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THE ODYSSEY OF PORTRAYAL



WOMAN IN INDIAN CINEMA



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Abstract

This study is an effort to understand the various stereotypical and novel images portrayed by women in Indian Cinema. All vehicles of media play a significant role in the life of an individual but the socio-cultural force that cinema holds is the strongest. Various media theories have been formulated which promulgate the idea that what is reflected in media, particularly cinema is a mirror image of the society. This study traces imagery as portrayed in Indian Cinema and points out works where the mould has been broken to go beyond the skin deep beauty and explore the inner self. The conclusion highlights the tangential relations between media, state and religion and its cascading effects on portrayal in cinema.

Keywords

Indian cinema, Portrayal of woman,
Bollywood, Commercial cinema, Feminism

The issues of media, identity and gender are a constant source of discourse amongst academicians, thinkers as well as the media industry. These issues have become integral to the discipline of media studies with regular research in this domain. Media is popular and full of diversity as a source of mass consumption. All media content consequentially has its influence on constructing ideas and generating debate (Schnell, 2001). The media scene in India has expanded in the recent times as there is a surplus of media choices available to the audiences (Brosius & Butcher, 1999). The structure and the system have also undergone a sea change with privatisation and globalisation. Huge corporations from overseas with their own profit motives own media houses. It has been able to transcend borders and look at issues more holistically rather than in the context of nationalistic perspective. Hence, these developments are bound to affect the manner in which media scrutinises and covers any issue – gender being an important one. Women are also major consumers of mass media and thus the way they are represented in media coverage is a major concern for the discipline (Byerly & Ross, 2008). Several international forums have recognised the ramifications of such a transformed media environment on women's access to media, their role in the media structure and the presentation of their perspective in media coverage (Hamburger, 2003; Lamche, 1985).

In this study, an attempt has been made to examine the changing portrayal of women in Hindi cinema. While cinema in India is in itself a diverse strand of expression incorporating mainstream cinema which holds popular appeal, art/parallel cinema that engages with social issues, middle cinema and regional language cinema. The explorations in this study are limited to mainstream/popular Hindi cinema better known as 'Bollywood'¹.

From the victimhood of women as reflected in the yester years daughter-in-law under the invincible Lalita Pawar as the evil conniving mother-in law, to the arc glass belly shaking divas of the 1970s to the silly girl being punished with a kiss in the 1990s, and yet the up to date Jiah Khan imagery as portrayed in *Nishabd* (Ram Gopal Verma, 2007) with Amitabh Bachchan, with shades of *Astitva* (Jhamu Sughand, 2000), *Mrityudand* (Prakash Jha, 1997), *Damini* (Rajkumar Santoshi, 1993) and *Arth* (old) (Mahesh Bhatt, 1982), the Indian cinema is replete with a typical formula treatment where the cinematic aperture views women as a body to be possessed. The carnal taming of the body signify one's lordship of the woman, in essence actually eliminating the thinking, soulful imagery of the woman as reflected in a few works like Madhur Bhandarkar's *Page 3* (2005) (Not withstanding that the director himself was accused of casting couch aspersions).

The cinema of Bollywood is seen to exercise widespread influence over people and enjoy mass appeal. Popular cinema and culture derive from each other. Films are believed to be the opium of the Indian masses as people rely on this medium to help them escape to a world of fantasy. In very explicit ways, cinema seems to shape the cultural, social and political values of people of this country. The representation of women in popular cinema witnesses many shades for analysis (Poudeh & Shirvani, 2008; Choi, 2011; Benegal & Gandhi, 1980).

The odyssey begins

In the beginning, the women who choose the most unconventional profession were scorned upon as prostitutes by the society or tagged as women who are easily available (Campbell, 2006). Though in the later years Nargis Dutt played a more exigent and substantial role in *Mother India* (Mehboob Khan, 1952), but the basis and thought of portrayal remained the same. The ideal women were depicted to be subservient and introvert, dependent and fragile always clad in a 'saree'. The stereotypical role as played by the most was by Nargis in *Mother India*.

As time passed away when the women in celluloid were usually just a part of a tale in relation to maintain the sexual angle. Audience were assumed to have a belief of visualising a tale of a hero and a heroine in a cinema. The scene during the 70's witnessed that the vamps of that era like Bindu, Helen, Arunairani were the first heroines to engage into smoking, drinking and enjoy pre-martial sex on screen.

People drew pleasure in seeing the act of sex or song and dance sequences of the vamps although maintaining a sacrosanct distance from the vamp and a subtle approval of the modernising of the heroines like Asha Parekh and Tanuja. Sharmila Tagore became the first woman to wear a bikini in the movie *An Evening in Paris* (Shakti Samanta, 1967). Satyajit Ray shot a scene for his film *Prawtidandi* (Satyajit Ray, 1970) in which a woman wears a swim suit.

Suddenly from the jeans and 'salwar kameez' clad heroin, the entry of Mumtaz, Teena Munim and Zeenat Aman changed the dressing style altogether. Zeenat's onscreen kiss in the movie *Heera Panna* (Dev Anand, 1973) and also her ever popular song with guitar in hand *Chura Liya he dil ne* (Nasir Hussain, 1973) in *Yaado Ki Baraat* was the entry of a new look but the imagery remained the same. In the 80's the women were taken a bit critically in their role in celluloid and it was reflected in the movies like *Umrao Jaan* (Muzaffar Ali, 1981) and *Paakizah* (Kamal Amrohi, 1972).

The woman of the 1980s with titles like *Zakhmi Aurat* (Avtar Bhogal, 1988) starring Dimple Kapadia released in 1988 was the beginning of a new era. The roles that showed her as a protagonist increased in frequency but the stereotype did not change. With the era of 90's when woman became more substantial, Seema Biswas proves this through her act in the movie *Bandit Queen* (Shekhar Kapoor, 1996). She was not a homely woman, whose only duty is to serve her family and exchange pleasures with the husband, but she was a fighter, a piece of courage, a symbol of power who when wronged could win battles.

With the inception of shooting and horse riding in movies like *Janbaaz* (Feroz Khan, 1986), the story of a woman was seen challenging the power of a man. This period witnessed many such performances that happened to enlighten women to take an upgraded position in the society reflected by cinema. Later in the 21st century, the role of women became more elastic and has been taken into the platform of world cinemas. Movies such as *Astitva* (Mahesh Manjrekar, 2000), *Lajja* (Rajkumar Santoshi, 2001), *Chandani Bar*, (Madhur Bhandarkar, 2001), *Page 3* (Madhur Bhandarkar, 2005), *No One Killed Jessica* (Raj Kumar Gupta, 2011), *Kahaani* (Sujoy Ghosh, 2012) are responsible for this upliftment. Not only bollywood, but every regional industry has taken the step to emancipate the status and role of women in the silver screen. The journey started way back and has faced various turbulence, still the women has the power of accepting all the odds and made the way to be 'Heroines' on the silver screen.

Work, life and women

There exists a cadaver of feminist film making in Hindi cinema, still the role that women play has been more or less conform to the values upheld by the Indian society. Women in Bollywood have been uni-dimensional characters who are sometimes good or worst or sometimes white and black. There were no shades to experiment with. This dichotomy was reinforced in popular films which makes a divergence between the Heroines and the vamp, the wife and the other woman.

Cinema has also been reflected from a different perspective and that is religion and mythology. Women have essayed roles of various goddesses and then they were treated as a supreme human who has no faults and is being held in a high esteem. The ideas of loyalty and compliance to the husband, Hindi cinema considerably institutionalised patriarchal values (Tere, 2012).

Films like *Dahej* (V. Shantaram, 1950), *Gauri* (A. Bhimsingh, 1968), *Devi* (V. Madhusudan Rao, 1970), *Biwi ho to Aisi* (J.K. Bihari, 1988), *Pati*

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Parmeshwar (Manu Desai, 1958) depicted woman as passive submissive wives as perfect figures and martyrs for their own families. How real are the women characters in Hindi films? This is something to debate about because morals, ethics, principles, beliefs have dominated the framework in which these films are placed. Thus, women rather than being depicted as normal human beings are elevated to a higher position of being ideal who can commit no wrong. Their grievances, desires, ambitions, feelings, perspectives are completely missing from the scene. They are really portrayed as the 'other human' because they are shown as not belonging to the real world life. For example *Abhimaan* (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1973) begins with premise of the wife (Jaya Bachchan) being more talented than the husband (Amitabh Bachchan). This in itself is a boldness of the stereotype. However, the film depreciates from then on when the wife gives up her thriving musical career for satisfying the husband's ego terminating to a conservative end that demands loyalty to traditional values of marriage and motherhood.

Bollywood heroines have mostly been homely, satisfied to stay within the boundaries of a family even after passing the institution of marriage. Although educated and empowered, keen to carve their own path, but never gets the chance to open up and do something which will belittle the achievement of the men.

How real are the women characters in Hindi films? Where are the women building careers and working professionally? They have been almost silenced. Raza (2003) talks about how Hindi cinema in the seventies had women in different working roles. Jaya Bachchan as a knife sharpener in *Zanjeer* (Prakash Mehra, 1973) and a singer in *Abhimaan* (Hrishikesh Mukherjee, 1973); Hema Malini as a village Tonga (horse carriage) driver in *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) and the general manager of a company in *Trishul* (Yash Chopra, 1978); Rakhee as corporate secretary in *Trishul* and a doctor in *Kala Pathar* (Yash Chopra, 1979); Vidya Sinha who works in a private firm in *Chhoti Si Baat* (Basu chatterjee, 1975).

The working woman vanished from the popular blockbusters of the nineties which demoted Indian women to the boundary of the home. The concern boils down to the personification of women who stay next door, walk on the street, spend time working in office and return home after a tiring day. Where are these women in Hindi films? In an era of information overload, it is not too fundamental to expect some social awareness from the medium called Cinema. All this while, there has been discussion about media's responsibility to the society. So why cinema should be engaged only with creating leisure for its audience and not make them think critically? Popular oratory culture

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needs to be challenged and cinema can do it effectively if it exhibits some sensitivity to gender issues. This is because Hindi films now enjoy a huge international market in many South Asian and Western countries (Kripalani, 2005). Thereby, operating in a larger framework like this calls for a portrayal of women which is not only accurate but also just to the cause of women empowerment. Cinema is an art which has no obligation in gender biasness.

The focus on body contours

It is a past story that the narratives of Hindi cinema are always male dominated. The themes have been created from the perspective of the men. The heroine is always a secondary character to the hero. The role of women becomes a side part while the central position belongs to the hero. The situation is more or less a centralised one. The heroine is devoid of any independent role. Her role is charted out in the context of any male character which is central to the script. It may be the hero, the villain, the father, the boss, an elderly male figure etc. This kind of circumstances limits the role of women in providing fascination, respite and entertainment. For example, the character of Priyanka Chopra in the movie *Agneepath* (Karan Malhotra, 2012) does not have any effective resemblance to the story, it was pushed into the script just to add up a love angle for the hero, otherwise the commercial aspect of the film may get weaken a bit.

A female character in mainstream Hindi cinema is always used for the sexual appeal it creates. A fine figure, with explosive get up, the imagery if seldom is removed from the sexual desires that it is suppose to allure. The role has shifted only slightly with time, whereas there was high emphasis on a pelvic in the 1950s with Meena Kumari and Asha Parekh, it turned to a volumptuous figure with Sri Devi and Madhuri and then transferred attention to the long legs and the sharp curves in belly with Shilpa Shetty and Depika Padukone – every recopies – bound to create a sensuous ambience thoroughly enjoyed by the men.

In the action genre popularised by the effect of Akshay Kumar, Sunny Deol and Sunil Shetty; the heroines are abruptly positioned in the romantic track as a diversion for the audience from droning spell of violence. It is unusual for our industry to witness a woman in a supreme role, which will lead the story forward.

There is a minor diversion in American Cinema. Although the heroines in their industry get the position of being a prominent part of the film, at times, they take the liberty in leading the film. An example is Angelina Jolie in a romantic, sensuous mood in *Salt* (Noyce, 2010). There she was

a fighter, a lady of strength and courage and the entire story was based on her vision and actions. Julia Roberts from *Pretty Woman* (Garry Marshall, 1990) to *Stepmom* (Chris Columbus, 1998) steals the lead of a protagonist. The plot is woman centric and at times she is the cynosure of the entire script in 2014 released *Gone Girl* (David Fincher, 2014) and *Before I go to Sleep* (Rowan Joffe, 2014) but unfortunately even then whether it is the demand of the script in both the above flicks or the aspect of freedom in media and culture but somehow the underlying statement has been the carnal possession and demonstration of the female body. The aspect of lordship and ownership does not leave the protagonist at any point of the story. The story about the woman revolves only around her love for the man. In case of *Gone Girl* the treacherous woven plot illuminates the extreme madness of the lead but again although highlighted as a successful career girl; in the end it leaves a bitter taste for her.

On the other hand, Bollywood has dished out such female characters that the audience has almost been tamed into accepting women in certain kinds of roles. The women is compliant, domestic, honourable, noble, kind or may be ideal, on the other hand the depiction of a vamp comes as a sharp contrast. Even when she is shown as a career girl like Sonali Bendre as doctor in *Hum Saath Saath Hai* (Suraj Barjatya, 1999), it remains as a mere reference with no coverage or relevance of her work life. If the woman is errant, reckless, courageous, hostile, and most of the times ambitious and agitated and may have a complete negative shades imbibed. This depiction of the female characters is the clearly dichotomous. Strangely Bollywood refuses to take the middle path and treat women characters with shades of grey. Women are depicted as either good or bad and not as per the situation people generally face in their real life.

Whereas on the one hand the reel is said to sell dreams, on the other hand, it is said to depict reality as a mirror of the society but such depictions on the reel make it different and artificial. The blockbuster hit romantic comedy *Biwi No.1* by David Dhawan (1999) has the wife played by Krishma Kapoor is shown to sacrifice her successful career to experience domesticated ecstasy with her husband played by Salman Khan. When the husband drifts apart from her, then it is the other woman essayed by Sushmita Sen who is an ultra new is blamed for the same and is demonised all through the film as a bad woman. The title of the film depicts that the wife wins her husband at the end and brings him back from the vamp.

Conclusively, this highlights the victory of traditionalism over modernism. They are not just an object of one's personal possession. The

hero as the saviour and the heroine as the victim is also a routine script in the mainstream Hindi cinema. The heroine is reflected as weak and in dismay every time and is rescued by the hero. It is reliving of the Cinderella era where the prince in silver armour saves the heroine. Take the case as vice versa and there is bound to witness a zero ticket selling session in the cinema halls. Scenes after scenes the same stylisation the hero saves the heroine and that is the greatest achievement of the film especially if it happens in the climax.

In the recent year *Ra-one* (Anubhav Sinha, 2011) in which we find that the hero is carrying the heroine in his arms. Are women still confined within the arms of the men? If not, then why are the reels depicting it? Directors feel their story might be lashed out by the audience if there is a scope to give a centralise power to the women or the heroine. It still seems a big risk to associate intellect diversity in the role of women.

Heroines still represent commodification and are the eye candy for entertainment (Ahmed, 2013). Commodification as a dictionary meaning means to turn into or treat as commodity. Here the reference holds the same intent of using the female body as commodity to add to commercial value of the motion picture. The interesting aspect is that any producer who risks money in making a commercial flick, type casts the heroine in a stereotypical role. Not risking the profits least it irks the common man of the front row. So the game plan remains to make everyone happy with the status-quo.

The thought provoking diva

In Indian Cinema, there are few directors who have stifled the untouched features and cast women in roles depicting a strong protagonist. The monotony of stereotype has been shattered by them and they dare to explore and expand subject concentrating on women. Contemporary films like *No one killed Jessica* (Raj Kumar Gupta, 2011), *Cheeni Kum* (R. Balki, 2007), *Chameli* (Sudhir Mishra, 2004), *Ishqiya* (Abhishek Chaubey, 2010), *Paa* (R. Balki, 2009), *Dirty Picture* (Milan Luthria, 2011) and *Kahaani* (Sujoy Ghosh, 2012), comes as a complete overhaul of the imagery given to female lead by the Bollywood industry until now. The female lead pervades all the spaces that are traditional holds for male counterparts. Whether it is her visits to the local Police Station or her staying in a cheap hotel where until now the audience are enthralled by entry of the woman other than a whore as one may assume in such areas. To top it the director, Sujoy Ghosh has introduced the protagonist as a female in her late pregnancy, where she looks all the more vulnerable. Despite this the director subtly introduces romance between the

protagonist and the lead male support actor played by Parambrata Chatterjee as policeman.

When Bollywood is breaking the uniformity, then the Bengali film industry also indulge itself into it. Filmmakers like Late Rituporno Ghosh, who from the very beginning placed woman in the supreme role in his films like *Unishe April* (Rituparno Ghosh, 1994), *Dahaan* (Rituporno Ghosh, 1997), *Ashuk* (Rituporno Ghosh, 1999) and Aparna Sen who made a classic in her debut *36 Chowrongee Lane*, (Aparna Sen, 1981) and later films like *Paromitar Akdin* (Aparna Sen, 2000), *Mr. and Mrs. Iyer* (Aparna Sen, 2002). These films have forced the creators to take a new look at the variety of roles essayed by the women and introspect into the kind of stereotype which was being disseminate earlier. The credit for this change also goes to those 'heroines' who faced the challenge in depicting bold characters on screen. In the recent contemporary era heroines like Vidya Balan, Konkona Sen Sharma has led this change of direction. Others like Jaya Bachchan, Smita Patil, Shabana Azmi, Nandita Das have also bagged such roles and their effort and willingness has changed the angle of the camera from the women's body to her identity.

To quote film scholar and writer Soma Chatterjee (2010), "in Hindi cinema the role of women is very much like a decorative item. It stays so that the scene looks good and has a sort of an attraction. They are very much curbed within the traditional and patriarchal framework". The period of 90's witnessed the emergence of various family dramas in Bollywood. The films made a blockbuster hit, but yet again they highlighted the patriarchal values of Indian society. Directors like Sooraj Barjatya, Aditya Chopra and Karan Johar were the driving force behind such genres. The films also had a connect with those Non-resident Indian community representing migrated people residing outside, so that their nostalgia for everything Indian is felt, as if staying in touch with their roots. In the genre of chamber drama though the heroines bagged the role of being a leading lady, the protagonist, with many responsibilities, yet somewhere the experimentation with their roles leaves a lot to be desired. Some examples are the characters played by Kajol in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hein* (Karan Johar, 1998), Madhuri Dixit in *Hum Apke Hein Kaun* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994), *Dil to Pagaal Hai* (Yash Chopra, 1997) and Jaya Bachchan in *Kabhi Khushi Kabhi Gham* (Karan Johar, 2001). While women were essaying important characters in the above films, still their identities were absent from the main text of the film. Most of such kind of films laid down the conditions for ideal womanhood in a stereotypical way.

Chakravorty (2002) reveals the relationship between patriarchal values and popular mainstream cinemas and how does it gets reinforced through this

medium. In the film *Hum Apke Hai kaun* (Sooraj Barjatya, 1994) in which two sisters *Nisha* and *Pooja* were said to be a scientist and a painter respectively, but on the contrary they were never seen in their work place. They mostly occupy the house and the kitchen. Even though they are modern and have a broad outlook, still they submit to the desires of their family and are eventually domesticated. This was an indication of an era which witnessed educated and economically independent women as insensitive, thus concluding that they can only achieve success in playing nurturing roles. A woman in a film who is said to be a heroine is looked as a character that can cook, help in domestic works, can speak few romantic lines and can show certain appealing signs of attraction.

In *Hum Saath Saath Hain*, Sonali Bendre was a doctor by profession, but no scene was filmed her role as a doctor. Instead she is a timid, traditional kind of a girl who dutifully obeys her in-laws and places herself under their shadow. In such films the homely role of the women was reinforced by the use of *mangalsutra*, vermillion sindoor,² and convoluted wedding rituals. Karan Johar's debut *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998) is a tale of an enticing young chap, *Rahul* (Sharukh Khan) who likes to go around with girls who wear short dresses and carry the attitude of being seductive, but on the contrary he prefers to marry homely girl. Men have a dual choice and intentionally want to enjoy both the personality of women. His best friend *Anjali* (Kajol) was a happy go lucky unconventional girl who falls for *Rahul* and tries to turn into a stereotypical make-up wearing saree clad beautiful girl. Under the veils of opulence, this film again reveals the mode of patriarchy. A man can marry twice, but the woman has to stick with one. The audience like to make the women suffer onscreen. The more they cry, the more the emotional impact. This is not really a onetime watch and that's why the film still has a huge viewership whenever it comes on television.

In war movies, the women have been kept waiting for years for their husbands to return. Every time their screen presence is supported by some sad songs, or some flashback of good times. Heroines are the character who also evokes sympathy from the hero. It so happens that the hero will fall in love with her, but sometimes may not really carry it till the end of marriage. Heroines are also put to evoke sympathy from the hero. The softness, calmness suits them and there it happens that the director mingles her with something which will just rouse some sentiments and the Indians are the master of viewing such tragedies.

In the movie *Humaara Dil Aapke Pass Hai* (Satish Kaushik, 2000) Aishwarya Rai is a rape victim. She finds sympathy and an attachment of

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love in Anil Kapoor, who accepts her as a woman of true spirit after the atrocious incident took place in her life. There is indeed a happy ending to the story, when Anil Kapoor after hearing about the rumours spreading concerning him with Aishwarya proposes a marriage. This can also be seen as a sign of showing sympathy towards the female lead.

In Hindi cinema the script always has a sympathetic appeal towards the heroine. It is important that such depiction find justification in the power structures that governs the values and morals of Indian society. These power structures do not impart any sort of agency to women. There is always an intention to portray woman as ideal stemming from the social and cultural context in which Indian culture reside. This ideal allows only two categories of women characters on screen—the good that is to be romanticised and the bad that is to be demonised (Datta, 2000). Still, the stories and script cannot break the myth of feminine beauty embodied by fair skin, curvaceous figure and glamorous make-up. Nandita Das, one of the finest actresses of the country has expressed the difficulty she had to face for her dark skin tone. The fight of the skin tone is still an ongoing affair.

Women in realistic cinema

Realistic cinema or as we say parallel cinema³ is a genre where stories are mostly adopted from real life situation. Parallel cinema or New Wave in cinema was a blanket term coined by critics for a group of French filmmakers of the late 1950s and 1960s, influenced by Italian Neo-realism and classical Hollywood cinema. And the Indian New Wave, commonly known in India as Art Cinema or Parallel Cinema as an alternative to the mainstream commercial cinema, is a specific movement in Indian cinema, known for its serious content, realism and naturalism, with a keen eye on the socio-political climate of the times. It has got a different style of film making. As it doesn't really have that hurry to rise abruptly in the popularity meter, it tries to reflect the characters in a much wider spectrum. Parallel cinema, by their nature, is different from the usual mainstream movies. They are different either in their storyline, style of narration, direction or photography, editing, commitment, to name a few. In short, they are off the beaten track. Sometimes these films provoke the audience to think even after they come out of the theatres (Thounaojam, 2014).

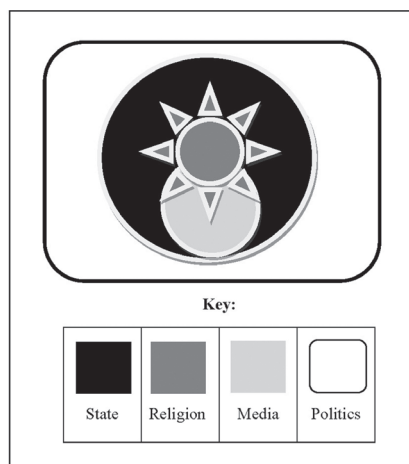
The roles of the heroines have been given a broader space and a new life. The real situations that a woman faces are conceptualised on screen. An example is the movie *Queen* (Vikas Bahl, 2014); it has achieved both critical and commercial success. When we are talking about realistic cinema,

then regional films also gets a priority into it. The Bengal film industry has been shining with films which are recognised all over the world at different festivals. This industry also changed the perspective of making a film. The contemporary age cinema conceptualises an experimental style of film making has got due recognition. This genre has mostly been within the periphery of independent directors and low budget movies, but still the cinema is been made which is breaking all the odds and negativity that was once a huge obstacle in the realm of making films. This experimental genre has given women an independent space on screen. They could showcase their talent, their emotions and nothing gets hidden under the shadow of men. As the acceptance of realistic cinema has gone up, then a hope prevails that this genre will not really undermine the presence of heroines in celluloid. They will and should get the best opportunity to emancipate their own identity.

Conclusion

It can be said in the right perspective that one may like or dislike cinema but one cannot hide or isolate himself from the all pervading impact that cinema has on an individual's psyche consciously or unconsciously. Cinema might be a form of an entertainment, but to be more accurate its a medium for 'Infotainment'. Society remains male dominated, and that is hard to change as long as surnames of the husbands are adopted post marriage and property moves in the male line. Although Supreme Court Legislations are diluting the age old norms of ancestral inheritance and Hindu Marriage Act still relegating second grade citizenship granted to women, may not go without three dimensional changes. There are three aspects of this study.

Fig 1: Model describing interrelationship of media with state-religion and politics (Source: Author).



According to the above model the State as an overpowering agency covers the entire gamut of existence of a being. It decides how and under what laws and to a large extent the environment in which we grow up and function. But there exists within the allowed pervasiveness of the state another powerful agency, the religion which on a number of occasions exerts pressure on the state for a desired response. The state may or may not frame laws as per the religion but it certainly can't ignore it. This game of pacifying the state dominion continues through the realm of politics that each exerts on the other.

Media which is subservient to the state as well as the religion functions within the frames set by both entities but part of the media which delves on themes not related to religion or law but based more on human inter-relationships matrix function within the ambit of state but outside of the religion. Whereas religious in scriptures give a stable dignified yet subdued image of the woman as reflected by the likes of Sita, there are facets like the incarnation of Durga by the synergy of the male gods, that may show a powerful feminine entity. Nevertheless, the woman within the dominion of religion is endowed with dignity and respect, subject to her subjugation to her male lord. Traditionally, even the epics Ramayana states how Kaikaye tricked Dushratha into sending Ram as she was led by the love of her son Bharat and harboured ambition to make him the crowned king. The depiction of ambition is again not for self but for a son.

Mahabharata is replete with instances whether it is Draupadi who is harassed in court, or Shikhandi who is a eunuch and therefore no man worthy of valour can attack him. But here very much like Ramayana, the wish of the woman is given prominence—in marriage or when Ram follows the golden deer as per the wish of Sita. Therefore, religion although places a high moral ground for the lady to follow, depicts her as a dependent entity her place remains strong because of the good mannered males around her so despite the subjugation of the image of womanhood, the respect for self is not lost as long as she shadows her husband.

The part which is outside the purview of the religion is the area where social politics dominates, and inter-caste or inter religious sensibilities dwell, this aspect is also the one from where challenges arise for both the state and the religion but always the body of the script has the silent approval of the majority (spiral of Silence) (Noelle, 1993). It is in this domain that the female protagonist dwells. *Queen* (Vikas Behl, 2014) who does not follow the traditional subjugation in the end is an example, *Mrityudand* (Prakash Jha, 1997), *Paroma* (Aparna Sen, 1984), *Arth* (old) (Mahesh Bhatt, 1982),

Astitva (Mahesh Manjrekar, 2000) are all such motion pictures. But these are rare box office collections. In the commercial cult of mainstream cinema, achievements of women are a rarity, and her recognition has been a cause to worry. Even the contemporary cinema in the era of women empowerment reflects her as a zero figure aspiring curvaceous long legged lass, reducing her to an eye candy stereotype. The social mindset demands a man who is a money churning machine, and a woman who is the whole sole responsible of the household. Gender roles are sharply divided therefore even when an equal presence on screen is attempted the stereotypic shadows loom large. Any attempt at assaulting the male superiority of the nation breaks and attempts at establishing parallel structure gets thumbs down. Strangely, *Kahaani* stands apart, inspite of the female pervading the male spaces; it gathered applause, either due to ingenuity of the plot, or the silhouetted love of the protagonist who avenges the death of her husband.

Cinema has changed, it is changing more, but we wait for a day when women are not neglected and made to stand on the fringes. Their depiction as white and black is replaced by shades of grey which actually mark the personality level of an individual in their actual setting. Their status can be withheld from degradation if regional cinema sensitive to women issues and replete with stories of her heroism gets the mainstream pace. Cinema has to create a separate and independent space for Indian women not outside but within the functional society, herein the role of state comes into prominence. With stringent laws for protection and armed with Domestic Violence Act⁴, we as a society are moving towards accepting challenging roles of women. Roles of women as politicians, as CID agents, as professionals but cinema makers have to attempt a conscious makeover of the change of the image of the macho man into a sensitive, nurturing and even household helping individual.

It is for the cinema makers to adapt and modify the age-old beaten mould of a man and recast it into a humane individual contemporary in approach. Cinema constructs images, now it's time to construct the images of not only the women but simultaneously also change the image of the man and thereby bring cardinal reshaping of the society. With time the society will adopt these new images as the real actors, the real character and the real inspiration.

Notes

- 1 The commercial cinema of India which makes exclusively Hindi language films is called Bollywood, based in Mumbai.
- 2 Sindoor or vermilion applied first time during marriage rituals in certain communities in India. Another ritual generally followed by wearing of a thread put around the neck of the

wife by the husband is Mangalsutra made of gold / beads.

- 3 Parallel Cinema designates an alternate cinema which is away from the melodrama of the commercial films and attempted a different treatment of commercially viable films.
- 4 Domestic violence and emotional abuse are behaviors used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Violence can be criminal and includes physical assault (hitting, pushing, shoving, etc.), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking. Although emotional, psychological and financial abuse are not criminal behaviors, they are forms of abuse and can lead to criminal violence (Retrieved from Domesticviolence.org).

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VISUAL FRAMING IN INDIAN PRINT MEDIA



A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION



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Abstract

This study investigates the manner in which Indian newspapers use visual frames to communicate news. Using the example of a news event covered by four leading English language newspapers published from Delhi, it analyses how each newspaper had used different frames in respect of visual data available from the same common pool of photographs. The study points to the scope for further research on visual framing of news in the Indian print media through correlation with the relevant editorial points of view.

Keywords

Visual framing, Indian print media, Delhi Metro, Newspapers visuals, Prime Minister.

On 6th September 2015, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation extended its metro services from ‘Badarpur’ on the borders of Delhi and Haryana to ‘Faridabad’ in the State of Haryana. All mainstream English newspapers published from Delhi covered the event, with textual as well as visual narratives. The Prime Minister of India travelled by taking the inaugural Metro-ride on way to the launch-event at Faridabad. It was widely reported that the Prime Minister had taken a surprise last minute decision to travel by Metro rather than flying on a helicopter which was previously scheduled. It was also reported that he boarded the Metro at the ‘Janpath’ Station and travelled with the other commuters till Badarpur (the last station of the route in Delhi), beyond which the Metro line was to be inaugurated. According to news reports, the Badarpur-Faridabad leg was travelled by the Prime Minister accompanied only by his entourage. It was also reported that on the return journey, Prime Minister boarded the train from Faridabad along with other commuters. Since Prime Ministers in India do not ordinarily travel by Metro, it makes for interesting news in itself.

A Prime Ministerial tour or travel is a widely covered event and it is not unreasonable to assume that the travel by the Metro (newsworthy in itself) would have been similarly covered. Indeed, there were releases pertaining to the event on the Press Information Bureau’s (PIB) website¹, in which visual coverage from the time the Prime Minister arrives at the Metro Station before embarking on the journey has been released. It is, therefore, possible to reasonably assume that the photographer(s) may have been clicking away from the time the Prime Minister boarded through his journey to Faridabad and the return journey. Some of the visuals were, therefore, expected to be depicting the Prime Minister alone, for instance as reported between the Badarpur-Faridabad leg of the route; as indeed some others were expected to be depicting the Prime Minister in the company of his official entourage, or in the company of other dignitaries associated with the function, or with other commuters as they boarded the Metro at various halting points – as a matter of fact, PIB had released as many as 19 photographs relating to the event on 6th September, 2015².

For public office holders, or more specifically politicians, visual portrayals ‘convey cues and attributes that can affect the perceived credibility, truthfulness and suitability’ (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015). Images that the audience associates with political personalities depend on how they present themselves, and how they are represented by the media. Certain visual cues of representation by media can influence the way audience perceive the subject – nonverbal cues (like expression), formal cues of representation (like camera angle) and contextual cues (like others in the image) (Kepplinger, 2010). In

this short case study, the visual coverage of the event by the Delhi editions of four leading English mainstream newspapers selected for their circulation figures and editorial influence. This is intended to serve as a pointer to the scope for more exhaustive research to ascertain the range of meanings they would associate with these visual images as against the subjectivity of the researcher's own perception.

Locating visual framing in media literature

In terms of literature focused on 'framing', media is typically said to frame issues "through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration" (Tankard et al., 1991). Individual frames at the level of audience help the reader or audience actively to make sense and identify with the news; and media frames at the level of the news are characteristic of the news itself (Entman, 1991). A functional interpretation could be that framing merely facilitates journalists to package the diverse elements of news effectively for the audience (Gitlin, 1980). The media effects interpretation would be that framing can systematically influence the audience's understanding of events presented by the media (Scheufele, 1999).

In media literature, there are studies on visuals as instruments in shaping public opinion (Grabe & Bucy, 2009); and there is evidence that, visual images may reinforce pervasive prejudice and discrimination (Heurer, McClure & Puhl, 2011); that, news photographs may communicate stereotypes (Fahmy, 2004); that 'implicit visual proposition' may be the discursive form through which stereotypes are subtly activated and maintained in society (Abraham, 2003). It has also been argued that unverbaised meanings embedded in pictures are particularly elusive (Messaris & Abraham, 2001).

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The notion of using visual frames draws from the belief that there are 'hidden meanings' underlying a wide range of images in the media (Barthes, 2000). Indeed, visual frames are considered to be more powerful than textual frames, because they can both obscure issues as well as overwhelm facts (Wischmann, 1987). Visual frames have been analysed in terms of obvious themes as well as embedded ideological meanings, because framing can be understood both as dependent on various factors (Scheufele, 1999) as well as an independent variable influencing audience frames (Entman, 1993). Visual images and their meanings can be interpreted based on similarity, and unless morphed or stage managed, can represent reality being closer than text in this respect. However, visuals also lack the explanatory accuracy that texts possess; prone as they are to a wider range of interpretations than words; in relation to causal explanations for example.

In comparison to analysis of framing in textual narratives, the selection of a photograph to the exclusion of other available photographs, the foregrounding or backgrounding of subjects and objects, the focus, the blurring, the composition, the lighting and the contrast, the close up or the use of wide angles are all relevant to visual images; and serve a purpose similar to what choice of words, turns of phrases, punctuations, verse or prose do to the meanings conveyed by textual narratives in print media. Meanings should be ascertained and embedded meanings should be deciphered from the visual, which is challenging, because one of the handicaps with visual images is that imagining what has been included or excluded from the media frame may be highly subjective when viewed from the audience frame.

Visual narratives in sample newspapers

The visual narratives in the Delhi edition of The Times of India (TOI), Hindustan Times (HT), The Hindu and The Indian Express, which are four of the leading English language newspapers published from Delhi, have been selected as sample.

Visual narratives in The Times of India

The Times of India carried the picture of the Prime Minister inside the Metro rail on its front page of 7th September, 2015. The main news item pertaining to the inaugural event – “Vikas Comes to F’bad riding on the Metro” was spread across two columns which was carried in the inside page (Times City) along with a photograph of the large crowd gathered at the inauguration. There was a two columned news item on the Chief Minister of Delhi not being invited to the inauguration at Faridabad. There was yet another three-column news story on how it was one; small trip for PM; but ‘a big-ticket moment’ for all his fellow passengers on that metro trip – this news on his trip was accompanied by yet another photograph of the Prime Minister presenting him interacting with some young passengers sitting next to him.

The coverage of the Prime Ministerial visit as well as the controversy relating to the Chief Minister having not been invited, both given extensive textual coverage, indicates to the broadly ‘neutral stand’ of TOI on the controversy. TOI’s visual coverage of the Prime Minister’s Metro-ride is shown below. Figure 1 (image) shows the Prime Minister talking to a small group of young girls travelling on the Metro. Figure 2 (image) carried on an inside page by the newspaper shows the Prime Minister with several commuters sitting alongside him as well as on the opposite seats.

[illegible]

The news headline that was published on the front page of The Hindu, in the lower half of the broadsheet with the headline “No Kejriwal at Metro inauguration”. The story led with the news that the Chief Minister of Delhi had not been invited to the inaugural function, which is a newsworthy issue in itself. The news story was spread across four columns in which the visual

coverage consisted of a picture of the Prime Minister. Leading with the news of the Chief Minister of Delhi not being present at the inauguration – in preference to the news about the Prime Minister travelling to inaugurate the Metro service is, quite obviously, an ‘editorial discretion’. The picture is attributed to the news agency Press Trust of India (PTI). The relevant portion of the news coverage by The Hindu, photographed from a hard copy of the newspaper, is shown below (Figure 3, image).

Fig 3: Coverage by The Hindu, Delhi/NCR



Visual narratives in The Indian Express

The Indian Express³, in a front page news item, carried the photograph (Figure 4, image) of the Prime Minister interacting with other passengers in Metro. The story of Prime Minister’s travel to the site of the function to inaugurate the Metro service was anchored with, perhaps even more newsworthy and topical issue of the demand for “One Rank One Pension” that was being agitated by Ex-Servicemen at the time and Prime Minister’s announcement on that demand. Again, it is well within the editorial prerogative not to have led with the Prime Minister’s travel to the function for launching the Metro

service between Delhi and Faridabad. The photograph carried by the Indian Express (Figure 4, image) is the same that was carried by the Times of India, showing the Prime Minister interacting with other commuters, he is seen holding some official papers; and the picture has been attributed to PTI; and therefore, we may presume that the photograph carried by the Times of India has also been released by the news agency.

Fig 4: Coverage by The Indian Express, Delhi/NCR

PM CLEARS THE AIR ON ONE RANK-ONE PENSION

‘OROP also for those who retire early’

Don't be misled, panel proposed to sort out issues is not a pay commission: Modi to armed forces

SARAH HAFEEZ
FARIDABAD, SEPTEMBER 6

CLEARING THE air a day after his government announced implementation of the one rank-one pension scheme for armed forces personnel, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Sunday he will ensure that OROP benefits also apply to those who retire prematurely.

Welcoming the statement, protesting ex-servicemen said they will end their hunger strike but continue their agitation till all their demands are accepted by the government.

Speaking at a rally in Faridabad after inaugurating the Delhi-Faridabad Metro corridor, Modi urged the armed forces not to be "misled" because a commission proposed on the "com-

plex" issue was not going to be a pay commission. "This commission will be there to iron out shortcomings, if any, to see if small changes are needed."

"Jawans have to retire after 15-17 years of service. A few people think they will not get OROP, they are misleading you by calling it VRS (voluntary retirement scheme)... If anybody gets OROP, jawans will be the first... Those injured, those who had to compulsorily leave, they will get OROP. Can a Prime Minister who loves the armed forces even think of depriving such people of OROP benefits," he said.

Taking a swipe at the Congress, Modi said "those who did nothing for 40-42 years, do they have any right to ask questions, do they have any right to mislead the country... your sin

COMMISSION PROPOSED ON THE "COM-

plex" issue was not going to be a pay commission. "This commission will be there to iron out shortcomings, if any, to see if small changes are needed."



The Prime Minister takes the new Metro from Delhi to Faridabad Sunday. PTI

The newspaper also carried yet another picture (Figure 5) in the inside pages, showing the Prime Minister interacting with some young girls travelling by the same Metro train – coincidentally, it is the same photograph, which had been carried on the front page by the Times of India.

Fig 5: Image source: Press Information Bureau



The Hindustan Times⁴ published the following photograph (Figure 6, image) on its front page, which also shows the Prime Minister interacting with a few fellow passengers, and is attributed to Press Information Bureau (PIB), the official website of Government's information machinery. Indeed, it is the same photograph that has been credited to news agency Press Trust of India (PTI) by The Indian Express.

Fig 6: Image Source: Press Information Bureau



On an inside page (page 2), there were three other photographs of the event carried by The Hindustan Times – one showing the Prime Minister moving on the platform of the Metro station in the company of Haryana's Chief Minister and other dignitaries. Another photograph is that of passengers enjoying the first Metro ride, and the third photograph given below, which is being considered for the study, is that of the Prime Minister interacting with some young fellow passengers (Figure 7); and happens to be the same photograph that has been carried by the Times of India on its front page and by The Indian Express on its inside page.

Fig 6: Image source: Press Information Bureau



Note that all photographs used by the sample of newspapers are acknowledged to be from only two sources being the Press Trust of India and the Press Information Bureau. Access to PTI, photo services is through subscription, and PIB website is accessible without barriers to all registered newspapers. The sample consists of the leading English language 'National' newspapers, which have access to both sources. Their access to PTI is borne out by the fact that all carry, from time to time, news dispatches attributed to that agency. While PIB can be reasonably expected to be responsible for the image management on behalf of the Government, that there is photo sharing between PIB and PTI can be observed by the fact that the same photograph has been attributed to PIB by The Hindustan Times, and to PTI by The Indian Express.

As a matter of fact, it is found that PIB had released as many as 19 photographs⁵ covering various aspects of the event, from the time the Prime Minister had set out for the Metro ride, to his return journey. Therefore, the sample of photographs for this study is common and accessible to all newspapers. We can safely rule out any bias on the part of in-house photo-journalists belonging to any newspaper, in so far as the visuals being studied. As there is simply no scope for any bias in production or release of the pictures by the same news agency, and the PIB photo releases may or may not be used by a newspaper, it can be fairly concluded that there is no source bias in respect of the visuals. Therefore, it can be reasonably assumed, further, that the visuals published by every newspaper are a conscious editorial preference from among the 19 photographs 'uploaded' by PIB.

Analysing visual 'framing'

To the readers of The Times of India, the newspaper may convey that the passengers travelling with the Prime Minister could approach the Prime Minister and interact with him. By giving the headline of a 'big-ticket moment', the newspaper also conveys that it was a historic event for those who were travelling with the Prime Minister. No photo credits were mentioned in the newspaper, even though, it was found from the use of the same photograph in other newspapers that the photograph carried on the front page in which the Prime Minister is seen with a group of young girls⁶ and the photograph showing him seated alongside as well as opposite to other commuters⁷, were actually released by the wire agency, the Press Information Bureau, and used by PTI as well.

It is also obvious from the coverage by The Indian Express, The

As a matter of fact, it is found that PIB had released as many as 19 photographs covering various aspects of the event, from the time the Prime Minister had set out for the Metro ride, to his return journey. Therefore, the sample of photographs for this study is common and accessible to all newspapers.

Hindustan Times and the Times of India, that the editorial desks in the three newspapers chose to use the visuals showing the Prime Minister interacting with fellow commuters; even though they may or may not have consciously decided to not use the PTI release of the photograph showing the lonely figure of the Prime Minister travelling alone⁸, used by The Hindu. Considering that the PIB had uploaded all pictures and the news agency had released the picture in question to all subscribers, even the other three newspapers had the option of using the visual used by The Hindu.

The comparison of the visual coverage in the four national newspapers shows how the same event has been differently presented by The Hindu, from the other three which show the Prime Minister interacting with other commuters on the Metro. The visual coverage depicting other commuters, shown interacting with him, could be said to be favourable and positive for the Prime Minister. Whether or not a visual image dominated by the subject (as in the instant case, the Prime Minister does as the sole subject in the photograph) can be positive would depend on the context and setting of the occasion. For the sake of argument, let us imagine a picture published depicting the Prime Minister at his work desk in South Block, or showing him on a stroll in the lawns of his official residence. Both instances are liable to be interpreted differently from the picture under scrutiny, because the context-driven-expectation of the audience differs.

In the two imaginary instances, it is naturally to expect that the Prime Minister has moments to himself in solitude, if not privacy. The picture carried by visual used by The Hindu, can also be similarly interpreted in the expectation of the Prime Minister being insulated from other commuters, for reasons of security. However, the cues in the two instances are different – in the former instances, the expectation of solitude is value-neutral, and no adverse inference needs to be drawn. After all, there would be many other moments when the Prime Minister would be meeting visitors to his office or guests at his residence. The expectation of solitude on a Metro-ride is not similarly value-neutral, and if at all, it has connotations other than that of insulation for reasons of security. And such connotations may be more in the negative perceptive range – distance, coldness, aloofness if not arrogance, and the VIP culture of special privilege of travelling alone etc.

Another difference between the two contexts is that of non-routine nature of the event. The Prime Minister can be expected to be in his office or at his residence as a matter of routine, even though he may be occasionally depicted alone in a photograph taken at his work desk or at his residential lawns. On the contrary, there is no such audience expectation of the Prime

Minister taking another Metro-ride routinely, because the Metro is not the normal mode of transport of the Prime Minister of India. Thirdly, politicians represent the people and even though there is nothing adverse vis-a-vis the Prime Minister, in the picture used by *The Hindu*, for a political personality not being shown in the company of people can certainly not be perceived to be positive.

A public representative, holding a public office in a democracy, is expected to be associated with warmth, people-friendly appearance, accessibility, and is expected-to-be at ease among people. The visual used by *The Hindu*, does not tell its readers – in contrast with what the other newspapers convey to their respective readers – that the Prime Minister did actually interact with the other commuters during the Metro-ride. The lonely picture of the Prime Minister, captured at a moment when he was yet to mingle with fellow passengers, conveys a forlorn image against the people-friendly, affable and accessible frames conveyed by *The Times of India*, *The Indian Express* and *The Hindustan Times*.

It is not important whether, or not, the three newspapers consciously intended that a positive frame of the Prime Minister be conveyed to its readers, that may not have been the case. On the other hand, it can be said that there was definitely no such intention on the part of *The Hindustan Times* to project the Prime Minister favourably, in which, for instance, there was a ‘teaser’, just below the photograph of Prime Minister interacting with fellow passengers on the front page, for Page 2 news, “PM’s faux pas at rally.” The related news with a headline “Modi faux pas leaves people surprised at rally” mentions that the Prime Minister had announced a project (extension of the Metro service to Ballabhgarh) on which work had already commenced and in that sense was not a new project.

The significant factor is that a picture, which depicts other commuters on the Metro-ride, does show the holder of a public office, an elected representative of people, in a natural and to-be-expected frame. In other words, even if readers of the three newspapers were not to read any positive meanings in the visual narrative carried by each, they would not read any negative meanings into the visuals carried. On the contrary, the picture of the Prime Minister used by *The Hindu*, showing no commuters alongside, or in the background or in interaction with him, conveys a rather stern image of someone not seen in the company of people, as aloof, distanced from people, cold, inaccessible, and an archetypical VIP – each a negative frame for a public representative. Again, while the pictures used in the other three newspapers foreground the Prime Minister in the picture frame, *The Hindu*

uses the picture in which the empty seats in front and the windowpane of the Metro coach are in the foreground, with the Prime Minister receded to the background, making the element of solitude and remoteness even more pronounced.

Since the scope of this study is limited, we need not examine the ideological reasons behind visual framing, or the editorial bias, or examine the agenda setting and gate keeping effort, if any. We are merely trying to understand the comparative use of visual framing by newspapers, without going into the causality thereof, which in itself could be a valuable and interesting insight. Consequently, even though the limitations of comparing the visual coverage, without going into the textual narratives of accompanying news-stories are obvious; no recourse is being taken to the analysis of textual narratives in the stories carried by the sample newspapers.

Let us limit ourselves to the academic questions – what possible meanings could the reader of *The Hindu*, coming across the picture, associate with Prime Minister's Metro-ride? And, again, could the preference for an otherwise aesthetically pleasing picture, leaving out use of any visual of the Prime Minister having interacted with fellow commuters on way, be said to have exhibited editorial bias to any extent? One possible embedded meaning is that the absence of other commuters in the picture may be pointing to the fact that the Metro coach may have been got vacated for the Prime Ministerial travel – a virtual red rag for the middle classes, who may be allergic to any preferential treatment being extended to 'VIPs'. Another possible interpretation by the reader of *The Hindu* could be that since the Metro service was to be launched from Faridabad, it had not been thrown open for the general public until after the launch; and, hence, commuters were not to be expected in the photograph. Owing to the use of common pool of sources of these photographs from the PIB, already discussed, we cannot attribute photojournalistic-bias in the use of the photograph by *The Hindu* as no in-house photojournalist has been credited with the photograph. The possibility, therefore, remains that advertently, or otherwise, the editorial desk could have visually framed the news of the Prime Minister's Metro-ride differently from the other newspapers. To study the same, let us look at the captions carried by each newspaper along with the visuals used.

Captions used

The caption in *The Hindu* read, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi took the Metro from Janpath for the inauguration of the Badarpur-Faridabad Line on Sunday". This caption is direct and matter of fact, and also news-worthy, given that it is not usual for a Prime Minister in India to travel by the Metro.

The Metro-ride is in itself the news, and therefore, the picture refers to the event of the Metro journey as it took place. The subject being the Prime Minister, the caption that the subject 'took the Metro' is not out of place with the picture itself; and what is more, it is a truthful supplement to what was shown in the frame – the Prime Minister, the Metro coach, and the seats. However, when contrasted with the captions used by the other newspapers, the use of the words, 'took the Metro' is found to be the substitute used by The Hindu for the words, 'interacting with co-passengers' – words, the newspaper could not have used because of the sheer incongruity that may have struck with a lonely Prime Minister on board the Metro. For the record, the actual caption used on the PIB website was: "The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi travelling by the Delhi Metro to the inauguration ceremony of the Badarpur-Faridabad Metro Line on September 06, 2015".⁹

The photograph credited to PTI was captioned The by Indian Express as "Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacting with co-passengers while travelling by Delhi Metro to Faridabad on Sunday". The use of the words "interacting with co-passengers" is contrasting with the words "took the Metro" used by The Hindu. The caption used by The Hindustan Times, "Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with co-passengers while travelling by Metro from Janpath to Faridabad", also uses the 'peg' of 'interaction'. The caption used by The Times of India for one of its photographs was "Modi took passengers and Metro officials by surprise as earlier he was scheduled to take a chopper to Faridabad". The photograph accompanying The Times of India's main story carried on the second page was captioned: "Sharing their Mann ki Baat.....", alluding to a radio programme by the same name, introduced by Prime Minister after assuming Office, to reach out to people on issues of salience for the nation from his perspective. Again, for the record, the captions released by PIB on its website in respect of both photographs used by the newspapers, other than The Hindu, were identical: "The Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi interacting with the co-passengers while travelling by the Delhi Metro to Faridabad on September 06, 2015." Thus, in contrast to The Hindu, the captions used in each of the other newspapers specifically points to the interaction between commuters and the Prime Minister.

Conclusion

To conclude, to the reader of The Times of India, the newspaper may convey that passengers travelling on the Metro could approach Prime Minister, who was their co-passenger, and interact with him. The reader may decipher that the Prime Minister is popular, warm and accessible; and passengers

were happy to interact with him, as evident from the smiles on the faces of women seated by the side of the Prime Minister. This gives a human interest 'frame' to the trip. The Prime Minister is seen holding an official file, but the attention he is shown paying to the fellow passengers projects an air of informality. And, the files and official papers also succeed in conveying that the Prime Minister means business even while travelling, that is to say, he comes across as someone who does not waste any waking moment of his tenure in office – another positive frame.

The Indian Express conveys to the reader a frame of people-friendly, warm and accessible Prime Minister, who wants to experience the trip as any other common passenger would. By using a photograph showing the Prime Minister interacting with passengers shown sitting alongside him and also in the row of seats opposite to the one occupied by the Prime Minister, Indian Express, it may be concluded, has also used a positive 'frame'.

Similar to The Indian Express and The Times of India, The Hindustan Times shows the easy access allowed to passengers to interact with the Prime Minister, even though, in reality, the security arrangements could not be relaxed. To add to the positive 'frames' depicting the Prime Minister, the presence of youth in photographs used by the three newspapers, indicates a 'connect' between the youth and the Prime Minister. The sense of informality projected by the visual is also positive. Obviously, such positive frames are not the creation of the newspapers in question, rather because of the PIB releases, which the editors could just as well have chosen to ignore, as The Hindu did.

In comparison, how would a reader of The Hindu look at the coverage of the same event by the newspaper? The visual coverage by The Hindu consists of a picture of the Prime Minister sitting all alone on a seat on the Metro. There is no other human presence in the picture. The figure of the Prime Minister is seemingly officious, and makes for little human interest. It is quite possible that the photograph released by PIB/PTI had been taken during the Badarpur-Faridabad lap of the ride, when there were no other commuters, except the entourage of the Prime Minister. Even so, the selection of the photograph for use by The Hindu, given available alternative options, does point to the possibility of editorial 'framing'. Unveiling the motivation for using a positive, negative or neutral frame by any newspaper is beyond the immediate scope of the present analysis; and, there are obviously other tools and techniques of analysis available to media researchers for a comprehensive analysis. For the limited purpose of this preliminary investigation, suffice it say that the meanings conveyed through

The Indian Express conveys to the reader a frame of people-friendly, warm and accessible Prime Minister, who wants to experience the trip as any other common passenger would.

the visuals may be subtle or blatant, depending on whether or not the benefit of doubt is to be credited to the ‘desk’.

Notes

- 1 PM inaugurates Badarpur-Faridabad Metro line. Retrieved from pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx on 6th September, 2015
- 2 Retrieved from <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/photo.aspx>
- 3 Accessed on <http://indianexpress.com/article/cities/delhi/pm-narendra-modi-launches-delhi-metros-faridabad-corridor>
- 4 Hindustan Times (Delhi), Dated 7th September, 2015, accessed on <http://library.pressdisplay.com/> through <http://ap5.auth.athensams.net/my/resources>
- 5 <http://pibphoto.nic.in/photo//2015/Sep/...>
- 6 PIB (CNR 72111 Photo ID :69442). Retrieved from <http://pibphoto.nic.in/photo//2015/Sep/2015090669442.jpg>
- 7 PIB (CNR :72103 Photo ID :69434). Retrieved from <http://pibphoto.nic.in/photo//2015/Sep/2015090669434.jpg>
- 8 PIB (CNR :72117 Photo ID :69448). Retrieved from <http://pibphoto.nic.in/photo//2015/Sep/2015090669448.jpg>
- 9 PM inaugurates Badarpur-Faridabad Metro line; pib.nic.in/newsite/erelease.aspx on 6th September, 2015

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COMMUNICATING SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH CINEMA



A CASE STUDY



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Abstract

Media can play an important role in the success of communication for development initiatives by highlighting key issues in development and promoting new ideas among the people. Experts have acknowledged the role of entertainment in educating the masses. In this case, films, with their ability to interlace information with entertainment, can serve as a powerful tool in laying the foundation for change. This study aims to critically analyse the social issues raised by popular Bollywood films and their role in creating an ideal ground for putting forward key issues in the society which could further aid in the better reception of development initiatives by the people. The study offers a reading of Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades* to emphasise how films can embed in its narrative social issues without compromising its entertainment value and therefore serve as an efficient tool for communication for development.

Keywords

Social change, Communication for development, Films for change, *Swades*, Bollywood

Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1974) while discussing the distinction between high and popular culture came up with a number of definitions to express the term “popular”. He defines popular culture as, “a kind of culture that has been developed by a people or by the majority of a people to express their own meanings and values, over a range from customs to works.” Williams also acknowledges that popular culture may refer to “a different kind of culture that has been developed for a people by an internal or external social group...”. His ideas about popular culture was elaborated in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983) where he reiterates that “popular culture was not identified by the people but by others” (unlike folk culture) and therefore it is accused of deliberately setting agendas to win people’s favour (p.111). While all the above definitions provide varying degrees of understanding of the term ‘popular’ in popular culture, Storey (2008) provides a simple definition of the term by acknowledging the fact that popular culture “is simply the culture favoured, followed and liked by people” (p.5).

Visual media’s ability to influence people has been acknowledged since the time of its advent. However, the role of film as an object of propaganda and mass indoctrination was recognised during the First World War when a series of propaganda films were made by rival countries to sell ideas about their enemies (Smither, 2015). The World Wars proved that the film medium has enough potential to stimulate mass action; that with the strong emotionally charged content, it could trigger hatred for the enemies by vilifying their positions and in turn achieve glorification of the self. But apart from this political end that it served, the medium gained popularity among the people who found escapism from their mundane worries in the entertainment that commercial films offered. Though film was recognised to have immense potential, it being a commercial medium drew flaks from various critiques of popular culture who felt that the media sold cheap entertainment and stories that are masked in illusions of reality. Similarly when television came, the medium was equally criticised for its negative impact on the society. As the debate over the uses of film and television continued, later researches especially towards the 1970s and 1980s (for eg. television experiments by director Miguel Sabido in Mexican television) proved that the same medium could be used for ushering positive change, that film and television are not solely escapist but also informative and educative, and above all, had the potential to attract people’s attention.

A new field called “entertainment-education” emerged in the development discourse after the success of Sabido, who produced seven soap operas with social messages to promote social behaviour using television

fiction. Soon after its success, the strategy was also adopted by countries like India, Kenya, Tanzania and Brazil, where television and radio started using fictional genres to spread social messages (Tufte, 2005). In the Indian context, *Hum Log*¹ was the first indigenous soap opera dealt with different social issues where at the end of every episode, popular film actor Ashok Kumar gives a message to the audience (Kumar, 2009). This format was also replicated in the Indian superhero series *Shaktimaan*² that was telecast by Doordarshan in 1997. *Shaktimaan* played by Mukesh Khanna appears at the end of every episode to recount the lessons learnt from that episode. While television and radio began to increasingly incorporate developmental goals in their productions, this was not the case with the commercial films. The question regarding film was what the real purpose of film is and should fictions be used to entertain or to educate? Owing to its commercial nature, mass entertainment is always the primary goal of films and therefore social themes, though present are often either veiled under the entertainment content or are considered secondary in importance. This is not the case with entertainment-education which comes under the ambit of development communication or communication for development. Entertainment-Education uses entertainment content as a bait to spread social messages and therefore, profit-making is considered secondary or inconsequential for such programmes. While these programmes are chiefly concerned with imparting education through entertainment, education is never the primary focus of commercial films and therefore majority of the films are more indirect in their approach towards social issues.

In this study, an attempt has been made to look at the trajectory of entertainment-education and how popular films could also play a part in broadening the scope of 'education through entertainment'. The argument is supported by the analysis of Ashutosh Gowariker's *Swades* (2004) which abounds in community messaging strategies. *Swades* is not simply a film that stands out for being a champion of the communication for development approach but it also opens up the scope for commercial films to be used as communication for development component by development organisations to affect positive change at the grassroots. *Swades* has been a subject of various academic discussions, with different scholars all over the world pouring in their perspectives on the film. Some of these range from articles on the construction of the ideal Indian identity (Valančiūnas, 2008), to a plea to the diasporic audience for investment in the country or their return to their homeland (Chakraborty, 2011; Sinha, 2012) as also for fostering inclusiveness and belongingness among the non-residential Indians (Ranganathan, 2010). None of the research studied *Swades* from the entertainment-education perspective. In the overall debate on the effectiveness of popular films as

communication for development tool, this study attempts to show through the analysis of *Swades* as well as by referring to other Bollywood films made on social themes, the immense possibilities that popular films open up for encouraging social change.

Locating films within entertainment-education discourse

It is pertinent to understand here that ‘communication for development’ was born out of the need for an alternative approach to the use of communication in the transfer and execution of development goals, more precisely the spread and adoption of new ideas and innovations. During the early 1960’s, American scholar Everett Rogers came up with the diffusion theory (1962, 1983) where modernisation was conceived as a process in which individuals move from a traditional way of life to a modern, technically developed way of life (Melkote, 2001). The focus was on developing the skills of the farmers in third world agrarian countries according to a structure modeled along the lines of those in the western developed nations.

But this model of development could not be sustained for long. One of the main reasons for the failure of dominant paradigm of modernisation approach was its incongruence with the cultures of the localities where it was tested. Roger’s diffusion of innovation was also criticised for its extreme focus on exposure to mass media, its inattention to message content, neglect of the recipient’s depth of knowledge, one-way flow of information, pro-source, pro-persuasion, pro-literacy bias etc, besides the fact that women, especially in the rural area in the 1970s remained disproportionately neglected in this approach (Melkote, 2001). In this model, it was also seen that although Rogers stressed on the role mass media could play to this end by spreading awareness about new possibilities and practices, he attributed a greater role to interpersonal communication in bringing about any attitudinal change or in the adoption of a new idea. This meant that mass communication is less likely than personal influence to have a direct effect on social behaviour (Servaes, 2008). While acknowledging the direct role that interpersonal communication and various mass media can play in bringing social change, many communication for development experts often overlook the role of ideological processes that are materialised in the form of popular texts. Since the last few decades, communication experts (Tufte (2005), Rogers, Cody & Singhal (2004)) have recognised that development goals can be achieved by introducing an entertainment value to education. The range of fields where entertainment-education is used varies widely from agriculture, to rural development, gender equality, promoting literacy, peace building, conflict resolution etc. One of the most important advantages of such strategy is that

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it uses subtle techniques to promote or influence attitudinal changes thereby enhancing social mobilisation, collective action to articulating people's participation in development works.

Tufte (2005) defines entertainment-education as, “the use of entertainment as a communicative practice crafted to strategically communicate about development issues in a manner and with a purpose that can range from the more narrowly defined social marketing of individual behaviours to the liberating and citizen-driven articulation of social change agendas” (p.162). He traces the growing trend of entertainment education since the 1950s and 1960s for circulating pro-development behaviours, and how the field has now expanded to cover within its ambit aspects of social marketing as well as various interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary approaches to identify problems of power inequalities, to enhance collective action and to bring about structural change. Drawing on his own research on Brazilian telenovelas, Tufte writes that what makes television an attractive genre for development is the fact that it has a wide mass appeal and can engage people to identify and involve themselves with the stories told in radio and television.

Similarly Singhal (2007) talks about the various ways in which popular content can have a greater impact than factual ones. He argues that although most of the time, popular entertainment contents are regarded as escapist and unworthy of academic consideration, in reality, because of their appeal, they can be more provoking and enlightening than other mediums. Citing examples of programmes launched in India like the entertainment-education soap opera called *Tinka Tinka Sukh* in radio and *Lazos de Sangre*, a popular Brazilian *telenovela* in 2000, he shows how they made listeners in the villages actively oppose the practice of dowry after the show's protagonist committed suicide in *Tinka Tinka Sukh* and how new donor registrations increased manyfold in Brazil after the protagonist of *Lazos de Sangre* was diagnosed with leukemia. Singhal and Rogers (2004) acknowledge that entertainment programmes influence the audience's external environment which help in setting the necessary pre-conditions for social change at the systemic level. The programmes serve as catalyst for social change by acting as social mobiliser, advocate, agenda-setter in influencing policy initiatives in a socially-desirable direction (p.6).

In this entire discourse on entertainment-education for development, films do not find a space for discussion. According to Singhal (2007), “to be of value, the programmes should be either a long running mass media programme or should be doing social merchandising, which involves

a conscious placement of a social message in the popular mediated narrative” (p.260). In other words, entertainment-education programmes strategically employ media role models to promote socially-desirable behaviours and dissuade socially undesirable behaviours. It is with this consideration that commercial films never feature in the list of strategic tools for communication for development initiatives. While radio programmes or soap operas continue for a long duration and therefore can constantly reinforce the development messages every day, films do not have a fixed agenda that is sustained over time. Also, because of its profit oriented goals, films are not considered as entertainment-education tool. Having acknowledged this fact, one can also not deny the influence that films exert on the audience. The technology-enhanced images, scripted one-liners and a strong celebrity presence have enough ability to register quick responses from the audience, thereby increasing their recall value. And although films cannot be specifically tailored according to the development projects, there is always the possibility that development workers pick up socially relevant films as part of their entertainment-education agenda. Yet, commercial films are hardly looked upon as a material for communication for development initiatives. Instead, the focus is more on folk forms or other audio-visual contents like documentaries to affect change. It should be understood that commercial films also has the capacity to induce positive or negative ideas about certain attitudes, behaviours and way of life by slowly penetrating into the audiences’ psyche. For instance, popular commercial films have its leverage by firstly, being inclusive of all people irrespective of gender, caste, creed, and secondly, because it has no rigid prescription for message treatment, its delivery changes from country to country and region to region. Without a pro-literacy bias, films can easily reach even the people from the lowermost rung of the socio-economic ladder, an ability which brings it closer to the communication for development praxis.

To support this argument, an article by Franklin Fearing (1947), *Influence of the Movies on Attitudes and Behaviour* refers to several works published by major experts in the field of attitudinal research like Herbert Blumer, Edgar Dale, Thurstone and Peterson to show the impact of popular films on audience. He specifically refers to the attitudinal research done by Thurstone and Peterson during the 1930s under the aegis of the Payne Foundation where they registered measurable changes in the attitudes of people after watching films. Franklin also rubbishes claims made by various experts who question the film medium for being authoritative instead of participatory by saying that motion picture does not “have a fixed pattern of meanings or ideas which are received by a passive mind. Rather, what the individual ‘gets’ is determined by his background and his needs;” that

just “like the folktale, or the medieval morality play, films may be regarded as a means through which the individual understands himself, his social role, and the values of his group. It also a means by which the individual orients himself in a universe of events which appear to occur haphazardly and chaotically” (p.70).

Over the years, there is a strong recognition that a deficit of information is not at the core of the problem but rather the root of the problem lies in power imbalance, structural inequality, and in deeper societal problems. These could be overcome by a participative mode of communication where people are able to identify the problems in their everyday lives and where entertainment-education programmes can enhance and encourage people to act, collectively as well as individually, upon the problems (Tuft, 2005, p.166). Films could provide a site where important issues can be raised and debated, without compromising on its entertainment value. This could in turn help in raising public consciousness, problem identification and finally lead towards change. The aim of this study therefore is to highlight the role of Bollywood films in raising social issues and encouraging critical thinking among the masses. This study provides a reading of the Bollywood film *Swades* (2004) and the analysis is guided by Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (1977). The study argues that popular films can complement communication for development activities and support them by embedding socially relevant messages in its narrative and hence can play an essential role in creating a climate of acceptance to new thoughts and ideas.

Films and social change

German playwright Bertolt Brecht (1978) said, “Art is never without consequences.” Therefore, good or bad, a piece of art always includes an image of the world. This image could either be a portrayal of the world we live in, a critique of the world, or a picture of an alternate world. According to Hall (2009), popular culture is a site where ‘collective social understandings’ are created. It provides a terrain on which ‘the politics of signification’ are played out (Storey, 2008). Therefore, if film, as an example of popular culture is a site of collective social understandings, then it justifies its role as a mediator of issues of social importance, a site where ideas can trigger responses in the psyche of the viewers, even if subtly. Miriam Bratu Hansen in her deconstruction of Siegfried Kracauer’s *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (1960) writes that for Kracauer, a film’s relationship to the material world “does not rest in any narrow notion of representational verisimilitude, but instead in its ability to both resemble and decompose that world, making us experience both alienation and similitude” (quoted

Films could provide a site where important issues can be raised and debated, without compromising on its entertainment value. This could in turn help in raising public consciousness, problem identification and finally lead towards change.

in Hansen, 2012, p.277); it rather involves the viewer as a engaging subject which both experiences the sensory imaginations as well as assimilates the multiple perceptual viewpoints that is offered by the medium. Films in other words offer new modes of seeing and experiencing the world around us. With commercial aims in mind, films may be a complete package of entertainment, star power and tried and tested formulae for success, but it is never divorced from social reality. It rather reflects the common themes and exigencies of the real world in palatable forms. One of the most magical qualities about films is that it can initiate a thought process without seeming to do so. This ability to prick the perceptual thought space, to attach ideas of virtue and vice to various subject positions, to question the system in the form of a storyline, lies the popular film's capacity to induce social change, if not to directly act then to create the 'preconditions for take-off'.

Since the very beginning, social themes have been taken up by conscious filmmakers who believed that films surpassed mere entertainment but needed to serve a more social purpose. Therefore, although most of the early films of the silent era (1912-1934) were driven by the mythological tales of a country rich in folklore, legends and ancient history, issues of social importance did finally make a mark after an initial period of delay. In the years 1929-30, about 27 films were made on social themes (Thoraval, 2000). Dhiren Ganguly's *Razia Begum* (1922) took up the issue of communal disharmony while Franz Osten's *Achhut Kanya* (1936) condemned the debilitating system of untouchability which discriminated people on the basis of caste and class by portraying the love story of a brahmin boy and an untouchable girl. Mori Gidwani's *Kisan Kanya* (1937) produced by Ardeshir Irani also dealt with the peasant revolt against feudal oppression. Similarly, films like Vankudre Shantaram's *Duniya Na Mane* (1937) produced in the same year took up the theme of women empowerment. In *Duniya Na Maane*, Shanta Apte plays the role of an empowered woman who stands up for her rights and refuses to consummate her wedding in revolt against the society which treats women as commodity.

Taking up such a theme at a time when women's inferior position in the household was almost a taken, was a commendable task. P.C. Barua's *Devdas* (1935) though a romantic tragedy questions the patriarchal system as well as the rigid caste and class structure that separates love. K.A. Abbas's *Dharti Ke Lal* (1946) paved the way for social realism in Indian films where he discussed the human dimension of Bengal famine of 1943. This was followed by a period in Indian films, known mostly as the golden period where the star system flourished and escapist films were made for mass entertainment. The pulse was that people no longer liked serious social and

political subjects and all were in search of pure entertainment. But even, during this period, directors did not step back from making socially relevant films. Bimal Roy's *Sujata* made in 1959 once again broaches the topic of untouchability to attack the discriminatory social system. The films made during this period tried to encourage people to break free from the social stereotypes and embrace change.

In the 1960s to 1990s, the trend of producing popular box office hits continued but along with this, many films also started to entwine social message and entertainment together. Women empowerment, caste and class system, untouchability, widow remarriage etc were some of the recurrent themes to be found in Indian films during that time. The film *Prem Rog* (Raj Kapoor, 1982) starring Rishi Kapoor and Padmini Kolhapuri talks about widow remarriage at a time of a conservative India, when widows were boycotted from the community and were expected to spend the rest of their lives in sorrow and deprivation.

The 1976 film *Manthan* particularly stood out in the communication for development discourse. The film by Shyam Benegal set amidst the backdrop of the White Revolution of India-1970, traces a small set of poor farmers of Kheda district in Gujarat who had the vision to take control of their situation by setting up cooperatives and ushering in the milk revolution. It was the first film in the world to be produced by the farmers of the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Federation who contributed Rs. 2 each for the production of the film (Thoraval, 2000, p.159). Similarly, the film *Susman* (Shyam Benegal, 1986) was produced by a group of worker cooperatives, to highlight the plight of rural handloom weavers. *Samar* (1999) by Benegal also takes a dig at the caste system and the oppressive forces of elite politics. The later part of the 1990s to 2000s saw a huge number of films many on social themes.

Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India (Ashutosh Gowariker, 2001) shows peasant empowerment as well as takes up the issue of untouchability, *Matrubhoomi: A Nation Without Women* (Manish Jha, 2003) speaks about women's right and raises a voice against female foeticide, *OMG – Oh My God!* (Umesh Shukla, 2004) dismantles the superstitious beliefs surrounding God, *Phir Milenge* (Revathi, 2004) takes up the cause of HIV/AIDS patients, Deepa Mehta's *Water* (2005) on widow remarriage, films like *Taare Zameen Par* (Aamir Khan, Amole Gupte & Ram Madhvani, 2007) and *Margherita with a Straw* (Shonali Bose & Nilesh Maniyar 2014) which shows the story of people with special abilities. *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* (Nila Madhab Panda, 2015) on water scarcity, *Manjhi - The Mountain Man* (Ketan Mehta, 2015) on collective efforts for social change, etc and the

most recent film *Hindi Medium* (Saket Chaudhary, 2017) that encourages enrollment into government schools are some of the films made on social issues during the 21st century. In all these films, different aspects of the social life have been covered.

It can be summarised from the above that Hindi films have a long standing history of embedding social messages in their narratives in entertaining forms. Neal Miller and John Dollard's theories of social learning (1941) and Albert Bandura's refined version of the theory, known as the Social Cognitive Theory (1986) is of particular relevance here as they suggest that there is a possibility of communicating social change through media channels, such as film, television, video, etc. over time among the members of a social system.

According to the Miller and Dollard model, the process of social learning takes place in two ways: by imitation of what one sees and by identification with the broader characteristics or qualities of the observed model (Baran & Davis, 2015). Miller and Dollard argued that people learn by observing and media provides the stimulus for individuals to act and these are then reinforced through various agencies. Contemporary Social Learning Theory known as Social Cognitive Theory argues, that "one can acquire symbolic representations of the behaviour and these 'pictures in their heads' provide them information on which to base their own subsequent behaviour. Media characters can influence behaviours simply by being depicted on the screen" (Baran & Davis, 2015, p.171). According to Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, social cognition through the use of media representations operates in three major ways:

1. Observational learning: Here, the audience acquires new patterns of behaviour by simply watching the models in a representation;
2. Inhibitory effects: where audiences are discouraged from following a model in a representation after witnessing him/her being punished for exhibiting certain behaviour; and
3. Disinhibitory effects: where the likelihood of adopting the model's threatening or prohibited behaviour in a media representation increases when they see some rewards attached to it (Baran & Davis, 2015).

Following from Bandura's social cognitive theory, the popular films with social themes can be used for triggering and reinforcing learned behaviour in the audience. For instance, a film like *Swades*, with Shah Rukh Khan in the lead has all the elements that make it a popular film and yet the film is replete

Miller and Dollard argued that people learn by observing and media provides the stimulus for individuals to act and these are then reinforced through various agencies.

with components that make it apt for study as an appropriate communication for development material. This is further substantiated by the case study of Gowariker's *Swades*.

Analysis of *Swades*

The film *Swades* by Ashutosh Gowariker is a perfect example of how films can provide a site for promoting social action and critical thinking in the minds of the audience. The film starring Bollywood actor Shah Rukh Khan is worth an examination for a series of critical questions it raises to its viewers as well as for prescribing to a participatory model of social change. The film begins with Mohan played by Shah Rukh Khan, a NASA scientist returning to India in search of his nanny Kaveri Amma. The search takes Mohan to a remote village of India called Charanpur. Of the various problems that grapple the entire village, one is the issue of frequent electricity cuts. The film shows how a highly educated man armed with technical skills encourage collective action among the villagers to solve the problem of electricity shortage. One of the redeeming features of the movie which makes it so interesting for a communication for development study is its special focus on development through community mobilisation and people's participation. Besides, the film's treatment of issues like school-dropouts, dowry, child education, human rights, equality of sexes, child labour also make it an interesting study in the field of communication for development. The following is an analysis of the various sequences in the film that mark it as a communication for development material.

Questioning the patriarchal set-up

In one sequence, Geeta, the female protagonist of the film rejects a marriage proposal after getting to know that she will not be allowed to continue her job once the marriage takes place. The reaction of the groom's family to the idea of a working daughter-in law reinforces the patriarchal mindset prevalent in the Indian society which considers it a disgrace to the family's name and honour to let their daughters work out of their homes. Such an attitude also restricts a girl's right for economic independence. The film questions this patriarchal mindset through the agency of Geeta who turns down the marriage proposal as a rejection of the notion that women are meant for domestic work and child rearing. Further, Geeta also speaks up against the mentality of the society which demands such sacrifice from their daughters, while stating that had she not refused the proposal, they would have gone on to demand dowry. Through this, Gowariker also exposes Geeta's abhorrence towards the dowry system. The sequence opens up the discussions to the

larger problems facing the country like illiteracy, poverty and caste system.

Promoting the role of indigenous culture in development

In a dinner scene post Geeta's rejection of the marriage proposal, Gowariker shows a discussion among Mohan, Geeta and Kaveri Amma about the probable cause of the country's problems. Like the modernisation paradigm of development which blamed the oriental cultures and traditions for its failure, and termed them as obstacles in the path of development, Mohan also states that as long as India clings on to its age-old customs and traditions, it cannot be developed or harbor progressive thoughts. To this Geeta offers an alternative perspective and states that it is the traditions and cultures that have been holding the country together. In other words, Geeta proposes a development model which is not removed from ones' indigenous cultures and practices. Geeta proposes that to change people's mindset one need not break away from one's traditions but rather what is required of the realisation of one's potential, by taking action in one's own hands rather than blaming the government for inaction. Geeta's prescription of development is rooted in the country's culture. In this discussion, all three participants, Mohan, Geeta and Kaveri Amma are one with the fact that literacy and poverty go hand in hand. Therefore, they stress the importance of education in bringing about positive social change.

Stressing importance of primary education

Again in another sequence, the village panchayat asks Geeta to shift her school to smaller space. Geeta requests the authorities to allow her to use the premises for some more time with the assurance that if all parents start sending their children to school and if one can control the problem of school dropouts then the school will require a large premise. Through this, Gowariker raises the problem of low school attendance and school drop-outs in many remote areas of the country, where despite government initiatives like the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan*, school dropouts continue.

Voicing gender bias in education

In order to help Geeta retain village school premises, Mohan takes it upon himself to persuade the people for sending their children to school. He ropes in the village wrestler, an insider in the villager as his conduit in changing public opinion in favour of children's education. The village wrestler here plays the role of the opinion leader through whose assistance Mohan becomes successful in changing the opinion of the villagers regarding education. During this process, Mohan discovers that the reason for the low

enrollment rates in village schools is deep rooted. Firstly, Mohan finds out the patriarchal bias towards education. Even the head of the village holds back his granddaughters from pursuing any further education after their primary schooling. His reason is reflective of the opinions of many in villages who dropout their daughters from school at an early age as they believe that the girl's ultimate aim in life is to run the house and rear children for which household training is more important than school education. Although Gowariker highlights the gender stereotype in the field of education, the fact remains that in India, the dropout among boys is also on the rise as they roll out of schools to contribute to the family income.

Promoting equality for mankind

Again, another social malaise that Gowariker exposes in the film is the issue of caste based discrimination. Mohan, while trying to get more children into Geeta's school comes across the family of a labourer who rues about the partiality of the system towards people belonging to less privileged classes and states that education is not meant for people like him. Although the government has churned out a number of schemes for the development of the less privileged castes in the country to bring them at par with the others, in many remote villages and even urban areas, caste discrimination is still rampant. When Mohan requests the man to send his daughter to school, he gives the same patriarchal explanation that a girl's place is in the house and explains that his daughter would soon be married off. Therefore, through this film, Gowariker, exposes some of the social problems and stigmas that are rampant in the country. Through Mohan, he directly targets the stereotypical notions that abound the Indian rural landscape. Here, he constructs Mohan as a champion for universal education. Mohan convinces the people that education is for all, irrespective of caste, creed and sex and therefore pleads even the lowest rung of the society to send the children to school. The issue of caste based discrimination is clearly debated in the film. As Mohan travels to collect Geeta's money from a poor farmer in another village, he realises the evils of the rigid caste system which punishes men for deviating from their traditional profession in order to try for something new. Also, while returning from the other village, he sees, children selling tea in the station side and his heart fills with sorrow. Here, although the issue of child labour is shown only fleetingly, the protagonist's sorrow and disgust for it is unmistakable and does not escape the audience. The above scene is once again an attempt to show Gowariker's advocacy for universal school education for all.

Stressing the importance of self help: Towards a participatory approach

Apart from taking up socially relevant issues like child labour, literacy,

Gowariker, exposes some of the social problems and stigmas that are rampant in the country. Through Mohan, he directly targets the stereotypical notions that abound the Indian rural landscape.

dowry, gender equality, the film also directs the attention of the viewers to the idea of participatory communication and collective efforts. Here, Mohan criticises the villagers for their laidback attitude to solving their problems and encourages them to take development in their own hands through collective action. The frequent power cuts and the lackadaisical attitude of the district administration had been a concern for the villagers. Mohan with his sharp technical background urges the villages to unite and come together to solve this problem. He, along with the villages investigates how electricity can be generated in the village and through discussions with the village elders and participation of all, men and women, teamed with his own technical knowledge, builds the infrastructure for generating electricity. This takes us back to the idea of participatory development where people come together to take control of their lives and problems. The above sequence also draws resemblance to the model of the *Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement* in Sri Lanka which is inspired by the Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya. This model advocates inclusivity and welfare for all through sharing of time, resources, energy and labour.

In the film, the role of Mohan is that of a facilitator. He brings in his knowledge and expertise to solve the problem of electricity shortage but the effort is collective and executed in consultation with the villagers. The film therefore in its final analysis, reproaches the “God takes care of everything approach” attitude and rather advocates community development through people’s participation and collective action.

In the above discussion we saw how the film *Swades* is not just a film where the communication for development praxis is in force but also how films can raise critical awareness about the social evils in the society. Apart from its storyline and content, that makes the film an apt communication for development material, it is pertinent to mention that the film also shows how folk forms could be used to spread important social messages.

Encouraging use of folk media for social change

Through the dance drama of the Hindu epic Ramayana, Gowariker also sends out a message against caste discrimination. It must be noted here that Bollywood has always come up with films on interesting subjects of social importance. While in *Swades*, it was Shah Rukh Khan who played the role of the facilitator, in the recent film *Pink* (Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury, 2016), it was Amitabh Bachchan who played this role by putting forward some resounding truth about stereotyping of women in the country. The message he sends out in the film *Pink* is loud and clear; that no amount of explanation,

reason and excuse will suffice to when one tries to violate a woman's dignity after she has denied access to her body.

Similarly, in the film *Phir Milenge* (2004), starring Salman Khan and Shilpa Shetty, the issue of HIV AIDS was taken up. The film talks about the pitfalls of communicating HIV and the trauma of the victims. Again, the Aamir Khan starrer *Lagaan* (2001) broaches the subject of untouchability and caste discrimination.

Vicky Donor (Shoojit Sircar, 2012) is a movie that breaks many taboos of Indian society as well as films. It talks about sperm donation and artificial insemination and how it is becoming the need of the hour. It also touches upon the topic of remarriage and the broadening mindset of the Indian middle class. Similarly apart from the above, as have been already discussed, there are many examples where films have played a crucial role in raising issues of social importance in the public domain opening the gates to more critical discussions and contemplation on these issues.

Conclusion

The above reading of the film *Swades* shows how films can broach important issues of social concern and provide a site for reflection. The aim of communication for development is to bring about progressive changes in the lives of the people of a community without disrupting or disregarding the local sentiments. In order to facilitate this change or to introduce a new idea, communication for development experts must attempt to involve the locals of the region and themselves take up the role of a facilitator. However, to bring about development and social change, the people of the community must also welcome the new set of ideas and innovations, most of which are in direct contradiction to their age-old belief systems, cultures and customs. While communication for development experts use various behavioural and attitudinal change strategies to bring about this change, it often overlooks the silent role that popular commercial films can play to achieve this objective. In *Swades*, as well as in the other films in discussion, it is seen how filmmakers are providing edutainment to the audience.

Through popular films, messages have been generated and passed on to the larger masses. Therefore, in the process of bringing social change, film as a medium has a major role to play. A big challenge for social change movements is motivating people to make changes in their everyday lives. Communication expert and social theorist Albert Bandura (1970, 1971, 1986, & 2006) in his Social Learning Theory stated that individuals learn by observation or by imitation and are therefore influenced by what they

watch. However, it has been observed that the influence is more when the same is performed by people in the peer circle or outside it whom they adore, worship or look upto. In this case when popular stars endorse ideas, they are followed by their fans that remember the act, and discuss about it. One can argue that by watching their favourite celebrities, fans can make assumptions about how the world works and decide whether or not to incorporate that behaviour into their own lives. When fans see their favourite stars endorsing a particular idea, they too try to emulate them and also pass them on to their peers. Therefore, the effect that a Shah Rukh Khan or Amitabh Bachchan or Salman Khan has on their fans in the various pockets of the country cannot be compared to the effect a documentary film or video has on the people.

It is in this light that I argue that popular films with its equally popular star cast have the capacity to influence the mindsets of the audiences. While audiences remain engrossed in the entertainment a film offers, they are also introduced to new ideas, and perspectives which can provide food for further discussions. As a starting point, I propose that after problem identification, development organisations or NGOs can start by screening popular films to the audience for a sustained period of time which can not only help in gathering crowds in big numbers but also easing the community members into cooperating with the development experts. Every screening then can be followed by a discussion on the social themes raised by the film and comparing the actions of the protagonists with that of the community. Such a discussion should however be a two way process, where audiences are encouraged to express their alternative points of view and contemplate upon their activities instead of blindly following their favourite celebrities. In this way, films can also be used by development communication facilitators in conjugation as a first stage to create a climate of positive social change and complement it with other development initiatives. What is needed now is that Bollywood films especially popular stars endorse films with important social messages. From the above it can be concluded that popular Bollywood films, through its entertainment content has the ability to silently penetrate into the subconscious of the audiences, and trigger attitudinal changes that are pro-development. In this way, films can create a climate of acceptance in the society so that any further intervention by social groups and organisations could be successful.

Notes

- 1 *Hum Log* (July 7, 1984 to December 17, 1985) was India's first indigenous soap opera made on the lines of Mexican Telenovela *Simplimenta Maria*. The soap opera which was produced by Sobha Doctor and directed by P Kumar Vasudev was sponsored by Maggi Noodles. Scripted by Manohar Shyam Joshi, in the 156 episodes of the soap opera, the makers made

a conscious effort to blend entertainment with education in the form of a fictional story that revolved around a lower middle class north Indian joint family. The show ended each day with an epilogue where popular film actor Askok Kumar appeared to pass important messages based on social themes to the audience. The show was also participatory in nature as it allowed viewers to write letters to the makers to communicate their observations. Based on the letters, the makers incorporated several changes in the storyline. According to a study done by Rogers & Singhal (1991), the soap opera covered themes like family harmony, alcoholism, national integration, health problems and family planning, women empowerment, public welfare, political corruption etc. *Hum Log* provided the roadmap for many soap operas to use social and educational content in their programme.

2 *Shaktimaan*, which was telecast every Sunday on Doordarshan, was one of the first Indian superhero series in the history of Indian television. Influenced by western superhero series like *Batman*, *Superman*, etc, Shaktiman series was produced by Mukesh Khanna and directed by Dinkar Jani. The series was first telecast on September 20, 1997 and around 400 episodes were aired on DD National. Mukesh Khanna played the role of Shaktimaan and his alter ego Pandit Gangadhar Vidyadhar Mayadhar Omkar Nath Shastri. Initially the series began as a purely entertainment show but when the makers saw the scale of its influence and popularity among the children (even reports that children started to commit suicide and hurt themselves in the hope of being saved by Shaktimaan), they decided to come up with an epilogue on the lines of the soap opera *Hum Log* called, *Sorry Shaktimaan* and *Choti Choti Par Moti Batein*. In this segment, Shaktiman himself appears to advice children on different subjects like saving water, electricity, health and sanitation issues, education and respect to elders, patriotism, environmental awareness etc.

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CARTOONING IN JOURNALISM



MAPPING THE ORIGIN AND
GROWTH OF CARTOONING IN INDIA



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Abstract

This study maps the origin, growth and present status of cartoons in India. Though India has had a long tradition of lampooning and caricature in its popular culture, 'cartoon' as the term is understood now was a British import to India. Gradually the *desi* fervour grew, and the typical Indian humour began to play a greater role. Cartoons in India exposed the soft social underbelly of our society, it helped India's freedom struggle by fanning hostile attitude against the British administrators and Government. It played a role of social critique. After independence, cartoons, especially political cartoons became even more popular. However, it suffered a decline in finding space in mainstream newspapers from 1990s. This study attempts to analyse the reasons thereof and it also attempts to document the different sub genres of present cartooning in India.

Keywords

Cartooning in India, Punch, Indian cartoonists, Comic magazine, Indian freedom struggle, Popular culture

Caricaturing and lampooning of public figures and social codes existed in the singing and story-telling traditions in India for a very long time. However, caricature as a systematic weapon of social criticism began with the popular *pata* art of Kalighat and *bat tala* (literarily it means under the Banyan Tree, figuratively it means low-brow) literature, where even the coarse and the vulgar were employed as sectorial tools. Colonial Calcutta gave rise to these in the nineteenth century.

Modern caricature as a form of journalism was a British import in India. In 1872, Colonel Percy Wyndhem started *Indian Charivari* from Kolkata, a comic magazine inspired by *Punch*, an English comic magazine published from London. The inaugural issue of *Indian Charivari* stated, “No literary vehicle exists by which the faults and follies of our public men may be satirically exposed, and our own various grievances humorously ventilated.” The magazine inspired similar publications including the popular Bengali magazine *Basantak*, nevertheless maintained utmost secrecy about its operations. However no single humorous publication made a deeper impression in India than the English comic magazine *Punch*. It produced a riotous procession of its offspring during the second half of the 19th century: *The Indian Punch*, *Delhi Sketch Book*, *Momus*, *The Oudh Punch*, *Urdu Punch*, *Gujarati Punch*, *Hindi Punch*, *Parsi Punch* and even *Purneah Punch* from a remote town in Bengal and *Rafiq Punch*, an Urdu weekly from Moradabad.

According to Lahiri (2012), Calcutta’s and India’s cartoon legacy dates from two publications – *Indian Punch*, which lampooned Indian society and manners, presumably for the consumption of British residents in colonial India, and its answer, *Indian Charivari*.

Mitter (1994) writes about cartoons in India in the early 19th century:

....Although artists like Sir Charles D’Oyly initially poked gentle fun at the Anglo-Indian lifestyle in the early nineteenth century, they soon turned to the Indians as an object of mirth. Interestingly enough, so did the early Indian cartoonists. The significant difference was that while British cartoonists in India viewed the Indian subjects from the lofty heights of moral certainty, Indian cartoonists generally engaged in penetrating self-parody and social comment rather than using the new-found weapon against the Raj. In Bengali cartoons, the exposure of social mores attained the ruthless candour of Gillray and Rowlandson. British lack of self-criticism may be explained by the fact that the imperial bureaucracy had ossified into benevolent despotism

as the British community, now confined to clubs, cantonments and hill stations, became more and more racially exclusive. The most brilliant representations of expatriate life were G. P. Atkinson's *Curry and Rice or The Ingredients of Social Life at Our "Station" in India* (1859) (p. 17).

One of the longest running English-language comic magazines published by an Indian to take up political issues was *Hindi Punch* (1878-1930). Its editor, Barjorji Naorosji, who belonged to the *Parsi* community in Bombay, supported the moderates in the Indian National Congress founded in 1885. It cleverly adapted prints by the universally popular academic painter Raja Ravi Varma to make a political point. In a 1905 cartoon it depicted Lord Curzon, the *bête noire* of the nationalists, as Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of learning in a parody of his high-handed treatment of academics at the Shimla education conference. By 1910 a number of *Punch* titles were published in various parts of Eastern, Western and Northern India including North Western Provinces and Avadh. But interestingly hardly any *Punch* clone was published from South India.

The variety of comic-based *Punch* versions indicates that much graphic satire was being produced in Urdu at that time. *The Kanauj Punch*, an Urdu weekly had a circulation of 500 copies. *The Rafiq Punch*, another Urdu weekly from Moradabad had a circulation of 450 copies. In Ahmedabad *Gujarati Punch*, an Anglo-Gujarati weekly published by Somalal Mangaldas Shah had a circulation of 3400 copies (Khanduri, 2013). Though later day cartoonists were critical of the quality of cartoons published in these *Punch* versions both thematically and stylistically (Laxman, 1989), these cartoons played an important role to satirically highlight the socio economic and to some extent political situation of the country.

One of the first cartoons by an Indian to make a political impact was published in the Bengali newspaper *Sulav Samachar*¹ in 1870, highlighting a glaring injustice. During this period poorer Indians were often assaulted by the Europeans leading to their death. If the case came to court at all, the victim's 'enlarged spleen' was blamed for his death. The cartoon shows a dead coolie with his wife weeping next to him. A European doctor conducts a perfunctory post-mortem while the offender stands nonchalantly smoking a cigar. The cartoon, with its suggestion of collusion between European authorities and the offenders, was one of the seditious pieces that provoked the British administration into imposing vernacular press censorship in 1878.

Two modern innovations, printing technology and the process of

One of the longest running English-language comic magazines published by an Indian to take up political issues was *Hindi Punch* (1878-1930).

mechanical reproduction turned Bengal into a society dominated by the visual image in the mid 19th century. Pictorial journalism became an indispensable part of literary culture. The Bengali educated enjoyed a rich harvest of illustrated magazines, thanks to the brilliant entrepreneur, Ramananda Chatterjee, whose *Prabasi* (which means ‘migratory’ or ‘non-resident’) became a model of publishing early this century. The use of high quality illustrations and graphic art in Bengali monthly magazines such as *Bharat Barsha*, *Manasi* and *Masik Basumati*, greatly expanded opportunities for aspiring cartoonists. The most popular Bengali cartoons, however, were social and not political. The stock characters being the hypocritical *zamindar* (landlord) henpecked husband, pompous academic, obsequious clerk, illiterate Brahmin were the cartoonists’ favourites. Characteristic behaviour and typical cultural situations, such as the plump head clerk returning from the market with his favourite fish or the thin school-teacher with stick-like arms and legs were well captured in drawing after drawing.

From 1917, one of the most popular cartoonists of Bengal, Jatin Sen, featured regularly in the leading monthlies, *Manasi* and *Bharat Barsha*. Sen’s penetrating observation of Bengali physiognomic types, blending individual idiosyncrasies with national peculiarities, was unmatched for the period. A student at the Calcutta Government Art School, Sen turned graphic art and images to cartoons for cinema hoardings, after failing to make headway in the Nationalist Oriental art. A chance meeting with Rajsekhar Bose, a well-known literary figure of this time made him join his literary circle. Soon his cartoons became the inspiration for Bose’s brilliant satirical works, *Goddalika* (The going on) (1924), *Kajjali* (Dream of Monkey) (1927), and *Hanumaner Swapna*⁴ (1927). These remain some of the most inventive parodies of Bengali life, with their keen eye for the ridiculous in social behaviour.

Cartooning as an instant, satirical art form has been very popular in Kerala. The earliest Malayalam cartoon excavated so far was published in 1919 in a local humor journal, titled *Kshamadevatha* (Goddess of Famine). The bare line drawing, modeled predictably on the *Punch* cartoon, was showcased by the editor (as yet anonymous) as a satirical visual form popular in the West. The art form became so popular that Unny (2012) commented, “Malayalam newspapers might go without the masthead, but never the cartoon on page one. Turn the pages and you’ll find more. Kerala’s cartoonists are more professional than elsewhere in the Indian language press, and organised as well”.

The erosion of social values under the impact of westernisation remained

the favorite topic of Malayalam and Bengali caricature. In fact it was the most prevalent topic across the regional languages. But nobody match the unsentimental eye of Gaganendranath Tagore, who raised cartoons to the level of high art. A nephew of Rabindranath, Gaganendranath's trenchant lithographs began appearing from 1917 onwards in *Birup Bajra* (Play of Opposites), *Adbhut Lok* (Realm of Absurd) and *Naba Hullod* (Reform Screams). Gaganendranath produced some sharply observed political cartoons, but by far his most original ones were social satires. Mitter (1997) observes:

...If he drew with the economy of the *Pata* of Kalighat, his ferocity also bore an uncanny resemblance to expressionist cartoons published in *Simplicissimus*, the German paper founded in 1896. Both German and Indian cartoons are recognisable by their strong lines, grotesque figures and faces and use of broad flat surfaces. From their styles it seems likely that they ultimately drew inspiration from the technique of Japanese prints, which Gaganendranath admired (p.18).

C. Subramania Bharti (1882-1921) was the first cartoonist in Tamil Journalism. He employed cartoons in Swadeshi period (1906-11) in a fiery nationalist Tamil weekly named *India* (*Madras 1906-08, Pondicherry 1908-10*) (Rao & Murthy, 2014). Often the entire front page of the weekly was devoted to one or more cartoons. One of the standard themes was exploitation of the Indians by the English. Another target of Bharti's vicious cartoons was the moderates in Congress Party. His cartoons employed folklores, proverbs and Hindu mythology and animals. He used *Panchatantra*² tales and Aesop's fables. Each cartoon was accompanied by elaborate commentary. Rao and Murthy (2014) observes that those were the days when there were no facilities for making blocks by the photo process method; cartoon blocks had to be drawn on paper, copied in reverse on lead or wooden blocks, and then engraved. Bharti would spend hours with the artist engraver to bring out his ideas as perfectly as possible. In fact, he is reported to have posed and shown the engraver many of the postures and grimaces he had wanted to be portrayed. After Bharti, there was a lull of about a decade. Then cartoons were used during Civil Disobedience Movement. T.S.Choklingam's³ *Sudhantira Sangu* earned the wrath of Colonial Government because of its cartoons.

The Hindu in 1925 had published its first political cartoon which was drawn by an artist who signed himself "Horace", the cartoon attacked the Justice Party and its doings. Dr. P. Varadarajulu Naidu, Editor of *Tamil Nadu daily and weekly*, was a lover of cartoons. Many cartoons in the *Tamil*

Nadu Weekly published in the late twenties were drawn by K.R. Sarma. Other notable cartoonists of South India like Thanu and Vasu moved from *The Indian Express* to *The Hindu* and vice versa. Mali, the ace cartoonist, discovered by S. Sadanand⁴ in *The Free Press Journal* of Bombay migrated to Madras and became an asset to *Ananda Vikatan* (first published 1928) and its sister magazine in English, *The Merry Magazine*, which provided space for cartoons and encouraged cartoonists.

The first Telugu cartoonist Tallisetti Rama Rao (1906-1960) was born in Jeypore, Odisha. He was a lawyer by profession. His first cartoon appeared in 1930 in a monthly titled *Bharthi*. Subsequently his cartoons were published in *Andhra Patrika* and *Prabha*. He drew cartoons to educate the public about the ills of smoking, consumption of liquor, dowry and slavery. Though they lacked the sharp punch and satire of a cartoon, they still paved the path for more people to draw cartoons (Rao & Murthy, 2014). Subsequently, many other cartoonists came into Telugu journalism. Viswanathanarasimha Murthy, R.S. Naidu and Rambhatla Krishna Murthy (the first political cartoonist) were the first leading cartoonists in Telugu. Mention must be made of the popular cartoonist Sridhar, who has been publishing a daily pocket cartoon in *Eenadu*, one of the largest circulated Telugu daily since its inception in 1974.

The first Marathi newspaper to carry cartoons on political and social matters was *Bhoot*. It was started in 1890 by Anandrao Ramachandra Dharandhar. It used to get published on every new and full moon day. It was very popular but ceased publication in 1904.

Political cartooning in India, which was a British import – gradually started to find its own style and idiom by the turn of 20th century. However, it was K Shankar Pillai, popularly known as Shankar (1902-1989) and his *Shankar's Weekly* published from Delhi that made political cartoons immensely popular. Drawing caricatures had been a hobby with Shankar from his student days. When he was working as private secretary to the shipping tycoon Narottam Morarjee, he used to doodle in his spare time, and soon started sending cartoons regularly to *The Bombay Chronicle*, *The Free Press Journal* and *The Weekly Herald*. In 1932, Joseph Pothan, the editor of *The Hindustan Times* offered him a job as staff cartoonist. After six years with *The Hindustan Times*, he was granted study leave for a year so that he could go to London and study art professionally. In 1946, he quit *The Hindustan Times* and two years later he started his own journal, *Shankar's Weekly*, India's first journal of political cartoons, which became very popular. In fact *Shankar's Weekly* was as popular in India as the legendary *Punch*. *Shankar's Weekly*

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closed down in August 1975 after 27 eventful years. During its three decades of existence, it created a demand for cartoons and also inspired a whole generation of artists to become professional cartoonists. The first generation of post-independence Indian cartoonists, including R.K. Laxman and Abu Abraham, was greatly influenced by *Shankar's Weekly*. It set a benchmark for standards for younger cartoonists. As a result a bunch of cartoonists emerged in the media scene. Another reason for the growth of cartooning in India in the 1970s and 1980s was the support that they got from the media houses and public. A fairly tolerant social and political milieu ensured fair amount of independence for the cartoonists to practice their art. Some of the cartoonists working in mainstream newspapers became very popular with the readers and became household names. Among them mention must be made about R.K. Laxman, Abu Abraham, Mario Miranda, Ravishankar, Sudhir Tailang, Gopikrishnan, Shubham Gupta, Shekhar Gurera, Maya Kamath, O. V. Vijayan, Pran Kumar, Mohan Sivanand, Kutty and Keshav. Major regional language newspapers also had brilliant cartoonists and a conducive atmosphere for their art to flourish. Therefore many consider 1970s and 1980s to be the golden period of cartoons in India across languages.

In Hindi, magazines like *Dharmyug*, *Saptahik Hindustan* and *Sarika* started publishing cartoons prominently. Inside last page of *Saptahik Hindustan* was kept for cartoon column "Kaisi Rahi" made by Ravindra. As Triambak Sharma, Editor Cartoonwatch says:

...Those days cartoonists Sushil Kalra, Shiksharathi, Sudhir Dar, Sudhir Tailang, Suresh Sawant and Kaak were introduced to readers. Hindi cartooning was also blessed with cartoonist like S. Phadnis and Prabhakar Jhalke of Yevala, Maharashtra. Among the next generation cartoonists working in Hindi newspapers, we have Prashant Kulkarni, Prabhakar Vairkar, Manjul. In Delhi we have Shyam Jagota, Shekhar Gurera, Kajal Kumar, Jagjeet Rana, and Chander. In Indore we have Ismail Lahiri, Kirtish Bhatt and Devendra Sharma. In Jaipur we have Abhishek Tiwari and Chandrasekhar Hada. Bihar is blessed with cartoons of Pawan with Hindi and regional Bihari language touch. Rajesh Dubey in Jabalpur, Pankar Goswami in Bikaner and Nirmish Thaker in Gujarat are also working on Hindi cartooning for decades. B.V. Panduranga Rao in Bangalore also draws Hindi cartoons with English ones. In Chhattisgarh we have senior cartoonist late B.L. Wahi, S.R. Tailang, Triambak Sharma and young cartoonists like Bhagwat Sahu, Ajay Saxena, Nishant Hota, Dhanesh Diwakar and Sagar.

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There was a dip in the visibility of cartoons in newspapers post 1990. This also happened across languages and regions. Pande (2003) noted that there is also the aspect of changing habits of readers. In the earlier days, newspapers used to be crammed with news matter particularly on the front page, with the pocket cartoon providing the only visual relief. Today, not only has color entered the front pages, the pictorial presentation and design gimmicks have completely edged the cartoon out to total insignificance. However, cartoon has its appeal and attraction for readers who need a dose of humour. New crop of cartoonists are drawing witty cartoons with increasingly ‘in-your face’ attitude. In 1996, Cartoonist Triambak Sharma launched Cartoonwatch, a cartoon-centric magazine “to fill the gap left by the closure of the renowned and much-missed *Shankar’s Weekly*”. It claims to be the only magazine of its kind in the country.

Besides print, television and internet have been providing excellent opportunity for cartoonists. Technology has been a boon. And in fact one can say that cartooning has found a fresh lease of life in social media. It has become easier to draw cartoons with the software available. Many cartoonists are moving from print to other media, Priya Raj, a management professor was the first Indian to have a daily cartoon column on the internet⁵. He launched India’s first cartoon website and introduced India’s first cartoon channel on a horizontal portal.

By mid 2016 many cartoonists have made their presence felt on cyber world, with own websites, online cartoon exhibitions, etc. Many of them are using social media. Content wise also, there has been much expansion. Cartoons are being drawn on various subjects – from politics and social issues to management to sports, even science.

A new genre of journalism is being created called: Comics Journalism. It is a form of journalism that covers news or non-fiction events using the framework of comics – a combination of words and drawn images. Creators of Comics Journalism use visual medium to tell the story or disseminate information. Comics Journalism travels to one specific area/field and collects information and documents, incidents in visual form and later unfolds all information and facts in one story format. These stories are mostly first person accounts, but not always. World Comics India has developed a six months diploma course at University level in Comics Journalism. This course is soon to flag off in different Universities in India⁶.

Another novel attempt is ‘Grassroots comics’ – taking cartoon strips to the grassroots. The use of Grassroots Comics is relatively a new phenomenon,

after its inception in India it has been replicated in other South Asian countries and a few countries in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and Europe. The Grassroots Comics movement started in the late nineties. A group of like-minded cartoonists, development journalists and activists looking for using their skill beyond their livelihood and betterment of the society came up with an idea of using comics as communication tool.

Cartoonists now have several organisations to promote their art across the country. Kerala Cartoon Academy has been functioning from mid-1960s⁷. Bangalore based *Indian Institute of Cartoonists*⁸ is another such organisation, established with the aim of showcasing, promoting and preserving the art of cartooning in the country.

Notes

- 1 *Sulav Samachar* was started on 16 November 1870 from Calcutta by Keshub Chandra Sen. Umanath Gupta was the first editor of this cheap journal (priced one pice) for the information of the masses. The weekly dealt with diverse subjects such as the miserable condition of the peasants, the administrative system, measures for the uplift of the common people and their education, abuses of the *zamindari* system and exploitation by the zamindars, abuses of the British administration, importance of science and scientific explanations in elementary form and prices of commodities, apart from general news from urban and rural areas.
- 2 The *Panchatantra* is an ancient [Indian](#) collection of interrelated [animal fables](#) in verse and prose, arranged within a [frame story](#). The original [Sanskrit](#) work, which some scholars believe was composed around the 3rd century BCE is attributed to [Vishnu Sharma](#).
- 3 T.S. Chokkalingam was the first editor of Tamil daily Dinamani. He also started a daily on his own, Dinamani in 1944.
- 4 Swaminathan Sadanand (1900–1953) founded the English-language The Free Press Journal in 1930. He was the first editor of the paper. In 1927 he had started the Free Press of India Agency, which was the first news agency owned and managed by Indians.
- 4 *Toon Talk*. Interview with Prof. Priya Raj, The Times of India, Bhubaneswar edition, November 15, 2010.
- 5 <http://www.worldcomicsindia.com/comicsjournalism.html>
- 7 <http://www.keralacartoonacademy.com/>
- 8 <http://www.cartoonistsindia.com/htm/home.htm>

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REFLECTIVE IMAGE OF HONOUR KILLINGS IN CINEMA



ANTHROPOLOGICAL INFERENCES FROM TAMIL CINEMA



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Abstract

With the series of incidents of honour killing frequenting in media and channels in recent past, the bilingual (*in Tamil and Telugu*) film *Gauravam* reckons significant accord for its stern message on honour killing. This study with the anthropological acumen has tried to foreground the structural root cause of honour killing with reference to India, that is, the caste underpinnings in social realm and link it with the contents and allegories of cinema – *Gauravam*. While there have been many Tamil cinemas that had the caste resignifications, the film *Gauravam* stands for its critique on caste system in terms of honour killing. This study therefore, probes the caste contours of Tamil cinema as well as the portrayal of women as chastity and pronouncing ritual status. In doing so, it compares the core valour of theme that were set in general contour for Tamil cinema. Moreover, the study will culturally try to understand the resentment of society towards the choice of mates and love marriages.

Keywords

Gauravam, Tamil cinema, Honour killing,
Caste system, Family dishonour

Anthropology as a discipline of keen observer of social instances and social phenomenon, proved itself to be on the popular case on sensational assassination of the Fadime Sahindal (1975-2002), who had become the public icon by newspaper interviews and media projection for boldly standing against the rage of patriarchal Turkish lineage for making public the threats from her family after the mysterious death of her Swede boy-friend in 1998. With the trail of continuous threat for her life by family members, she continued to grow stronger talking on the deprived status of migrant women. She had also raised the issues of migrant women in the Sweden parliament and constantly moved across the country as campaigner. Unfortunately, during the year 2002, Fadime Sahindal's father shot her on the row of allegations of family dishonour. The first reactions on the incident provoked a two perspective notion among the *Kurdish* society. The first from the male *Kurdish* intellectuals was that the murder had nothing to do with the *Kurdish* culture, rather explained in terms of psyche – as her father was crazy. While the other assertion which was kind of related but considered as there was no such notion of honour killing instead the incident needs to be reviewed from the root cause that lies in the universal patriarchal structure. In both these assertions Kurkiala (2003) finds a conspicuous missing of taking up a middle stand because in first perspective the father was not been generalised at all and while in the second case it provides a generalisation to a specific category of culturally motivated sanction on the act (p.7). Mikael Kurkiala as a responsible anthropologist expressed his unwillingness and dissatisfaction over the testimonies in a local daily despite, the threat of the widespread reluctance to explain Fadime's fate in cultural terms which could even lend turning to stem such an interpretation to racist bias. However, it gave a brave turn to the fate of discussions that countered honour killings.

This anecdote apprehends the gist of intensity through which the issue of honour killing can be understood. Unduly because, the fact that despite every preparedness with caution and the wide campaigned fame which she gained for the same reason of threat of murder by the family, Sahindal's life could not be saved. It is agonistic to see every day or other; the dailies containing at least a column from any of the part of the county reporting on the killing of youths in the name of honour. The narration in the above anecdote was to not only apprehend the existential nature in the problem of honour killing in society but to also emphasise on refract a reflective in the intervention that could possibly be made in annihilating it. This precise recreation of its existential notion has been promptly reflective as a form of cinema and has widened the campaign against this social misnomer.

Films on honour killings

Cinema has taken up an effective role in the campaign against the honour killing worldwide. There had been some cinemas which featured contents either in the form of addressing both fictional – whereby the story is recreated or in some instance, as documentation of real events. More importantly, it should be presupposed that the social purpose of cinema is vividly comprehended through its social actions on the realm of exigency that hamper the society like that of honour killing. Across the world strong political contentions are registered on honour killings in different forms. Several films on honour killings like the Turkish films *Mutluluk* ('Bliss', Oguz, 2007) and *Ateşin Düştüğü Yer* ('Where the Flame Falls', Gunes, 2012); Iranian film *The Stoning of Soraya M.* (Nowrasteh, 2008) mediates on the violence on women in the name of honour and campaigns the anti-establishment of honour killing in the society. Liberal movements, organisations, scholarly writings and media jointly are barging against this evil tragedy.

There have been Indian films too in the list viz. *Aakrosh* ('Aggression', Priyadarshan, 2010), *Guddu Rangeela* (Subhash Kapoor, 2015), *NH-10* (Navdeep, 2015), *Sairat* (Nagraj Manjule, 2016) etc. actuating the campaign against this social plague. These films have been pertinent to the Indian social system and have projected the form of caste oppressions of Indian social structure coupled with the contour of honour killings. And one such film in the list is the Tamil popular cinema – *Gauravam* which has a similar storyline of the Hindi cinema – *Aakrosh*. The film *Gauravam* indeed is a bold effort to symbolise the caste based 'honour killings' happening in Tamil Nadu of India which once was the land of a number of political rational thinkers.

South Indian cinema

Though not a pan Indian scenario, impinge of cinema has wide and deeper proven impact especially among the Tamil and Telugu audience in history. To say, very significantly, the radical and socially provocative ideas of the cinemas of 50s and 60s during the post Independence renaissance period had been the fate of political life in both Tamil Nadu and earlier undivided Andhra Pradesh. Cine stars were throne to hall of fame through cinema to have even become the leaders of the states (Sivathamby 1981; Pandiyan, 1992; Dickey, 1993; Rogers, 2009; Prasad 2004, 2009). C. N. Annadurai, K. Karunanithi, M. G. Ramachandran and J. Jayalalithaa were prominent

personalities who had the affiliation with Tamil cinema and became the Chief Ministers of Tamil Nadu. Vijaykanth and Sivaji Ganesan emerged as the eminent leaders of the state.

Meanwhile in Andhra Pradesh, N. T. Ramarao had been for some years sworn-in Chief Minister and Chiranjeevi emerged as a major political leader of the state. More emphatically, in the history of Tamil cinema, strong political and social contents on Dravidian ideologue appropriated and utilised this medium all to its behest. Nonetheless, both Tamil and Telugu cinema have been consistently talking about the social problems through its lens at regular intervals of time. But then, caution on explicitly narrating or portraying on caste disjunctions, direct attacks on creed or individuals and portraying crude form of contemporary life were mostly contained. In recent periods, one such film that caught the eyes of antagonism for the specific cause that portrayed the social system in real is the bilingual cinema- *Gauravam*, filmed by Radha Mohan, Prakash Raj and team both in Tamil and Telugu. The basic one-line of the film was based on honour killing practised among the caste community in order to keep up the pride of caste creed.

Social structural roots of honour killings

Human Rights Watch (2001) defines honour killings are acts of vengeance, usually death, committed by male family members against female family members, who are held to have brought dishonour upon the family. A woman can be targeted by (individuals within) her family for a variety of reasons including: refusing to enter into an arranged marriage, being the victim of a sexual assault, seeking a divorce—even from an abusive husband—or (allegedly) committing adultery, victims of rape, sometimes for very trivial reasons, like dressing in a way deemed inappropriate or displaying behaviour seen as disobedient (Holt, 2014).

Honour killing is experienced in all parts of the world especially where the equality and rights of women are considerably low. In some parts of the world, including Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Brazil, Uganda, and many countries in the Middle East, when a woman's family believes that her behaviour has threatened the "family honour," killing her is seen as the only alternative (Lesnie, 2000, p. 12). In reasoning out the cultural attitude towards this act, Professor Sharif Kanaana (cf. Ruggi, 1998, p.13) believes that honour killing reflects the patriarchal orientation of these countries aimed at creating a system of social control designed to protect important familial power structures including reproductive powers. He contends that

honour killing is not aimed at controlling women's sexual behaviour; rather, it is aimed at protecting an important familial power structure, reproductive power (Awwad, 2001, p. 40).

In India, statistics from 2010 indicate roughly 900 reported honour killings in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, while additional 100-300 honour killings took place in the rest of the country (Annavarapu, 2013, p. 130). Unlike other countries, the social structure of India is the consolidation of patriarchy and hierarchically differentiated society unique with caste, lurking the social systems to actively promote this social phenomenon. One of the significant characters of caste system in India is its prescribed unique norms in marriage practices and strict endogamy. Marriages in this system are considered to provide a structural link between kinship and caste whereby the kinship alliance and relations established by them strengthen the caste group in turn providing a wider social leverage and polity. Meanwhile, it is conceived that any breach in the normative system brings down the status of not only the immediate family also the clan, family and the caste group (Chowdhry, 1997, p. 1019).

The alliance system in India bestows the sexuality in upholding the patriarchy. Mainstream Hindu society that is primarily based on the *varna* categorisation of caste system, establishes every interaction in the society through the line of patriarchy. According to Jaiswal (2008) the practice of caste endogamy was not a borrowing or survival of aboriginal practice rather was "evolved and consolidated in the process of regulating hierarchical subordination of social groups and reproduction of patriarchy" (p. 5). Perhaps, even in the marital order the female are procured with lower status as devised in the concept of *anuloma* and *pratiloma*. It is evident that caste or *varna* exogamy is not a new phenomenon from its *vedic* text on the scriptions of *anuloma* and *pratiloma* marriage systems. The text provides the detailed description on different forms of marriage across the *varna* elaborately in the tales of origin of caste. *Anuloma* is when the higher caste male marries a lower caste female and *pratiloma* is where the higher caste female resorts to marry a lower caste male. The phenomenon of *pratiloma* when the higher caste female marries a lower caste male is considered to be a social stigma, condemned and the girl is out-casted or akin to beast, because of child born out of the marriage is considered to be of low caste's progeny (Beteille, 1990, p. 493). Since, *vedic* period the patriarchal assertion of caste system has deemed the position of women as low. The social sanction of *anuloma* does not acknowledge the sanction of *pratiloma* where a male is never questioned for his illicit activities instead the female has to endorse it with chastity and virginity, lucidly giving her

In India, statistics from 2010 indicate roughly 900 reported honour killings in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, while additional 100-300 honour killings took place in the rest of the country.

the delusive pride of community and family.

The patriarchal character of Indian society imposes a strong constraint on the human character and conduct of women. They are as Das (1976) argues considered the “gateway” of caste and needed to be policed to protect the purity (cf. Abraham, 2014, p. 57). For the Hindu theory, purity of women has been long the cornerstone of caste and kinship (Beteille, 1990, p. 492) through which the hegemonic patriarchy is sustained. Anthropologist Nur Yalman argues that “it was land, women, and ritual purity that castes sought to protect and this was done through controlling women’s sexuality” (Yalman, 1963, p. 27). Thereby, to protect the purity of caste, especially, the upper caste horror of hypo-gamy (Abraham, 2014, p. 57) substantially the women were provided with a ritual status.

Caste until today operates in organised form to protect its character. Very interestingly, in the cases on honour killing in India, the intervention of caste panchayat, otherwise the *khap* panchayat is significantly noted. Reports and cases filed against these killings reveals that most number of the perpetrators are the community *khap* panchayats who sternly interfere into the issue forcing the household members even to the extent of committing crimes like filicide in the name of caste chastity and honour. In 2004, the *khap* panchayat of Jhajjar district, Haryana, declared a married couple brother and sister, despite woman being pregnant. They ordered the termination of the marriage just because the couple violated the principle of village exogamy (Rajalakshmi, 2004). Any disturbance in the carry forward of traditional norms like the issues on incest is still dealt rigidly by these panchayats. For instance, the first ever major case reported in India on 2007 was the *Manoj and Babli* of Haryana (Dogra, 2013; Thapar-Björkert, 2014), where the couples were murdered by the order of the *Jat* (caste) /*khap* panchayat. The conviction was reasoned as *sagotra* marriage (members belonging to same *gotra* are considered as the brother and sister; thereby marriage between is considered incest) within the same caste.

In the year 2008, on the perpetual denouncement of *khap* panchayat, a father despite his daughter’s pregnancy, allegedly tied her hands and legs to a tree along with her husband brutally murdered them by running over the tractor in Karnal District of Haryana. Then, further during 2009, in Singhwala district, an Ayurvedic medical practitioner was murdered in his in-laws house by a group of men while on his way to bring back his wife after the legal judgement by the High court of Punjab and Haryana, legitimising their marriage as legal (Thapar-Björkert, 2014). The stern attitude of *khap* panchayat is evident from many more such incidences across India. *Khap*

panchayat enforces a distorted claim on *sagotra* marriages as it would amount for incest but, the Indian Penal Code (IPC) does not constitutionally account for any sort of ban on such marriages (Kokal, 2013, p. 23).

On the continuing trail of honour killing the Supreme Court based on the Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking protection to couples married inter-caste and within *gotra*, from the wrath of these panchayats observed that – to kill or physically assault a young man/woman who marries against their wishes is wholly illegal and referred this acts nothing but barbaric and brutal murders (Kokal, 2013, p. 23). The archaic tradition of systems however, disapproved the proposal of Government to amend Section-300 to include honour killing within the purview of murder and sanctioned declaration of the indulgence of *Khap* panchayat in these crimes as unlawful under the proposed new bill – The Prohibition of Unlawful assembly (Interference with the Freedom of Matrimonial Alliances) Bill, 2011.

Theoretical understanding

The popular cinema of India has always maintained to provide with entertainment for its viewers. But films under this category has purposed in mediating the eventuality of honour killing as a social misnomer in the vogue of counter social action to the exigency of honour killings. For scholars in film studies from different disciplines, it is a system of social reproduction that is recreated according to the taste culture and social exigency. Taste culture according to Foley (1990), intersects the choice in affiliating and repulsion of available consumer capital with other elements in the culture. It evokes the understanding between the categories for their own life-worlds and those with others (Mechling, 2001, p. 67). In asserting the consumer notion of cinema, the taste culture (Bourdeiu, 1992, p.10) provides the geographical and cultural boundary to the cinema with narratives of modernism and post-modernism that simultaneously provides a tension between the forces of change and stasis operating in taste culture (Harbrod, 2002, p. 15). And being a medium of cultural expression, cinematic oeuvres are devised through implicit admiration from the society as either they formulate a specific set of popular culture or else appropriate it simultaneously from the society.

Meanwhile, social exigency envisages the happenings in the socio-political routine or incorporates both popularly noticed and unnoticed aspects of daily life of the society. It develops the change in the genre through social actions. Miller (1984) asserts that genre is constructed duly out of situation and need. Further, she suggests that exigency is a social

process and a form of social knowledge (Chess, 2015, p. 70-71). Therefore, the genre's communicative purpose in Miller's genre theory is in a sense, socially negotiated and that it mediates between private intensions and social exigency (Miller, 1984, p. 163). In cinema the combination of the eventualities and exigencies with mutual construing of events, interests, and objects provide a reflective of social actions. Also cinema being a product of the incorporation of social facts and phenomenon that exist in the society, in one sense, it also act as buffer to document the eventualities and precariously bring to the screen – the past, present and future social systems, cultural practices and dogmas of society.

Tamil cinema and film *Gauravam*

The story eventually starts with the Arjun fortunately happens to visit his friend Shanmugam's village while on the way to his business venture and finds annoying replies on enquiring about his whereabouts. He manages to meet up Shanmugam's father who was helpless, frail and sick. All along his way he finds dejected attitudes of villagers but ultimately seeks the help of an advocate with whom he later falls in relation and his friend's paternal brother - Maasi. To his dismay, he finds from Maasi that Shanmugam was in relation and eloped with a girl, who is the daughter of upper caste landlord of the same village. Angry on their elopement the villagers show an indifferent attitude by not willing to talk about them.

In a later development, Arjun along with his friends put up tireless effort investigating, tenting in the village probing Shanmugam's whereabouts. He notably finds a clue from the drawing skills of a mentally retarded neighbourhood child staying next to Shanmugam's house. This child was a feeble victim of the communal riot that took place some years back in the village. His mother and father were killed and his sister Selvi survives the agony of gang rape during the riot. The child is taken care by Selvi and always likes to isolate himself from rest of the world spending his time in a wrecked old temple in the disengaged part of the village. Accidentally the hero spots the sketches in one of his collections showing the murdering event by some men nearby the old temple provokes to probe further filing a case against the murderers who as expected were the son and his allies of the upper caste landlord.

It is quite interesting to observe that both in Tamil and Telugu format, the film though had same storyline, eventually screens different climax. The landlord wants his son Saravana to go for an intensive search for the couple. On the orders, the Saravana launches a wide search and manages

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to find the couple, but in a fit of anger he thrashes the couple to death. In Tamil version, the landlord is informed about the incident and is shown to have involved in hiding out the matter. Finally in the legal proceedings the landlord kills himself afraid of the dishonour of arrest and Saravana is arrested. While in the Telugu version, the landlord is not informed about the murder instead kept as eloped couples. Later, when Arjun probes the issue and takes Saravana to landlord for convicting his assault of couple, the landlord immediately fires Saravana and surrenders the court for killing his son.

The difference in the climax is the understanding of the film-maker in interpreting and determining the scope of the culture of audience. The theme of both these films deal with India's cruel social practices of honour killing which seems to be performed to uphold the pride of certain dominant caste groups. This write-up is an attempt to understand the existing social structure in relevance with the aforesaid film. And it discusses critically on honour killing in the public sphere and tries to answer them with anthropological contexts especially by analysing its root in the structure of Indian society. Apparently, more emphasis has been laid on the signification in Tamil cinema to unravel the apartheid cultural nexus and it could be asserted as an immediate reflective on the contemporary social exigency on number of cases in recently reported issues of honour killing. Meanwhile, the usage by Telugu counterpart of the film *Gauravam* has shown a bit of tolerance in understanding the intend change needed for the upsurge of relevance with the contemporary political and social scenario. Moreover, through the medium of content analysis this study would also understand the need for the two different version of film making to satisfy the audience. But let us first socially understand the problem of honour killing, and then its perspective in the reflective mode on the cinema screen.

Analysis of the film

Family and honour in Tamil cinema

In the history of Tamil cinema, the genre of family had a very late entry when compared to the social cinema. It took almost four decade since the inception of Tamil cinema to encourage family genre which as such was a counter effect to the social milieu during 1950s and 60s¹. The main valour of theme set in these family based films were the contents on the culture and family value and pride. A stereotypic formulation was conventionally build-up with a rhetoric conversation of modernity and tradition. Thus in recreating a cinematic image, the disruption in the family orderliness due to an uncertain circumstance would be the first plot point (the rise of conflict

in cinematic term) of the film, subsequently, emphasising the importance of honour of the family. The same conventional formulaic appeal is upright in the film *Gauravam* through the disturbance that arose due to the couple's elopement in the family or the village order in upholding the pride forms the first plot.

As a bilingual film, *Gauravam* (the word literally meaning -'honour') emphasises in its crux the filicide in the name of honour as its theme. The term honour is comprehended always with the complementary opposite, shame. According to Kamir (2006), "honour is the center-piece of societies that evaluate their members and rank them according to adherence to rigid conduct codes, requiring specific manifestations of pride, assertiveness, and independence of men, and sexual purity of women" (p. 196). Honour for a society/community/ family provides a structure and place in the social hierarchy with strict social roles, encouraging competition amongst men and sexual constraint among women. It is widely believed that conforming and abiding to the prescribed code would yield status and deviating from them brings about social denigration.

The base plot of film *Gauravam* is rooted in the murder that resulted to keep up the pride and honour of the family. Irrespective of all the sentiments and emotion of being a loving daughter and affectionate sister, the girl was lynched to death by her own brother for choosing her partner from a lower caste to reinstate the honour of the family. This film is a reflection of social envy in Tamil Nadu. It tries to vigil the social audience on continuous happenings on honour killings in the state. This may be the reason as a hint of envy observed in the purposeful change of climax according to the Tamil audience which is significant for the political and social climate existed during the period of release in Tamil Nadu. Perhaps, none would have forgotten the flashing events of Dharmapuri in Tamil Nadu, that eventually followed by the elopement of Ilavarasan and Divya (Arivanantham, 2013) resulting in the death of Ilavarasan and eventually creating social debates across nation. There might be many such incidents occurred which were not reported or unnoticed but after the issue of Ilavarasan and Divya there were a number of incidents of honour killings reported in the media.

Contentions of caste in Tamil cinema

Sara Dickey (1993) views that the restoration of melodramas whose fortuitous resolution may indicate an avoidance of the true conditions of most viewers lives which are characterised by happy endings offering hope to viewers (p. 48). Perhaps it is void and profoundly seen that infusion of caste dimensions

in cinemas especially with comply of lower caste, naturally had moved the climax of the film with sad or filthy ending. In Bharathiraja's rural based films *Vedham Pudithu* ('New Age Testament', Bharathiraja, 1987), the affair between *Thevar* boy and higher caste priestly *Brahmin* girl do not join rather, succumb to a tragic accident resulting separation and in *Muthal Mariyathai* ("First Tribute", Bharathiraja, 1985) the protagonist develops a fair proximity towards a migrant lower caste woman and at the same time his nephew falls in love with lower caste cobbler girl respectively also projects a climax resulting in separation. There are many more films like the *Vennilla Kabadi Kuzhu* ('Vennilla Kabadi Group', Suseendran, 2009), *Sethu* (Bala, 1999), *Kadhal* ('Love', Balaji Sakthivel, 2004), *Bharathikannama* (Cheran, 1997) etc. resulting and setting similar melancholic impression on the minds of the audience. In such films the plot point of the film is based on either the antagonism of caste within the caste group or with the others especially the lower caste.

Though the film *Gauravam*, basically adopts the ingredients of caste facet, it has tried to put it thoroughly on the constructive side of the society by protracting and exposing the contravening nature of hierarchy existing in the caste system. As a breakthrough from the conventional film history of Tamil cinema, it has appropriated the caste impinges with soft criticism. Say for instance, the scene which opens in the Tea shop describes the rural village's caste hierarchy. *Maasi* comes to the tea shop and finds a use and throw cup hung in the tree standing besides the shop. He gets the tea and moves himself aside to a corner away from the shop, while other villagers get tea in a tea glass and chatter unnecessary stuffs sitting on the tea bench. On other occasion the local leader of the political party explains the intact nature of rural social structure and the village now he reside and says that the hierarchy is prevalent even among the lower caste dalits as they too follow strict restriction in marriage alliance by avoiding marriage with other dalit castes.

Gender and mate selection

Perpetually, the mainstream cinema has always maintained that, the protection of women is the act of pride and honour. In the film *Sundarapandiyan* (Prabhakaran, 2012), the initial scene opens with the murder of a youth for the very reason he has distorted in attracting the perpetrator's caste female in the local bus. And in the blockbuster film *Khaadal* ('Love', Balaji Sakthivel, 2004), the theme of the film reflects the scenario of the love between the higher caste girl and the lower caste boy eventually been forcefully separated and his fate ends as a demented beggar in the roads.

Though the film *Gauravam*, basically adopts the ingredients of caste facet, it has tried to put it thoroughly on the constructive side of the society by protracting and exposing the contravening nature of hierarchy existing in caste system.

These Tamil cinemas in the contemporary social period of modernisation, signals a wave of caution to abide the traditional norms of strict caste endogamy against love affairs to the viewers.

In the film *Gauravam*, there are two inter-caste love plots that entangles with respect to modernity and tradition needs critical evaluation. The first couple had to face the fate of defeat duly because of the social structure that existed in their close nexus. The father of the girl who was a dominant caste leader had been a renowned person in the village especially among his castemen. For him his caste boundaries are his limitations for all his endeavours. He believed on upholding the traditional norms and values of his community and felt that was the reason why the villagers respect him. While the boy's family who were labourers and workers, mostly the oppressed section living in the same village had to obey the norms put forth by dominant enclaves of caste system. Irrespective of the educational acclaims these couple could not make it through because of stern social frame on concrete notion of belief and value on the pride, honour of the family and community which ultimately killed the couple. Another couple Arjun and Yazhini, fall in love with each other during the course of investigating the missing former couple. Arjun being an urban bought-up though has a peripheral vicinity of caste, had the liberty to choose his girl. And the advocate whose father is a rational thinker himself married to a Bengali woman did not mind the fringes of caste and tried to put every thought in rational temper. Thereby, the second couples love or to say in other words the independent choice of their will was accepted by the environs of this couple.

In subsequent period, the theme of Tamil cinema has converted its contour of woman keeping in pace the social development, political, economical and civic life. Niranjana (2000) presupposes the image of women in a further commercial version with the naive of nationalism, she asserts that:

...the Indian women are produced at a particular conjuncture between nation (imagined as an autonomous, sovereign, nation-state) and modernity (including both processes such as democratisation and the spread of mass communication, and discourses such as those which produce the very distinctions between 'tradition' and 'modern') (p.139).

Even in case of the film *Gauravam*, the female characters have been given considerably less significance. The lead female charter of the film (heroine) is opened with a regular sequence as a social activist involving

herself in public issues. The character did not enhance the role further even though, being an advocate it could only give a feminine outlook in the film as a charm young looking girl supporting the quests of the male protagonist. Other women characters to mention are – the eloped girls sister-in-law and her mother who are typically the subdued women abiding to the patriarchal orders. But, significant of them is the character of *Selvi* who has been portrayed as the rape victim of the village during the riots that occurred seven years back. Though she belongs to the same village, the notion of rape abandoned her from marriage and was a symbol of sympathy. But, the signification of the film provided a gain as *Maasi* marrying her breaks the social construct of rape and virginity.

Sometimes the complicated nexus of cinema industry is far beyond the reach of accessibility in promoting films with social consciousness. The recently released film *Yenru Thaniyum* ('When Shall it End', Bharathi Krishnakumar, 2016) has a strong storyline of voice against honour killing. But, the film-makers could only manage to get a single theatre for its show in Chennai city which is famous for its multiplicity of theaters. The process of cinema to reach until the audience with all its intentness requires a lengthy procedural under goings subsumed with the taste culture of the audience that was successfully aligned in the film *Gauravam*.

Conclusion

As a socially conscious film, *Gauravam* has tried to include possible inclusion of social realities in the film. Say for instances the film-maker in certain occasions has captured the generally prevalent attitude of the oppressed section as the scene, where suddenly some of youths are chased and trashed for a silly reason provides an extra touch to the indifference prevailing in the village, the attitude of local administration handling the issues of atrocities on caste establishes that the victims apathy is a regular incident they face and were to their regular business. But when they come to know about the murder by the upper caste members they become out of their temper.

Just after about six month's period of the incident of Ilavarasan and Divya, the film *Gauravam* hit the screen with similar content of the dreadful episode. It arouses tremendous deceitful comments like the leader of caste association, issuing a public press statement after the launch of the promo trailer of the film by saying 'this sort of film would erupt communal tension again in the regions of Dharmapuri'. Understanding the impact of cinema and its modular form of documentation is the reflection of such comments.

The projection of honour killing in the film *Gauravam* is the appropriation of reflection found in the social order. The intent idea has provided a discussion on social structure that denounces the status of women in society. The patriarchal social order that defines the norms and symbolic values connotes pride and status of family with character and chastity of woman. Honour killing is the reaction on the female choice of life partner as against the clutches of traditional norms and hierarchy which in turn is considered culturally as the network of status, safety and upsurge of polity. Eventually cinemas that hold the responsibility of reflecting the social problems sublime them diverting and threatening the progressive thoughts to restrict and intrude fundamentalism into the minds of young generation. Thus this film *Gauravam* upheld the reflective responsibility of cinema to unravel the socially lucid phenomenon.

Note

1 Tamil cinema found the major impact of Dravidian ideology and prominence that were reflected in the form of increased number of social cinemas starred by MGR, while at the same time, there were also family based genre that were equally in the verge of proliferation starred by Sivaji Ganesan.

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ABSTRACTS

COMMUNICATOR VOL. LII(1), JANUARY-MARCH 2017

People's Empowerment through Radio: Community Radio as a Participatory Communication Tool

Esther S. Kar

It has been over 20 years since the Hon'ble Supreme Court gave its landmark judgement declaring airwaves as public property. Since February 1996, Government of India has made a conscious effort to open up the airwaves to a diversity of media and also create a space for the Community Media. In the context of development communication, the Community Radio as a participatory communication tool has proved its effectiveness and reach and created a paradigm for involvement of the beneficiary in the decision making process. This study discusses how Community Radio sector in India has empowered and given voice to the most marginalised and ensured their participation in the development process.

Researching Community Radio: Reminiscences of a Conceptual and Empirical Journey

Kanchan K. Malik

This paper reflects on the first ever doctoral work on 'Community Radio in India' carried out by the author at a time when the not-for-profit sector was not a reality in the broadcasting ecology of the country. It traces how the campaign for community radio in India and some of the grassroots experiments of narrowcasting informed her research findings and analysis. The paper also make linkages, where possible, to the changes that have been witnessed in the field of research on community radio over the last decade and a half – how the academic foundations have evolved, transformed and progressed and what are the newer perspectives and prospects for research with the changing policy environment and practices within the CR sector in India.

Insights from the Past: Exploring the Future of Community Radio in India

Shweta Prajapati

This study is an attempt to deliberate upon the critical issue of sustainability in the community radio sector with some insights from functioning of various community radio stations in India. While providing a brief account on the interlinked challenges faced by community radio stations, the study discusses a few case studies within the framework of social, technical, financial and institutional sustainability. It is

based on the author's interactions with different community radio stations across India and also her own managerial experience of working with one of the stations. Insights from these varied incidents have been put together to deliberate upon common concerns and also share some interesting observations from the field which can indicate towards possible solutions.

A Home away from Home: Migrants, their Voice and Community Radio

N. Ramakrishnan

Migrant communities are among the most marginalised communities in any society and they face extensive xenophobia and discrimination. An important component of establishing migrant rights is for societies to establish spaces and platforms that allow migrant communities to express themselves and speak out. One important way to achieve this is the use of community radio, a form of radio that is owned, managed and run by communities themselves. This article examines the challenges of voice poverty as applied to migrants. It explores how community radio has addressed the issue of migrants' rights and inclusion through sensitive programming and affirmative spaces for migrants to participate in community discussions.

Community Radio: An Emerging Tool for Science Communication

Bijay Basant Patro

The three instances cited in this article point to the ability of ordinary citizens with the inclination to report on science being able to harness the facilities of Community Radio Stations so as to broadcast science programmes. Together, all the three experiments integrate the creative abilities of radio reporters in the communities to demystify and communicate science in a language (even colloquial language) that their listeners understand. This article provides a glimpse of three such interventions – a programme series on 'Science for Women Health and Nutrition' and mathematics on radio or Radio Maths and the science of climate change, a programme series that goes by the name Shubh Kal. While contributing to raising scientific temper, which is every citizen's duty, as enshrined in the Constitution of India, these initiatives have laid the foundation of a people's science movement in the country.

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