

The Representation of Racism in *The Man Who Knew Infinity* Movie by Matthew Brown

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze racism in *The Man Who Knew Infinity* movie using Paradies, Harris, and Anderson's theory. *The Man Who Knew Infinity* that released in 2016 is a film directed by Matthew Brown that features the character of a genius mathematician from India named Srinivasa Ramanujan who wants to publish his formula about mathematics in Trinity College. As an Indian, Ramanujan experienced various acts of racism committed by the British, both mentally and physically. This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The data collected through four steps, such as watching, screenshotting, note taking, and identifying the data. The result of this study showed that the main character experienced racism because of his race and nationality. The kinds of racism that the main character experienced namely stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination.

Keywords: *discrimination, prejudice, racism, stereotypes*

INTRODUCTION

Literature is an activity of expressing feelings, ideas, beliefs, and other expressions that use language, both spoken and written, as the essential elements. Literature is a kind of expression of what people have seen in their lives, which has been represented through words, either orally or in writing (Eagleton, 2005: 2). Consequently, literature and reality have relations because literature works can reflect the reality of society. One of the media of communication and literary works is a film, which is often used in this modern era. Film is a tool to convey various messages to audiences through a media story. Essentially and substantially, films have power that will have implications for society (Wibowo, 2007: 196). The search for ideas can be done in various ways, such as lifting stories from biographies, novels, true stories, short stories, poems, fairy tales, or it can also refer to personal notes.

In the present decades film is getting a huge popularity compared to the other works. Film is popular for many reasons, starting from the time it takes to enjoy a film which tends to be less than reading a novel, especially for people who have other activities and have a short free time.

Furthermore, the film's storyline is easier to remember because it displays real visuals, not the audiences' imagination. Film can be enjoyed by everyone from children to the elderly. Issues or problems that appear in the film are very diverse, one of which is the issue of social problems that occur in society, namely racism.

The Man Who Knew Infinity is one of the films that raises social problems which is racism that occurred in England during the first world war. The film was released in 2016, written and directed by an American director, Matthew Brown. This film received a Saturn Award nomination from the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, namely Best DVD / Blu-Ray Release. This film is also screened at various film festivals in various countries, one of them is at the Singapore International Film Festival, an annual film festival held in Singapore and becoming one of the most influential film festivals in Asia. This film was based on a true story that tells the story of a mathematician from Madras, India, named Srinivasa Ramanujan who tried to publish his formula of mathematics in Trinity College during World War I. Ramanujan is a smart and kind man, and loves numbers so much. He went overseas, even left his family for his dreams. While pursuing his dream, Ramanujan who was an Indian always looked down upon by the westerns because they think that Ramanujan is not good enough to stand with them. These beliefs are stereotypes held by the British against Ramanujan who is an Indian. With the existence of these negative stereotypes, it will lead to prejudice, the feelings of dislike of the British towards Ramanujan which ended with discrimination being carried out on him. He often experiences acts of racism because of his race, both mentally and physically. Mentally, racism is an action that results in fear, loss of self-confidence, loss of the ability to act, a sense of helplessness, and severe psychological suffering on a person. This action is also intended to suppress, ridicule, and humiliate the victim. For example, saying words that hurt but are considered as a joke. Meanwhile, physically, racism is an act of violence that causes bodily pain, injury, and illness, such as hitting, kicking, punching, and pushing.

Based on the summary of the film above, it seems that this film reflected the issue of racism towards Indian people in the United Kingdom. Historically, the British had colonized India for 200 years. Britain entered India intending to conduct trade relations with India. But after defeating one of the kingdoms in India, Britain began to expand its territory. Even though it seems that the colonial era is over, the fact is that the British are still committing acts of racism against Indians. With this film, Matthew Brown wants to remind how racism is experienced by

Indians. According to Fredrickson, racism is a different treatment of a person or group based on their race and skin colour. Racism is the result of various acts of intolerance that have existed since ancient times until now. With this growing intolerance, it is not surprising that racism still occurs in various parts of the world.

Racism that often occurs is usually due to differences in skin colour, ethnicity, race, nationality, and religion. It is these differences that make one party feel the most superior compared to the other. Banks states that humans are grouped/classified in various colours, which are black, white, red, and brown (Dewi; Prabasmoro; Wardiani, 2020: 2). With these colour differences, biologically social differentiation arises which is considered a natural thing, thus triggering racism where certain races feel superior to other races. Those who consider themselves as "the one" always create discourses that settle the opposition party as "normal" to accept racist actions. These discourses are also documented in literary works in various forms such as films, novels, poems, and short stories to show their domination. The researcher is interested in discussing the issue of racism because nowadays many people know that racism is real and does exist, but most people think that it is a normal thing and the situation is fine. So if racism cannot be eliminated, then racism needs to be minimized. In order to minimize this act of racism, the researcher formulated the title of this research as follows "The Representation of Racism in *The Man Who Knew Infinity* Movie by Matthew Brown" using theory by Paradies, Harris, and Anderson to tell the readers what racism is, the kinds of racism, and the bad effects that follow this action.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a descriptive qualitative method. The method is used by describing and analyzing data that is relevant to the analysis topic. The researcher attempted a descriptive analysis of this research that focused on racism. The data that is used by the researcher is divided into two, which are primary data and secondary data. Primary data obtained from the object of research, which is *The Man Who Knew Infinity* movie consist of characters, actions, and dialogues. Secondary data sources are obtained from journals, thesis and books concerning the object of research. The data collection was done by watching, screenshotting, note taking, and identifying the data. The data were analyzed by describing, interpreting the data, and drawing the conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study is the acts of racism experienced by the main character in *The Man Who Knew Infinity* movie divided into three major parts which are stereotypes (racist belief), prejudice (racist emotion), and discrimination (racist practices and behavior) analyzed using Paradies, Harris, and Anderson's theory.

Stereotypes (racist belief)

Stereotypes (racist beliefs) are beliefs about an individual based on his membership in a group regardless of the characteristics of the individual himself (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson in Taufik & Hasniar, 2016: 111). However, it turns out that the further influence of stereotypes is not only felt by the perpetrator who judges the individual but victims of the stereotypes can also feel that the judgment of others is the truth. This will have a bad impact if the stereotypes given are negative stereotypes. The researcher found some acts of stereotypes done by the perpetrator and also by the victims who believed that the bad stereotypes about themselves were true.

Ramanujan's friend: At least you hold yourself in good esteem. Whatever is written in your fate will happen. You can't change that.

Ramanujan: My fate is to have a wife who lives with my mother while I sleep here with you all because the British think I'm a raving lunatic.

Ramanujan's friend: As we do Indians.

Ramanujan, who was sad because he never got a job, began to feel tired of his fate. Instead of going home and meeting his wife, he had to sleep in an inappropriate place and leave his wife to live with his mother. This burdened him because he felt that he was not a good husband because he could not provide proper facilities for his wife. His inability to get a job is felt because he is Indian. The main character is aware of the negative stereotypes that British people feel about him. By using the word raving lunatic, this implies how Ramanujan sees himself as if he is a brat who has lost his mind. Ramanujan's friend also added with the above sentence, that they are Indians, which means that they are belittled and underestimated because of their race.

Mr. Hardy: "I beg to introduce myself as a clerk in the Accounts Department."

Mr. Hardy's employee: What this time?

Mr. Hardy: Quite impressive, really. Someone's gone to a lot of trouble. A Hindu clerk! And who claims he can give meaning to the negative values of the gamma function.

Mr. Hardy's employee: Mr. Littlewood?

Mr. Hardy: Without doubt.

After convincing himself, Ramanujan finally decided to send a letter containing the formula he had to Mr. Hardy, one of the Fellows at Trinity College. After receiving Ramanujan's letter, Mr. Hardy was impressed by his discovery. Ramanujan introduces himself as a Hindu clerk.

Knowing that Ramanujan was a Hindu clerk, Mr. Hardy seemed surprised to hear that. Mr. Hardy couldn't believe that a Hindu clerk could come up with such an impressive formula. He even alleged that the letter was from his friend Mr. Littlewood. In the conversation above, it can be seen that the stereotypical actions shown by Mr. Hardy and his employees are that they underestimate the ability of a Hindu clerk to create formulas in mathematics. They assume that the formula was made by their friend, Mr. Littlewood, who is also a Fellow at Trinity College who is famous for being intelligent. This shows as if a Hindu clerk would not be able to make this amazing formula.

Prejudice (racist emotion)

Prejudice (racist emotion) is a feeling of dislike for someone based on their membership in a group (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson in Taufik & Hasniar, 2016: 110). The results of negative stereotypes will bring these beliefs to negative prejudice as well. So with the emergence of negative prejudice, a person will tend to have feelings of dislike or hatred towards a certain person or group.

Professor 1: I mean, we bring these Indians over at great expense and look what happens. Yeah, well, it's not just that this cap is Ramjin, whatever his name is, is Indian. After all, we do have Indians students here.

Mr. MacMahon: Just not ones with no education to speak of. It's a disgrace.

The professors were gathering in the hall as their routine. One of the professors mentioned Mr. Hardy's decision to bring Ramanujan from India so they could work together. The professors felt that Mr. Hardy's decision was not a good idea. From the conversation above, it can be seen how some professors openly show their distaste for Ramanujan, even before they meet. They felt that letting Ramanujan into Trinity College was a waste as they already had several students from India before. One of the professors, Mr. MacMahon, assessed that Indians were a backward race because they were unable to speak. The meaning of speaking here is the ability to make amazing breakthroughs such as publishing theories and so on. He even mentioned it was a shame.

British Man: Look who it is, the genius fog! Can you believe they send us off while he kips here in luxury? Oi! Where do you think you're going? You freeloading little blackie.

The first world war has started. Many British men were sent to war to defend England. On the way home from the post office after looking for a letter from his wife. Ramanujan crosses paths with several British youths. They start troubling Ramanujan. They are angry because they feel that they are going to fight between life and death to defend their country but on the other hand

there are foreigners who are not native to England who can live leisurely without having to go to war. They even carried out acts of racism verbally by calling Ramanujan a “little blackie”. The scene above shows how British people see Ramanujan as a retard because he is not British by calling him “the genius fog”. The word “fog” here means “fog” which means people who are old-fashioned. They also called Ramanujan a “little blackie” because he was a non-white person.

Discrimination (racist practices and behaviour)

Discrimination (racist practices and behaviour) is the bad treatment of someone based on their membership in a group (Paradies, Harris, & Anderson in Taufik & Hasniar, 2016: 111).. Discrimination is a final act that is the result of stereotypes and prejudiced actions.

Mr. Howard: Little wog let me tell you something. You don't do a stunt like that in my class. You don't belong here and you can tell your Master Mr. Hardy I said as much! Now, get out!

Mr. Howard is one of the professors who hate Ramanujan. While attending Mr. Howard's class, Ramanujan was very enthusiastic because this was the first time he was able to receive a proper education. While explaining the material, Mr. Howard notices Ramanujan is the only student who doesn't take notes. He felt that Ramanujan was very arrogant for his actions. When the lesson is over Mr. Howard restrains Ramanujan and scolds him and hits Ramanujan in the chest. The act of discrimination can be seen clearly in the scene above. The word “little wog” uttered by Mr. Howard contains elements of racism. The word wog is a derogatory word used by the British to refer to people from mainland India. Mr. Howard also physically abused Ramanujan for no reason. He hates seeing Ramanujan who looks very enthusiastic and can answer the questions he gives well.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis in findings and discussion, this study may conclude that racism that appeared in *The Man Who Knew Infinity* movie consist of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. The three types are interconnected. Starting from stereotypes accompanied by negative beliefs about an individual because of his membership in a group. With these negative stereotypes, a person's opinion will lead to prejudice or feelings of dislike because of an individual's membership in a group. The last is discrimination, which is an action that is bad against an individual because of his membership in a group. Of the three types, the most commonly found data are stereotypes and prejudice. The stereotypes found are not only felt by

the perpetrators, which is British, but Ramanujan as the main character and the victim of the stereotypes himself will feel that these negative views are the truth. Ramanujan often shows feelings of inferiority towards the British because of his race. Even before going to England Ramanujan already felt that he was looked down upon because he was an Indian. *The Man Who Knew Infinity* movie shows how this act of racism occurs and the impact it has. Racism cannot be completely eliminated, but with an awareness of how bad an act of racism is, we can try to minimize it. As long as we still think that culture, ethnicity, or skin color affects our abilities, attitudes, motivations, even ways of thinking and lifestyle, then racism will always exist.

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