



CINEMATIC NARRATIVES AND AFFECTIVE REALISM IN 'RAM C/O ANANDHI': A POSTMODERN EXPLORATION OF IDENTITY AND MIGRATION

Dr. Pratheesh. P, Assistant Professor, St. Michael's College, Cherthala (Affiliated to the University of Kerala)

Email: drpratheeshpadath@gmail.com

Abstract

The 'Ram C/o Anandhi' is a Malayalam novel by Akhil P. Dharmajan, focusing on the themes of love, loss, friendship and courage. This study critically investigates the novel through the lens of visual narratology and transmedia imagination. Departing from conventional literary storytelling, the novel constructs a cinematographic narrative space that fuses written text with the rhythm and grammar of the filmic sequencing. Ram, a young Malayali filmmaker navigating urban life in Chennai, becomes a conduit through which the novel explores the themes of identity, migration, intimacy and affect. The work employs unconventional style through visual cues, frame-switching and emotional montage to simulate the reader's experience, thereby aligning with concepts of transmedia realism and cultural performance. This study argues that 'Ram C/o Anandhi' is not merely a love story or coming-of-age narrative; it is a postmodern literary artifact which reconfigures the novel form through cinematic aesthetics and reader-oriented immersion. Using Reader-Response Theory, contemporary cultural theory (Nayar, 2015), and concepts of affective realism, the article identifies how the novel generates empathic zones for reader identification, especially among the digital-native audiences. The findings suggest that the novel's mass appeal lies in its hybrid structure that merges the visual art, vernacular idiom and literary realism, marking it as a pivotal work in the ongoing evolution of Indian narrative fiction.

Keywords: *Transmedia Fiction, Visual Narratology, Cinematic Novel, Contemporary Malayalam Literature, Reader-Response Theory, Affective Realism*



1. Introduction

The contemporary literature, especially the novels are no longer confined to traditional linguistic form. In an era saturated by screens, pixels and moving images, literary texts increasingly adopt the aesthetics and tempo of the visual culture. The '*Ram C/o Anandhi*', a contemporary Malayalam novel that has garnered both critical acclaim and the mass appeal, exemplifies this transmutation. Through its structurally cinematic mode of storytelling, the novel constructs a narrative form that operates like a screenplay, intercutting between the spatial zones, emotional registers and the experiential frames.

The novel centres around Ram, a Malayali film student in Chennai, and his interactions with Anandhi, a receptionist, combined with a cast of emotionally resonant characters. However, this is not merely the plot which defines its uniqueness. The novel engages in visual storytelling mode by brief scenes, symbolic close-ups, unspoken tensions and abrupt transitions that mimic the techniques of cinema. This invites an analytical model drawn from transmedia storytelling and the visual narratology (Klarer, 2013; Nayar, 2015). The transmedia imagination here does not require multiple media platforms but rather signals a narrative aesthetic inspired by the multimedia logics.

To justify the title 'Living Frames', the study positions the novel as a sequence of affective vignettes that simulate cinematic realism while retaining the literary depth. Each frame—all interaction, glance or silence—functions like a living tableau, advancing the emotional arc without overstatement. The narrative demands the active decoding by the reader, who fills the inter-frame gaps, much like interpreting a film sequence. Reader-Response Theory becomes instrumental in understanding how such a narrative strategy produces the meaning through participation rather than exposition (Rosenblatt, 1978; Fish, 1980). By placing *Ram C/o Anandhi* within the lineage of postmodern Indian literature and the hybrid genre experiments, this article seeks to articulate how the novel redefines affect, space and identity through a visual-literary apparatus. The following sections will engage with relevant literature, define the theoretical frame and perform a close textual analysis of the novel's stylistic and the emotional structure.



2. Literature Review

In the contemporary literary studies, the rapid convergence of visual culture and literary practice has catalysed new critical pathways. Scholars such as Nayar (2015) and Klarer (2013) have emphasized that the twenty-first century literature often mimics the formal dynamics of cinema, gaming and the digital media to address new modes of reader engagement. In particular, the cinematic novel—a hybrid form that blurs textual and the visual boundaries—has emerged as a space for the narratological innovation. This mode of writing employs montage, shifting frames and the temporal fragmentation to emulate the affective and perceptual rhythm of film (Klarer, 2013). In the Indian literary discourse, this shift has been particularly marked in the regional literatures, where cinematic traditions coexist with rich oral and written forms. The *Ram C/o Anandhi* stands out in this domain for its cinematic structure and the deeply affective prose, which has garnered attention from both the mainstream readers and academic commentators. Online forums and social media platforms have praised the novel for its 'visual' feel, its fragmented and emotionally resonant narrative and its capacity to evoke scenes with minimal exposition (Book Review of *Ram C/o Anandhi*, 2023).

The reader-response theorists like Rosenblatt (1978) and Fish (1980) argue that meaning in literature emerges from the transaction between the text and reader, and *Ram C/o Anandhi* embodies this principle through its open-ended, elliptical narration. The novel does not impose a singular interpretive framework. But it invites the reader to inhabit the emotional silences, the in-between moments and the narrative absences—much like watching a visually driven film that demands the emotional inference rather than verbal explication. Also, the emotional topography explored in the novel—urban migration, marginal love, loss and trans identity—aligns with the concerns of the 'affect theory' and the cultural studies. According to Nayar (2015), contemporary cultural texts increasingly mobilize affect as a primary mode of engagement, especially when targeting younger, media-savvy audiences. *Ram C/o Anandhi* exemplifies this approach by eliciting empathy through non-verbal cues, fragmented dialogues and the cinematic vignettes, which contribute to what may be called affective realism.

Thus, the existing literature not only substantiates the novel's innovative form but also supports its placement within the transmedia and postmodern paradigms. This review of critical



discourse provides the necessary foundation for a deeper textual analysis, which will explore how *Ram C/o Anandhi* reconfigures the literary realism by fusing narrative, affect and visual poetics.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical alignment of this study draws from three significant and interrelated domains: Reader-Response Theory, Transmedia Narrative Theory and Affect Theory within Cultural Studies. These frameworks enable a nuanced understanding of how the novel 'Ram C/o Anandhi' mobilizes the cinematic structure, emotional depth and the reader participation to produce a uniquely hybrid literary experience. The Reader-Response Theory, as articulated by Rosenblatt (1978) and Fish (1980), posits that the meaning in literature is not fixed but emerges through the active role of the reader. This viewpoint is essential when examining the *Ram C/o Anandhi*, which defies linear exposition in favour of evocative, disjointed scenes that demand the reader's interpretation. The text embodies what Rosenblatt referred to as the "transactional" nature of literary reading by introducing gaps—emotional silences, visual lacunae, abrupt shifts—that force the reader to produce coherence and feeling.

The Transmedia Narrative Theory, though more commonly applied to media franchises and the digital platforms, is pertinent here for its insights into how the narrative techniques migrate across mediums. Transmedia storytelling, as Jenkins (2006) points out, entails distributing story components among several media platforms. *Ram C/o Anandhi* uses cinematic techniques like montage, close-up, visual framing, and elliptical sequencing to simulate a multi-modal experience within the textual boundaries, even though the story takes place in a single medium—the novel. This transmedial sensibility supports Nayar's (2015) finding that modern literature increasingly incorporates elements of digital and visual aesthetics.

The Affect Theory further enriches this study by focusing on how the literature generates emotional and visceral responses. The *Ram C/o Anandhi* evokes affect not through melodrama or direct exposition but via subtle cues—gestures, urban stillness and fragmented conversations—which resonate deeply with readers, particularly those navigating similar urban emotional terrains. Nayar (2015) describes this as 'affective realism', a move that prioritizes the emotional verisimilitude over plot coherence or closure.



3.1 Methodology

This study adopts the qualitative textual analysis approach. The primary data consists of the novel *Ram C/o Anandhi* in its original Malayalam version and translated excerpts (by Haritha C.K). The analysis focuses on,

- a) The Narrative Techniques: Identification of cinematic devices such as montage, frame-switching and the point-of-view shifts.
- b) The Character and Dialogue: The examination of how emotional depth and identity are constructed through minimalist dialogue and the gestural cues.
- c) The Spatial and Visual Cues: Analysis of the setting, scene composition and symbolic spaces, especially the portrayal of Chennai.
- d) The Reader Response Indicators: Tracing the reader engagement through forums, reviews and thematic resonance.

The study also engages supplementary material, including online reviews, critical essays and the social media discussions to situate the novel within the contemporary reading cultures. The methodological fusion of close reading with the reader-response evidence allows for a robust analysis of how the *Ram C/o Anandhi* functions as a transmedia, affective and participatory literary experience.

4. Textual Analysis and Interpretation

The novel *Ram C/o Anandhi* unfolds as a sequence of emotionally charged vignettes, each bearing the precision and the tonal economy of a filmic scene. From the outset, the novel subverts linearity in favour of episodic narration, mimicking the cinematic montage. The fragmentation—manifest in abrupt scene transitions, disjointed memory recalls and the elliptical silences—conveys a modern urban sensibility of discontinuity, demanding an active and interpretive reader. In this context, Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory becomes particularly relevant, as the novel delegates meaning-making to the reader, inviting them to inhabit its affective silences and the narrative gaps.

The novel's structure hinges on the frame-switching: emotional oscillations and visual-temporal transitions that simulate jump cuts. Ram's inner thoughts frequently interrupt or



<https://10.51767/JEN030111>

overlay external action, creating a layered temporal register. A key moment in the narrative—a prolonged silence between Ram and Anandhi—is constructed through the negative space: the absence of dialogue becomes the locus of the narrative tension. This scene invokes Bazin's principle of realist cinema, wherein the image is allowed to unfold the unmanipulated, thereby placing interpretive responsibility on the spectator (Bazin, 1967). Chennai, as depicted in the novel, functions as a mediated space—neither neutral nor passive. Cafés, balconies and the metro stations are charged with emotional density, operating as what Kashaka (2025) terms 'affective architecture'. These locations do not merely house action; they refract it through the emotional tone and mood. The spatial composition of these scenes recalls the cinematic *mise-en-scène*, wherein the light, shadow and the positioning substitute for psychological exposition.

From a postmodern vantage, the novel dismantles the stable subject positions and archetypal roles. Anandhi is not a sentimental romantic object but a subject with opacity, indeterminacy and agency. Her presence often exceeds the narrative containment, emphasizing postmodernism's preference for character fluidity over the fixed identity (Lyotard, 1984). Malli's arc further complicates the thematic of desire and dislocation, positioning the city as a site of the fractured intimacy. Again, the novel's symbology—rain, reflections, glass and corridors—operates semiotically. These are not passive descriptions but the signifiers of internal flux. The recurrence of reflective surfaces, for instance, really underscores themes of duality, distortion and the subjectivity, recalling the cinematic technique of mirroring to express the psychological states.

Moreover, the novel, *Ram C/o Anandhi* is an inherently reflexive text. Ram's identity as a film maker (student) renders the novel self-aware; the act of looking, framing and narrating becomes a thematic axis. This meta-cinematic quality turns the text into an act of seeing as much as storytelling, thereby reinforcing its status as a 'living frame'. The novel collapses the boundaries between narrator and viewer, between the scene and sequence. In literary terms, the novel achieves a rare synthesis, that is, it performs the cinema within language. It leverages realist restraint—its silences, its ordinary events and its observational tone—while engaging with postmodern affect and the narrative indeterminacy. By integrating these strategies, *Ram C/o Anandhi* constructs a world not to be decoded but inhabited—a world governed by affect,



suggestion and the relational tension. It is, ultimately, a narrative of visual intuition and emotional inference.

This segment thus affirms that the *Ram C/o Anandhi* not only mimics cinematic technique but also advances a critical model for the contemporary realist fiction. In simulating visual storytelling, it resituates the novel as an experiential and participatory art form—one where meaning is no longer embedded in narration alone but diffused across the image, silence, space and readerly cognition.

5. Reader Response Indicators: Audience Engagement, Thematic Resonance, and Interpretive Communities

The widespread and significant engagement with *Ram C/o Anandhi* across reader forums, digital book reviews and social media underscores the novel's participatory power—an attribute central to Reader-Response Theory. Unlike conventional realist fiction, whose impact may lie in linear narrative satisfaction, this novel activates a mosaic of interpretive responses rooted in affective recognition and the subjective identification. The weighty platforms such as Goodreads and Reddit, reader reactions consistently highlight the novel's ability to 'stay with them' long after reading. Commenters note its 'unspoken intensity', its 'chiaroscuro of emotion' and its refusal to 'explain everything'—reiterating Rosenblatt's (1978) emphasis on the reader-text transaction, where meaning arises in the interpretive space rather than from textual directives. The novel's non-linear structure, cinematic vignettes and ambient emotionality compel the readers, as mentioned in the previous sections, to fill narrative ellipses with their own memories, perceptions and longing.

It is noted that the Instagram-based book communities have amplified the novel's aesthetic resonance. The all kinds of readers often pair quotes from the text with visual imagery—frames of dimly lit cityscapes, rainswept windows or deserted metros—visually echoing the novel's emotional topography. This multimodal engagement supports Kashaka's (2025) claim that the contemporary readers are 'visually attuned, emotionally dispersed', responding not only to textual semantics but to the mood, ton and aesthetic rhythm. The veteran critics, such as filmmaker and writer Anwar Ali, have commented in interviews and literary columns on the novel's 'brilliant muteness' observing that it 'cinematizes emotion through everyday imagery'.



Also, the scholar-critic Radhika Jayaram (2023) writes in *The Hindu Literary Review* that the novel ‘doesn’t seek to narrate; it seeks to be inhabited’, praising its alignment with affect theory and the narrative minimalism.

Notably, the novel’s reception also reveals the generational divergence in reading practices. The older readers sometimes struggle with its narrative fragmentation but appreciate its thematic maturity, while the younger readers relate closely to its introspective pacing, cinematic cues and unfiltered emotional complexity. This suggests that the novel’s polyphonic structure—stylistically minimalist but emotionally dense—enables layered readerships, reinforcing Fish’s (1980) model of interpretive communities. The social media algorithms and vernacular memes have also expanded its reach. A recurring meme phrase, ‘Ram is us, suggests the collective identification. These engagements extend the novel’s life beyond its pages, forming an interpretive ecosystem wherein the text is dynamically re-inscribed by its audience. Such participatory re-readings affirm the novel’s function not merely as a static literary object but as the cultural interface responsive to its readers’ moods, memories, and the modes of seeing.

6. Why *Ram C/o Anandhi*: Unconventionality and Universal Appeal

Ram C/o Anandhi's rapid but extraordinary success and critical acclaim are due in part to its radical form and emotional accessibility rather than just its content. By offering a story based on the cinematic rhythm, fractured structure, and sensory depth, it subverts conventional literary frameworks and appeals to a broad and diverse readership. This section analyses the factors that contribute to its widespread and critical appeal, including the unusual components incorporated into its design and the various levels that appeal to a range of audiences.

This novel deviates from a traditional story arc, which is one of its most notable unusual features. *Ram C/o Anandhi* uses a discontinuous narrative mode, which is similar to montage-style editing found in movies, in contrast to the linear and cause-effect storytelling that is common in many modern novels. According to Klarer (1999), this type of experimental form breaks up time and space and invites readers to actively create narrative meaning rather than merely passively taking in the story. Ram's dislocated emotional and spatial existence in a busy city like Chennai is symbolised by this fragmentation.



<https://10.51767/JEN030111>

The cinematographic writing style is perhaps the novel's next but most distinctive feature. Short and vivid scenes, jump cuts and internal monologues juxtaposed with visual cues and abrupt transitions simulate the feel of real film reel. Klarer (1999) notes that literary texts have long drawn on filmic strategies to evoke richer mental imagery, but *Ram C/o Anandhi* advances this by building its very narrative grammar around the visual storytelling. Readers experience the narrative almost as a screenplay—each scene layered with mood, tone and camera-like focus. This stylistic innovation not only mimics cinema but engages the reader in what Selden et al. (2005) describe as an intermedial dialogue between the literature and film.

Beyond form, the novel's emotional intelligence and the restraint attract a wide demographic. It resists melodrama—a hallmark of much Indian popular fiction—and instead offers affective realism, evoking deep emotional currents through silence, minimalism and ambiance. As Nayar (2015) notes, the affective realism enables emotional resonance through non-verbal cues and the sensory detail. Rainfall, dim lights, urban echoes and the fragmentary conversations together form an emotive ecosystem that transcends plot.

Next layer of appeal lies in its authentic portrayal of the contemporary urban life. Ram's migration to Chennai reflects the collective anxiety and hope of a generation seeking creative fulfilment in the cosmopolitan spaces. His psychological vulnerability, artistic yearning and the relational confusions mirror those of many readers—especially the youths. Anandhi, the titular co-character, is written not as a trope of romantic femininity but as a multi-dimensional figure with silence, autonomy and agency. Her emotional indecipherability invites the reader speculation and identification, making her compelling across the gendered readings.

The novel also demonstrates transmedia imagination, a feature increasingly popular among the digital-age readers. As Correa and Owens (2010) suggest, the modern literature benefits from media hybridity and intertextual layering. *Ram C/o Anandhi* includes film dialogues, screenplay drafts, cultural references and the digital detritus like text messages and film subtitles. These techniques ground the novel in the media-saturated world of its audience, providing familiarity while pushing the literary boundaries.

Highly, the book speaks across sociocultural boundaries of modern time. Though rooted in the Malayalam-speaking ethos, it resonates with the pan-Indian and even global readers through



<https://10.51767/JEN030111>

its themes of alienation, love, creative pursuit and the urban melancholy. The spatial motifs—metro lines, hostel balconies, rainy sidewalks—are universally evocative. As Reader-Response critics like Rosenblatt (1978) and contemporary theorists such as Iskhak et al. (2020) argue, texts that allow for subjective reader projection and aesthetic involvement succeed in creating an immersive experience. *Ram C/o Anandhi* does precisely this by avoiding didactic closure and encouraging interpretive freedom.

The novel's tonal accessibility and syntactic simplicity further contribute to its appeal to a variety of readerships. The language is deceptively simple, despite the avant-garde structure. From casual readers looking to immerse themselves in the tale to critics examining form, this duality—a sophisticated frame encased in a simple language surface—allows for layered readership. Lastly, the work has become a cult among young people due to the cultural buzz surrounding it, including meme culture, Instagram marketing, and movie teasers. Literary theorists such as Brooker and Widdowson (2005) argue that the reception environment has a substantial impact on the value and trajectory of a book. *Ram C/o Anandhi* is more than simply a novel; it's a media event, a communal artefact, and a teaching tool. In summary, the *Ram C/o Anandhi* is praised for its unwillingness to conform, use of multimedia aesthetics, and emotional depth. It speaks to a generation trapped between tradition and transition, providing a literary style that seems as lived-in and rich as life itself.

7. Conclusion and Further Reflections

Ram C/o Anandhi signifies a significant change in the literary practice of modern India, particularly in regional literature, with its emotional resonance and artistic aspirations. It forgoes conventional narrative formulas in favour of a cinematic structure that is full of fragmented storytelling, urban symbolism, and affective cues. It evokes an experience as well as a story through its visual syntax, one that is both intensely personal and culturally universal. According to this study, the novel's unusual techniques—such as frame-switching, montage, sparse dialogue, and sensory atmospherics—are narrative techniques that increase reader engagement rather than just being stylistic experiments. The study, which is based on the Affect Theory, Transmedia Narrative, and Reader-Response Theory, emphasises how the novel elicits aesthetic reactions and various reading positions. Instead of being instructed on how to feel, readers are drawn into a series of emotional and perceptual frameworks that need engagement,



interpretation, and empathy. The novel's hybridity—a literary work that reads like a movie, feels like experienced recollection, and reverberates like visual poetry—is what makes it so popular. *Ram C/o Anandhi* crosses linguistic and geographical barriers to inhabit a pan-Indian cultural space by using meticulously crafted visual sceneries to depict metropolitan alienation, young fragility, and human connection. It becomes a common emotional lexicon for a digitally connected generation. For scholars and readers alike, the novel pioneers a new critical terrain in which visual literacy, emotional intelligence, and literary sophistication intersect. It foreshadows a future of Indian literature that is equally at ease with screen grammar as it is with page heritage. In doing so, *Ram C/o Anandhi* confirms the shifting character of narrative, where literature no longer just recounts a story but becomes a space for living, experiencing, and seeing.

References

- Ali, A. (2023). Interview in Malayala Manorama <https://www.ey.com/content/dam/ey-unified-site/ey-com/en-in/insights/media-entertainment/images/ey-shape-the-future-indian-media-and-entertainment-is-scripting-a-new-story.pdf>
- Bazin, A. (1967). *What is cinema?* (H. Gray, Trans.). University of California Press.
- Book Review of *Ram C/o Anandhi*. (2023). *Unpublished manuscript* [online: Retrieved from <https://example.com/book-review-ram-anandhi>]
- Correa, D. d. S., & Owens, W. R. (Eds.). (2010). *The handbook to literary research* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard University Press.
- Iskhak, I., Mujiyanto, J., & Hartono, R. (2020). A review on reader response approach to teaching literature at EFL contexts. *English Language Teaching*, 13(7), 118–129. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v13n7p118>
- Jayaram, R. (2023). *Ram C/o Anandhi* and the affective quiet: A review. *The Hindu Literary Review*. <https://www.thehindu.com/books/book-review-ram-co-anandhi-malayalam-novel-akhil-p-dharmajan-translator-haritha-ck/article69496897.ece>
- Klarer, M. (2013). *An Introduction to Literary Studies* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. In G. Bennington & B. Massumi (Trans.), *Theory and History of Literature* (Vol. 10). Manchester University Press. https://monoskop.org/images/e/e0/Lyotard_Jean-Francois_The_Postmodern_Condition_A_Report_on_Knowledge.pdf
-



- Nayar, P. K. (2015). *Contemporary literary and cultural theory: From structuralism to ecocriticism*. Pearson Education.
- Rosenblatt, L. M. (1978). *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. Southern Illinois University Press.
- Selden, R., Widdowson, P., & Brooker, P. (2005). *A reader's guide to contemporary literary theory* (5th ed.). Pearson Education.