

## Post-Method Media Criticism Contextualising Vernacular OTT Narratives through *Chiraiya*

Dr. P. Sitharthan<sup>1\*</sup> & Dr. M. Nagalakshmi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor & Research Supervisor, PG and Research Department of English, Presidency College, Chennai

<sup>2</sup>Professor & Research Supervisor Department of English, Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies, Pallavaram, Chennai

**Corresponding Author:** Dr. P. Sitharthan (Associate Professor & Research Supervisor, PG and Research Department of English, Presidency College, Chennai)

Received: 16/03/2026

Accepted: 17/04/2026

Published: 28/04/2026

**Abstract:** This article examines how vernacular OTT narratives in India invite a reconsideration of established analytical approaches, taking *Chiraiya* as a focal case. Rather than approaching the series through pre-existing theoretical models alone, the discussion develops what is described here as Post-Method Media Criticism (PMMC)—a flexible interpretive orientation that privileges context, textual detail, and emergent meaning. Drawing, in part, on the conceptual vocabulary of post-method pedagogy, the study attends to how the series constructs gendered and classed subjectivities through a restrained aesthetic marked by silence, duration, and minimal action.

The analysis proceeds through close engagement with selected scenes, considering not only visual composition and performance but also the role of sound, pacing, and episodic structure. What becomes apparent is a narrative mode that resists the urgency often associated with streaming content. Instead, *Chiraiya* situates meaning within the ordinary—gestures, pauses, and everyday negotiations—while remaining shaped, albeit unevenly, by platform conditions such as format and visibility.

The article suggests that such texts are not easily accommodated within conventional frameworks of realism or genre. PMMC is proposed, therefore, not as a fixed method but as a way of reading that remains responsive to local specificity and formal variation. In doing so, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions around digital media, vernacular storytelling, and the methodological demands posed by increasingly heterogeneous narrative forms.

**Keywords:** Vernacular OTT Narratives; Post-Method Media Criticism (PMMC); Digital Media Studies; Indian Streaming Culture; Everyday Realism; Contemporary Indian Web Series.

**Cite this article:** Sitharthan, P. & Nagalakshmi, M. (2026). Post-Method Media Criticism Contextualising Vernacular OTT Narratives through *Chiraiya*. *MRS Journal of Arts, Humanities and Literature*, 3,62-66.

### Introduction

Over the past decade, the expansion of OTT platforms in India has altered not only how content is distributed but also how it is conceived and received. What initially appeared as an extension of existing media industries has gradually developed its own internal logic—one that accommodates a wider range of narrative forms, including those that sit outside metropolitan sensibilities.

Among these, vernacular web series present an interesting case. They often operate with limited resources, yet their narrative strategies do not simply mirror mainstream cinema on a smaller scale. Instead, they tend to foreground everyday experience, local idioms, and forms of temporality that do not align with the accelerated pacing typical of commercial streaming content.

*Chiraiya* can be located within this emerging space. At first glance, its narrative may seem minimal, even uneventful. However, this apparent simplicity is somewhat misleading. The series is less concerned with plot progression than with the textures of daily life—gestures, pauses, routines, and the subtle negotiations that

structure interpersonal relations. These elements, while easily overlooked, cumulatively produce a distinct mode of engagement.

Much of the existing scholarship on OTT media relies on established frameworks—genre classification, realism, or platform economics. While these approaches remain useful, they do not always account for the specificity of texts like *Chiraiya*, where meaning does not readily conform to pre-existing analytical categories.

This article proposes an alternative approach, tentatively termed Post-Method Media Criticism (PMMC). Rather than beginning with a fixed theoretical model, PMMC works outward from the text, allowing interpretive strategies to emerge in response to contextual and formal features. The emphasis, therefore, is less on applying theory and more on calibrating it.

The discussion that follows is guided by three broad questions:

1. In what ways does *Chiraiya* construct marginal or non-dominant subjectivities?

2. How do elements such as silence, duration, and minimal action contribute to its narrative form?
3. What might a more flexible, context-sensitive mode of analysis look like in relation to such texts?

### OTT Platforms and Shifting Viewing Logics

The movement from broadcast television to streaming platforms is often described in terms of technological change, but its implications extend further. As Amanda Lotz has argued, the so-called “post-network” condition involves a reconfiguration of audience engagement, where viewing is no longer tied to fixed schedules but to individualized consumption patterns.

In the Indian context, this shift intersects with linguistic diversity and regional segmentation. Platforms increasingly invest in localized content, not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a market strategy. Yet this localization is not without tension. While infrastructure may be global, the narratives it circulates are often embedded in specific cultural contexts, producing a layered interaction between scale and specificity.

What remains less examined is how these conditions influence narrative form at a granular level—how pacing, episode structure, and tonal register are subtly adjusted in response to platform expectations.

### Vernacular Narratives and the Question of Voice

Discussions of vernacular media frequently intersect with the concerns of subaltern studies, particularly the issue of representation. Ranajit Guha’s efforts to foreground marginalized histories, along with Spivak’s well-known interrogation of subaltern speech, continue to shape how such narratives are approached.

However, the migration of these concerns into digital media contexts introduces new variables. OTT platforms do not simply provide neutral spaces for expression; they mediate visibility through algorithms, recommendation systems, and promotional strategies.

In this sense, the presence of marginalized voices in series like *Chiraiya* should not be taken at face value. What is at stake is not only representation but the conditions under which that representation becomes perceptible—or remains muted.

### Intersectionality and Everyday Power Structures

Kimberlé Crenshaw’s formulation of intersectionality has been widely adopted across disciplines, often as a conceptual shorthand for layered identity. While useful, its application can sometimes become overly schematic if not grounded in specific contexts.

In *Chiraiya*, the intersections of gender, class, and rural location are not articulated through explicit discourse. Instead, they are embedded in everyday interactions—who speaks, who hesitates, who occupies which space. Power is not always declared; it is enacted through routine.

This suggests that intersectionality, in this case, is less a framework to be imposed and more a pattern to be traced through close attention to detail.

### Affective Realism and the Limits of Representation

Raymond Williams’s notion of “structures of feeling” remains relevant for texts that operate below the level of explicit

articulation. Such texts do not necessarily represent social conditions in a direct or explanatory manner; rather, they evoke them through mood, tone, and atmosphere.

The concept of affective realism extends this line of thought by emphasizing experiential authenticity over narrative clarity. In series like *Chiraiya*, meaning is not always codified. It emerges gradually, often in ways that resist paraphrase.

This raises a methodological challenge: how to analyze what is felt but not fully stated. Any adequate approach must account for this ambiguity without reducing it to abstraction.

### From Post-Method Pedagogy to Media Analysis

Post-method pedagogy, as articulated by B. Kumaravadivelu, emerged as a critique of rigid teaching models. Its emphasis on particularity, practicality, and possibility was intended to foreground context and adaptability.

Transposing these principles into media studies is not entirely straightforward. Pedagogical situations and media texts operate under different conditions. Nevertheless, the underlying impulse—to resist one-size-fits-all frameworks—remains relevant.

PMMC draws selectively from this lineage, not as a direct extension but as a reconfiguration. The aim is not to establish a new orthodoxy but to retain a degree of methodological openness.

### Theoretical Framework (Less Mechanical, More Discursive)

#### 1 Rethinking Method: Toward PMMC

PMMC is best understood not as a fixed method but as a set of tendencies. It begins with a simple premise: that interpretation should be responsive to the text rather than predetermined by theory.

Three guiding orientations can be identified, though they are not always separable in practice:

- Particularity draws attention to context—social, cultural, and industrial.
- Practicality insists on grounding interpretation in observable features.
- Possibility encourages attention to forms of meaning or agency that might otherwise be overlooked.

These are less rules than points of emphasis. Their application varies depending on the text.

#### 2 Platform Conditions as Analytical Context

Platform studies provides a necessary backdrop, particularly in relation to OTT media. Algorithms, interfaces, and release structures are not external to the text; they shape how it is produced and encountered.

In *Chiraiya*, for instance, the pacing of episodes and their relatively short duration cannot be entirely separated from platform norms. At the same time, the series does not fully align with dominant expectations, creating a space of partial conformity.

#### 3 Intersectionality and Subalternity Revisited

Rather than treating intersectionality and subalternity as discrete frameworks, this study approaches them as overlapping concerns. Both address questions of visibility, voice, and power, albeit from different angles.

What becomes important is not their theoretical distinction but their practical usefulness in reading specific scenes. Where they illuminate, they are employed; where they do not, they recede.

#### 4 Affective Realism as Analytical Sensibility

Affective realism is less a theory than a way of attending to the text. It shifts focus from what is represented to how it is experienced.

In practical terms, this involves paying attention to duration, atmosphere, and sensory detail—elements that are often secondary in more plot-driven analyses.

### Methodology

#### 1 Approach and Scope

The study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach centered on a single case. This is not intended to produce generalizable claims in a statistical sense. Rather, it allows for a more sustained engagement with the text.

*Chiraiya* is treated as a site of inquiry through which broader questions about vernacular OTT narratives can be explored.

#### 2 Materials Considered

The primary material consists of the available episodes of the series. These are supplemented, where relevant, by paratextual elements such as promotional descriptions and viewer-facing summaries.

Secondary sources—critical essays, theoretical texts—are used selectively to frame the discussion rather than to dictate it.

#### 3 Mode of Analysis

The analysis proceeds through close viewing. Attention is given to:

- framing and composition
- sound design and silence
- performance and gesture
- pacing and duration

These elements are not treated in isolation but in relation to one another.

#### 4 Analytical Movement

Rather than following a rigid sequence, the analysis moves iteratively:

- scenes are identified based on affective or formal distinctiveness
- observations are noted without immediate theoretical classification
- patterns are allowed to emerge across multiple instances
- theoretical concepts are introduced where they clarify rather than obscure

This process is, by design, somewhat open-ended. It allows for adjustment as the analysis develops.

#### 5 On Methodological Limits

It is worth acknowledging that this approach has limitations. Its reliance on close reading makes it time-intensive and potentially subjective. Moreover, focusing on a single text raises questions about broader applicability.

However, these constraints are also part of its strength. By resisting premature generalization, the analysis remains attentive to detail—something that broader surveys often sacrifice.

### Analysis and Discussion

#### 1 Narrative Minimalism and the Weight of the Ordinary

The opening courtyard sequence does not merely situate the narrative; it recalibrates how the viewer is expected to watch. The camera remains still, almost insistently so, while the protagonist sorts grains in what appears to be unremarkable domestic space. Yet the scene resists dismissal as “uneventful.” Its duration is doing work.

Time here accumulates rather than progresses. The repetition of gesture—the steady movement of hands, the sorting, the pause, the resumption—gradually acquires density. What might initially register as background activity begins to foreground itself. This is not a withdrawal of narrative energy so much as its redistribution.

It is tempting to read such minimalism as aesthetic restraint, but that would be insufficient. The sequence appears to insist on a different epistemology of attention. Instead of guiding the viewer through cues—music, cuts, dramatic escalation—it withholds them. Ambient sound remains unembellished; there is no extraneous scoring to instruct emotional response. The environment is not stylized into significance; it simply persists.

From the standpoint of particularity, the meaning of this scene is inseparable from its context. The labour depicted is not symbolic in any overt sense, nor is it narrativized as struggle. It is routine. And precisely for that reason, it becomes legible as lived time rather than representational shorthand. The scene does not generalize; it localizes.

#### 2 Thresholds, Hesitation, and the Grammar of Limited Agency

The doorway sequence introduces a more explicit configuration of power, though it avoids dramatizing it in conventional terms. The protagonist stands at the threshold, neither fully inside nor outside. The spatial arrangement is almost schematic, but its implications are not reducible to metaphor.

The male interlocutor remains partially off-frame. This is not merely a compositional choice; it produces an uneven distribution of visibility. He is present, undeniably so, yet not subjected to the same visual scrutiny. The protagonist, by contrast, is contained within the frame, her body language fully exposed.

What is striking is the absence of overt confrontation. There is no raised voice, no decisive gesture. Instead, meaning resides in hesitation—slight delays in response, averted gaze, a subtle shift in stance. These are not dramatic acts, but neither are they negligible.

An intersectional reading complicates any straightforward interpretation of agency here. Gender alone does not account for the dynamics at play; class position and rural context are equally operative. The protagonist’s responses are shaped within these overlapping constraints. Agency, in this instance, does not announce itself. It is negotiated, often quietly.

If PMMC’s possibility parameter is taken seriously, then such moments require a recalibration of what counts as resistance. The scene does not offer defiance, but it does register friction. Not refusal, exactly, but something less compliant than acquiescence.

### 3 When Silence Speaks: Audibility and Its Limits

The kitchen sequence shifts the emphasis from space to sound—or more precisely, to its uneven distribution. Multiple voices overlap, producing a kind of acoustic congestion. Within this environment, the protagonist's relative silence becomes noticeable, though not immediately interpretable.

Silence, in this context, is not empty. It is structured by what surrounds it. The camera lingers on her after lines have been delivered by others, extending the moment beyond speech. These extensions matter. They create a temporal space in which reaction—not dialogue—carries weight.

Gestures begin to function as a secondary language: a tightened grip, a pause before movement, a slight change in expression. None of these are emphatic, yet collectively they form a pattern. The scene does not translate silence into speech; it allows it to remain opaque, though not unintelligible.

From a subaltern perspective, the issue is not simply whether the character speaks, but whether speech is available to her as an effective mode of participation. The sequence suggests limits—not absolute prohibition, but constrained audibility. What cannot be said is not entirely absent; it is displaced.

Here, PMMC's practicality becomes methodologically useful. The interpretation does not rely on inferred psychology or abstract claims. It proceeds from what is visible and audible: shot duration, framing, and sound overlap. The restraint of the analysis mirrors, in some sense, the restraint of the scene.

### 4 Platform Logics and the Refusal of Narrative Urgency

One of the more intriguing aspects of *Chiraiya* lies in its relationship to platform expectations. Streaming content is often structured around retention strategies—cliffhangers, narrative escalation, rapid pacing. This series, however, seems only partially aligned with those conventions.

Episodes frequently conclude without resolution. There is no narrative hook in the conventional sense, no engineered suspense designed to propel immediate continuation. Instead, endings tend toward stillness—a lingering look, an unfinished gesture, a fade into ambient sound.

That said, the series is not operating outside platform constraints. Episode length remains within expected limits; the segmentation is clearly designed for digital consumption. What emerges, then, is not outright resistance but negotiation.

There is also a noticeable gap between paratext and text. Promotional materials may suggest a more dramatic register than the episodes themselves deliver. This disjunction is not incidental. It reflects the tension between algorithmic visibilities—which often favours intensity—and the series' commitment to restraint.

Within PMMC, this is where particularity intersects with practicality. The form of the text cannot be fully understood without reference to its mode of distribution. At the same time, the text does not simply submit to those conditions; it adjusts, selectively.

### 5 Affective Alignment without Resolution

The dusk sequence, with its tracking shot, appears deceptively simple. The protagonist walks; the camera follows.

Nothing “happens” in a narrative sense. Yet the scene exerts a quiet pull.

Part of this lies in the synchronization of movement. The camera does not observe from a distance; it aligns itself with the character's pace. This produces a form of kinaesthetic proximity. The viewer is not merely watching movement but, to some extent, inhabiting it.

Lighting contributes to this effect. Dusk is neither closure nor beginning. It suspends the scene between temporal states. The absence of non-diegetic sound reinforces this suspension. Ambient noise remains, but it does not organize the scene into a clear emotional trajectory.

If one turns to affective realism, the sequence can be read as privileging experience over interpretation. It does not resolve into meaning; it lingers as sensation. The viewer is not directed toward a conclusion but held within a state.

Within PMMC's possibility frame, this suggests another mode of engagement. Recognition, rather than resolution, becomes central. The scene does not demand understanding; it invites attunement.

### 6 Toward an Operational Logic of PMMC

Taken together, these scenes do not simply illustrate PMMC; they pressure-test it. Certain tendencies become visible across the analyses, though they resist neat systematization.

Context repeatedly proves decisive. Meaning does not travel easily outside the conditions in which it is produced. At the same time, interpretation remains anchored in the text—its images, sounds, and performances. There is little room here for abstract generalization that cannot be traced back to formal detail.

Perhaps most significantly, agency appears in reduced scale. It is not absent, but it rarely takes spectacular form. This raises methodological questions: how to register subtlety without over-reading it? How to avoid imposing coherence where the text maintains ambiguity?

In practical terms, a few working principles emerge:

- segmentation based on affect rather than plot
- attention to the interplay of modalities (visual, sonic, performative)
- contextual framing that includes platform conditions
- sensitivity to small-scale variations in behaviour and speech
- a degree of interpretive restraint

These are not rules. They are, at best, provisional guidelines—subject to revision depending on the text under consideration.

### Findings

The analysis of *Chiraiya* yields a set of observations that are best understood as tendencies rather than definitive claims. They point toward broader implications but remain grounded in the specificity of the case.

### 1 Minimalism as a Productive Constraint

The series demonstrates that reduced narrative intensity does not necessarily diminish engagement. On the contrary, duration and repetition can generate a different kind of

attentiveness—one that relies less on anticipation and more on sustained observation.

## 2 Mediated Presence of Marginal Voices

While vernacular OTT spaces expand the field of representation, they do not eliminate mediation. Marginal subjectivities are present, but often indirectly—through gesture, silence, and affective cues rather than explicit articulation.

## 3 Agency as Gradational Rather Than Absolute

Agency does not appear as a binary condition. It fluctuates, often within narrow margins. This suggests the need for analytical frameworks that can accommodate partial, situational forms of action.

## 4 Platform Conditions as Structuring Forces

The influence of platform infrastructure is evident, though not uniform. Formal elements—episode length, pacing, endings—bear traces of industrial logic, even where the text diverges from dominant patterns.

## 5 Affective Engagement beyond Narrative Closure

The series privileges emotional resonance over narrative resolution. Viewership, in this sense, becomes less about “finding out what happens” and more about remaining within a particular experiential register.

## 6 PMMC as a Flexible but Demanding Approach

PMMC proves useful, though not effortless. Its insistence on contextual sensitivity and textual grounding requires a slower, more attentive mode of analysis. It resists quick categorization, which may be precisely its value.

## 7 Implications for Further Study

If these tendencies hold across other vernacular OTT texts, they suggest a shift in analytical priorities—from generalized frameworks to context-driven interpretation. However, this remains an open question, requiring comparative work.

## Conclusion

The foregoing discussion has attempted to stay close to the textures of *Chiraiya* rather than moving too quickly toward general claims. In doing so, it becomes apparent that the series does not readily lend itself to frameworks that privilege narrative momentum, clear resolution, or overt articulation of conflict. What it offers instead is a slower, more diffuse mode of storytelling—one in which meaning gathers around gesture, duration, and the often unremarked rhythms of everyday life.

This raises a broader methodological question. If texts such as *Chiraiya* resist the terms through which digital media is frequently analysed, then the issue may not lie with the text alone but with the expectations brought to it. The attempt, therefore, has been to work toward a mode of reading that does not impose coherence too quickly, and that remains attentive to context without reducing it to background.

The notion of Post-Method Media Criticism, as outlined here, is best understood in that spirit. It does not claim to replace existing approaches, nor does it offer a stable set of procedures. If it has any utility, it lies in its willingness to remain provisional—to adjust itself in response to the demands of the material, rather than the other way around. This is particularly relevant for vernacular OTT narratives, which often occupy an uneasy position between local specificity and platform standardization.

At the same time, it would be premature to treat *Chiraiya* as representative of a broader tendency without further comparative work. Questions remain about how similar strategies operate across other regional series, and how audiences, in turn, engage with these quieter narrative forms within an attention economy that tends to reward immediacy.

What can be suggested, perhaps more cautiously, is that such texts invite a shift in emphasis—from interpretation as extraction of meaning to interpretation as sustained attention. Whether this shift can be accommodated within existing critical practices, or requires more substantial rethinking, is something that remains open.

## References

### Primary Source

1. Chiraiya. Directed by Shashant Shah, JioHotstar, 2026

### Secondary Sources

2. Athique, Adrian. *Digital Media and Society: An Introduction*. Polity, 2013.
3. Crenshaw, Kimberlé. “Mapping the Margins.” *Stanford Law Review*, 1991.
4. Guha, Ranajit. *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Oxford UP, 1988.
5. Kumaravadivelu, B. “Toward a Postmethod Pedagogy.” *TESOL Quarterly*, 2001.
6. Lotz, Amanda D. *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. NYU Press, 2014.
7. Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” 1988.
8. Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford UP, 1977.