

## In the Name of God: Examining Ritual Abuse within Child Abuse in the film Maya (2001)

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**How to cite this article:** Dr. Pragati Shukla (2024). In the Name of God: Examining Ritual Abuse within Child Abuse in the film Maya (2001). Library Progress International, 44(5), 39-45

**Abstract:** This paper examines the intersection of ritual abuse and child abuse, particularly within the context of religious traditions. Using the film Maya (2001) as a case study, it explores how ritual abuse, often conducted under the guise of religious rites, perpetuates systemic psychological, physical, and sexual harm against children, primarily girls. The analysis highlights how cultural and religious practices, once rooted in spirituality, have sometimes morphed into exploitative rituals, legitimized by misconstrued interpretations of religious texts. The film Maya depicts the journey of a young girl subjected to abusive religious ceremonies, reflecting broader societal issues where child abuse remains hidden within religious frameworks. By unpacking the sociocultural dimensions of these rites, this study underscores the need for a reevaluation of religious practices that enable abuse. It further questions societal complicity, the role of religious authorities, and the implications of ritual abuse on child rights and well-being.

**Keywords:** *Ritual abuse, child abuse, religious practices, cultural exploitation, Maya film, religious rites, societal complicity, child rights.*

While literature and cinema have addressed the issue of child abuse, certain aspects, such as ritual abuse within child abuse, remain underexplored. Abusing children under the guise of religious rituals is a widespread yet often unrecognized form of abuse, as it is seen by many as an expression of faith. Ritual abuse falls under the broader category of religious abuse, justified in the name of God and present throughout history. This form of abuse encompasses sexual, physical, and psychological harm inflicted on a child over an extended period, typically carried out in a systematic and collective manner. It sometimes occurs within religious cults, group practices, or family settings, making the concept of ritual abuse complex and closely tied to survivors' narratives. Some definitions given by professionals are as follows-

1. Abuse that occurs in the context linked to some symbols or group activities that have a religious, magical or supernatural connotation, and where the invocation of these symbols or activities are repeated over time and used to frighten and intimidate the children. (Finkelhor, Burns and Kalinowski qtd. in Mitchell, 111)
2. Ritual Abuse has been defined as psychological, sexual, spiritual and/or physical assault on an unwilling human victim, committed by one or more people whose primary motive is to fulfill a prescribed ritual in order to achieve a specific goal or satisfy the perceived needs of their deity. Children are most frequently the victims of all types of ritual abuse, largely because of their vulnerability and lack of power. (Robinson "Ritual Abuse (RA): An introduction to all points of view")
3. Ritual abuse is a brutal form of abuse of children, adolescents, and adults, consisting of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, and involving the use of rituals. Ritual does not necessarily mean satanic...(Sullivan "Ritual Abuse and Mind Control")

Thus, religion and abuse are interconnected. But since religion in itself is a sour point of human psyche, no one wants to talk about it. But we cannot turn our back from such issues. It happened in history, it is happening in present and will happen in future, and reason is not religion, but the interpretation of religion. As Jimmy Carter, former US president points out, "The most serious and unaddressed worldwide challenge is the deprivation and abuse of women and girls, largely caused by a false interpretation of carefully selected religious texts and a growing toleration of violence and warfare"(3).

India is a holy and religious land dominated by the spiritual philosophies. If we go back to the history we find that Indian religion has paved the way for the philosophies that are practiced today, such as Yoga, Buddhism, and Jainism etc. But in the last two – three hundred years the definition of religion has changed in India. Religion has been no more than just a spiritual belief; a way to God or to salvation, but it plays a crucial role in shaping our cultural, social and political structures. In other words, it has become a subject to man's identity and because of it; religion has become a source of exploitation, maltreatment, abuse and so on. As a critic Rita Swan points out in her article "Child Abuse under the Guise of Religion", "Every kind of child abuse has been rationalized by someone as a religious practice like beatings, dangerous diets, forced marriages, slavery, exorcism, sexual exploitation, genital mutilation, and conversion therapy for L.G.B.T. youth and medical neglect." (*Nytimes.Com*)

Ask an average person, "What is religion?" and they might say it's Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam. We are often born not just as human beings but labeled as Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, and so on. Broadly, religion is understood as a system of faith and worship—a set of beliefs, ideas, and cultural values that shapes the connection between humans and a higher power. While everyone seems to know what religion is, defining it precisely often proves challenging. As in Henry Fielding's novel *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (1749), Rev. Mr. Roger Thwackum says "By religion I mean Christianity, by Christianity I mean Protestantism, by Protestantism I mean the church of England as established by law" (32 bk.3 ch.3). For common man this is the only aspect of religion. But in other sense, religion has very broad meaning as it consists of theological, philosophical, anthropological, sociological and psychological phenomenon of human kind. Moreover, religion is a kind of institution with no fix states and changes time to time with people and society. At the same time it has value and meaning for both individual and society. It provides emotional and psychological support and explanations to an individual, at the same time it controls the society and functions for social cohesion and integrity. It has become a powerful tool for social, cultural, political integration. In terms of institution, religion has functioned to regulate the religious sentiments, principles and practices, and to spread and preserve them. Thus, a religion secures its position and reputation from the moral, ethical faith and scope it offers. But when this religion perpetuates unethical and immoral subjugation of human kind, it becomes means of exploitation. As Gandhi says, "Religion is to morality what water is to the seed that is sown in the soil. Just as the seed is choked under the earth when it is not duly watered, so too the morality which is devoid of the fertilising influence of religion gets thin and dry and is ultimately destroyed. In other words, morality divorced from religion would be an empty thing" (qtd. in Deshpande 67). He also points out:

There is no religion higher than Truth and Righteousness. If we commit sins with the name of God on our lips, can we hope to win the grace of God? Suppose one man admits the existence of God, but lives a life of falsehood and immorality, while another knows not the name of God but lives a life of truth and virtue, can there be any doubt as to which should be regarded truly religious as well as moral? (qtd. in Deshpande 68).

If we look at the history, we find that religion had worked as a means of exploitation, where the strong had always manipulated and exploited the weak in the name of god especially in terms of female. As Georges Bizet points out "Religion is a means of exploitation employed by the strong against the weak; religion is a cloak of ambition, injustice and vice..." (qtd. in Kick33). If we look at the contemporary religions of the world we find that in every religion, women play secondary role. Women are always treated as inferior and have been deprived from the equal opportunity. She is just a commodity for the male, all the time at the back and call of men, to take care of children or in night to serve his sexual desires. Tahira S. Khan quotes Mazhar ul Haq Khan in *Beyond Honour* (2006), "It is a great tragedy of our society that woman has not a just place in it. Excepting a few cultured and polite families, in all others, she is not at all treated well. Man does not care for her, even though she may be his mother, sister or wife...." (5). Although National Laws provide more power to woman but still she is rendered legally, economically, politically and culturally remains inferior to man.

In each religion, women are undetectable creature. They never headed a strong position as a religious educator. They were barred from holding power even as nun they are always subordinate to father. If we talk about religious scriptures women are either invisible or occupy minor positions as Eve is formed from a rib taken from Adam and moreover Jesus and his 12 disciples were male. In Hinduism women were created by God as part of duality in creation to provide company to men and simplify creation. In the chapter nine and shloka three of *Manu Smriti*, Manu writes for women, "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protects (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence". (Sharma 67 Ch.9). In Islam women are legally inferior to men, lacking the same rights as their husbands. As *The Quran* ("Sure Nisha", Verse 34) says:

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property). As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds,

(and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means (of annoyance). Surely, Allah is Ever Most High, Most Great". (Al-Hilaliqtd in Adnan 123)

The main issue with a woman is her body and her sexuality. Women's sexuality is linked only to reproduction and, even sexual pleasure particularly for women, is condemned or absolutely prohibited in many religions such as genital mutilation is one of the religious rituals which is done to stop women from getting sexual pleasure. Sami A. Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh in the article "To Mutilate in the Name of Jehovah or Allah: Legitimization of Male and Female Circumcision" writes: Doctor Hamid Al-Ghawabi admits that female circumcision does reduce the sexual instinct in women, but he sees this as a positive effect. With age, the male sexual instinct lessens. His circumcised wife will then be at the same level as him. If she was not, her husband would be unable to satisfy her, which then would lead him to drug-use in order to succeed. (Abu-Sahlieh 577)

Thus, women are repressed, ignored and abused by every society in the name of religion in the world. They are considered inferior to men by these groups and are, therefore, convicted to be a second class type of person. At large, many women have no rights at all. As a consequence, the men, especially through their religious faiths, threaten and strictly ban the utilization of an unlimited amount of talent and abilities within women. Digvijay Singh's *Maya* (2001) is a story of such religious faiths where a girl is abused in the name of religious ritual and trained for future to bear such abuses and become subordinate to male dominated society. Before discussing *Maya* as a text of ritual abuse, there is a brief synopsis of film.

### ***Maya***

Release Date- 07 September, 2001

Story and Direction - Digvijay Singh

Cast – NityaShetty, Nikhil YadavMitaVashisht and Anant Nag

Language- Hindi

Production- Emmanuel Pappas, Dileep Singh Rathore, Raj Singh

The film begins statement "Based on true practices" and then quotes Khalil Gibran's lines, "The things which the child loves remain in the domain of the heart until old age. The most beautiful thing in life is that our souls remain hovering over the places where we once enjoyed ourselves" (*Maya*00:00:02-00:00:13).

The film is set within the boundaries of Andhra Pradesh and is about a twelve- year- old girl Maya. She lives with her cousin Sanjay, maternal aunt and uncle whom she calls mummy and baba. Sanjay and Maya are the best child companion to each other. They do all their childish pranks and mischief together. They spend their day in creating troubles for others and in their young children talks. But everything changes when Maya gets her first period's means Menstruation. Now she goes to her real parents' house and there she is prepared for ceremony which takes place when a girl reaches to her puberty. It is a period when a girl transits to womanhood.

Maya is unable to understand what is happening with her, because she is not allowed to play, to enter into the kitchen and she is just told that she is no longer a child. The auspicious day of ceremony has come and the first time, she wears saari and like a decent and submissive daughter, she quietly obeys up to the moment she is taken into a room inside the temple where a group of Pandits is waiting. And, finally the door is closed and we listen a child's screaming. Sanjay listens Maya's cries and shouts that someone please open the door. He constantly knocks the door but his father comes, scolds him and takes him away. And later we see Maya's dangling legs and a pair of unclothed male legs confront Maya on a table where she is exposed to a pain of sexual molestation. And then film closes with a statement, "Child abuse is not a cultural phenomenon, nor is it bound by region. These practices although forbidden by the Indian Government are still prevalent in parts of the country today. This film is not based on one particular practice but is a synthesis of various practices like "Devdasi", "Jogini" and "Anang Dana Pratana" (01:40:43-01:41:10). Thus, after answering several questions, Maya leaves many questions unanswered in the mind of viewers such as what does happen to Maya after that. Is a female responsible for female exploitation? Is there any solution to overcome such abuses? Does religion need reinterpretation?

Rituals are integrated part of every religion because religion is a system of faith which comprises the worship of supreme power. There are so many religions in the world and each religion has its own way of shaping and giving meaning to human perception of God and universe. For example- Hindu religion and Christian both believe in HOLY TRINITY, but they both have their own interpretation of this belief such as in Hinduism 'trinity' means 'Tridev'- Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh- part of 'Aadi Shakti' while in Christianity it means Father, son and holy spirit 'as one god in three Divine person'. But in both religions, the religious life of a person is focused on devotion to supreme power. This devotion, generally, takes the form of rituals and practices, sometimes related with statues and images of Gods in temples or sometimes just worshipping through meditation. The performance of rites, customs and rituals are the central part of every religion and a way of worshipping God. The words traditions, rituals, rites, customs and ceremonies are interrelated and have a religious value. They also have a non –religious connection but most of the time, they are associated with religion:

Anthropologists and Linguists have long been interested in ritual and ceremony for what they reveal about the religious, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of societies and cultures. As a symbolic and or performative action, rituals can be explored not only for their meanings but also for the effects they have on the lives of their participants. Even so the definition of a ritual is not quite clear; it is one of the themes in the area of religion and culture that affects most of us". (Possel "Religion & Rituals")

Most of the religious practices and rituals are performed in special places and under special conditions, in a specific manner because they enhance the experience of believers and it also makes the rituals more effective such as in Hindu religion 'Pinddaan' is one such ritual stated in Smiriti and Purana, to be performed after death of a man at Gaya in Patna. Thus every religion has several rituals and all are performed in the name of God. These are made to help the human being in his worship to supreme power.

Religious ritual reinforces the basic tenets of religion. For instance, the "partaking of the host" in the Catholic mass is a symbolic participation in the "last supper" of Jesus and, by extension, an affirmation of the acceptance of his teachings. Rituals are often charged with high emotions. The exalted feelings people experience during rituals provide positive reinforcement for continuing them. When rituals make people "feel good", they reinforce the belief that their religion is the "correct" one. (O'Neil "Overview of Religion: Rituals in Religion")

Thus, we can say that religion plays an important and fundamental role in imparting meaning and significance to human existence and rituals are necessary because they give meaning and structure to a religion. But ultimately, all rituals are not significant for human being and at times they are means of personal profit and a medium of exploitation. Moreover, the problem is not the religion but the interpretation of religious text and performance of rituals according to the religious authority. All religious texts are written by the males and they are also interpreted by the males so the actual problem is the prominence of a one gender. In the article "Does Religion Oppress Women?" Nicholas Kristof quotes Jimmy Carter, "It is ironic that women are now welcomed into all major professions and other positions of authority, but are branded as inferior and deprived of the equal right to serve God in positions of religious leadership. The plight of abused women is made more acceptable by the mandated subservience of women by religious leaders" (Nytimes.Com). Digvijay Singh's Maya is a victim of such religious leadership.

Maya is a twelve- year- old girl who enjoys her childhood with her cousin Sanjay. They both are best friend, carefree, village kids and do all childhood mischiefs together. At the same time, they both are curious about their body structure which is a very common notion among this generation. There is a scene in the film where Sanjay asks Maya to show her lower portion of the body as he says to Maya, "I will let you eat the samosa if you show me yours" (Maya00:04:44). But Maya does not take his words seriously, eats samosa and says, "I have already eaten samosa but I will show you mine if you show first" (00:05:07). This is a very innocent and common curiosity of childhood. When we were at this age, we wanted to know why boys piss by standing and girls by sitting. They are as innocent in questioning about their body structure as we were in our childhood. The life of Maya is pleasant and warm. Though she is disciplined by her uncle and aunt together with Sanjay but also adored. But this beautiful life becomes a fairytale when the next day she starts menstruating or reaches to puberty. And from here starts the journey of not only Maya but all those girls who are abused sexually, as they join puberty in the name of God by the religious leaders.

As discussed earlier, we find in all religious texts that females are portrayed as morally polluting and corrupting creatures and as sexual slayers. Their bodies, menstruation, and sexuality are often portrayed as "polluting" by all religions. Aru Bhartiya in her paper "Menstruation, Religion and Society" writes, "We don't know what may have been the reason that forced the holy men to refer to menstruating women as 'unclean'. But all religions (excluding Sikhism) refer to menstruating woman as 'ritually unclean'" (523).

Menstruation in India is a very taboo subject and girls feel shy in discussing it with others. Moreover, Menstruation changes the life of a girl because in just one day she transmits from childhood to womanhood even if she starts menstruating at the age of ten. Everything was okay yesterday with Maya but today when she gets her first day of so called 'periods' (mahinaaana) nothing remains okay, and it becomes a matter of discussion among Maya, Sanjay, Uncle and aunt. Now she is instructed by her aunt that she has grown up and she needs not to worry:

Sanjay's mother: Now you have grown up. Don't cry...you are my grown up girl. This will go on for a week....Don't worry of your stomach ache. We will have almond desert everyday....No excursion for a week. All right? Take rest. (Maya00:27:23-00:27:28)

Maya is still unable to understand what happened to her, when her cousin Sanjay asks to her, "Why was mummy so mad? What did you do?" (00:29:29). She replies, "I am not sure, but I think it's because I pissed in the courtyard, mamma was angry" (00:29:31). It is very difficult for a girl to understand the menstruation in a single day. As Suneela Garg and Tanu Anand in the article "Menstruation related myths in India: strategies for combating it" points out:

Menstruation is a phenomenon unique to girls. However, it has always been surrounded by taboos and myths that exclude women from many aspects of socio-cultural life. In India, the topic has been a taboo until date. Such taboos about menstruation present in many societies impact on girls' and women's emotional state, mentality and lifestyle and most importantly, health.... (184)

Menstruation not only causes physical pain to a girl but also mental pain because just in one day you grow up from child to woman. It is something like that you make relationship with man and you are no more virgin. Now Maya is told by everyone that she has grown up and should behave like grown up girls. She is not allowed to play and not allowed to enter into the kitchen. But she is unable to understand that how can a person grow up just in a single day. Even Sanjay is not ready to accept that she has grown up:

Sanjay: Did mamma scold you?

Maya: No. She just told me I have grown up.

Sanjay: How can you grown up? You have grown up and I am still a child.

Maya: I guess so.

Sanjay: You haven't grown up. You have gone mad. (Maya00:37:37-00:37:50)

Thus menstruation for female is not just a change in physical status but it also a change in her mental, emotional and social status in the society because suddenly, there starts hormonal change in her body, she becomes impure just in a day, not allowed to touch anything for next seven days and she transmits from childhood to womanhood. In November 2015, Sabarimala temple of Kerala made a statement, "...women will be permitted to Sabarimala after the invention of a machine which can scan and judge their purity" (International *Business of Times*). Suneela Garg and Tanu Anand give the following argument for the impurity of women during menstruation:

Culturally in many parts of India, menstruation is still considered to be dirty and impure. The origin of this myth dates back to the Vedic times and is often been linked to Indra's slaying of Vritras. For, it has been declared in the Veda that guilt, of killing a brahmana-murder, appears every month as menstrual flow as women had taken upon themselves a part of Indra's guilt.[4] Further, in the Hindu faith, women are prohibited from participating in normal life while menstruating. She must be "purified" before she is allowed to return to her family and day to day chores of her life. (184)

Thus, everything changes when a girl starts menstruating. A physical change in body imposes several mental abuses on a girl child. But this is not enough. Society does not satisfied by this abuse and goes even beyond it when this impure body is cleansed with sexual relationship made by the religious leaders. As Maya after her Menstruation is prepared for 'prayer ceremony' by her family. A grand ceremony is to be conducted. Maya parents go to priest to take auspicious date for 'Pooja'. Even a priest comes to home to see this blessed girl. He says to Maya:

Pujari (priest): Oh ho! So this is the lucky girl. Come, my child. Such a sweet child. So beautiful. Beta you know? You are a very lucky child. (Maya00:59:55- 01:00:11)

Finally, the auspicious day comes and Maya is taken to the temple for Pooja accompanying her parents and relatives. They all take four -five rounds (parikrama) of the temple and then Maya is taken into the room alone by the pandits to perform last ritual of this Pooja where she is forced to do 'Arti' and after that they all have sexual intercourse with her one by one. Maya screams but no one listens her cry. Why? because it's religious ritual. As Pujari comes out after sexually abusing Maya and announces, "God has been very kind on this girl. Bless her!" (01:27:22-01:27:28). Wow what a judgment! You make relationship and then are able to say that girl is a pure soul. How can these religious leaders or so called messengers of God, after abusing a child, pronounce, "Maya is a pure soul, and God loves such souls. She will always be happy" (01:28:53-01:29:00).

Maya is not a story of one practice but is a combination of many practices that are performed as a ritual in the name of God. Maya gives voice not only to child abuse but also to ritual abuse which is still not allowed to discuss. Digvijay Singh's *Maya* is the story of such domination where girls are abused at the very tender age by males in the name of religious rituals. In other words, it is a study of religious rituals that are performed in the name of God by the religious leaders to satisfy their mental and physical hunger and such abuses are not called abuse but the blessings of God. Laurie Matthew in her novel *Groomed* (2012) aptly points:

I definitely think it is the word ritual which causes people to question, to feel uncomfortable, or even just disbelieve. It seems almost incredible that such things would happen, but too many of us know exactly how bad the lives of many children are. A great deal of child pornography shows children being abused in a ritualized setting, and many have now come forward to share their experiences, but there is a still tendency to say it just couldn't happen. (205)

India is a secular and multicultural country. It is a land of spirituality and religious beliefs but these religious beliefs have become means of exploitation and self-profit. Maya's story is a result of one of these beliefs. The character of Maya is not portrayal of one girl but of many girls who are dedicated to God namely given to temple priests as a part of devdasi and Jogini tradition. Thus, children are abused in the name of God and society does not accept it rather claims it to be

religious rituals. Sharing the plight of devdasi tradition in her article, "Where Virginity Is for Sale in India, Joanna Sugden writes:

In Koppal, an impoverished district in Karnataka, virginity is for sale. When girls dedicated in local temples under the illegal devadasi system hit puberty, their virginity is auctioned off to the highest bidder. Traditionally girls in this district in south India undergo an 11-day purification ceremony following the onset of menstruation. The "first maturity" ceremony, as they call it in Koppal, marks the transition into womanhood. (Sugden *The Wall Street Journal*).

Molesting children as a part of religious ritual is universal phenomena and visible in all cultures, directly or indirectly. It has multiple layers such as beatings with rods, justifying sex, drinking of urine as religious medicine, medical neglect, doubting etc. In an article written for ABC news paper on 4 Dec 2014, "Child abuse royal commission: victim recounts being raped during ritual at Satyananda Yoga Ashram" by Claire Aird shares a victim's experience:

APR recalls that when she was no more than six years old she was taken into a dark room lit with candles. There were five or six male swamis in the room, some of whom she recognised from the ashram. During the ritual, she was held down and raped by Ahkandananda, the India director and spiritual leader of the ashram. "While he was doing that, Ahkandananda cut the skin between my breasts with a knife and then licked the blood. He threw it into the fire," she said. APR said she was then assaulted by several of the men and still has a scar down her chest. (*ABC News*)

Digvijay Singh's *Maya* is a story of abusing young girls when they come to puberty as, "In rural villages, young girls are still dedicated to god namely given to the priests, as briefs as part of the devdasi tradition" (Tsering "A Beautiful Film about One of India's Ugliest Secrets"). And, parents play an important role; participate with full faith in such type of abuse. Though *Maya* shares a very good relationship with her parents and they seem educated enough but still for them prayer ceremony is the necessity for the continuity of religious traditions. When *Maya* reaches puberty, her relatives and parents prepare her for ceremony to dedicate her to the God. Thus, a child is not abused only by the priests but by the family and the society who are accustomed by the blind faith. In this way, *Maya* also raises the question on our parenting. Are we safe with our parents? Are they protector or perpetrator? As in *Maya*, parents are happy and satisfied after ritual. When Sanjay's mother asks to Sanjay's father, "I think everything went well?" He replies, "Oh yes! His Holiness said, "Our prayer ceremony was truly blessed". He was all praises for *Maya*. He said, "She is truly blessed and God really loves her" (*Maya* 01:30:00-01:30:14).

Researches show that in most of the cases of child abuse, parents are equally responsible, especially, mothers. They ignore the crime and force the child to remain silent and make them to accept that these things happen. Thus, the child abuse puts question on the role of adult in our life. Commenting on the presence of adults in child's life, Adrienne E. Gavin in her book *The Child in British Literature: Literary Constructions of Childhood, Medieval to Contemporary* writes, "Both the presence and absence of adults cause problems for the child. Absence causes neglect, victimization of the child, while presence causes restrictions on childhood freedom, excessive adult dependence on the child, or abuse of children" (15).

After carrying out the case study of *Maya*, we can say that the child abuse is one of the major issues children are facing worldwide and religious ritual abuse is the most sadistic and horrific form of child abuse because such types of abuses are still not accepted and explained by the legal authorities because the religion is a sour and controversial part of a human 'sinner self as Freud calls "Religion would be thus a universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (Palmer 49). Freud compares religious rituals with obsessional actions and says that religious rituals "is one of the conditions of the illness that the person who is obeying a compulsion carries it out without understanding its meaning-or at any rate its chief meaning" (115). The abuser and abused is not aware of meaning of such practices as Freud points out, "In all believers, however, the motives which impel them to religious practices are unknown to them or are represented in consciousness by others which are advanced in their place" (116).

Digvijay Singh's *Maya* is a story of such religious practices which have become the part of human psyche without any reason and scientific meaning. The ritual sexual abuse of children, especially, young girls of India is the theme of the film. These girls are triply abused- one by the religious leaders, second by the society and third by the family. Moreover, the film gives a symbolic presence of 'lizard' to signify that these impractical and atrocious traditions which we are carrying from history without any significant use as Dennis Grunes points out; "...the film sets a symbolical infestation of lizards—survivors of pre-history. Certain unquestioned traditions, no matter how monstrous, carry their own aura of necessity in the continuity of culture, religious or otherwise" (*Grunes.Wordpress.Com*). At the end of the movie, *Maya* and lizard both are left together behind without any explanation, and the perpetrators, society and family moves to perform, to celebrate and to help others to perform in such duties. The best message film gives is that an immature is mature and mature is immature through the children who are able to understand that something wrong is happening with *Maya* while aged one are turning blind eye towards the traditions. The final message film gives that it is the destiny of a girl child and she cannot escape as Matthew Laurie in her short story collection *Fight! Rabbit! Fight!* Appropriately summaries this notion:

....Nothing was inevitable. She had not chosen this way. It was her fate. It had been decided since before time began. It had been decided before she began. Nothing could be done. There was no point in trying. It was way too late. The inevitability of nothing was totally supreme, overriding everything. No way out. No way through. She could only accept the unacceptable. She could only endure the unendurable. Nothing was wrong! (76).

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