

PIONEER

VOLUME 13, Issue 1, June 2021: 41-51

GODZILLA – A STUDY TO EXAMINE AS MORE THAN JUST A MONSTER MOVIE

¹**R. Sanjeev Srivatsan***

¹School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Jain University, Bengaluru, India.

¹*sanjeevsvrivatsan99@gmail.com*

²**Mekhala Venkatesh**

²School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Jain University, Bengaluru, India.

²*v.mekhala@jainuniversity.ac.in*

*Corresponding author: *sanjeevsvrivatsan99@gmail.com*

Received : May 7, 2021

Revised : May 27, 2021

Accepted : May 27, 2021

Published : June 30, 2021

Abstract: Godzilla, the most iconic movie monster that everyone will think of whenever someone talk with people about a giant monster obliterating a city. Its legacy has been living for almost seventy years and will keep live for the years to come. From looking at the perspective of Ecocentric theory, it seems that Godzilla is a force of nature that obliterates the Japanese city Tokyo to teach humans a lesson that our selfishness, arrogance and the attitude of placing ourselves on top of nature would only lead to tragic consequences. Using Conceptual Metaphor Theory, this article discuss about the movies which actually focuses on the core element of Godzilla instead of the portrayal of Godzilla as a monster fighter or as a savior of humanity in the aspects of ecocriticism, environmentalism, politics and post-modernism, along with the king of the monsters.

Keywords: *ecocriticis, environmentalism, force of nature-destruction, godzilla-king kong; nuclear weapon.*

INTRODUCTION

Godzilla, also called as “Gojira” by Japanese, is a fictional prehistoric creature which was mutated by the nuclear tests conducted at the pacific back in 1954, which was a post-World War era. The name “Gojira” is actually a portmanteau of these two different Japanese words Gorira (Gorila) and Kujira (Whale) and he has been described as a cross between a gorilla and a whale, due to his huge size, appearance and power and aquatic origin. However, in the western world, the name ‘Gojira’ has been anglicized to “Godzilla” since the western audiences found it convenient to call it in that way. Godzilla’s gender was gender-neutral and people from the original movie referred to him

with “it” pronoun. But, in the later movies (especially in the American dubbed movies), people began to describe him as male. He has been considered as “King of the Monsters” due to his unique appearance, design and having the spirit of confronting any kind of threats and attacks. The Japanese call him as “Gojira” which according to some people means “the God of destruction” and it is said that he’s the nightmare of every Japanese people. He is powered by nuclear radiation and uses his signature weapon is the “Atomic Breath” which has the temperature of more than 50,000 degrees Celsius which easily could incarcerate buildings, melt poles and artilleries in a matter of seconds. We have always felt sympathetic and shed tears for the people affected by that monster’s wrath but we have never questioned about why Godzilla wanted to wreak havoc and hurt everyone. The director of Godzilla-1954 Ishiro Honda told in his interviews that Godzilla is the embodiment of all the nuclear bombs we have created to destroy the nature as well as ourselves and he’s reminding us that the only danger for humanity is ourselves. We underwent two world wars and it led to the deaths of millions of soldiers, innocent civilians, women and children and they were all died in vain. Godzilla is the lesson for mankind to teach us how deadly and lethal our weapons are. Godzilla is a slow, walking nuclear bomb who wants us to remember our wrong actions could lead to death, destruction and even to our extinction. The objective of this article is to convey the importance of Godzilla in Japan, specifically how this movie icon has become a part of their culture and expresses the fear of Japanese people towards nuclear bombs as well as global catastrophes.

The idea of writing an article about Godzilla was seeded in my mind ever since I have started being a fan of this series and I have always seen Godzilla as my childhood hero, just like the superheroes from the western world. Many people have criticized me for the obsession I have towards this series because they have always looked at this movie from one side, thinking that Godzilla is a typical monster movie, where a creature wreaks havoc and people are trying to survive the attack. But after watching plenty of movie critics’ videos and articles online as well as observing and analyzing some underrated intellectuals in the comment sections, they have inspired me to do my own research on this movie icon and the outcome I have received was staggering as well as beneficial.

DISCUSSION

Godzilla has been considered as the longest running movie franchise in the history of cinemas. There are over 32 movies made out of this icon between 1954 and 2019 and his appearance and characteristics have changed from time to time. The movie series has been divided into four eras.

Table 1. The Eras of Godzilla Movies

NAME OF THE ERA	TIME PERIOD
The Showa era	1954 to 1975
The Heisei era	1984 to 1995
Millennium era	1999 to 2004
Legendary era	Began from 2014

Godzilla was considered to be one of the first monster movies in history, although the Hollywood has released a movie a year before that, called “A Beast from twenty thousand fathoms” and that movie had a similar kind of message to convey through the movie (Dangers of atomic bombing) but Godzilla has fulfilled the portions where the Hollywood missed to fill up. Godzilla had a strong message to convey and their intention to commercialize the movie was secondary option. In the earlier era of Godzilla movies, the creature was portrayed to be the God of Destruction and it represents the Japanese’s fear towards nuclear weapons. As the franchise gradually began to expand, the creature has been portrayed as the savior of planet earth by battling other powerful and life-threatening earth and alien monsters and acquired the title “King of the monsters”. This iconic monster can never be replaced by anything else and the courage, tenacity and spirit of the creature is what keeping this movie icon and the franchise alive to this day and for the years to come. The original movie was the only movie to depict the aftermath of his wrath and also shows the result of what a nuclear bomb could do to the city and to its people. It was also the only movie to explicitly feature the deaths caused by Godzilla’s wreckage and the radioactive poisoning which succumbs people even after the end of his destruction and returning to the ocean. It had a strong political and social message and it is just staggering to see how the modern Godzilla movies have drifted away from the core element of what Godzilla means and known for. Also, Godzilla was not born evil or wanted to obliterate Tokyo out of sadistic choice. He was just a normal, innocent dinosaur

who had no idea where he got himself into after those nuclear tests. He was confused, afraid and enraged and attacked everyone out of self-defense and impulse. He was apparently a victim of Mankind's folly and arrogance. As Ishiro Honda quoted

"Monsters are tragic beings; they are born too tall, too strong, too heavy, they are not evil by choice. That is their tragedy."

In other better words, monsters are not born; they are made. Human beings always want to take advantage of nature for their personal gain and pleasure. It has been imprinted onto our minds to destroy and exploit nature and whenever we try to play god, nature strikes back with its sheer power and wrath and teaches us an important and impacting lesson in the end. By saying this, we can analyse Godzilla in the aspects of both "being a force of nature" and "being a victim of human folly". The original movie was supposed to be dark, gritty, brutal and depressing and it reflects the aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings and it actually has a hidden message regarding what the Americans have done to them by their nuclear bomb testing in the Pacific.

People were hopeless, accepted their fate and defeat against Godzilla and no one couldn't complete their last wishes before they were disintegrated and poisoned by his atomic breath. No one had a painless death. Everyone was suffered including the government. This movie clearly was not made for younger audiences and it was made only for the purpose of expressing the grief and sorrow that Japan has faced and undergone during the second world war. There weren't any left or right-wing arguments or ideologies and everyone has joined together to mourn the dead and grieved the loss of innocent civilians who have been the victims of this disaster and also grieved the soldiers who have died in vain.

But, when one door closes, another door will definitely open up to achieve success. A brilliant young scientist named Dr. Serizawa, came up with the idea of a weapon that could kill Godzilla by disintegrating the oxygen particles in his body and it was called as "The Oxygen Destroyer". Unfortunately, after the completion of creating his weapon, he burned all of the files regarding his projects since he believed that the government could misuse this weapon and could bring more harm to the environment than Nuclear weapons.

The weapon he created to save mankind accidentally led to the creation of another giant monster that almost murdered Godzilla's son in front of his eyes in the movie

“Godzilla Vs Destoroyah” which was released in 1995. This shows that human beings are not omnipotent species to invent or produce something without any kind of flaws whether its major or minor and would even lead to miserable outcomes.

Dr. Serizawa was really concerned about the government getting their hands into his weapon and recreates it and in order to avoid that, he volunteered himself to activate the weapon underwater, by going into the habitat of Godzilla. After the activation, he ultimately sacrificed himself in the process and the weapon began disintegrating Godzilla down to his bones. It was more of a melancholic moment than a moment of celebration because someone has sacrificed themselves to save mankind and their scientific works died along with them. And the government was really concerned whether there would be any other Godzilla-like creatures roaming around that was created by the folly of mankind. This movie has been portrayed as a disaster movie which shows that a disaster caused by nature will not spare anyone and will bring impact to everyone in equal manner and the impacts have been pictured throughout the movie.

There are several controversial ideologies and opinions that are revolving around this movie. Some believe that this movie was targeted against the American government and criticized them for the use of atomic bombs, promoting nuclear warfare and revealing the consequences of their horrible actions. Secondly, the director never had any plans to direct a sequel since, he only had the intention of conveying a political message through this movie but however a movie came out a year later, featuring Godzilla and a new monster with the appearance of Ankylosaurus called “Anguirus” and thus it led to the beginning of a movie genre called “Kaiju” which means “Giant Monsters” in Japanese.

Thus, this movie kick-started a franchise and the owner of Godzilla trademark “Toho pictures” began commercialism by releasing more movies and introducing more new monsters and later began merchandizing in order to gain the attention of younger audiences. Godzilla’s appearance has started to change from an intimidating creature to more of a children-friendly character.

This movie can be analysed from the perspective of a documentary since the cinematography focuses on the annihilation of Tokyo and the aftermath of Godzilla’s attack and those imageries of death and destruction resembled the nuclear bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The entire movie felt too real and impacting and made people aware of how their ignorance have led to the creation of a monster. And the human

character in this movie is what makes this movie very significant and totally different from the rest of the kaiju or monster movies out there. Here is the quote said by one of the most popular film historians David Kalat regarding Godzilla in one of his books ‘*A Critical History and Filmography of Toho's Godzilla Series*’

“He is a nightmare created out of the darkness of the human soul. He is the sacred beast of the apocalypse. As long as the arrogance of mankind exists, Godzilla will survive”

The appearance of Godzilla and his attack strategy in this movie is very scarier when you put it in perspective that this gigantic creature is supposed to be equivalent to a nuclear bomb done in slow motion.

After sixty-two years, Japan has decided to make a Godzilla by following its traditional roots instead of portraying the enormous creature as a saviour or a monster fighter. The movie was called “Shin Godzilla” (‘Godzilla Resurgence’ in English) released in 2016 and this movie has portrayed Godzilla as a force of nature and as a monster that represents the Tohoku earthquake happened in 2011.



Figure 1. Evolution of Shin Godzilla (A) Stage-1 (B) Stage-2 (C) Stage-3 and (D) Stage-4

That earthquake was considered to be one of the most powerful ever recorded in the history of Japan and it led to a Tsunami that took out the lives of 15,000 people. It also led to one of the worst nuclear accidents in history apart from Chernobyl, “*The Fukushima Daichi disaster*”. The movie was focused more on the political bureaucracy of Japan and also focuses on a government’s delayed response to a national threat.

What makes this movie different from the original Godzilla movie (1954) was this movie has portrayed Godzilla as an innocent creature suffering and crying out in pain because of the radiation it has absorbed from the radioactive waste materials dumped in the ocean and it underwent the process of evolution which usually takes over millions of years in a span of weeks and months. Secondly, Godzilla in this movie was not a prehistoric creature but a mutated frilled shark and apparently this version of Godzilla has eight stages of evolution according to the directors of this movie *Hideaki Anno* and *Shinji Higuchi*, who are well known for their popular anime series called “Neon Genesis Evangelion”.

This version of Godzilla was supposed to look like a devil destined to incarnate on this planet and a perfect epitome of the word ‘Abomination’ and also this movie was considered to be the scariest and most unsettling Kaiju movie ever made. And Every time Godzilla roars in this movie, he was roaring out of pain and makes the views and critics think that whether he wants the world to hear that he was created by our ignorance and arrogance and he wants to be killed and end the pain. He was not evil by purpose and he doesn’t even know what is going on with his body. This movie features a song “Who will know?” composed by *Shiro Sagisu* in which the lyrics actually represents Godzilla’s thoughts and feelings and it plays during the scene where Godzilla obliterates Tokyo with his most powerful atomic breath ever and in the process, Japan’s prime minister was killed.

Also, there’s a scene where Godzilla proceeds to vomit blood from its gills which was acidic and radioactive and melts through every human construction that was on its way and also poisons the surroundings. The movie has only shown its four stages of evolution and by the time it began evolving to its fifth stage, the military has decided to freeze the creature using a blood coagulant temporarily and it was uncertain whether Godzilla died in the end or not. But, the ending scene features some human-like creature emerging from its tails which brought an eerie feeling among the viewers and brought a lot of questions whether they are the children of Godzilla but according to some critics, the entire evolution of Shin Godzilla is an allegory to Darwin’s theory of Evolution.

The first stage was a fish and the second stage was an amphibian and the third stage was a land creature and at the end of fourth stage, it begins evolving into humanoid creatures and the final form is considered to be the “God form”. The final form was

considered to be the most powerful and invincible form in the whole universe and there is a scene in the movie where the daughter of the Japan's prime minister quotes a line "*Godzilla, truly a god-incarnate*". Apparently, this concept of Godzilla was inspired by a monster from the Toho Kaiju universe named "Destoroyah" which has about four stages of evolution.



Figure 2. Godzilla Atomic Breath: Screenshot from Kind of Monsters

Although this version was shown to be the most powerful Godzilla in existence, it was also the weakest Godzilla version at the same time. The primary reason was because he was created out of human interference in the ocean and in the first three stages of his evolution, he was compared to a new-born baby, confused and anxious and the human artilleries were able to penetrate his skin until he reaches the fourth form. Though his atomic breath is the most powerful one to show on-screen, it will take from weeks to months to recharge if he uses up all of his energy and in the meantime, he undergoes hibernation. This Godzilla is actually the largest version to portray on-screen, towers the 2014 version of Godzilla just by few meters but unfortunately, he's the slowest version of Godzilla which makes him vulnerable to human weapons and disqualifies him from being a monster fighter. There is a scene where the military jets bomb the creature from the above which was able to wound his dorsal plates.

This movie has been praised and admired by a lot of critics for respecting the origins and roots of the original Godzilla, portraying Godzilla as what it meant to be, a metaphor of nuclear bombs and being the force of nature. Godzilla has both cultural and political impacts towards Japan and that should explain why this movie has reframed the events of 2011 Tohoku Earthquake that led to a tsunami and a nuclear disaster. This movie has also debunked the political bureaucracies and agendas, showing how a government responds to a national threat and focused more on the authoritarian angle of Japan's politics.

The movie showcases the ugly side of some politicians that hides the truth from people in order to keep their power and career safe and intact but failing to realize that their moral decisions could actually benefit people. The Prime Minister of Japan shown in this movie can be a perfect example to the politicians we see nowadays who wants to protect their image and integrity but, failing to save people from a catastrophe. This movie takes place in an era where technology and communications have been advanced and the procedure of evacuating people from the impact zone could have been done on time but yet it has been failed due to the government's delayed response and their misinformation to the people that there is no calamity.

Their failure to act has led to tons of property damage and human casualties and still the government officials were hesitant to arrange a press conference to warn public about the giant monster because they did not want to cause a global panic and they even fail to mobilize the military on time to both evacuate the people from the impact zone as well as combat the evolving monster. The Prime Minister thought that combating the monster would lead to a collateral damage but apparently the monster was actually causing more damage than they thought and attained its third form where it can stand in two legs and learning to defend itself from heavy artilleries. Their action of delaying the attack and bringing Godzilla under control has only led to more deaths and destruction.

According to some critics, the movie has a correlation with the ongoing pandemic, because this movie has so many elements paralleled to the situation the whole world is experiencing. The way Japan responded to the attack of Godzilla clearly resembles the way world governments respond to the present 'pandemic', a delayed reaction to the disaster and they didn't want to spread fear and misinformation and, in the end, held accountable for the consequences of their actions. This movie, yet again, was targeted

against the United States for their use of nuclear weapons, dumping of nuclear waste materials into the ocean and their portrayal of Godzilla as a saviour and refining the core elements of what Godzilla was meant to be.

CONCLUSIONS

As we have reached the concluding part of the article, I have taken some time for self-realization and found out that we have underestimated this movie franchise, thinking that it was made to convey the thoughts of the Japanese critics about the dangers of nuclear bomb. But, Godzilla conveys more messages apart from that. From the conceptual metaphor analysis, I've noticed that both the original as well as the remake of Godzilla has a correlation to the crisis we are experiencing right now as well as the crisis we have experienced in the past decades such as Chernobyl, Haiti Earthquake and the Indian Ocean Tsunami. Mother nature shows its fierce side when humanity clutters with the natural equilibrium and Godzilla is considered to be the force to nature to restore the balance. Godzilla was not the provoker but instead he has been provoked and taunted to rise from the ocean and obliterate the creations of humanity. Both the original version as well as the resurgence version projects the causes and the consequences of mankind's inconsiderate actions. But, what separates the original from the remake is the director's approach in showcasing the tragic scenes as well as the way they convey their messages. Shin Godzilla was more of an authoritarian movie because they have focused more into the political side of Japan while the original focused more into the battle and the aftermath and the government did not fail to act in time. In conclusion, Godzilla teaches us an important lesson and I hope it will not be hard for the mankind to follow and make the world a better place. *Do not mess with nature*, and thus, Godzilla reflect the mindset of the Japanese and have a cultural significance.

REFERENCES

- Andy Brownson. (2002). GOJIRA! <https://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/gojira.html>
- Anne Allison. (2006). Godzilla on My Mind: Fifty Years of the King of Monsters by William Tsutsui. *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, 32(1), 170-173.
- Benny Chen-Heng Yang and Yuli Isnadi. (2017). A Cultural Perspective on American Godzilla Movies. *Conference: The 6th International Conference on Social Science and Business*, Okinawa, Japan.

- Głównia, Dawid. (2013). Socio-Political Aspects of Kaijū Eiga Genre: A Case Study of the Original Godzilla. *Silva Iaponicarum*. XXXVII.
- Ikeda Y. (2011). Godzilla and the Japanese after World War II: From a scapegoat of the Americans to a saviour of the Japanese, *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, 12(1), 43-62. doi: 10.15388/AOV.2011.0.1096.
- Jones, J. C. (2015). Japan removed: Godzilla adaptations and erasure of the politics of nuclear experience. In M. Edwards (Ed.), *The Atomic Bomb in Japanese Cinema: Critical Essays* (pp. 34 - 55). McFarland Publishers.
- Julian Ch Lee. (2019). Why Godzilla is the perfect monster for our age of environmental destruction? *The Conversation*. <https://phys.org/news/2019-05-godzilla-monster-age-environmental-destruction.html>
- Kathryn Page-Lippsmeyer. (2018). Godzilla, *Cinema and Media studies*. DOI: 10.1093/obo/9780199791286-0298
- Matt Zoller Seitz. (2021). Godzilla vs. Kong. <https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/godzilla-vs-kong-movie-review-2021>
- Nakano, H. (2008). Signs Taken for Monsters: What Made Godzilla So Angry Then? *Yokohama Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(2): 1-7.
- Tsuji, Yuichiro, Godzilla and the Japanese Constitution: A Comparison Between Italy and Japan (2017). *Italian Law Journal*, 3(2), 451-477. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2987655>