



The Projection of Marginalized Voices in Hindi Cinema: A Critical Appreciation of the Select Films



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ABSTRACT

Marginality, a socio-political concept, takes into account the power politics that aims at defining the social space of some individuals by the dominant group and also controlling the behavior pattern of the marginal. This definition has been confirmed and illustrated by a number of authentic sources like Oxford English Dictionary (Online ed.), Webster Dictionary, Key Issues in Postcolonial Feminism: A Western Perspective, 'Disciplining Feminism : From Social Activism to Academic Discourse' and a host of others. Marginality denotes a position which can be defined in terms of the limitations of an individual's access to power. It can be observed that people are sidetracked by the mainstream on the basis of race, gender, age, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy. Hence marginality needs to be studied in social and temporal context of the problematic. Bill Ashcroft in this regard makes a comment that deserves to be viewed in detail:

The perception and description of marginality is the outcome of the binary opposition of some discourses, such as patriarchy, imperialism and

ethno-centrism where some experiences are central and some experiences are peripheral. Although the term is misleading because the marginal groups do not necessarily are defined by the notion of a fixed center. Structures of power that are described in terms of "center" and "margin" operate, in reality in a complex, dynamic and multidimensional way. The marginal hence is the indicative of the position that can analyzed in terms of the limitations to access the power."

The present paper aims at critical appreciation of the selected films to bring out The Projection of marginalized voices in Indian Hindi Cinema. Indian Cinema proved to be the most accessible and cheaper source of information, entertainment and education to almost all may be literate-illiterate, rich-poor or men and women. Hence the Cinema can be considered as the powerful means of mass communication, a reflection of society, a cultural medium of change and a creative documentation of history.

KEY WORDS

Hindi Cinema, Marginalized voices, Bollywood, Marginality-caste, gender, Dalits



RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

The media in general and cinema in particular plays an important role in raising awareness of social issues and the factors which lead to the marginalization of the various groups and to spread awareness among the masses on the process of marginalization. There are various forms of marginalization, some are obvious or some are subtle. For instance subtle forms of marginalization can be experienced in various industries or discrimination against candidates for employment on the basis of religion, origin, sexuality or sexual orientation or on medical grounds. The obvious forms are violence or harsh criticism against a group or strata of the society. The effects of marginalization are devastating and lifelong. Marginalized usually suffer from an identity crisis as they are often portrayed negatively restricting their existence to mere an object rather than an individual.

Historical review of Hindi cinema:

Originating from the first commercially successful movie '*Raja Harishchandra*' (mute movie) to the first audible movie '*Alam Ara*' to the present day movies like *Mission Mangal* or *Chhapaak*, Indian cinema has been entertaining and teaching to its viewers in the most creative and engrossing way. India's first film was produced by Ram Chandra Gopal (R.G.) entitled *Pundalik* and was released on May 18, 1912. As the title suggests, The film portrayed the legend of one of the most famous Maharashtrian saint, Pundalik. Dada Saheb Phalke's film *Raja Harishchandra* was released on May 3, 1913 and is considered as a milestone in the journey of Indian cinema and earned him the title of 'Father of Indian Cinema'. Indian films are of different genre hence the role of Indian Cinema is also much diversified. During the decades of 30s to 60s, Indian cinema had influenced the youth practically. The issues like freedom struggle, unemployment, dowry and women's emancipation, poverty and exploitation, social conflict and national integration. Due to the perpetual transformation in the society, the themes adopted for filmmaking have also dynamically portrayed with reference to the time and space.

The Hindi cinema never had been encompassing the virtues of people from different classes and castes, their social aspirations and traditional values. Marginal characters are usually portrayed as submissive, unable to articulate their need, or as powerful but cruel or hard-hearted. In pre-independent era the caste system had been a central issue for film making. Which is projected convincingly in the films like '*Achhut Kanya*' (1936) and '*Sujata*', (1959). These films highlighted the plight of women in the orthodox Indian society. *Achhut Kanya* fictionalized the controversial issue of inter-caste marriage in general and untouchability in particular. The story of – a Brahmin boy and a Dalit girl – who fall in love with each other but the society did not approve their relationship as both belong to different castes. However their parents had approved their relationship.

However Hindi cinema had portrayed the Themes of marginalized narratives by choosing the categories of 'the poor', 'the common man' and the hard-toiling peasants, poverty, corrupt government officials, police violence and evil landlords which obviously reveals the class prejudice and conflicts between mainstream and marginal communities. The Films like



'Awara' (1951), 'Deewar' (1975), 'Zanjeer' (1973) are some of the examples in which caste had been subtly portrayed on screen but socio-economic standing of the Characters, physical untidiness, complexion, emotional weakness, submissiveness or repeated subjugation are some of the traits which may be misleading for the audience to believe that these characters are inferior. However, these films subtly escape caste as a construct just by contradictory portrayal of marginal and mainstream characters. Thus these movies never highlight the caste as the primary cause for the character's oppression.

It can be clearly observed that the Hindi films in during pre and post-independence powerfully portrayed the socialist concerns. However in 1960s, films had restricted their interests to the upper-middle-class. In the 1970s, Indian films specifically projected the image of the 'angry young man' there by touching to the social concerns of economic inadequacy, corruption, and anarchy, neglecting the social evils like caste or women's empowerment. Not a single director had portrayed a protagonist from marginal sections confronting social problems. In 1980s, Hollywood cinema had experimented to give voice to historically marginalized ideals and ideas, equal and visible space. Women, dalits, LGBT and physically challenged individuals had been projected on silver screen. However, in popular Hindi cinema, it had not been visible as Upper-caste people had produced and directed the films from the perspective of center or mainstream society for the pleasure and profit of mainstream society in Indian cinema. Thus it can be said that Indian films are written, directed, and produced by those who are interested in propagating the upper class tastes and values.

In 1990s, due to globalization and privatization, higher middle class has emerged as the new audience for the movies with more paying capacity and totally different sensibilities. Hence a major shift can be observed in film making in India. This age cinema was produced for entertainment and relaxation of higher middle class. Hence films were produced as per the taste of this newly emerged higher middle class and global audience rather than social and creative aspects of the film makers. A reverse trend can be seen in 2000 where the Films about social issues began to be produced again experimentally only hence very few in numbers.

At the Jaipur Literary Festival, the session panelist and director Mishra said that Bollywood films rarely featured a Dalit actor or told stories of marginalised communities. "It does represent a majoritarian point of view, possibly because there is this idea of not upsetting people. At one point in time, Muslims were depicted a certain way. He would either be a 'qawwal' or the hero's best friend and he would die with the 'azaan' in the background," said Mishra. "Has there been a Dalit actor of any note? Has dalit stories been told? When you take only Bollywood cinema, you know you have a pretty sad record in these matters and we have to admit it," he said. Both Ali and Mishra, however, agreed that things were changing for the better. During the session, Imtiaz Ali recalled how movies, rather than moral science textbooks, had shaped his morality and outlook on what moral standards to follow. "The Indian cinema has always told me how to behave with my mother and sister. What moral standards to have. Cinema taught me how to behave rather than religion or moral science books. There are social issues and national issues, which I feel, are getting moulded by Indian cinema," Ali said.

Analysis of select films

The present paper aims at analyzing the select films viz Masaan (2015), Chauranga (2016) Set in the spiritual city of Varanasi, Neeraj Ghaywan's debut film 'Masaan', meaning 'Crematorium' talks about love, uncertainty and destruction fabricated in the journey of despair



and hope. The director effectively takes on the dynamics of the caste system. The Caste is an important theme in the film but is explored very subtly. The movie is a fine portrayal of the cremation that takes place at the Harishchandra and Manikarnika ghat of Varanasi for twenty four hours. Vicky Kaushal casted as Deepak, the central character of the film belongs to the Dom Community. He along with his family works at the cremation ghats for their livelihood by burning bodies on funeral pyres. He wanted to get rid of this social caste based marginalization.

Deepak Chaudhary even if a lower caste boy is studying civil engineering and dares to fall in love with an upper caste girl Shalu Gupta. Their love blooms against the backdrop of burning funeral fires in a world of strong social restrictions ends tragically as Shalu is killed in an accident and her corpse turns up at the same ghat where Deepak and his family prepare funeral pyres as their livelihood.

Couple of scenes from the film puts light on the marginalization based on caste very subtly. The scene is portrayed as Deepak's father has a small party near the crematorium and a Brahmin man was also the part of it. However he is eating his meal on a stool separately and others are sitting on a khat and having their meal.

Second scene differentiates the status of the lovers -Deepak and Shaalu explicitly by portraying the backdrops of their homes while conversing on phone call. Deepak avoids revealing Shaalu his home, caste and social status. Deepak reveals his social origins in the night and Shaalu was shocked. However she takes a stand not to leave him and assures him that she will always be with him even if her parents will not approve their relationship. She further advises him to focus on his placements and livelihood. Shaalu dies in a bus accident while on a pilgrimage trip with her family. Her dead body was brought to the same cremation ground where Deepak's family works. Deepak collapses on seeing her dead body and feels purposelessness in life. He keeps her ring as a souvenir.

The second story portrays the marginalization of women through the character of a trainer at a coaching computer centre Devi Pathak. Actually the film opens with passionate lovers Devi Pathak and her student, Piyush Aggarwal, checked into a hotel room and are interrupted during sex by the policemen for indulging in "indecent behaviour". Inspector Mishra shoots Devi in that condition on his mobile phone and Piyush locks himself in the bathroom and commits suicide by slitting his wrists. Devi and her father Vidyadhar are blackmailed by Inspector Mishra demanding Rs. 300,000 to discard the case. In order to raise money, Vidyadhar indulges in a betting game. For betting small boys used to dive and collect the maximum number of coins from the Ganga in a specific time. Jhonta, an orphan who volunteers himself for the game. Devi also has to quit her job for her defamation of pre-marital sex which follows her even at Varanasi where she gets a government job in the railways.

Devi has to leave the job and Varanasi and pursues a course at Allahabad University. She visits the family of Piyush and is slapped by his father. So she comes to the banks of the Ganges for throwing the gift of Piyush in water. The ring of Shalu which was thrown away by Deepak in Ganges is picked up by Jhonta. Suddenly he lost his consciousness in water. He regains consciousness in the hospital and gives the ring to a remorseful Vidyadhar, who decides not to play with Jhonta's life. He sells the ring and is finally able to pay off Inspector Mishra. Deepak, who is by the bank, notices Devi crying and offers her water to drink. A boatman beckons, offering both of them a ride towards Sangam. They both ride the boat.

Due to this, Masan thus sets a new equation of looking and understanding the marginal identities, by transcending the quintessential way of looking at human beings as merely a sum



of their prescribed identities, thereby revealing the fact that the thread of pain is common to all. The boatmen ask them to come and sail towards Sangam, a ride which is thought to release sinners from the suffering of this world. The ending of film is portrayed metaphorically symbolizing boat ride of both in the river of life towards salvation, and the sun shines in the background.

Chauranga

Bikas Mishra's debut film *Chauranga* focuses on the atrocities faced by the marginalized and finding a solution by magnifying the ugliness in a contemporary set up. *Chauranga* is set against the backdrop of a village in Bihar which reveals the social microcosm of rural Bihar, a world divided between the haves and the have-nots, between the privileged and the disadvantaged, between the landowners and landless laborers. In fact after abolishment of Zamindari the lower caste has to go through daily discrimination and humiliation and exploitation of women. The powerful characterization creatively portrays the social fabric, its dynamics and power play.

The central protagonist in *Chauranga* is a rebel, an angry young Dalit teenager Santu who wanted to be educated and crave for the love of a girl from upper caste. The hegemony of caste, gender and patriarchy becomes the backdrop in *Chauranga*. It portrays the bitter facts of social dynamics of rural life in Bihar. The village symbolizes and unveils the interplay of binaries of class, caste and gender and its oppressive systems very boldly. It is a saga of pain, poverty, humiliation and oppression of the untouchables and the oppression of women, irrespective of their caste and status. The film depicts untouched and bleak world of the untouchables embedded in poverty, starvation, sexual exploitation and social exclusion.

Based on a true story, *Chaturanga* portrays the Dalit-Brahmin conflict .A 14-year-old Dalit boy in a village has a cherished dream of going to a town school, like his elder brother. His only escape from reality is to climb up a tree top to watch his crush - the upper caste girl, the village head's daughter-who used to ride on scooty on her way to school. His elder brother during his vacation returns to the village and suggests his brother to express his love to the girl. He dictates a letter expressing his brother's love for the girl however the letter is found by her father, the village head. The events that follow script the death of the two brothers by the upper-caste boys of the village.

The movie is a truthful portrayal of the fact that the Dalits alone are not subjected to oppression, women and children are doubly facing the oppression. Bajarangi and Santu are sons of a dalit woman Dhaniya who is accepting illicit relationship with Dhaval, village head so that she can feed and educate her sons.

Dhaval is the village landlord who has lost his financial power yet wields his muscle power due to his high caste. Dhaval can have sexual relationship with Dhaniya however he has strong objection if her son Bajrangi touches his feet. Dhaval's goons beats a Dalit boy while up wandering in front of the temple and threw him in the well, Dhaval decides to seal the well and dig a bore well that sprinkles blood when the bore well is inaugurated with overrated celebrations. There was none in the village to interrogate the atrocities of Dhaval against the boy.

Chauranga is a critical portrayal of the discrimination based on caste and the access to power only for the upper castes. The lower caste individuals and women irrespective of caste are perpetually marginalized. Nidhi, Dhaval's wife is a classic example of stereotype of



subjugated woman whose life is bound by the daily routine as a wife and daughter in law. However she believes that her daughter Mona should be educated so that she will not be subjugated like her mother. Dhaval even denies conjugal bliss to his wife.

Dhaval's mother also is living the life of oppression defined by patriarchy and her life is bounded by performing the rituals and serving the blind priest of their family. Nidhi is allowed to abuse sexually by the blind priest by her own husband and mother in law as they believe that only priest can cure her ailing husband. Motki, the pregnant hoe loved and nurtured by Dhaniya and is killed by the Brahmin priest because of his fear psychosis of all four legged animals. The priest only allows his goat the right to live.

Mona, daughter of Dhaval and Nidhi, reaches to school every day on her scooty. She is the only person in the entire village who can live her life freely. The fourteen-year-old Santu, a lower caste boy has a crush on her. He convinces Bajrangi to write a love letter on behalf of him to her. Bajrangi finally writes the letter with the red colored ball-pen. However the sick Dhaval accidentally found the letter and punishes Mona by slapping and beating. He locked her in a room and she was ignorant about the fact of love letter.

Mishra realistically captures marginality of lower castes and women on screen. Bajrangi is asked to talk about the letter because he is the only boy in his community who can read and write. Hence he is called by Dhaval however Bajrangi reaches to Dhaval as his mother has not reached home since two days. Dhaval orders his goons to beat him but at the end, Santu dares to run away by jumping onto a running train that might take him to *Chauranga*.

Santu is a representative of rebellious spirit who dares to love the daughter of an upper caste landlord. It also highlights the plight of women's life in the patriarchal society. The three women characters in the movie are the worst sufferers of stereotyping of gender roles by Patriarchy. Their suffering represents the universal tale of exploitation and subordination women in domestic and socio-cultural ethos. Caste is the constructed system of Marginality and power politics. It methodically subjugates the marginal and prohibits them from the access of power and resources systematically.

The movie is a breath taking attempt to portray human oppression, in a devastating way. It also voices the patriarchal morality which legitimizes male chauvinism and sexual exploitation of women. It tries to dismantle the binaries of power and powerless, central and marginal.



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