Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

Research Report

Qualitative Analysis on Application of Ethnomethodology on the movie, "12 Angry Men"

Submitted by
Devi. S.B.
2011261005
Fourth year,
M.Sc. (5yr) Electronic Media,
The Department of Media Sciences,
Anna University,
Chennai

Under the guidance of
Dr. K.P. Jayasankar
Professor and Chair,
Centre for Critical Media Praxis
School of Media and Cultural Studies
Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mumbai
Acknowledgement

I owe my great sense of gratitude to Dr. K.P. Jayasankar, Professor and Chair, Centre for Critical Media Praxis, School of Media and Cultural Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences for giving me an opportunity to work under his guidance.

I am immensely thankful to Prof. S. Parasuraman, Director, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai for providing me Internship opportunity.

I am thankful to my family and friends for their encouragement.

- Devi.S.B.
Introduction:

Decision taken by Jury members acts as an important role in the legal system of some countries. Generally, the Jury consists of 12 members who discuss on the case by considering the evidence produced in the court. In order to decide whether the defendant is guilty or not, the Jury members converse among them based on the facts of the case only. The Jury unanimous vote helps the judge to make verdict in the case. This is how the court functions when a criminal case is assigned to the Jury.

Having this as a concept, Reginald Rose has written and produced the American movie named, "12 Angry Men" in 1957. Directed by Sidney Lumet, the film is mostly shot in a Jury discussion room in the presence of 12 Jury members.

The case revolves around a minor teenage boy who is being accused of stabbing his father to death. The Jury analyses this case by observing and applying practical methods in each aspect in the case evidence.

At the start of discussion in the Jury room, preliminary voting was taken to know the decision of each Juror on whether the defendant is guilty or not. The voting ended up in 11:1 ratio which depicts the casualness and uninterest shown by Juror's who considered the boy is guilty in the case even before actually discussing the facts/evidence of the case. Except Juror 8 who ended up voting the defendant is not guilty, just for the sake of having a discussion, which caused irritation among other members who wanted to finish this case soon.

Juror 8 moved the case on to more in-depth scenes of evidence of the case. By establishing the matter of facts and evidences, the presence of Juror's different personalities and varied preconceptions on the case, their background and the interactions in the room gave space for more doubts and clarifications in the case. This was also an important factor that helped Juror 8 to convince other Juror's that the boy who is accused is "not guilty."

The witnesses of this case was an old man and a women across the street. The major reasons were that the defendant has a weak alibi who was not able to remember what he did previous night, a knife he claimed to have lost is found at the murder scene, the old man as witness who
heard the boy screaming as "I will kill you" and the women across the street who has seen the defendant running from the house at the time of murder.

By exploring each and every situation and applying the facts, each evidence was broken and gradually increased the possibility of defendant to be "not guilty." The attempt made by Juror 8 was not in vain. There was a gradual increase in the voting count towards "not guilty".

An intense conversation on the honest assessment of the facts in this case lead to a conclusion. If an unanimous vote is not taken by the jury, it would have been a hung jury where the jury must retire from the case who could not take a decision.

The method and way in which the case is solved and the pace of the movie involves and interest the audiences. It attracts the attention of people in solving the case.

Juror 3 was the final person to change his decision to vote "not guilty" as he had a wrong impression of teenage boys. His personal experience with his own child made an influence in this case. Finally, 12 Jury members voted for the minor boy to be "not guilty."

The various aspects of Ethnomethodology process is observed in this movie. The stages involved in solving the problems and analyzing the facts in this film is very challenging

Ethnomethodology is a study used by people to construct, account for and give meaning to their social world which also points to a broad and multi-faceted area of inquiry. People are seen as rational actors, but employ practical reasoning rather than formal logic to make sense of and function in society. [1]

John Heritage states,

"In its open-ended reference to [the study of] any kind of sense-making procedure, the term represents a signpost to a domain of uncharted dimensions rather than a staking out of a clearly delineated territory.” [2]

This report analyses the way in which "Ethnomethodology" is applied in the film "12 Angry Men." A Qualitative analysis is done by applying various theories of Ethnomethodology in various scenes in this movie.
Methodology:

12 Angry Men story explores various situations and facts which coincides with the Ethnomethodology practices, a type of research methodology mostly used in Qualitative research. To study the implementation of Ethnomethodology in this film, "Qualitative Analysis" is used as the research methodology. The qualitative research provides the richness and depth of explorations and descriptions. [3]

Qualitative analysis would help to study the subject with deep understanding to gain more knowledge on the research. It aims to provide an explicit rendering of the structure, order and broad pattern found among a group of participants [4]. A qualitative data about human groups in social setting is generated.

Meaning emerged from observation of the film and Ethnomethodology type of research method can be analyzed using Qualitative Research.

Pope and Mays states Qualitative analysis as:

"Development of concepts which helps us to understand social phenomena in natural settings rather than experimental, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences and views of the participants." [5]

Qualitative analysis display real sensitivity to how a social situation or process is interpreted from a particular background and set of values and not simply based on the situation itself [6].

Ethnomethodology is also a qualitative research method focused on the way that participants in a social setting create and sustain a sense of reality [7]. Initially, in 1954, the term "Ethnomethodology" was originally coined by Harold Garfinkel [8]. This method would help in easier understanding of the situation and provide a practical solution as we connect with day today experiences in analyzing.

The study of ordinary members of society in the everyday situations in which they find themselves and the ways in which they use commonsense knowledge, procedures, and considerations to gain an understanding of, navigate in, and act on those situations. Ethnomethodology’s interest is in how ordinary people make sense of their social world.
The point of ethnomethodology, according to Zimmerman and Wieder, is to explain how members of society go about the task of seeing, describing and explaining order in the world in which they live. [9]

Ethnomethodology research involves Conversation analysis which is a study based on an interaction by a group of people by observing the speaker, statements made, identifying and repairing problems and also their actions.

Each and every investigation scenes done by the Jury members in the film "12 Angry Men"; the methods they used, raising queries by Juror's and solving them by applying day to day life experiences and practices to the suitable situations; it represents the usage of "Ethnomethodology" method to solve the case given to the Jury.

Hence, a Qualitative analysis has been chosen as the research methodology to seek an in-depth understanding of each decision making process by the Jury members in the movie.

**Observation:**

By applying Qualitative Research, each scene in the movie "12 Angry Men" is analyzed by the process and methods practiced in Ethnomethodology.

The presence of 12 Juror's from different backgrounds have joined up together in the discussion of a minor criminal case, where a teenage boy from a slum area has been accused of murdering his own father. The involvement of 12 Juror's lend their support, starting from practical reasoning, arguments, justification, clarification and solving the queries with a sensible conclusion.

An approach that seeks to bring out understanding of how practice is embedded in ordinary competence by people is Ethnomethodology. Practice is always unique as it's a part of local culture. The way we perceive things, practice and acquire knowledge differs from person to person in respect to their cultural behaviour, religion, friends and place they live and so on.

Ethnomethodology is one such research method which requires people from different background to be present for sharing their views in the discussion and application of logical solutions either have experienced earlier in their life or by experimenting the situation which is rather more convincing to others.

In order to conduct the case in an organized manner, Juror 1 remains as a foreman who is actually an high school football coach. He conducts the preliminary voting among Juror's to the
question whether the boy is "guilty" or "not guilty". The Juror's are free to express their opinions.

Since the relationship between Juror 3 and his son is worse, his personal thought over teenage boys is influenced in this case. Juror 3 is a businessman who has been physically harmed by his son who remains very stubborn in his opinions throughout the discussion process.

To attend a baseball game, Juror 7 also blindly votes the defendant as "guilty" so that the discussion ends quickly. According to Juror 10, he stereotypes people from slum areas to be criminals.

Apart from all these preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience, Juror 8, an architect, breaks the mindset of people and decision of case and starts the discussion by considering the evidences produced in the court. He puts down and shares his reasonable doubts in the case and continues to advocate for the boy. Application of Ethnomethodology starts from here.

In Ethnomethodology studies, it is done in such a way that would discuss the social actions followed by each individual within the group by sharing their experiences in the group directly. By doing so, it would help to apply various human life experiences in the situation in order to solve the case. It doesn't impose on setting the opinions of the researcher with regards to social order.

**Scene 1:**

**Argument:**

By taking the witness of an old man into consideration, who has claimed to have heard the boy shouting, "I am going to kill you" during the actual time when the murder took place.

**Justification:**

*Juror 8* argues it to be impossible and provides another evidence that a train has passed during the same time when the murder took place and the voice heard by the old man would not be clear or audible enough. He also further applies practical reasoning of day today experience by saying that people who shout "I am going to kill you", is said in anger and never actually meant it.
Analysis:
Here the Juror 8 applies practical reasoning and human behavioural action in certain situation. The factors used by Juror 8 for convincing his point refers to Ethnomethodology practices. Juror 8 keenly observes the case and the evidences statement given and compares it with the day today life. This gives better understanding of the situation and probability of trueness of the case becomes low. Ethnomethodology seeks to study detailed features of the production of the social order.

Scene 2:
Argument:
The second claim of the old man witness was that he had seen the boy running out of the building from the apartment door in 15 seconds when the death happened.

Justification:
According to Juror 5,6 and 8, the old man had a stroke and wouldn't have been possible for him to walk quickly to the door. Therefore he couldn't have clearly seen the face of the person running during that short period of time. By bringing these factors to reality, and having heard the loud statement "I am going to kill you" earlier, the old man must have assumed that the defendant must be running away.

Analysis:
The members in the discussion are now involved and analyzing in depth of the situation. Various dimensions in the case are given importance. The queries raised on the health aspect of an old man has turned out to be one of the convincing factor to justify the argument. Considering the effects of this health issue of the old man into this situation was very practical. At the same time, assumption which a normal lay man would also make by hearing the loud statement was also considered and compared to the situation. Therefore, involving oneself in the situation and finding the possibilities is also, Ethnomethodology.
Scene 3:
Argument:
The arguments and justification by Juror 8 makes Juror 3 explode in anger during the discussion process, by using the phrase "I will kill him."

Justification:
Listening to this, Juror 8 questions, "You don't really mean you'll kill me, do you?" Juror 8 clarifies and proves his previous argument as mentioned in Scene 1.

Analysis:
This is one way of experimentally proving the argument. In some factors, Ethnomethodology involves experimental application as well. A defendant shouldn't be led to death due to personal reasons. The Conversational analysis is used here by Juror 8 who has clearly observed the statement made by Juror 3. This makes him realize and relate to the similar statement made by the boy as stated as an evidence given by old man. Thus, interaction among the members plays a major role in understanding the scenario of the case.

Scene 4:
Argument:
The boy has stated in the court that he had been to a movie along with his friends during the time of murder. Juror 4 doubts this point as the boy couldn't remember what movie he has seen.

Justification:
This question was clarified by Juror 8 by conducting an experiment on Juror 4 by asking to list the events of previous day. Few events of previous five days with some difficulty was listed by Juror 4.

Juror 8 refers to the state of Juror 4 where he was not under any emotional stress and could able to list only few. Whereas, the defendant was under a emotional stress which can lead to forget certain things by nature.
Analysis:
An experimental approach of Ethnomethodology was conducted. It is then compared with the emotional state of an human being in certain situations. When a person in emotionally stressed, he leads to tension and nervousness. Due to this, it very natural for a human being to lack remembering skills in that period. Juror 8 tries to convince by explaining the emotional state which the boy would have underwent. It was proved to Juror 4 experimentally and practical application of life.

Scene 5:
Argument:
The downward stab wound found on the body raises a question by Juror 2 that how was the boy being a foot shorter than the victim was able to stab downward to death.

Justification:
To clarify it, an experiment was conducted by Juror 3 and 8 which proves the possibility. But yet, having come from a background, Juror 5 who has grown up seeing the knife fights in his neighbourhood shares his thoughts from his observation that the usage of switchblade towards the opponent by a shorted one is impossible to stab downward. He further states that there won't be a grip to hold the switchblade downward and also would be time consuming to do so.

Analysis:
Even though the experimental approach proved the situation yet Juror 5 explains his experience and strongly argues with his practical knowledge. His study of conscious experience in using a switchblade during his childhood has helped him to justify his point. Phenomenology also as an important criteria in the Ethnomethodology research.

Scene 6:
Argument:
The second witness, the woman is taken to notice by Juror 4. The woman is an eye witness to the case who lives across the street. She has seen through her window while the train passed by.
**Justification:**

_Juror 9_ notices that the woman had impression of spectacles on both the sides of the nose, but didn't wear it to the court. _Juror 8_ questions back to _Juror 4_ if he would sleep wearing his eyeglasses. The response given by _Juror 4_ is no. Thus _Juror 8_ justifies the case by saying that the witness who was sleeping wouldn't have enough time to wear her eyeglasses in night as the incident has been taken place in a fast way.

**Analysis:**

Observations made on witness and also on Juror member was helpful to solve the query raised. The act of _Conversational analysis_ has been applied here. By noticing the impression of spectacles on Juror member made them realize that even the witness had the same impression. And the basic sense and the activities followed by human in daily routine of removing the specs while sleeping, further cleared the doubt. In order to justify this argument, practical life experiences and observation played the main role. These involve as the part of _Ethnomethodology_ research.

**Conclusion:**

_Situational and Conversational analysis_ has played a major part in this movie, "12 Angry Men."

The analysis of this movie has given varied dimensions practiced in _Ethnomethodology_ and _Qualitative research method_. In depth analysis from the evidence provided and with the application of day today activities followed in life helped to judge the case with a solution. The space given for each member in the Jury helps in understanding of each individual and their perception through a strong interaction among the Juror's. This subjective understanding of Juror's and sharing of their views helps to raise more queries in different dimensions and solve the case. The movie demonstrates the process of resulting in an unbiased and valid solution with necessary justification.

The common notion behind _Qualitative Research_ is that it influences personal opinions and views of the researcher. Whereas, _12 Angry Men_ breaks this critic of Qualitative research. The application of _Ethnomethodology_ practices involves without the interference of preconceived notions and stereotypes of the investigator which is reflected in the movie.
Therefore the movie twelve angry men substantiates the pragmatic analysis of qualitative enquiry using Ethnomethodology which culls out the social facts that are constructed largely on the sources of how people make meaning out of the given situation based on their experiences and how they draw rational behind their thought process. The movie highlights the significance of unbiased nature of an investigator which facilitates the investigation to arrive at a justifiable stand which is drawn out of multidimensional analysis of facets that are considered as of day to day life events and how the logic is applied in making sense of the reality.

**Reference:**


