
Tamil Movies *Andha Naal* and *Pencil*: A Structuralistic Approach

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Abstract:

Literary and critical theories have assumed considerable importance in recent centuries. Modern literary theories help us to comprehend the world better and to think logically. They offer different interpretations of history and current events of the world, but each theory is based on certain key concepts. Structuralism is a predominant one among literary theories. It is defined as the internal relationship through which constituent elements of a whole are organized. Structural analysis consists of discovering the significant elements and their order. Structuralism, as a school of literary criticism, flourished during the 1960s. Ferdinand de Saussure's remarkable book *A Course in General Linguistics* (1916) popularized Structuralism and introduced Structural Linguistics, which attaches importance to signs. On the other hand, Film studies have evolved into a significant part of the literature. While literary theories are mostly applied to literary texts, analyzing Indian regional movies with a theory remains a less explored area. Under these circumstances, this paper tries to scrutinize two Tamil movies, *Andha Naal* and *Pencil*, from the perspective of structuralist theory as a constructive analysis. The purpose is to bring out the hidden framework, perceptions, and innovative findings. On the whole, this paper sheds light upon the Tamil movies titled *Andha Naal* and *Pencil* from the perspective of Structuralist theory.

Keywords: Structuralism, Framework, *Andha Naal*, and *Pencil* movies.

Introduction

The main focus of Structuralism is to analyze the interrelationship between an individual text and its underlying structure of literary elements. This approach includes comparing a particular work with the previous traditions and forms of literature and examining whether it follows or does not follow such norms. For instance, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*, the first detective short story by the American writer Edgar Allan Poe, has remarkably been the trend-setting for detective fiction. C. Auguste Dupin, the detective in Poe's work, is accompanied by his friend,

an unnamed narrator. Following the same structure, the British writer Arthur Conan Doyle framed the well-known detective Sherlock Holmes and friend cum narrator Dr. Watson to solve many crime thriller cases. On the other hand, G.K. Chesterton, the English author, created the character Father Brown in an unconventional way. While the former characters are professional detectives, the latter is a priest who solves mystery cases.

In the same way, this paper tries to examine the underlying structures of two Tamil movies, *Andha Naal* and *Pencil*. *Andha Naal* is a 1954 Indian Tamil mystery-thriller film directed by S. Balachander. It is the first film-noir in Tamil cinema and the first Tamil film to be made without songs, dance, and stunt sequences. The plot is set against the backdrop of World War II. The story is about the killing of the radio engineer Rajan. The suspect list includes Rajan's wife, Usha, neighbor Chinnaiya Pillai; Rajan's brother, Pattabi; Rajan's sister-in-law, Hema; and Rajan's mistress, Ambujam. Further, the story moves from each individual's point of view. *Pencil* is a 2016 Indian Tamil mystery thriller film written and directed by Mani Nagaraj. This film is set back in a school where a notorious student, Nithin, is found dead by repeatedly stabbed with a pencil in his neck. The plot moves with multi-dimensions from the perspectives of suspects. Further, this research paper tries to figure out the structuralistic approach to these two movies.

Research Questions

The hypothesis of this research paper aims to find responses to the arising questions. Is the structuralistic perspective applicable to the entire story of these two movies or specific arenas? Apart from the structuralistic approach, do these two movies have any touch of literary elements? Do the findings have any values that empower society?

Literature Review

Sreeram GopalKrishanan, in his research article "Veenai Balachander's *Andha Naal*: A noir-style sociopolitical statement by a music genius," stresses the crucial aspect of music in his paper. He further throws light upon the Dravidian perfect storm, Dravidian exceptionalism vs neo-Shaivite identity, the conflict between traitorous husband and patriotic wife, and so on. Moreover, the crux of the paper reveals the fact that *Andha Naal* is not just a noir-style film but also a political film loaded with historical context. Dr. Halit Alkan in the paper "A Structuralist Analysis of William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*" brings out the binary opposition between public hatred and private love of Capulet and Montague families. On the whole, this paper conveys that the melody operates on the fixed cycle of public hatred and private love in this play. Love can live forever only when society is in peace.

On account of analyzing these articles, it is evident that *Andha Naal*'s movie is viewed as a socio-political conflict, and the Structuralism theory is applied to a

classical text. Convincingly, a structuralistic approach to movies like *Andha Naal* and *Pencil* is a novel idea to proceed with.

Main Text

Peter Barry in his *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literature and Cultural Theory* mentions a few factors to be included in a structuralist critique. Initially, parallels in the plot are found, then echoes in structure, reflections or repetitions in character and motive, and contrasts in situation and circumstance, followed by patterns in language and imagery. Here are some concepts and ideas formulated by structuralist critics to reproduce the above details. Ferdinand de Saussure, the father of Structuralism, came up with the concepts of 'langue' and 'parole.' While the former denotes the underlying system of language, the latter stands for individual usage in a particular situation. Noam Chomsky, another key figure in Structuralism, reciprocates these ideas by coining them as 'competence' and 'performance.' Interestingly, the predecessor *Andha Naal* movie can be considered to be the language, and its successor *Pencil* movie is Parole, framed in a particular situation. To compare specifically, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* by Thomas De Quincey is the earlier explorer of drug addiction. Later following the base idea, Indian writer Jeet Thayil came out with *Narcopolis*, and William S. Burroughs painted the novel *Junky*. This is how Structuralism penetrated from language into literature. Notably, this research paper demonstrates how it evolves into detective movies.

Diachronic linguistics refers to the study of the historical development of language across time. Further, it stresses the evolution of etymology and language. Since this paper analyzes two different movies with 62 years of difference, the evolution of thriller mystery, this paper aptly fits into this constraint of Structuralism. Tzvetan Todorov, the Bulgarian historian and literary critic in his essay "The Typology of Detective Fiction" classifies genres within detective fiction. The 'whodunit' is the first of all genres, which includes two stories- the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. The movies *Andha Naal* and *Pencil* are framed in the same way to unfold the story of the investigation and the story of the crime. In particular, these two movies move in the view of each suspect. Every suspect is harmed by the killer. Following that, 'The thriller' is placed next. Prospection takes the place of retrospection. The story of investigation outsmarts the story of crime. This aspect is found in these two movies, where the story of investigation grabs the attention of the audience. Finally, 'The suspense novel' is the third genre which embraces two subgenres - 'The story of the vulnerable' and 'The story of the suspect as detective.' *Pencil* movie fits in the latter subgenres, in which two suspects, Shiva and Maya unveil the knots to find out the real killer as well as under the urge to prove them as innocents.

The theoretical framework of this paper elaborates on how the movie *Pencil*

follows and unfollows the pioneer thriller mystery *Andha Naal* in its underlying structure. In case of similarities between these two movies, as a start, both movies open with the murder without revealing the killer's face. Once the movies are on the flow, the audience has the mindset that the victim is a villain who deserves death. Once the killer is found out, he/she confesses in front of the police, but the killer has a valid point as a motive for the killing. On the one hand, *Andha Naal's* movie is inspired by Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon*. On the other hand, *Pencil* movie is a remake of the South Korean film *4th Period Mystery*. So, both these movies follow their predecessors. 'Poetic Justice' is a significant literary element coined by an English critic, Thomas Rymer, which means good must be rewarded and evil must be punished. This saying is partially true in these movies; the villain character embraces death, but ironically, the killer with virtues is eventually punished for his/her action.

Regarding the unfollowing elements in these two movies, comedy in *Pencil* holds a primary position. On the day of the murder in the school, an inspection team visits the campus to approve recognition. At this juncture, many events happen simultaneously, which makes the audience burst out laughing. Subsequently, the hidden dead body is also revealed at the same time. Meanwhile, in *Andha Naal's* movie, there isn't a grain of scope for comedy. In *Andha Naal's* movie, the C.I.D. officer Sivanandam joins hands with the police and solves the case, but in the movie *Pencil*, as mentioned earlier, two students, Shiva and Maya, untie the knots. Both these movies end with the confession of killers, yet in *Pencil*, the killer directly communicates to the viewers and ends with a message to society. Here is a glimpse of another literary feature. The explanation for foreshadowing in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* is mentioned as follows:

Foreshadowing means by which the reader of a literary work is altered to something that will occur later on in the work...

Foreshadowing contributes to the reader's sense of a work's form and structure by providing evidence that the work constitutes not a mere sequence but a formal design in which various elements have been intentionally integrated (140).

This saying applies to *Andha Naal* movie. C.I.D. officer Sivanandam's inquiry to the college principal and protest scenes in the college campus in the movie are picturized purposefully as foreshadowing to unmask the murderer. Such a detailed and intensified foreshadowing is not found in the *Pencil* movie.

Andha Naal's movie has the backdrop of the pre-independence period and a historical timeline; conversely, *Pencil's* movie skillfully comes under 'Campus Novel', which has a university campus as its setting. Cuddon, in his *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, defines it as:

The genre frequently exploits the cloistered nature of campus life; in

such cases, the university is presented either as a microcosm of society or as a world removed from it. Perhaps because of their relative isolation, there is a strong tradition of setting murder mysteries on university campuses, which replace the country house setting of 'Golden Age' crime fiction (101-102).

The pencil movie throws back the gist of this genre. In this movie, a romantic affair goes on between two teachers; once this matter comes to learners' knowledge, they take advantage of it. The dignity of the teaching faculties falls. Additionally, special attention is given to the son of a film star, Nithin; the entire movie revolves around finding his killer. The school management shows keen interest only in maintaining the reputation of the school. Ironically, turning their deaf ears to suicide and accidental death of students, yet hid the issues by bribing the authorities. Predominantly, the movie *Pencil* not only unfollows its forerunner, *Andha Naal* but goes beyond it. On the whole, all the above factors that are decoded reciprocate the crux of Structuralism theory in these movies - *Andha Naal* and *Pencil*.

Summation

The structuralistic approach is applied to the entire part of *Andha Naal* and *Pencil* movies for better comprehension and interpretation. Since the stories of these movies travel in different narratives, this research paper suggests applying narratology theory in these movies as a future scope of research. Apart from the structuralistic view, this paper illuminates other literary features like poetic justice and foreshadowing, as well as genres like campus novels. Peter Barry, in his *Beginning Theory*, under the heading of the scope of Structuralism, says: "This is the typical structuralist process of moving from particular to the general, placing the individual work within a wider structural context" (47). Similarly, Sir Francis Bacon, the eminent English essayist, propagated the inductive method, which starts with specific observations and moves to general conclusions. By these notions, this research paper expels the fact that no one has the right to take the law into their own hands through the structuralistic approach to *Andha Naal* and *Pencil* movies as a microcosm to empower society. Overall, this paper elucidates the appearing havoc and its relevance to the chosen works.

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