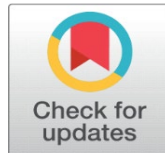
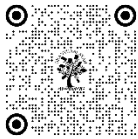


# CINEMATIC NARRATION OF THE REALITIES OF SELF: A FOUCAULDIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

This is one of the most provocative and intriguing question ever since the inception of human sciences to which philosophers, psychologists, social psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists etc. have been responding in various ways. The question itself posed in a manner that it reflects the inability of the man to know his own Self in an objective manner. In a way, identity constructions often starts with the very same problem “Who am I?” which means that the explorations of the foundational elements that gives knowledge about the idea of self is necessary starting point for any theory of identity. However, what is equally important is to try and unravel the processes through which idea of self gets materialized in a particular fashion in certain context which hints towards the possibilities of the subjectivities within the idea of self. Here, two important propositions of Mitchel Foucault becomes salient that explores the ‘construction of self’ and ‘invention of self in societal framework’. Foucault argues, that Self is constructed by the ‘technologies of power’ and it can be invented by the ‘technologies of self’. However, construction and invention are not two independent processes but it is an interaction between the power and the resistance. This article would try and understand the two theoretical propositions with reference to the Bollywood Cinema *Dear Zindgi*. The film portrays how the binary oppositions are produced, and manipulated by the technologies of power which eventually constructs the idea of self within a social/cultural context and in what ways, technologies of self is a necessary catalyst for the invention of self.

**Keywords:** Technologies of Self, Technologies of Power, Cinema, Identity and Self



## INTRODUCTION

In the history of modern ways of theorisation, the textual and factual understanding of material world has had a hegemonic impact. This has led to the understanding of being and becoming in a particular manner through the usage of positivist tools like texts, facts, scientificity together with the methodical application of the rational and logical mind. Perhaps, it has disregarded every other forms of knowledge which are creative and can have huge impact on socio-cultural fabric. Thus, most of the knowledge about the material world and its interconnectedness with human mind intrinsically excludes the ‘diversified and creative thinking of the subject’. Therefore, agents become subservient to the dynamics of “Grand Theories” that eventually takes away the autonomous existence of popular expressions which have capacity to influence the material ties between the cultural and the political. However, social science is not a static science because the unit of analysis i.e. society is ever changing and dynamic<sup>1</sup>. So in order to comprehend this dynamics, it is an imperative to analyse the creative imaginations of the people which are rooted in cultural expressions like cinema, folk, theatre etc. because of its sheer simplicity and mass appeal makes it an important medium through which demotic consciousness gets constructed, imagined and narrated. This is crucial for theorizing because what we are witnessing is

<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussion see, Hichcock, C. (2004) *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science*, Wiley Blackwell publications.

the emerging shift from 'linguistic turn' to the 'pictorial turn'<sup>2</sup>. Now, the pictures (traditional and digital) have become a source of knowledge that can help us in understanding our ways of 'being' and 'becoming'. Here, cinematic narration of everyday realities can be quite useful in understanding life-worlds of human beings. In fact, "conventional cinema voices the concerns of the people and is essentially political, in that it is a major cultural and ideological force that not only reflects reality, but constructs it" (Kazmi, 1998).

The socio-cultural rules, norms, prohibitions towards certain behaviour, interdictions and restrictions associated with it often constructs, manipulates and modifies the inward self as something normal or abnormal. So, usually an individual seeks to confirm the inner deviations of self in relation to its outer domain. However, sometimes when the behaviour is not conforming to the outward framework of self (or social self) then it creates a crisis situation for the inward looking self. Thus, Foucault argues, it leaves no scope for the existence of difference within the inward looking self (Foucault, 1988). The story of Bollywood cinema *Dear Zindgi* clearly explains the influences/manipulation of Self formation in relation to analytics of power and occasional transgression of the binary oppositions by the individuals for celebrating the difference. In the movie, *Dear Zindgi* (2016, Gauri Shinde) Kaira (Alia Bhatt) is a promising cinematographer. Fatima, Jackie and Ganju are her three best friends. Her cheerful life becomes a nightmare when Raghuvendra, a film producer for whom she breaks up with her childhood sweetheart, ends up engaged to someone else. Her landlord turns her out of her apartment because the building association wants to rent apartments only to married couples. This serves as a catalyst for her shift to Goa to live grudgingly with her parents. All this leads to her spending many sleepless nights. While in Goa, she seeks out Dr. Jehangir "Jug" Khan (Shahrukh Khan), a psychologist, for her insomnia, after having accidentally heard him talk at a Mental Health Awareness Conference. Meanwhile, she meets a musician, Rumi, for whom she begins to develop feelings, but they break up before anything serious can happen. Kaira, at this stage is full of anxieties and fear of coming into any relationship which somehow compels her to think that there is some problem in her mind, in fact, she feels she is not normal and that is why she continues visiting for psychotherapy session in order to find out solution to her sleepless night. But, during sessions Dr. Jahangir Khan tries to make her understand is that problem does not lie in her inner self but she thinks differently, she fears that why she does not conform with the outside world when there is no need to do so because she is a different person and have different likings and desires.

Why is it so that we need to see the self in binary oppositions of being normal and abnormal; good and bad; male and female? What if somebody is neither good nor bad and what if somebody is neither male nor female? Why it has been the case that inner desires, feelings of Self must adhere to the already existing categorization of identities? Perhaps, this is the concern of Foucault when he tries to explain the technologies of power, and self which concerns not simply with the acts that are permitted and forbidden but with the feelings represented, the thoughts, the desires one might experience, the drives to seek within the self any hidden feeling, any movement of the soul, any desire disguised under illusory forms.

## 2. THE IDEA OF SELF: PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL DISPOSITIONS

An individual detached of its socio-cultural situations is obviously easily comprehensible but rarely conceivable. In fact, for the sake of objective interpretation about human nature scholars and theorists tends to ignore the myriad processes through which an individual goes through so as to find out the ways in which one can understand 'self' and 'other'. There are philosophers who argue for a case that abstract individuated self can never be imagined without the prior understanding of the societal influences. In a way, self is not something which is a construction of an individual alone but self is moulded, modified and produced within certain socio-cultural context (Walzer, 1983; Taylor, 1989). Perhaps, that is why Aristotle said that "man is a political animal". However, there are philosophers who believe that an independent or ultimate self is existent in every human being. These philosophers usually conceptualize the idea of individual self is prior from the social influences that can be understood through rational explorations of the knowledge about self. In other way, it emphasizes on the aspect of self-determination as an important characteristic of individual's mind that tries to capture the unique attributes of every individual. In this line, the idea of Descartes during enlightenment era situates individual self at the level of thinking. So, who am I? According to Descartes is a "thing that thinks". Thus, it naturalizes the notion of self as something with which an individual born. However, it tends to bypass the processes through which

<sup>2</sup> Picture Theory By T.J. Mitchell in which he argues for the autonomy of the image from the word, such an autonomy and iconic turn does not simply and naively concern the current condition of domain and primacy of images in contemporary society, supported by the proliferation of digital means of reproduction—a debatable claim in itself—but it rather concerns a theoretical and scientific shift in people's relation to images. The iconic turn would then rather interest "the way one talks about images", with the result that each science or theory of images would necessarily imply also a new philosophy of language concerning images.

'Self as being' and 'Self through becoming' interacts and influences the foundational elements in every given society. Similarly, Kant also argues that empirical self-consciousness "I" is an attribute of the individual inner consciousness which can be understood through logical and rational mind (Kant, 1787).

Whatever the origins of our representations, whether they are due to the influence of outer things, or are produced through inner causes, whether they arise *a priori*, or being appearances have an empirical origin, they must all, as modifications of the mind, belong to inner sense. (Kant, 1787)

This makes a reflection on the individuated ultimate self that exist as something natural and as an attribute of mind that carries the capability of knowing the "I".

Over the years, scholars and theorists have tried and explored various tools and epistemic notions like self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-awareness, embedded self that tries to explicate the intricacies of the internal Self. Of course, these epistemic notions cannot be treated as something interchangeable with the idea of Self but only complimentary and supplementary to the 'Self- concept'. In fact the idea of Self is distinguishable from [self-awareness](#), which refers to the extent to which [self-knowledge](#) is defined, consistent, and currently applicable to one's [attitudes](#) and [dispositions](#). Self-concept also differs from self-esteem: self-concept is a cognitive or descriptive component of one's self (e.g. "I am an excellent student"), while [self-esteem](#) is evaluative and opinionated (e.g. "I feel great about being an excellent student"). Self-concept is made up of one's [self-schemas](#), and interacts with self-esteem, self-knowledge, and the social self to form the self as whole. As C.H. Cooley in his concept Looking Glass Self<sup>3</sup>, has argued a person's self grows out of society's interpersonal interactions and the perceptions of others. In a nutshell, the idea of Self has always revolved around the interaction between individuated or independent Self and the social Self.

However, what if the very notion of individuated Self and social self gets problematized and the foundations of it becomes de-legitimized? The reason for Kaira's anxieties is non-conformity of her inward self with the normative valuations of the outward world which led her to create a perception that she is a deviation from the normal path and could not see her differential attitudes, desires, and feelings. Here, the ideas of Mitchel Foucault can be both extremely critical and constructive in terms of deconstructing the realities of the Self or what Foucault calls 'technologies of the self'. For Foucault, abstract individual self does not exist which further means that it cannot be discovered but can only be invented. Therefore, any endeavour to know the ultimate self can be a self-defeating and counter-intuitive exercise because the paths are designed in the context of subtle but effective and determinate power-relations that objectivizes the identity of the subject. Hence, individual's understanding of its own self is not something which is produced by him/her but by the 'technology of power' which permit us to produce, permit and manipulate things. In the movie, a colleague of Kaira happens to be gay and other friends of Kaira teases that gay person in a scene that he visits to psychiatrist because he is gay. On hearing this, Kaira asks, "why do you meet psychiatrist" and the gay person replies that "he meets psychiatrist for self-satisfaction that he is a gay". This narrative in the film reflects that how a non-conformist self when comes in interaction with the outward conditions then it tends to create a crisis for the inner self and consequently, produces a fractured self-knowledge. It is this process of technology of power that manipulates the inner will and self of the individual. Thus, it is not only about the concept of the individual Self but also about the other elements and processes of it. Foucault would argue that this sort of inward and outward interaction of individual Self impedes the celebration of the inner feelings, thoughts, desires and eventually produces a fractured self-perception. So, the binary oppositions of 'Self' and 'Other' leaves no scope for difference because any sort of difference becomes a deviation from normalized notions of the self.

### 3. TECHNOLOGIES OF POWER: CINEMATIC NARRATION

Kaira, out of her anxieties makes a visit to the psychologist Dr. Jahangir Khan because she started doubting over her non-conformist behaviour and her different attitude as something abnormal and unacceptable to the social norms. She sees a dream in the movie where several women wearing costumes of bride are laughing on her which compels her to think about her fear of not getting in relationship. Even her parents usually tell her that she is a childish girl and should get married with a mature man. These all incidents created a pressure on her for modifications in her attitude but because her desires and feelings does not want modifications and that is why she finds herself in a crisis situation. This is

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<sup>3</sup> Cooley's concept of the looking glass self, states that a person's self grows out of a person's social interactions with others. The view of ourselves comes from the contemplation of personal qualities and impressions of how others perceive us. Actually, how we see ourselves does not come from who we really are, but rather from how we *believe* others see us.

something about which Foucault have talked about while arguing how power manipulates, produces and objectivizes the subject's identity. In this sense, her perception of the self is fractured by the binary oppositions of the societal framework which is very much a construction of the 'technologies of power', which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject. (Foucault, 1988)

#### 4. TECHNOLOGIES OF SELF: CINEMATIC NARRATION

Technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform "I" themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault, 1988). In fact, when an individual starts celebrating the difference and non-conformist attitude it means a resistance to the technologies of power is creating possibilities for the invention of the self. In the movie, Dr. Jahangir Khan says to Kaira that "always be on the driving seat of your life and don't let other to control the steering. It is because you don't control it that why you find yourself in several doubts, fears and anxieties". But, there last session of psychopathic treatment ends with a statement of Dr. Jahagir Khan the problem is not in her inner self but it is in the outward societal framework and because she is different and thinks differently does not mean she is wrong or bad. Instead, she has to understand her difference and treat others simply as human beings (even father and mother) who can do mistakes. This is an exemplary cinematic narration of invention of the self about which Foucault talks about. For Foucoult going beyond binaries and celebrating the difference is the point from where an individual can invent the self.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The movie *Dear Zindgi*, is an expression of Foucauldian perspective that have potentialities to be sensitive about the context and difference. If I am neither believer nor non-believer then how would we accommodate the differences beyond the binaries? The meta-narratives of theory and philosophy of self usually try to capture the interaction and negotiation process of individual and social self through self-concept gets materialized. However, the very normative valuations are itself constructions of the power-relations so it fractures the inner self and dominates it to control and submit to the conformism which is an implicit character of the societal frameworks. So, any study which is driven from the point of view of the interactional process can be problematic because it does not take into account the difference and the context in which self is being mediated through practices. Perhaps, this may be the reason that Foucault did research to understand the analytics of power from the vantage point of so called abnormalities like madness, insanity, sexuality, prison, punishment so on and so forth. Here, the idea of technologies of power and technologies of self tries to capture the internal dynamics of power relations that constructs the Self and technologies of self can create the possibilities for inventing it.

#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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