

SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF IRANIAN FILM: COLOUR OF PARADISE

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ABSTRACT

The film is not a language in the sense that English, French or mathematics is. Nevertheless, films also narrate stories through different signs. Since the film is like a language, some of the methods that we use to study language are profitably applied to a study of film. The power of language system is that there is a great difference between the signifier and signified, however in film, the signifier and signified are at times almost identical.

KEYWORDS: *Film, Mise-En-Scene, Semiotics, Signified, Signifier*

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INTRODUCTION

The film has its own unique language as it communicates through image, music, dialogues and sound effects. Several semioticians have given various perspectives regarding the analysis of film images, music and text considering film as a system of signs. The most prominent figures in this arena are C.S Peirce, an American Philosopher, and Semiotician, Roland Barthes, a French semiotician, Christen Metz. Roland Barthes has quoted in his essays, for instance, Rhetoric of images, Image, Music and Text and Camera Lucida how to read images as a system of signs. More importantly, he has discussed denotative and connotative meanings of signs in his book Image, Music and Text. Using still images from films of noted film director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein, he has discussed different levels of symbolism, obvious and hidden meanings in an image. He has also discussed the famous images from Ivan the Terrible (1944), Battleship Potemkin (1925) and Ordinary *Fascism* by Mikhail Romm.

The given research study is qualitative in nature involving various parameters or theoretical constructs that are useful as an aid to the analysis of the film. The researcher has used semiotics in the analyses of film borrowing an idea from Roland Barthes connotation and denotation of images, C.S peirce trichotomy, index, iconic and symbolic signs and famous film theorist Andrew Dix's mise-en-scene. The researcher has used indexical metaphors suggested by Peter woolen while quoting C.S Peirce in his famous work 'Signs and meaning in the cinema'.

The French term 'mise-en-scene' means 'Putting in the scene' or 'everything you see on the screen'. Mise-en-scene has its roots in theatre and is one of the key components within film language. Further 'mise-en-scene' tells us how various visual elements interact and narrate a story in the film. These elements include physical landscape, lighting, colors, props, camera movements and characters within a frame. It also includes sound effects. All these elements possess a wealth of meanings and film narrates the story through these elements.

Critics pay attention to the analysis of mise-en-scene after the development of auteur study of a single director's film. "Mise-en-scene is the tone and atmosphere of the film, visual metaphor, the establishment of the relationship between characters, the relationship of all parts to the whole" (Gibb's 2002, 57).

For the purpose of discussion, the researcher has followed Andrew Dix's and James Monaco's terms of mise-en-scene. Andrew Dix divided mise-en-scene into five elements settings, lighting, camera movements, props, costumes, and acting. The researcher has also used sound and gestures as an important element for discussion. According to James Monaco. "Gesture is an important element of film signification". In his famous book 'How to read films' Monaco further writes that sound must seem in general, far more denotative and iconic than the image, it is nevertheless possible to apply the concepts of symbol, index, metonymy if the necessary changes are made.

Semiotic Analysis

Film: Colour of Paradise/Colour of God

Direction: Majid Majidi

Script: Majid Majidi

Duration time:90 mins

Year of Release.1999

Place: Iran

Although Majidi's films, thematically, revolves around the difficult life of Iran's underprivileged, the Sufi canons of poetry underlie his films subtly. Majidi has also acknowledged the influence of classical Persian poets Shams-ud-din Hafiz, Sa'di and Jalal ad-Din Muhammad Rumi on his films. The pervasive influence of poetry affects the way in which Persian filmmakers treat their social subjects.

Besides subtle overtones of Persian poeticism or religious allegory which underlie this film, the director has remained successful in maintaining the sense of realism. Like the films of other prominent directors such as those of Abbas Kiarostami, Majidi's films also exhibit some features of neo-realism that have been with much dispute linked with Italian neo-realism.

These include the portrayal of the difficult life of an underprivileged class of society, ambiguous endings, long shots; use of natural location with minimum alteration, use of non-actors. Mohsen Ramezani is a real blind boy who plays the character of Mohammad. The Persian name of the film is "*Range-Khoda*". So the most appropriate English title of the film should be *Colour of God*, instead of *Colour of paradise*. It is a simple yet powerful film made with delicacy and beauty. Soundtrack is alive with natural sounds of birds. The soundtrack is tweaked to emphasize Mohammad's auditory acuteness.

Brief Summary of the Film

Color of Paradise (Rang-e Khoda-1999) details the life of Mohammad, an eight-year-old blind boy who is unloved by his widowed father, a coal worker. The film focuses on the journey of Mohammad back to his native village in Iran during his summer break. The film opens with a black screen with Persian titles. We hear the sounds of taped voices, clunking of a tape player being switched on and off, children's voices crying out, "that one is mine"!, "that's mine" (audio

tapes are being sorted out). In the opening scenes of the film, Mohammad waits patiently to be picked up by his father for summer holidays at a school for the blind in Tehran. Hearing the chirping of a fledgling bird that has fallen from nest next to him, Mohammad climbs a tree and lovingly returns a nestling to its nest.

When the father, Hashim, arrives he pleads before school authorities to keep Mohammad at school during holidays. Afterschool officials refuse his plea, he reluctantly takes Mohammad back to his village situated in lush green Caspian area of Iran. At home, he is welcomed by his grandmother Aziz and two sisters.

Hashim fears that burden of caring for Mohammad will scare off his prospective bride and he forcibly sends him to blind carpenter to be tutored.

Grandmother Aziz loves Mohammad and scolds his son for placing his personal desires above that of his family. Disraught at Mohammad’s banishment Aziz leaves the house in a rainstorm. Hashim convince her to stay back, questioning his destiny and pleading his own case. He wonders why he lost his father and wife? Why he is now cursed with blind boy?. Aziz remains quite.

In the midst of her distress, she helps stranded fish get back in to stream. Aziz faints on her way so hashim carries her back home. Eventually, she becomes ill and dies. The family of the girl he wishes to marry called off the wedding because of bad omen.

Hashim decides to get Mohammad back home. On his way, while crossing rickety bridge Mohammad falls into swift stream. After long hesitation Hashim jumps into the river in order to save Mohammad. Eventually he is deposited unconscious on the river bank.

In the last sequence of the film father awakens from the exhaustion of survival on the shore of the sea. The sorrowful discovery melts father’s rocky heart and he dashes down the shore to cradle Mohammad’s lifeless body in his arms. Golden light falls on Mohammad’s hand.

Semiotic analysis of the mise-en-scene elements

Color of Paradise (Rang-e-Khoda) in Persian by Majid Majidi is an interesting genre for semiotic analysis. The aspect of signifier and signified has been discussed in the analysis of the film. (Themes identified through mise-en-scene).

A variety of signs employed by the filmmaker in the construction of film can be categorized as:

Signs and Their Meanings Are Enlisted Below

Settings/Location

Some Important Locations as Signifiers

Table 1

Signifiers	Signified
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interior dormitory. (Children standing close to tape player surrounded with cassettes). Classroom (children embossing braille letters on paper). 	School for blind children
Busy roads, cars, shops, multistoried buildings.	Urban landscape or urban life of Tehran
Image of village with River, lush green forest,	Rural life

mountains, village hut and grazing cattle's.	
Coalmine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Widowed Hashim works at a coal mine. ● Pessimism.(Mohammad's sighted father Hashim is a blind one. He can see only misery). ● Darkness of Hashmi's soul.
Farm in full bloom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Optimism of blind boy Mohammad. ● His love for nature.

The setting is the location where the action takes place. Settings can be natural or artificial. It plays a significant role in the construction of film language. Different film genres construct settings as per their own requirements. One can find the distorted settings of German expressionist films and the natural settings of Italy's streets and countryside in Italian neorealism films (Hayward 2000, 325).

Majid's locations are real and essential to situate the meanings of his films. He uses real locations to reveal the wealth of connotative meanings. The filmmaker has placed characters both within urban and rural settings. Majidi constructs the image of village with river, lush green forest, mountains, village hut, grazing cattle and some other signifiers of rural life. The urban landscape is constructed with cars, shops, buildings, and other similar objects.

In the opening sequence of shots, the film showcases dormitory and classroom to establish the educational center for blind children. Besides obvious denotations, Majid's films reveal a wealth of connotative meanings. The location has also been used by the filmmaker to reveal the perceptions of son and father. Majidi uses real locations in both realistic and metaphoric styles.

In the later scenes of the film, Mohammad waits patiently to be picked up by his father for summer holidays at a school for the blind in Tehran. Mohammad while sitting on the bench next to garden hears a peep of a fledgling bird that has fallen from nest next to him. Mohammad climbs a tree and lovingly returns a nestling to its nest. Majidi uses this location to reveal the humanistic qualities of the character Mohammad. It also shows Mohammad's alignment with divine approbation and even divine attributes.

Filmmaker carefully casts his character Mohammed against visually stunning pastoral settings of streams, fields, and flowers of the landscape to show his closeness to nature.

Mohammad runs through the vast richly colored flora of his family farm in spring (**Fig: 1**). A season of spring, a garden in full bloom, cypress trees all are used as emblems of beloved (God) in classical Sufi poetry. Mohammad can read signs of God around him using Braille. His intense longing "to reach out" and "touch God" alludes to the effective yearning so characteristic of Sufi poet's condition.

Blind boy's optimistic way of life is not shared with his sighted father hashim who is cast against monochromatic landscape which lacks vibrant color. Coalmine is a significant site used by filmmaker to cast his character hashim. Denotatively coalmine is a working place of Hashim. The darkness of coal mine signifies his pessimistic approach towards life (**see Fig.2**). Director Majidi Majidi has also used the deep space to integrate the characters into their natural surroundings.(A film utilizes deep space when significant elements of an image are positioned both near to and distant from the camera).In this composition(**see Fig 3**) father looks in apprehension at the school where his blind son has visited.

While Mohammad enjoys the company of other normal children, the father believes that Mohammad should not mingle with normal children because of his disability. The two different perceptions are reflected beautifully through this composition.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Table 2: Lighting and Color as Signifiers

Signifier	Signified
Black screen	The world of blind children
Character Hashim cast against the dark background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The character Hashim is cast against dark background. • Fears of Hashim • His hidden evil desires deep down his unconscious mind to get rid of the blind son.
Mohammad among colorful flowers in a vast field.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The blind innocent child Mohammad can see the color of God. • The intensity of the boy's inner sight in such idyllic looking sequences. • (God is everywhere)
Frontal Light illuminates Aziza's face. She is laying on the bed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of frontal lighting gives a character a spiritual outlook. The face of Aziza radiates as she dies peacefully indicating her spirituality.
A soft light gradually illuminates Mohammad's hands. (last shot of the film)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child receives revelations of God's beauty. • Mohammad has united with God and can now feel him with his fingertips.

Discourse

Film lighting serves as an important signifier which is used to create mood, perception, attention, illusion, and feelings among many other human cognition manipulations. Majid Majidi has successfully used visual imagery to convey the perceptions of Father and son.

The filmmaker has used highly shadowed, dark and contrasting images with feelings of danger, suspense, depression, misery, and evil. He has placed the character in this mode so as to interpret him as having evil intentions.

Mohammad's sighted father Hashim is a blind one. Hashim, a coal worker, is an ungrateful father who can see only misery. He considers his gentle, God loving blind son as a burden and an obstacle in his upcoming marriage. The character Hashim capable of seeing visually stunning pastoral settings of streams, fields, and flowers of the landscape around him is nonetheless blind to the beauty of nature. Hence Majidi casts his character Hashim against the dark background.

On the other hand, Bright lighting set-up, less contrast and a shiny look are used to cast the character Mohammad. This lighting approach triggers an emotional response of joy, happiness, and honesty. Mohammad does not let his disability prevent him from experiencing the bounties of God. Mohammad's optimistic view of his life is not shared by his widowed father.

In Islamic mysticism 'light' or 'nur' is used in reference to God and the faithful men and women. The filmmaker has carefully used light at different moments in the film to evoke spirituality associated with characters. For instance, in the last shot of film soft yellowish light, illuminates Mohammad's hands. His fingers open up gently. Light intensifies as he is moving his fingers turning them towards the sky or symbolically towards heaven. These are the fingers that have often tried to touch the invisible God. Whether by stroking bird's feathers or squeezing chaff in a field of wheat. However, at the moment of death, God appears to have reached to him signified through the illumination of hand (Fig:4). The warmth and brightness of the sun, emblem of divine love as detailed in the first words of the film has now reached to Mohammad.

Similarly, the mystic feeling is also evoked when the face of protagonist Aziza (grandmother) illuminates with bright natural light at the time of her death. Her face radiates as if with divine light thus giving a character spiritual outlook. Mohammad's beloved grandmother Aziza was a devout Muslim who cherished her grandson for the treasure he is.

The cinematographer has used these lighting approaches to enhance a movie's plot, characters, theme, style, and overall mood.

Filmmaker has carefully used the colors not only to set the tone of the scene but also to invoke mystical feelings. The blind boy Mohammad is heir to an environment of vivid color. When Mohammad returns village from school on vacations he gets delighted to experience the richly colored flora of his family farm in spring. A season of spring, a garden in full bloom, cypress tree and rose all are used as emblems of beloved (God) in classical Sufi poetry. Majid has carefully used these motifs and symbols as mystical elements to evoke Mohammad's experience of optimism. (See Fig: 05) On the other hand, Mohammad's father is cast against monochromatic landscape which lacks vibrant color. His scenes are plagued with a grey mist.



Figure 4



Figure 5

Table 3: Sound Effects and Music as Signifiers

Signifier	Signified
Sounds of a tape recorder and indistinct voices(shot of credit lines)	Viewers are placed completely in the shoe of blind children. (Film opens with credits over black, as the sounds of a tape-recorder and some indistinct voices are heard).
Song on a tape recorder.	Voice of an old woman singing with the accent of Iran. Mohammad's grandmother is singing a beautiful mournful song. Unlike other blind kids who keep commercial music tapes, protagonist Mohammad listens to his grandmother.
Sounds of cars moving on Tehran streets and a song played by radio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bustling city life in Tehran • Location plays an important role in creating narrative spaces. • The scene has been used to establish a contrast with village life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sounds of different birds (Cooing of a ring dove or the Sound of woodpeckers) 	Mohammad deciphers hidden meanings in bird calls.
Haunting call of a mysterious bird. Indistinct threatening noise echoes from the forest	The horrible sound resounds at the moment of heightened conflict in the film. The haunting birdcalls at times cast judgment on Mohammad's father, at times proclaims the innocence of Mohammad. Represent evil eye which is lurking in the darkness.

Discourse

According to James Monaco, "Sound must seem in general, far more denotative and iconic than the image, it is nevertheless possible to apply the concepts of symbol, index, metonymy if the necessary changes are made" Majidi successfully manipulates different sounds which serve as important signifiers of film. Majidi's manipulation of sound keep the viewers firmly focused on the world around Mohammad. Several times within the films all sounds fade out leaving just one prominent and noticeable sound, usually that of a bird singing.

Though Mohammad cannot see, he seems to sense fully the splendor of the natural world, amid his other senses primarily touch and hearing. With birdsong, it seems that Mohammad repeatedly tries to decipher what message it might have for him.

He insists to his grandmother that distant woodpeckers talk to each other with their knockings. Always he strives to hear some hidden meaning and reality. Despite his turmoil about his blindness and his conflict with his father, the boy senses divine presence everywhere.

The idea that sensory objects make proclamation of ultimate meanings persists in Majid's films. The call of birds portends significant events and questions. The haunting call of a bird heard throughout the film act as a recurring leitmotif in film. At times it proclaims the innocence of blind boy, at times casts judgment on his father.

Mohammad dressed in his redshirt sits up to listen closely. For a half minute of film time, Majidi freezes his camera to stare at clouds swirling through the mountains as that mysterious bird peals its song. Towards the closing of this scene, Mohammad's grandmother lies in a bed hearing the same birdcall.

The sound bridge unites the grandmother and the grandson in their perception of the hidden meanings of nature. She smiles in deep pleasure as the light on her face brightens a sign of inward delight. At this moment Mohammad seems to have sensed his grandmother's death.

Humanism dominates films such as that of Majidi. It is the combination of humanism and realism in Iranian cinema that has led to its worldwide popularity. Guided by touch and sound Mohammad rescues a fallen chick and returns it to its nest.

Table 4: Dialogues as Signifiers (Only Important Phrases/Words in Dialogues have been Undertaken for Analysis)

Word/Phrase (Signifier)	Signified
“Now I reach out everywhere for the God”	In the religious-philosophical tradition that serves as an allegorical language for Majid’s films, God is indeed the very principle of life. Mohammad expresses a feeling of separation from God and his intense longing “to reach out” and “touch God” alludes to the effective yearning so characteristic of Sufi poets condition.
“God loves the blind more than other people”.	Mohammad’s teacher has told him that God loves blind people. God tests his loved ones through trials and tribulations. Suffering brings out character trait of sympathy, compassionate and self-sacrifice.
Hashim to Aziza “Why I should be thankful to God”. What should I thank him for? All the miseries of my life. For my blind son? For the death of my wife?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hashim’s relationship with nature is one of animosity. He rages against deity who has left him without a father, and more recently without a wife and yet with a blind child. • Mohammad’s sighted father is blind and ungrateful who can see only misery. He cannot see the treasure he possesses in the form of a pious blind boy.
“I thought you will never come”	Mohammad holds his father’s hand emotionally and clings to his face while uttering these lines. Child’s ability to love deeply and sincerely despite his feelings that he is not loved.

Discourse

Hashim fears that burden of caring for Mohammad will scare off his prospective bride and he forcibly sends him to blind carpenter to be tutored. Mohammad weeps before his new mentor and explains him the source of his sorrow, citing the isolation his blindness has imposed on him.

Amid the litany of sorrow, he recalls the counsel of one of his teachers at boarding school. The core of the comment “God loves blind more than other people” seems to have imbued him with immense hopefulness and has shaped his urgent search for the divine presence.

Majidi invokes a classical form of Sufi romanticism dwelling on the idealized image of the eternal and unreachable love. Sufi poets like sham-ud-din Hafiz (1320-1389), or Jalal-ad-din Mohammad Rumi used a series of motifs and symbols in their poems (ghazals) which become analogous with the beloved. In one of his poem Hafiz says “We are

like lutes once held by God/being away from his warm body”, explains this constant yearning.

As blind boy, Mohammad reaches out everywhere for God and he can read signs of God around him using Braille. According to Ebni Arabi, Sufi thinker, all things possess speech because “mystery of life” permeates the “existent things” because as a result of God’s constant attention upon them. “Unlike Mohammad, hashim’s relationship with nature is one of animosity. He cannot perceive the treasure he possesses in the form of a pious blind boy.

Table 5: Camera Movements, Camera Angles, Heights, Slow -Motion Shots as Signifiers

Signifier	Signified
Mohammad caresses his father’s hand(level of framing used in the shot)	Camera focuses only on Mohammad. Father is almost excluded from frame thus evoking audience sympathy for the character.
Extreme long shot of a vast beautiful field of wild colorful flowers. Mohammad touches them with his fingertips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majidi infuses mystical elements to Mohammad’s experience of blindness. • Mohammad is heir to an environment of vivid color. • Gratitude to God enables us to see everything and everyone as a jewel for our enjoyment.
Extreme long shot of Hashim on the horse and the school building. (Hashim and school are placed across the diagonal line in composition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement of visual elements across the diagonal line indicates conflict, tension, and dynamism. • Hashim passes within sight of the school. He gets angry as he notices Mohammad among a group of school children.
Extreme long Shot of landscape in the fog.	Foreshadowing death of protagonist Aziza(grandmother)
Horse and collapsing bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Violent movements of a horse attempting to stay on the rickety bridge throw Mohammad into turbulent water • Slow motion shot has been used to add deeper emotional intensity to the scene. • To enhance audience immersion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High-angle shot of Hashim.(in the last scene of the film) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sense of weakness and powerlessness in the character.
Soft light illuminates Mohammad’s hand.(Extreme close-up shot)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A close-up shot reveals the details of the subject and enhances audience attention. • Close up of open palm towards the sky. Connotatively as if towards heaven. • A glimmer of sunlight gradually brightens the hand. Transcendent light, at last, touches him.

Discourse

Camera angel and camera height can also form a significant element in a film. Camera level is used to signify sympathy for characters that occupy particular levels in the image or create pleasurable compositions.

Majid Majidi uses different camera heights to signify the difference between son and father. The camera concentrates on Mohammad as he recognizes his father’s hand after patiently waiting for him for hours inside the school. The father is almost absent from the frame. Only the part of him that Mohammad touches is visible therefore increasing our empathy with the blind boy.(fig:06) In the next shot where father and son are on the shop in Tehran, camera level is

adjusted to father's size making Mohammad defenseless figure in the world that overcomes him.

Angel of framing has been used by the filmmaker to create striking visual compositions. It has also been used to create a relationship between character and camera's point of view. The camera angle is also used to show vulnerability and power. The high angle shot of hashim in the last scene although emphasizes his vulnerability and powerlessness. The character appears small inside the large frame. However, we cannot exclude deeper layers of meanings. The character hashim now in full realization of love for his blind son, is under the full protection of God, incubus, though he has been. For the father, at last, has actually 'seen' his son.(fig:07)

Slow motion shots have been used to redirect the viewer's attention to important details that would otherwise go unnoticed. Slow-motion shot of violent movements of the horse on the rickety bridge has been used to achieve deeper impact.

Through extreme long shots of the richly colored flora of the family farm or the use extreme long shot of landscape in fog, Majidi has let the images and metaphors speak and elicit what they will.



Figure 6

Table 6: Main Characters/Acting as Signifiers

Character/ Signifier	Signified
Hashim (father)	Evil, heartless, selfish
Blind boy Mohammad(son)	Pure, compassionate,,inquisitive, optimistic
Aziza (Grandmother)	God-fearing, spiritual, caring.

“For the audience, the activity of reading a performance involves bringing together of actor and character, and the interpretation and evaluation of acting has tended to assess whether or not the actor has ‘become’ a character” Therefore acting is often measured by the scale of realism and it is articulated in terms of whether a performance is more or less ‘believable’ ‘truthful’ or ‘realistic’ (McDonald 2000, 28).

This approach (realistic and neo-realistic) can be seen in Iranian films which use real locations, non-professional actors set in rural areas of Iran. It also draws many comparisons between contemporary Iranian cinema and Italian neo-realist films or ‘poetic realistic’ films of Satyajit Ray. The element of realism is being observed in the acting skills of Majidi's characters. Children usually form the main protagonists of Iranian films. According to Majidi children act as a strong force to communicate socio-political; message to the wider world.

Hashim fears that burden of caring for Mohammad will scare off his prospective bride and he forcibly sends him to blind carpenter to be tutored. When Mohammad weeps before his new mentor and explains him the source of his sorrow, citing the isolation his blindness has imposed on him, it does not appear 'acting' but real grief.

The filmmaker has used non-professional child actor in the film. Mohsen Ramezani is a real blind boy who plays the character of Mohammad. Mohammad is acutely attuned to the world around him and can read signs of God around him using Braille.

Child protagonist Mohammad also represent humanistic themes in the film. Mohammad is a virtuous boy who has the ability to care for everyone despite his own disability. Mohammad saves a nestling from a nearby cat. Mohammad gropes the trunk and branches of nearby tree reuniting bird with its mother in the nest. Metaphorically his own longing to reunite with family.

Hashim, on the other hand, is an ungrateful father who can see only misery. He considers his gentle, God loving blind son as a burden and an obstacle in his upcoming marriage. His acting prowess is depicted through his expressions. For instance in the scene when Mohammad falls into the river. Hesitation on Hashim's face to save Mohammad when he falls into river appears more realistic and believable.

Costumes

Studies of film noir have drawn attention to the function of costumes in the text which can be read from a psychoanalytic perspective. Pam Cook's discussion on *Madonna of seven moons*-1945 British drama film directed by Arthur Crabtree shows how the central character's spilt personality that of upper-class woman and the hedonistic gypsy is represented through costumes as a complex signifier of various themes. It reveals that film costumes can also be used as 'language' to present the ideas of the story. Color choices of costumes are one of the significant things that need to consider as it may show symbolic meanings to tell the audience about the story. In the film character, Mohammad is usually seen in colorful clothes which evoke the feeling of optimism. However, the dark brown or dark black costume of hashim signifies the traits of the character. In most scenes, blind boy wears a blue shirt which is a cool color.

Symbolic Props Used in the Film

Table 7: Symbolic Signs in the Film

Symbolic Devices	Meanings
Golden bangles	Marital happiness: material wealth.
Red rose	In the context of the film it signifies emblem of divine love in Sufi poeticism. (Mohammad brings it as a gift)
Candles in shrine	Prayers seeking Protection.
Rosary beads	Sacred symbol, a sign of faith
Gravestone	Death of the character Aziza

Symbolic signs have cultural and religious significance. These are used as important devices to create meanings within the films. When both father and son return to the village from school, Mohammad brings the card with a picture of red rose as a gift for his dear ones and his father purchases golden bangles for his prospective bride. Golden bangles are one of the most important narrative leitmotifs in the colour of paradise. It is invested with dual meaning that of marital happiness and material wealth. Lighting candles in holy shrines have cultural and religious significance among Muslims. Candles in holy shrines signify divine light and the light of divine guidance. It has religious as well as cultural connotations. The use of candles in Persian folklore is quite widespread. In Persian it also acts as a means of obtaining

wish. Mohammad’s grandmother is a devout Muslim who cherishes her grandson for the treasure he is. When she fears that her son is planning his second marriage she takes Mohammad to a holy shrine and lights candles. She is praying for the safety and security of Mohammad. Grandmother counting sacred verses on rosary beads are shown a couple of shots before her death. Death of the protagonist is symbolically represented through gravestone.

Table 8: Gestures as Signs Only Important Gestures Have been Undertaken for the Study

Signifier	Signified
Change in the countenance of Aziza at death bed	Aziza was a pious lady who dies a bless full death. (Smile on her face reveal as if she meets the unseen)
Hesitation on Hashim’s face to save Mohammad when he falls into river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • His hesitation which lasts for more than 30 seconds is the culmination of the outlook which appears sometimes subtly throughout the film. • A crescendo of anger and despair as the father sees blind son as a curse and obstacle to the life of happiness he seeks.
Mohammad touches his father’s hand, caresses it and then clings to it. (He is about to cry)	Mohammad is a virtuous boy who has the ability to love despite knowing the fact that his father does not love him. (correct grammar)
Fingers of Mohammad moving as if reading Braille (last shot of movie)	These are the fingers that have often tried to touch the invisible God. But now at the moment of death, God appears to have reached to him.
Hand covers Hashem’s face	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shame • Distress

Discourse

“Gesture is one of the most communicative facets of film signification”. (James Monaco, 2000). Gestures can also serve as indexical metaphors. Majidi has successfully used facial expressions either to reveal inner beauty or inner conflict of his characters.

At the time of her death protagonist, Aziza smiles in deep pleasure as the light on her face brightens. The change in countenance or facial expressions provides a sign of inward delight as she dies a blissful death.

When creaky wooden bridge collapse, Mohammad falls into the swift stream. His father stands on the bank, indecisive whether to save his son or not, for this is his chance to be free of him. Majidi has beautifully revealed this inner conflict of the father through his body language.

Hashim sobs covering his face as he receives news that the family of the girl he wishes to marry called off the wedding because of bad omen. Hands cover the face as if in shame, shield it from the outside world, the knees are pulled up almost in the fetal position. The ego has shrunk into a protective shell. Texture and the background of coalmine which is rough, uninviting support the gesture.

Table 9: Indexical Metaphors Used in the Film

Image	Denotation	Connotation
Cracked mirror and blood-stained hand	On hearing upon horrible sound coming from the forest, hashim cut his face accidentally while shaving. The small hand mirror he was using slips out of his hand and breaks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The image in the cracked mirror is the logical metonymy. It has a layer of connotative meanings. Hashim looks at his face in a fragmented mirror. His

		<p>image is split into two revealing his conflicting personality.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Character Hashim's gaze into a broken mirror calls upon a motif in Persian poetry and Sufi thought, in which mirror is the soul itself. • Blood stained hand foreshadows tragedies lurking ahead
Red rose	Particular type of flower (Mohammad brings it as a gift)	Emblem of divine love in Sufi poeticism.
Stranded fish	A Fish stuck in the stream with no way of getting anywhere else. The protagonist grandma helps a stranded fish get back in to stream.	<p>Grandma's intense desire to get Mohammad back home.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fish indicates religious allegory.
River and pebbles	Mohammad caressing the surface of flowing stream of water. He touches pebbles in the river bed as if he was reading braille signs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River metaphorically signifies the flow of life which carries along with it disappointments and lost opportunities of the characters' lives. • Mohammad tries to discern Persian words in the texture of river stones.
Turtle fell on its back	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Turtle struggled in vain to get back on its feet. (Hashim walked passed a turtle turned on its shell when he was taking Mohammad back home. He did not help it up). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It metaphorically represents hashim's futile efforts at last to save his blind son. • Foreshadowing trouble. This shot appears before Mohammad fell into the river.
Rickety bridge	Father and Mohammad are walking ahead towards dilapidated bridge on the river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bridges are a symbol of progress, stability, and connection. Majidi's has carefully used the visual imagery of the rickety bridge to reveal 'risk' and 'failure'.
Solitary bird	In the last part of the movie, the image of a solitary bird is shown flying across the sky. The shot appears immediately as the father regains conscious and try to locate his son.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moment of the child's death • A bird is a common symbol for the soul in Persian literature. Here it is metaphorically related to Mohammad's soul.

Discourse

Majid's films present a world in which images such as fish, bird, rain, water, and clouds indicate religious allegory. The contact that Mohammad makes with natural phenomenon around him has far more mystical implications than mere physical orientation.

For instance, Mohammad gently picks up pebbles from the river bank and murmurs the sound of Persian alphabets as if letters are literally inscribed into the earth and legible to the fingertips. Mohammad tries to discern Persian words in the texture of river stones or wheat buds to read the world with his fingers as if the language of God was Braille.

Further, the call of birds portends significant events and questions. The image of a rose on the card which Mohammad brings as a gift can be perceived as an emblem of beloved (God) in Sufi poetry.

Thematically Majid's film 'Color of Paradise' deals with difficult lives of Iran's underprivileged, but there is also the influence of classical Persian poets on his films specifically the poets Hafez, Sa'di and Rumi. Sufi-metaphysical world views of those poets underlie his films subtly, while at the same time maintaining a sense of realism.

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