Colors and Costumes in Cinema: A Semiotic Analysis of Classical Dance Visualization in Malayalam Movie "Manichitratazhu"

Bhavya V L[1], Harikrishnan D[2]

[1]Ph.D. Research scholar, Department of Visual media and Communication, School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, Kerala, India.
[2]Assistant Professor (Sr.Gr), Department of Visual media and Communication, School of Arts, Humanities and Commerce, Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi Campus, Kerala, India.

ABSTRACT

This study tries to understand the importance of colors in portraying emotional states of characters in cinematic frames, focusing on the film 'Manichitrathazhu'. Effective usage of colours of dance costumes in Indian cinema, to reinforce the emotions of characters, is thematically analysed by examining the costumes used by the character 'Nagavalli', during classical dance scenes in the Malayalam movie 'Manichitrathazhu', in comparison with the emotional state of the character. It addresses gaps in the literature about the social relevance of the colors used in Bharathanatyam dance costumes and the feelings they communicate. Harmony in colors of the character's costumes is interpreted as linked to the emotional state of the character by using color theory. The analysis is done based on the established color combinations already being used in costumes of classical dance forms. Qualitative content analysis is used as the method, with the support of secondary data.

Keywords: Colours of Costumes, Indian Movies, Manichitrathazhu, Nagavalli and Semiotics.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background: "Manichitrathazhu" is a Malayalam movie in Indian cinemas. The genre of the movie includes the epic psychological thriller storyline. Nagavalli is a character in the movie who performs a dance to portray the character of an epic dancer. The movie won a National Film Award in the category "best popular film providing wholesale entertainment" (ottplay.com, 2023). Further, Malayali actress Shobana won the best actress award in the same award ceremony for the character portrayal of Nagavalli or Ganga.

Nagavalli is portrayed thrice in the movie with various dance costumes. Each portrayal varied in terms of the colour of the dance costume. While one portrayal displayed a red and white dance costume for Nagavalli, the other portrayed the character in a red, green and yellow coloured dance costume. Further, the third portrayal of the character displayed a blue, red and golden yellow dance costume for the character of Nagavalli.

According to Ryan and Lenos (2020), movies are portrayals of stories and characters that are associated with stories. Indian movies released in Malayalam tend to uphold the integrity of culture and heritage through stories that depict life. Further, movies tend to penetrate the heart of audiences through stories portrayed by the characters.

Actresses and actors represent characters to uphold the meaning of a story to the target audience. As a result, the colour of the costume of the characters plays an important role in establishing the background and context of stories. Further, the colours of costumes represent the emotions of characters in movies. Thus, in order to establish the true essence of characters, the colour of costumes plays an important role. In addition to the enacting abilities of the actors

and actresses, the costumes play an important role in establishing the features of a character. Further, specific colours of the costume are associated with specific storylines in movies. As a result, the colour of costumes needs to be effective to portray and describe characters to the audience.

In addition, Chandra and Bhatia (2019) presented that Indian classical dance forms has been among the major dance forms that characterise Indian movies of the epic genre. Classical attributes are inculcated into movies through various classical dance form. The dance form further has a specific design of costume which can be affixed with colours to associate with the emotions of characters performing dance in Indian movies. Nagvalli in "Manichitrathazhu" has been attired in Bharathanatyam costumes of various colours while performing dance in the movie.

Rationale
The character of Nagavalli has been portrayed in multiple coloured costumes in the Indian-Malayalam movie Manichitrathazhu. Further, inconsistencies in a combination of colours have been observed in the movie while portraying the character of Nagavalli. Even though red has been the consistent colour for all the portrayals of the character Nagavalli in the movie Manichitrathazhu, the proportion of the colour varied in each portrayal. Further, the additional colours have been inconsistent for each portrayal of the character Nagavalli and her costumes. Bharathanatyam is the dance form that portrays the character and emotions of Nagavalli.

Colour is a symbolic representation of characters in dance forms and movies (Kodžoman *et al.* 2022). Despite the inconsistencies in costume colour, the actress who portrayed the character of Nagavalli won the National award for best actress in the movie Manichitrathazhu. The study proceeds to understand the importance of colours and inconsistencies in colour in the portrayal of characters in movies like Manichitrathazhu. Further, the study helps to understand the need for varying colours in dance costumes to ensure the success of character portrayal and movies in the Malayalam epic psychological thriller Manichitrathazhu.

Aim, objectives and question
Aim: The study aims to understand the importance of colours in portraying semiotic characters in the movie Manichitrathazhu for the character Nagavalli.

Objectives
The objectives of the study are indicated below.
- To understand the significance of colours in dance costumes of the character "Nagavalli" in the Indian movie "Manichithratazhu" according to the texts of Indian classical dance forms.
- To understand the relevance of colours choosen in the costumes to the depiction of character "Nagavalli" in the Indian movie "Manichithratazhu".

Question
Are the colours of the costumes chosen according to the emotions of the character "Nagavalli" in the Indian movie "Manichithratazhu" based on the depictions of the colours in the texts of Indian classical dance forms?

Significance of the Study
The study is significant in illustrating the importance of colours and semiotic aspects in movies directed and produced in India in the state of Kerala. Further, the study helps to understand the relevance of the emotions of characters and dance forms portrayed in movies to the colour of costumes and the portrayal of characters.

2.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Concept of Colour

Colours are the diverse range of hues to which human beings are exposed on a daily basis. Colours can be seen as a part of the nature around human beings in the form of flora, fauna and landscapes (Mohr *et al.*2018). They are also utilised by humans in the creation of a myriad range of art forms and practices, including dance which is depicted in public and public spaces. Specific colour hues are associated with specific emotions and connotations. For instance, red is associated with danger, aggression and anger. However, it is also depictive of excited states, romance and joy, to name a few. According to Witzel (2019), colour categorisation and their perceptions have cultural and psychological underpinnings to them as well.

Colour Theory

The Colour Theory is based on three key concepts, namely the "Colour Wheel", "Colour Harmony" and the "context" of how the colours are used. Colour wheels are utilised for the exploration of the interrelationships that colours with different hues possess, as well as their lightness or complementary nature. The juxtaposition of the colours in a manner to produce a sense of unity or balance to the audience is known as Colour Harmony (Weingerl and Javorsek, 2018). A specific combination of colours may be aesthetically appealing, and their usage may lead to the enrichment of a particular piece of artwork or craft. Colour combinations may be strategically utilised in dance forms such as traditional Indian dance.
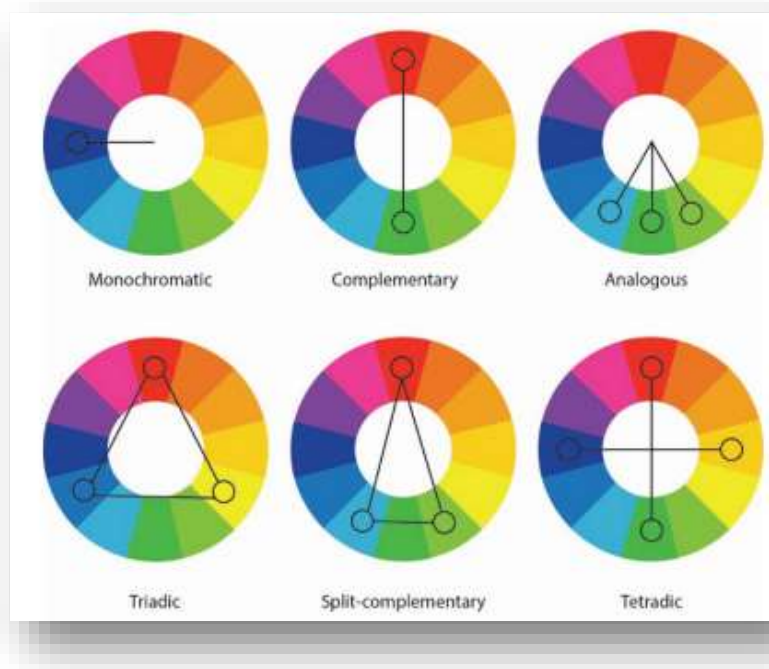
Figure 1: Six basic colour hue templates

(Source: Weingerl and Javorsek, 2018)

Significance of colour in dance costume

According to the view of Adjei and Osei-Sarfo (2016), the costume is a dress style comprising garments and accessories that are representative of a particular time period or adhere to a specific country. The costumes are useful in defining the culture and origin of people for a long time frame and are considered to be symbolic expressions as well as communicative tools, depictive of the societal spirit as well as the personality of the individual who is wearing the

costume. It is significant in terms of visual communication and may depict social scenarios such as marriages or rituals. Life situations, in general, can also be depicted through the usage of specific coloured costumes. For instance, the uncertain nature of life is exhibited through the usage of dull-coloured costumes by Nigerian dancers.

Figure 2: Kathakali performance with colourful costumes and makeup

(Source: Dhanapalan, 2016)

As per the view of Jain *et al.* (2021), a range of intense colours are exhibited in "Indian classical dance forms" owing to the vibrant costumes and stage drama that they engage in. On the contrary, Binder (2016) highlighted the popularity of colourful costumes that were in use in the vibrant dance forms of India, which include local dance forms as well, such as the *yaksagana* dance-drama from Karnataka.

Figure 3: Vibrant, colourful makeup of Kathakali dancer

(Source: Dhanapalan, 2016)

Despite the lack of explicit guidelines or documentation regarding the appropriate use of colour in Bharathanatyam costumes.The costumes are vibrant and multicoloured. The use of

contrasting border colours, which they carry over from the sari tradition, and the patterns created by the borders of the different costume pieces grace the dancer's form. According to the view of Dhanapalan (2016), the Indian subcontinent is traditionally rooted in its performing arts, which comprises dance, drama and music. There are a total of eight classical dances that are recognised in India, namely: "Bharatnatyam, "Kathakali", "Kathak", "Kuchipudi", "Mohiniattam", "Manipuri", "Sattriya" and "Odissi" respectively. Among these, the traditional dance form "Kathakali" utilises colours in its presentation. These are made use of by the dancers who may be depicting a specific story through their performance. The costumes are voluminous, other than being colourful, and the jewellery, including gilded earrings, rings, bracelets, armlets, necklaces, glittery headgear, and even anklets, are rich in terms of colour. The makeup is robust in nature as well, making use of colours such as "white", "yellow", "red", "green" and "black". According to (Pathloth, RASA PRAKARANAM The aesthetics of Sentiments and their interpretation in, 2020), "Bharata Muni enunciated the eight Rasas in the Nātyasāstra, an ancient work of dramatic theory. Each Rasa, according to Nātyasāstra, has a presiding deity and a specific color. There are 4 pairs of Rasas. For instance, Haasya arises out of Sringara. The Aura of a frightened person is black, and the aura of an angry person is red".

Colour and emotion of character

As per Dhanapalan (2016), the styling attributes in Kathakali are made use of to depict the emotional states of the characters. The makeup makes use of "realism" as its art style and is temporal in nature. The colours that are utilised in the makeup are used to exhibit the state of mind of the character involved. For instance, a demonic character that is kingly in nature will be coloured with a green makeup patch and red as a colour will be made use of in infrequent intervals as an example of the devilish motives of the character. However, a character that is completely immersed in the depravity of darkness and evil will be depicted in "red", along with interspersion in "black".

The mood and emotion of the characters are aptly depicted through the usage of different colours in Kathakali makeup. Odissi dancers make use of a tikka on their forehead made out of sandalwood paste, which is symbolic of purity (Pattnaik and Samantaray, 2017). They make use of silver jewellery for both genders. On the other hand, bangles that match in terms of colour with the costume are utilised in Bharatnatyam. As per the view of Saikia (2021), different ornaments were prescribed for men and women as per their emotions and sentiments, along with other factors.

Keltner *et al.* (2016) stated that "colour", "scent" and "natural scenes" are mediums of expression of emotions. This is observed in dance forms which act as cultural artefacts for a nation. On the contrary, Pattnaik and Samantaray (2017) stated that brightly coloured saris are worn by Odissi dancers, and they specifically wear bright shades such as orange, red, green, or purple. The soles and palms of the Odissi dancers are painted with Alta, a colouring agent that is red in colour, which can make the hasta mudras more dramatic. Bright and gorgeous coloured costumes are leveraged in Bharatnatyam as well. They also make use of Kajal or black eyeliner around their eyes. On the other hand, Odissi dancers make use of black kohl as a depiction of the temple spire of the Hindu God, Jagannath, a crown with a decorated back with flowers. According to (*Detail Study of Bharatanatyam, Devadasis-Natuvnar, Nritya and Nritta, Different Bani-s, Present Status, Institutions, Artists*, n.d.) "Bharatanatyam makeup has a few unique features. Heavy lines are drawn around the eyes, extending outwards past the eyes. Similarly, the eyebrows are darkened and extended outwards with liner. The purpose of this makeup is to accentuate the movements of the eyes and eyebrows, and make them more visible, because they are an important part of the dance, especially for expression".

Literature gap

While the study focuses more on the significance of colours that are utilised as a part of the costumes in classical dance forms of India and their role in the expression of the emotions of the characters depicted by the dancers, it focuses less on the societal significance depicted in terms of the colours that are utilised. The colours depicted are representative of not just the emotions and sentiments of the characters; they also represent the social scenario of the culture that they belong to, as well as religious and cultural anecdotes. The study has focused less on this area.

3.   METHODOLOGY ANALYSIS

Research philosophy, approach and design

The belief that helps to proceed with studies is termed *research philosophy*. Research philosophy is further categorised into "positivism, realism and interpretivism" research philosophies. The realism philosophy presents that reality is independent of beliefs perceived by humans and the thoughts processed by the human mind (Pandey and Pandey, 2021). Positivism philosophy presents that studies are objective in nature based on observations (Mishra and Alok, 2022). In contrast, interpretivism philosophy presents that studies are subjective in nature, and theoretical relevance needs to be established to understand the relevance of events to the theories. The study follows an *interpretivism philosophy* of research and rejects all other philosophies.

The approach to the collection of data and its analysis, followed by its interpretation, is termed the "*research approach*". The research approach is categorised into the "deductive and inductive" approaches to studies. The deductive approach aims to narrow down studies to specifications by converging them into specific areas of study. It is a top-down approach that aids in convergence to specifications. In contrast, the inductive approach aims to broaden a study by diverging from specifications and moving ahead towards generic attributes (Al-Ababneh, 2020). It is a bottom-up approach that aids in diverging from specifications towards generic aspects. The study follows a *deductive approach* to research and excludes the latter.

The strategy that aids in the research proceeds is termed "*research design*". Research design is categorised into "explanatory, exploratory and descriptive" research designs. Descriptive design helps to present the events sequentially to infer conclusions based on the last event. In contrast, Exploratory research aids in providing new dimensions to a study by exploring areas less explored in prior research (Al-Ababneh, 2020). In contrast, the "explanatory design" of research aids in establishing the relationship between variables based on the causes and the consequent effects on dependent variables due to changes in independent variables (Newman and Gough, 2020). The study follows an *explanatory design* of research to establish the effect of the colours of costumes on character portrayal in dance forms and movies.

Data collection method

Secondary and primary are the methods to gather data in research. The primary method enables researchers to collect data through focused group observations and discussions, surveys and interviews (Newman and Gough, 2020). It further aids in the collection of real-time data contrasting the secondary method. The secondary method aids in gathering data from pre-published sources such as electronic books, journals and newspapers (Mishra and Alok, 2022). The study follows the secondary method of gathering data and excludes the primary method.

The keywords used in the secondary search include colours, costumes, dance forms, Indian movies and Malayalam movies. Further inclusion and exclusion criteria characterised the secondary search. Criteria considered are linguistics, publication year, convenience of data collection and availability of adequate and relevant information.

The following table illustrates the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Secondary data published in and after 2019	Secondary data published in years preceding 2019
Secondary data published in English	Secondary data published in regional or local languages
Secondary data accessible in "pdf formats"	Secondary data inaccessible in "pdf formats"
Secondary data available in full-text	Secondary data is available in limited or partial texts.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

(Source: Self-created)

Data analysis method
Data analysis follows the gathering of data in a sequential research process. "Qualitative and quantitative" data analysis are the prevalent categories of analysis in research. A "quantitative analysis" aids in analysing numerical data and statistical results, followed by graphical representations of numeric data (Newman and Gough, 2020). In contrast, textual data can be analysed with the aid of a "qualitative analysis" in research (Patel and Patel, 2019). The study follows a "qualitative data analysis" and rejects the former method of analysing data.
Further thematic analysis is the sub-category of qualitative analysis that aids in analysing the pattern and flow of data to interpret results (Al-Ababneh, 2020). Themes have been developed by aligning the objectives with abstracts of articles through a screening process. Further, it helps to achieve the aim of the study by answering the question of the study.

Ethical considerations
Ethics are the principles or regulations that mandate adherence to a research process (Mishra and Alok, 2022). Honesty is ensured in data presentation to avoid malpractices, and integrity is ensured by avoiding harm to individuals, entities, and intellectual properties, followed by compliance with the regulations of the university to ensure ethical practices.

Limitation
The study follows a secondary method of gathering data and presents the results effectively. However, the limitations of the study include the exclusion of the primary data-gathering method. The primary data collection method aids in collecting real-time data. The study is dependent on published data; however, the inclusion of primary data collection would have helped to understand the perspective of directors and costume designers in portraying the character Nagavalli.
In addition, secondary sources available in English have been emphasised in the study. The inclusion of other regional languages like Malayalam would have helped to collect more accurate data as the movie is based in the concerned language.

4.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Results:
Theme 1: Significance of colours and symbols of emotions
According to Kodžoman (2019), the colours of costumes denote the emotions and psychology of humans significantly. It further denotes the characteristics of individuals and characters. Character depiction in movies is thus backed by colours and specifications in the colour of costumes that are the primary attire of characters in movies. Colours have been predominant in representing humans and their characteristics since prehistoric times. Indian movies have

incorporated the theory of colours to depict characters and situations followed by the emotions of characters in portrayals.

The colour red is associated with courage, and the combination of red and white is associated with courage entangled with passion for specific aspects. Further, a combination of red, blue and yellow denotes emotions and characteristics of anger, happiness and sorrow simultaneously. In addition, the combination of red, yellow and green denotes anger and disgust while depicting happiness derived from specific aspects. Costumes in classical dance forms in India prevalently use colours to depict semiotic characteristics in addition to expressions of the enacting individual.

Figure 4: Red, yellow and green combination

According to Dandekar (2021), the semiotic perspective in Indian movies attempts to portray "visual design" through colours and the representation of emotions through the specific colour of costumes. Characters in Indian movies are thus portrayed through specific designs and colours of costumes to uphold their emotions and characteristics. Colours are symbolic of human emotions that are portrayed in Indian movies.

Figure 5: Blue, red and golden yellow combination

The portrayal of human emotion through the colours of costumes has been prevailing in Indian movies for ages and is predominantly observed in contemporary movies of the past decade (Dandekar, 2021). Further, classical characters who are distinct from reality are portrayed with

the colours of the costume to present before the audience the specific emotions of the characters.

Theme 2: Importance of depiction of characters in movies through specific coloured costumes

According to Tursunovich (2022), folk culture or classical culture is depicted through colours to establish historical significance. Colours are symbols of characteristics that depict historical characters. Further, colours contribute to the valour of depiction by instigating human imagination and association with emotions. Thus, colours in movies are significant in depicting characters through specific characteristics and personality traits. Further, audiences can associate with the culture and vigour of characters through the colours of costumes depicted to portray characters (Tursunovich, 2022). In addition, colours act as semiotics that represents the historical values associated with specific cultures. Colours of costume further depict linguistics despite the absence of communication, thereby establishing a strong connection between characters and audiences.

In contrast, Iryna (2020) argued that colours help to add extra-lingual factors to characters through the depiction of identity. Iryna (2020) reinstated that red is associated with specific cultures and characteristics and contributes to additional vigour in character representations. It helps to attract audiences' attention and develop the perception of the characters portrayed through movies. Colours are not only symbolic of emotions but also add to the vigour of identity and characteristics, thereby rendering a multidimensional phenomenon to characters. Iryna (2020) reiterated that the colours of costumes aid in bridging the gap between linguistics and extra-linguistics in character portrayal. It further helps to develop the perceptions of mythology, stereotypes and circumstances, followed by a depiction of cultural values. Colours are further effective in abridging gaps in expressions of individuals enacting the character and help to portray the character in its true essence. Thus, colours play an important role in character depiction in dance forms and in movies.

Discussion

Based on the results, it can be interpreted that the character of Nagavalli has been portrayed in an inconsistent colour of costumes to portray the emotions of the character in the movie Manichitrathazhu. Further, it can be interpreted that Nagavalli has been portrayed in standardised colour costumes in order to portray the emotions that audiences are acquainted with. In addition, colours play an important role in bridging the gap between expressions, linguistics and extra-linguistics (Iryna, 2020). It can be interpreted that the colours of costumes that depicted Nagavalli in three dance scenes in the movie Manichitrathazhu have been determined based on the target emotion to portray the character.

Figure 6: Red and white combination

Colours are effective in portraying cultural values and historical significance (Tursunovich, 2022). It can be interpreted that the three combinations of colour aimed to portray three different emotions for the character Nagavalli. The red and white combination depicted the courage and passion of Nagavalli for dance. Further, the red, green and yellow combination depicted anger and disgust about certain incidents portrayed in the movie; however, the happiness towards the dance form is depicted with the colour yellow. In addition, the red, blue and golden yellow combination of costume colours depicts sorrow, happiness and anger (Kodžoman, 2019). It indicates that the emotions of Nagavalli reflected sorrow and happiness together with anger towards a certain incident that has been depicted in the movie Manichitrathazhu. Thus, colours are semiotics and symbolic of standardised emotions that depict characteristics and identity of characters in movies like Manichitrathazhu for Nagavalli highlighting historic cultural values. Further, they represent the change in emotions for Nagavalli based on changes in circumstances and situations.

5. CONCLUSION

In the context of semiotics in Indian movies, it can be concluded that colours symbolise the emotions of characters and bridge gaps in linguistics and expressions of the individual enacting the character. It helps to portray the character with the truest essence depicting cultural, historical and mythological values. It can be further concluded that Nagavalli's character has been portrayed in Manichitrathazhu with inconsistent colour combinations to depict the changes in emotions and the different emotional aspects of the character in the movie. With an interpretivism perspective and an explanatory research methodology, the study applies a theme analysis based on secondary sources and a method of deduction.Key findings underline the crucial role of specific-colored costumes in character portrayal and the significance of colors and symbols in expressing emotions. Colors become powerful symbols that elevate cultural complexity and connect extra-linguistic and linguistic elements. Nagavalli's costume's purposeful irregularity in color is seen as a calculated decision to evoke a range of feelings. The study concludes by establishing colors as essential semiotic instruments in Indian cinematic character portrayal, emotion communication, and cultural importance. "Manichitrathazhu" succeeds because of the creative application of color, which also offers insightful information on the subtle role colors play in character development.
Conclusions can be further drawn that the effectiveness in portraying the character of Nagavalli through appropriate colours helped the actress to bridge the gap in expressions and linguistics, thereby achieving the best actress award for the concerned character portrayal. Further, it can

be inferred that the effective portrayal of the colours of costumes has helped the movie acquire the best film award in the concerned year, thereby indicating that inconsistencies in the colour of the costume are essential to portray emotions and semiotics in movies and is a predominant factor in Indian movies like the Malayam Manichitrathazhu.

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