

ANALYSIS OF TRUTH, CAUSALITY AND MARGINALIZATION OF WOMEN IN THE CONTEXT OF AN ASIAN MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

History writing involves the reconstruction of events of the past, whether be a significantly small detail or several series of events resulting in a bigger incident, it is often carried out through the method of interpretation which is based on one's memory, perception, and critical ability to analyze an event. Movies thus act as a medium of showing the occurrences of any event which had initially gone through the process of writing before being put in front of the camera in the form of acting. It provides an important platform to analyze the crucial aspects of how a narrative is formed, the process of ascertaining the truth to a particular event, the causes that led to a specific incident, and how it is being interpreted by the characters. The movie *Rashomon*, in this regard, is one of the significant movies which provide multiple narratives of a single event, apart from being one of the finest psychological thriller films of the 1950s, which enables the viewer to play the role of a historian and analyze and interpret the critical aspects of truth, causality and marginalization of women in the context of the movie and discover its similarities in one's present-day surroundings.

Keywords: truth, causality, women, interpretation, marginalization

Introduction

The movie '*Rashomon*' directed by Akira Kurosawa in 1950 is one of the first Japanese movies to receive significant international fame in the realm of Golden Lion and Academy Awards. This psychological thriller movie had a profound cinematic and cultural impact which eventually led to the creation of the term, of what is known today as '*The Rashomon Effect*.' It refers to the phenomenon where individuals interpret the details of an event in a different or contradictory manner, which is explicitly portrayed in the movie through the focus on the complexities of human nature, as several characters interpret various stories leading to multiple incidents, thus showing several possibilities of one single main event. This makes the audience question what is true and what is not. Set in the context of an ancient Japanese era, the central theme of the movie revolves around the murder of a samurai and the despoilment of his wife by a bandit. As history writing primarily focuses on uncovering any incident or event as accurately as possible, this movie provides a forum for discussion and analysis of some of the central questions associated with the interpretation of facts while writing history. Some of the significant aspects related to history writing in association with the context of the movie involve the attribution of several causes which

leads to the eventual death of the samurai and the despoilment of his wife, understanding the role of interpretation and the marginalization of women from a historical point of view.

Truth and Narrative

The four central narrators in the movie include a woodcutter, a bandit, the samurai's wife, and the samurai as a dead man speaking through a medium, who describe their own versions of the murder which they regard to be the 'truth' in their own sense, which eventually leads to the murder of the samurai and the despoilment of his wife. E.H Carr in his book, '*What is History?*' describes history to be an enormous jig-saw puzzle with a lot of missing parts (Carr 1990, 13). Similarly, all these major characters who narrate their stories contradict one another thereby missing out on several smaller details which makes one question whose version of the story could be attributed to the closest possible truth. As truth is often considered to be objective in nature, it could be assumed that the characters are speaking based on what they saw and heard of the murder being committed. However, since all the four central characters in the movie narrate their stories in the court of law (courthouse garden), it is possible to assume that they were motivated by self-interest to portray themselves as the real victim. This is observed in the initial scenes of the movies which display the testimony of the

woodcutter wherein he presents himself to be the founder of the dead body, while at the end of the movie he hesitatingly admits the truth to a villager about lying at the courthouse in order to not get involved in the murder case. Apart from the woodcutter, neither the bandit's story matches the woman's nor the woman's story matches with the woodcutter and vice-versa. Thus, it is observed that there is no absolute truth attached to the sequence of events that took place in the forest. This brings us to question what motivates humans while interpreting the facts of a particular incident.

Role of human emotion in interpretation of facts

In the context of the interpretation of facts within a historical framework, E.H Carr describes in his book '*What is History?*', that facts are not as pure as they seem to be, because they are always refracted through the mind of the recorder, therefore they do not or cannot exist in a pure form (Carr 1990, 22). The role of human emotion comes into play here, as while interpreting an event a certain amount of subjectivity always exists to suit the central theme of the event as well as the motive of the narrator. This makes one realize that in order to understand the narrative, it is first necessary to apprehend the motive of the author or the meaning of a text, to understand the differences in the interpretation of facts. These differences, according to Carr, mostly occur because we try to achieve our understanding of the past through the eyes of the present (Carr 1990, 24). Therefore, a very thorough scrutiny of sources is required to arrive at the most objective manner of dealing with facts to describe an event as truthfully as possible. In the movie, despite the varied accounts of the events in the forest where the main story occurs, the certainty of the story lies in the murder of the samurai which could be attributed to several causes.

Causality

While confronting the necessity of assigning causes to events, E.H Carr provides the first characteristic while approaching the problem of cause is to assign several causes to the same event (Carr 1990, 89). Placing this rule in the context of the movie, the reason for the

eventual death of the samurai could be observed through the narration of the characters at the courthouse. The woodcutter, the woman, and the dead samurai all refer to voluntary causes that leads to the samurai's death such as the bandit might have killed the samurai in a fierce duel according to the narration of the bandit, or, the possibility of the samurai's wife killing her husband in a fit of rage, or, the bandit must have hit her, then killed the samurai and put the dagger on the samurai's wife's hand to make it look like a crime committed by her, or, the samurai killed himself out of shame and disgust as his wife was dishonored by another man, or, the samurai's wife might have instigated both the men on killing each other after they accused her of being a dishonorable woman, or, the bandit killed the samurai by accident. The several narrations in the movies show that no truth is absolute in the strictest sense of the term, therefore needs to be verified quite carefully in order to provide an accurate explanation to a set of events as possible. Apart from these voluntary causes that led to the death of the samurai, the bandit's narration in the court points out an incidental/involuntary cause which shows the importance of ascertaining multiple causes in any event.

Importance of Incidental causes

Carr in '*What is History?*' describes the role of accidents in history while placing it within a hierarchy of causes. According to him, the relative significance of one cause or set of causes is determined by the essence of its interpretation (Carr 1990, 103). Therefore, in the context of an incidental cause which seems to be a minor cause within the cause hierarchy, the bandit in the movie while being on trial in the courthouse, mentions a mild breeze blowing through the road on which the samurai and his wife were traveling. This led him to have a glimpse of the samurai's wife which subsequently led to the horrific chain of events in the forest. Thus, while ascertaining the truth of an event and searching for a motive behind the narrator's statement, it is necessary to locate several causes to understand the possible flow of events that may have led to the eventual outcome of any incident set in a

movie, story or within a real historical framework.

A glimpse into the role of patriarchy

Gerda Lerner in her book *'The creation of Patriarchy'*, describes patriarchy to be a historic creation formed by men and women as a 2500-year-old process that enabled men to dominate over women and children by establishing values, customs, laws, and social roles in favour of the men (Lerner 1986, 212). In the context of the movie this critical aspect sums up to be one of the significant and deep-rooted cause which led to the murder and the despoilment of his wife. It is portrayed through several dialogues and actions on part of both the men and the woman. The bandit's narration shows that his primary resolve was to kidnap the wife of the samurai rather than kill the samurai in the first place. However, as a married woman is considered to be the property of her husband in an ancient Japanese society, the bandit needed to duel the samurai and eventually kill him honourably in order to acquire his wife. The notion of owning a woman is clearly portrayed in the bandit's narration. Subtle references on the need for the approval of the husband (samurai) in order to kill herself due to her virtue being stained by another man is portrayed through the woman's version of the story, where she is shown to be extremely helpless and begs her husband to kill her because she was torn between two men, while eventually almost killing herself but failing to do so in the end. This aspect of being below her husband and seeking his approval for everything lies in the deep-rooted aspect where women were methodically led to believe that a woman is not the real master of her life and must always be dependent and adhere to her husband at all times. Furthermore, in the context of the movie, dominance over the lives of women is observed in the narration of the dead samurai's story, where he was entirely ready to forgive the bandit when his wife agrees to run away with the bandit while asking him to kill her husband. The bandit in turn seeks permission of her husband whether to kill her or let her go. This is one of the surprising yet deep-rooted aspects of the age-old notion that even a nobleman's wife if dishonoured by another man other shall be at

the mercy of the men who portray themselves to be the decision makers of the society, having the power to allow a woman/person to live amongst themselves or be cast off by the society. Even the bandit is portrayed to be in a higher position than the woman regardless of the heinous crime he committed, as it is depicted in a very dramatic manner in the movie where the bandit places his foot over the samurai's wife, thus showing it does not matter even if she belongs to a nobleman's family, as she is a woman, her position shall always remain beneath a man. The position of a woman being consolidated and actualized through their sexual relationships has been focused upon in this scene, wherein for the women, sexual exploitation is the very mark of class exploitation (Lerner 1986, 215). Thus, the connection of class exploitation being related to a woman's chastity is one of the important aspects this movie tries to portray which exists even in the present day scenario.

The aspect of control over women's sexuality

The narration of the woodcutter's part of the story which he describes to the villager in the initial scenes of the movie brings into light the context of women's sexuality in the movie. Both the bandit and her husband tend to discard her after acquiring their part of the pleasure, the husband formerly and the bandit in the forest, then afterward tend to seriously question her moral character while refusing to look unto themselves for being solely responsible for the chain of events that occurred in the forest. This aspect of the story needs to be looked at with a deeper understanding with regards to the control of women's sexuality since ancient times, where women were meant to serve their masters in every possible way. Lerner in *'The Creation of Patriarchy'*, describes it is through their sexual behaviour that they gain access to class. "Respectable women" gain access to class through their fathers and husbands, but breaking the sexual rules can at once declass them. The gender definition of sexual "deviance" marks a woman as "not respectable," which in fact consigns her to the lowest class status possible (Lerner 1986, 215). The condition of a woman slave revolved

around the activities of the harem primarily, other than the norms of being a child-bearer and household maker which were some of the activities deemed fit for the married women or women of relatively higher stature. As much of history has been written from a man's point of view, it has only been about men's history (Lerner 1986, 4). Women have been structurally kept away from knowing and understanding their contribution in every single event of history, which eventually led them to question and seek answers about their own identity, position, and power they are capable of. Furthermore, the context in which the samurai's wife asks both the men to be able to fight off one another in order to truly win her in the later scenes of the movie provides a strong example of how patriarchy has divulged its roots so deep into the minds of women which have made them assert their own worth in terms of what men think of them, thus having no solid ground to stand for herself and eventually questioning her own rights in terms of freedom, equality, etc.

Conclusion

The movie *Rashomon* thus emits multiple narratives concerning human nature, trying to blend both objectivity and subjectivity in the context of finding out the closest possible truth through ascertaining a range of causes within the hierarchy of causes, while also disseminating the important message of marginalization of women through the story of the samurai's wife. It combines understanding the aspects of interpretation of facts and the complexities of human emotion involved with it, which shows some of the crucial factors while writing history. All these narratives make *Rashomon* so rich that it is a story within a story. At the end of the movie, the portrayal of the sunlight after a heavy downpour and a baby seems to represent hope, that despite all doubts the priest in the movie had on the human soul and his questions about faith and morality at the beginning of the movie, the priest's faith is slowly restored by the actions of the woodcutter as the woodcutter takes the responsibility of the baby and walks off towards the screen, representing the baby to be a symbol of hope that humanity needs to cherish and build together for a better future.

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