

Spatial Metaphor and Dream Narration in the Film Pad Man

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Abstract: As a film with profound connotations and broad social impact, "Pad Man" has not only prompted introspection on traditional local values in India but also sparked global discussions on women's rights. This paper takes the film as its subject of study and, from the theoretical perspective of spatial metaphor, deconstructs the metaphorical meanings of the three spatial settings—the Indian countryside, the city, and the United Nations headquarters. It systematically teases out the narrative logic of the protagonist Lakshmi's dream, from its inception and development to its culmination. On this basis, the paper further explores the deep connection between individual resistance and social change, excavates the ideological value of the film in the collision between tradition and modernity, as well as between individual and universal values, and provides a new perspective for understanding the social critique and cultural dissemination functions of the film.

Keywords: "Pad Man"; Spatial Metaphor; Dream Narrative; Social Change

1. Introduction

As a powerful artistic expression, movies often use various elements to convey profound thoughts and emotions. Among them, the use of geographical space is a key link in the film narrative. It is not only the physical place where the story takes place, but also carries rich symbolic significance and cultural connotation, which is closely intertwined with many factors such as history, culture, politics, race, gender, power, psychology and even time [1]. Pad Man, a film based on the famous Indian entrepreneur Arunachalam Muruganatham, combines the personal struggle of the hero Lakshmi with social and cultural changes through the ingenious construction of geographical space, presenting a story full of tension and enlightenment for the audience.

As the core narrative carrier of Pad Man, India's

rural areas, cities and United Nations headquarters each play a unique role in the film, bearing rich metaphorical meanings and embodying different order norms, behaviors, historical connotations and values. The transformation of these spaces not only promotes the development of the story, but also becomes an important starting point for analyzing the theme and value of the film. Through the deconstruction of these spatial metaphors, we can deeply understand the development track of the hero's dream, the deep connection between personal struggle and social change, and the fierce collision between Indian traditional culture and modern civilization.

2. Rural India: the Traditional Field of Dream Germination

In India in the 1990s, sanitary napkins became an unbearable luxury for ordinary families because of their long-term dependence on imports and high tariffs of 12%. A pack of sanitary napkins with a price of about 55 rupees is equivalent to a month's rice and oil expenses of ordinary families. This kind of economic pressure is particularly obvious for women in poor rural areas, and sanitary napkins have completely become consumables that they cannot afford. However, this dilemma has not improved rapidly over time. Until 2012, more than 80% of women in India were unable to use sanitary products such as pads due to limited economic conditions or traditional concepts [2]. Forced, they can only choose unsanitary materials such as dirty cloth strips, leaves, ashes and even cow dung to cope with the physiological period, which directly leads to the high incidence of gynecological diseases and seriously threatens their lives. This physiological dilemma formed by the superposition of economic burden and concept provides a real and heavy social background for the story of Pad Man.

The Indian countryside in the film Pad Man is not only the starting point of the story, but also the concrete carrier of traditional thought and

conservative social structure. The social order in rural areas is deeply dependent on the discipline system constructed by family and religion, which forms an ideological barrier that is difficult to break through, and the taboo of physiological period is one of the most representative cultural symbols, and its influence runs through all aspects of women's lives. Women will be labeled as "unclean" during the physiological period. The Indian Code of Manu clearly states, "Don't approach a wife whose menstruation begins. Don't sleep with her. Don't eat with your wife. Because if a person approaches a woman defiled by menstruation, her knowledge, energy, physical strength, vision and life span will be completely destroyed. But those who stay away from their defiled wives will have increased knowledge, energy, physical strength, vision and longevity [3]." In addition, they also have to abide by a series of strict taboos, not to enter the kitchen, not to touch religious objects, not to touch men, and even to be isolated on the balcony or in a special hut until the end of their menstrual period. This taboo is not only a direct suppression of women's physical rights, but also a core link to maintain the traditional social order [4].

In the daily practice of family and community, the long-term discipline of religious teachings constantly strengthens the concept of unclean physiological period, which makes women flinch from high sanitary pads because of shame even if they use rags that are too dirty to clean bicycles to cope with physiological period, distorting normal physiological phenomena into unspeakable secrets. This double harm can be clearly seen in the physical and mental levels. The health crisis caused by unsanitary products continues to threaten life. On the other hand, women gradually internalize discriminatory ideas and fall into the predicament of self-deprecation and depression. Just like the resistance and shame of his wife, Ge Yateli, when her husband, lakshmi, made pads. She felt that her husband's behavior was against the rules, and he was doing something unseemly and embarrassing. At a family gathering, my nephew accidentally pulled out the pad in lakshmi's pocket and shouted "Uncle's little handkerchief". In an instant, the expression of women in the room froze, with embarrassment and shame on her face. Greatly felt even more humiliated. She pleaded with her husband, "Don't go on. You're embarrassing me in front of everyone." In her

eyes, her husband's concern for women's physiological health has become an act that shames the whole family. It is difficult for her to understand why her husband wants to break the tradition and stick to such a thing that is regarded as taboo by society. In addition, when lakshmi was spurned by the whole village for sending pads to girls for trial use, she pushed her husband away, saying that "it would make her husband's family lose face" and eventually moved back to her family. This is a true portrayal of Indian women's physical and mental injuries under traditional taboos.

From the social origin, physiological taboo is essentially a concentrated expression of discrimination and marginalization against women in rural India. Under the traditional framework that men are superior to women, women's bodies are defined as the source of danger and impurity, which must be controlled and regulated through strict taboos. This concept directly binds women to family roles and deprives them of equal opportunities to participate in social life. Religion further strengthened this cognition in this process, making it deeply rooted in social and cultural texture and hard to shake; At the same time, the idea that men are superior to women has penetrated into key areas such as family decision-making and resource allocation, and women have always been marginalized and lack the right to speak independently. The oppression of this social structure makes women face double obstacles in the pursuit of menstrual health rights and interests. We should not only resist the prejudice of traditional ideas, but also break through the institutional barriers of male-dominated society. In the film, when lakshmi was obsessed with developing safety pads for his wife, his experiment triggered a collective panic in the village. Handmade pads are not only a product, but also a tear of the thousand-year-old dogma that "women's body is forbidden to be touched by men", so they are expelled by their families and violently confronted by villagers. Their behavior is essentially an open challenge to the gender segregation system and cultural ignorance. Behind this conflict, it reflects the reality that women's rights are seriously deprived under the traditional social structure. Their reasonable demands have been ignored, their physical and health rights have become victims of the concept that men are superior to women, and their

development opportunities and personal dignity have been ruthlessly suppressed under the traditional framework [5].

In such a depressed traditional rural environment, lakshmi's rebellious consciousness is like a seedling growing in a crack in the rock, and its awakening stems from the direct observation of his wife's pain and unfair treatment during her physiological period. When he witnessed his wife's physical and mental torture due to taboo and poverty, he began to question the traditional authority and then challenged it. His rebellious behavior is essentially a thorough awakening to deep social problems such as gender inequality and backward ideas. He no longer takes his wife's experience as a natural tradition, but clearly realizes that women should have equal rights of body autonomy and health, and the physiological period should never be the reason why they are labeled as "unclean" and restricted from normal life. In his view, providing cheap and safe pads for women is a key step to break this dilemma. This can not only solve the health crisis of women during their physiological period, but also help them get rid of the taboo of isolation during their physiological period, really get out of the closed house, freely participate in social production and public life, and realize the double liberation of body and spirit.

However, lakshmi's rebellion caused an uproar in the closed rural society. His family couldn't understand his unconventional practices, and his neighbors accused him of violating religious teachings. He was isolated and under great pressure. However, this pressure has not shaken his determination to pursue equal rights for women, and this spirit of struggle bred in the traditional soil just highlights the fierce conflict between individual consciousness and collective tradition. As an unconventional individual, he dared to face the inherent concepts of the whole society, and this courage and firmness became an important support for the subsequent narrative. In order to achieve the specific goal of producing cheap safety pads, lakshmi bravely chose to leave the countryside and go to the big city of Delhi to seek development space. This spatial transfer is not only an active response to the traditional social pressure in rural areas, but also an important turning point in transforming individual ideals into practical actions, which has deep symbolic significance. In addition, from the perspective of theme expression, the

awakening and strengthening of lakshmi's rebellious consciousness marks the formal germination of the abstract dream of pursuing women's equal rights, and his individual behavior begins to be related to a more ambitious social value goal, thus expanding the theme depth of narrative.

3. Indian Cities: a Modern Hub for Dream Development

In the narrative of the film, Delhi, a big Indian city, as the core symbol of modernization transformation, has built a completely different development framework for the hero's dream practice from the traditional rural field, and its promotion of dreams presents a progressive logical context.

From the initial level of spatial empowerment, Delhi's modernization features are first reflected in the dual support of resources and atmosphere. On the one hand, the technical support network built by the intellectual elite in the city provides a key boost for the hero to break through the technical bottleneck of pad production. The advanced technology and ideas mastered by elites directly promote the production of pads from the original mode to the standardized production with high efficiency and high quality; On the other hand, the open atmosphere brought about by the market economy has broken the market limitations in the closed rural environment, provided the possibility for its products to cover a wider range of consumer groups, and consolidated the foundation of dreams. This dual support of technology and market is essentially that Delhi, as a modern space, empowers lakshmi from "having a dream" to "being able to practice", and the prominent effect of this empowerment is in sharp contrast with the conservative and closed rural society, further strengthening Delhi's key position in the dream promotion.

On the basis of space empowerment, the appearance of Parry has become an important turning point in the development of the hero's dream, realizing the deep integration of individual support and concept innovation. The value of Parry is not only reflected in the companionship and encouragement at the emotional level, but also in its identity as a modern knowledge system and a carrier of innovative thinking. Unlike the traditional conservative Geyateli, she is a new female representative with higher education in India [6].

Her vitality and wisdom not only injected spiritual power into the hero, but also promoted the hero to break through the shackles of traditional rural concepts by introducing new ideas and methods. For example, under the influence of Parry, lakshmi took part in the biggest innovation and progress competition in India, and began to jump out of the limitations of traditional production and business model, actively learn marketing strategies, explore diversified cooperation paths, and gradually master the ability to stand in the highly competitive urban market. The core significance of this change is to make the hero's dream connotation change from "resisting tradition" in the rural stage to "achieving the goal through innovation" in a more constructive way, laying the foundation for the further development of his dream.

With the innovation of ideas, Delhi's openness and inclusiveness further promote the hero's dream of "expanding from personal demands to social issues". Multiple social contacts in urban space enable the hero to observe a wider range of social problems. He gradually realized that the significance of pad production is not limited to helping his wife or women around him, but a universal issue related to the health and employment of Indian women during their physiological period [7]. This cognitive change directly promotes the upgrading of its behavioral logic. He changed from a self-employed person who focused on commercial production to a promoter who actively participated in social activities and linked various social forces, and his pad production also extended from a simple commercial activity to a social undertaking with public welfare attributes.

In the end, the hero's dream was realized under the continuous function of the modern space of Delhi. Through technical empowerment, we can break through the bottleneck of production, expand the development path with the help of concept innovation, and deepen social cognition with the help of spatial characteristics, and finally realize the leap from "solving problems around individuals" to "promoting the improvement of group social issues". In this process, Delhi's modernization attribute has always served as the underlying logic, connecting key links such as technical support, concept innovation and cognitive upgrading, so that the development of the hero's dream is both coherent and natural, and has a clear level and

depth.

4. United Nations Headquarters: the International Stage for Dreams to Sublimate

As an imaginary and artistic space, the geographical space of movies is not equal to the real space. Therefore, it does not have the transparency and integrity of the real space. Its fiction means fuzziness and fracture. The selective presentation of movie images will inevitably lead to blind spots in space. The narrative development of space is also uneven and discontinuous. Some spaces have been described and presented in detail, some spaces are vague and abstract with little information, and some spaces need readers to infer to know their existence, but they lack specific information and significance [1]. Although the geographical space of the film is not completely equal to the real space, it is a symbolic representation of the real world. It realizes the mapping of the physical and cultural logic of the real world through artistic reconstruction, forming a multi-dimensional correlation system with correspondence, similarity and extensibility [8].

The film "Pad Man" shows a large-scale character scene with colorful panoramic and far-sighted shots, which fully shows the Indian life in the film and the uniqueness of Indian movies[9]. Detailed video materials have constructed a complete image of India's countryside and city, profoundly depicting the impact of Indian traditional culture and modern social civilization and the difficult course of the hero from the germination of his dream to the realization. For example, the cramped picture of rural women hiding in the corner to deal with their physiological period, the scene of lakshmi being criticized and spurned by her family and the village collective for making pads, lakshmi's laboratory in the city of Delhi shooting experimental data with smart phones and recording it with notebooks in rural areas, and the juxtaposition of science and technology billboards and traditional handicraft shops on the streets of cities all highlight the collision between rural areas and cities, tradition and modernity.

At the end of the film, lakshmi was invited to the United Nations Headquarters, and gave an exquisite speech in distinctive Indian English for about 9 minutes, which won applause from the audience. Judging from the narrative length, the

presentation of the United Nations Headquarters is much shorter than that of India's urban and rural space, and it belongs to an abstract space with little information. The audience can't see the global political interaction scene outside the venue, and they can't know the details of international communication behind Lakshmi's speech, but this space accurately reflects the cultural logic of the United Nations space through artistic reconstruction. As the core platform of global political and cultural exchanges, it represents global consensus and cooperation, and is an important place to solve global problems. In the film, it is not a simple geographical place, but a symbol of the sublimation of the hero's dream. The fact that the hero can stand on the stage of the United Nations shows that his efforts and achievements have been recognized by the international community. This behavior is also of great significance when he puts the issue of female physiological period under the global vision. His behavior can be described as the sublimation of three dimensions, which jointly promoted the female physical health problems from the edge to the center.

The first is the sublimation from individual experience to collective narrative. Based on his personal experience (individual experience) in India's urban and rural areas, he successfully transformed his story into a collective narrative representing the universal plight of women around the world through the global platform of speaking at the United Nations. This change makes people deeply realize that menstrual health is not unique to India, but a global public health and social justice issue that needs to be solved urgently. The second is the leap from local challenges to the international agenda. With the help of the authoritative international stage of the United Nations, he successfully raised the issues of menstrual stigma and lack of health resources, which were originally regarded as social and cultural challenges in India, to the core of the international development agenda. This leap has attracted extensive attention and substantial support from multinational organizations, governments and the international community, and has greatly gathered global forces to solve this problem [10]. Finally, it has achieved a leap from material drive to value guidance. Lakshmi's initial production of pads may have a certain material pursuit, such as improving the life of his family, but the core

appeal of his speech at the United Nations has clearly transcended the material level and sublimated to the high-level pursuit of women's equal rights, dignity protection and spiritual value. He clearly advocated empowering women and ensuring their health and dignity. As its manifesto emphasizes, "strong man not making country strong. woman strong. mother strong. sister strong, then country strong." Women are the fundamental cornerstone of social progress and national prosperity, which profoundly reveals the inseparable internal relationship between women's empowerment and the overall development of society.

To sum up, the stage nature of the United Nations endows individuals with the communication power to fight against geographical restrictions. The hero's personal struggle is no longer confined to India, but has become a force to promote global social change. His story inspires more people to pay attention to women's rights and interests and participate in social changes. This combination of personal struggle and global value communication reflects the film's deep thinking on the power of social change and global value communication. At the same time, it also makes the global audience clearly feel that although the strength of individuals is small, as long as they have firm beliefs and unremitting efforts, they can promote social progress and change [11]. This kind of ideological value has important enlightenment significance in today's era of globalization. As R Barchi, the director of the film *Pad Man*, said at the Beijing premiere, "I don't know if what I have done will bring about changes, but I think if everyone can make a little effort, every little makes a mickle, we will make a difference."

The idea conveyed by the film is not only at the narrative level, but also transformed into practical influence in reality. In an interview with *China Youth Daily*, R Barchi revealed that after the film was released, it has promoted two remarkable changes in the local area. First, it has changed the public's cognition and consumption habits of women's physiological products. Previously, sanitary napkins were rarely sold in small shops, and even if they were sold, consumers were often ashamed to buy them because of conceptual constraints; Nowadays, whether it is a large supermarket or a small shop, women's physiological products have become common commodities. Second, it has promoted support at the policy level. The Indian

government has started relevant plans to provide land for villages to build sanitary towel factories, to ensure that the factory products can be directly supplied to women in the villages, to provide protection for women's rights and interests from the aspects of infrastructure and resource supply, and to realize a benign closed loop of "film narration-concept innovation-policy implementation".

5. Conclusion

Pad Man has formed a distinct narrative logic chain through the metaphor construction of three geographical spaces: rural India, urban India and United Nations Headquarters, which completely presents the whole process of the hero's dream from germination, growth to sublimation. The use of this spatial metaphor profoundly reveals the complex relationship between individuals and society, tradition and modernity, and native and global. In rural India, the hero's dream is difficult to germinate under the suppression of traditional ideas, which reflects the conflict between individual and collective consciousness. In Indian cities, dreams have grown in a modern environment, realizing the transformation from personal demands to social issues. In the United Nations, dreams have been sublimated, and individual struggle has global influence. Through the deconstruction and reconstruction of different spaces, the film not only deeply discusses the core themes such as gender equality, the collision between tradition and modernity, social change, but also profoundly conveys the important value of individual struggle in promoting social development. This rich ideological connotation and vivid social enlightenment make Pad Man go beyond the scope of ordinary narrative films, which not only leads to reflection on women's rights and traditional concepts in India, but also promotes related social cognitive changes, and also stimulates extensive attention and discussion on women's rights and interests issues around the world, making it a work with profound connotation and broad social influence. The film

not only provides an Indian model for the world film, but also provides another mainstream commercial film culture and film aesthetics for the world film.

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