

Embracing Grief: Exploring New Age Cinema's Paradigm Shift in Dealing with Death

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Abstract

This paper aims to examine New Age Cinema, specifically Dark Comedies, through an exploration of how modern individuals respond to the hopelessness of their situations. The central argument posits that despite facing the same absurdity as their ancestors, contemporary individuals have developed a new paradigm for coping with absurdity by approaching it through humor. Within this context, the study analyzes two representative films, namely the local production "Thithi" (2015, Kannada) and the international film "Parasite" (2019, English), in light of the theory of thanatology. The theory of thanatology is elucidated through the lens of Freudian humor, serving to shed light on the portrayal of Dark Comedies.

Key Words: thanatology, tragedy, comedy, dark comedy

1. Introduction

Historically speaking, tragedy was considered to be based on some flaw in the concerned individual man. But tragedy for the modern man in the modern world becomes negligible as compared with the traditional perception one had of it. The decline in the grimness associated with death or tragedy may be traced to the unforgettable episode of dropping the atom bomb, constant manufacturing of destructive weaponries, the Cold War etc. The involvement of big nations in these inhuman activities has to be counted as a significant factor that has reduced our emotional response to the world around. Thus, instead of a serious deliberation over what constantly transpires around us, we are left with just one option – laughter. The modern world has seen to it that our genuine emotions are completely worn out. The modern man has replaced the serious and emotional response with intellectual laughter. In a way, Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet in this background may appear like a wonderful absurdity!

The shift in response to tragic sequences today is conspicuous. The current paper draws from thanatology, which basically deals with the concept of death and helps us understand the modern man's approach to death. The movies that are dealt with in this paper have one thing in common: death. However, though death is a commonality in these movies, the causes could be different. Despite the different causes behind the deaths, there lies one particular element in all these movies that draws our immediate attention, that is, the ultimate approach to death. Thus the movies, against the background of

Freudian Relief Theory and Thanatology shall be examined to analyze the characters' attitudes toward bereavement, grief and ultimately death.

In this regard, the modern movie makers are now the new age thanatologists since they can be seen as resorting to their professions to offer valuable services at a time when the modern world has been haunted by millions of deaths caused by wars, pandemics etc. The movies of the New Age Cinema have shown noticeable paradigm shifts with regard to grief and death. These movies, therefore, may be counted as counsellors for the people who have experienced the trauma of extreme grief and bereavement. The movies when viewed through the lens of thanatology operate at different levels and are emotionally multifaceted. It is important to be notice that the movies do not simply over simplify death by showing reluctance to deal with death conservatively.

New Paradigm to Approach Grief

There is rapid pace in the change witnessed in the contemporary, industrialized civilizations. This has noticeably changed people's exposure to the notion of death. There have been numerous indirect and direct aspects variably influencing their notion of death concepts. It is therefore recommendable that enhancement of people's perception of death and bereavement happens at all levels for the people to be in a state of preparedness. (Anderson et al. doi:10.1098/rstb.2017.0262)

Sigmund Freud in his *Jokes and Their Relation to The Unconscious* maintains that our entire mystical world, the academic kingdom of our ideas and thoughts never unfolds itself in the face of the external gaze. It can never be openly imagined visibly or pictorially. Nevertheless, it does contain its weaknesses, its deformities and its inhibitions. It is a wealth of unreasonable and amusing contrasts. Thus, a joke can be a conclusion about a situation intending to produce a comic contrast.

That way, the modern movie maker has arrived at a level where he knows that Tragedy, unlike before, fails to elicit the desired response from the tired modern audiences. The modern man audiences have invariably needed a different approach to the sense of loss other than extreme grief. Thus, the New Age Cinema believes that a modern movie goer demands a comedic structure to help the audience comprehend and acknowledge the enormity of humanity's flaws from a cynical outlook rather than Tragedy's more empathetic view of individual suffering:

Psychological theories are gradually becoming focused on man's inherent capacity to comprehend the concept of his future coupled with the notion of unavoidable death. It is aware that one's present-day behaviour is invariably dependent not just on the past. Instead one needs an orientation towards his future happenings. (Fiefel, pp. 6-7)

The conventional views of morality have been effectively countered in the movie *Parasite* which is a South Korean dark comedy of 2019 directed by Bong Joon-ho. The movie's opening shot operates just like the opening sentence of a novel by setting up the tone of the movie. If the author of a book uses the strength of his linguistic prowess to make an interesting beginning, the cinematographer uses the power of the visuals to convey his creativity to the audiences. The cinematographer of the move *Parasite* Hong Kyung -pyo puts to use his framing perspective to communicate to his audiences.

The very first frame of the movie very clearly conveys to the audiences as to what the crux of the movie is. The window frame in the very first scene has been brilliantly employed. The acute economic disparity suffered by Kim Ki-taek's family is tellingly indicated by the glass window that shows into their basement house. If *Thithi* (the other movie which is part of the discussion) opens with the death scene and makes the audiences to anticipate seriousness, *Parasite* also makes one believe initially that it could be about the desperate struggles of a poor family to make ends meet. All shots in the beginning are about visual architecture to metaphorically indicate the central theme which is a commentary on the various layers of the North Korean society.

A filmmaker might deepen a film's theme by juxtaposing contrasting shots. As we have seen, there is a cut in *Slaves* from the manacled feet of slaves to the galloping hooves of horses. Whether the horses are in the same vicinity as the slaves is irrelevant; the point of the cut is the contrast between the enslaved and the free. (Dick, 78)

Kim Ki-taek and family live in an underground house. Quite importantly, Hong Kyung -pyo uses the camera movement and light adjustment for varying purposes to make the audiences immediately grasp the economic situation of two different families of the movie. Quite expectedly Kim Ki-taek and family are unemployed. Their poverty is further intensified when there is no free Wi-Fi. The menace of the insects is addressed by leaving the windows open when the government does fumigation on the street. Their family is run on certain temporary jobs such as fixing of the pizza boxes. However, the actual movie begins when the son Kim Ki-woo becomes an English tutor to Mr. Park's daughter.

If one goes by conventional notions, the audiences are expected to sympathize with the acute sufferings of the characters. The sufferings of the characters are to be understood to have been caused by their immoral actions. The relentless outpouring of the emotions of the characters of Kim Ki-taek and family ought to reinforce the societal moral code.

The New Age movie here deconstructs the notion of moral response to a dark situation by the way of making the poor family respond to their poverty quite differently. The expected suffering is replaced by a surprisingly clever scheming. Kim Ki-taek's son makes an entry in to the wealthy household of Mr. Park without a college degree. Once the son gets inside the wealthy household of Mr. Park as the tutor, it takes almost no time for the rest of the family to create fake identities to create for themselves new job opportunities. Kim Ki-taek's daughter Ki-jung creates a fake certificate for her brother and helps him construct his identity as a tutor. Her brother learns about Mr. Park's son's interest in art. This creates an opportunity for him to infiltrate his sister Ki-jung into the family as an art therapist. The girl proves to be a marvelous con artist since she immediately wins over the naïve wife of Mr. Park.

Following this the visual storytelling continues where Ki-jung creates a scene by leaving her panties inside Mr. Park's car which would eventually create suspicion about the young driver's

manners. He is suspected to have had sexual liaisons inside the car because of which he will be fired. In place of the fired driver Kim Ki-taek takes over as the new driver. The master stroke is the way in which Ki-jung gets her mother also inside the wealthy family as the house keeper. The current keeper is accused of being afflicted with tuberculosis. Apparently the woman's condition becomes a suspect case of TB as Ki-jung would have exposed the lady to peach to which she would be extremely allergic. Ultimately, the whole family will be infiltrated and would be involved in careful planning and rehearse their roles professionally. Eventually, the entire family is employed in various positions inside the same household.

The Kannada movie *Thithi (Funeral)* happens to be a 2015 film directed by Ram Reddy. The beauty of the movie is such that it features completely non-professional actors. They all are from the surrounding villages Mandya district of the state of Karnataka. Basically, though the very title of the movie is *Thithi*, it contains a humorous story that revolves around the death of an old man who has died at the age of 101 years.

The plot of the movie is simply about how almost three generations show their reactions to the death of the 101-year old patriarch nicknamed as Century Gowda. A traditional movie goer would consider the reaction of the son Gaddappa who seems apparently unmoved and unemotional to be immoral. The stories of all generations are depicted through the technique of parallel cuts: Parallel cutting makes it possible for two concurrent actions to be depicted on the screen without one's being completed before the other begins – the filmmaker simply cuts back and forth between them. (Dick, 77)

The movie, though is all about a funeral and begins with the death of the old man ultimately evokes laughter in the audiences. The theory of thanatology maintains that humour is realized as a result of our awareness regarding the concerned situation and the actual features associated with that situation. That is, the entire situation eventually becomes incongruous as the behavioral patterns of the individuals in the concerned situation will be questionable as there will be a visible shift from seriousness to lightheartedness. And the response of the audiences to the depiction of these scenes could be understood through the following words of thanatologists: The gullible adherence to the conventions of the prevailing discourse regarding grief is expected to lead to three deadly outcomes — service providers may become unhelpful, friends and family of the bereaved may not provide sufficient support, and moreover the bereaved may themselves become distraught when their grief greatly differs from “normal” expression of grief (Breen & O'Connor, pp. 199-218)

Therefore, in coming to terms with movies of this kind, the following words of Freud are to be taken seriously as he is indicating at the mindset of the larger population of this world which is regulated by a moral code because of which even the responses of all people could be homogenized. This demand for a sense of sameness does require some relief as response to the various happenings of one's life need not be limited by the monotony of one's behaviour:

When a person is controlled by a humor that is concerned with only serious thoughts, a jest is not to be understood as having succeeded in creating pleasure that was intended. He must have to be cheerful himself so as to be in a favourable position to respond to the jest of the other person. The same problem

does apply to tendentious jokes and also to innocent jokes. but in the latter there is a further obstacle in the form of opposition to the purpose which the joke is trying to serve. The listener may not be ready to laugh at certain brilliant but obscene jokes if he has no exposure to humour of such kind. (Freud, 240)

To add to this Gaddappa's son will be simultaneously involved in the arrangement of the funeral and also getting his father's signature on some papers for the official transfer of the property in his name. If the movie were to be seen from the perspectives of Roman and Greek philosophers this is to be termed as immoral behavior. Such immoral behaviour was believed to corrupt the immoral individual's soul. This was the reason as to why Roman and Greek philosophies propagated the belief that one must know how to behave morally to avoid sinking into ruin.

The film refuses to follow the established structure of the worldview regarding morality in a situation like death. The movie addresses the regular emotions like lust, gluttony and greed and leads us into the different minds of the current three generations in the family of Century Gowda. The conventions of movie making are violated even in the language as well where it is completely colloquial. The narrative is totally in coordination with the seamless Mandya culture. The three male characters Century Gowda, his son Gaddappa, and Gaddappa's son Thammanna are incorrigible, Bohemian and materialistic respectively. The behaviour of these characters would be viewed by Roman and Greek societies as aberrational and outside the established manners which is a potential threat to the decorum of all.

2. Conclusion

Thus in conclusion, this paper has inquired into the theory of thanatology to investigate the diverse perceptions of New Age Comedy. While subjective viewpoints regarding the requisite seriousness in tragic sequences persist, this paper has sought to elucidate the nature of humor in the modern world and its various social functions. Moreover, the examined films not only showcase what is deemed humorous but also challenge the conventional idea of tragedy. Drawing from psychological theories, particularly the recent theory of thanatology, humor is understood as originating from a culture of healthy behavior. As Freud argued, humor and jokes serve as indirect expressions of hidden elements in human behavior. In this regard, the association of caricature with jokes emphasizes the need to reveal concealed aspects. This determinant is crucial to understanding the nature of jokes beyond mere comicality.

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