

Fictionalising Trauma: Paratextual Analysis of Select Tamil Novels

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Abstract

Gerald Genette's concept of paratext widens the horizons of literary canon in multidimensional approaches through textual materials that includes pictorial, title, author, font etc that acknowledges its key notions. In such context, innumerable modes of medium acts as a interlink to highlight the critical concept irrespective of prefixed protocols or notions embedded to the theory. On basis of such interpretation this paper attempts to relocate and redefine the projected idea through the layers of select Tamil novels and their Symbolic connectivity in conflicts of war, trauma, diasporic consciousness, photo realism, expressive images etc. Interpretation of parthenium plant with Srilankan war conflicts and its invisible political sketches through several imagery serves the primary essence of the paratextual sequence in Thamizhnadhi's Parthenium. A thematic representation of carnatic music to project the cultural and geographical back ground of the protagonists embark on a journey to Paris and the quest for life well characterized in the novel Paris 'ukku Po by Jeyakanthan. Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's Tamil translation work of Balyakalasakhi gives the classic touch of artistic portrait through the brush strokes of certain unhappy occurrence in protagonist's life. All the descriptions are analytically evolved and careful observations are systematically carried out in elitist view. Moreover the mere study of this paper well clarifies and serves the rich flavours of paratextual elements and traumatic factors that provides valuable and rich essence to the texts as well as clear understanding of the theory.

Keywords: Paratext, Interlinks, Text, Redefine, Imagery, Novels, Portraits

The concept of 'Paratext' introduced by Gerard Genette in *Thresholds of Interpretation* attempts to redefine and relocate ideas on literary texts. The arguments account to vision the analysis interlinked to textual materials at the borders through which its essence is evidenced. Such analysis in multidimensional perspective to derive its key theme from various zones are acknowledged and related with texts that includes pictorial, textual, title, author etc. Gerette argues that such analytical approaches are mandatory to account the meanings that covers and their paratextual interlinks create. Since contemporary society evolves with a notion by judging a book by its cover. This paper attempts to interlink the concept of

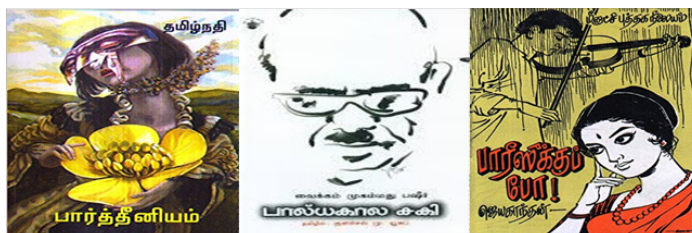
paratext and its elements with select Tamil novels *Parthenium*, *Paris'ukku po*, and *Balyakala sakhi*. This study intends to analyse these thematic perspectives from humanitarian eye and not a statistical one.

The cover of Thamizhnadhi's *Parthenium*, a good example for diasporic writing as well as a war novel, and an important work in Sri Lankan literature that provides ample ground for interpretation. The title refers to the Parthenium plant that is environmentally hostile to any other plants that grow near it. It cannot be killed unless completely uprooted, and causes death to neighbouring plants. In this novel that's heavy on symbolism, evidence of love story that takes place amidst the backdrop of the struggle in Sri Lanka. In this context, the Parthenium plant represents the Indian government which plays a duplicitous role by sending its soldiers to Sri Lanka under the pretext of helping, but in reality to turn on the various peoples' movements and slaughter innocents. The woman on the cover holding the Parthenium plant obviously represents India, wearing a mask of tears to project a fake sympathy to the Tamils' cause. In reality it is clear that the real villain of the piece. Her royal outfit shows the mask of respectability that a government is supposed to wear. The setting is among lush green fields with a mountainous background, which is a major element in the story. The author photo provides an interesting parallel to the cover, depicting her smile while the front cover depicts a crying woman.

Another major instance showing the importance of Paratext can be found in the novel *Paris'ukku Po* by Jeyakanthan. The story revolves around the theme of music, particularly Carnatic Classical music. The protagonist Sarangan, unwilling to follow the conventions of both society and classical music embarks on a journey to Paris to discover his musical calling. His love story, as well as other subplots, forms the structure of the narrative. The cover plays a vital role in understanding the theme of the novel, using both photorealism and abstraction to convey what lies within. With music being the predominant theme, the protagonist is reduced to an abstract figure in the background. The veena, an instrument representing classical music, is shown prominently while the violin, representing Western music, is pushed unassumingly to the background. Western musical notes take the shape of branches of a tree. This may be interpreted as the lead character leaving behind his cultural and geographic roots to reinvent the existing form. At the same time, the title of the novel, plastered across the middle of the image, reflects the urgency of Sarangan's quest for change.

The cover of Vaikom Muhammad Basheer's *Balyakalasakhi* translated by Colachel Muh Yusuf, is a wonderful example of the influence of the author on the text. The work is translated from Malayalam to Tamil, and lest there is loses sight of that, the Malayalam title is retained, only spelt in Tamil with a Malayalam font style. It is vital; therefore, that the cover designer gives importance to the original language that the work was written in. Furthermore he eschews an expressive cover image for a more personal one.

The cover depicts a minimalist portrait of the author drawn in a few broad brushstrokes. The economy of lines contributes to the stark simplicity of the theme. Moreover there is immediate infer in the events of the book deal with the life of this man, and it's not a happy tale. It is indeed more effective than a back-cover photograph of the author because it portrays him artistically and in a more abstract form.



Significantly the font style and size hold no special meaning within the broader context of the narratives of all three books. The books are printed in paperback so as to attract the common reader and not project an elitist view. All observations stated here are based on conjecture, but provides a fascinating insight into the power of paratext in understanding the hidden layers of meaning in a text.

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