



December 1: Illustrating Documentary Description of P Sheshadri's Film

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Abstract

A Sign is the primary non-verbal visual language to communicate and communicating through a sequence of sign forms a vital structure adopted to display the theme in films. The study attempts to analyse the thematic narration of the film December 1, drawing upon the social reality of a political play ruining an underprivileged family. The film represents components of expression through verbal and non-verbal communication exhibited through shots portraying the theme. The study investigates to emulate the thematic illustration of shots and the expressions of artists which transcends the narration revealing the social stigma of a family. The study comprehends to analyse the documentary (textual) description (narrative) approach that are adapted by the filmmaker, in an attempt to represent the social issue of society, and as perceived by the viewer. The study concludes by depicting the reality of characters and society with technical adaptations in the editing of a film.

Keywords: Film analysis; Kannada film; Textual analysis; Visual communication

Introduction

The centenarian Indian film industry started in 1913 AD is 108 years old and for many across the globe, it means Bollywood. However, in reality, over eighty percent revenue of Indian cinema is contributed by regional language Indian films. India, a land comprising various languages and dialects amongst the regions, the western and northern portions are majorly dominated by Hindi, while the eastern region is ruled by Bengali though Hindi is also welcome. The diverse of language is evident among the four southern states comprising of four different languages namely, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu. Amongst them, Kannada cinema seems to have not received adequate attention

from academic circle and critics from the scholars pursuing media studies.

The first film Kannada film industry (presently popular as Sandalwood), produced was film Bhakta Kabir, a play enacted by veteran theatre artist Gubbi Veeranna who tried to film it, in 1924. Ten years later in 1934 Sati Sulochana made its first release and hence is considered as the first film of the language, followed by Bhakta Dhruva. The industry made remarkable dominance among other languages during the 1970's and later till now, producing over 150 films annually. While majority of films are dominated by mass driven commercial subjects, a few off-beat films classified as art-cinemas gets global recognition to the industry, illustrating the language and its dialect, culture, history and perspectives of the society. Among the cult and off beat Indian film makers, Girish Kasaravalli, MS Sathyu, P H Vishwanath, P Sheshadri, and T S Nagabharana stand out to be recognised in representing the nativity and locale of Karnataka through their films on global platform.

The Kannada Film Industry popularly known as Sandalwood presently produces over 150 films annually, competing with that of other neighbouring languages, however, seems to fall behind with its overall revenue. Nevertheless, the penetration of digital service providers on Over the Top (OTT) platforms seems to provide solution to fill the revenue gap by exhibiting new age films along with those sustain in the theatres.

Review of Literature

The signs and symbols relating to gestures, images, objects and anything what can be seen and perceived through non-verbal communication by any person can be related to semiotic. It is the study of sign process that communicates a meaning. The early semiotics of a film was acknowledged by Ricciotto Canudo, an Italian writer who identified the "language-like character of cinema" and Louis Delluc, a French writer who wrote the ability of film to transcend national language"; both working during the 1920's. Vachel Lindsay referred it as "hieroglyphic language". It

was between 1920's to 1940's, a Hungarian film theorist Bela Balazs wrote about the nature of film. It was during the same time, Russian writer and critic Boris Eichenbaum outlined the principles of syntagmatic construction of films. According to Boris, the syntagmatic analysis deals with the sequence and structure as opposed to the paradigmatic emphasis of paradigmatic analysis and is a particular of language which is figurative, with the treatment of filmic syntax, linkage of shots in phrases and sentences. However, Yury Tynyano, another Russian writer and literary critic had different approach to interpret the signs of film. Yury, approached the cinema as presentation of semantic signs produced by cinematic procedures visible to the world, while Boris viewed the film in relation to the inner speech and image translations of language.

The concept of film as a language was intensely explored during 1960's, when structuralist thinkers started criticizing structuralism and semiotics became popular in academia [1]. However, works of Umberto Eco-Italian novelist and semiotician, Pier Paolo Pasolini-Italian director cum writer and Roland Barthes-French literary theorist and many others were discovered, Christian Metz-a French film theorist became popular.

Metz combined the shots of the film to give a linguistic structural meaning. A film generally communicates with denotative and connotative structures. Denotative is what the audiences perceive through visuals and sound, which they need not try to identify anything other than what they see and hear. While, the same visual and sound becomes connotative by the way the scene is shot which evokes the feelings of the audience. This involves the emotional overtones, objective interpretation, social values and ideological assumptions. Metz attempts to derive that the study of connotation brings the viewer closer to the notion of the cinema as an art and within which the paradigmatic connotation exist. For example, a low angle shot of a flower conveys the dominance or overpowering when unconsciously compared it with an overhead shot, while syntagmatic connotation would compare the flower shot with actual shots that follow the low angle shot. The meaning of this shot is compared to other shots we actually see.

Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis work, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics: Structuralism, Post-structuralism, and Beyond* in 1992, highlighted film semiotics as a new tool in art criticism. The book provided an overview of previous thinkers and defined terms critical to semiotic film theory, with a didactic introduction to the vocabulary and interventions in film theory as five parts namely, Origins of semiotics, Cine-semiology, Film narratology, Psychoanalysis and realism to inter-textuality.

A film as a whole is narrative, where the story is presented in the form of visual narration. Though narrative begins with the history of mankind, and existed in unlimited forms at all times, in all corners of earth and in all societies. Roland Barthes mentions that a film uses a combination of one or more methods likely, oral or written language, static or moving visuals, gestures, or through

an organised mix of all these to create a narrative. However, voice-over format is most popular and contributes significantly in narrating a story accompanied with powerful shots.

The key of study in Semiotics relates to the text (literature, film, or even a piece of music) [2]. The meanings in films are constructed through signs, which has two parts, signifier-which means what we see and perceive like the sound, visuals; and signified which is the reaction or psychological feeling based out of the signifier. Semiotics does not confine to study the sign but what is conveyed in film. A point of view movement of the camera into a room and to the top/high angle of a person sleeping on the bed, signifies that some person/character who is out of the frame comes to the room and looks at the person. A small tilt of the camera when looking at the person, signifies that the character is looking at the person from head to toe. The combination of all these shots shall give a perception (signifying) of suspense scene, and the background sound adds value to quantify the significance of the scene. Hence, contemporary semioticians study the sign as part of the semiotic medium, movement along with the text and literature form. Though scholars and researchers across the globe have defined semiotics, Abubakar et al, [3] mentions Taylor and Willis who stated that, "semiotics or the science of signs is primarily the study of how signs communicate, it is also the study of rules which regulate the operation of each system of sign". As Rose argued, semiology offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning while Hill and Church argued that, the overall consequences of semiotics attention to cinema were to weaken concern with the issue of realism and strengthen attention to the cinema as a particular kind of textuality. On the other sense, Joe Montenegro Bonilla [4] quotes René Wellek mentioning that the arts are in constant interrelationship, as all are human activities. The particular case of literature and cinema as two related types of creative production, which have come to be intricately related, reveals much of the complexity of comparative studies in the field of the arts. Hence, every scholar has defined and explained semiotics of the film to the best of their understanding and perceiving capability.

Analysing a film as a piece of creative art are based on the flow of events [5], which are Syntagmatic-the structure of the film, Diachronic/Diatomic-the shots related only by theme, Synchronic/Diatomic scenes-the different places at the same time. The study follows the frame work of the earlier scholars to review thematically including the textual and narrative approach in analysing the film December 1.

Methodology

Film analysts adopt one or more among the various methodologies of analysing a film. The recognised various types of approaches are a) text-based film analysis i.e., structural approach which describes how the film is structured, b) topic-based analysis also known as narrative approach elaborating on the style of narrative, c) picture and sound approach deals with iconic analysis i.e., analysing the symbols and icons represented, d) psychoanalytical

approach which is with the psychological development of character and their actions and (5) historical approach, which depicts to the historical data and evidences. Using either of the approaches, researchers also refer to the audience perceptions and meanings as described by David Bordwell's 2x (excellent) chapters in 'Evolution, Literature, Film: A Reader in 2010.

Besides, researchers narrow down to the angle of what exactly they want to analyse, viz., the meaning, message, setting, time and space, characters, film contents-like facts, genre, plot and structure, conflict, characterisation, narrator point of view, imagery, theme, cinematic effects-sound track, use of cameras, lighting, editing and conclusion correlating with semiotic and theme selected for visual narration [6].

Researchers also concentrate on specifically filmic features of the movies, such as mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing and sound strategies, as well as those larger organizational forms, such as narrative and non-narrative structures and movie genres as the responses to the movies always extend beyond the film frame, which will additionally leads to "close readings" of the complex business of film distribution, promotion, and exhibition to show how the less visible machinery of the movie business also shapes our understanding and enjoyment of particular films [7].

Objects from everyday life acquire several functions in films: they can be solely used as scene objects or to support a particular film style. Other objects are specially chosen to translate a character's interior state of mind or the filmmaker's aesthetical or ethical commitment to narrative concepts [8].

The methodology adopted in this study are textual, narrative and iconic approach which largely is to analyse the structure, narration and the use of camera in narrating the story visually based of social theme.

Themes in Indian Films

Film is a reflection of society which sometimes catches up and sometimes lead the society [9]. The change in cinema and its presentation are due to the expectations of the audience who currently are not restricted to one language but to the world cinemas is though observed at large, majority of the Indian films are narrated with the past and present social issues that are presented with different thoughts of incidents. While few directors in India have even attempted to showcase technology dependent lifestyles of the future, yet the story line is directly narrated keeping the society and social issues closely with human emotions, unlike the Hollywood style of films.

Globally, films are rated with their revenue earnings against its total investment. Indian films however are not different with this global business phenomenon, the depth of real issues gets diluted amongst the grandeur visuals comprising the sets, making styles, star casts, songs, fights, comedy, romantic, emotional narrations in a commercial film which holds the present audience. Nevertheless, Indian film makers in all languages including those Kannada directors mentioned earlier have deserved the applause

for making sensible films focussing on the social issue in depth and narrating with real story showcasing the culture, life style, and dialect which are unlike the high revenue generating commercial films. Such films are however categorised as Art films generally produced to showcase for awards and recognitions amongst the film festivals organised both at domestic and global forums.

The theme of art films largely focusses on the issues reflecting directly on a society comprising different communities with diverse cultures, and practices of various customs and traditions amongst numerous castes, sub-castes, sect and sub sects. The narration of social themes revolves around the central character and their nativity. However, narrating on a social issue is basically with its presentation styles. A subject which is apt for an art film can be modified and finetuned to a commercial presentation and vice-versa, however it can be observed that the bifurcation of art film and commercial films are with the presenting styles. On the same context, film researchers and scholars by and large attempt to analyse art films which seem more connected thematically and semiotically, observing the film making grammars which forms the text, rather selecting a mass appealing commercial film. However, the new generation film aspirants and scholars tend to analyse the use of technology in films that are appraised. Observing various Indian films of different languages from the past to the present, it can be noticed that the theme of any Indian film represents the sociality of a society, incorporating various genres to entertain the audience in narrating the story.

December 1

Directed by renowned National award-winning director P. Sheshadri in 2014, December 1 won National awards for Best Film and Best Screenplay. The film gained excellent critic reviews upon theatrical release for the script, exhibiting reality of society and emotions of blameless women creating tension, maintaining suspense, truthfully being sarcastic, natural humour and the repercussions of a political campaign, defaming the family. However, it was not wrong from the political angle, the director portrays the perspective of the conservative society when the truth is revealed. The director attempts to narrate the story by developments of shots semiotically represented to appreciate the film.

The film depicts the real paradox lifestyle situation of people in Basapura, a village in Bijapur district in the Northern region of Karnataka state, India. The protagonist Devakka, lives with her family of her husband, and two children and her mother-in-law. She makes her living selling jowar roti's (a dish prepared from corn flour) to the hotels at the town five miles away, while her husband works in a flour mill owned by the head of the village, after he gets physically handicapped in a road accident. The roti's are though popular among the region, her earnings and living depends on uncontrolled external forces; however, with great difficulty, the couple make their ends meet and dreams to educate their children empowering them to make their living better in future. The deprived social status gives no option to her to voice out, yet she expresses her dreams and aspirations with her little daughter whom she carries along on her way to deliver

orders. A hotelier who often transacted purposely denies buying, reasoning quality issues and also refuses to pay for his previous orders and threatens to return them to her. With a helpless gesture, she moves on to her next customer. On her way back, she looks at the fancy and attractive footwear displayed on the store's showcase and upon enquiring the price, she compromises to a Hawaii slipper bought to her son with the one fifth of her days earning. With all her poor living and strains of earning, Devakka's smile never gets distressed her happiness.

The first twist in the tale ensues when her husband is abruptly taken by the officials of the District Collector's office, while he was at the flour mill. The DC immediately makes all arrangements to visit their house immediately and reveals the intension of the State's Chief Minister to stay over at their home on the previous night to December 1st and assures that it would be confidential. The news spreads among the villagers by word of mouth and gains attention among the people in town. However, none except few officials knew the reason, why the Chief Minister chose Devakka's house. People around change their viewpoint on the couple. The village chief calls them and gives some money to upgrade their wardrobe, the hotelier who had denied buying roti's, invites her to the hotel for purchase, while the school teacher requests to get their personal favours, a few villagers influence her to get civic amenities for the village and a few others poison her mind.

The officials arrive to Devakka's house and execute the renovation required for the chief minister's stay. They paint the house, install fans, refrigerator, television, sofa-sets and even construct a wash room with western commode while the village roads get asphalted. The old lady at home gets fascinated with the television installed and wishes to watch the crime news while, a local press reporter by then attempts to interview Devakka and returns in futile. The Chief Minister who arrives by the chauffer is received by the village chief, District collector and others. Devakka traditionally welcomes the escorted Chief Minister and serves the dinner with her famous Jowar Roti's. The couple joins the Minister's dinner upon compelling to pose to the press cameras. The Chief Minister gets irritated at the cry of their young daughter, and officials requests Devakka to take her child outside. The local news reporter who is behind the reason, bribes the peon of the District Collector and gets the information on Chief Minister's arrival to Devakka's house.

The news gets printed in bold headlines on the next day's daily edition, which shook everyone who is connected to Devakka-the village, neighbours, hoteliers and customers who were for her roti's at the town. However, the illiterate and innocence couple get no clue on what is happening around them, till the Chief Minister address's the press, who were waiting since the previous day. The minister makes his statement that the idea of staying over at Devakka's house was demonstrated by himself to spread the message that there is no harm to be around or with HIV infected people on the occasion of World AIDS Day.

As the Chief Minister leaves the village thanking Devakka and the villagers, all the rented gadgets and furniture are also taken out from their home and leaves the television as a memorable gesture. The couple who lived happily till the previous day, lose their respect and happiness when perspective of everyone changes again, with their conservative mindset of keeping the HIV infected couple at bay. Their dreams of educating their children get shattered and both of them lose their jobs. People hesitate to get their grains floured at the mill and none buys roti's from Devakka. While the family is at distressed, the news channels on television takes pride to publish the Chief Minister's stay with repeated mentioning of HIV infected couple.

Devakka starts preparing roti's and reaches the office of the District Collector along with her husband and barges in to his chamber, disturbing the DC's meeting. She spills the basket of hundred roti's on his table, saying "tell the Chief Minister to eat all these roti's" and walks back venting out her anger. The film ends with this shot leaving powerful thought in the mind of viewers, discussed in the semiotic analysis.

Analysis

Textual: The structure of December 1

The film is structured with the ironical situation of an under developed village Basapura in Bijapur in the northern region of Karnataka, establishing the regions nature of black soil, undeveloped infrastructure and roads and civic facilities. The film reveals with the song showing the nativity of the region and the director has made a good choice of establishing the location as an untold character which is represented visually.

Narrative: Shots depicting the theme

The close shot of people carrying water in pots describe the absence of water supply at homes and juxtaposing a mid-shot of the bird depicts the naturalistic scene of dry region and underdevelopment of the village. The establishment shot of a small home and extreme close-up shot of burning firewood tilting up to Devakka-the protagonist cooking the roti's depicts the economic status of the family, while the tapping sound complementing to the close shot of fire wood and to the preparation of Jowar roti's describes the inexistence of no gas connection to that of the urban living. The shot is cut to an overlapping dialogue and following with the shot of the old lady who informs the arrival of Jogawwa's (traditional people who rely on people offering). This scene and the composition of shots depicts her family environment, social strata, regional culture and establishes Devakka's nature of being composed in handling her family affairs along with her job of preparing roti's.

The next close shot proceeds to sound of the stick banged to the floor, and the limping man who asks for food. Devakka's expression reveals her commitment to her husband which has a disagreement for him and signals her son to serve him with roti's,

while her husband smashes the onion to have with the served roti's depicts their poverty, that is not affordable to the side dishes to consume roti's. The mid-shot of Devakka's son hugging her after she assures him to get a slipper reveals the happiness of the child which underlyingly reveals him saying her not to forget by showing his love. The wide shot of the village, while Devakka walks carrying her daughter and roti's, depicts the nature and the scenic beauty of very few trees grown between the fields in the hottest region of the state. The shot of black soil in the foreground while Devakka is enthusiastically walking on the fields also describes her life and lifestyle, without any description.

The mid shot of people waiting in the flour mill focussing on their jowar grains, describes the demand and monopoly of the flour mill in that village. The various shots constructing the behaviour of people showing concern and creating the hype, Devakka and Mahadevappa dreams of their ambitious life after the minister's visit, symbolically by keeping the oil burn light in the background.

The next important phase is when the DC and the head of the village gives money to Devakka for getting some good dress for the minister's arrival. Devakka buys a pair of black shoes for her son's school, the enjoyment of the boy wearing the shoes for the first time are shown by actions and expressions in the long and close-up shot. The boy's joyous moments and excitement are captured when the interiors of the house get renovated with television, refrigerator, western commode and the close-up shot of electric bulb and his innocence is captured by one mid shot when he secures his new shoes by hiding in the uninstalled commode. The news about the couple would have come on papers and the long shot combined with the over the shoulder shot of the police who was on the minister's security denies sipping the tea prepared by Devakka in doubt reveals that the disease the couple have is contagious. This shot has two characters with contrast expressions, the police doubts while illiterate Mahadevappa has no clue on the news that was in the paper and spread among the villagers. The shot of minister addressing the press reveals the entire idea and the story gets the twist at the pre-climax stage. The minister's address to the television media makes the news produced across the state and Devakka and Mahadevappa gets fame as HIV infected couple and all their ambitious dreams which they thought gets shattered. While the minister leaves the village, the boy hears to the sound and looks at the helicopter flying like a bird which cannot be reached or touched and juxtapose the shadow shot of the helicopter on the ground from a high angle, conveying the position of the family which is left in isolated shadow. The villagers, the head, the hoteliers, teacher everyone disowns the couple and detach themselves. The old lady who had no clue till then gets to know the reason and the family are in a state of anger and disheartened, while the boy does not understand but enjoys watching the television, which exuberates showing the ministers visit to their house. The old lady who was exited to watch the television, throws her walking stick to the television to disconnect is a shot which represents the innocence, anger, sadness and frustration among four different people.

The next shot is complemented with the sound of tapping the roti's, which was seen in the beginning of the film but the feelings and expression of Devakka is changed from happy to anger, depicted by the close-up shot of burning firewood. Devakka prepares hundred roti's and the shot is followed to her brisk walk carrying the roti's. The audience expect Devakka is going to sell her roti's, but the final climax shot could never be expected that Devakka barges in to the DC office amidst the meeting and throws the roti's on his table depicting the helplessness in one aspect, venting out her anger on breach of trust on the other. The expression of Devakka and briskly moving out leaves lot of question on the system and playfulness for publicity in the viewers mind.

Textual and narrative techniques

The mid-close shot of a person cutting the firewood, continuing to the long shot of Jogawwa's walking and singing to the next shot of Devakka walking on the fields depicts three activity happening at the same time by juxtaposing the shots. The shot of two people coming to the village on the motorbike, while Devakka is out to sell and Mahadevappa is busy in the flour mill depicts three activity happening at the same time. The shots of people eagerly waiting for the minister's arrival both at the outskirts of the village and on the small lane leading to Devakka's house shows the hope of people waiting to see their leader and the irritation of the minister to interact with his people depicts the actual behaviour of politicians. A lot more shots of Devakka and her husband, villagers, journalists waiting to interact while the minister is discussing on his schedule inside her house, the news hunger journalist bribing the corrupt peon to get information, and finally the Chief Minister's address to media who propagate and sensationalise the news more than required; every shot depicts a deeper meaning of devastated hope of the villagers, the attitude of politicians, crooked yellow journalism and insensitive role of media.

Dialogue depicting the social theme: The dialogue of the mother-in-law telling her grandson describes that becoming Jogappa is not something one wishes to be Devakka asking her husband about the wages unpaid to furnish school uniform, slate, chalk and shoes for their son depicts that the learners at school still rely on the chalk and slate and underlyingly shows the state of education system in the remote rural areas. Mahadevappa's dialogue "Olle yavarig kaal illa antaara"; This dialogue sounds simple, but has greater dual meaning, that there is no good time for good people, also means that good people do not have legs, as Kaal refers to time and the leg in northern dialect of northern Kannada language.

Devakka's son requests his mother to get slipper for him from the town for which she assures him only if she earns at the town, shows the reality of their poor living standards. Devakka who dreams ambitious good life, hears her husband telling her that this house could be sold at higher price and becomes an iconic home when adverted that the state's Chief

Minister stayed at this house, describes the sentimental value of their home and proud feelings. The dialogue of Devakka's sister who was restricted from entering the house at the time of ministers arrival breaks up the relationship and the last dialogue of Devakka to the DC "hoga nimma mantri ga kottu tinnak helri" meaning "go give these roti's to minister and tell him to eat" shows her helplessness to voice out and depicting that they have ruined their life.

Conclusion

The film narrative is symmetrical in terms of story, characters, dialogues, expressions, location, characterisation, behaviour and reality. The poor lifestyle of villagers in the undeveloped village in the Northern region of Karnataka is represented visually with limited or necessary dialogues and other means of semiotic. The film appreciates the location as a character along with the artists, irrespective of the number of times they appear. The director captures the reality of living, changes in the behaviours and attitude, the political play and its effect on the peacefully living family. The narration and the dialect are apt and there are no unnecessary picturization in the film. The semiotic representation could be found in each of the shot which speaks more than what could be told in dialogue. The narration of the film describes how a political play and media dissemination in the name of social justice and awareness deludes the living of a poor family. The technique in most of the places espoused during the editing is "J Cut", bringing in the voice or sound related to the next following shot, which is overlapped on the previous shot.

The film narrative ends dropping questions in mind as what would be the life of Devakka there after? How the bureaucrats and politicians use the poor for their publicity and doing of social goodness? Why did not the minister choose the rich who had the HIV? December 1 is a film acclaimed with sensitive story portraying innocence, humour, hypocrisy, and orchestration of political and social reality.

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