REPRESENTATION OF THE CHOLA DYNASTY IN THE FILM AAYIRATHIL ORUVAN (2010) – A SEMIOTIC APPROACH

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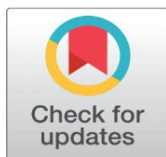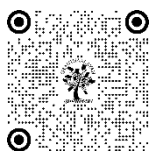[3] Assistant Professor, Department of Visual Communication Sathyabama Institute of Science & Technology, Chennai, India

ABSTRACT

The research is on the film Aayirathil Oruvan (2010) directed by Selavaraghavan. It is inspired loosely by the historical decline of the Tamil Chola dynasty and the rise of the Tamil Pandya dynasty. The Concept of the movie is an archaeologist goes missing when he went to search for the existence of the Chola dynasty, a team of officials are formed and go on a journey to find him where they cross a lot of hurdles and finally reach the Chola dynasty which is very surprising for them and find the archaeologist as well. The researcher has chosen the semiotic approach to analyze the movie. The researcher wants to analyze the historical perspective of the movie and identify the hidden details about the Chola king and his dynasty.

Keywords: Aayirathil Oruvan, Semiotic Analysis, Chola, Representation, Mythology

1. INTRODUCTION

Tamil cinema has embraced movies revolving around mythological themes as a timeless tradition. Karnan and Thiruvilayadal emerged as tremendous successes, shattering box office records. While mythological films held a significant position in

the early days of Tamil cinema, they gradually diminished in popularity, making room for productions centered on family dynamics and societal issues. However, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the genre experienced a remarkable resurgence under the guidance of the renowned writer/director A P Nagarajan, hailed as the maestro of mythological cinema.

2. AAYIRATHIL ORUVAN

Director Selvaraghvan is one of the most acclaimed directors of Tamil cinema and his movies have often been hit films. His fan base is very huge in Tamilnadu, who eagerly waits for his announcements and new releases of his next films. Aayirathil Oruvan was one of his dream project, it's an action, adventure movie. Karthi, Reema Sen, Andrea Jeremiah, R.Parthiban, Pratap.K.Pothen, and Azhagam Perumal were the main lead in the film. The movie was announced in the year 2007, the movie shooting was completed in the year 2009 it took 263 days for its production work and shooting process. Later the movie was released in the year 2010. During the release of the movie the director and the producer announced the movie's budget was 32 crores. Later in 2021, the director revealed that the movie's actual budget was 18 crores. The initially announced budget was to create hype among the audience. (This movie was celebrated by the Telugu audience rather than Tamil audience).

In 1279 AD The decline of the Chola dynasty seems imminent when the Pandyas expel the Chola people from their kingdom in South India. To escape from them and save the life of his follower, the Chola emperor sends his son to a secret region along with the Chola people. The fugitives take the holy idol to the Pandiyas, angering them. To capture the stolen idol, the fleeing Cholas and Pandiyas extend their plunder into unexplored regions but do not find them.

Centuries later, in 2009, Indian archaeologists continue to search for the existence of the lost Chola group based on clues left by ancient Pandya warriors. All the archaeologists who tried to look for the lightning are gone. Chandramouli, an archaeologist, is the latest missing person.

The Indian government arranges an expedition led by Officer Anitha, tasked with locating Chandramoul and the Chola kingdom. Officer Ravisekharan commands the Indian army, providing support for the mission. To ensure the expedition's success, they enlist the expertise of archaeologist Lavanya, who happens to be Chandramouli's estranged daughter. Officer Anitha receives crucial documents about the Chola dynasty, prepared by her father, along with instructions on reaching their destination.

Officer Anitha leads a group of porters, led by Muthu, and an army to carry the necessary supplies during their journey. The team embarks on their adventure, heading towards Min-guan Island, located near Vietnam. Along the way, they encounter and overcome seven traps set by the Cholas, including sea creatures, cannibals, warriors, snakes, hunger, quicksand, and a village. Unfortunately, many porters and soldiers fall victim to these traps.

Eventually, Muthu, Anitha, and Lavanya become separated from the rest of the group. They stumble upon the ruins of a village where they experience eerie occurrences and almost lose their sanity before finally discovering Chola's secret hideout. Inside, they encounter an isolated primitive Tamil group ruled by a Chola king. The king and his people have been waiting in hiding, anticipating the arrival of a legendary messenger who will restore their land's glory and prosperity and lead them back to their homeland, Thanjavur.

Believing herself to be the awaited messenger, Anitha reveals her true identity to the king. Meanwhile, Muthu and Lavanya find themselves treated as slaves, while Anitha seizes the opportunity to prove her worth. She endeavors to charm and persuade the Chola king to march back to her homeland within two days, where he can rightfully be crowned as king. However, the king questions Anitha's legitimacy, as her actions do not align with the descriptions passed down by their ancestors. The ancestors had written that the messenger would be heralded by a hailstorm and that enduring mistreatment from the messenger would ultimately benefit the tribe.

Simultaneously, Anitha astounds the priest and contaminates the water sources, while encountering the sacred idol of the Pandya dynasty. Eventually, he unveils his true identity as a descendant of the Pandya lineage, a race that dedicated countless generations in search of the Chola prince and his people. Intriguingly, the minister responsible for funding the expedition is also of Pandyan descent. The Chola king is disheartened as he had believed Anitha to be the genuine messenger he had been awaiting. Anitha and Ravishekaran amass a formidable army and launch an assault on the concealed kingdom. However, the king eventually realizes that Muthu is the actual messenger destined to rescue the Cholas from the clutches of Anitha and the invading forces. Despite their valiant efforts, the Cholas ultimately suffer defeat and are captured. Tragically, the army inflicts heinous acts of sexual assault upon the women, the king is slain, and the men meet their demise in the sea. Fortunately, Muthu manages to escape and successfully rescues the Chola prince. Fulfilling the prophecy, the messenger ensures the revival of the Chola dynasty by returning its seed to India.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Utami and Setia (2021). According to "A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS CONDUCTED ON THE MOVIE POSTER FOR "SHUTTER ISLAND," it was discovered that the poster incorporates two elements: verbal and visual components. The verbal aspect encompasses various categories, such as the headline that introduces the main character, the movie's title, and a line on the poster that entices the audience with the island setting and the difficulty of leaving it, serving as an indication of the movie's release date. Simultaneously, the visual aspect of the poster effectively communicates the film's genre, which is mystical, through its colors, shapes, and background. The movie poster effectively conveys a message through both its verbal and visual components, utilizing semiotic signs.

Wantoro (2018) On his conference paper SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF SPACE AND TIME IN THE FILM "TIME MACHINE" studied that the film Time Machine clearly presents the tools of a time machine born of relationships and intelligence. With this tool, the main character of (Alexander Hartdegen) can set the direction of space, time, and destiny according to his wishes. Through this Time Machine film, the author (which is actually the United States as the creator of modernism) seems to want to spread the view that relationships, intelligence, and science are the only means of progress. The goal was to make all viewers accept this point of view, thus achieving universalism as one of the characteristics of the modernist narrative. The character of the message is a time machine with all its functions. The researcher stated in the film, these are all well-designed and presented, indirectly using visual cues so that the audience does not feel patronized, indoctrinated, or influenced. This is all to facilitate the slow delivery of the message and embed it in the mind of the reader. The message of this film shows the lust for power of the United States (the West in general) that will never end. Human desire, based on advances in scientific technology that is still being developed today, penetrates space and time to change

history. The researcher also states that the story of is true, not just the fate of according to their expectations. The greater the desire of the people to correct history, the more it changes fate, which happened like Alexander Hartdegen when he wants to change the fate of his lover Emma. The researcher concludes that to find diffusion in the medium of film, because the film has not yet reached all can be projected easily, quickly, and possibly.

Viduthalai et al. (2017). On their conference paper, FAILURE OF DALIT RENAISSANCE: An analysis of Dalit and Non-Dalit films through a semiotic lens reveals that Dalit films carry a significant social responsibility that distinguishes them from mainstream movies. The researcher highlights the positive trend of an increasing number of Dalit films and filmmakers. However, it is crucial for Dalit films to avoid mere imitation of mainstream cinema and the perpetuation of caste glorification, violence, and political propaganda. Instead, Dalit filmmakers should demonstrate meticulousness in every aspect of their work, recognizing that even minor misrepresentations of Dalits could be exploited by political parties. It is essential for Dalit filmmakers to provide a well-rounded perspective on the issues they address, rather than solely focusing on a single aspect. They have a duty to society and the marginalized communities that Dalit literature and cinema originated from, serving as a unique and alternative form of artistic expression. In doing so, they should refrain from excessive glorification of violence, pride, and fanaticism, and instead emphasize alternative education, constitutional arrangements, and empowerment. The researcher concludes by urging Dalit filmmakers to be role models for the Dalit community and strive towards an egalitarian society grounded in equality.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
4.1. REPRESENTATION THEORY

Stuart Hall believed that performance is the phenomenon through which individuals in a society employ communication to generate significance involving the arrangement of symbols that enable us to interpret and depict the world within the broader framework of beliefs and principles. These interpretations are not static or inherently objective; rather, they are brought forth and shaped by the collective constructs of a given community.

Hall (1997) identified two "representational systems" –

- Conceptual maps and
- Language.

4.1.1. CONCEPTUAL MAPS

The conceptual maps show how the director thought the migrated Cholas would have set up those seven traps to prevent outsiders from discovering their new location. They did this in order to defend their monarch and the stolen Pandya statue. In order to locate the migratory Cholas, the archaeologist travels all seven paths in the film, but the Tamil Nadu government declares him dead halfway through. A team is assembled to locate the archaeologist and the Chola people in order to learn the truth; after navigating all 7 traps, they learn that the Cholas are still alive and have their own secret dynasty. This mythological film was made using the sources gathered and the director's imagination.

4.1.2. LANGUAGE

According to the movie Aayirathil Oruvan (2010), the second system of representation, language is used in many ways. The language spoken by the hero is picturized as a local language due to his personality and the other two main lead character's language is picturized as a professional language. The language spoken by the Chola people and the King is sentamizh. Pre climax sequence is picturized as mono acting – without dialogue, using gesture to communicate. This scene is about 10 to 15 minutes which is a wow factor of this film.

5. METHODOLOGY

Semiotics is used by the researcher in this study. The Greek word "semeion," which means "sign," is where the word "semiotics" originates. The study of signs is central to semiotics. The study of signs and how they function is known as semiotics. The researcher analysed the content by semiotic and content analysis.

6. OBJECTIVES

To understand the representation of the Chola dynasty with the help of background set works, dialogues, and costumes that the characters adorn in the film.

To analyze the signs in Aayirathil Oruvan (2010) movie.

To study the symbols and signs in the movie Aayirathil Oruvan (2010). How the signs help in the storytelling process.

7. HYPOTHESIS

Aayirathil Oruvan (2010) movie songs have additional material that would help it connect with the audience.

8. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The major focus of the research is how the filmmaker presents the Cholas dynasty in the film Aayirathil Oruvan (2010). The researcher's major issue is if the depiction of the Cholas dynasty in the film Aayirathil Oruvan (2010) uses signs and symbols from the film.

9. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The title card is based on Rajaguru (Face) who is the mentor of the Chola dynasty. The font is created based on the Chola weapon, the weapons are bow and arrow, Spear, and Cholas trident. Figure 1

Figure 1

Figure 1 Movie's Title Card

The opening sequence of the film features artwork with narration telling how the migrants travelled while encountering seven difficulties before settling in a cave on an island. To alert the messenger who is coming to help them, the migrants depicted each of the seven battles within the cave. The same paintings appear again toward the film's conclusion. This was communicated by the director to highlight how highly Cholas valued the paintings. Figure 2

Figure 2

Figure 2 Storytelling Through Paintings

In 1931, S.K. Govindasamy, a professor at Annamalai University, discovered Chola frescoes from the Brihadisvara temple's circular corridor.These are the first Chola paintings discovered. Figure 3 The hallway appears dim, with its walls fully coated in two layers of paint stretching from the floor to the ceiling. Researchers

have unraveled the method employed in these frescoes. A consistent blend of limestone is applied to the stones, requiring a couple of days for solidification. Within this brief period, sizable artworks were created using natural organic pigments.

Chola paintings were painted during Nayak's time. Below are the Chola frescoes that express the fiery spirit of Saivism. They were probably synchronized with the completion of the Rajaraja Chola temple.

Figure 3

Figure 3 Chola's Frescoes

Rajendra Chola 1 captured many places in Vietnam and also captured Vengai and Kalinga Kingdom. He has also conquered two islands that is Lakshwadeep and Maldives and renamed the Maldives "Munnir Planthivu Pannirayiram" which translates "the region comprises a vast expanse of twelve thousand islands and a surrounding ocean where three bodies of water converge". These islands eventually became valuable locations for the establishment of crucial naval bases.In one of the interviews, the director stated that " Cholas are the ones who owned the fleet and did overseas trading with those fleets". With these references, the director picturized that the Cholas would have settled in Vietnam (Mingua Islands) Figure 4 and conveyed it to the audience.

The ritual of cholas is to have hidden paths under the building they build. Thanjavur's Brihadeeshwara temple built by the Cholas has 10 paths which are said by the people around and there is no evidence for this. It is also stated that only 3 out of 10 are the correct paths and the rest are wrong. It is said that the Government has closed all the paths for public safety.

With these references director Selvaraghavan imagined those 10 paths as 7 traps in which the 3 are artificial traps i.e., the sink hole, Hunger, Village, and its chaotic sounds whereas the rest 4 are natural traps i.e., Sea creatures, Cannibals, Red Warriors, Snakes.

Figure 4

Figure 4 Island Intro

9.1. SEA CREATURES

The initial snare was placed on Min-guan Island in Vietnam, which possesses the form of a gleaming fish. This is not a figment of the imagination but an actual existence. As depicted in the film, the fish's shape is conveyed through the radio. The species resembling manta rays, commonly referred to as Devilfish, were selected for a specific reason by Selvaraghavan. Manta Rays exhibit exceptional intelligence akin to that of elephants. Additionally, these intelligent creatures have the ability to designate their territories. This could possibly explain why the Cholas employed a trap involving Manta Rays. Figure 5.

Figure 5

Figure 5 Sea Creatures

9.2. RED WARRIORS

The warrior's journey toward the border trap concludes with the display of an image depicting a tree adorned with the face of a red Indian Figure 6. This image can be associated with the epic novel "Ponniyin Selvan." The Native American warrior bears a resemblance to the legendary "Velaikaran Padai," a group of protective warriors devoted to safeguarding the king. Originating from the Pandyas, the "Velaikaran Padai" concept spread and subsequent kings established their own groups of warriors. When unable to fulfill their duty of protecting the king, they express remorse and commit suicide. In this movie, we witness a Native American individual confronting the Chola King's palace and offering an apology before ending his life by cutting his throat.

Figure 6

Figure 6 Red Warriors

9.3. QUICKSAND

In this scene, Nadarajan's shadow appears only at sunrise and sunset Figure 7. The sunlight takes on the shape of Nadarajan, allowing for safe passage across the earth without encountering the perilous quicksand. This particular scene can be associated with the Virupaksha Temple, dating back to the 17th century Figure 8. A fascinating occurrence takes place there, as the inverted shadow of the Raja Gopuram falls upon the wall of the Hall Mantapa, located over 300 meters away. Lakkana Dandesha, the chief under Deva Raya II, the ruler of the Vijayanagara Empire, regarded this phenomenon as an example of advanced technology.

Figure 7

Figure 7 Quicksand-Natraja's Shadow

Figure 8

Figure 8 Virupaksha Temple

After entering the cholas' cave, Karthi is observed being operated on by the Cholas to remove the bullet from him Figure 9. Cholas had the skills to perform the surgery just like doctors did, even in the absence of medical knowledge and facilities. According to historical accounts, Cholas placed a high priority on public health care.
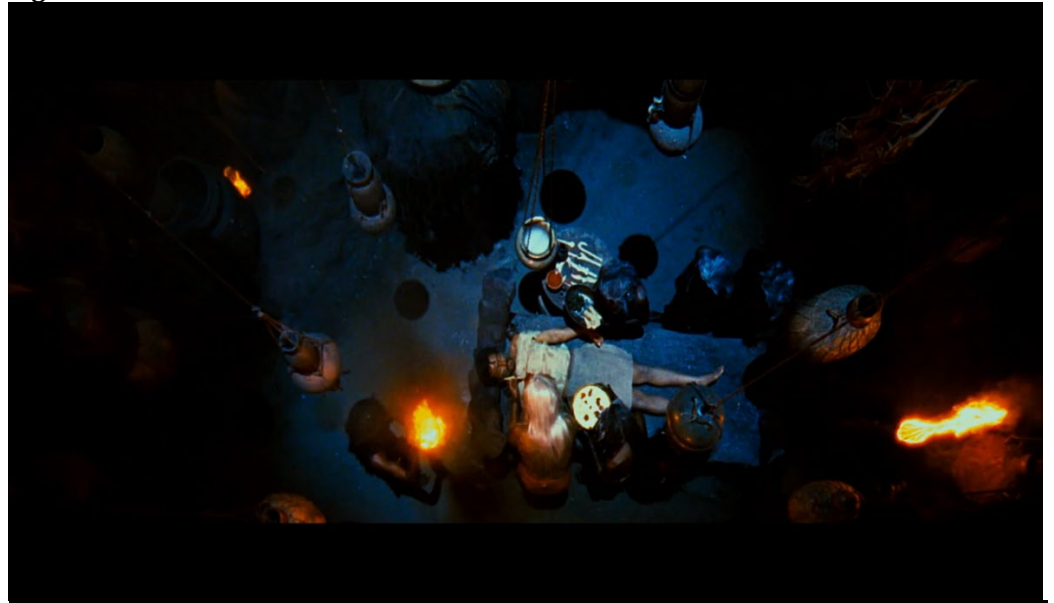
Figure 9

Figure 9 Treatment Scene

Cholas adopted Navagandam practices means putting an end to those who live for more than 200 years because they won't be able to care for them. The main reason for human sacrifice is either the King is ill or to win the war, this was their belief. The Chola people come forward on their own for human sacrifice during the war as it is their ritual and a statue of them is placed in their memory. Based on this, the filmmaker pictured that Chola people had begun traveling back to Thanjavur as their messenger had arrived and that a 200-year-old man would volunteer to be sacrificed as human sacrifice Figure 10.
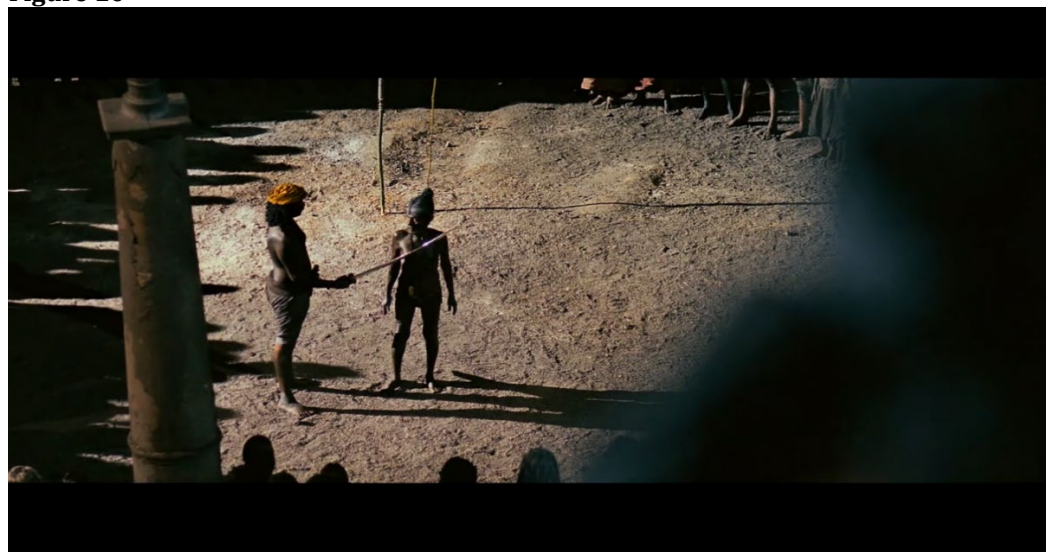
Figure 10

Figure 10 Navagandam Scene

Reema sen asks one of the Cholas women to be her messenger to convey a message that she found the Chola dynasty and their idol, to the chief of the team with who they all planned and came with to find the archaeologist. The Cholas women is

seen running to the chief tell him the message and is seen begin dead. During the king period, the warriors had to travel to other places for war, after defeating their enemies and getting victory one of the warriors runs back to the state and tells the king about the victory and dies. Figure 11 The director has picturized the scene that way.

Figure 11

Figure 11 Reema Sen Assign a Messenger to Pass the Message

The Cholas used the catapult technique to defeat their enemy's troops. The movie director gets inspired and used this catapult technique for this war scene Figure 12. The main rule of the War is that defender nor the a-fender should step back which pronounces as a victory. In this scene, the army people are seen stepping back whereas the commando who is part of the pandays troop stops his henchman from coming back which pronounces as cholas are the victories. Figure 13

Figure 12

Figure 12 The Army People Gets Stepback for First Time

Figure 13

Figure 13 The Chief Commander Shouted at the Army Force

But the Cholas were didn't step back when they fought. They move forward, this shows that the Chola's brave and their strategy. Figure 14

Figure 14

Figure 14 The Chola's Army were Step Forward

To get the victory the commando is ready to kill his very own henchman who are in between the Pandyas. This show how Inhumane and he can go to any extreme for the victory to get back his idol.

Figure 15

Figure 15 The Army People Gets Stepback for Second Time

When the Cholas attack them with the miners, the military troops stepped back another time Figure 15. The Commando was afraid that their army will get defeated. So, the commando says to his henchman to kill Cholas by throwing bombs at them. Figure 16

Figure 16

Figure 16 Bomb Blast

The Chola people even though being hidden for years and starving to death had advanced thinking, they go as miners Figure 17 to defeat their enemies. In reality, the Cholas never did something like this but through this Particular scene, the director conveys how advanced Chola people think.

Figure 17

Figure 17 The Chola's Miners Force

10. CONCLUSION

The success of a film is determined on the properly placed signs and the mixing of signs to form a whole and establish meaning. The researcher wants to analyze the historical perspective of the movie and identify the hidden details about the Chola king and his dynasty.

The researcher examines this film to identify the signals in the film and how the filmmaker used these indicators to communicate messages. The researcher like to point out the findings indicate that the filmmaker used symbols and signs in his film to communicate messages. Semiotics in the film is a vital and fascinating component of each visual. It is the use and connection of signs and pictures to construct a plot and define specific events that occur inside the plot.

The Cholas set traps on Vietnam's Min-guan Island, which is shaped like a fish, using Manta Rays due to their high intelligence and territorial behavior. The second trap involves the concept of cannibals guarding the Cholas' passage. Prior to entering the border trap, a red Indian face carved onto a tree was presented, potentially linked to the "Velaikaran Padai," soldiers devoted to protecting the monarch. In Ilha da Queimada Grande, a dangerous island off the coast of Brazil controlled by snakes, Selvaraghavan chose it as a trap due to its perilous nature. The fourth trap involves starvation, while the fifth trap involves a shadow that appears at sunrise and sunset, potentially linked to the Raja Gopuram of the 17th-century Virupaksha Temple. The sixth and seventh traps are the village and chaotic sound traps, which aim to drive Karthi, Andrea, and Reema Sen mad and under the control of Raja Guru. The ultimate goal is to prevent them from reaching their destination. Semiotics is utilized to produce meaning in various mediums, including text, radio, television, graphics, comics, and cinema.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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