

## Transcending the Self through Shadows: a Psychological Study of *Pesum Padam* or *Pushpak*

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The cartography of life experiences, man or his variant ideologies, can be traced as an ontological association of the conflict between the real and its shadow. In order to introduce clarity, the word real is at more ease if it might be comprehended as the 'self'. In August 15, 1947, when the dream of sculpting a newly free nation began: scathed and free of colonial impacts, the dream was pictured through the onset of the 'great Indian dream', largely built on the architectural model of the free and the greater 'American dream'. But it suddenly got effaced due to the call of Emergency and all that was left for the 'self' in a post-colonial nation like India, was a ridicule of the 'shadow' of the virtual reality, while Bharat remained the real self in the macrocosmic structure: a nation where the common mass or proletarian section was being still exploited by the neo-colonial bourgeoisie. The duty of the individual self from the proletarian section that remains then, subsequent to the Emergency being called off belied in combating those nuisances of shadow of the overhauling politically silenced episode, is to transcend his real self through the characteristic feature of a shadowy Emergency, which is silence itself. Production in arts took place radiated with versatility where silence played the role as one of the main characters. In the literary field of studies, be it fiction, dramatic representation or even visual fiction (primarily recognised as cinema); silence plays either the role as the apparent epigram or the subversive anagram. For instance in the genre of fiction, in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*(1985), Emergency plays a key role in tearing apart the prolific virtues of the protagonist Saleem Sinai by silencing even his child Adam. Here Adam transcends the silencing holocaust through a postmodern magic realistic technique and utters '*abracadabra*' while the nation meets its freed scalp from a dystopian matrix. In theatrical representation, Badal Sircar made his audience and readers

relieve the silencing pressures of the ‘ideological state apparatus’ and ‘repressive state apparatuses’ upon the middle and lower class individuals in the play *Procession* or *Michhil* (1974), even prior to the Emergency, and directly appeals for an upheaval of protest through an intellectual rebellion. In cinema, or the visual fiction, a south Indian classic arrived upon the wings of *Pesum Padam* (1987) or later transcribed as *Pushpak* in Hindi cinema, directed by Singeetham Srinivasa Rao, silence plays the dais upon which the self of the individual has all that is left to transcend through his shadows or ‘hyperreal’ prototypes. According to Donald Richie in *The Films of Akira Kurosawa*, apart from the “apparent mystery” and “elliptical intent”, the most fascinating aspect of the film *Rashomon* is the difficulty to determine its ‘meaning’. In the movie *Pushpak*, the challenge to a critic is rolled with the dice of film’s ‘silence’. In brief the silent movie begins sketching the life of a lower middle class character dwelling in a rugged rented room, awakening from his sleep and battling with everyday competition, be it in answering the nature’s call at mornings or spoof ‘monetary battle’ impersonations with a beggar for the vain sake of pride, or even serious and depressing pictures of contest for job vacancy with his prototypes. Through a matter of chance and unethically taken advantage, the protagonist kidnaps a wealthy drunkard, and tries to live a much dreamt life of his latent rich shadow. He moves into a five star hotel named *Pushpak* where the drunkard has been putting up lately and then succeeding events of love, conspiracy, life threats, disillusion, delusion, disappointment follows with a brilliantly worked up elements of humour. Finally, the movie terminates with a transcended protagonist from his silent realization through his various silent experiences and lessons learnt from the ‘*Pushpak* hotel’ dream. This paper is an attempt to analyse and outline an underlying triangular fabric of psychological experiences of the individual self and his transcendence through the shadow of silence which the movie uses as an effective tool.

In this section, the initiatory psychological point of approach is to step in to the Marxist psychological zone and relocating the protagonist as a defunct proletarian individual in such a society where the latter has just awoken from the dystopian Emergency and still trying to rebuild the entire artefact of a ramified republic order. The scene of the protagonist's competition with the other members in the building for acquiring the toilet is an explicit example of the battle of prototypical proletarian contenders to crack the feat of victorious galore even at one's own home, while the meta-structural bourgeoisie devises the rule. Even the recent buzz and tension regarding the F.D.I. issue is reminded by this scene where the paradox of competing for survival in a capitalist world, 'begins at home'. Subsequently his contest with the beggar regarding monetary pride is a dark reminder of an extinct dream of the Indian socialist order. The protagonist's hopes and succeeding delusions after standing in 'job vacancy' queues act as necessary sequels. Eric Hobsbawm, the renowned Marxist historian opined in his *The Age of Capital: 1848-1875*(1991), that after 'the great boom' of capital and 'the world unified' upon the inflating ideas of globalization, it is difficult for the proletarian individual is impotent to realize their imminent state of stasis 'self' while the 'shadow' of the vacuous panache of the capitalist individual feeds upon him. Had the protagonist kidnapped and murdered the drunkard in the movie *Pushpak*, and eloped by robbing his money, then the movie would have fallen in a fiasco with no more possibilities of idea left from it to deduce. But events do not succeed in this regimented pattern. Rather it goes on in such a way which leads us to the Marxist intellectual realization of the self coming directly to comprehend the capitalist dystopia and the inherently breeding corruption and political conflicts, conspiracies and other complications 'through their minds'. It is here when the character starts living a bourgeois life, still unaware about his latent thoughts, and moves into a life experience of grandeur at Pushpak hotel. The shadow of the bourgeoisie experience is understood when the murderer arrives in the hotel to kill his targeted mission and mistakes

the protagonist for his target, quite apparently the wealthy drunkard. Here the politics of rivalry for power in the capitalist world remains as the signified. The girl with whom the protagonist falls in love helps to save his proletarian integrity and defend his non-conformist stand with the constrained set of capitalist decadence. The alarming imagery of the beggar's monetary possessions vanishing into thin air amongst a crowd of greedy contenders helps to awaken the protagonist and excavate himself out of the capitalist life and the withdrawal from that temporary pole culminates when the proletarian individual observes the photos of late Mister Pushpak, the owner of that hotel, who had battled his way in a stringently placed nation to achieve success, without unethical shortcuts. In this manner, the individual self of the protagonist transcends through the shadow of a capitalist world with a counteractive shadow of his own proletarian integrity and now the protagonist knows that he could finally castrate his foreign shadow while holding the rose: as a remembrance of love, integrity and *change*. He can fully now deduce his changed and mobile state of mind and hence "the proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win." (Engels and Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* 94)

The second polar region dwells in the alien metaphysical frame of mind where the psychological self has to guard itself with the shadow of the existential chaos and angst. As Heidegger comments that all of the denizens of this world "have been thrown into life", time is the vast spatial zone where the individual has to either choose succumbing and being victimised by the impending chaos. In *Pushpak* too, we find the individual grappling with its existence against the static universe and all that is left to him is the great abyss of time between life and death. The transcendence is only possible through an evolution from 'being' to 'becoming' as of that which happened to Sisyphus in Albert Camus' novel *The Myth of Sisyphus*. This novel like the movie *Pushpak*, is an epitome of man's eternal struggle against the chaotic absurd universe. The life of the protagonist was not fine until he could either

provide mobility to it by acquiring a job or by an understanding of the world and the nature of absurd – this nature of ‘being’ is termed by Jean-Paul Sartre as “being-in-itself” or a “non-conscious being” in his magnum opus *Being and Nothingness* (629) or as “inauthentic existence” by Albert Camus. For Sartre such an existence is dwelling in the illusion of a life which is otherwise null and impotent to offer anything meaningful. The being dwells in a state of “bad faith” and it is possible for an individual to recognize this “bad faith” only when he becomes a “being-for-itself” (629). This inauthentic being of self battled with its own prototypical shadows and failed to grasp the true existential enigma where the chaos can be countered by the display of ‘potency’. The “being-in-consciousness” arrived since incidents started to wrestle the scale of balance only after the protagonist moves into the hotel. Jean Paul Sartre argues that bad faith “must affirm *facticity* as being the transcendence, and transcendence as being *facticity* (117).” Finally, the death imagery of the beggar makes the protagonist leap upon the plane of ‘being-for-itself’ where he, for the first time, can comply with the terms of his reality and the existential reality of others too. The girl represents as the key symbol for not allowing the ‘being-in-conscious’ to commit suicide: which would mean an uncompromising nature from his side to be the victim of life and chaos. This would have also meant that he had finally accepted to his own predicament and allow death to overcome and overpower him. When in the final scene of the movie ends with the protagonist clinging to the girl’s gifted rose, and having a more determined look and attitude towards his struggle, any viewer can understand that after coming out of the Pushpak hotel, the hero has discovered finally an inherent underlying essence of ‘trueness’ in a Titanic ship laden with ‘rich’ falsehood. Thus, the girl’s rose gift is his guiding factor to overpower ‘life’ and ‘death’ and transcending his real to the state of ‘being-for-itself’.

The tripartite way of adaptability to most psychological critics in ‘understanding jigsaws’ follow up with the psychoanalytical episode of ‘id’, ‘ego’, and ‘super-ego’. Dr. Gautam

Banerjee, a well-revered psychiatrist of Manab Sangbad, in an article 'Health Education in a Broader Perspective' comments that the human mind is never at rest, unless dead. He says, the mind 'Even in its most inactive state like sleep at night or in a stage like coma, the brain cells can function to capture dreams'. Even psychoanalyst like Patricia Kilroe observes this and in her essay 'Dream as Text, Dream as Narrative' propounds that life is compositely built "with a series of dreams as the narrative". Life of the protagonist in the sphere of 'real' is a passive one, representing a narrative dream (before the Pushpak hotel's incidents) heavily stationed upon the pillars of rules set by the 'super ego' as he seems nothing but a Jungian archetype. Hence, he even competes with the beggar everyday in absurd stupidity. When his hand's shadow is seen to be reaching for the ice-cream thrown away by the drunkard, for the first time Carl Jung's 'shadow' or the Freudian 'id' comes into play and falls into the clutches of the golden eagle's (Pushpak hotel's symbol) shadow. In the next dream, he lives the dream narrative of the 'shadow' or the 'id' and enjoys all the pleasures of a rich man's life. He then glamorizes himself by buying rich clothes, and finally revels in temporary satisfaction on outwitting his rival, that is, the beggar. The next dream narrative of the 'moral principle' or Freudian 'ego' arrives through the girl coming into the protagonist's life inside Pushpak hotel ironically, and much later through the death of his rival, the beggar and in the climax through Mister Pushpak's demise. He realizes his mistakes and the unethical kidnapping. Therefore, he lets the drunkard arrive at Pushpak again, but drops in a 'silent' letter for him. So now the real or the ego can transcend the Jungian 'shadow' of Pushpak (or the 'id') and is ready to face the artificially stagnant 'super ego' or the life originating from his small rented room.

Silence is through which the history of cinema begins, but never so impossibly presented with probabilities, at least in Indian cinema. It is this silence of the south-Indian magnum opus *Pesum Padam* or named as *Pushpak* in Hindi, that for the first time, an all Indian audience can reach out and grasp this dark comedy with some really hilarious scenes for

simple fun and some carrying dark undertones. The silence makes us remember Agha Shahid Ali's one-lined poem *Suicide Note* which only uttered "I could not simplify myself." Through this silent movie *Pesum Padam* or *Pushpak*, the single utterance is not possible due to a presence of numerous probabilities. This paper therefore, concludes with three possible psychological zones of the triangular pattern of the protagonist: life before, inside, and after *Pushpak* hotel. Future attempts will reinforce the importance of the film and grounds of relocation are always possible.

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