

Ecofeminism: From the Perspective of Indian Cinema and Performing Arts

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Abstract

This is a hence proven fact that cinema and theatre especially performing arts connects larger audience while representing the core and periphery of a civilized and uncivilized society. In this very fact location of women as female protagonists is very limited and obscure. Also, the initial instances shows that they were treated as supporting character. In this paper I will try and highlight the roles of female characters in indigenous Bollywood and some popular literature also from the perspective of Ecofeminism. To understand Whether they were visible as facilitator of nature and ecology or they were seen exercising their agency through those characters or they are just objectified for publicity stunt in commercial films. This paper will also be touching upon the new age Cinema and theatre where some critiques are observing this as a contrasting effect of past. From the beginning of the civilization, whenever men needed support for livelihood and rule, women have provided their helping hand. For instance, in ancient civilizations women were seen as gatherers, those who put together resources, nurture and take care of them. But their clutch and agency are missing, when it comes to their social, political and cultural sphere. This basic makes them a ‘choice based’ role player, where both choice and role are not of their interest. There are several examples in our visual art-based Cinema i.e., Bollywood. There are movies which explains the generational change and continuity, along with the cognizance of watching spectators.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, spectator, stipulate, concise, narcissists, horrendous, juxtapose, malignant, stygian, descry, Victorian

Introduction

These days everything become viral so fast that people ignore stygian part of it. Every story has its multifaced impacts on the society and in this case where I am trying to descry role, nature, and visibility of women in the visual art it can differ from fundamental theories of ecofeminism. These examples will vary in different and scenarios. These movies cover innumerable topics where optically intangible emotions like happiness, sadness, grief, pain of women is juxtaposed through caste discrimination, gender discrimination, familial disputes, sexual harassment, rape culture etc. Women population is made visible by mainstream Cinema and Performing Arts. Before partition of India and Pakistan the movies displayed very holy, pure and chaste roles for women. In many cases women of Upper Castes were not allowed to do intimate scenes. The roles which were given to them were subtle and *Victorian*. Just to be good wives to their husband, skilled in the tasks of household works like Meena Kumari of Saheb, Biwi aur Ghulam, the film follows Chhoti Bahu's effort to keep her husband—who likes drinking and watching prostitutes perform—at their home by drinking with him. She becomes addicted to alcohol, leading both of them into bankruptcy. This shows women did not had permanent assets for her bad times and also the false pride of

upper caste husband who was ready to sacrifice everything for his interests. This particular example tempers the so-called marriage vows of Hindu *satpati* which says *man will promise to provide each other the good things of life: food, physical and emotional nourishment and wealth*. There are plenty of examples which will make us believe that women had no agency to choose what is good or bad for them. On contrary to this there are plenty of examples of this emotional baggage which makes them to surrender to the needs of men and dominance. Women are told to act in a certain way which is now gotten into their nerves and genes, from which they are unable to come out or it will take more time and strength. Likewise, we are turning a blind eye and a deaf ear towards Mother nature. Particularly, in this movie Meena Kumari's (the lead actress) role is criticized by many people culturally pro people, those who had believed that she had done bad stuff which does not represents a good wife. On the other what she was believing was that she will again attention of her husband by being like him (alcoholic) or by doing all those things which were liked by his man in other women. So, she was choosing to be other person just for her husbands' attention and also trying preserve her status and reputation in female politics of her home.

There is plentitude of examples where in cinema women are viewed as nature lover, humanitarian in behavior, always ready to sacrifice first (or may be pushed to sacrifice), softest target of society to critic and condemned. For years the Cinematic Narrative is same and very rare examples are there where female protagonists' roles are visible. Till now also society is not able to digest female centric movies.

Objective

The objective of this paper is to connect instances of movies where female played a role similar to fundamental guidelines of society and what they receive in general after playing such roles. Are these roles apt for the changing society? Or women are still struggling for their basic right? Or they have moved forward but society is acting as a constant hurdle? To discuss this change and continuity I have tried to emphasis powerful female characters of movies.

Value

1. To examine the principle structure, themes, dialogue, and visuals in the films to explore the underlying essence of dystopian narratives related to female protagonists.
2. And examine roles of reproduction and motherhood of female characters. The study contributes to previous studies on female and nature representation in Indian movies.

Creating a theoretical Frame

To add to the understanding of film through film theory, it is important to lay out a foundation for dystopian narratives of Indian Cinema and an understanding of how nature has often been seen onscreen and Offscreen i.e., outside the theatres. For example, previous research on representation of nature has identified an anthropocentric view of nature that reduces the natural world to a tool that benefits humans (Koger & Winter, 2010; Corbett, 2002) and people are consuming it blindly in some cases. In a similar way, work that has analyzed dystopian films focuses on a fear of the loss of control of nature and the potential to expose human condition (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013) where filmmakers have tried to show something exclusive. In order to complement ecofeminist theory, previous studies on motherhood were also explored and consulted. These studies have allowed to recognize the foundation of placed expectations on women to be mother figures and nurtures.

Feminist studies have agreed on the labor that motherhood entails for women and how this labor is unequal in contrast to that of fatherhood (Stearney, 1994; Feasey, 2012). This work has also taken into consideration the responsibility of exploring the naturalization of motherhood for women, or as defined by Adrienne Rich (1976), the “natural mother” (p. 34). Meanwhile, ecofeminism has also identified the feminization of nature and explored the recovery of nature by women (Merchant, 2013; Yates, 2017). Many views in feminism and ecofeminism clash on this topic. Early feminist scholars argued that putting an environmental responsibility on women encourages the equating of women with nature, for their equal participation and progress, therefore, makes them less than culture (Ortner, 1972; Stearney, 1994). In contrast, other scholars argue that the connection of women with nature should be embraced and that the dichotomy that places culture over nature should be questioned (Merchant, 2013; Yates, 2017). Still, ecofeminist scholarship agrees on the notion that there is a simultaneous domination of nature and women and both are fighting for their rights. Rights, again should be natural ones, progressive ones, sustainable ones and ones which are not to keep parity in exceptional cases.

Methodology

This paper uses a theoretical method, analyzing secondary data which has been collected from secondary sources such as journals, books, magazines, newspaper articles, oral histories, digital material and website publications. In order to answer the research questions, it proposes using a qualitative research method to examine the emerging patterns on how women as characters and nature as a landscape are framed in society of mainstream Indian cinema. To be more specific, the media analysis method proposed here is textual narrative analysis. This method seems best suited, since it focuses on the various elements of a narrative: structure, themes, dialogue, and visuals. In this methodological process, three views of each film will be required as one focuses on a combination of structure and theme, a second view focuses on dialogue, and the final one on visuals. The objective of a narrative textual analysis is to examine a work as a text that helps the reader make sense of Indian society in various themes and approaches. Similarly, film theory has that aim for film, but narrative analysis asks questions on why a story is told in a particular way.

Film analysis

For analysis I have chosen selective movies which are trying to trigger some social nuances of past and present. In this series Achhut Kanya (1936), set in British Imperial period. This movie highlights many issues like caste, being an untouchable by caste Dukhia got job in Colonial Contribution to India i.e., Indian Railways. He saved life of Mohan (the lead actor) from venom by sucking it who belongs to privileged brahmin community. Later he becomes friends with Dukhia’s daughter Kasturi. Dukhia being a single parent always taught his daughter that how his work is so crucial and lives of people dependent on it as he was the one gives signals to passing trains. He knew such privileged job he will not get in Hindu society, so he taught her daughter very well about signals. And at the time of climax her daughter sacrificed her live to save lives of others. The Narrative analysis gives a story with numerous nuances of caste discrimination, gender discrimination, societal penance-dowry etc. In movie, husband is addressed as *malik*, on the other hand wife is addressing herself as *dasi*. Here character of Kasturi is compared with a lifesaving soul or divine character who continued save lives afterwards also and a symbol of her presence is erected nearby the crossing where people visit and pay gratitude. The visual analysis was having enough potential to convey the social biasness against women, that they are believed as superhumans but not mere

human. That, agency was not appreciated but their sacrifice was valorized. To be visible in society women had to sacrifice themselves?

Mother India (1957), as the name is suggesting female protagonist-based movie. Its central character is a peasant woman, Radha (Nargis), whose determination to weather all forms of social and personal adversity without compromising her honor becomes a symbol of India's own pride as an ancient culture and a new democracy. The film is at once a sort of Indian "Stella Dallas," which finds the heroine making sacrifice after sacrifice on behalf of her family, and a "Gone with the Wind"-style epic of social change. After Radha married, she discovers that her mother-in-law has gone into debt with the heartless local money lender, Sukhilala (Kanhaiyalal), to finance the lush festivities. But a marriage that begins in debt is already in danger, the lust festivities show over expenditure on the institution marriage, which leads to wastage and competition amongst communities to spend on marriage, where both groom and bride are treated as mere commodities.

Gradually Radha and her husband (Raaj Kumar) are forced to sell off their land and cattle to finance the exorbitant interest the moneylender demands. When the husband loses both arms in a farming accident and can no longer support his family, he runs away in shame, leaving Radha with their two young sons. The visual analysis at this points "Mother India" shades into "Mother Courage", so called cultural critics must have liked this phase of life of Radha. But the questions which prominently pertinent to the scenario were mother-in-law was the owner of the land for which Mother India turned up? Does she have any agency on the matters of property? How a mother's courage could not push to send her children to school for better life and education so that they can understand the value of zeros in moneylender's records? Such divine character with logical flaws.

Ankur (1974), The title of the film, Ankur, meaning seedling, sets the film's theme, which explores the birth and predicament of a child (*seedling*) born outside the union of caste endogamous marriage. In the village, Surya meets Laxmi and seduces her, a Dalit woman from the community of *Kumhars* (*Potters*) who works as a cleaner along with her husband with a speech and hearing disability and an alcoholic, Kishtayya, in his ancestral home. The narrative analysis shows, caste norms are conceived and altered around the demand for this labor, evidenced by Surya's acceptance of Laxmi's cooking instead of the village priest's wife, as she charged him comparatively less for it. Dalit women in India have been called "*Dalit among Dalits*". They have been threatened by sexual assault and abuse at the hands of upper-caste men owing to their easy access to Dalit women, who historically have enjoyed greater spatial mobility as working-class women in the Indian social order. This greater mobility, coupled with easy access by upper-caste men, has made their bodies a site of both desire and exploitation, a theme explored in detail by Benegal in his film. The visual analysis has shown two different categories of women throughout the film—those whose agency and existence are constantly denied by their caste status and those whose caste position provides them with a sense of protection and agency. For example, when an upper caste woman is put at stake and lost in a poker game by her husband to his friend, she refuses to leave her house and go with the friend. Furthermore, she uses her agency to shut the door on him. The door here then becomes an important motif for the space and agency that Dalit women do not enjoy, as Laxmi literally did not have a door in her hut, thus making it possible for Surya or any other man to barge in without permission.

Bandit queen (1994) The film is based on the life of Phoolan Devi, an Indian dacoit turned politician, who after being gang-raped by upper-caste men in her village, went on a killing spree. Phoolan Devi, who the filmmakers never bothered to actually meet during production, criticized the film for its inaccuracies, whereas Indian author Arundhati Roy wrote a scathing essay in which she accused Kapur of depicting a rape scene without Devi's consent. This movie is a story how Phoolan became 'Devi'. The film was briefly banned in India and Phoolan Devi only rescinded her complaints about the film after the producers, Channel Four, paid her £40,000. This movie highlighted how insensitive and unsafe police custody and jail management is that while surrendering she had demand for basic and separate amenities from men cell.

Lajja (2001), literal meaning in hindi is shame, and in Indian society women were always see as symbol of honor and shame. (Good knows who have made such portable shame and honor keeper, I guess women itself). The plot of movie is set in urban and rural places of two different countries, and a woman running from her husband trying to hide at different places in difficult circumstances. She was married to so called progressive and man, who tried to kill her. When she came back to India her parents gave her tough time and did not accepted that she wanted to leave her husband. They wanted her to reconcile with her husband and live happily after. But she was adamant not to reconcile with her husband and left her parents' home. Later on, while hiding from her husband's goons she entered into a marriage where she saw how groom and his baraatis were walking in proud and all stretched out, while on the other hand bride side people were leaning to welcome humbly. There she saw the penance of dowry and how bride's father was brutally humiliated just for money. And groom was ready to sell himself just on his father's order, here fundamental right of man was in danger. Later on, while escaping and hiding from her husband she reached some village where she met Janaki, a theatre actress in love with her colleague The older theatre director Purushottam lusts after Janki, but keeps his younger wife, Lata confined to their house. He badmouths Janki to Manish, creating a rift. Manish asks her to abort the child as he suspects it isn't his, indirectly accusing Janki of sexual relations with Purushottam. Outraged, Janki intentionally botches a scene during a performance of the *Ramayana*. The angered audience assaults her, causing her to miscarry. Role of Ramdulari was shown as progressive women.

Pinjar (2003) based on Amrita Pritam's novel by the same name, the film deftly unveils the tragic lives of women who were mistreated by men from both the communities. Moreover, the pathetic state of women in the society at the backdrop of partition makes it a timeless art which continues to hold relevance even in the present times. *Pinjar* revolves around Puro, a Hindu Punjabi woman, who is abducted by Rashid as a result of a generation-old vendetta which persisted. As Puro's brother, Trilok, and her fiancé, Ramchand, secretly search for her without the approval of their respective families, Puro struggles to survive through the trauma of isolation and ostracization. At one point, she successfully escapes only to be abandoned by her family members in the name of prestige and honor.

She returns to Rashid and unwillingly submits to her destiny by losing her religion, name, and identity in the process. Her characterization takes an unexpected turn towards the end when she reunites with her family but decides to stay with her husband.

Findings

These films show various relationships between NATURAL AND HUMAN SPACES for example in Achhut Kanya, an untouchable was treated as symbol of protector the way mother earth is protecting and providing us livelihood. A small shrine was made to remember act of kindness like we celebrate various festivals to thank mother nature. But now capitalism has changed every celebration made it global and popular which some way other polluting our environment. For instance, people celebrate festival like Holi, here or there the breaking news flashes that women are mistreated, abused and attacked by group of people who says *Bura na mano holi hai*. On one hand we celebrate festival for new crop and prosperity given by Mother Nature and on other hand we man handling women around us those who have same fertile nature as like Mother Nature.

HUMAN UNDERSTANDING OF NATURE, particularly in case of men understanding about nature of women, they have set rules and regulations for all castes of women and policing through these rules for years. Sukhilala in mother india thought women can be bribed through gold ornaments and bodily pleasure, when there is no man to look after her. Same movie another instance Radha took killed her son who wanted to kidnap Sukhilala's daughter. This shows nature of woman is visible as both birth and death.

CULTURE OVER NATURE. What is nature? Prakriti and female body has almost all features of outside prakriti and what is culture? Culture means simply the "way of life" of a people or their "design for a living." Kluckhohn and Kelly define it in his sense", A culture is a historically derived system of explicit and implicit designs for living, which tends to be shared by all or specially designed members of a group. Female respect is over powered by many cultural dominant practices. For example, Dowry as a culture, child marriage, honor killing, female feticide, rape culture etc.

Male members of the society are always seen as agents of violence, only. This statement is hiding a well know but well ignored sentiments associated with men. This effect of moral policing is not only visible on women but on men also. And it has further made whole generation of men misogynist and primary oppressor in a female life whether they say fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Now a day toxic boyfriend and live-in relationship are also very contemporary.

Conclusion

According to the Intergovernmental Panel Of Climate Change, by 2030 we will reach a limit for the planet's temperature that will cause irreversible damages if we continue with our current fossil fuel consumption (Miller & Croft, 2018). These dire threats don't seem that different from the warnings in the fictional scenarios of eco-dystopian films. These narratives act as cautionary tales that alert us of a possibly haunting future. And discards the perfect happy endings concept. On the other hand, humanity is losing its sanity and through different episodes nature is trying to warn us. We're at the cusp of the "Anthropocene," an era characterized by the impact that humans have on the environment. And the question is we are seeking for parity or still imbalance society and its over whelming will make others to sacrifice for them.

The above analyzed films reflect our fears related to social environmental doom led to repercussions and misfortunes, but they also demonstrate a desire to control natural resources and female bodies (the way

Sukhilar banned Radha to work on fields and how Laxmi was thrown out from work). There have been various challenges to make freedom and agency more accessible to women.

Limitation And Recommendation

Ideas of treating women as inferior and expectations of motherhood may seem antiquated in the twenty-first century. However, the films show how these examples of reproductive governance are transferred into the ideas that the analyzed films communicate. After more of 50 years of an ongoing environmental movement and efforts to promote sustainability, we might think that we know we have to take care of the environment. The films reflect that our general underlying understanding of nature is to see it as a commodity that serves humanity. Not everyone is listening to the discourse going on in climate summits, and most people are not listening to the debates taking place in legislative halls that affect women's health. However, most people are watching films and receiving the messages that cinema is communicating, so perhaps, these messages may be saying more about us as a culture.

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