

Psychological analysis of the movie “Deewar”

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Abstract: The name “Deewar” immediately conveys a sense of conflict and separation. The study discusses this iconic Bollywood film from 1975 starring Amitabh Bachchan, Shashi Kapoor, Neetu Singh, Nirupa Roy, Satyen Kappu, Parveen Babi and many other talented artists. Employing theories given by some well-known psychologists such as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson, the inner conflicts, moral dilemmas and choices made by the main characters of the movie were examined. The movie is famous for its iconic lines and mesmerizing music that people haven’t forgotten to date. This analysis will delve deeper into the major themes of the movie.

Key Words: Moral Dilemma, Psychoanalysis, Ecological and Psychosocial Stages, Movie Analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION- ABOUT THE MOVIE :

Deewar is a classic Hindi Bollywood movie released in the year 1975. Its director, *Yash Chopra*, hailing from Punjab, was a very well-known artist and was considered to be one of the best filmmakers of the time. In his movies, he has done an excellent job at highlighting the main characters, especially in this movie, *Deewar*, which is known not only for its powerful dialogues but also for its story buildup and *incredible character development*.

This is the story of two brothers, *Ravi* (played by *Shashi Kapoor*) and *Vijay* (played by *Amitabh Bachchan*), and how they were born and brought up by their mother alone when their father ran away.

The movie starts with *Anand Babu*, played by *Satyen Kappu*, who was the leader of the trade union, addressing the community of workers and wishing to see them have access to proper health care, housing, and education. He is portrayed as a *strong and vocal character* who never took bribes and was always truthful and honest. However, when he chose to pick his family over the workers when threatened to harm his family during a strike, he was humiliated and shamed by the workers, which pushed him over the edge and made him abandon his family forever.

This in turn affects his family, especially his son, *Vijay*, who is treated very badly by the workers and is tattooed with “*Mera baap chor hai*” on his arm, which does not only mark his destiny but also his choices. He works as a shoe polisher to help her mother earn money. They are pushed into poverty and live in a slum area where the two brothers spent most of their childhood. *Vijay* starts working at a dockyard and is later hired by a businessman in the underworld as a smuggler.

Ravi, *Vijay*’s brother, on the other hand, is the *perfect son*. He is the one who has been protected by *Vijay* and his mother throughout his childhood. They earn money to send him to school. *Vijay*’s life is a struggle to own the past by retributing it, whereas *Ravi* strives to forget or eliminate it by becoming an honest police officer and getting a decent government job.

The *mother*, *Sumitra Devi*, played by *Nirupa Roy*, has a vital role in the movie. She sacrifices a whole lot to give her sons the best life possible. When the father abandons them, she resorts to low-wage manual labor at a construction site to earn. The movie revolves around their relationship and how, later in life, choosing two different paths in life puts them in a difficult situation when *Ravi* is ordered to arrest *Vijay*.

2. METHOD :

“Deewar” represents the literal barrier between the two brothers, meaning the conflict and drama due to differences. Vijay chooses to become a criminal and Ravi, a police officer, the opposing side of the law. This creates a lot of tension between the characters and affects those around them, especially the mother.

The movie, *Deewar*, was chosen for the analysis based on how relevant it is in the context of the major theories of psychology and how it could provide a deeper understanding of their practicality in detail. The perspectives from which this movie was analyzed were the *Psychoanalytic Perspective by Sigmund Freud*, *Erik Erikson’s Psychosocial Stages*, *Ecological System Theory by Urie Bronfenbrenner* and *Moral Development given by Lawrence Kohlberg*.

The movie was watched multiple times to understand the plot and the character development. The relationship between the main characters, Vijay, Ravi, the mother and the father were noted down as well as major themes were picked from the movie the first time it was watched. The second time, how each character develops from childhood to adulthood and how major plot twists take place were recorded. Finally, the movie was watched a third time to relate the characters to the major theories and stages.

It was also noteworthy that all the characters were at different stages and had different perspectives on life. They either aligned or deviated from the theories in one way or another. *Deewar* allowed us to explore the aspects of human development in a very unique way. How the unresolved conflicts of childhood of the two main characters, Vijay and Ravi, make them choose different paths in life is very well depicted in the film. In addition to this, the storyline revealed how the two characters’ senses of morality were opposites. It revealed how the immediate and the broader social environment can influence a person’s decisions and choices with regard to the person they become upon growing up and the identity they wish to take. Hence, *Deewar* was a great pick for the analysis.

3. CHILDHOOD TRAUMA :

3.1. Parental abandonment and its Impact.

Parental abandonment can have a huge impact on one’s emotional and moral development. It can affect the ability of the child to form secure relationships in life, act out and show aggression, avoid people, or even hamper the ability to *make* the right decisions. It can happen due to negligence, death or divorce between the parents, or even guilt and shame in the case of the movie *Deewar* (Healthcare, 2024).

Vijay and Ravi both experienced a similar childhood in terms of parental abandonment. Their father left them, which not only pushed them into poverty, but also caused emotional distress. They had different journeys growing up. Vijay was humiliated to the extent that the tattoo “*Mera baap chor hai*” scarred him for life. Since then, he became completely invested in helping his mother earn money and even grew up intending to help her live happily.

If Vijay’s environment from childhood to adulthood is compared and differences are chalked out using *Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory*, vast changes are noticed. In his childhood, he was surrounded by people who didn’t respect him, and except for his mother and brother, he could only rely on himself. When he grew up, his immediate environment included people who treated him with respect, especially at his workplace after he was hired as a smuggler. Growing up, he did not have many friends, but he soon met people from work and even a woman whom I discuss in *theme 2.2*. He grew up in a slum and belonged to a low-income family, which suggests he did not have access to basic needs, did not receive any education, and most importantly, did not have anyone to rely on. The following diagram illustrates his immediate environment: -

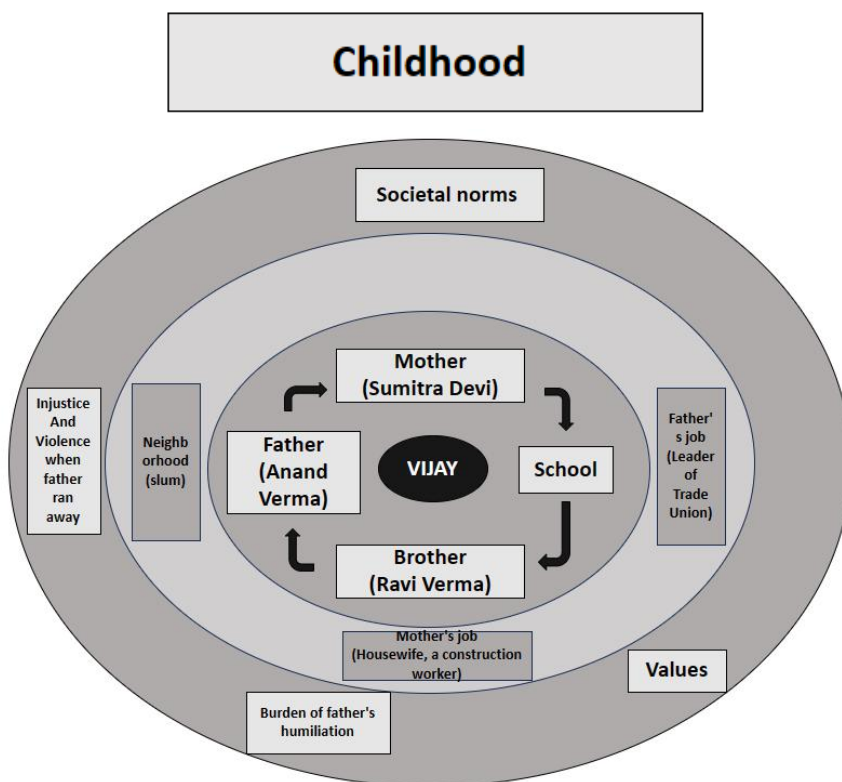


Figure 1: Vijay's Childhood

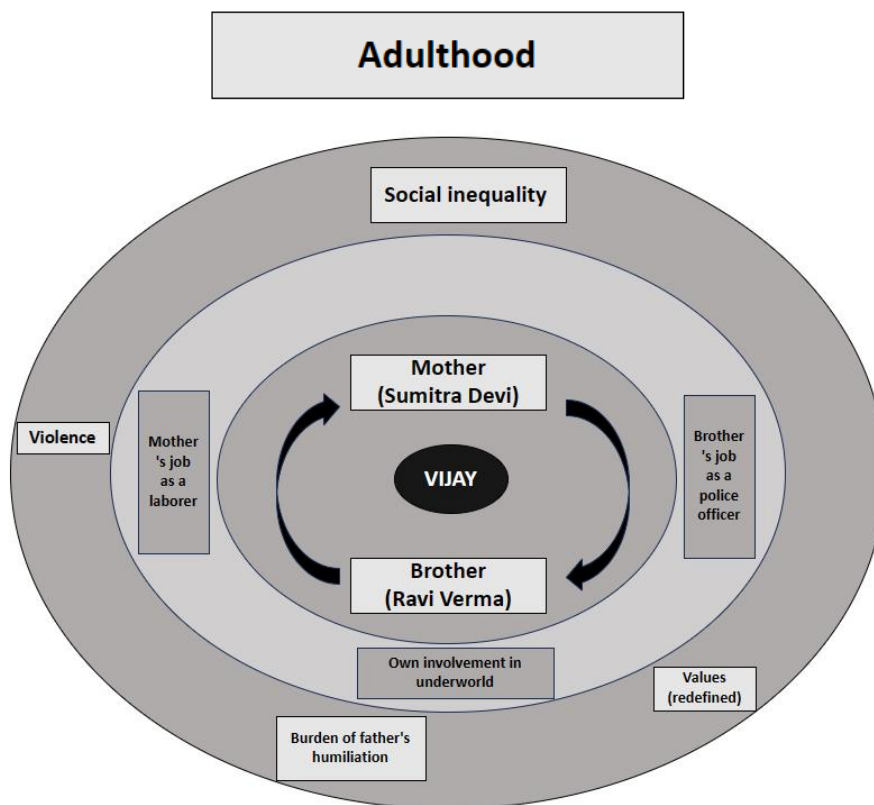


Figure 2: Vijay's Adulthood

The younger brother, Ravi, was also affected by his father leaving them. But, as he was too young to understand why it happened, he was not as affected as Vijay was in his childhood. He also grew up in the same environment but had a relatively positive upbringing. His school life wasn't shown in the film, but he most probably had a friend circle and someone to rely on at school. He receives education and lands a job as a sub-inspector.

Parental abandonment can lead to the formation of strained relationships as well. In Vijay's case, his sense of abandonment leads to a strained relationship with his mother, Sumitra Devi. As for the mother too, she is torn between her moral values and the love for two sons.

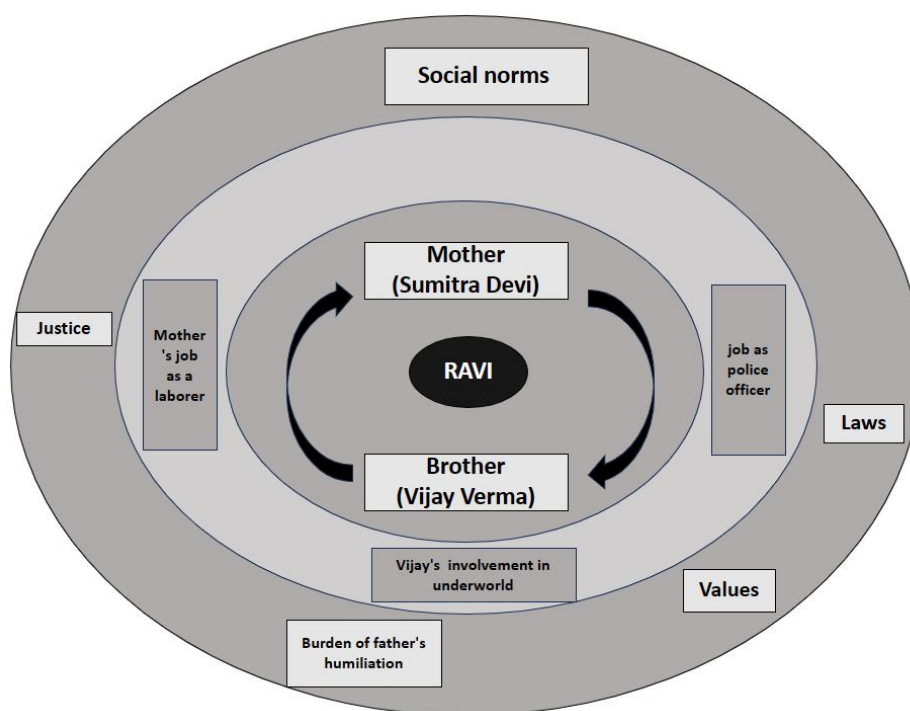


Figure 3: Ravi's Life Growing Up

Overall, Ravi's job as a police officer and Vijay's job as a criminal creates conflict within the family due to the interactions taking place in the mesosystem. Interactions include the family's involvement with police and criminal figures like Samant. Hence, the choices made by the three main characters, especially the brothers, are hugely dependent on the environment they grew up in and the people they were surrounded by.

3.2 Poverty and Humiliation.

Despite the childhood Vijay had with his father leaving the town and the public humiliation, he took the initiative to help his mother and worked as a shoe polisher to send his younger brother to school. He grew up with acute awareness of their deprivation. This shows a sense of purpose and responsibility. In addition to this, he chose the wrong means of acquiring money, but it was morally correct according to him, so he developed a basic moral understanding too. He knew what was right and wrong since he was seen protecting his coworkers when their hard-earned money was being taken away at the workplace. This portrayal of Vijay's character in the movie suggests he is at the *Initiative versus Guilt Stage*. A sense of guilt is also observed in Vijay at the end, when he realizes what he has done when his mother is very sick and when the people, he worked for killed Anita, his significant other, behind his back. He had a lot of respect and love for his mother, so he felt very guilty for not realizing this sooner.

As for Ravi, as described in Section 1.1, his childhood was relatively less rushed and peaceful. This does not mean he did not face adversity. He was bullied too but was more protected by his brother and mother.

It was easier for him to lead a principled life. Due to the fact that he was the only son who went to school, he successfully developed a very strong personal and social identity. There is a very clear conflict when he is stuck between his duty as a brother and that of a police officer, but he is able to resolve it. He went to his brother to talk to him first about this, but when Vijay denied backing off, Ravi had to fulfil his moral duty as a police officer. This suggests he was at the *Identity and Role Confusion Stage*, according to Erik Erikson's stages.

Mother seems to be at the *Generativity Versus Stagnation Stage*. She was very proud of how she raised her two sons when one got selected as a police officer and the other earned and put a roof over her head. She was also proud of how far they had come despite all the challenges and after what their father had done to them. This represents the generativity aspect of the stage. With regards to stagnation, she felt extremely upset and disappointed upon finding out what Vijay did for a living and was shown displaying anger and dissatisfaction at the end.

4. RELATIONSHIP OF THE MOTHER WITH THE TWO SONS :

4.1 Characterization of Mother in Indian Cinema.

Indian cinema represents the main characters, such as mothers, children, heroes and the villains with similar traits and features. If we look at Sumitra Devi, Vijay, and Ravi's mother, the movie presents her as caring, devoted to her family, and always upholding moral values. This is how every mother is portrayed in most of the old cinema, such as *Mother India*, which was released in 1957 (Nandakumar, 2011; Gokulsing and Dissanayake, 1998).

Sumitra (played by Nirupa Roy) plays a very important role and is the leading reason why the sons chose different paths in life. She shares a similar bond with her two sons. It is quite evident in the movie that Vijay was trying his best to give his mother the best lifestyle, which his father could not, in his childhood and adulthood.

4.2 Relationship of Mother with Vijay.

There are instances that show how protective Vijay was towards his mother when he was young. He beat up the person who humiliated her in the workplace when she appeared to be extremely dehydrated, injured, and tired due to lifting heavy weights. He decided to work as a shoe polisher when he saw his mother struggling to send both her children to school.

Later in life, he is seen working really hard in the dockyard and in the underworld after that, resorting to morally incorrect means of earning without realizing its consequences just to provide his mother with the best living and put a roof over her head and feed her good food. The first thing he does upon getting the money from smuggling is buy a nice flat where his mother was a construction worker, which shows how he dedicated his entire life to her. This desire of Vijay to do everything for her mother reflects his need to gain his mother's love and approval to some extent, which can be seen in his dialogue from the scene when his mother comes to know about his job: -

Sumitra: Maa jaayegi...

Vijay: Nahi Maa, tum mujhe chood kar nahi jaa sakti. Tum mujhe bahut chhhate ho maa, mein jaanta hoon, tum mujhe chood kar nahin jaa sakti.

Vijay: Lekin maa meine ye sabh tumhare liye kiya. Ye bungalow, ye gaari, ye rupaiya, ye paise, ye sabh tumhare liye; ye sabhkuch tumhara hain...aur tum mujhe chood kar jaa rahe ho....?

Even at the end, he realizes his mistake when both the women in his life, Anita (who dies) and the mother, are sick and are seen begging for Sumitra's forgiveness. Not much is known about Anita (played by Praveen Babu) except that she is found in bars smoking and drinking. Like Veera, Ravi's significant other, Anita gives us a small peek into Vijay's life, how he is around women, and what makes him vulnerable.

He has also expressed hate towards his father in the movie, as he looked up to him but was proven wrong when he ran away and left his mother on the street to take care of the children all by herself. As mentioned

in theme 1.2, Vijay was made to feel humiliated in his childhood and was made fun of due to his father, and since then he has only worked hard for his mother and brother and “took the role of the father” later in life. He chose to become a gangster and has been seen asserting power and control over people too which also explains why he is fixated on the *Phallic Stage* given by *Sigmund Freud in Psychoanalytic Theory*. Another stage that comes to mind is the *Oral Aggressive Stage* since Vijay did express anger many times and was seen smoking too.

4.3 Relationship of Mother with Ravi.

In the case of Ravi, he was exposed to a much different world than Vijay and seems to be stuck at the genital stage. He did not go through the harsh treatment like Vijay in his childhood and went to school. He balanced between various areas of life. He has been portrayed as a warm and caring son as well as a responsible police officer. He looked up to his mother and always fulfilled his duty with hard work and determination, which is very well depicted in the movie.

His superego and ego developed well. Although he is torn between his duty as a police officer and as a brother, he decided to approach his brother first and tried his best to talk him out of it, but later chose what was morally right according to the social norm. He has been displayed as a mature and dependable man whom his mother trusted fully and whose side she took when she got to know Vijay’s job as a smuggler. This explains why he could be at the *Genital Stage* as per the *Psychoanalytic Theory*.

The following exchange of dialogues between Vijay and Ravi gives us a clear idea as to why they fit the stage: -

Vijay: Aaj mere paas buildingey hai, property hai, bank balance hai, bungalow hai, gaadi hai ... kya hai, kya hai tumhare pass?

Ravi: Mere paas maa hai

In addition to this, the movie displays how a negative parent-child relationship can hamper one’s overall development to a great extent. Sumitra Devi is seen preferring one son over another on many occasions, which did have an emotional impact on the sons. There’s sibling rivalry, the central theme of the movie, which is quite evident, and could possibly be the result of this preference shown by the mother. There was pressure to earn money on Vijay and excel in academics on Ravi, which could be one of the reasons why they chose different paths in life. The mother also fails to recognize the efforts made by the sons, which did not have an impact on their motivation or feeling of worthlessness, but it did hamper their self-esteem and had the opposite effect on Vijay as it made him realize his mistake at the end.

5. MOTIVATION TO WORK :

5.1 Vijay.

Vijay was seen working hard, both as a child and an adult. His work ethic and purpose, however, were very different from those of his mother and brother. Vijay saw his mother’s struggles, and his aim was clear. Earning money for her. He starts out as a shoe polisher, acquires a job at a dockyard, and later is picked as a smuggler, which gets him into loads of trouble. What is noteworthy here is that earning became his lifestyle. It was no longer about what’s right or wrong and based on this, he made his own rules and chose his own path of justice. This is what’s described in Stage 4 of *Moral Development Theory* given by *Lawrence Kohlberg, The Social-Order Maintaining Orientation Stage*. His struggle is to give his family a better life. His dialogue, “*uff yeh adarsh yeh usool*” conveys why he fits this particular stage.

His motivation stems from his sense of responsibility as the elder brother and son. He wanted to lift his family out of poverty. He is seen as a reliable and trustworthy coworker by others which earns him respect in his workplace. As it’s mentioned in theme 1.1, he faced constant hardships and injustice, due to which he even refused to take money thrown on the ground, which shows he wanted to be treated with respect and dignity. He threw a brick at the person who insulted her mother at the workplace when she appeared to be extremely dehydrated, injured, and tired due to lifting heavy weights. He also shows aggression on many different

occasions, which could possibly be due to betrayal from his father, and the harsh treatment by his father's workers, and a desire to not be a coward and become a better person than him.

5.2 Ravi.

In the case of Ravi, he chose to become a police officer and follow in his father's footsteps to some extent. Before he ran away, Ravi and Vijay looked up to him, as he was very vocal and honest. They even used to copy his behavior, from reading a newspaper to standing on the bench and delivering a speech like he did. The following lines show how much respect they had for him: -

"Vijay: Pitaji, humare school ke masterji ne aapke baare mein kuch kehe rahe the.

Sumitra: Kya kehe rahe the...?"

Vijay: Woh kehe rahe the ke tumhare pitaji....

Ravi: Nahi...nahi..nahi... kehe rahe the 'Anand babu...'

Vijay: Ha..ha... Anand babu..."

Some of these qualities were imbibed by Ravi, and he became an honest police officer who followed the law and order and even went after his brother when he got to know his wrongdoings. This explains why he could be at *The Social Contract Stage* according to *Moral Development Theory*. In addition to this, Ravi initially faced problems getting a job and soon realized that it's hard to get one if you do not have higher connections in the field. There's a huge bias even today that hiring managers may subconsciously favor candidates who are recommended by people in their social and professional circles, even if they do not intend to be biased.

5.3 Mother's Struggle.

As for the mother, there is no stage that comes to mind, but her motivation to work was completely different from that of her two sons. She was working to provide them with a better livelihood, food to eat, and clothes to wear. She worked at a construction site which was very demanding for her, but she received help from Vijay and Ravi.

There are studies that suggest that single parents, especially single mothers, face numerous problems in raising their children. A study on problems faced by single mothers shows that financial problem was the main stressor for majority of the single mothers, something that is very well depicted in the film as Sumitra Devi faces financial difficulties and her job is unstable which makes it even harder for her to raise her two sons. (Kotwal and Prabhakar, 2017). The emotional toll on single mothers is immense as according to the study, the majority of them reported loneliness, hopelessness, identity crisis and lack of confidence. Till the time Vijay and Ravi got decent jobs, they were dependent on the mother which made it harder for her to handle their responsibility and financial aspects of the family at the same time.

6. RELEVANCE IN MAHABHARATA :

The movie touches on the theme of redemption, which is also very well depicted in the *Mahabharata* when Arjuna faces a dilemma. Arjuna is torn between his duty as a warrior and the fact that he must fight his own family in the battle of Kurukshetra. Similarly, Ravi is torn between his duties as a police officer and a brother. Both choose the path of morality and righteousness, despite the circumstances. Ravi decides to abide by the law and go against Vijay, while Arjuna, guided by Lord Krishna, decides to wage war to restore dharma.

In the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna says, "Tasmad asaktah satatam karyam samacara asakto hy acaran karma param apnoti purushah" which means, *"Therefore, without being attached to the fruits of activities, one should act as a matter of duty, for by working without attachment, one attains the Supreme"*. Arjuna's decision to fight against the Kauravas was not based on his liking for them or personal grudge, it was because that was the most logical thing to do according to his *Dharma (morality)* (Srivastava et al., 2013). This is the same reason that drove Ravi to make the decision to go against his brother, despite his connection with him.

7. CONCLUSION :

Deewar represents the psychological and moral conflict that individuals may go through in their lives. It depicts the capacity of an individual to overcome challenges, even when confronted with the most brutal circumstances. Despite being abandoned by their own father, living in poverty for almost their entire childhood, and going through emotional turmoil, Vijay and Ravi are able to recognize their past actions and decisions.

I remember watching Deewar for the first time with my dad in 2010 and found it to be one of the most interesting movies of all times. Watching it after almost 13 years from a psychoanalytic point of view has most definitely ruined the storyline for me but looking at the characters with a focus on psychological theories has made me realize how one person's life can encompass so many aspects, especially a character played by Amitabh Bachchan whom I grew up watching.

This analysis has allowed me to explore further and apply the theories in the real world. My knowledge was limited to the books but now after attempting to analyze every character, every dialogue and every plot twist in Deewar, I find myself applying these theories to understand human development in every other situation I encounter. I have learned the importance of environmental influences and the need to explore the childhood of an individual to understand them better.

This has also enabled me to frame my own interpretations and identify themes and study character development which I haven't done before. It has developed my critical thinking skills and has made content retention much easier. It has deepened my knowledge and has made me view human development from a different lens.

The themes in Deewar remain relevant even today. The movie not only raises questions about moral dilemmas arising from socioeconomic pressures, but also about inequality and injustices. Although my experiences are very different from those of the characters, it did make me reflect on my own life. The application of the theories emphasized that we all are shaped by our childhood, environmental influences and complex internal conflicts.

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