

BHUVAN SHOME – AN ANALYSIS WITH REFERENCE TO 5 CODES OF ROLAND BARTHES

Kumar Anketa

Abstract--- *Bhuvan Shome is a movie, directed by the renowned Indian Film director Mrinal Sen that revolves around a male character's individual transformation by some interesting turn of events. The plot of the is story and its perception by the viewer with leading charecter as a case is taken in the paper. It is an attempt to relook into the hidden meaning in this offbeat Hindi movie following Barthes' theoretical framework of coding. Roland Barthes have identified five codes to unfold and understand the text in a scene as it signifies. Following content-based analysis, few selected shots and dialogues identified to have multiple meanings are analysed. Bhuvan Shome, the character circumstantially switches off his costumes from Western to rural Indian attire. These costumes symbolically undermine his innocence and makes him an epitome of imperfection. His transformed dual persona from modern (period) versus traditionalism are thematic polarities in the story. Some references including western men's suit, hunter's dress and dress of Indian rural farmer men and women etc., which portrays the cultural knowledge of Indian lifestyle. The paper presents the application of Barthes five codes on the selected shots that enriches an understanding to the viewer and attempt to disclose the multiple hidden meanings embedded with these codes.*

Keywords--- *Costume, Hindi Parallel Cinema, 5 codes, Mrinal Sen*

I. INTRODUCTION

Roland Barthes was a French Linguistic and a renowned critical narratologist who abandoned the conventional notion of interpretation of a narrative in tune with the original construction of the text or as per the definite visualization of the author while writing the story. He explains that in any narrative the text can have different signifiers which may be interpreted with multiple meanings to the viewer, listener or reader (Barthes, 1974). In case of the film Bhuvan Shome this may be true to visuals. To understand a text or visual for interpretation of its hidden meaning he proposed a theory of five codes to helps the receiver in unfolding and understanding any narrative into different or several connotation.

Bhuvan Shome, is a movie in Hindi language majorly spokan in India. The movie was directed by Mrinal Sen and released in 1969. The movie was funded by the National Film Development Corporation of India, the central agency established to encourage production of high-quality films in the country. The film won three National Awards because of its simple yet unique narrative technique coupled with unusual presentation. Bhuvan Shome is a story about a character's personal transformation with some interesting turn of events. It is an emotional drama with

Kumar Anketa, PhD student, Department of Indian Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Science, University of Malaya, Jalan Universiti, 50603, Wilayah Persekutuan, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Assistant Professor, National Institute of Fashion Technology, Doorbhash Nagar, Raebareli, UP, India

an underlying sense of humor. There are several ways to approach 'Bhuvan Shome'. On one level, it can be described as a film about a man's bird hunting adventure in desert region of Gujrat in India. On the other side, Bhuvan can be looked as a strict bureaucrat who finds it difficult to survive outside his comforted existence. The film creates an argument upon as a treatise of human solitude and longing for companionship. The paper applies Barthesian five codes on hindi film Bhuvan Shome directed by Mrinal Sen.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sequential method as off Berthes S/Z is used in the paper. Where he divides Sarrasine, a French story, into lexias and then applies the five codes on it. In the paper, the target text has not been divided but the few scenes from the movie have been divided into frames like lexias followed by few other steps proposed in the codes.

As a case, the entire film was viewed and studied carefully to identify its embodied suspense, enigmas, symbols, binary polarities of the charecters as potrayed and cultural references that corresponds to five elements of Barthes' theory. Upon observation it was established that several shots, dialogues and words tends to mean something which is not evident through dislogues, mannerism, gestures or costumes hence can be interpreted in multiple ways. The film is divided into five segments corresponding to the characteristics of the five codes.

III. ANALYSIS WITH APPLICATION OF 5 CODES ON BHUVAN SHOME

3.1 The Proairetic Code

This code is a narrative code (Eagleton, 1993, p. 120) which defines those features of a script reflecting tension in its plot. These features play twofolded role in the script as firstly they contain the tension of something that is about to happen and secondly, they let the viewer think hard to resolve the tension for the situation at the same time. Viewer is constantly questioning the actions that are being portrated on the screen.

This narrative code let the viewers focus on actions and contemplate what might lye ahead in the story. These apprehensions by the viewer towards the shots in the film preserve the curiosity of the viewer until the end. For example the action starts in the story with the opening shot of fast moving railway track with Indian classical alap in the background that paves the way for some action packed in the movie for the viewers.



Picture 1 (left): Railway Track as Proairetic code

Picture 2 (right): Freeze frame of the main charecter Bhuvan Shome

(Image source: www.youtube.com, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bvJW-5Z33E>, Retrieved on June 29, 2019)

The next scene in which this code that can be unraveled lies in the freeze frame technique that is used by Mrinal Sen where he particularly freezes the frame zoomed onto the facial expressions of Bhuvan Shome with the explanation of that particular instant with the help of background narration or character speaking of himself. In the beginning of the film Bhuvan speaks of his intention of firing the other railway officer who is working unethically by accepting bribes from the passengers in the train. These intensions are not directly spoken of instead is narrated by freezing the frame. This particular freeze frame brings the focus on the nominal character of the story Bhuvan Shome who is a widower civil servant working at a high post in the Indian railways and lives in Calcutta. He is known for his strict and adamant behavior among his subordinates who fired his own son working under him when he failed to meet Bhuvan's standards for discipline.

By freezing the frame on the face of the character put forths negative aspects of this particular charecter and makes the the viewers think that something bad is going to happen in the movie because of the shady introduction of the main charecter in the movie.

3.2 The Hermeneutic Code

This code is applicable to the part of the story or scene that contains mystery enabling viewer to solve the puzzle it contains. After watching scenes contaning enigma, viewers tend to seek multiple reasons to know why that is happening in the particuplar shot? . This particular movie case has an enormous elements as puzzle. Like when the viewer see the title of the movie, Bhuvan Shome which contains an enigma as the viewer relate this particular movie title with a person's name but also raises question in thier head of what is this movie name is going to reflect in the entire lenght of the movie. A viewer might raises several questions on the genre of movie, of being satirical. They may start to think if its a comedy or murder mystery, if the movie reflects an irony related to the society or related Indian railways after notcing the movie name with moving Railway tracks pictured in the background. A person's name as a title is enigmatic for the viewer which tends to resolve after the viewer is finished watching the entire lenght of the film. For example enigma starts when the character is shown roaming in the dark room alone thinking of his monotonous life and his values that has dawned upon him. The dark room is a symbol of emptiness that he has in his life because of his disciplinarian attitude.

The next scene which applies Hermeneutic Code is the one where director is trying to show the times of partition of Bangladesh from India, where viewers are left to decide the temperament of the movie as a political satire. Or these shots were merely to show the times of this story. This enigma is resolved when the narrator narrates the new found interest of Bhuvan Shome's in bird hunting as a pursuit to break out from his monotonous life. This particular frame with animation of bird flying on Bhuvan Shome's head is quite a comical representation of his newfound interest. Now through this visual, the viewer's understand Bhuvan Shome's agony and looks forwards to his accomplishment of his new found interest in hunting shown with use of an animation sequence of birds flying over his heads as a part of the narrative. But, the enigma related to his strict and inflexible attitude of this character

remains equivocal, debatable for the viewers.



Picture 3 (left): Bhuvan taking lessons on Bird Hunting narrated with animated birds flying over his head

Picture 4 (right): Bhuvan Shome on the voyage to Bird Hunting

(Image source: www.youtube.com, Retrived from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bvJW-5Z33E>, Retrived on June 29, 2019)

Further in the scene where Bhuvan Shome leaves for hunting amid dry and desert region of Gujrat, gets up early in the morning and pictured sleeping on the bullock cart is another example of equivocal scene. This scene depicts Bhuvan Shome as naïve to hunting but yet enthusiastic to pursue his new endeavors. This picture might make the viewer's laugh but ponder over the situation carefully at the same time. In order to run away from his tedious and lonely life for a while, he goes on bird hunting in a rural area in Gujarat. Bhuvan Shome is shown not to be a skillful hunter.

All the jamming, snares and partly explained scenes are resolved in the end when Bhuvan Shome after hunting a duck gave it to the village girl named Gauri played by Suhasini Mulay who helped her in his pursuit throughout the film, symbolizing his new found self because of the bird hunting adventure in Gujrat. This film on analyses can be seen as a character study of a strict bureaucrat who finds it difficult to survive the moment he steps outside his comforts zone.

3.3 The Semantic Code

The film has few Semantic Codes. There are several approaches to explain Bhuvan Shome. Like in the various shots where Gauri is trying to help Bhuvan Shome can be observed as an approach of the film defining rural-urban divide in India. Whereas it can be also looked as vulnerability of the villagers towards strangers as they are helpful and friendly to this strict bureaucrat who comes from the city and is cruel to everyone around him. It can be observed as a film about human companionship and trust. The code is applicable to the fact that Bhuvan being a character that does not trust anybody easily but blindly puts his trusts in Gauri who helps him during hunting.

Initially, Bhuvan is reluctant about Gauri's childlike suggestions to make his hunt successful, but due to her simplicity and affection, which he eventually he began to admire, he does as she tells him to do. In one of their conversations, she tells him how an unreasonable 'big officer' this person called Bhuvan has been who is about to fire her husband from his railway's job as he was involved in a case of bribery. Bhuvan is left with having to choose

between his principles and an act of kindness.

Gauri holding mirror in front of Bhuvan gives the depiction of helping Bhuvan find his new self who is open to learning new things and breaking his old beliefs. Denotation on these scenes can also be perceived as hint of eroticism that runs through the movie. These scenes can also be indicative of sexual attraction between Bhuvan Shome and Gauri as she holds the mirror for Bhuvan after he is dressed as a villager in a white colored dhoti and a kurta with a turban on his head.

3.4 The Symbolic Code

The principle of this code is to identify textual antithetical elements that “allow multi-valences and reversibility” (Seldon, et al., 2005, p. 152). The first focus of the reader is to identify simple binary polarity system. There are two examples of symbolic code.

The first example is conflict between Bhuvan Shome’s first persona as a strict disciplinarian depicted wearing Western suit, represented as a Westernized Indian officer of high rank working in Indian Railways. The main character in the left side of the picture is shown wearing classic western suit along with the waistcoat and white collared shirt with tie. To convey the appearance furthermore the character is wearing sunglasses and is often times shown to be having cigar. Apart from Costume functioning as Symbolic codes we can also derive Cultural or Referential codes from the picture as Barthes suggests anything which refers to external body of knowledge which can be scientific, historical, and cultural knowledge.



Picture 5 (above): Transition of Bhuvan Shome from a strict disciplinarian to vulnerable village man in a Indian rural attire on Bird Hunting expedition (Image source: www.youtube.com, Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bvJW-5Z33E>, Retrieved on June 29, 2019)

As the story progresses, Opposite to his self, Bhuvan Shome wears a dress of a rural Indian farmer on persuasion from village girl named Gauri that connotes surrender of his earlier beliefs and having a new perception on the humanitarian ground.

Second antithesis is between Bhuvan Shome and Gauri as character of Binary opposites in the film. The difference in the spectrum between the two characters is an approach for a social commentary on the great rural-urban divide in India. The film pits together two polar opposite characters in Bhuvan and Gauri. Bhuvan is an old man, living in an urban environment and lacking vibrancy. On the other hand, Gauri is a young girl, living in a rural

environment, full of energy and innocence. Bhuvan is trying to hunt down birds, and Gauri has a myna bird as her pet. When it comes to hunting, in order to make the birds feel comfortable around Bhuvan and let him get close to the birds, Gauri insist on wearing the local clothes. He has brought his own lunch on the trip, but Gauri makes him eat the local food. A man reluctant to change was learning the lesson of adaptability in a different environment. When he realizes his decision to dismiss Gauri's husband will impact her life, his principles become more flexible, which help him escape monotony.

3.5 The Cultural Code

This codes can be unraveled in the shots which seems to contain common knowledge of the world. In this viewer focuses on the physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary and historical factors realted to the characters in the story to relate to the common knowledge (Barthes,1974; &Felluga, n.d.).

The story encompasses the costumes that are reflection of the Western world to the attire of the rural Indian village. Bhuvan Shome is seen wearing what is called "Modern Western Male Attire" specifically the man's standard suit with jacket, trouser, shirt, and tie (Zelinsky 2004, p.84). Gauri's heavily hand embroidered lehenga, choli and dupatta embellished with mirror work is indicative of her belonging to Rabari tribe in Gujrat that lives in Giri region in India. Her wearing Bindi on her forehead is indicative of her following Hindu belief (p.129).

The part of the film Gauri is shown doing embroidery on the piece of fabric is indicative of her practicing the craft. The word "bhale" (Dave, p.43) is a reply to "avo jo"(Dave, p. 77). These words are from language of Gujrat. Avo Jo implies "Come back again" where Bhale is reply to Avo jo means "All right". It is a salutation in regional langagaue named Gujrati.



Picture 6 (above): Gauri's handcrafted and mirror embellished skirt (Image source: www.youtube.com, Retrived from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bvJW-5Z33E>, Retrived on June 29, 2019)

IV. CONCLUSION

The codes helps reader to understand any movie in all the possible dimensions. The semantic meanings of the words "Bhuvan Shome" gives in-depth understanding to the ironic representation of Bhuvan Shome's transition till the end of story which ruptures his traditional beliefs. The codes also helps viewer to understand the psyche of characters and how popular cultures can create an identity for people. The cultural code gives light to the Eastern

and Western cultures well reflected in the movie through costumes.

REFERENCES

- [1] Eagleton T. (1996). *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd Edition, Blackwell publishers ltd.UK
- [2] Shahraz Q. (2007). A pair of Jeans. In Muneeza Shamsie, *Contemporary short stories by Pakistani women*, pp 157-168, Oxford University press, Karachi
- [3] Zaib Sabah, Mashori Mustafa Ghulam (2014). Five Codes of Barthes in Shahraz's Story A Pair of Jeans: A Post-Structural Analysis, *ELF annual Research Journal* 16, pp 171-184
- [4] Linda W. and Lillethun A. (2018), *Fashion History: A Global View*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London, UK
- [5] Dave J. (2015), *Colloquial Gujarati: The Complete Course for Beginners* by Jagdish Dave, Routledge Publishers
- [6] Banerjee S. and Srivastava A. (1988), *One Hundred Indian Feature Films: An Annotated Filmography*, garland Publishing, London & New York
- [7] Naik D. S., *Traditional Embroideries of India*, APH Publishing Corporation, New Delhi