and nothing

is novel enough to stand on its own. Every monument needs its pillars. And you need our answers.

And what better than mythology to form such pillars! For, weren't we always advised to read the Classics? To devour and ravish Homer, Dante and Milton. To lap at the fountains of knowledge left behind by Kabir, Mirabai and Tagore.

And nothing is as old or as all-encompassing as mythology. It can very well be defined as that grand *metanarrative* around which every possible story revolves. And going back, what do we find there?

A learned scholar dying a slow and painful death ignoring every warning he received by all those who truly cared for him. He loses everything- the empire he built from scratch to the son who defeated God himself- all because of this *death drive*. Some might disagree and blame it on his Ego. But Ego being self-destructive in nature can very well be considered an agent of *death drive*. An agent that accomplishes the goal of all life-Death.

For the feminist has been muted for too long, it is increasingly important to include a female character now. Balance is but an essential ingredient of the dish called life.

Let's turn our focus to Sita then. How sardonically poetic it is for the victim to be followed by the perpetrator! Before I get charged with genderdizing language to a woman's disadvantage just after claiming to unsilence the feminist inside me, let me go ahead and suggest another way of interpreting her character. Of course, she can be remembered as the headstrong female survivor that needed no man to protect her dignity. We need to bear such things in mind for the feminist is now unmuted and can lash at the slightest provocation.

But could she have avoided the predicament she found herself in had she listened like a good, obedient girl to Lakshman's advice and not crossed the line? Feminism- the kind where disregarding everything a man says- was yet to find its way out of

Vogue videos and Netflix series to dawn upon her in a forest out of all places. So, amounting it to *death drive* won't be very inappropriate.

This is in no way diminishing the significance of Propp's *Interdiction-Violation* theory (drawn out of repeated patterns Propp observed in almost all folk/fairy tales in which the hero ignores a solemn warning and pays greatly for doing so). For dearest Derrida has already fought for our right to multiple narratives.

Her plight is nothing better than the humiliating death that Ravana dies despite being good and righteous. She had crossed the line only to give alms to the snollygoster posing as a beggar, for heaven's sake.

What is then to be made of humans, who, grow up listening to such tales and then later binge-watch movies that dance around similar themes of danger and thrill. In fact, how tightly both are inter-connected.

Who better than the brilliant *Aussies* to explain this connection! Even a fatal injury to the head of their fellow brother, Phil Hughes, couldn't put an end to their unyielding love of bashing the opponents with more than just their words on the fields. Some cricket enthusiasts would proudly declare at this point:

But they take as strong as good as they give.

Well, of course they do. But that's beside the point. The question here is, "Is it really necessary?"

Also, "Isn't cricket a gentleman's game? So, why the dreadful violence?"

But then who ever could bash the mighty head of Sir Viv Richards who is as famous for playing without a helmet as he is for his strokes.

So, you see it's just a bunch of boys having a little manly fun while working the fields. Only till no harm is done.

But once a skull is broken open or a life forever lost, we have cricketers to grill and roast for a change. Much to the reprieve of all artists. Turns out there are other lovers of Death Drive as well.

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