

**EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL VARIANCES AND NARRATIVE DYNAMICS: A  
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF LAAPATAA LADIES AND POOR THINGS<sup>i</sup>**

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**Abstract:**

*This research article delves into the realm of comparative literature through an interdisciplinary lens, exploring cultural variances and narrative dynamics in the cinematic landscape. Utilizing Champoux's Observational Model and Horton and McDougal's theoretical framework, the study conducts a comparative analysis of two films: Laapataa Ladies directed by Kiran Rao and Poor Things directed by Yorgos Lanthimos. Through this analysis, the article unveils intriguing insights into the evolving socio-cultural landscapes of contemporary India and Victorian England, shedding light on themes of identity, societal expectations, and the human condition depicted in these cinematic narratives. The comparative method helps in illuminating previously unknown aspects of one text, which can be better highlighted through comparison with another text.*

**Keywords:**

*Comparative literature, narrative dynamics, cinematic analysis, Laapataa Ladies, Poor Things, socio-cultural landscapes*

## EXPLORATION OF CULTURAL VARIANCES AND NARRATIVE DYNAMICS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF *LAAPATAA LADIES* AND *POOR THINGS*<sup>ii</sup>

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### Introduction:

Comparative literature, as an interdisciplinary field, transcends geographical and cultural boundaries to explore the rich tapestry of global literary traditions. (Bassnett) Scholars in this discipline aim to redefine the concept of literature by integrating literary experiences with broader cultural phenomena. This research article delves into the cinematic realm, utilizing Champoux's Observational Model (Film Remakes As A Comparative View Of Time) and Horton and McDougal's theoretical framework (Introduction) to analyze two films, *Laapataa Ladies* directed by Kiran Rao (2023) and *Poor Things* directed by Yorgos Lanthimos. (2023) The comparative method helps in illuminating previously unknown aspects of one text, which can be better highlighted through comparison with another text. Through this comparative analysis, we unveil intriguing cultural variances and narrative dynamics, shedding light on the evolving sociocultural landscapes of contemporary India and Victorian England.

### Antecedents and Historical Context:

The origins of comparative literature can be traced back to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's concept of "world literature" and the contributions of Russian Formalists like Alexander Veselovsky. (Damrosch) In India, Rabindranath Tagore advocated for Vishva Sahitya, emphasizing the importance of transcending national boundaries in literary studies. (Tagore) Similarly, the cinematic realm offers a platform to explore cultural nuances and societal norms through visual storytelling.

### Theoretical Framework:

Drawing upon Champoux's Observational Model and Horton and McDougal's assertion that films reflect cultural issues and norms, our framework contextualizes cinematic narratives within their socio-cultural milieu. This approach aims to elucidate the cultural variances embedded within *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things*, offering insights into the evolving sociocultural landscapes of contemporary India and Victorian England.

### Comparative Review: *Laapataa Ladies* vs. *Poor Things*

Examining the cinematic endeavors of *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* through Champoux's Observational Model unveils intriguing cultural variances and narrative dynamics. Both films offer captivating visual presentations, delve into thematic depth, feature commendable performances, and balance tone and genre with finesse.

#### Visual Presentation:

In the realm of cinema, visual presentation plays a pivotal role in immersing audiences into the world of the narrative. *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* exemplify the power of visual storytelling, captivating viewers with their distinct visual styles and creative use of imagery. While both films excel in their visual presentation, they do so in markedly different ways, each contributing to the overall impact and atmosphere of the story.

*Poor Things* enchants audiences with its visually stunning portrayal of a fantastical journey spanning continents and centuries. The visual appeal of the film is evident from the outset, with creatively designed sets and lush cinematography contributing to its surreal ambiance. The journey from Lisbon to Africa to England is a feast for the eyes, with each locale offering its own unique visual splendor.

One of the standout aspects of *Poor Things* is its seamless blending of Victorian aesthetics with fantastical elements, creating a visually rich tapestry that transports audiences to another world. The sets are meticulously crafted to evoke the grandeur of the Victorian era while incorporating elements of the fantastic, adding depth and dimension to the narrative. From opulent ballrooms to eerie laboratories, each setting is imbued with symbolism and meaning, enhancing the thematic exploration of the story.

In contrast to the fantastical elements of *Poor Things*, *Laapataa Ladies* opts for a more grounded visual approach, capturing the rustic charm of small-town life in rural India. The visual appeal of the film lies in its authenticity, with most scenes shot in real-life locations that reflect the vibrancy and diversity of Indian culture.

From crowded trains to dusty village streets, the film immerses audiences in the sights and sounds of rural India, capturing the nuances of everyday life with remarkable detail. The visual presentation of *Laapataa Ladies* is characterized by its realism, with no shortage of vibrant colors, bustling streets, and picturesque landscapes. Each frame is a snapshot of rural Indian life, offering a window into a world that is both familiar and captivating.

Both *Poor Things* and *Laapataa Ladies* utilize symbolism to convey deeper societal connotations, enriching the viewing experience with layers of meaning and subtext. In *Poor Things*, the juxtaposition of Victorian aesthetics with fantastical elements serves as a commentary on the human condition, exploring themes of innocence, discovery, and manipulation. Similarly, *Laapataa Ladies* uses its realistic portrayal of rural Indian life to delve into themes of identity, societal expectations, and gender roles, inviting audiences to reflect on the complexities of Indian society.

Thus, *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* demonstrate the power of visual storytelling to captivate and engage audiences. Whether through fantastical journeys and surreal ambiance or realistic portrayals of everyday life, both films excel in their visual presentation, offering viewers a feast for the eyes while conveying deeper themes and societal connotations. As audiences immerse themselves in the visual splendor of these films, they are invited to contemplate the intricacies of the human experience and the world around them.

#### Narrative Depth:

The richness of a narrative often lies in its ability to delve into complex themes and explore the intricacies of human experience. *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* exemplify this narrative depth, offering audiences compelling insights into identity, societal expectations, and the human condition. While both narratives tackle profound themes, they do so through distinct narrative techniques and storytelling approaches, resulting in unique and captivating viewing experiences.

In *Laapataa Ladies*, the narrative unfolds in a linear fashion, allowing audiences to follow the journey of its characters with clarity and coherence. The story intricately explores themes of identity and societal expectations, particularly concerning women in Indian society. The secret surrounding Jaya's desire for education in organic farming at Dehradun University serves as a poignant reflection of the socio-cultural realities faced by many young women in India. Her craving for education symbolizes a yearning for financial empowerment and independence, challenging traditional gender roles and expectations.

Additionally, Phool's desire for a happy married life highlights the dichotomy between societal expectations and personal aspirations. The revelation of the lady's suicide as a result of untamable sexual urges, constrained by Victorian puritanism and hypocrisy,

adds a layer of depth to the narrative, shedding light on the oppressive forces that govern female sexuality in society.

In contrast, *Poor Things* employs a non-linear narrative structure, utilizing flashback techniques to unravel its intricate storyline. The narrative delves into themes of innocence, discovery, and human nature, reimagining the Frankenstein trope in a contemporary context. The complexities of the narrative are heightened by the use of flashbacks, which add depth and dimension to the story, allowing audiences to piece together the puzzle of Bella Baxter's life and experiences.

The exploration of innocence and discovery is juxtaposed with darker themes of manipulation and control, as Bella navigates a world that seeks to suppress her agency and desires. The non-linear narrative enhances the suspense and intrigue of the story, drawing audiences deeper into the mysteries surrounding Bella's past and present.

Thus, *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* exemplify the narrative depth that can be achieved through thoughtful storytelling and thematic exploration. While *Laapataa Ladies* adopts a linear approach to unraveling its socio-culturally relevant themes, *Poor Things* employs a non-linear narrative structure to reimagine classic tropes and explore the complexities of human nature. Both narratives invite audiences to contemplate the intricacies of identity, societal expectations, and the human condition, offering profound insights that resonate long after the credits roll.

Performances:

The success of any film often hinges on the strength of its performances, as talented actors bring characters to life, enriching the narrative experience. In *Poor Things* and *Laapataa Ladies*, standout performances elevate the storytelling, offering audiences compelling portrayals that resonate long after the credits roll. While both films feature commendable performances across the board, it is the nuanced portrayal of complex characters that truly leaves a lasting impact.

Emma Stone's portrayal of Bella Baxter in *Poor Things* stands as a testament to her versatility as an actor. Bella is depicted as a woman grappling with her own sexual desires, navigating a world that seeks to control and suppress her agency. Stone imbues Bella with a sense of vulnerability and defiance, capturing the internal conflict that defines her character. Through subtle gestures and nuanced expressions, Stone brings Bella to life, allowing audiences to empathize with her struggles and triumphs. Her

performance is a masterclass in subtlety, capturing the essence of Bella's journey with depth and authenticity.

In addition to Emma Stone's standout performance, *Poor Things* benefits from notable contributions from Willem Defoe and Mark Ruffalo. Defoe brings a sense of menace to the role of Bella's manipulative partner, adding layers of complexity to the narrative. His portrayal serves as a foil to Stone's Bella, highlighting the power dynamics at play within their tumultuous relationship. Similarly, Ruffalo delivers a compelling performance as a conflicted doctor entangled in Bella's complicated desires and childishness. His nuanced portrayal adds depth to the narrative, enriching the character dynamics and driving the story forward.

In *Laapataa Ladies*, the performances of Pratibha Ratna, Nitanshi Goel, and Chhaya Kadam shine as they navigate the complexities of their characters' lives. Phool and Jaya, portrayed by Ratna and Goel respectively, grapple with societal expectations and cultural taboos surrounding female sexuality. Despite the "veil" of secrecy and taboo that surrounds their experiences, Ratna and Goel infuse their performances with subtlety and nuance, allowing audiences to glimpse the inner turmoil of their characters. Similarly, Kadam delivers a standout performance as a matriarch grappling with her own financial independence. Together, the ensemble cast of *Laapataa Ladies* brings depth and authenticity to the narrative, enriching the exploration of socio-cultural realities.

Genre and Tone:

In the realm of storytelling, the interplay of genre and tone serves as a dynamic force, shaping narratives and engaging audiences in multifaceted experiences. *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* exemplify this interplay, navigating the delicate balance between light comedy and dark societal commentary. While both narratives employ humor as a vehicle for storytelling, they diverge in their approaches, offering unique insights into the complexities of social and cultural realities, particularly concerning female sexuality. *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* share a common foundation in the genre of light comedy, utilizing humor to entertain and engage audiences. However, what distinguishes them is their willingness to delve into darker themes, shedding light on the intricacies of societal norms and cultural expectations. In *Laapataa Ladies*, the comedy serves as a lens through which to explore the lives of its characters, providing

moments of levity amidst the challenges they face. Conversely, *Poor Things* ventures into darker territory, employing surrealism and pathos to confront audiences with uncomfortable truths about society. The tone of both narratives oscillates between comedic and thought-provoking, offering a nuanced portrayal of the human experience. In *Laapataa Ladies*, the tone is characterized by its light-heartedness, punctuated by moments of introspection and social critique. The comedy serves as a vehicle for addressing serious issues, such as gender inequality and societal expectations, allowing audiences to engage with these themes in a more accessible manner. Similarly, *Poor Things* navigates between moments of hilarity and poignancy, challenging audience perceptions with its unconventional narrative approach. The tone, while predominantly comedic, is underscored by a sense of underlying tension, as the narrative confronts taboo subjects with unflinching honesty. At the heart of both narratives lies a profound exploration of social and cultural realities, particularly concerning female sexuality. *Laapataa Ladies* offers a humorous yet incisive critique of societal norms, highlighting the absurdity of gender expectations and the constraints they impose on women. Through its ensemble cast of characters, the narrative delves into issues of identity, agency, and empowerment, challenging audiences to rethink their preconceived notions. Similarly, *Poor Things* confronts audiences with the harsh realities faced by women in society, using comedy as a tool for social commentary. The narrative deftly navigates between moments of absurdity and poignancy, shedding light on the complexities of female experience in a patriarchal world.

#### Conclusion:

In essence, *Laapataa Ladies* and *Poor Things* offer captivating cinematic experiences, enriched by their distinct cultural contexts and narrative intricacies. These films stand as testament to the diversity and creativity within contemporary cinema, leaving indelible impressions on audiences worldwide.

This comparative analysis contributes to the broader discourse on cultural representation in cinema, highlighting the importance of contextualizing narratives within their socio-cultural frameworks. As the cinematic landscape continues to evolve, comparative approaches offer valuable insights into the complexities of human expression and societal dynamics depicted on screen.

In conclusion, the objective of comparative literature studies to deepen our

understanding of texts by juxtaposing them against each other and illuminating previously unseen aspects is exemplified when analyzing a Hollywood film set in Victorian social milieu alongside a Bollywood film set in early 21st-century rural India, reminiscent of Victorian society in England. This comparative approach transcends geographical and temporal boundaries, offering invaluable insights into the complexities of human experiences, societal norms, and cultural transformations depicted in cinematic narratives. Through such comparative analyses, we not only enrich our appreciation of individual films but also contribute to a broader dialogue on cultural representation, identity, and the universal themes that resonate across diverse cinematic landscapes.

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<sup>i</sup> This article has been written with the collaborative aid of OpenAI's advanced language model, ChatGPT 3.5. Employed as a facilitative tool, it has contributed to structuring and refining the content, adding a layer of sophistication to the writing.

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