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A Study on the Postmodern Realism in *Ram C/O Anandhi*

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to explore Akhil P. Dharmajan's *Ram C/o Anandhi* as a unique convergence of cinematic realism, urban affect and wider readerly participation. The novel deviates from conventional fiction by combining spatial symbolism, narrative fragmentation and visual narration techniques to create a subdued, engrossing topography of emotion. The study investigates how cinematic syntax-such as jump cuts, frame-switching, and mise-en-scene, is translated into writing to engage readers visually and emotionally. Through rigorous textual analysis, reception studies, and interdisciplinary theoretical framing, the article reveals how Chennai develops as an emotional topography and affect becomes narrative architecture. This study situates *Ram C/o Anandhi* within the changing outlines of Indian postmodern literature, emphasising the novel's connection with contemporary readers used to visual storytelling. It contends that the book initiates a spatial-emotional style of literary realism adapted to the sensory rhythms and interpretative wants of a digitally saturated audience.

Keywords: Cinematic Realism, Affective Realism, Urban Fiction, Malayalam Novel, Visual Narrative, Reader-Response, Postmodern Aesthetics

In an age of hyper-visual culture, literature no longer operates solely within the bounds of linguistic narration. *Ram C/o Anandhi*, a Malayalam novel by Akhil P. Dharmajan, represents a paradigmatic shift in how regional Indian literature internalises and refunctions cinematic aesthetics (Dharmajan 2020). The novel organises its narrative through visual sequencing, affective modulation, and active reader participation, making it a significant contribution to hybrid

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literary forms in post-liberalisation India. As André Bazin argues, cinematic realism relies on long takes, natural lighting, and the minimisation of authorial intervention to present a continuous and interpretive reality (Bazin 19). In a similar vein, the novel's refusal of heavy exposition in favour of an ambient, immersive atmosphere invites the reader to function simultaneously as spectator and co-narrator. Matthew Gamble extends this understanding by suggesting that cinematic realism, when viewed through a Kantian framework, encourages spectatorship as an ethical mode of engagement characterised by restraint and perceptual patience (Gamble 64).

Through the affective framework offered by Pramod K. Nayar, the novel's emphasis on mood and ambient feeling can be understood as a form of literary realism attuned to postmodern sensibilities (Nayar 22). These aesthetic decisions render the text not only an instance of cinematic literary expression but also a document of spatial and emotional interiority. In the sections that follow, this article examines how cinematic grammar, such as montage, silence, and *mise-en-scène*, shapes the novel's narrative architecture. It also investigates how space and affects coalesce into emotional topographies and how readers, shaped by image-driven media environments, engage with a narrative that deliberately resists conventional storytelling. Ultimately, *Ram C/o Anandhi* emerges as a text that both reflects and refracts the aesthetic conditions of twenty-first-century storytelling (Pratheesh 122).

The convergence of cinematic realism and literary narrative has shaped a significant body of interdisciplinary scholarship since the mid-twentieth century. Bazin's foundational work foregrounds realism as cinema's ethical and aesthetic commitment to the ontology of the image, advocating for long takes, deep focus, and narrative ambiguity as mechanisms for preserving perceptual freedom (Bazin 41). Although Bazin's theory originates in film discourse, it offers crucial insights into literary works like *Ram C/o Anandhi* that simulate cinematic temporality and realism within prose. Expanding Bazin's framework, Gamble argues that realist cinema withholds manipulation, allowing viewers to discover rather than be directed toward meaning (Gamble 64). This principle echoes in literary texts

that prioritise minimal narration, ambient detail, and interpretive openness – hallmarks of this Malayalam novel.

In literary studies, the use of cinematic methods within narrative fiction is frequently discussed under the broader concept of media hybridity. Rajewsky characterises intermedial fiction as that which rearticulates the codes of other media in its textual form, often resulting in hybrid aesthetic grammars (Rajewsky 46). Kashaka identifies a rising genre of ‘visual novels’ in Indian fiction, characterised by montage construction, ambient symbolism, and an emphasis on mood over exposition (Kashaka 1224). Simultaneously, affect theory offers a robust vocabulary to understand the novel’s emotive registers. As Nayar posits, affective realism in literature centres around evoking mood and sensation rather than conveying psychological depth through exposition (Nayar 24). Characters become emotional conduits, and spaces transform into affective containers.

Reader-Response Theory also plays a central role in conceptualising the novel’s reception. Rosenblatt emphasises the reader’s role in producing meaning, particularly when the text offers interpretive ambiguity (Rosenblatt 196). Fish reinforces this model through the concept of interpretive communities, where meaning arises through communal frames of reception (Fish 526). Together, these critical traditions of cinematic realism, affect theory and reader-response criticism provide a composite structure through which to examine *Ram C/o Anandhi*. This fusion clarifies the novel’s aesthetic innovations and situates it within broader transformations in literary form and reader subjectivity in the age of media convergence.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology based on close reading, digital ethnography and spatial-affective analysis. Rather than relying on formalist approaches, this framework emphasises literary phenomenology, where mood, space and reader perception co-produce meaning. The novel is approached as a visual-affective artefact, and its text is treated as a network of cinematic codes. As literary texts increasingly borrow from filmic grammars, the methodology must recognise the fusion of narrative and sensory techniques. The paper tracks how cinematic cues, jump cuts, *mise-en-scène*, long silences translate into literary minimalism, relying on

Bazin's visual ethos and Gamble's aesthetic realism as critical anchors (Bazin 22; Gamble 19). To explore spatial affect, the study maps emotional tonality to specific locations in the novel – balconies, metro stations, film studios – interpreted through the lens of Nayar's affective realism (Nayar 29). These geographies do not merely house characters; they modulate psychological tension and ambient emotion. Reader engagement is traced through digital ancillary texts, Goodreads reviews, Instagram captions, and forum threads, to observe how contemporary readers, especially younger audiences, respond to the novel's fragmentary and visual form. These responses are framed through the theories of Rosenblatt and Fish, whose emphasis on reader-generated meaning illuminates the novel's dialogic texture (Rosenblatt 197; Fish 539).

The study aims to explore how *Ram C/o Anandhi* weaves cinematic realism into its literary fabric, paying particular attention to the techniques through which the novel mirrors filmic sensibilities. It also seeks to understand how spatial aesthetics and emotional cartographies shape the narrative's overall mood and tone. In addition, the research examines how readers in the digital age, especially those engaging through online platforms, interpret and respond to the novel's affective and visually oriented storytelling. Guiding this inquiry are a set of questions that probe the novel's formal and affective textures. First, the study asks how cinematic techniques, such as visual framing, montage, and meaningful uses of silence, are translated into the novel's prose. It also considers the role urban settings play in shaping the story's emotional dynamics and the characters' inner worlds. Finally, the research examines how contemporary readers respond to the novel's formal minimalism and its reliance on visual and emotive cues, particularly within a media environment increasingly shaped by image-driven sensibilities.

Ram C/o Anandhi eschews conventional plot progression in favour of atmospheric vignettes that simulate the rhythm and syntax of cinema. This formal departure from linear narration represents not merely stylistic experimentation but a deeper epistemological recalibration of how narrative, subjectivity, and space are constructed and received. Its episodic structure, frame-switching, and montage logic produce what may be termed a cinematic phenomenology – a

shifting emotional field in which meaning is not declared but emerges through duration, silence, and spatial immersion. The novel demands not just interpretation but presence, not just cognition but affective attention. Echoing Bazin's formulation of cinematic realism as a commitment to perceptual freedom, Dharmajan constructs a literary space where the authority of the narrator is purposefully diminished (Bazin 23). Narrative power is instead distributed across objects, gestures, weather, architecture, and absences. Prose in these novel functions as *mise-en-scène*; composition, not commentary, animates its pages. Transitional moments, a sideways glance, the echo of footsteps in an empty stairwell, the hush of rain through a metro grille, become narrative fulcrums. These details demand slow reading, a suspension of interpretive urgency, a textual equivalent of the long take.

The emotional tempo of the text follows what Gamble describes as "ethical spectatorship", a viewer-reader relation premised on time, patience, and moral proximity rather than interpretive dominance (Gamble 59). Ram and Anandhi do not exist to disclose truth; their presence unfolds in gradients of gesture, silences, and unresolved longings. Unlike conventional psychological realism, *Ram C/o Anandhi* dislocates interiority from verbal exposition, rendering emotional reality through glances, pauses, and spatial placements. This challenges literary norms of characterisation and anchors the reader in a post-verbal, visual mode of empathy.

Chennai, far from being a neutral backdrop, operates as an emotional topology. Its urban cartography shapes and reflects the characters' affective states. Rooftops serve as affective thresholds, staircases encode ascents and descents not only of space but of mood, and corridors hold the inertia of human delay. Such alignment between built environment and emotive undertone situates the novel within what Nayar calls "affective cartography," wherein space is neither container nor context, but an agentive register of emotion (Nayar 29). In this novel, the city, like a character, does not talk but gestures, echoes and absorbs. Then the epistemological claim is clear: the 'space knows'. This idea reorients narrative epistemes away from the speech and internal monologue and towards architecture, gesture and environmental resonance. Such a formulation disrupts the

classical notions of knowledge production in literature, proposing a poetics of environmental cognition and atmospheric memory.

The character, Anandhi's portrayal, radicalises this further. Her character journey, if you can call it that, is chronicled via embodied opacity rather than events or words. Her silences defy narrativization, and her resistance to offer psychological clarity represents a feminist intervention in the long history of female characters rendered intelligible solely via emotional exposure. Anandhi remains an affective occurrence rather than a psychological profile – an exemplar of Barthes' *punctum*: an element that outflows symbolization and thus acquires haunting intensity (Barthes 65). In one striking instance, Anandhi's tranquillity in the hospital corridor is rendered with such cinematic precision – her face half-lit, her posture unmoved, and her eyes averted – that it becomes the narrative's emotional centre of gravity. No dialogue is needed; the scene bears the meaning through affective architecture. This refusal to translate silence into explanation is not simply aesthetic minimalism – it is an epistemological ethic that privileges ambiguity as the legitimate narrative mode.

The novel's reflexivity too deepens in its theoretical architecture. Ram's film-school background is purposeful and not incidental, as it becomes a site of metanarrative critique. His commentary on his classmates' films – critiquing their overuse of the close-ups, melodrama and resolution – mirrors the novel's own departure from similar tropes. Ram C/o Anandhi does not merely narrate the story, but it critiques the very expectations of story-ness. The novel is an exercise in literary phenomenology, where reading becomes an act of watching and watching becomes an act of being. This reflexivity serves a dual purpose: it emphasises form as content while also involving the reader. When the text denies exposition, it invites affective co-authorship; when it withholds climax, it asks the reader to reconsider narrative satisfaction. Empirically, this structure maps onto the reading practices of contemporary young audiences increasingly shaped by the visual media. According to studies on reader behaviour in digital contexts, younger readers engage more profoundly with texts that provide open-endedness, visuality, and emotional tone rather than plot-driven linearity. The reaction of Ram

C/o Anandhi on platforms such as Goodreads and Instagram backs this viewpoint, with readers characterising the novel in terms of how it feels rather than what occurs. The novel's motifs – rain, stairwells, balconies, and doorways – are repeated not to add metaphorical weight, but to establish a mood ecology. These are not symbols to be deciphered, but sensory signals to be experienced. This is consistent with an emerging style that academic Divya Kashaka refers to as the “visual novel” – in which the story emerges through ambient accumulation rather than teleological sequencing.

Finally, the *Ram C/o Anandhi* enacts a postmodern ethics of storytelling, as it goes non-linear as honesty, with honesty as meaning and spatiality as epistemology. It challenges not just established narrative norms, but also ideas about what readers want or need. Its interpretative complexity is not a defect, but rather a challenge – a call for a slower, deeper, and more spatially conscious manner of literary interaction. Reading *Ram C/o Anandhi* takes you through a landscape of emotion, a picture corridor and a rooftop of remembrance. It is a novel that must be felt to be known, halted to be comprehended and observed rather than eaten. It establishes a new grammar of literary realism that accepts cinematic speed, spatial sensitivity and emotional architecture as viable modalities of epistemic inquiry and narrative articulation.

Unconventional Elements and Their Narrative Efficacy: A Critical Analysis

What sets *Ram C/o Anandhi* apart in the canon of contemporary regional (Indian) fiction is not simply its subdued effect or the spatial elegance, but its radical departure from the expectations of the narrative convention. The novel succeeds in challenging the reader's literary expectations by deploying a series of unusual strategies that defy regular storytelling mechanics – techniques that are not just aesthetic but also epistemologically revolutionary.

First and foremost, the narrative abandons a teleological storyline. Instead of cause-and-effect logic, the story moves via fragmented moments that do not lead to a conclusion, but rather create a complex emotional topography. This anti-plot device is a structural dissent, an intentional denial of narrative closure that

distinguishes the book as postclassical by design and intent. Here, the author aligns with the postmodern ethos articulated by literary theorists such as Brian McHale and Linda Hutcheon, who argue that narrative authority must be problematized and not asserted. The narrative's structure reflects not the journey of a protagonist but the meandering of the perceptual experience, challenging readers to abandon the anticipatory logic of climax and closure. Second, the novel's narration style is iconoclastic in its restraint. Rather of providing explanatory scaffolding, the language in *Ram C/o Anandhi* is noticeably thin. Minimalism, or evasive grammar, is used to produce emotional intensity rather than dramatised interiority. Ellipses, visual fragments, environmental allusions, and sensory residue all contribute to the novel's emotional palette. This storytelling strategy has theoretical resonance with Roland Barthes' concept of the "writerly text," which allows the reader to create meaning rather than receive it. Such writing requires interpretative labour, resulting in a kind of cognitive-emotional involvement that is uncommon in current popular literature.

Another unusual feature is the visual syntax integrated in the text. Dharmajan creates scenes with cinematic intentions, using compositional framing, lighting metaphors, and camera logic. Scenes, for example, begin with spatial descriptions that resemble establishing shots, such as a shadowy corridor, a neon sign blinking outside a metro station, or the angular immobility of a chair in an empty hostel room. These visual blueprints stimulate the reader's cinematic sensorium, enabling a new way of textual absorption. This intermedial crossover – between prose and visual imagery – places the novel squarely within the scope of what Irina Rajewsky calls intermedial literature: tales that translate the codes of one medium into another without becoming purely derivative (Rajewsky 44). The narrative temporality is one of the most notable examples of an unconventional success. In *Ram C/o Anandhi*, time is recursive, non-linear, and frequently fragmented. Mood takes precedence over chronology, and emotional velocity – rather than temporal sequence – is used to experience temporality. This temporality is consistent with what Gilles Deleuze calls the "time-image," in which moments float as unadulterated manifestations of duration and sensation rather than being subservient to action (Deleuze). Like memory intruding

upon consciousness, Ram's flashbacks are not discrete; instead, they bleed into the present. This approach produces a phenomenological authenticity that resembles lived experience, despite the possibility of disorientation.

The work also deviates from mainstream fiction by refusing to psychologise its characters in a traditional sense. Characters are portrayed through spatial inhabitation, visual presence, and emotive resonance rather than history or speech. Legibility is particularly resisted by Anandhi. Her silences are retained as emotional relics rather than being filled with explanatory intent. Feminist criticisms of representational excess, which frequently reduce women to symbols, tales, or metaphors, are consistent with this aesthetic of opacity. *Ram C/o Anandhi* resists such reduction and adds to a growing corpus of feminist-visual literature that values independence above accessibility. The novel's exploration of space goes beyond traditional narrative structures, presenting the city as a vital character rather than just a backdrop. This urban landscape is depicted through emotional experiences rather than mere functionality, emphasising how locations like the metro, cafés, and hostel corridors serve as significant sites of emotional resonance. Each of these spaces has its own unique rhythm and atmosphere, contributing to the overall narrative in profound ways. For instance, the recurring imagery of rain-slicked balconies, dimly lit hallways, and flooded intersections elevates these settings into symbols that evoke deeper meanings, yet they resist simplistic interpretations. These environments are not merely allegorical; instead, they create rich atmospheres that enhance the emotional depth of the story, reflecting the complexities of urban life and the characters' experiences within it. The interplay of these spatial motifs invites readers to engage with the narrative on a sensory level, allowing the city to emerge as a living entity that shapes the characters' journeys and emotional landscapes.

Also, the novel's artistic position is elevated by Dharmajan's reluctance to editorialise or moralise. No lessons learnt, no redemptive arcs, no epiphanies. The characters wait, act, retreat, and go. By doing this, the book presents a realism that is far closer to the rhythms of actual life than it is to the structure of fiction. This is integrity to experience, not a lack of resolve. The way this method

forces readers to embrace ambiguity as a principle of story design rather than as a deficiency is what makes it so successful. From the empirical standpoint, the novel's unconventional systems have been met with considerable acclaim across social media platforms and reader forums. Its widespread use on Instagram, incorporation in academic curricula, and high Goodreads engagement rate all attest to its cultural traction. The novel's cinematic pace, atmospheric beauty, and defiance of melodrama are often cited by readers as its main draws. These signs demonstrate that rather than alienating readers, the novel's experimental elements have developed a specialised, emotionally aware readership.

Overall, *Ram C/o Anandhi* achieves a wonderful balance of experimental form and emotional clarity. Its unusual strategies, anti-plot structure, minimum writing, cinematic design, spatial poetics, and female opacity are not gimmicks, but rather epistemic choices. They form a narrative grammar that is fit for the cognitive-affective reality of a visually overloaded, temporally fragmented, and emotionally sensitive readership. By rethinking how tales should be conveyed, the novel redefines what it means to narrate in the twenty-first century.

Reader Response Indicators: Engagement and Interpretive Communities

The *Ram C/o Anandhi's* popular and critical acclaim reveals its appeal to readers who enjoy hybrid forms of narrative. Rather of providing a neatly planned narrative, the novel encourages a participatory reading style in which emotive clues, spatial moods, and narrative ellipses combine to create meaning. This approach is consistent with Rosenblatt's concept of the transactional reader-text interaction, in which the meaning of a literary work is derived from the reader's active interpretation rather than the text itself (Rosenblatt 199). On forums like Goodreads and Reddit, fans praise the novel's emotional nuance and quiet intensity. User reviews frequently include descriptions such as "cinematic but not dramatic," "haunting," and "slow but unforgettable." These indicate that the emotive atmosphere, rather than the story, becomes the major attraction. Fish's notion of interpretative communities helps explain how readers with comparable media experience and aesthetic tastes congregate around

common meanings, especially when interpreting Anandhi's silences or the city's sad atmospheres (Fish 534).

Instagram posts inspired by the novel frequently include sombre, desaturated visuals – empty seats, rain-soaked windows, and lighted balconies at night – along with text snippets. These image-text pairings mirror the novel's own grammar of visual narration and highlight how readers' interpretative behaviours extend beyond reading to curation and visual creation. Such methods support Kashaka's concept of the "visual novel," which is increasingly influenced by digital aesthetics and networked reception (Kashaka 1224).

The novel 'asks us to dwell in the quiet', according to literary critics like Radhika Jayaram, who writes in *The Hindu Literary Review*. Jayaram argues that the novel's stylistic choices purposefully forgo dramatic arcs in favour of emotional integrity. In a similar vein, screenwriter and director Anwar Ali compares the text's structure to a slow movie and commends it for not over-scripting impact. According to these comments, the novel's popularity lies in its capacity to promote emotive recognition among a range of readers, including social media users and scholarly reviewers. It transforms from a word into an environment and a mood that may be experienced. The variety of interpretations supports the novel's artistic approach even more: Deferred, diffused, and co-constructed meaning

Conclusion

A subtle yet powerful recalibration of literary realism for the digital, post-cinematic era is demonstrated by *Ram C/o Anandhi*. The novel rejects traditional emotional arcs and dramatic closure through its ambient moods, visual grammar, and narrative fragmentation. Rather, it transports the reader to a temporal-spatial continuum characterised by silence, pause, and glance – elements of a literary practice influenced by the spirit of cinematic realism. Because of its formal restraint, mood can take the place of message, readers can co-compose meaning in dialogue with the text, and space can host feelings. The characters in the book are not arc-bound but rather emotionally resonant through gesture and absence, and the

cityscapes are not settings but syntax. This supports Gamble's claim that ethical spectatorship, which underpins realism in art, asks how we see rather than what we know. Moreover, the novel's resonance in reader communities both popular and critical reader communities reveals its adaptability across interpretive registers. It invites not consensus but multiplicity, not immediacy but reflective depth. In this, *Ram C/o Anandhi* signals a literary turn where storytelling becomes affective cartography and textuality becomes cinematic in its visual restraint and spatial pacing. The novel thus offers more than a narrative; it proposes a new sensorium of reading – one attuned to silence, surface, and slowness. In doing so, it anticipates a literary future shaped not by plot but by perception.

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