

Dynamics of Power in Satyajit Ray's "Kingdom of Diamonds"

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Abstract: The paper explores the intricacies of the film, *Kingdom of Diamonds*, directed by the acclaimed cinematic artist, Satyajit Ray. The filmmaker portrays the structural violence of the imperialistic force on the common people of the society through the archetypal representation of the kingdom. Various microcosmic examples are used by the filmmaker to expose the negative impacts of the structural violence. Moreover, the film uses the powerful symbolism of the brainwashing machine that is used to punish the commoners by the despotic ruler of the kingdom. The writing discusses the manner in which the filmmaker exudes the tendency of the powerful force to consolidate its omnipotence through the establishment of the huge idol. The film's portraiture of the final subversive act of the common people represents the friction between the powerful and the oppressed people. As such, the socio-political commentary of the filmic narrative has been decoded in the paper.

Index Terms – Satyajit Ray, *Kingdom of Diamonds*, structural violence, symbolism in Ray's film.

I. Introduction

The cinematic work titled, *Kingdom of Diamonds* (Bengali: *Hirak Rajar Deshe*), directed by the stalwart filmmaker, Satyajit Ray, can surely be deemed as one of the most significant artistic works in the history of world cinema. The film went on to receive critical acclaim, and has remained extremely popular among the audience from across the globe even after so many years of its theatrical release in the year 1980. What makes the film stand apart is the sheer quintessence with which the filmmaker has engaged in making a political commentary about the human society. The filmic narrative has attained timeless and universal appeal owing to the relevance of the plot. While the director has excelled in bringing out the subtleties of expression with aptness, the cast including famous actors like Tapen Chatterjee, Rabi Ghosh, Utpal Dutt, Soumitra Chatterjee, have proved their mettle in hogging the attention of the audience in the best possible manner. An introspective analysis of the film can make one understand how the filmmaker plays an instrumental role in using symbolism and metaphors to highlight the theme of oppression with all the vehemence.

II. Structural Violence in "Kingdom of Diamonds"

It goes beyond any doubt that the filmmaker uses the plot as well as the characters of the film as perfect archetypes. The plot entails the portrayal of structural violence meted out to the common people of the kingdom of diamonds by the despotic ruler who leaves no stone unturned to extract the most out of the diamond mines even if that means torturing the mine workers for toiling harder. It is truly intriguing to note how the filmmaker portrays the entire council of ministers to be mere supporters of the despotism of the king. Thus, it is not hard to comprehend that the entire power in the kingdom is centralized in the hands of the brutal ruler. Satyajit Ray, the skilled director, does his very best in portraying the nature of oppression that the common subjects of a state might be subjected to. If one delves into the definition of structural violence, it can be comprehended that this term refers to a kind of violence where a social institution or social structure goes on to harm the common people by the act of preventing them from meeting the basic requirements. As one watches the film, it is not hard to identify how the imperialistic wrath of the king impedes the fulfillment of the very basic needs of the commoners of the land.

The narrative portrays how the king orders the closing down of the school in the kingdom in a bid to thwart the common people from being subversive toward the status quo of imperialism. The king expresses his belief that the common people become prone to being less obedient with the gain of education. It needs to be reckoned that education is considered to be the most effective way of combating oppression as the dissemination of knowledge among the common people can pave the way for awareness and critical thinking that would prove to be instrumental in questioning the institutionalized forms of oppression and subjugation. The filmmaker is effective in highlighting the role of education, and the friction between oppressive forces and institution of knowledge and awareness. The imperialist force believes, "There is no end to knowing, desire to acquire knowledge is hence futile." This famous dialogue from the film aptly exudes the attitude of the oppressive forces toward imparting education among the common masses. Apart from this, one also finds the king of the land being insensitive toward the state of abject poverty of the common people as well, and is only found to be bent upon extracting diamonds and filling the exchequer with the taxes collected from the commoners and the

diamonds extracted from the mines. The narrative shows people being unable to satiate their basic needs, while the outer world believes the kingdom of diamonds to be a place of prosperity and riches.

III. Brainwashing: A Symbol of Vehement Oppression

While watching the film, the audience can be reminiscent of Stanley Kubrick's seminal cinematic work, *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), which portrayed the application of aversion therapy on the male protagonist, Alex, for curbing his criminality. The film documented the negative impact of aversion therapy on the human mind through the portrayal of the Alex's actions after the treatment. In the film by Ray, one finds the use of brainwashing machine made by the maverick inventor who works for the king of the land. The inventor comes up with this path-breaking invention that has the capacity of pressurizing any person into the adoption of a radically different belief through the use of systematic means. The filmic narrative shows the king ordering a number of common people to be brainwashed as a punishment for various non-conforming activities that do not ascribe to the parameters of the state machinery and norms of the kingdom. The narrative shows the king ordering a singer and a farmer among others being ordered to be brainwashed by the use of the machine. As such, the people who are brainwashed start to chant the lines that have been forcefully imbibed in their brains by the machine.

It should be comprehended in this context that the portrayal of the brainwashing machine works as a vehement symbol of the oppressive force exerted by the imperialist force on the hapless people of the kingdom. The symbol represents the negative impact of the overpowering forces that can thwart the normalcy of life and existence of any individual as in the case of the ones who were forcibly brainwashed at the king's orders. The director aptly uses the visual image of the brainwashing machine to indicate the nefarious nature of the invention and its impending negative impacts on the victims. Thus, one can see the machine in the form of a demonic head that engulfs the victims inside when the common people are put inside for the execution of the procedure of brainwashing. The audience is stirred to gauge the horror associated with the result of brainwashing as the victims fail to return to normalcy, and keep on uttering the chants that they are influenced with through the process of brainwashing. The symbol of the brainwashing machine is the most stirring figurative representation shown in this film.

IV. Apotheosis of the Ruler

The filmic narrative shows the ambition of the king of the land to establish a huge idol of his own in the kingdom as a marker of his paramount power, prestige, and success as the ruler of the kingdom. The idol can be taken as the symbol of the immense power of the king. The establishment of the idol includes the proposed inception of a new era termed as the "Diamond era" by the king, while he proposes to wipe off all other calendars that exist. Moreover, the king aims to portray his greatness through the idol to all the imperial powers around the kingdom of diamonds as he goes on to invite the regal representatives to his kingdom for the festive celebrations of the success of his rule. Satyajit Ray does the best to show how the centralization of power in the hands of an imperialistic force can bring severe impediments for the common people, while the powerful individual can tread on the path of further consolidation of his power. The establishment of the idol represents the tendency of apotheosis of a powerful force and its institutionalization in history. The entire plot of the film revolves around the inclination of the king in context to project an omnipotent image of his own to the rest of the world through the festivities, the riches, and the idol.

V. Subversion and Revolution

As the plot thickens, one finds the active role of the teacher of the school in planning a protest against the oppressive rule. The teacher, Udayan, is helped by the two male protagonists of the film, Goopy and Bagha, who use their special abilities to combat the nefarious forces of the kingdom of diamonds. The characters in context also expose the corrupt nature of the powerful as they are able to influence the king's guard to take their sides on being paid with diamonds. In the climatic sequence of the filmic narrative, the king himself and his entire council of ministers are brainwashed using the nefarious invention. The common people are found to assemble at the large ground where the idol has been placed. The collective force of the common people of the kingdom pulls the huge idol down to the ground. Even the brainwashed king and the council of ministers are made to join the process of pulling down the huge idol.

Thus, it can be comprehended that the entire sequence of the idol being pulled down is a metaphor for the revolution of the common, oppressed masses against the imperialist forces. The institutionalized system of oppression and hierarchy of the imperialists gets subverted with vehemence in this sequence, with Satyajit Ray portraying the active participation of every section of the society coming together for the cause. As such, the film can be taken to be a perfect portrayal of the friction between the powerful and the powerless resulting in the revolt against the mighty forces. It shows how the common people being united among them attain the paramount power that has the potential to overthrow even the most powerful and dreaded ruler. The audience can juxtapose the omnipotent figure of the king shown toward the beginning of the filmic narrative, and the brainwashed, powerless one shown at the very end of the cinematic representation. The triumph of the common people, and the role of leadership ascribed to the teacher shows the primary importance of education and awareness in the human society. Thus, the film, *Kingdom of Diamonds*, succeeds in bringing

out the dynamics of power hierarchy and its impacts on the society through the representation of the fictional kingdom which sees a socio-political transformation.

VI. Conclusion

It would be correct to end by saying that the film by Ray has been rightly immortalized in the pages of history of world cinema. The narrative's aptness in providing a political commentary makes the film all the more relevant for scholastic attention as well as critical appreciation. The film's narrative is highly intriguing, while the thematic content remains extremely relevant for the human society. Moreover, the quintessential use of figurative expressions in the course of the narrative simply accentuates the affective appeal and cinematic charm of the fictional work. The characterization, the symbolism, and the metaphors come together to create a lasting impact on the minds of the avid audience. The filmic story transcends the boundaries of culture, language, and community.

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