



A Critical Socio-Cultural Analysis of Bernardo Bertolucci's Film 'Little Buddha' with The Perceptual Lens of Psychoanalytic Study

*Arijit Ray*¹

¹Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India (A Rabindranath Tagore Founded Institution of National Importance), India

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ABSTRACT:

Bernardo Bertolucci, one of the greatest masters filmmakers of Italian and World Cinema, a revolutionary auteur, artist made his epic venture in the discourse of Buddhism through his cult classic cinematic journey of "Little Buddha". Here, as an Artist he tried to introspect the deeper intonation of Buddha's 'middle way path' in the realm of the attainment of Nirvana at the course of myriad surmountable events of human suffering. This stunningly remarkable film with its historically significant visuals and scenes on teaching saga about Tibetan Buddhism and substances of its reincarnation (Specially the superior Lama), nature, soul, energies, spirits along with the juxtaposition of Buddha's life. This article paper will elaborately analyze some of the critical cruxes of the film as review in the realm of Psychoanalytic Purview and try to explore some lights in regard of Buddha's philosophy and Tibetan Buddhists' sect' belief.

Keywords: Little Buddha, Cinema and Buddhism, Psychoanalysis and Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Reincarnation and Socio-Culture, Himalayan socio cultural history, Buddhist Socio-Cultural History-Cinema and Psychoanalysis Cinema and culture

Introduction:

Bernardo Bertolucci, one of the giants filmmakers of Italian and World Cinema, a created a historical classic film in 1993 named 'Little Buddha', where he dealt with the several ideologues of Buddha and Buddhist' perspective in regard to the invoking regional phenomenon of Tibetan Buddhism and its myriad revelations. This beautifully crafted film with its scenic visual sequences on the notion of Tibetan Buddhism and its diverse perspectives on nature, belief soul, energies, history, myth spirits along with the juxtaposition of Buddha's life. Through this kaleidoscopic introspection Bertolucci created a enormously spectacular script and screeplay in its aural accordance with the instance of Himalayan Vajrayana Buddhist belief-system and its conceptual depth of reincarnation philosophy. Bertolucci engulfed his thoughts "Buddhism is more a philosophy than a religion. It is the idea that man has to find God within himself. It is terribly modern. It is revolutionary. In a way, 'Little Buddha' is my revolutionary film", at the helm of the theatrical release of the film. The exquisite thematic exploration of the celluloid, wreathed in "Little Buddha" tapestry a story about a child and his journey from east to west, along with a Tibetan lama's quest for his venerable teacher of higher spiritual consciousness, and the essence of Prince Siddhartha's life's tell and his attainment of the the path to enlightenment. And finally the findings of the cinematic excels gave the audience as a path of exceptional revelation.

This paper will try to analyze the film in regard of the script and presentation by the filmmaker on the aspects of its socio-cultural history and scenarios based on Tibet's region's Buddhist belief system with a formative and translucent outlook of the Psychoanalytic fitting.

- **Objective of the Study:**

- To analysis the thematic exploration of the film in the realm of critical context and historical purview
- To explore the idea mechanism of the filmmaker Bernardo Bertolucci in his close ascension to the vicissitudes of Buddhism and Western conglomerates.
- To endeavour to establish the symbiotic nexus of the psychoanalytic foundations with the manifested oeuvre of the film.

- **Hypothesis:** To see the relational significance with the storyline of the film and the percussion of the historical accuracy as well as the its thematic attributes in the domain of classical intonation of Psychoanalytic perspectives especially foundationally envisioned by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung.
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Methodology:

The research design of the study consists a thematic explorative approach of qualitative study and interpretative description amalgamating the synthesis psychoanalytic theory of involving the detailed visual and textual analysis of the film with the ethos of theoretical implantation of the ideas of Freud and Jung.

- **Direct Viewing and Analysis :** The repeated viewing of the film to analysis in depth of the narrative structure, thematic and audio-visual details as well as symbolic interpretation.
- **Script Analysis:** Through the sub-headings this article will light upon the film's critical analysis through its screenplay and dialogue.
- **Director's Interview and Commentary:** Several interviews and commentary of Bernardo Bertolucci' are being utilized to understand his insights, artistic, creative and psychological motifs.
- **Scholarly article and Reviews:** Critical content analysis of the various scholarly article, film reviews, critiques to disseminate the centrifugal interpretations of the film
- **Psychoanalytic Purview:** Several tools and key concepts of Psychoanalytic assumptions theorized by Freud and Jung would be characteristically analyzed.

Thematic Development:

Bertolucci created a cinematic excellence which was attempted to disseminate something magically woven saga mixed with mythologies, socio-cultural constitution and human psyche. The scripted narrative of the film goes like this - in a monastery in Indo-Nepal-Bhutan region of Himalays, Lama Norbu , who is a Tibetan monk, came to know that some of his followers in Seattle might have found a boy who could have the potential possibilities to be the reincarnated soul of Lama Dorje, who left the world few years back. After learning this news, Lama Norbu started to his voyage towards America with a native monk where he encountered Dean and Lisa, the parent of the boy. After reaching their home, welcome by Lisa wholeheartedly, with a cold warmth Dean, a magically steering moment was created with a musical marvel by the cinematic pose when boy, metamorphosed with mask first time encountered with the monks. The revealing of this story stunned and quite shocked to the parents by the aura of mysteries. During their leaving at the first meeting, Lama Norbu gave a book to this boy, Jesse, to make him familiarize with the life and the journey of Buddha from a background of kingdom to the attainment of enlightenment. Along with the perusal of the Buddha's story the film goes with the backyard imagery reliving screenplay of the Lifelong tale of Buddha : A tree turned down to help the mother to give birth. At the spell of his arrival evocation the magical voice of the little born reveals to the screen: " I have been born to reach enlightenment and free all creatures from Suffering" with the awaken of newborn's first step, lotus gave the blooming blossoms and thereafter the sage proclaimed that this new-born would be emancipator of the entire world. The film stories delves into the past life of Siddhartha through the reading of the book, revealing prince's youth time of marrying the queen Yasodhara and becoming an efficient horseman and archer. With having full contented with life and the highly comforted ambits provided by his father, one day Siddhartha decided to go outside of the palace with this court men and wished to see the outer world. At the stroke of facing the real world, Siddhartha encountered people with sickness, old-paleness, poverty, death, disease and therefor realized the real countenance of human suffering from the depth of his soul. These all attributes shattered him so deeply that he decided to leave his home with new baby being born, and want to embrace the life of asceticism to find the ultimate answer for human pain and suffering. In this his new journey of an ascetic he was accompanied by others peer ascetics. Then suddenly in one day Siddhartha could overhear a teacher of music telling his disciple that pulling the strings too tight or keeping it too loose-both should be avoided. This thought gave a discerning perception to the Siddhartha's mind, acclaiming the middle path, avoiding the extremes on both of the side; this led him to leave his ascetic path and made him to eat the rice-bowl offered by the village lady Sujata realizing that the true path towards enlightenment lies on the path of 'middle way'. This incident made other ascetics angry and they left the company immediately but after taking the food Siddhartha filled up with new liveliness and spirit and started to meditate with a deeper vision and consciousness.

In the mean real time of film's current narrative in Seattle, USA, the Jesse's parents were in their indecisiveness whether they should allow Jesse to go to Himalayas and see the substance of the smysterious prospect. At that time, with the devastation of his business partner friend death, Jesse's father decided to go India with Jesse. After reaching to this part of the world they came to know about the two more potential candidates of Lama Dorje's incarnation -a poor vagabond boy from the roads of Katmandu along with an Indian girl, predated with a rich background. Jesse instantaneously became close friend with them and participate the leftover narrative of the film about Siddhartha's life period particularly the phase of attaining the Nirvana or Enlightenment from the telling of Lama Norbu. At the penultimate stage of doing Meditation beneath a big banyan tree in near-about Gaya, Siddhartha is astoundingly disturbed by armies and spirits of demons and evils. But Siddhartha conquered all with his determined detachment and oneness with the spirit of the universe, and attained the enlightenment to become the Buddha, the Awakened one. Along after these three kids came to know the significance of death and reincarnations at the stroke of various rituals and functioning performed by the monastery with a glancing visually soothing cinematic marvel. The film ends with a magical cinematic sequence with a new vision of confounding elements of togetherness.

Framing:

In the film "Little Buddha," Lama Norbu uses a cup of tea to explain the concept of reincarnation to Jesse's father. He compares the mind to the tea, which moves from one container to the next after death but remains the same. The film effectively conveys Buddhist teachings about seeing reality with a childlike wonder. Tibetan Buddhism has had a significant influence on various aspects of society, spreading from India and China to Tibet, Mongolia, and Nepal. Tibetan Buddhism incorporates elements of Indian Buddhism, including monasticism and tantric practices, as well as unique traditions like the tulku system, where compassionate teachers are believed to be reincarnated. The Dalai Lama is the most famous example of a tulku in Tibetan Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhism follows traditional Buddhist teachings like the noble four truths, karma, not-self, and the notion of rebirth, as well as Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna doctrines. The Madhyamaka philosophy, emphasizing emptiness, is widely accepted in Tibetan Buddhism as the pinnacle philosophy of Vajrayana tradition, though it is interpreted in various ways.

Director took the liberty to interpret the several aspects of Tibetan Belief systems and orchestrated that tenets into the celluloid screen. The confluence Oriental belief in regard of Tibetan Vajrayana and western spectacles are being tremendously nuanced in this film by depicting various shots, characterizations' screenplay.

Socio-Cultural History and Perspectives:

Bernardo Bertolucci's Film depicted the socio-cultural aspects of Tibetan region's Buddhism along with several metaphors, details and anecdotes at the celluloid screen. The director went on to showcase a multifarious perspective of denoting Tibetan Buddhism. According to the Tibetan Buddhism and Dalai Lama, There are two ways in which someone can take rebirth after death: rebirth under the sway of karma and destructive emotions and rebirth through the power of compassion and prayer.

The concept of the circle of rebirth determined by their positive and negative karma, which is activated by craving and grasping. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, are able to choose their place and time of rebirth based on their compassion for others. Tulku refers to a specific aspect of the Buddha mentioned in the Sutra. This mythological elaboration discusses about how a person consumed by negative emotions and karma can attain the Truth Body (Dharmakaya) of the Buddha, which consists of the Wisdom Truth Body and Nature Truth Body. The former represents the enlightened mind of a Buddha, free from destructive emotions, while the latter refers to the empty nature of this enlightened mind. These aspects are only accessible to Buddhas, so they must manifest in physical forms to help sentient beings. It can be stated here that the ultimate physical form of a Buddha is the Body of Complete Enjoyment, which is only accessible to advanced Bodhisattvas and has specific qualifications. From this form, the Emanation Bodies of the Buddhas are manifested, appearing as gods or humans and accessible to all beings. These forms are meant for others, and the practice of identifying someone's previous life existed even during the time of Shakyamuni Buddha.

The religious practices found in the Tibetan cultural world, accepted by and even conducted by the monastic orders, include the incantation of mystic, magical formulas, the exorcism and destruction of demons, divination, auguries, oracles, and symbolic sacrifice and ransom -- aspects associated with Shamanism. It is this element within Tibetan Buddhism of magic and the supernatural, so remote from the original teachings and practices of Buddhism, that has led to its designation as Lamaism, as if it were a separate religion or at least a separate offshoot of the original faith. In attempting to account for these apparent contradictions, scholars have sought to identify the sources of these seeming divergences from what can be claimed as the pure, original Buddhist teachings.

The religious practices in Tibetan culture, practiced by monastic orders, include mystical rituals like incantations, exorcisms, divination, and symbolic sacrifices. These practices have led to Tibetan Buddhism being labeled as Lamaism, suggesting it is a separate religion from traditional Buddhism. Scholars have tried to understand the origins of these practices and their divergence from original Buddhist teachings.

Now if we look at the historical account we can see that the Tibetan Buddhism does have the four schools of practices : The first one is Nyingma(pa)- which is most oldest and ancient one created by Padmasambhava, who was a Tibetan master prospered in esoteric scripture known as tantras. This tradition does have its emphasis on meditation could able to catch the western audience. The second one is Kagyu(pa) , which is an Oral Lineage of Tibetan tradition which does have one major and minor subsect. The first one which is the Dapgo Kagyu, incorporates those of Kagyu schools what could be traced back upon to Gampopa tradition.

The Dapgo Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism is made up of four main sub-sects, including the Karma Kagyu, Tsalpa Kagyu, Barom Kagyu, and Pagtru Kagyu, as well as eight minor sub-sects that all trace their roots back to Pagtru Kagyu. The Drikung Kagyu and Drukpa Kagyu are among the most notable of the eight sub-sects. The Shangpa Kagyu, represented by Kalu Rinpoche, traces its lineage back to the Indian master Niguma. The Kagyupa tradition, founded by Tilopa and headed by the Karmapa Lama, emphasizes experiential meditation and includes famous figures such as Milarepa, Naropa, and Marpa. The Sakya(pa) tradition, founded by Khon Konchog Gyalpo, is led by the Sakya Trizin and emphasizes the teachings of great translator Drokmi Lotsawa and his son Gunga Nyingpo.

Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) who was the great grand-son of Khon Konchog Gyalpo, the founder of Sakya tradition did popularize the Sakya tradition with putting a lot scholarly activities. Next the Gelug(pa), which way of virtue known as also 'Yellow Hats'

This school very much represents the scholarly tradition. Gelug(pa), Way of Virtue, also known as Yellow Hats, whose spiritual head leader was the Ganden Tripa and Chief Leader is Dalai Lama, who had been the ruler since mid-seventeenth centuries until mid-twentieth when the current 14th Dalai Lama had to flee to India due to Chinese invasion. The Gelukpa school was established in the 14th to 15th century by Je Tsongkhapa,

who was known for his scholarship and morality. The Dalai Lama is a member of this school and is seen as the embodiment of Chenrezig, the Bodhisattva of Compassion- Avalokitesvara.

Tibetan Buddhists categorize Buddhist philosophy from India into four main streams: two from the Hinayana path (Vaibhasika and Sautrantika) and two from the Mahayana path (Yogacara and Madhyamaka). These schools have different beliefs and are based on the teachings of various prominent figures in Buddhist history. Additionally, the term "Tulku" is commonly used to refer to recognized reincarnations in Tibetan Buddhism. According to this certain elucidation of these aspects of the Buddha, filmmaker Bertolucci wrenched his thoughts and created a glancing imagery in the silver screen.

Tulkus in Tibet are believed to be reincarnations of enlightened beings or those on the path to enlightenment. The title is given based on various qualities and connections to enlightened beings. The process of recognizing Tulkus involves procedures such as predictive letters, recounting past lives, identifying possessions of the predecessor, and seeking divination from spiritual masters or oracles. Visions in sacred places like Lhamoi Latso are also considered in the recognition process. When it becomes extremely difficult to choose a Tulku, then a practise of certain divination is performed by employing 'zen talk' or dough-ball method. There could be the more explanations and different sagas, from these aspects of the space, director took his own creation as a phenomenological mastery and put it through into the screen. Thus in the film, 'Little Buddha', Director created his own creative venture of thoughts for the exploration through various attributes and plots for determining the prospective candidate for this Tulku, created his own cinematic glance what could show that the incarnation of the Lama had been compositely shared by 3 all potential candidates harmoniously. This symbiotic representation of the film marks a pivotal tonation to the flexibly intuitive domain of Tibetan Buddhist School and its myriad explanations in regard of its socio-cultural dimensions in the context of history.-and as well as its various interpretive imageries.

Psychoanalytic Countenance:

Bernardo Bertolucci's 'Little Buddha' what centrally deals with the story of a reincarnation of a great Buddhist Lama Sage', also amalgamates the different aspects of socio-cultural detailing along with diversified aspects of mythological substances and magical realism. It gives a rich tapestry of Psychoanalytic exploration in regard of unconscious purview of mind, unconscious visual motifs, identify and the process of individualism.

A) Freudian Psychoanalytic Perspective:

1. The Unconscious and Repressed Aspects and Memories:

Freud envisaged that bulks of our behavior is influenced by unconscious desires and repressed memories. In the Bertolucci's "Little Buddha," Jesse's connection to Lama Dorje can be seen as a manifestation of latent memories and unconscious links to in regard of the mythical past lives of Tibetan Buddhism. The conceptual notion of reincarnation in the film can be interpreted as the symbolic realm of the unconscious mind where repressed memories from previous existences influence the present psyche and mentalism.

2. Oedipal Complex Conflicts and Surge of Individualism:

Freud's concept of Oedipal complex suggests that children harbor unconscious desires for their opposite-sex parent and feelings of rivalry with their same-sex parent. Jesse's journey can be seen as a symbolic departure from his parents, a necessary step in resolving his Oedipal conflicts and forming his own identity.

3. Dreams and Symbolism:

Freud made the high emphasis on the importance of dreams and symbols in understanding the unconscious. The film's portrayal of mystical visions and dreams, such as Jesse's glimpses of his past life as a Lama, can be interpreted as the manifestation of unconscious desires and conflicts. These visions serve as a bridge between the conscious and unconscious mind, offering a pathway to understanding and integrating repressed aspects of the self.

B) Jung's Psychoanalytic Perspective

1. Individuation and the Self:

Carl Jung's concept of individuation is central to understanding Jesse's journey from West to East. Individuation is the process by which an individual integrates different aspects of the self, including the conscious and unconscious, to achieve wholeness. Jesse's experiences, including his identification as Lama Dorje, represent his journey towards self-discovery and integration of his past and present identities.

2. The Aspects of Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious:

Jung proposed the idea of archetypes, universal symbols manifesting in the domain of collective unconscious what do shape psyche and human experiences. The film's narrative throughout its blended tapestry of extraordinary visual motifs and glances are the exemplary structure of rich archetypal symbol, such as the Wise Old Man (Lama Norbu) and the Hero's Journey (Siddhartha's path to enlightenment). These conceptual

archetypes guide Jesse and the audience through a deeper understanding of the universal quest for meaning and self-fulfillment in the realm.

3. The concept of Shadow and Anima/Animus:

Jung postulated that the shadow represents the unconscious, repressed parts of the psyche, while the anima (in men) or animus (in women) represents the true self of the realm of unconscious. In the film, Jesse's interactions with the monks and his exploration of Tibetan culture can be seen as an engagement with his shadow, bringing to light the repressed parts of his identity. Moreover, the nurturing presence of his mother and the guidance of Lama Norbu can be viewed to reflect the anima's influence in his journey towards self-realization.

C) East and West : An Integration through culture and Mind

The substantial film's exploration of Eastern philosophy and spirituality through a Western protagonist's assimilation do also represents an ethos of psychoanalytic dialogue between different cultural constructs by of the self. The symbiotic intersection of Jesse's Western upbringing and the essence of Eastern philosophy of reincarnation and enlightenment reflects a synthesis of diverse psychological paradigms, promoting a holistic understanding of the human psyche and mentalism.

2 key elements here are discussed briefly in this regard :

1. The scenario of Transcultural Psychoanalysis:

The natural blending of Eastern and Western elements in the film "Little Buddha" invites the viewers for a transcultural psychoanalytic interpretation of the substance. This symbiotic approach envelopes how different cultural settings shape the unconscious mechanism and influence the Psychoanalytic process of individuation. Jesse's dual exposure to Western reality and Eastern spirituality could be thought as an attempt to reconcile and integrate these diverse influences within his psyche.

2. The Psychic Essence of Spiritual Enlightenment and Psychological Transformation:

This cinema suggests that the realm of spiritual enlightenment parallels psychological transformation. Siddhartha's journey to enlightenment can be interpreted as an allegory for the of self-discovery and healing. Similarly, Jesse's recognition of his past life and acceptance of his role as Lama Dorje symbolize the culmination of his psychological and spiritual journey towards wholeness.

Conclusion:

Bertolucci, one of the giants filmmakers of the world, has hold his ardour passion for Buddhist thoughts and philosophy since a long time. He always tried to understand the deep fabric of Buddhism being a western and wanted to create his own dialogic oeuvre through his filmmaking process. He studied Buddhism extensively as well as educated himself greatly with Oriental values, ethics and philosophy. In the cinema 'Little Buddha' Bertolucci tried to make closer dialogue between Eastern Thoughts and Western scepticism with his visionary screenplay. At the ending sequences of the film we can see the concept of the sharing spirit of reincarnation being attributed to the American young boy, Nepal's one young boy kid and a young Himalayan region' lady. Director Bertolucci has instrumented a brilliance of creative liberty in his cinema and took the cinematic voyage to account for intertwining the historical system of belief in the context of Tibetan regional Buddhism of oriental aspects with the practical imagery of American socio-cultural lives of western perspectives. In a concluding note it can be stated that "Little Buddha" disseminates a fertile ground for socio-cultural history, spirituality with psychoanalytic exploration, offering insights into the unconscious mind, the process of individuation, and the integration of diverse socio-cultural and psychological perspectives. Through the lenses of Freud and Jung, the film's narrative can be seen as a profound journey into the depths of the human psyche and the universal quest for self-understanding, self-discovery enlightenment. Thus this remarkable cult film illustrates the sheer luminance of sociocultural and psychoanalytic amalgam in regions with the marvel of cinematic excellence.

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