

Representation of Deprived Woman in Indian Cinema

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Abstract

Cinema is the best form of entertainment. At least in cinema people forget their daily routine problems. Indian cinema is a reflection of Indian society. Indian cinema is the best medium of Indians' motivation. They believe that they can do something in their life only on the basis of cinema. Cinema is a popular medium where people can express their opinions. They build the images and it is a strong platform to represent their culture also. The present paper deals with representations of deprived woman in Indian Cinema. These deprived women are a major chunk of the country's population. Their portrayal on screen is crucial. It determines the furtherance of already existing stereotypes in the society. The paper begins with a discussion on the field of deprived film criticism and how mainstream Indian Cinema has restricted itself to defined sketches of women. It also undertakes some glimpses from popular Indian Cinema to analyse the role of women. The role of women always dominated by patriarchal mentality. It further explores how the condition of woman always converted into marginal voices. In conclusion, a debate ensues on whether mainstream Indian cinema has been successful in portraying representation of deprived and exploited women and their different shades in a society which is dominated by the oppressors.

Keywords: Deprived, Woman, Indian Cinema, Marginalized voices, Bollywood, Gender

INTRODUCTION

Indian cinema is working to show the new and positive thinking towards women to the society. When we are thinking about the representation of women in Indian cinema women very rarely get the leading role. Even though they are leading the role they are always depicted as victims or as oppressed. Women were often depicted as one-dimensional characters, either as damsels in distress, virtuous mothers, or seductive temptresses. These portrayals were not just limiting, but also perpetuated stereotypes, giving little room for the exploration of the fullness and diversity of women's experiences. When we think about the role of women in Indian cinema it refers to the societal expectations and responsibilities assigned to women. Responsibilities like supporting men in positions of authority, caring for the family

and self-sacrifice within a hierarchical structure defined by traditional gender norms. The number of female filmmakers is also very less in the Indian film industry. The male producers, directors always confine the picture of women characters into two sides.

Earlier Duragabai Kamat was the first female actress in Indian cinema. She was an Indian Marathi actress, who was the first actress in Indian cinema. She is known as The First Female Actress in Indian Cinema when she acted in film *Mohini Bhasmasur* in 1913 at that time when it was not considered an appropriate profession for girls from respectable families. Later Devika Rani was known as the lady of Indian cinema. She was called the first lady of Indian cinema. She is credited for being one of the earliest personalities who took the position of Indian cinema to global

standards. Her films were mostly tragic romantic dramas that contained social themes.

As far as the Constitution is concerned the Constitution of India guarantees to all Indian women equality (Article 14), no discrimination by the State (Article 15(1), equality of opportunity (Article 16), equal pay for equal work (Article 39(d) and Article 42. Women deserve to be considered as equal as Men. But still also women receive secondary and stereotypical roles. They are bound to traditional roles of wives, lovers, and mothers only. Additionally, women have more value in those roles than in being independent and intelligent. The film industry also portrays women as glorified beauty objects, symbolizing sex appeal and entertainment.

Men are shown the most dominant humans in societies and film industries, while women are confined to being the best homemakers, kind mothers and sisters. On the one hand, women have always been marginalised; on the other hand, there is no end to the plights of marginalised women. Dalit women, one section of the marginalised, have been suffering in the patriarchal society of India. Their representation in Indian cinema is not free from flaws. The representation of Dalit women has been grossly victimised in the history of Indian cinema. As Dalit filmmakers have entered the film industry, the role of Dalit women on the screen has changed. However, it is slow-paced. Based on Gayatri Spivak's theory of 'Can the subaltern speak', the present study attempts to understand and analyse the representation of the marginalised. By qualitatively analysing the films *Achhut Kanya*, *Sujata*, *Ankur*, *Sadgati*, *Bandit Queen*, *Bawandar*, *Chauranga*, *Madam*

Chief Minister the research work tries to navigate the timeline study of the changing roles of marginalised women, Dalit women. Both these movies *Achhut Kanya* and *Sujata* have Dalit women represented as social victims in mainstream cinema. Laxmi, a protagonist in the movie *Ankur* (1974), represented rural Indian caste atrocities with a focus on the lower caste women's sexual exploitation.

REFLECTION OF SOCIETY IN INDIAN CINEMA

Contemporary Indian cinema has attempted to explore taboo subjects like sexuality, infidelity, surrogacy, divorce, live-in relations etc through movies like *Jism* (2003), *Astitva* (2000), *Salaam Namaste* (2005) etc. For ex: *Chak De India* (2007) talks about the conflicts that women face when they decide to excel in the field chosen by them. If the field is sports. The sportswomen in the movie are shown to negotiate these conflicts and not be morally upright by choosing family over career. They are not super-women; they are just normal beings who are able to decide their priorities. This portrayal is no mean achievement of Indian cinema. *Astitva* (2000) has been pitched as a film which explores the unconventional, the desires of a married woman who has long been neglected by her husband. The film is a revelation in the sense that it makes a strong statement about the hypocrisy in society. The film questions the realm of patriarchy which may not necessarily commit violence but manifest domination in other forms like denial of space and freedom and subjugation.

Society needs to accept these forms as patriarchal domination and not just focus on violence. The protagonist Aditi (Tabu) emerges in the end as a strong woman with her own thoughts who rather than seeking

forgiveness from her husband, chooses to walk out and live life on her own terms. Another film which shatters the myth of the patriarchal system as the protector of women's honour is *Mirch Masala* (1987). Patriarchy has been totally broken when the village men who are supposed to guard Sonbai's (Smita Patil) honour, instead agree to trade it for the sake of the village's safety. So, Sonbai has to depend on herself for protection from the subedar. It reinforces the notion of honour being associated with the woman's body.

PLACE OF WOMEN IN INDIAN CINEMA

In this paper, there has been an attempt to examine the relationship between women and Indian cinema. While cinema in India is in itself a diverse strand of expression incorporating mainstream cinema which holds popular appeal that engages with social issues. The explorations in this paper are limited to mainstream/popular Hindi cinema better known as "Bollywood." Indian cinema is seen to exercise widespread influence over people and enjoys mass appeal. Popular cinema and culture derive from each other. Films are believed to be the reflection of the Indian masses. In a very explicit way, cinema has shaped the cultural, social and political values of people of this country. While, the other forms of cinema are also important when it comes to the representation of women, restricting to popular cinema is the core concern of the paper. The interest in films taken by feminists stems from concern about women in cinema. The feminist approach to cinema asks a few suitable questions like, how women are represented on screen? how women's issues are treated in cinema? what does feminism mean to film-makers? how does the feminist agenda manifest on

screen? how is the women character positioned by the male character? and what is the role of women film-makers and women writers in depicting women's issues through cinema. Feminist critique of cinema has helped to view the reality presented by cinema in a different way and thus has contributed significantly to the discipline of media studies as well as film studies.

Indian cinema is different from popular cinema in the way that it takes inspiration for its subjects from real life situations and existing circumstances in the society. Though it may apparently fall in the realm of popular cinema, its approach and treatment of characters is more convincing than popular cinema. It is interesting to examine some films from this brand of cinema which is becoming popular among audiences. This type of cinema combines popular appeal and critical acclaim. Movies like *Black Friday* (2004), *Udaan* (2010), *No One Killed Jessica* (2011), *Once Upon a Time in Mumbai* (2010), *Akrosh* (2010) etc can be listed under this type of cinema. The portrayal of women in these movies which are not aiming to be commercial pot-boilers but want to present a real experience to the audience is a subject of inquiry in this part of the paper. For the purpose of specificity and clarity, Madhur Bhandarkar's films have been selected for analysis. Bhandarkar's cinema is associated with realism. He falls into the brigade of contemporary Hindi film-makers who have filmed real time issues and have been appreciated for the same. He has also been the recipient of many National Film Awards for his work on social issues. His films have dealt with bold and unconventional themes like exploitation of women, cycle of poverty, organized crime, police and govt. corruption, cult of celebrity and journalism, ruthlessness of big business and industrial

espionage. Majority of his films had female protagonists.

The females in Bhandarkar's films are usually shown as bold and empowered women who lead life on their own terms, take their own decisions. They don't conform to social norms and excel in their respective professions. A very positive portrayal of an independent leading lady characterizes the initial reels of his films. However, through the progress of the film midway, there is a downslide in the protagonist's assertion and she slowly get inclined to fit in the society's norms. In the end, she either has to fit in the norm or end up as a sufferer. There is a subtle reinforcement of the very value system that the film critiques at its outset. His films have been disparaged for being too judgmental by giving lessons on morality to the viewer.

In *Satta (2003)*, Bhandarkar tells the story of Anuradha who is a middle-class working woman accidentally entering the murky world of politics. In the beginning, Anuradha is an educated and confident working woman. She give-up her career after marriage. This questions the rationale of empowerment. Why did she agree to sacrifice her career for marrying a budding politician? Again, she enters politics by default and not by choice. She is forced to make a political career for the sake of her family and her husband who is

languishing in prison for a heinous crime committed by him. Thus, politics is not her first choice. There is no sign of protest when her family members ask her to contest elections in place of her husband. There is a mere conformity which goes against Anuradha's independent nature depicted before the marriage takes place. In her political journey, Anuradha is guided by the family's political mentor (Atul Kulkarni). The message conveyed is that women have no knowledge of politics and they are guided in political action by either their family or mentors.

CONCLUSION

Thus, the place of women in Indian cinema is challenge to gender hierarchy as well as opening up new realms for a post-gendered future. The paper in its ensuing sections will build an argument about the portrayal of women in Indian cinema based on various strands of feminist film criticism which have certainly enriched our understanding of women on screen. Indian Cinema proved to be the most accessible and easy source of information, entertainment and education to almost all may be literate-illiterate, rich-poor or men and women. Indian 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.

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