

When the Indian Cinema Rises for the Rest...

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The Indian film is as old as of a century, and has reflected the society. It has dealt much with the Indian history, myth and current affairs. It has also created films upholding universal human values which have reached the international stage to fetch the awards. In spite of it the pan Indian picture in the film seems to have not reflected properly and the true churning of the society for the sake of social reform is not perceived by the Indian film, over the bygone century. The film *Sairat* by Nagraj Manjule is proved to be so sensational that no film, mainly in the local language Marathi, has ever made such a record by all accounts. The reason/s may be different and varied; still it is the fact that, the feudal mentality cannot tolerate rebellious ideas like these.

Key Words: Indian film, feudal society, themes, downtrodden people, tolerance

Introduction

With the influx of the science and technology in the modern times, the society appears to have preferred cinema--- the audio-visual --- not only for the sake of entertainment but also for the shaping of the social mindset. The other arts, I mean fine arts, from the time immemorial, have fabulously reflected the society, and poetry that is literature stands as the excellent one among them for its qualities as Hegel propounds. Literature reflects and also shapes/ corrects the society because a poet has his own ideal world and he shows the ideal way to the society. Literature can never be the outdated phenomenon. It can be reshaped for the sake of art. Many novels and plays have often been the sources of films in the course of time. Literature over the myriad number of centuries, in the course of time; has reflected abundance of social picture. It impartially upholds human interest while reflecting and also shaping/

correcting the society. Cinema may be old enough of one and half a century, the Indian cinema made its view only after 1913.

The Indian society had been fettered in the four *varna* system and it, in that light, still wallows in the mire of social discrimination which has marginalized a large section of the society from all the ways of progress. The ways and sources of wealth are still in the hands of the so-called upper-caste people. Though the constitution of India, after its enforcement in 1950, has brought spectacular change in the life of the down-trodden section of the society, still their identity, in entire sense, is not immersed in the main stream of the society. They are still the “rest” (haves not). If they are educated, they find jobs in the service sector with the help of reservation provisioned in the constitution of India and the uneducated have to take up the jobs of sweepers, muckers, workers, farm-labourers and all kinds of lower level jobs because they are

landless, holding no realties. Then how can they be the owners of the educational institutions, sugar-factories and any kind of firm? They are merely looking wistfully at the owners' class. And if they, with hard work, made efforts to enter the other sectors they are impeded and cut to their size by their 'masters' in the society. Because the feudal mentality of the upper-caste people cannot tolerate such kind of revolt against the traditional system. Consequently, the lower-class person, due to lack of capital, credit and with a sort of inferiority complexes gets discouraged. The mental thralldom of the "rest" needs to be removed from their minds with confidence instilled by their upper-caste counterpart with their magnanimous initiatives taken in this respect. The ego and the discriminatory attitude of the upper-caste people don't allow the progress of the downtrodden classes and the democratic principles, equal opportunities for all and the sense of tolerance have never been fostered by the upper-caste society in India.

There are no filmmakers --- directors, producers or persons in that field--- from the downtrodden classes in India. The capitalistic class of the society--- merchants, traders, industrialists --- have so far controlled the field both at the local and the national level. They even cannot imagine the agonies of untouchables who have been deprived of their basic human rights. How can they hold the credit for finance from the banks and other financial sources?

Since cinema is the most effective media in the society, the Indian films have so far handled variety of themes but not social discrimination that could make upper-caste

members to think for social reconstruction. Is there any Indian film that has promoted inter-caste marriages or raised voice against any kind of social evil? All the films have so far shown the traditional picture where an upper-caste man, mainly the Thakur (master of the village) in the Hindi film cannot tolerate his daughter being in love with the chap from untouchable class. The Thakur, without fail, kills the boy, burns the hut of his parents and threatens them to leave their traditional village. It is not merely reflection of the society what happens in it but also helps to confirm the system. No Thakur, in the film, has ever supported his own daughter's decision to espouse some untouchable boy or has encouraged his villagers to adopt such kind of step. There are hardly any Indian films dealing with social discrimination. And if there are any, have failed on the box-office because the common people don't appreciate and never support social change in the society. However, a film or a piece of literature does not bring immediate change in the society. The change in society comes but with snail's pace.

The purpose of this piece of writing is to throw light on the protest raised in wake of the Marathi film *Sairat* (wild), reaching the 66th Berlin Film Festival, released on 29th of April 2016 by Nagraj Manjule. In fact, his previous film *Fandry* (pig) released in 2014 too had startled and created sense of uneasiness in the traditional mindset of the society. *Sairat* is proved to be sensational because a particular section of the society that is, of course, conservative and upholders of the feudal system, has taken strong objection. Their objection is not for

the theme that is love between a teen-ager boy and a girl and their eloping and getting married but their different castes. And more than that, the lover is from a lower caste-- *koli* (fishermen) -- that is considered to be beneath the caste, the girl belongs to. The members of the caste, the girl belongs to, are all the time seen raising slogans in the voice of liberal thoughts and against social discrimination. Ironically enough, when it is time of their test, they are not ever ready to lose their caste identity and accept the social reform for the egalitarian society. Their arguments, in protest of *Sairat* are funny and ostensibly hypocrite. They argue that the films like *Sairat* may spoil the culture. It may divert attention of small school-going children from their proper business that is studies and career to the unnecessary businesses in life which are supposed to be undertaken only after married life. Love cannot be business of teenagers so on and so are their arguments. It's funny enough that when the TV serials --- each is telecast round the clock and the films which are enough to spoil the culture. These pseudo-culturists are blind and deaf to them. The shoe pinches in the feudal mentality.

In fact these caste Hindus, right from the release of *Fandry*, have been restless because both the girls---- Shalu and Archi--- respectively in *Fandry* and *Sairat* are from an upper caste, not necessarily Brahmin but dominant, rich and boisterous. They become furious whenever some social event brings lower prestige to their caste. The Indian film, mainly the Marathi film has, over the decades, shown the true picture of the society around--- the Patil, the village headman, chairman of sugar factory or a

landlord as the womanizer, philanderer and keeping the lower-caste women as his concubines, attending the *Tamasha* (folk drama) parties and displaying his riches with money for bawdy songs. The so-called watchmen of the so-called culture never did take objection. On the contrary they accepted it as it was matter of pride for them. They are proud of being the member of dominant caste; may be exploiting other castes. They have been the advocates of exploitation against human dignity. These hypocrites, on the stage of public meetings, spit fire at the Brahmin caste for Brahmins being at the top of *varna* system. They are raising voice at its top against Manjule for *Sairat*.

Sairat is, an unprecedentedly ever, the first Marathi film which has received an untold response from every individual from every age group from every stratum of the society in Maharashtra, India. *Sairat* made all its viewers to speak in its language. Resultantly, on the box-office, *Sairat* earned about 100 crores what is unprecedentedly the record in the history of Marathi film. It has reached almost every corner of the world and all the people in the world have applauded it on the artistic and thematic ground, language does not matter. May be, *Sairat* is the best piece of art what has been highly embellished with each of its aspects -- music, songs, scenes, skilful techniques in the camera and dialogues in purely colloquial speech--- still it strikes chord in everybody's heart. It is matter of Nagraj's talents. It makes everybody feel the story of his/her own life. They are not Archi and Parshya, the individual couple that exceptionally falls in love but it is the story

of every teenager naturally gets attracted towards the person of opposite sex and I think, it is needless to mention Sigmund Freud and the other psychoanalysts here.

The focal point, Manjule wants to press here, is the inferiority complexes in the minds of the children like Jambuwant i.e. Jabya in *Fandry* or Parshya in *Sairat*. Jabya is beaten and spitten at with poisonous words sensing his caste and colour by one of his classmates for Jabya looks at Shalu. Jabya is also under tremendous pressure of his caste factor in his mind. He is afraid of the upper-caste people who will certainly crush him and his family may suffer for it. Parshya's father gets threat from Archi's brother prince when Archi and Parshya are found in privacy at the night of prince's birthday. Prince says that he will slay Parshya if their family does not leave the village right the next day. Parshya, at the end, gets honour-killing in *Sairat*.

The caste Hindus are raising voice at its top against Manjule for *Sairat*. In fact an artist, whosoever he is, cannot be against any section of society. Manjule, too, has made it clear in many of his interviews (it rarely happens that a director of a film is the invitee) of every T.V. channels for interview in the wake of some film on T.V. No artist or any piece of art can be the advocate or a propagandist of a section of society and rival of the other. The concern of the pseudo-culturists is not in defense of culture and the shaping of the small children at their tender age but the caste of the girl in the film. Another point what is not acceptable to the shouting throats that is the caste, Nagraj

Manjule belongs to. The feudal mindset of the shouting section is that no man from the downtrodden section should take up business like film and show his talents. He, instead of it, should mind pigs and dogs wallowing in gutter. He is not Manjule, the director alone, but the entire team of actors and all the musicians etc are from the depressed classes. (Archi) or Akash Thosar (Parshya) is from downtrodden classes. They had no degree or diploma of any training school in acting. Nagraj Manjule picked up the teen agers from countryside who even had not thought about such opportunities. The entire field of film and television has been the monopoly of a particular class and caste as well. When the oppressed persons get opportunity, they prove their mettle. It is the main reason of the irk of the protesters shouting against *Sairat* Instead of Manjule, had there been any Parsi, Brahmin, marwadi or Adani, Advani, Lalwani, Gidwani, Bokadiya, Singhaniya to produce a crowd-pulling film and even though breaching all the social, moral, ethical cultural norms, these so-called watchmen of culture would have kept mum. And what have they done so far? This is the feudal mindset in the Indian society that perpetuates discrimination and never tolerates the rise of the rest of the society. *Sairat* is the mile stone in the history of the Indian film. It is the dawn in the lives of the down-trodden classes who have so far been the victims of inferiority complexes. Nagraj, besides a film director, is the rebel not only to make films but also kindle flame in the hearts of the deprived classes.

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