

## Reflection of Deprived and Exploited in Indian Cinema

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### Abstract

Indian cinema has consistently reflected the struggles and injustice faced by deprived and exploited communities, advocating for social change. This study examines the representation of marginalised communities in Indian cinema, from the early years of social realism to contemporary films addressing caste, class, and gender issues. Through the critical analysis of the select films, this research highlights the impact of Indian cinema on social awareness and change, while also discussing the challenges faced by filmmakers in addressing sensitive social issues. The study argues that Indian cinema has played a significant role in amplifying the voices of marginalised communities and advocating for a more equitable society.

**Keywords:** Indian cinema, Marginalised communities, social realism, social change, representation

### Introduction:

Indian films are unquestionably the most –seen movies in the world. Not just talking about the billion- strong audiences in India itself, where 12 million people are said to go to the cinema every day, but of large audiences well beyond the Indian subcontinent and the Diaspora, in such unlikely places as Russia, China, the Middle East, the Far East Egypt, Turkey and Africa. People from very different cultural and social worlds have a great love for Indian popular cinema, and many have been Hindi Films fans for over fifty years.

Indian cinema is world – famous for the staggering amount of films it produces: the number is constantly on the increase, and recent sources estimate that a total output of some 800 films a year are made in different cities including Madras, Bangalore, Calcutta and Hyderabad.

Of this astonishing number, those films made in Bombay, in a seamless blend of Hindi and Urdu, have the widest distribution within India and Internationally. The two sister languages are spoken in six northern states and

understood by over 500 million people on the Indian sub – continent alone – reason enough for Hindi and Urdu to be chosen above the fourteen official Indian languages to become the languages of Indian Popular cinema when sound came to the Indian Silver screen in 1931.

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### Early years of Indian cinema:

#### Indian cinema's - post-independence social and economic landscape:

Indian cinema has long been a powerful medium for storytelling, entertainment, and social commentary. With a rich history spanning over a century, Indian cinema has played a significant role in shaping the country's social and cultural discourse. This research will analyze the impact of Indian cinema on social change and awareness, highlighting its ability to influence attitudes, challenge social norms, and promote empathy and understanding.

Indian cinema, post-independence, played a significant role in reflecting the country's social and economic landscape. Filmmakers like V. Shantaram, Raj Kapoor, and Bimal Roy created movies that addressed pressing issues like poverty, inequality, and corruption. Films like "Do Bigha Zamin" (1953) and "Mother India" (1957) highlighted the struggles of rural communities and the impact of urbanization, while movies like "Awaara" (1951) and "Shri 420" (1955) critiqued social and economic inequality. The cinema also focused on women's empowerment, with films like "Ardhangini" (1959) and "Sujata" (1959) challenging patriarchal norms. Additionally, movies like "Naya Daur" (1957) and "Kala Bazar" (1960) portrayed the impact of industrialization and urbanization on traditional communities. Through these films, Indian cinema provided a platform for social commentary, shaping the country's national identity and influencing social attitudes and behaviors, ultimately contributing to changes in laws and policies related to social and economic issues.

#### **Early Indian films that address social issues such as 'Do Bigha Zamin' (1953) and 'Mother India' (1957):**

"Do Bigha Zamin" (1953) and "Mother India" (1957) are two landmark films in Indian cinema that addressed pressing social issues of their time. Directed by Bimal Roy, "Do Bigha Zamin" is a powerful commentary on the struggles of rural communities. The film tells the story of a poor farmer, Shambhu, who is forced to mortgage his land to a wealthy landlord. As Shambhu struggles to repay the debt, he is faced with the harsh realities of rural poverty, exploitation, and the struggle for survival. The film's portrayal of rural life, poverty, and exploitation was a bold statement on the social and economic realities of post-independence India.

Additionally, directed by Mehboob Khan, "Mother India" is an epic drama that explores the struggles of rural women and the impact of poverty, exploitation, and social inequality. The film tells the story of Radha, a poor rural woman who struggles to raise her children and maintain her dignity in the face of poverty, exploitation, and social oppression. The film's portrayal of Radha's struggles and triumphs is a powerful commentary on the social and economic realities of rural India and the resilience of rural women. "Mother India" was a critical and commercial success, and it remains one of the most iconic and influential films in Indian cinema.

Both "Do Bigha Zamin" and "Mother India" were critically acclaimed and commercially successful, and they played a significant role in shaping the social and cultural discourse of post-independence India. These films helped to raise awareness about the social and economic issues faced by rural communities and women, and they inspired a generation of filmmakers to address these issues in their work. The legacy of these films can be seen in the work of later filmmakers, such as Satyajit Ray and Shyam Benegal, who continued to explore social and economic issues in their films.

#### **New Wave Cinema: A Focus on Social Realism (1970s-1980s):**

The New Wave cinema movement in India, also known as Indian New Wave or Parallel Cinema, emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a significant departure from the traditional Bollywood film format. Characterized by social realism, low-budget productions, and experimentation with form and style, this movement focused on realistic, socially conscious storytelling. Influenced by international art cinema movements and Indian literature, notable filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, and Shyam Benegal created films that tackled real-life social

issues, such as poverty, inequality, and social injustice. With a regional focus, many New Wave films were made in languages like Bengali, Malayalam, and Kannada, highlighting local cultures and issues. The movement's legacy includes influencing Indian cinema, gaining international recognition, and contributing to a national conversation about social issues, ultimately paving the way for future generations of filmmakers to explore socially conscious themes.

Films like "Samskara" (1970), "Ankur" (1974), and "Nishant" (1975) were pivotal in addressing social issues like caste, class, and exploitation in India. These films, directed by Girish Karnad, Shyam Benegal, and Shyam Benegal respectively, not only reflected the harsh realities of Indian society but also sparked crucial conversations about social change. "Samskara" critiqued the caste system, exposing the hypocrisy and moral decay within the Brahmin community. "Ankur" highlighted the exploitation of rural women, shedding light on the oppressive structures that perpetuate inequality. "Nishant" tackled the issue of class exploitation, portraying the brutal suppression of peasants by a corrupt and oppressive landlord. Through these films, the directors employed powerful storytelling, vivid imagery, and nuanced character development to humanize the struggles of marginalized communities, thus inspiring empathy and outrage in audiences. By addressing these pressing social issues, these films played a significant role in shaping India's social and cultural discourse, influencing a generation of filmmakers and audiences alike.

### **Contemporary Indian Cinema: Continuing the Legacy (1990s-present):**

Contemporary Indian cinema has continued the legacy of socially conscious filmmaking, addressing pressing issues and promoting empathy and understanding. Since the 1990s,

films have tackled a wide range of social issues, including Dalit representation, tribal rights, women's empowerment, and class struggles. Films like "Fandry" (2013) and "Sairat" (2016) have shed light on the struggles of Dalit communities, while "Lagaan" (2001) and "Newton" (2017) have highlighted the complexities of tribal life. Women-centric films like "Queen" (2013) and "Pink" (2016) have promoted women's empowerment and independence, while films like "Slumdog Millionaire" (2008) and "The Lunchbox" (2013) have explored the stark contrasts between wealth and poverty in India. Through these films, contemporary Indian cinema has demonstrated its commitment to socially conscious storytelling, continuing the legacy of pioneers like Satyajit Ray and Shyam Benegal. By tackling tough social issues and promoting empathy and understanding, contemporary Indian cinema has played a significant role in shaping the country's social and cultural discourse.

### **Contemporary Indian films that address social issues:**

#### **Dalit Representation:**

- "Fandry" (2013): Directed by Nagraj Manjule, this film sheds light on the struggles of a young Dalit boy and his family, exposing the harsh realities of caste-based oppression.
- "Sairat" (2016): Also directed by Nagraj Manjule, this film tells the tragic love story of a Dalit boy and an upper-caste girl, highlighting the entrenched caste system and its devastating consequences.

#### **Tribal Representation:**

- "Lagaan" (2001): Directed by Ashutosh Gowariker, this film is set in colonial India and tells the story of a group of villagers, including tribals, who challenge the British to a game of cricket to avoid paying taxes.

- "Newton" (2017): Directed by Amit V. Masurkar, this film follows a young government clerk who is sent to conduct elections in a Maoist-controlled tribal area, highlighting the struggles and complexities of tribal life.

#### **Women's Empowerment:**

- "Queen" (2013): Directed by Vikas Bahl, this film tells the story of a young woman who embarks on a solo journey of self-discovery after her fiancé calls off their wedding, promoting women's empowerment and independence.
- "Pink" (2016): Directed by Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, this film explores the issues of consent, patriarchy, and women's rights, highlighting the struggles faced by women in Indian society.

#### **Class Struggles:**

- "Slumdog Millionaire" (2008): Directed by Danny Boyle, this film tells the story of a young boy from the slums of Mumbai who becomes a contestant on the Indian version of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?", highlighting the stark contrasts between wealth and poverty in India.
- "The Lunchbox" (2013): Directed by Ritesh Batra, this film explores the unlikely friendship between an accountant and a housewife, highlighting the struggles of middle-class life in Mumbai.

These films demonstrate the growing trend of socially conscious cinema in India, shedding light on pressing issues and promoting empathy, understanding, and social change.

#### **Impacts and Challenges:**

##### **Analysis of the impact of Indian cinema on social change and awareness:**

One of the most significant contributions of Indian cinema to social change has been its ability to raise awareness about social issues.

Films like "Achhut Kanya" (1936) and "Sujata" (1959) addressed the issue of untouchability, while films like "Mother India" (1957) and "Do Bigha Zamin" (1953) highlighted the struggles of rural communities. These films not only reflected the harsh realities of Indian society but also sparked crucial conversations about social change. By shedding light on social issues, Indian cinema has played a significant role in promoting awareness and empathy among audiences.

Indian cinema has also been instrumental in challenging social norms and promoting progressive values. Films like "Sholay" (1975) and "Deewar" (1975) challenged traditional notions of masculinity, while films like "Fire" (1996) and "Pink" (2016) promoted women's empowerment and challenged patriarchal norms. These films have not only reflected the changing values of Indian society but have also contributed to the evolution of social norms. By promoting progressive values and challenging traditional norms, Indian cinema has played a significant role in shaping the country's social and cultural discourse.

Furthermore, Indian cinema has been a powerful tool for social activism, inspiring audiences to take action and promoting social change. Films like "Lagaan" (2001) and "Rang De Basanti" (2006) inspired audiences to challenge authority and promote social justice. These films not only reflected the aspirations and frustrations of Indian youth but also provided a platform for social commentary and activism. By inspiring audiences to take action, Indian cinema has played a significant role in promoting social change and awareness.

##### **Discussion of challenges faced by filmmakers in addressing social issues, including censorship and controversy:**

Filmmakers in India face numerous challenges when addressing social issues in their work. One of the most significant hurdles is



censorship, as the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) has the power to censor films that it deems objectionable or inflammatory. This can limit the ability of filmmakers to tackle sensitive social issues, and can often result in the watering down of important messages. Additionally, filmmakers may face controversy and backlash from various groups, including religious or caste organizations, who may take offense to the content of the film. This can lead to protests, boycotts, and even violence, making it difficult for filmmakers to showcase their work. Furthermore, the fear of repercussions, including physical harm or damage to their reputation, can also deter filmmakers from addressing social issues. Despite these challenges, many filmmakers continue to tackle social issues in their work, using their platform to raise awareness and spark conversations about important social issues.

**Examples of films that faced challenges and controversy include:**

- "Fire" (1996), which was criticized for its portrayal of lesbian relationships.
- "Water" (2005), which was criticized for its portrayal of the treatment of widows in India.
- "Uda Punjab" (2016), which was criticized for its portrayal of the drug trade in Punjab.
- "Padmaavat" (2018), which was criticized for its portrayal of the legend of Rani Padmavati.

**Reflection on the importance of continued representation and advocacy for social change in Indian cinema:**

The importance of continued representation and advocacy for social change in Indian cinema cannot be overstated. As a powerful medium for storytelling and social commentary, Indian cinema has the ability to shape attitudes, challenge social norms, and promote empathy and understanding.

Representation matters, and Indian cinema has a responsibility to showcase the diversity and complexity of Indian society. By continuing to represent marginalized communities and tell their stories, Indian cinema can help to amplify their voices and promote social justice.

Advocacy for social change is also crucial, as Indian cinema has the power to inspire and mobilize audiences to take action. By tackling tough social issues and promoting progressive values, Indian cinema can contribute to a more equitable and just society.

Moreover, continued representation and advocacy for social change in Indian cinema can have a ripple effect, influencing not only Indian society but also global conversations about social justice.

In conclusion, the importance of continued representation and advocacy for social change in Indian cinema is paramount. By continuing to tell the stories of marginalized communities and promoting progressive values, Indian cinema can play a vital role in shaping a more just and equitable society.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Indian cinema has had a profound impact on social change and awareness in India. Through its ability to raise awareness about social issues, challenge social norms, and promote progressive values, Indian cinema has played a significant role in shaping the country's social and cultural discourse. As a powerful medium for storytelling and social commentary, Indian cinema continues to inspire audiences, promote social change, and contribute to the evolution of Indian society.

Indian cinema has consistently reflected the struggles and hardships faced by deprived and exploited communities in India. Indian cinema has also provided a platform for marginalized voices, enabling filmmakers to tell stories that

reflect the experiences and struggles of deprived and exploited communities.

Overall, Indian cinema has played a significant role in raising awareness about social issues, promoting empathy and understanding, and advocating for social change.

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