

## **Love's Metamorphosis: A Detailed study of the secret codes of Love in the Bollywood film *Anwar* (2007)**

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of writing this paper is to evaluate the thematic values of love and devotion through reading the Bollywood romantic thriller *Anwar* (2007), which explores the themes of love, social issues and the complexities of human relationships. How the concept of 'devotional love' expressed by the Bhakti saints towards their devoted deities truly imprints its impact on this film, is the central finding from this psychologically enriched research on Love. The fact that the definition of 'Love' varies from person to person that has been shown in this paper. At the heart of the moral psychology of love, there are some cogent and nonsensical motifs. It shows how the norms connected to pure love, which delineate the 'superego' of the lover and how this 'superego' aids in taming the beloved. Both the eternal Lover and the Beloved shares a sire bond, which is also portrayed in this research. A blend narrative and visual analysis will be undertaken in this article to explore the theme of Love.

**Keywords:** Love, Devotion, Bhakti, Meera, Mehru, Saint, Krishna

### **Introduction**

Manish Jha's 2007 film *Anwar* is a multi-dimensional asset regarding the exploration of love, cultural identity, faith and social discriminations which are extremely prevalent in India. This film is an adaptation of a short story "Phalgun Ki Ek Upkatha" by Priyamvad. It investigates the fragmented identities in post-colonial India. The protagonist's being a Muslim youth and getting caught in a tragic series of events, continues highlighting the communal tensions in Indian society of that time. This film explores how religious identity is often being politicized and how it overshadows personal identity. The opening scene of this film captures the protagonist Anwar, while he is reading Namaz outside of an abandoned temple which provides him the 'mistaken identity' of being a terrorist. This incident reflects the social prejudices against Muslims of that time. Despite of being a Muslim Anwar refuges in a Hindu temple, it symbolically highlights the shared cultural heritage of India. Late fifteenth century's Indian Bhakti Movement reflects its influence in the said film where the themes of love, devotedness and religious syncretism resonate deeply. This film portrays Anwar's love for Mehru so pure and selfless that echoes the Bhakti poet's belief in unconditional love as a path to transcendence. His longing for Mehru parallels the devotional love celebrated by figures like Meera bai for Lord Krishna. The invocation of Krishna and Meera bai in the

dream sequence ties Anwar's personal love to spiritual devotion, blurring the line between earthly and divine connections.

### **The Theme of Love in *Anwar*(2007)**

Bhakti Movement flourished in India during the eighth century to seventeenth century. Due to this movement, the devotees emphasized a deep, distinctive and spiritual devotion to a chosen deity as a path of salvation. The Bhakti Poets and Saints described their relationship with God in some intensely personal terms, they often prayed God as a beloved, friend, parent or even a child. This movement broke the barriers of caste, gender and social status, asserting that anyone could love and worship God. Some Saints like Kabir, Meera bai and Tukaram emphasized that devotion was not confined to the elite or the learned. The love was the symbolic theme of the soul's complete surrender and union with God. Manish Jha's film *Anwar* highlights the thematic evaluation of such love in innumerable forms.

**Anwar's Love for Mehru--** The protagonist's love for Mehru is sincere but remains largely unspoken, as he is less expressive. Despite of being a passionate lover, Anwar couldn't have expressed his love ever through words. His love for Mehru becomes a metaphor for his yearning for meaning in a world full of chaos, prejudice and misunderstandings. Anwar's silent suffering represents the pain of love that is not reciprocated and also highlights the helplessness of losing the loved one.

**Mehru's Love for Udit--** Mehru hates India and wants to get settled down in America. She falls for Udit, a Hindu friend of Anwar who has got a job in America and soon leaving India forever. Mehru's love for Udit leads her to take a drastic action like eloping, as their relationship would never be accepted by her conservative family members. However, Mehru serves as a pivotal figure in Anwar's life. Though her love lies elsewhere, her actions and their consequences set the stage for Anwar's journey of introspection and self-destruction.

**MLA's Obsession with the DM's Wife—**Here the MLA's attraction is not based on genuine love or respect rather it is rooted in infatuation. His character represents the hypocrisy of individuals who publicly project an image of respectability while publicly engaging in unethical behavior. On the other hand, the DM's wife, Sunita remains passive in the case of MLA's obsession and her lack of response underscores her disinterest and highlights his one sided pursuit.

**Master Pasha's Love for Deepti—**Master Pasha, who works as a 'love guru' for Anwar, falls in love with a girl named Deepti who's a theatre girl. Deepti is writing a play and she wants Master Pasha to make the set for her play. However, Master Pasha's feelings for Deepti are deeply obsessive, bordering on unhealthy fixation. His love is less about Deepti but more about his own perception of Love. Eventually, Deepti is kind to Master Pasha which Pasha interprets as encouragement. His love for Deepti becomes a metaphor for the human tendency to chase unattainable dreams leading to his destruction.

**The Dream Sequence**—In the earlier dreams of Anwar, it has been shown that Meera is always running away from Krishna. As Anwar thinks Mehru is the love of his life but Mehru has a materialistic mindset hence she is not aware and is running away in the dream. In the end of the film, after their death when both Mehru and Anwar become souls, the final dream sequence portrays Mehru as Meera, who stops running and calls Anwar to immerse in herself.

### **Decoding the Film *Anwar(2007)* through the light of Umberto Eco's Ten Visual Codes**

Umberto Eco offered ten fundamental codes as instrumentation in shaping images, which provides valuable insights in reading this film.

- Perspective codes refer to the ways in which the viewers perceive and interpret visual information on the basis of their pre decided concepts. For instance in the film *Anwar(2007)*, Indian people's perception of considering the protagonist as a terrorist just because they found him Muslim, defines the perspective code well. People don't even wait for him to defend himself or rather they don't even give him a chance.
- Codes of Recognition involves culturally disseminate taxonomies when in a scene of the said film, two constables find Mehru and Anwar sitting in a park, one of them asks Mehru why isn't she wearing a 'burkha' despite of being a Muslim woman. Here the 'burkha' stands as the code of recognition for her being a Muslim woman.
- Iconic Codes of Eco, help to decode the inner meaning represented by a particular icon. In the film *Anwar(2007)* when in a particular scene, everyone's waiting for Anwar to come out of that abandoned temple, a person announces from the crowd that a nine year old boy clothed in a tri color shirt [the colors include saffron, white and green] is lost in the crowd. That boy becomes an iconic code for India and also indicates that the country is loosing dignity due to the communal riots.
- Rhetorical Code, according to Eco, focuses on the persuasive and communicative aspects of images through words or dialogues. As in this film, DSP Ashok Tiwari's emotional outbreak after talking with his little daughter, who' alone with his bed ridden wife, makes the viewers feel helpless. In another scene, Master Pasha's words echo from a hill top as he shouts "I am not a clown, I am an artist and the whole world is my stage" which shows how he's been misunderstood by the world.
- Stylistic Codes involve the artistic and stylistic choices made by the creator. In *Anwar(2007)* the dream sequence of Anwar and the flashback techniques used by Manish Jha convey some specific messages. When the film processes in flashback technique and focuses on Anwar's dream, at that point of time a saffron clothed woman appears in the dream but her face is never revealed but the style statement of that figure helps the viewers to consider her as Meera bai as she is all draped in saffron saree and wearing the chains of rudraksh.
- Iconographic Codes involve the use of symbols which may not directly resemble the objects or concepts that they represent but they have cultural meanings. For instance, the lost boy in the crowd draped himself in the colors of Indian flag. However he

represents the ideal of unified and harmonious India and his getting lost suggests the loss of innocence, direction and unity in India by communal divisions, political unrest and personal conflicts. The symbolism of the lost boy explores religious tension, love, betrayal and the broader search for meaning in a fragmented society.

- Codes of Taste and Sensibility according to Eco, encompasses the established norms, customs and conventions within a particular cultural or social context that dictate what is considered tasteful, appropriate or acceptable in visual representation. For instance, in the scene of Mehru and Udit's union, the cinematography heightens the emotional weight of the moment. Soft-lighting, close-up shots, and subtle background music emphasize their connection. This union challenges the interfaith relationships in a society where love often conflicts with tradition and orthodoxy. The tragedy that follows Mehru and Udit's union adds to the film's somber and reflective tone.
- Tonal Codes focuses on the use of light and shadow, as well as variations in color and contrast to convey meaning within an image. Tonal codes play a significant role in setting the mood, creating depth and emphasizing certain elements. In *Anwar(2007)* Master Pasha's death is staged with an air of performance, reflective of his dramatic personality throughout the film. As in the entire film, Master Pasha speaks in riddles and poetic musings, and even in his final moments he retains this larger-than-life aura. His death becomes a symbolic act rather than a mere passing, almost as if he is performing for an unseen audience in his stage-like deathbed.
- Codes of Transmission pertain to the methods that media is used to convey images or messages. They encompass the technologies and techniques employed in communication, such as writing, printing, painting, photography, film and digital media. In *Anwar(2007)*, the media plays a crucial role as 'code of transmission' acting both as a narrative device and a thematic symbol. The media sensationalizes events and perpetuates stereotypes rather than uncovering the truth. For example, Anwar, the protagonist, is mistakenly labeled as a terrorist after being found in a temple with a drawing book and artifacts. This misinterpretation spirals out of control as the media amplifies the narrative, ignoring the nuances and facts. This aligns with the idea of 'transmission' as a flawed code.
- Codes of Unconscious delve into the psychological and subconscious aspects of image interpretation. They consider how images may tap into our deeper, unconscious thoughts, desires, fears and associations, often on a symbolic or metaphorical level. In the film, *Anwar(2007)* the protagonist's final dream serves as a powerful metaphor, where Anwar visualizes Mehru in the costumes of Meera bai who wants Anwar as Lord Krishna to immerse in herself. This dream blurs the line between reality and imagination. It represents a liminal space where Anwar confronts his fear for morality, his failures and his yearning for transcendence.

### **Visual Images as the semiotics of Conveyed Messages**

A generation of thinkers in film studies, used to consider the film as a structure, however scattered the structure be, it still has a form. In Poststructuralism, for instance, scatteredness, dispersion and supplementation were more important than the concentration and routinized formalism of the previous generations of formalists and post structuralists. They insisted that the visual image which is a minimum unit of a film, has a kind of polysemy which means sharing the other levels of signification. However, the Barthesian concept of ‘Studium Punctum’ stands as a bridge between structural signs and its inner concepts. Studium is the coded cultural, linguistic and political meaning of the visual image. It’s generally something intended by the camera person and subjectively understood by the audience. In *Anwar(2007)*, capturing the flying white Doves in all the Love scenes stands as a studium because we all know the ‘White Dove’ stands as a signifier of pure love, peace and spiritual transcendence. The Punctum, on the other hand, is an incidental but poignant detail in any photograph. It constitutes the personal meaning that is not related to any cultural code. The meaning encoded by punctum varies from person to person. In my opinion, the random names of some couples written on the walls of that abandoned temple in the 2007 Bollywood film *Anwar*, was not intended to be a part of this film rather the couples might have dreamt of their love story to become historic. These names captured by the lens, stands as a punctum without invoking any recognizable symbolic meaning to the film.

In this film *Anwar(2007)*, Love plays an essential role of a complex emotion that defines categorization and definition. It is a unifying force that provides solace, camaraderie and meaning of life. However, Love can take many different forms each with its own depth and meaning which includes romantic love, parental love, familial love, platonic love and selflove. Fundamentally, love is about understanding the other and being vulnerable about recognizing and accepting people for who they really are. It is not merely a passing emotion, rather it is a decision a continuous dedication in fostering connections, for instance, Anwar couldn’t get his love in his lifetime but he gets Mehru after life when his subconscious mind deactivates itself.

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