

Unconventional Resonance: Situating Dalits in Indian Cinema

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Abstract:

Tribal/dalit literature is actually a search for identity, an exposure of the unrecorded exploitation by the social stratification and the confrontation of tribal folk with societal norms. It traces the history of tribal movements in India and focuses on the demands and issues that remained unheard, unnoticed and unsettled by the established conjectural and opinionated idiom. Over past decades, Indian cinema has witnessed a momentous metamorphosis in the way women are depicted through films. The silver screen portrays the tribal folk especially tribal women as the most subjugated people in the caste hierarchy, resulting in numerous forms of cultural, societal and political elimination, chiefly from social space, property rights and knowledge sources. Indian cinema with its regional opulence makes a staid effort to interpret the socio-economic and political aspects of the utilization of the tribal women and strives to give them voice. The paper is an unrest attempt to trace the tribal women's plight and seek the measures through which a shift from 'sympathy to empathy' can be made to reinforce them.

Key Words: *Dalit, womenfolk, resilience, resistance, emancipation*

Motivation is one of the most imperative causes in determining successful second-language acquisition as well as to comprehend and experience the correct core of literature. Silver screen is an integral part of students' lives and it makes perfect sense to bring them into the language and literature classroom. Subaltern literature is actually a search for identity, an exposure of the unrecorded exploitation by the social stratification and the confrontation of marginal folk with societal norms. It traces the history of subaltern movements in India and focuses on the demands and issues that remained unheard, unnoticed and unsettled by the established conjectural and opinionated idiom. Over past decades, Indian cinema has witnessed a momentous metamorphosis in the way women are depicted through films. The silver screen portrays the conquered women as the most subjugated people in the caste hierarchy, resulting in numerous forms of social, cultural and political elimination, chiefly from social space, property rights and knowledge sources. Indian cinema with its regional opulence makes a staid effort to interpret the socio-economic and political aspects of the utilization of the marginal women and strives to give voice to the unvoiced.

The empowerment and advancement of the tribal/dalit female-folk in India require suitable surroundings where they can raise their voices against the discrimination and the gender-

biasness which they have been facing and confronting since long back in the patriarchal societal setting. “Untouchables are persons of a discrete set of low castes, excluded on account of their extreme collective impurity with particular relations with higher beings, both human and divine. The compassionate fortification is indispensable to uplift the despondent status of tribal folk.” Indian cinema proves to be a pivotal medium through which the societal outlook, insight and norms can be altered or reshaped. Hence a change has been noticed in Indian cinema as it has shifted the lens from mere entertainment to the severe social issues. Marginalization and its upshot has entered the range of the silver screen and it is playing its crucial role by portraying the position and predicament of tribal women in Indian societal framework and assisting the vulnerable, isolated and ill-fated to live a shackle free, liberated life.

India in general, is distinguished by sharp gender discrepancies, though the condition of women differs noticeably by regional facets but almost all the tribal societies are patriarchal in nature and women may have freedom and articulacy in their own world. Otherwise tribal women suffer profoundly on every frontier of society because gender role is the fruit of social construction. Even the average family structure in India is patrilocal and patrilineal and patriarchal. Hence, the social framework delivers a culture which promote preeminence of male containment of female and tribal women are doubly victimized, by the socially and the family.

Caste is a primeval social body that encompasses daily life, the workings of which continues as a long-winded mystery. Despite continuous analysis and resistance by different thinkers and literatures in the olden and medieval times, the caste system has constantly deepened the social partition through its diverse expressions. Marginality is a perception that has been in particular eminent in sociological theories that spotlight on the interaction of social groups. From W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), to Bell Hooks (1984), to Henri Tajfel (1974) social theorists describe a phenomenon where a group or groups of people is barred from accessing supremacy in any of its many forms like social, institutional, political or economic within a society. It is argued that understanding marginalized folks with the practice and consequence of marginalization is centrally imperative when it comes to analyzing social issues because of the fact that people at the margins have an extensive sense of the larger group in which they exist. Because of their position they are forced to understand mainstream society as well as its suburbs, and recurrently surge between the two. It is like to be in the fringe is to be component of the entire but outside the main body.

Indian cinema is one of the most campaigning and progressive forces in Indian society. Through the influential mass media like Cinema, the subjects of social justice have been projected. The representation of subsidiary voices in Indian cinema has been noticed as a crucial subject of study. The issue of caste stratification and its effects was rarely a high-flying issue In Indian cinema and infrequently dealt with the gravity and exigency it deserves. It was noticed in 1934 with the release of Nitin Bose’s *Chandidas* and Shantaram’s *Dharmatma* (1935) and *Achhut Kannya* (1936) and the consequences of caste system was brought to the forefront. Caste bigotry and class fences stop to tie the marital bond between two childhood friends, Kasturi, a Dalit girl and a Brahmin youth Pratap who flourish in love. In next to no time, Kasturi is

enforced into a loveless union with a man having similar caste. But, coincidentally, they meet again at the village fair. Kasturi's husband, engorged by resentment and distrust, assaults Pratap at the railway level crossing, where he is gatekeeper. While the two men are occupied in a ferocious battle heedless of a fast approaching train, Kasturi, in an effort to save them, runs over and dies. Till today, *Sujata* (1959) is considered to have the status of a classic Indian film. Its mechanisms of pleasure, blend of pragmatism and idealism, and the compassionate vision that it embodies indicate an authoritative, notwithstanding fading currently in the symbolic universe of the 1950s. *Sujata* is a 'dalit' orphan who lost her parents in the epidemic of cholera. She has been looked after and nurtured by a Brahmin woman and her husband; she was unaware of her birth root and comes to know about her actual identity much later. But with the passage of time, she comprehends the reason which makes her mother to call her as 'she is like my daughter' and she shuts herself up into a shield of self-imposed quietness as a protest to the disloyalty done by her foster-mother and obviously through silence she expresses her rebellious voice.

In the post independence era along with *Sujata*, films like Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* and *Nishant* dealt with the theme of subjugation and affliction by the elite sect in society. The strain and distress of a 'dalit' woman is portrayed by Lakshmi, the protagonist and brilliantly played by Shabana Azmi in *Ankur*. The movie captures the malice of Indian caste system, predominantly evident in the countryside. *Manthan* (1976) depicts the same issue of the impact of the caste division in the lives of the rural folk. All these movies primarily center on the marginal characters, their confrontations with society, their resilience and their surrenders. The struggle of the underprivileged, the traditional fortunate middle-class sect, the growing rural capitalists and the new-fangled accommodators- all are mapped out with a opinionated realization and also is manifested in later films like *Aarohan* (1982) and *Mandi* (1983).

Prakash Jha's *Damul* (1985) explores boldly and flawlessly the capitalist politics in the village areas of rural India. A whole group of 'dalit' people living in a *dalit basti* is compelled to pay off the compulsory repayment of debts which they had never taken for. The protagonist of the movie Sanjeevana, a blameless from 'dalit' segment is sentenced to be hanged to death as a verdict due to reflecting his wisdom to the landlord's evil ways. Mr Jha, later made *Aarakshan* in 2011 which supposed to be a socio-political play focusing on the strong argument turning around reservation system based on castes in government jobs and educational organizations in India. Other Indian movies like *Lagaan*, *Bandit Queen*, *Bawandar*, *Sadgati*, *Shudra: The Rising Chauranga*, *Manjhi: The Mountain Man*, *Chauranga*, *Tarpan*, *Gangajal*, *Masaan*, *Deeksha*, *Paar*, *Samar* and many more regional movies like *Thyagbhoomi*, *Nandanar*, *Kabali*, *Kaala*, *Unnal Mudium Thambi*, *Devarmagan*, *Mannukkul Vairam*, *Ore Oru Gramathile*, *Kakparsh*, *Jait re Jait*, *Sairat*, *Harijan*, *Papilio Buddha*, *Chomana Dudi* etc are made with the same issue of caste and the consequences of it in the lives of the marginal rural people. Along with men, tribal/dalit women are mostly shown as the everlasting preys of the socio-cultural segregation and oppression. They have been humiliated by high caste males since long back and films like *Gauri*, *Devi*, *Mirch Masala*, *Phoolan Devi*, *Rudali* etc unfold the depressing truth that Indian women are always treated like passive and submissive; the victims of caste system and in fact

caste is supreme reality of Indian society which affects all walks of life here. The atrocious truth of caste, its aggression and its underneath circumstances of fallacy, unawareness and social psychosis have seldom been addressed. The process of modernization and industrialization has not been able to uproot the caste system and lessen its impact upon Indian society.

The social movements undertaken by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Dr.B. R. Ambedkar, and Periyar E. V Ramasamy - a segment of the Indian society such as 'dalits', tribal and 'shudras' who are not known by mass, hence historically kept away from the main stream. Probably the brahminical scripture, since the times of the *Vedas*, has been influencing societal framework as well as the religious, theoretical, cultural set-up, literary creations and a range of art forms. But this caste system has created a mind set over the passage of time affecting the subaltern folks and subaltern women who have been living in a ring within rings of various layers of tortures, excluded from societal, intellectual and political advantages. In Indian cinema the body of the subaltern female presents a stereotype contrast to the body of the privileged castes and it aims to reflect a true reflection of marginalization, oppression and torture. It is indispensable to trace the subaltern folk/women's plight through Indian cinema, feel with them and seek the measures through which a shift from 'sympathy to empathy' can be made to reinforce the ignored sect of the society.

Reference:

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