

Locating the Scattered Identity of Dalit Women in Adoor Gopalakrishnan Film's

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Abstract

Film is one of the most prominent medium to communicate with people. This intellectual narrative medium represent the social problem and dilapidate nature of social constraint is poignant. Master filmmaker like Satyajit Ray, Shyambenagal, Girish kasaravalli, and Adoor Gopalakrishnan who made real kudos for Indian films in India and across the World. The nature of narrative discourses are really reflect many aspects or realities and disturbing socio political, economic and cultural sense of village to metropolitan context. They are in front of representing women identity in their narration. This study will address how Dalit women and their identity represented in Adoor Gopalakrishnan films with qualitative textual analysis of selected movies from this master filmmaker films.

Keywords: Dalit Women • Identity • Film Discourse • Narrative • Malayalam • dalit women

Introduction

Malayalam films are popular and enjoy the patronage of the population in the Southern part of India that has reached the high level of social development and literacy level. The paradoxical position occupied by women in this society is reflected in the film as well. Malayalam film has maintained its distinct identity in terms of selection of stories and narrative aesthetic right from the beginning to the present. But when it comes in the presentation of women in films, we do not find any difference between them and other language films. "Located in everyday space, Malayalam films, however, provide a gendered version of modernity. By representing women's choices between public and private, work and home, these films serve as a cultural form and has shown female subjectivity under negotiation." Representing women in physical space are not innocent in the narrative context of spatial temporality which is an instinctive part of the everyday life of society.

Adoor Gopalakrishnan is a rare auteur in film history whose cinema has constantly explored a different aspect of social practice and everyday life of people in Kerala. He helped to put the Malayalam (Kerala) film industry in the world map. After the Satyajit Ray, he has the most significant reputation as India's iconic film maker. In all his films, the Gopalakrishnan makes an attempt in search of the identity of Malayali. The structure of Gopalakrishnan's films, their themes and style all coalesce, informing us about the filmmaker's own world view, how he dealt with Kerala history, and his political beliefs and humanism. But it also gives us hope and a sense of political detachment. In the structural sense, Gopalakrishnan's films also deals with visual discourses and have multiple layers of the reality and unreality that have been interlaced in the visual narration. It has been the narrative beauty of reality and myth. This student will map the hidden dimensions and the narrative discourse of Dalit women in selected films form Adoor Gopalakrishnan film's.

The repeated use of the term Dalit in the academic circles has been problematic. The word Dalit literally means "the downtrodden." It emerged

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in the context of 1970s labour movement in Western India. The term gained popularity within the academia as new dimensions of economic and political exclusion began to be studied. Low castes themselves used this term to highlight their exclusion from country's resources. However, "low" caste political mobilisation has become a potential area of study in India and abroad.

Traditional India was divided strongly based on the caste system. Hindu dharma or ideology insisted the caste system based on their birth, then divided people based on the four fold caste system which follows a hierarchy as the Brahmins the priests, followed by Kshyitriyas the warriors, Vysa the traders and Shudras the servants. Dalit who are broken people are not even included in the system; they are below all the other castes in the hierarchy. For close to 2000 years people have been discriminated based on their caste, and even now the India is unable to get rid of it. Caste system is deeply rooted with religious beliefs, which keep the system alive. Post-colonial period perpetuated the caste system and slowly it infiltrated into the films. The people of upper castes, who were wealthy in those times, ended up making lots of films [1]. Especially Malayalam cinema had witnessed a lot of caste based films, which glorified a particular religion and caste. However, the elite art and the powerful medium which fail to compensate the disparity in the religious and Cast based narration in the elite film's.

Objective of the study

Film is extremely important in any serious study of the women's question today because it is an art and medium that is essential allegorical, and that the women on screen comes to represent not an individual but a type. Representation of women in Malayalam cinema could trace in well context among in this Dalit women in the Malayalam film not yet to be well established. The primary objectives of this study is to explore the narrative trajectory and the identity of Dalit women in Malayalam film with in the specific reference of Adoor Gopalakrishnan film's.

Research Questions

The study is posed with following research questions

In what ways, Dalit women are made to work as sites of contestations and complementarities with reference to Adoor Gopalakrishnan's films?

In what ways Dalit women representation and Identity made possible in these films?

Methodology

Qualitative research is design to explore the human elements of a given topic, where specific methods are used to examine how individuals see and

experience the world. Qualitative approaches are typically used to explore new phenomena and to capture individual's thoughts or interpretations of meaning and process [2]. Qualitative researchers focus on emergent meanings derived from a variety of descriptions of the social world and these descriptions account for the perspective of individual actor in the context of the subject positions. According to Tin, 2012, Qualitative research carries the situations of the social, institutional, and environmental conditions within which people's life take place [3]. In many ways, these contextual conditions may strongly influence all human events. Hence this study adopts the qualitative research approach for the study. Qualitative studies also help to examine the media representation of women, blacks and other marginalized groups. They also help us to understand the critical theories to unpack the meaning of the texts [4]. The study adopt Qualitative textual analysis of following film It also dealt with the rationale for the selection of these films - Rat Trap (1982), Four Women (2007) and One Woman and Two Men (2008), Once Again (2016) besides discussing the methodological contexts of the study such as the selection.

Locating Dalit depiction in film

Representation of Dalit issuer and their identity in film has been central lacuna of film history, As Greenwood, et al. suggests, movies play a significant role in social and emotional development on an emerging adult [5]. Life lessons, character connections and social relationship of a movie are what stick in the mind of the audience. Movies not only have a positive effect but might also produce a negative effect on self-image. Overall what the movie offers for its audience is highly dependent upon the attitude of the audience. The negative sense of Dalit identity could be create very substitute identity among the developing sense.

Movies are not explicit; the meanings they present might not be visible at plain sight. For example, Ellis (2001) points out, religion is one of the constant themes in movies, it might not be explicit, when the viewer is aware of ideological and mythological concepts, it can be understood that movies are frequented with these buried meanings [6]. Even box office movies, which might seem devoid of religious meanings, might hold these meanings incognito. Which are very determined in nature, we should remember that movies are a big business, so there might always be an economic angle at play. The main reason for violence in movies are because the markets demand it, it's not because of the violence in the society [7]. But as in the society and it's reflection of reality in cinema we should consider the Dalit identity and the relevance of society and the importance of them. On the other hand, moviemakers must be responsible too. One of the problems that the movies face are, when controversial subject defying a normal commercial are made; chances are that it might be branded propagandistic. There is growing demand for, moviemakers to be responsible, especially among the intellectual crowd, where a movie is found to be no different than a newspaper or news channel, as they all derive power from freedom of expression.

Yengde S. states that, the relation between caste and caste narratives that have led to blatant caste sensibilities in his paper 'Dalit Cinema' as well in his book 'Caste Matters'. He further looked at how social interactions in the films reflect the mainstream communities' attitudes towards issues debated in the society. Continuous portrayal of dominant Hindu upper castes has alienated majority of the country's population. His arguments explain that representation of Dalits to be limited only as victims. As a Dalit himself, he opens up about what it actually means to be a 'Dalit'. He talks about 'Dalit being', 'Dalit love', 'Dalit capitalism' but most importantly talks about how upper castes continue to preserve and benefit from this system of hierarchy but rarely acknowledge it [8]. According to Singh 2011, 'The Representation of the Dalit Body in Popular Hindi Cinema' explored the subject of Dalit oppression in Hindi cinema [9]. He looks at selected Hindi movies over a period of half-a decade and critiques the cultural prejudices attached to the Dalit body like 'Acchut Kanya' (1936), 'Sujata' (1959), 'Lajja' (2001), 'Swades' (2004) and 'Lagaan' (2001). The melodramatic representation of 'lower' class has obstructed the thoughtful representation of Dalit characters. He says that the oppression of Dalits is not only material but cultural. He says that the treatment of the Dalit body has kept on changing in accordance with the socio-political developments, settings and discourses around Dalit identity [9]. In stark contrast Dalits are

portrayed as dark-skinned, shabbily dressed, skinny powerless characters who are dependent upon the morality of the social elites, catering to clichés about Dalit community without questioning it. In the film, the Dalit community lives in the conditions of helplessness, abject poverty, performs filthy jobs and faces daily violence and social ostracization. Even the law enforcement is seen harassing them. Minimal Dalit resistance is shown. Even when it is shown it is shut down through upper caste violence. This serves them to the cycle of voiceless subjects who do not have any agency. And once again an upper caste Brahmin man becomes a savior [10]. While Dalit community in general is shown as victim, the body of a Dalit women is depicted as a point of sexual and economic exploitation. Rape is used as a device of subjugation by the upper caste men. Based on the 2014 Badaun gang-rape and murder case. The movie portrays the bodies of young Dalit girls to be used for upper caste violence. The framing of a brutal gang rape and murder of two Dalit teenage girls who are later hanged on a tree just because they asked for a raise of Rs. 3 in the film expose the interlinkage of sexuality and gender with caste. Although, the movie gave a clear sense of closure to the case but in reality, the story remains unsolved [10]. To understand cinema as a political text thereby tracing stages which mark a shift in the body politic of the "low" caste women. These Hindi movies which were produced from the late 1930s till 1990s-Acchut Kanya (1936), Ankur (1974) and Bandit Queen (1996) which represent how the subverted identity narrate the logic of commodity and subverted women's sexual exploitation, moreover their body being substitute to satisfactions for male sex.

Based on the statement of Atwal (2018), argue that it is in the realm of Hindi cinema that arguments for caste and gender reform continued to be articulated since the 1930s. Theatre and cinema were products of the colonial times. In cinema, particularly interesting is the creative representation of "low" caste women from the colonial times to the 1990s. The "low" caste women's bodies proved to be an extraordinary template for modernising the socio-political discourses for the Hindi cinema makers [11]. Caste is still an issue which most mainstream Malayalam film-makers shy away from, though there are brilliant exceptions such as that of Neelakuyil (1956), Kammatipaddom (2016) and Kismath (2016) which took the issue head on. Even in these movies which had a Dalit woman as the chief protagonist, the characters were not essayed by Dalit Malayalam actresses but by upper caste women, with dark complexioned heroines being almost absent from the Malayalam silver screen.

The obsession with fair skinned heroines is probably as old as the history of Malayalam movies themselves. In the multi-award winner movie Chemmeen (1965) which brought great critical acclaim to the Malayalam movie industry by being the first South Indian film to win the President's award for the Best Feature Film, the female protagonist who is a fisherwoman was played by an extremely fair Sheela who ironically sported the name Karuthamma which literally translates into 'dark woman'.

In a 2016 commercially successful Nivin Pauly starrer movie titled *Action Hero Biju*, the hero who is a sub-inspector at a local police station in Cochin in settling a dispute between a married woman and her crazed lover asks – "Ninakku ee oru sadhanathe kittiyullo premikkan?" (Did you only get 'this thing' to love?) as the woman in question is dark and obese. The body shaming and casteism in the dialogue is all too obvious, but alas the scene was understood as one of light hearted humour by the makers of the movie. The ridicule of the dark female body is an oft-repeated trope in both Malayalam movies and Malayalam comedy shows; caste-shaming of the dark female body being the implicit undertone of the 'humour'. Adoor films always provide very prominent position for Dalit women in his films, even in the recent film itself, in this film Dalit woman's son who seeking money in front of upper community, what he ask in front of the house is my mother send to seek money as common woman who asking money from other men is consider very bad opinion as common. But the Trichy sense of their education purpose ever her husband was killed by the landlord of the concerned family. The complex narrative location also open the very complex identity stance of them in the representation.

Spatial practice and the Identity of Dalit Women

The aesthetics of Adoor Gopalakrishnan's films throw light on subservient people, especially the spatial practices of upper and lower-caste women that



Figure 1. Visually portrayed in public as objects of erotica in the "Rat Trap."



Figure 2. Two women chatting in the pinnampura (rear of the home).



Figure 3. Prolonged sequence where in the "Woman and Two Men" emphasise the upper community has no restriction.

reflect the complex notion of their reality in everyday space. In the history of Malayalam cinema, Dalit women represent the marginalized and sexually exploited. The film *Neelakuil* tells the story of Neeli, a young Dalit woman. Finding it difficult to get back home in the lashing rain one day, she seeks shelter in the house of Sreedharan Nair, an upper-caste school teacher who gets entangled in a sexual relationship with her, following which she gets pregnant. Social taboos and society fix all the blame on her [12].

A review of the scholarly literature on the subject reveals that Dalit women have been represented as sexually desirable, especially where upper-caste men are concerned, and even considered worthy of desire. In fact, even as the cinematic scene came to be crowded with men from these communities, none of the women were accorded prominent positions in the narrative. Dalit women are perpetually represented as a subverted identity, even in public and domestic premise, in the narrative diegetic. They are visually portrayed in public as objects of erotica (Figure 1) in the "Rat Trap." The working class woman's body has been utilized as an erotic object in a narrative sequence in

a cashew field, raising a series of questions: Why are these visual sequences placed in a cashew field? Is it not possible to place the sequence in a temple, a garden of flowers, or other public space? This is probably a result of the relationship that holds together cashew fields and working class people: most subaltern women depend on the cashew nut factory for their subsistence. The framed image tells of the subaltern identity and political discourse of working class women, and the characters' expressions in public underpin their identity as an oppressed class, forever being used as sexual objects or subject to slavery.

The identity of Dalit women, as they appear in public spaces, is inextricably tied to the allure of the forbidden, epitomised in a slutty mien and erotic inducements of a come-hither nature, thus reinforcing their negative image in society. The narrative unveils the dominant power of the upper-caste community and the pathetic situation of women in public, making a concrete statement about the working class community in public spaces.

The spatial practice of working class women in "Four Women" is comprehensive in its narrative trajectory. Chinnamma, who interacts with the working class women, reflects multiple levels of spatial identity through the narrative discourse. A shot begins with two women chatting in the pinnampura (rear of the home) (Figure 2). The upper-class woman sits in the kattila (the bottom of the door frame) attached to the house, while the working-class woman sits at a slightly lower position in the chaip, which is an extension of the home, alongside the main house.

The spatial location here is a study of societal mores, in which both the women have distinct, separate identities. It is an extension of the power wielded by a traditional society and the ideology of the feudal system. In the other prolonged sequence where in the "Woman and Two Men" (Figure 3) emphasise the upper community has no restriction out sider in same cast they communicate in jovial in the front side and share the happy incidents among them. As similar Dalit women supposed to reach near the home, they verbally inform the presence probably for their acknowledgement even their requirement itself they admitted in the scrutiny of enquiry. In the upper caste women enter in the sequence never demanding as similar in Dalit presence. The complexity of narrative domain shows that both women are experience different discourse in nature which are clearly demark front and backside spaces. This statement strongly demarcated the identity of Dalit women in these films.

Conclusion

Women in film has been demonstrated in beginning of film itself, the narrative locations of women in the trajectory open the complex sense of identity crisis in national to international film. Laura Mulvey rightly states, women body under the scrutiny of humane gaze which are sexually exploited bodies of women. This been no change in Indian scenario itself, their body has been explored in the sexual sight of protagonist and the spectator. In the elite films represented as upper cast women enjoy to explore the body of self, at the other pole Dalit women body has exploited and negative sense making

sight in these film. However the sexual porotype and denounced sense of their identity in the meaning making process offer very subverted determination for Dalit women in these films.

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