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THE MOULDED IDENTITIES OF DALITS AND ADIVASIS AS DISPARAGED REPRESENTATIONS IN BOLLYWOOD CINEMA IN INDIA

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Anish Gupta

University of Delhi & Natasha Negi Panjab University

ABSTRACT

Films are the most powerful means to convey a message and form an opinion in a short interval of time. This unique form of art has developed a narrative accessible to all sections of the society, especially when television has become affordable even to the poor. Though Indian cinema has completed almost 100 years, one can still notice the biased perception of an Indian filmmaker when allotting attributes to the characters. He never hesitates from associating each character with a certain caste than evoking the individualistic traits. Bravery and beauty are some of the attributes associated with Kshatriyas and aristocracy respectively, never related to tribal and Dalits. Even when depicting the love stories, trying to break all socio-economic barriers, these filmmakers' obsession to age old perceptions of distinctions on caste and class do not completely disappear. However, the author sects have time and again tried to expose the hypocrisy of Bollywood on such serious issues related to caste and class.

The land of Bollywood is an advent into a dynamic and charming overview, a kaleidoscopic picture of India. Since the day of the first silent film, Raja Harishchandra, through the days of representation of independence struggle in the 1930s and 1940s to the golden age of romantic idols like Raj Kapoor, Gurudutt, Dilip Kumar; the movie directors of Bollywood through a pictorial device called cinematography have strived to bring alive the colors, sounds and vibrancy of the land and land them straight into the periphery of its residents and to head towards their intrinsic walls.

The cinematic expression has successfully put through the issues of caste based atrocities on *dalits*, *tribal* and the downtrodden. A few have even succeeded in creating a certain amount of awareness that these communities also do exist among us. But their particular impressionistic lens has done so by bringing forth the parameters of caste, creed, race and income into play. As if their individuality is in a binary relation to certain gruesome incidents of their lives. The efforts to bring social justice is revered upon but on a parallel level these means of equality have also more and more emphasized on a historical superiority of the so-called higher castes in terms of bravery, appearance, distribution of even religious beliefs and the right to love. And the lower caste is considered inherently inferior and often referred to as 'the weak', which itself is ironical to name a group of people by characteristics thwarted upon them and not inherited by them. While Bollywood is time and again ascertaining that such naming ceremony remain so.

The paper tries to reveal the hypocrisy of Indian film makers who pretend to break the barriers of rich-poor, higher-lower, tribal-urbane in love stories or action packed thrillers but at the same time disparage the qualities and achievements of the downtrodden sections. The grave caste based issues are tuned and colored as per the likes of the movie makers just so to earn another commercial hit on the name of social awakening. The true incidents are barely touched upon and those real life struggles never in the actual sense reaches the audience. By now the viewer is used to framing the dalit in being and living like the dalit set in popular definition, as the poor who's situation is destined by the divine and as if he cannot choose to be anything more than the role of a verb assigned to him by the dictators of societal laws.

The modern form of the art of storytelling can be said to be sought from our rich culture of mythologies, folktales and incredible narrations that with the passage of time have come to reside in both the mind and soul of its addresser. However, one such story of a great epic The Mahabharata happens to categorize the brave for us. Parshuram was a great guru who vowed to free the earth from Kshatriyas and so used to train only Brahmins. On the last day of his training to Karna when Parshuram was resting in the lap of Karna, an insect bites Karna but despite the pain he doesn't move so not to hamper his teacher's sleep. On seeing the blood coming out of his wound, Parshuram wakes up and accuses Karna of hiding his true identity of not being a Brahmin and rather being a Kshatriya as only the latter can bear such an immense amount of pain. However, Parshuram remains completely unconvinced even when Karna explains that he is neither a Brahmin nor a Kshatriya

and he is ultimately cursed by his guru for being held responsible for committing an act of valor that is adhered to only one singular caste. Now, it is completely for the perceiver to apprehend it as it is and let the Indian film makers out rightly fix it deeper in our psyche or view it from an altogether individualistic perspective, where even a dalit can be an individual and not always represent what his community was. This feeling that bravery is the virtue of only Kshatriya and beauty is related to aristocracy, is so deep rooted in the minds of film makers that they can't restrain themselves from having that age-old class angle even when making love stories.

More so, a culture is taken forward by way of the ruling ideologies and Bollywood indeed rules the hearts of the people. But to accept it as a form or forming of one depends to a great extent on the receptor. The story of a popular Hindi movie of 80s- *Dharamveer* acknowledges the bravery of the son of a black smith (tribal caste) as a master of swordsmanship who takes on the enemies of the kingdom. And in process of outshining his low birth even dares to fall in love with a princess. On one hand where love is depicted to rise from even the humblest of background, both the princess and the audience are led to an angle of regret of falling for a tribal boy. Through such hypocritical air, the Bollywood however fulfills the promise to feed the concurrent ideology of the mass and reveals the hidden card portraying Dharam to be a lost prince, protagonist and hero of a high birth. However, this intrigues us as a reader and not merely a viewer of the developing narration, if but the art has not actually failed to revolutionize, failed to move beyond the set boundaries of class and caste and instead has provoked them further.

This is a common narration in Hindi movies such as *Tum Mere Ho* where an exceptionally beautiful daughter of a wealthy person falls in love with the son of a tribal leader. But by the end of the story it is revealed to the 'made-up-relief' of the viewer that the tribal is only a foster parent to this charming lad and his biological father is in fact a rich and influential person. So much so that his 'influence' which actually is thwarted upon the mindsets of the audience is considered to be a guilt free passage into the so called equality drawing institution of marriage which does draw an irony for sure. Then what if not be questioned with disbelief this kind of representation should be than selling the cheap tarts of a convenient mixture of centuries old conventions of class divide that this form of art has become into.

In yet another 90s Bollywood superhit, *Kaho Na Pyar Hai*, the protagonist has a double role. The poor one is shown to be meek and reproachable and soon killed off by the makers while his look-alike eventually succeeds in winning the heart of the heroine. Now this hunk in a 'Bollywood coincidental' way is of course filthy rich, owns all ranges of bikes and cars and is able to charm the audience too along with the girl's high class father. While, the dead martyr only receives few sobs and pity like people make sure happens in real life with the down-trodden as well. At this cross-point it does actually become difficult to understand if the people run the kingdom of Bollywood or vice-versa. In either cases, some drawn lines need to be shifted or erased all together.

Thus, Bollywood actually seems to be promoting the brave and heroic qualities in only characters belonging from higher class. In most Bollywood movies even the surnames of soldiers or police officers are rarely found to be those of the *dalits* or *tribal* or any lower caste for that matter. They are exclusively referred to as Singh, Rathor, Choudhary, Pandey, Sharma, and more of the upward strata as if hierarchy is a divine power instilled by the movie makers to have their art accepted by majority, by bowing down to the majority. Even an outwardly indescribable emotion of love is set perfectly in the bounds of the same class-caste structure. And in spite of spreading the radical perspective of such a powerful form of art, we here still sit and wonder guessing the names of the dalits or questioning the integrity of their life stories, which today have come closer to no ground level but to a distant reality.

However, even if one chooses to overlook the not so amateur steps of Bollywood, who then but it should be held majorly responsible for walking the small screen into the same footsteps. The small screen takes for granted even the very little space that it gets. In order to deliver the same notions of a masala product to satisfy the obsolete tastes of the same audience, the writers and directors do not even shy away from altering the truth. They do not even hesitate from fidgeting with the historical facts then let alone the hope of bringing forth the hidden ones in our conscious.

A 'well-rehearsed' television serial, *Chandragupta Maurya* built its narrative in the same way. A lead character Chankya is shown to be impressed by the bravery of adolescent Chandragupta and sees the future king of Magadh in him. The storyline undoubtedly succeeded in building up the celebrated folktale of Chandragupta Maurya until the episode four where it dawned upon the makers of the show that the rise in TRP of Indian tele-soaps is directly proportional to the twists and turns in it irrespective of their being valid or true. In the episode, Chankya seeks Chandragupta's mother Mura's permission to take along Chandragupta for proper education and training. And the following conversation takes place between them:

Chankya: "Your son has inborn quality of an ideal king. No one has told me anything about the background of your son but I can say it with full confidence that a khatriya's blood is running in the veins of your son. Yes or no?"

Mura: "I am hiding this truth since a long time, Acharya. We had a small kingdom. And Chandu's father was the head of that kingdom. One day Ghananada's army destroyed everything. He invaded our kingdom, burnt our farms, burnt our houses... Do you know Acharya, Chandu's father played the role of a courageous Kshatriya so well that he even laid his life fighting against Ghananand for the respect and freedom of the people of his kingdom."

As a matter of fact, this whole conversation doesn't have any historical background. Nowhere in the historical or secondary critical texts has it ever been mentioned that Chandragupta's father was a Kshatriya and had his own kingdom. Historians are unanimous on the issue that Chandragupta belonged to Maurya caste, which is considered to be a lower caste. Interestingly the director of the serial also could not mention the name of this "small kingdom" ruled by Chandragupta's father. This was clearly a fictional ornamental 'masala' added to the otherwise straight writ historical story. Art isn't a means to alter the identities but is to reflect upon their untouched aspects, as depicted in the following lines:

*And that's only
The only jewel,
My eyes will twinkle about..
Because unlike rest
Those drawn away,
This one was sewed on me..
In form of my dress.
My eyes adjust in it and not it..
And help me be speckled,
At my disassembled pace of life.*

The whole issue is not just of tracing or pin-pointing the loopholes in our creative sources but it is of being aware of the ethical and not just nodding to the confirmative. But as cinema has large influence in the lives of the people the makers should behave responsibly. Either they should show the truth or while enjoying their artistic freedom they should not disparage or form an image of the down trodden. In this manner, the cinema is only drawing the image of the lower castes and tribal farther and distant from society than bringing any equality or honor for the down-trodden.

We are a nation of great cultures but to choose the definition of ever-changing great is what actually the need of the hour is. Even on watching a toddler we can understand how a colorful depiction of mazes can bend his way of mind towards the new, then we as thoughtful citizens must not let our minds be retold the algae-d pictures again and again but scratch off the same to highlight them in a new light that not just widens our vision but also inspires others (Bollywood) to match up to the same.

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