

Unity of Plot: Aristotelian Concept of Plotting in Suresh Triveni's *Jalsa* (2022)

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ABSTRACT

Suresh Triveni's Jalsa: A Film (2022) centers a tragic tale of car accident which predominantly involves two ladies; Maya, a chief journalist and Rukhsana, a cook. The film opens with a hit and run case; Aliya, the daughter of Rukhsana, hit by exhausted Maya and left her in a pool of blood. This incident integrates more characters into the already overstuffed plot; complicit cops, a trainee reporter and a cocky young son of an ambitious politician. Hence, the rarely and never simple plot continues with an intriguing story-line and elements of surprise further. Pertaining to previous, the purpose of this paper is to explore how these distinctive perspectives are convincing to one action and constitute a unified whole. In order to analyze the tightly-executed plot, this paper will utilize the concept of unity-of-plot proposed by Aristotle. In his *Poetics* (Chapter, VIII), Aristotle defines plot as soul of tragedy and emphasizes on plot as an artistic whole. Moreover, to testify the unity of plot, Aristotle argues that the plot should be grasped by each of its parts without distorting the meaning of the whole. Additionally, the primary intent of this study is to explore how the plot of the chosen film is executed artistically.

1. Introduction

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle stated that the efficacy of a story hinges on its coherent plot. He emphasized the importance of each event in a story being interconnected with the plot, as they all contribute to the overall development of the narrative. In this regard, the most recent example of an attempt to test this Aristotelian theory is Suresh Triveni's *Jalsa* (2022), a film. Intertwining the lives of its characters through a series of emotionally intense and morally exacerbated events, *Jalsa* is a compelling drama that is reminiscent of the classical concept of a unified plot as articulated by Aristotle. In this study, we will try to look at Triveni's plot-unified through the prism of Aristotelian plotting. Through an analysis of the film's plot, character growth, and series of events, this paper will elaborate how Aristotelian concepts are applicable to contemporary cinema and storytelling.

1.1. Background of the study

Film and literature have the basic subjects of human nature, society and culture. Along with literary elements such as plot, characters and themes, film is similar to novel or short stories. Although film requires much attention for sound, lighting, camera, music and other compulsion of cinematography but includes the same genres as literature does. However, one aspect that takes film over novel is film does not pressurize its audience mind while literature forces readers to imagine (Peters, 2020; Totawad, 2019). Likewise, literature is presented through words while film through visuals, sound and music. Despite many artistic differences, the beginning of film comes up in literary form; script, dialogue, screen play and so on (Danielian, Donnelly, & Schaff, 2021). Thus, film primarily gratifies literature in its production which Bluestone calls as "*overtly compatible, secretly hostile.*" Consequently, the interdisciplinary study of film and literature tend to run like two sides of a single coin; paradoxically the entity of literature is 'words' while film has 'images'. Furthermore, Bluestone explains a true definition of "cinematographic specificity" can therefore only be made on two levels: that of filmic discourse and that of image discourse. Sarah Kozloff documents "*the conventional notion that films caught voice-over (like the measles?) from novels*" (Kozloff 2018).

1.2. Rationale

A screenplay has a lofty talent as drama does because both represent an artistic structure of plot, to which *Poetics* devoted much attention. Plot appears the principal subject in narrating or representing a tale in any form (novels, stories, films). Of course, Aristotle did not work with movie studios and never take cinematography into discussion in *Poetics*. However, he intentionally margins the necessary parts of a plot while neglecting unrelated aspects to a unified plot. His effort in theorizing unity of plot is universally accepted. So, we (Aristotle's) readers acknowledge his assumption which warrants us to such inquiry. Hence, the present study delves into the enduring relevance of the principles of unified plot, exploring their applicability in modern cinema.

2. Literature Review

Peters while talking about plot and plotting, argues that plot is exceptional aspect of reading which grasp our intention predominantly into the world of fiction (Peters, 2020). E.M. Forster in his *Aspects of the Novel (1927)* argues that "*narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence,*" whereas a plot organizes the events according to a "*sense of causality.*" In the *Poetics*, Aristotle assigned primary importance to plot (mythos) and considered it the "*soul*" of a tragedy. However, Ronald S. Crane, a critic from neo-Aristotelians or Chicago school, explains plot as the course of emotional responses which an author controls. Some narratologists prefer to call it as narrative structure, they avoid the term *plot* because they believe that '*it has become too vague in ordinary critical usage*'. To this extent, we consider plot as narrative structure then narrative has been defined by Aristotle as "*beginning, middle and ending*". Consequently, Chatman (2022) defined plot as an array of events in which includes key moments in the narrative. He further emphasis on the importance of plot in stories or narrative while Leitch has different views against the necessity of plot, he says that plot is not essential part of the story as many critic and scholars believe (p. 130). On psychological comment, Levi-Strauss does relate plot structure as useful tool to understand human brain which is close to anthropological studies (Strauss, 2020). Vladimir Propp, the

French structuralist, continues Levi-Strauss' philosophy of plot and its significance in understanding human mind (Teng, 2021). In this regard, he coined the term "*universal plot*" which means great tales have the same artistic plot. Somehow, the quality of plot according to Aristotle drama has more artistic than epic, by the same token Edgar Allan Poe prefers the quality of plot construction to the short story over novel (Fletcher, 2018; Li, 2018). Henry James talks about the coherence of plot and describes Tolstoy's War and Peace as loose baggy monster which could be more knitted (Seban, 2020). Even this terms also frequently used for many Victorian Novels that is why Poe primarily refers short story which is tightly knit than novel. In last but not the least, the works of Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield are considered loosely-plotted (Caldwell, 2010). Because of rejected plots their famous characters are not much into the discussion of great production. Hence, this review demonstrates that the essentiality of plot in both classical and contemporary storytelling is undeniable, regardless of changes in narrative forms and critical perspectives. Thus, knitted-plot is still in demand even in modern fictions and cinema.

3. Conceptual Framework

According to Aristotle's unity of plot is not mere the unity of hero and cannot be achieved by limiting the number of characters but an imitation of actions as whole or singleness. Because several unrelated sequences could happen to a single man as he referred the tragedy of Heracleids. By contrast we must assume that the narrative arising from characters are somehow unified. Hence, Aristotle means by unity is the entire plot neither a single event nor an individual character. Then Aristotle talks about disrupted and disunified parts in plot, he elaborates it as "*for a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole.*" As therefore, if a character or event does not contribute value to one action, it would be precisely something else. Another aspect of unity he discusses is structural union. Although Aristotle did not go in depth but many critics have elaborated structural union as it '*unites*' all action into one artistic whole. No matter how extensive representation of actions but should be interrelated to a centric theme or idea. Thus, a unified plot will have a '*spine*' in which if one event for instance is removed then the entire body of plot will be unstable. And a '*Determinate structure*' of plot never deviates from its skeleton (Edwards, 2020; Richardson, 2019).

In sum, Aristotle while talking on unity of plot argues three predominant aspects through which a plot will be considered a unified whole. First it must entail singleness either characters or events, then, there must be '*organic part*' in each character and event and they should have to contribute their significant existence. Hence, a unified plot should look like a '*spine*'.

4. Discussion and Analysis

The film touches the edge of plot when Aliya co-incidentally hit by a car and unexpectedly Maya run away. Rukhsana is informed and instantly goes to the hospital. Maya neither reveal to family about the accident nor to Rukhsana who is integral part of her house and the only friend of Ayush (Maya's disable son). Even Maya does not recognize to whom she hit but she keeps the secret. From this immediate situation, the plot seems that it would revolve around these two ladies and account of Aliya's accident. The action would go side by side with conflicting emotions of grief and guilt. On contrary, the subsequent chain of

actions tends to introduce more characters from different backgrounds and the film stays with impressive array into its two hours duration.

Foremost, More, a head constable, registers his presence and makes us to believe that he has full-fledged life; he gives 'a marriage invitation card' to his senior officer with meaningful happiness that his son-in-law is software engineer and lives in America (33:35-33:45). The entire scene reveals that More's daughter is going to marry next month and his retirement will also take place in next month. He requests further to Sub-inspector (SI) for cancelling the suspension order of his colleague standing just behind him. But instantly he was rejected by SI; '*maintain your dignity [Izzat Hai ... Maintain Karo]*' (33:34-45). Through this whole action one can imagine that More has a very happy life; he is close to retirement; an honest constable and devoted to his duties. Consequently, Aliya's father reports to More in police station, More shows sympathy and give him a glass of water, asks Aliya's younger brother '*why you did not go to school; [kiya re! school nai geya]*' (26:07-10). His behavior glorifies his soul as human. So, he is both a dutiful constable and worth human being. Surprisingly, nothing has been adhering to him as the plot progresses while unwillingly he becomes a crucial part of the story which started growing from Aliya's terrible accident.

To precede the case More was assigned to see the CCTV if there is any lead regarding the accident. He keenly observes to find any clue but before all, he becomes aware of his own misfortune. He reveals it later to Rohini that he had party with Paradeep who insisted him for retirement, they had all refreshments to celebrate like cherish dinner and wine. Consequently, wine shown its domino effect and they wrangled with three people who were hanging a political poster at that night. Although the matter immediately sorted out but when he watches that at 2 p.m. they were scrapping to a group of three youngsters and after an hour Aliya's accident occurred at the same place. Thus, More unintentionally traps in a jigsaw puzzle; to save his 30 years reputation, service and dignity or to help the poor family for justice. The personal concerns win over the solemn promise. He did whatever he did not in his whole service; walking in drunk, misuses his position and takes bribery. That event turns into a special corner of organic plot and carries with the flow of story. He deliberately inclines into the case above his duties. He makes plan with Paradeep to get rid of their follies at that night together. They decide to settle the case out of legal frame. So, they started to find a middle way such as Paradeep tries to convince Aliya's father to withdraw the case because '*the fault is also ours, that area is extremely bad, why did our daughter go there?*' [*Ghalti humari bhi hai, kachra area hai re wo, kioun gai thi apni bachi udhar?*] (48:48-56), later tempted him with a self-crafted story that '*they are very powerful people, will bring an influential lawyer*' [*bohat taqatwar log hain re wo, ek dam kadak lawyer khara krein ge samne*] (69:33-37). Both cops simultaneously employ frighten and advise him in cunning ways. It makes Aliya's father curious that which can be a better option? He shares with wife. Aliya's mother initially was not consent and hoped for justice, as her husband tries to convince because '*our daughter was also roaming outside at late night*' [*apni larki bhi itni raat ko Bahar ghoom rahi thi*] (49:57-50:01). Unlike him, she has more wit, that's why she completely denies his theory. After all she has a strong point of freedom for everyone in an independent country, '*so what? Smash her! [to... thok dene ka usko]*' (50:02-05). Later, when she realizes that it is better to have advantage rather to lose the case too. She also agrees to compromise with compensation. Cops try to keep minor amount while Aliya's parents demand 250 thousand Indian Rupees and the bargaining literally starts. Finally, they agree

on compensation for 10-12 Lac to close the case. Thus, More, who was just a cop with his own life and becomes an exceptional part of the plot. His presence justifies an obvious contribution to the skeleton of plot as Aristotle states about unity of plot.

The rise of Rohini George character seems rare to the mainstream hub of the story. She is an obstinate trainee and struggling with career opportunities. She has also difficulties regarding economy and family support. She reveals to More that she wants to take her mother along her to the city because she lives with her brother-in-law who beats her sister brutally. We see initially she is an ambitious character who wishes to climb upon the success rapidly. Apart from her personal territory, she becomes enthusiast in Aliya's case because she believes that it would give advantage for getting attention of her boss and company as well: '*A good impression will be made before the probation, my salary will be also increased*' [*Probation ke pehle achha impression ho jae ga, mera salary bhi barh jae ga*] (59:40-45). Thereafter, she wants to disclose the case on her own. She engages in the case and finds a clue that '*police want to suppress the case as it seems a high-profile case*' [*mere ko tip mila hai... wo... police wo case ko dabana chahta hai, high profile case hai, aisa lagta hai*] (53:04-15). As Maya hears it from Rohini she becomes uncomfortable but holds her position and dominates over Rohini to the further inquiry, '*let me think about it*' (53:59-54:01). Surely, she was not introduced in the story for this but to poignant extent. So, despite Maya's order, she continues to dig out the matter. She goes to police station to trace any clue from CCTV. There two characters meet who had no direct connection to the accident but coincidentally pushed to play the key roles in the development of plot. This is what Aristotle affirms that the presence of each character or event should contribute to overall structure of plot. She requests to More if he found any lead about the case, but he makes a lame-excuse that CCTV was not working '*it's a Chinese product, damaged suddenly*' [*China ka maal hai kharaab ho geya*] (59:07-10). The entire discussion goes dejected but she does not lose her spirit. She detects a hint of Aliya's boyfriend from an unrevealed source and tries to employ that information by sharing with Rukhsana. Although she does not make any progress but Rukhsana come to know with whom Aliya was at that night. Through many entrances and exits, finally, she retrieves CCTV from a shop located where the accident was occurred. Rohini's all efforts go worthless when she recognizes that it's Maya who brutally hit Aliya. Thus, ironically, she spoils herself instead of approaching a golden career and upcoming life as well. It's a second instance when a character comes from different orientation to achieve different goals but inserted into the main body of plot. Before her More and his companion were pushed into the story. Astonishingly, both events have great amount of amazement and depicted as an organic event of plot. Through these situations the impressive facts were artistically revealed for both characters and audience, the plot itself even became more powerful.

From the series of subsequent events, the pivotal event is when a dashing young boy hangs a poster to please his father who is going to register in political scenario. Coincidentally, More and Paradeep was turning back after the celebration of More's retirement part. Two cops and a group of three youngsters meet where cops were eliminating urine while youngsters were hanging the poster and an angry dispute began. This event has ruined More and thrust him into the unwanted plight. After watching CCTV, the outlaw cops think to take favor from the rich boy in order to settle the matter. But unexpectedly his penny pincher father denies the illicit trade. So, with reference to this event one can imagine that the wordy

quarrel between cops and youngsters has intentionally articulated the circumstances less for Paradeep and more for constable More. And the plot ultimately becomes more complex even more loaded.

Filmaker's knotty drama does not mere focus on the vital events or leading characters but it has keen representation of surrounding events and characters. Each minor contribution has its significant value which makes plot so worthy. Talking on Ayush, he is an abnormal boy and has emotional bondage with Rukhsana. To some extent he is very pleasing to Rukhsana's family; we see her own son plays video game with Ayush. Even he becomes the center of both principal protagonists of the film when the plot embraces to climax. Rukhsana takes him toward sea-shore and the mystery commences in audience and characters as well. Through this entire sequence reveals the thematic idea that how we feel when someone hurts our beloved people. Thus, Ayush becomes the center of attention and gives a gut-wrenching climax. Similarly, More's daughter was also depicted through a vantage point. Although she has not a direct participation but she was constantly mentioned by More as one of his core reasons for the settlement of Aliya's case. Likewise, the representation of young man's father as political leader also portrays a turning point into the story. To raise his political repute the poster was hanged and things became worse to More and company. Even Maya's boss has his own impact and working in his company Maya gets benefits for this case. He allows Maya to suppress Rohini's story on Aliya's accident. So, these references show how plot has been constructed by keeping each major or minor detail relevant to the single story.

5. Conclusion

In the beginning the plot was genetically dotted with a car accident and two enormous female characters. It could be guessed that the entire plot would draw a hide and seek puzzle between these two characters. However, the story was not a spoon feed but succumb to viewers. Every 20 minutes unfolds the new dimension of plot. We came to experience that it's not a film of two leads but the solid performances by the entire ensemble cast. The film nicely becomes a textbook that every watch gives a new understanding either structurally or thematically.

The characters are sketched in genuine situations and belong to the epitome of plot. Maya's character was established as well reputed journalist and elite class woman which she did perform well. Likewise, Rukhsana, although was a maid at Maya's home but she could be any kind of woman because of her wit, power and determination. However, More and the son of politician have their own professional and personal selves. It shows that all characters were having different intentions but as they came into the account of the story they became integral part of the plot. By the same token, events were also cracked through uneven situations but as plot grows all events become knitted to the central point of Aliya's character. This makes a true artistic unity in the plot of the film as argues by Aristotle in *Poetics*.

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