
Analysis Of The Movies 'Water' And 'A Family Thing' In Terms Of Kinship Theories

David Schneider used the analysis which came to be known as the culturist approach in which he examined that kinship as a cultural system that is based in shared symbols and meanings.

In the film 'Water', the actors playing the role of widows in the 1900s, in a highly patriarchal society in Varanasi, who after their husbands' death are forced to leave all the worldly affairs and to live an isolated life, where there are many do's and don'ts for them like eating fried food or sweets, not taking part in the rituals, not going out to work for money and to just to earn money by begging and finally to curse themselves for the bad fortunes they have brought and waiting for the death to arrive to relieve them from this sub-human life. Whereas shaving heads, only wearing white saris are only symbols which identify a widow. According to Schneider, these are norms which determine people's behaviour so that they are accepted as a member of the community; these norms are what Goodenough stated as 'how to do it rules'. And when a member tries to break these norms or rules like Kalyani in the movie 'Water', who was forced to become a prostitute and earn for the house by her own members in the widow ashram and when she finally wanted a remarriage and to stop this work, this led to non-acceptance on both sides in the widow ashram as well as in the boy's house which ultimately led to the suicide of Kalyani. Both the examples prove Schneider's view that cultural and normative systems overlap in everyday life. Thus, because this film brings the harsh traditions into a sharp focus and affected majority Hindu fundamentalist sentiments it faced opposition during its shooting as well as its sets were destroyed in Varanasi and the UP government decided to intervene and stop the film's shooting after which the court intervened and ordered the government to give the crew of the film full security during the shooting and protection to every viewer of the film during its premier.

Schneider also examined that blood was the core symbol of kinship in the United States and gave the two terms 'order of law' like in the relations of husband and wife and 'order of nature', such as that between an unacknowledged illegitimate child and its mother while relations between 'blood kin' can be derived from a combination of both. This division between the order of nature and law is what is exactly depicted in the film 'A Family Thing' in which, Earl Pilcher's mother and father relation existed only in law, while Earl's relation with her mother only existed in order of nature, and after her death a letter made a shocking revelation that she was only his social mother while his biological mother was a Black American maid named Willa Mae, who was raped by Earl's (white) father and that she died while giving birth to Earl. His adoptive mother's dying wish is that he go to Chicago to meet his half-brother, Raymond Murdock and thus he takes on a journey upon himself to meet his blood kin or step brother. He

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finally met him and at Ray's home, and finally Aunt T reveals that she knows who Earl really is and tells him 'I know both of your mothers'. Though Schneider, did his fieldwork in Chicago he failed to observe the division by racism in that part of the state which is also a critique of his theory. This film also throws a light on these topics by words like 'nigger', 'nigger state' by Earl, 'white southerner sleeping on my bed' by Virgil Ray's son and finally 'no matter how much my qualification is but job here in Chicago will go to a black man' again by Earl while he was in a bar.

The theory of Janet Carsten is also very much seen in both the films. In 'Water' the widow ashram though the widows were not related to the blood but still they became because of sharing food which was cooked and eaten in the same hearth, they all lived under one roof, this is similar to in the film 'A Family Thing' in which Earl lives in Ray's house for a couple of days, thus they all became social kins to each other with Carsten called 'siblingship' or 'to become a kin' and what Schneider called as 'kinship solidarity' was derived from a combination of two sources: relationship as 'natural substance' and relationship as 'code for conduct'. It was because of this relatedness that the women in the widow ashram survived the burden of harsh traditions and it is because of this only and Aunt T's influence all over the family that the two brothers can come together and recognise their relationship of half-brotherhood and forgetting their hostility towards each other. There was also a concept of mid-wife in the film 'A Family Thing' who helps the woman during her child birth and also cuts the umbilical cord and then buries it which very similar to the Malays in Pulau Langkawi, which Janet Carsten studied. But one area where Carsten lacked was in answering the question that till what time a woman has dominance in the household affairs? This film gives the answer in an Indian context that a wife or a woman has dominance over the house and household affairs till the time her husband is alive and after the husband's death the wife is treated as symbol of bad luck and thus forced to live an isolated life far away from her family and even her children.

Thus after comparing two movies, 'Water' and 'A Family Thing' with both the theories of David Schneider and Janet Carsten, we can see that kinship is not always born out of the biogenetic substances but it can also arise from the sharing of the food which is cooked and eaten under the same roof, living together or drinking milk from a woman other than your mother. Apart from these we can also see that how our culture have a deep impact on us, they affect our behaviour, the normative system tells us our do's and don'ts, gives us an acceptance in the society and in doing so develop kinship solidarity.

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