

Intertextuality and the Imagery of the Concept of Alienation in TV Chandran's Films "Danny" and "Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam" - A Semiotic Enquiry

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the imagery of the "Concept of Social Alienation" in internationally acclaimed Indian director, TV Chandran's Films "Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam" (Malayalam, 2003) and Danny (Malayalam, 2001). Semiological review of the films reveals that the director has adroitly used various form of Intertextuality to deepen the concept of alienation like constitutive Intertextuality, metatextuality, paratextuality, along with metonyms and historical allegories, to visualize the concept of political and social alienation of the protagonists, thereby highlighting the plight of marginalized societies in India.

In this study, the researchers explore post structuralism approaches to decode the texts, and its significance of generating meaning in the textual system. This complex system with multitude of signs, text is seen not as a

closed system of meanings, but a weaving of codes. Analyses also reveal that the director has attempted to record the parallel history of the historically (mainstream History) insignificant population in the country, and the usage of theatre technique "Distancing Effect" to bring effectiveness to the imagery of the "Concept of Alienation".

Introduction

The concept of alienation is deeply embedded in all the great religions and social and political theories of the civilized epoch, namely, the idea that some time in the past people lived in harmony, then there was some kind of rupture which left people feeling like foreigners in the world, and in future this alienation would be overcome and humanity would again live in harmony with itself and Nature.

The word "alienation" suggests separation and distance; it contains within the term "alien", a stranger in a society who has no connections with others, no ties, no 'liens" of any sort. This notion is of central importance in understanding Marxism, which derives alienation from the capitalist economic system. Capitalism may be able to produce goods and materialistic abundance for large numbers of people (though, ultimately, at the expense of others), but it necessarily generates alienation and all classes suffer from this, whether they recognize the fact or not.

In sociology and critical social theory, alienation refers to an individual's estrangement from traditional community and others in general. It is considered by many that the atomism of modern society means that individuals have shallower relations with other people than they would normally. It is also sometimes referred to as commodification, emphasizing the compatibility of capitalism with alienation. Many sociologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were concerned about the alienating effects of modernization.

German sociologists George Simme and Ferdinand Tönnies have written rather critical works on individualization and urbanization. Simmel's "Philosophie des Geldes" ("Philosophy of Money") describes how relationships become more and more mediated through money. Tönnies' "Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft" ("Community and Society") is about the loss of primary relationships in favour of secondary relationships. The American Sociologist C. Wright Mills conducted a major study of alienation in modern society with "White Collar", 1951, describing how modern consumption-capitalism has shaped a society where one has to sell one's personality in addition to work

In a broader philosophical context, especially in existentialism and phenomenology, alienation describes the inadequacy of human being or mind in relation to the world. The human mind, as the subject of perception, relates to the world as an object of its perception, and so is distanced from the world rather than living within it. This line of thought can be found, among others, in Søren Kierkegaard, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, André Gorz, Albert Camus and Theodor Adorno.

Researchers focus on the works of TV Chandran's depiction of social and political alienation of the protagonists in the selected movies, and study how the director uses the various forms of Intertextuality to deepen the concept of alienation, along with other semiological techniques used in the movies. The theory of Intertextuality introduced by Julia Kristeva assumes that meaning and intelligibility in discourse and Texts are based on a network of prior and concurrent discourse and texts. Every text, encompassing image, film, Web content, musical composition is a mosaic of references to other texts, genres, and discourses. Every text or set of signs presupposes a network of relationships to other signs like strings of quotations that have lost their exact references. The principle of Intertextuality is a ground or precondition for meaning beyond "texts" in the strict sense of things written, and includes units of meaning in any media. Essentially, Intertextuality describes

the foundational activity behind interpreting cultural meaning in any significant unit of a cultural object like a book, a film, a TV show, a Web genre): whatever meaning we discover or posit can only occur through a network of prior "texts" that provide the context of possible meanings and our recognition of meaning at all.

In this study, the researchers include post structuralism approaches to decode the texts, and its significance of generating meaning in the textual system. Post structuralism is the critical theory and philosophical movement that denies the validity of the structuralism movement and questions universal claims of objective knowledge. In post structuralism, culture is considered inseparable from meaning. In post structuralism; the text is seen not as a closed system of meanings, but a weaving of codes. A major determinant of meanings is Intertextuality. The author's authority is dismissed, and the reader is an active producer of meanings.

T V Chandran and his films ' Danny' and 'Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam'

T V Chandran is an internationally acclaimed Indian Film Director. He is a director with Marxist inclinations, and most of his films have strong undercurrent of history, politics and feminism. His film Alicinte Anveshanangal (Search of Alice) was the official Indian entry at Locarno. Since then he has won several major national and state awards for most of his works, and his films have been screened at major international festivals.

T.V. Chandran's Film Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam (Lesson one: a long Wail) focuses on the social alienation of the protagonist Shahina, who represents a marginalized Muslim community encompassing illiterates and religious minorities in India. The film bagged the gold medal for the best film in the Dhaka International Film Festival. Whereas, his Film "Danny" (2001) focuses on the social and political alienation of the protagonist Danny Thompson, who represents a marginalized community encompassing illiterates and religious minorities in India. The director got the inspiration for

this film from "The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas" by the Brazilian Novelist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis.

Rabindranath Tagore's 'Prayer' as Intertextuality to depict denied freedom in ' Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam'

The semiotic notion of Intertextuality introduced by Julia Kristeva is associated primarily with poststructuralist theorists. Kristeva referred to texts in terms of two axes: a horizontal axis connecting the author and reader of a text, and a vertical axis, which connects the text to other texts. Uniting these two axes are shared codes: every text and every reading depends on prior codes. According to her 'every text is from the outset under the jurisdiction of other discourses which impose a universe on it'. In the film, director uses the poem "prayer" to link the real meaning of freedom. The poem written by Tagore is a plea, not for the political independence that was being sought early this century in India when it was written, but for freedom from parochialness and dogma prevailing in our society. The protagonist's poetical recitation is repeated in the cinema indicating three turning points in the development of the story as well as in the character of Shahina. This poetical interlude reminds the viewer about the real meaning of freedom in societal context, contradicting with what is prevailing.

Furthermore, movie visualizes the stark contradiction of school lessons with protagonist's real life, as she reads lesson's like "Man is a Social Animal, "a child learns the first lessons of democracy at home, you agree or not", hymns from the poem" daffodils" and also the teacher discusses renowned Malayalam writer Mohammed Basheer's short story "Bhoomiyude Avakashikal" (Owners of the Earth) in the class, which speaks about the equal rights of animals and men over the earth in a situation where even basic human rights are deprived.

T.V. Chandran allows the work of Rabindranath Tagore and others like Basheer, through borrowings, to make an impress upon his film. Yet he re-arranges these borrowings to simultaneously put his own

stamp on them and by extension of their sources. In this way, Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam becomes the centre of a complex web of interrelationships. Ultimately, the most important function of the film's allusions is to provide cues by which its solipsistic narrative becomes "readable". At the same time, ironically, they work as a commentary on the depth of 'concept of social alienation'. The poetic interlude connotes at a suggestive level that how long it will take this community to be liberated from poverty and injustice.

"School" as a metonym that stands for the educated and literate world

In post structuralism, the text is seen not as a closed system of meanings, but a weaving of codes. In the movie, 'Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam', the school acquires dimensions of a character as Shahina life revolves around it. The director uses School and the associated elements like books, lessons and teachers as metonyms which stand for the educated and literate world. Metonymy is, broadly defined, a trope in which one entity is used to stand for another associated entity. It involves the substitution of one term for another, and, the substitution is based on contiguity. For the protagonist, school is something personified, and seeks solace in all sorts of discomforts whether it is in the form of new books or her discussion with classmates about various subjects or school as such. For example, when the family members fix her marriage without her concern, she escapes into the school for protection. When she is hospitalized, her only concern is to continue the interrupted school examination. Furthermore, she is not stressed at the time of divorce, instead is thrilled because she considers it as an option to continue her studies. Ironically the school becomes the arena for bride fixing, and remains a mute witness to the tragic drama enacted around it. Through these metonyms, the director poignantly visualizes the harsh reality where the intelligentsias are mute spectators to these social evils. In the beginning of the film, we can see Kasim (school teacher) tries to oppose the views of the religious orthodoxy and male chauvinism prevailing in the community. He is shown helpless towards the end

of the movie, exposing the over dominance of the religious orthodoxy over the educated and literate world.

Repetitive and networked texts to bring forth the perpetual nature of Social Alienation

The theory of Intertextuality introduced by Julia Kristeva assumes that meaning and intelligibility in discourse and texts are based on a network of prior and concurrent texts. Every text is a mosaic of references to other texts, genres, and discourses. In Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam, the movie starts with a lone purdha-clad woman (Razia, Shahina's Friend) clutching her baby alighting a bus from Mysore and move towards her natal home, with the threat of divorce at her back. At close of the story, we see Shahina alight from a bus and move towards her native shore, carrying an unborn child in her womb with the suggestion that this is an ongoing story in this part of the world.

The director also visualizes the world of poor Muslim women in the rural ambience by depicting the plight of unending purdha-clad women clutching wailing babies many a times in the movie, and in the final sequence, the director adroitly added Shahina and her baby to the unending human chain of women misery. Their world, from grandmothers to granddaughters, wives of all generation under one roof symbolizes the perpetual nature of the problem.

The usage of Historical allegory to extend the meaning of alienation

The most interesting instances of allegory are those in which the surface of the text either gives unsatisfactory answers to readers' interrogations or remains overly enigmatic, thus including a sense of recognition of the opacity of language and mandating the search for the concealed meaning. Apart from mythical narratives, we are all familiar with fragmentary utterances, apparently interrupted messages, suggestive juxtapositions of images that would seem enigmatic or "completely illogical" If our reading was restricted to what is literally there on the surface. The prestige of allegorical

exegesis derives from its claim of solving a textual problem, of a illuminating the crucial aspects of the text that are at the root of enigmas.¹

In a classroom scene, the teacher asks stressed and mentally imbalanced Shahina, the meaning of the word "Placidly". The teacher repeats the word many a times, but she is unable to answer the question. This is a fragmentary utterance and has no connection with the main narration. But as a historical allegory, the word "Placidly" which has a dictionary meaning "calmness" ² is used by the director to expose the amount of ignorance and suppression in a satirical way by darting the question to a representative of the oppressed community who is an embodiment of calmness and ignorance.

'Metatextuality' or 'Relay' to offer the interpreter the scope for deconstructing the text connected with the socio- political alienation of the protagonist in 'Danny'

Linguist Norman Fairclough defines 'constitutive Intertextuality, which signifies the interrelationship of discursive features in a text, such as structure, form, or genre. In the movie ' Danny', the director deploys the structure of "The Posthumous Memoirs of Bras Cubas" by the Brazilian Novelist Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (Subtitled as the Epitaph of a Small Winner, Published in 1881), the novel has a unique style of short, erratic chapters shifting in tone and style. Instead of the clear and logical construction of a normal nineteenth-century realist novel, the novel makes use of surreal devices of metaphor and playful narrative construction. The novel is narrated by the dead protagonist Brás Cubas, who tells his own life story from beyond the grave, noting his mistakes and failed romances. The fact of being already deceased allows Brás Cubas to sharply criticize the Brazilian society and reflect on his own disillusionment, with no sign of remorse or fear of retaliation. Through the structure of the novel, director uses discursive features to cover the life of the protagonist Danny Thompson from one

period to another in an unmethodical way. Furthermore, the director brings in a type of Intertextuality called metatextuality, which is explicit or implicit critical commentary of one text on another text to support the story of the protagonist.

The film 'Danny' is a biography of an unknown person Danny Thompson, who is also a mute witness to the ongoing political and social transformation in India, especially Kerala State from 1940's; Danny also represents thousands of people who are not able to participate in the social movements chiefly because of their familial and social problems. The film captures the many moments of desolation and dejection of the protagonist, Daniel Thomson or Danny from a youth to a septuagenarian. There are major incidents happening in Danny's life too, when the world is really shook by turning incidents. But those happen in Danny's life go unnoticed by anyone, even Danny himself. The director, T.V. Chandran effectively uses a voice over (commentary) of historical parallelism to highlight the insignificant history of the marginalized whose history is not recorded in any so called "history".

In the film "Danny", parallels go like this. Danny is born on the day when Quit India movement started. Danny's father dies on the Independence Day. Danny's first wife leaves him when the first Communist government is dissolved. Danny gets married with Clara, when emergency is declared. In 1964 as the Communist party sees a split and President's rule is imposed in the State, Danny starts taking his English classes and moving with the whims of Margaret as the latter tightens her grip over him. When Mrs. Gandhi was assassinated in the year 1984, there is a molestation attempt on Margaret by a fellow professor. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and demolition of Babri Masjid comes the tyranny of Anna (Danny's Daughter in Law) on Danny. Danny is taken by force into a sanatorium for senile people amidst the death of the first communist chief minister of Kerala, and crowning of the BJP Government in Delhi.

The movie draws constant parallels between social history and Danny's life, and T.V. Chandran tries to visualize the political and social alienation of the marginalized in the Indian society by interpreting history from their point of view.

Roland Barthes used the term *relay* to describe text/image relationships which were 'complementary'. This sort of Intertextuality should lead one to examine the functions of those images and spoken text used in close association within a text not only in terms of their respective codes, but in terms of their overall rhetorical orchestration. These codes involved in such textual systems clearly cannot be considered in isolation, where as their interplay reveals incoherence, ambiguities, contradictions and omissions which may offer the interpreter scope for deconstructing the text.

Paratextuality to convey Distancing Effect and the "Concept of Alienation "in Danny

T.V. Chandran makes use of the Distance effect or alienation technique introduced by Brecht as paratextuality in drama to take emotion out of the production and persuade the audience to distance themselves from the make believe. Paratextuality is the relation between a text and its 'paratext' - that which surrounds the main body of the text - such as titles, headings, prefaces, epigraphs, dedications, acknowledgements, footnotes, illustrations, dust jackets, etc.;

"The distancing effect is achieved by the way the "artist never acts as if there were a [fourth wall](#) besides the three surrounding him [...] The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place." ³The use of direct audience-address is one way of disrupting stage illusion and generating the distancing effect. In performance the performer "observes himself"; his or her object "to appear strange and even surprising to the audience. He achieves this by looking strangely at himself and his work."⁷

In the film "Danny, the director invites his film audience to identify with the issues faced by the characters and not the characters themselves. Mammooty, the actor enacting Danny Thompson, in the beginning appears to introduce him as Mammooty himself and later on in the sequence depicting Danny's first love affair, (two scenes in a single shot) we see the same alienation. This encourages the actor to disassociate himself from their roles; all of this would make the political truth easier to comprehend. Apart from this, the film has got a non linear narrative style with voice over commentaries explaining how the life of Danny Thompson is related with mainstream history, to disrupt the narrative flow in the cinema.

This alienation technique brought in through Paratextuality prevents the audience from losing itself passively and completely in the character created by the actor, and which consequently leads the audience to be a consciously critical observer."⁴The alienation effect serves a didactic function insofar as it teaches the viewer not to take the style and content for granted, since the medium itself is highly constructed and contingent upon many cultural and economic conditions.

Conclusion

Semiological review of the film " Danny " and "Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam" directed by T.V. Chandran reveals that the director adeptly used Intertextuality to visualize the concept of political and social alienation of the protagonists, thereby highlighting the plight of marginalized societies in India. In the movie " Danny", TV Chandran brings in Constitutive Intertextuality, Paratextuality and metatextuality to visualize the subaltern history of a marginalized individual in the form of historical parallelism to highlight the insignificant history of the marginalized whose history is not recorded in any so called "history".

Muslim women are among the poorest, educationally disenfranchised, economically vulnerable, politically marginalized group in the country. Their status in India is attributable to certain

intrinsic, immutable "Islamic" features and because of their social status from Muslim laws. T.V. Chandran through this cinematic intervention highlights the alienation faced by these women in a poignant manner. Semiological review of the film "Padam Onnu Oru Vilapam" directed by T.V. Chandran tries to deepen the meaning of the visuals by using approaches like intertextuality, repetitive and networked texts, and historical allegories. This dismal status of Muslim women is a crucial issue needing urgent action. According to latest studies on Muslim minority women, an improvement in literacy rates would directly influence their socio-economic and political status as citizens of India, as the literacy rate among Muslim women (50.1 per cent) is lower than the rate among other women in India, including Hindus (53.2 per cent) and Christians (76.2 per cent).⁵ Unfortunately in India, they are not even given a chance to complete schooling, and so called educated and social academicians are mute spectator to this social evil. T.V. Chandran visualize this cruel reality by using "School", and its associated elements as a metonym, which stands for the educated and literate who are unsuccessful in bringing a social revelation in the community.

TV Chandran's intuitive sense of Intertextuality act as a ground or condition for meaning in all forms of text (verbal, visual, sound, and all combinations), considering dependency or presupposition in meaning. The text connected with series of signs, presupposes a set of prior instances of the signs to help the reader to interpret the meaning. Furthermore, function as a learned archive or encyclopedia of references, genres, background knowledge, and symbolic meaning of socio-political alienation in what we are viewing, reading, and interpreting. The generative meaning-making process that the term "Intertextuality" attempts to describe is as foundational to culture as the grammar of a language and the many uses of connected statements in all discourses.

Notes

1. Ismail Xavier; Historical Allegory, A Companion to Film Theory

² The Concise Oxford Dictionary

³ Brecht, Bertolt "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", page 91. Hill and Wang, 1964

⁴. Brecht, Bertolt "Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting", page 92. Hill and Wang, 1964.

⁵.Report of the Pew Research Centre's Forum on Religion and Public Life (a non-partisan US-based research group)

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