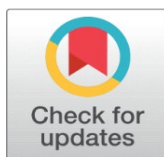


ECO-FEAR AND ECO-TERROR IN FILMS: A STUDY OF CHANGING PARADIGMS IN INDIAN CINEMA

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ABSTRACT

Cinema and movies always work as a tool of awareness. Indian cinema, especially the Bollywood movie industry is changing its paradigm from the traditional romanticized catchup and family drama to socio-political and environmental awareness. The young and new generation filmmakers' interests fall on the impending issues rather than so-called traditional issues. They take cinema as a tool to raise sensitive issues as only this medium can rapidly raise awareness among the mass population. Except for the other issues, the ecological issues also become the main subject of their movie. Nila Madhab Panda, the award-winning director uses cinema as a tool of awareness. His movie Kaun Kitney Paani Mein (2015) is the best example of environmental awareness. This film points out very critical issues of water crisis of two villages- Upri and Bairi. His movie highlights how unskilled and mismanagement can lead to the brink of shortage and scarcity. Another director, Aparnaa Singh points out the consequence of fatal disease due to the chemical reaction in groundwater in her movie Irada (2017). The paper attempts to emphasize how cinema can take as a tool of environmental awareness for the mass population analysing the visual portrayal in detail with the help of two theories- Agenda Setting Theory and Walter's Narrative Paradigm. It also aims to focus on changing paradigm of the contemporary Indian cinemas dealing with the ecological conscience.

Keywords: Ecology, Scarcity, Mismanagement, Awareness, Irada, Kaun Kitney Paani Mein

1. INTRODUCTION

Now-a-days one of the sources of entertainment is the screening and streaming. Cinema and movies as a part of them draw the attention of both intellectuals as well as common people (Kubrak, 2020, 03). The movie Kaun Kitney Paani Mein (2015) directed by Nila Madhab Panda is an excellent example of environmental awareness. The movie is set in two fictional villages-Upri and Bairi. People of Upri village assume themselves as superior to the villagers of Bairi and that is why they think that they are born only to pass their lives idly and leisurely. They are very lazy and unskilled. They live on their ancestors' wealth and property. But soon they become poor as most of them prefer comforts and enjoyment without doing any work. The common people are far off words, even Braj Singh Deo, the king of the village becomes poor, and he starts to live on credit. No one was willing to buy their property even at minimum cost. The only problem with their property was the scarcity of water. The whole area was dry and even the wells and tubewells were

dry. After failing to sell their property to a Britisher, Rajkumar himself expresses his regrets that this is the result of the Karma of their ancestors as they were very unskilled and not farsighted. At a time, they consumed water so unskillfully that now a single drop of water becomes very precious to the villagers. All the ponds, wells and tubewells are dry even if one digs a new well, he will also get the same drought. On the other side, the Bairi villagers are very skilful and know how to use water and that is why they never face scarcity of water.

The movie *Irada* (2017) directed by Aparnaa Singh unfolds the environmental terror. It is set in an area of Punjab. The movie opens with a dialogue of Nasseeruddin Shah who plays as an ex-army officer. He is very much keen to send his daughter also to the army but very soon he discovers that his daughter is infected with the mortal disease cancer. He then starts to dig out the exact reason behind this and then he becomes very surprised with the fact that at least one member of almost every family of that area is infected with cancer. The news came out as a terror to the city dwellers that the whole area's ground water becomes poisonous due to the dissolve of the solid waste in water. The experts then come with the fact that not only the water but also the whole areas' soil, food and vegetables are infected with those poisonous chemicals. The most pathetic reality is that the terror is created by none but the corporate businessman with the help of the government. The above two films witness the environmental exploitation that leads to the crisis and finally a mass death. Through movie both the directors expose the true reality of environmental degradation. Successfully they cast their characters to draw attention to the fatal environmental issues.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Climate awareness in movies is a blessing for our future earth. Besides the OTT platforms and web series, the movie also highlights many environmental issues. It develops the thought of how film can focus on people's sustainable thinking. It also represents the logistics of the environment and the digital world (Pal & Debnath, 2021, 10). The scholars note their notions on the natural disasters in film. Anuj Kumar reviewed a very recent movie *Dunki* (2023) set in a small town of Punjab flashes on the immigration problem (Kumar). Though in this movie the characters are not portrayed as climate refugees, but such a portrayal of illegal migration can be seen in Amitav Ghosh's novel *Gun Island*. There we see the portrayal of a heart-rending image of illegal immigrants who left their homeland for the fatal curse of climate change in their lives. Aishwarya, Nayanathara, Sreena and Balakrishnan in their article "The Commodification of Water and Environmental Degradation in *Mad Max: Fury Road*: An Eco-Marxist Analysis of Water Capitalism" on the movie *Pushpa, The Rise* (2021) link the connection between capitalistic projects and the environment. The film is a portrayal of the capitalistic system that controls the fate of environmental oppression and contamination (U. Aishwarya, 2023, 306). The movie *Kedarnath* (2018) sets on the holy place Kedarnath, centred on the disaster and human action. Sony and Adith in their article "Picturing the Anthropocene through Flood Narratives: The Environmental Disaster Discourse in Indian Cinema" reflect on the Anthropocentric perspectives and the imminent threat of the ecological and environmental disaster (Raj & Suresh, 2022, 204). The article "Climate Change in India: A Wakeup Call from Bollywood" on the movie *Kadvi Hawa* (2017) by Manvi and Ajay, focuses on the moral role of the individuals to save humankind. The movie deals with the environmental degradation of a north-Indian fictional village Mahua (Sharma & Choubey, 2020, 4). Thejas and Prasanth's article "A Portrayal of Ecological Perspectives on Climate Change in Indian Cinema" on the

Malayalam film *Ottaal* (The Trap 2014) portrays the reality of individual suffering in the adverse climate change. This film depicts the cruel reality of climate politics and social justice (Thomas & N.S, 2019, 4250). The movie *Jal* (2013) is set in a drought affected area. It explores the suffering of the dwellers in the desert. It also portrays the struggles of both human and non-human species (Ravichandran & Bandyopadhyay, 2019, 249). Flood is a very fatal phenomena in the Indian landscape. A science fiction movie *Dasavatham* (2008) depicts the mass destruction by the effects of the deadly virus spreading after the flood washed away in 2004. This film portrays the havoc of the immense disaster (Raj & Suresh, 2022, 210).

3. RESEARCH GAP

The films *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* and *Irada* witness the critical issues of the present environmental phenomena but none of the scholars dealt with the contemporary changing paradigm of Indian cinema's trend. The researcher watched both the movies very minutely and attempted to note down in this paper the impending environmental fear and terror represented by the Directors through their characters.

Research Objectives:

- 1) To study the changing trend in contemporary Indian cinema.
- 2) To examine how cinema works as a tool of environmental awareness.
- 3) To analyse the contents of the movie that focuses environmental issues.

4. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative study based on the contents of both of the movies- *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* and *Irada*. The researcher has used the content analysis method taking the help of Agenda Setting Theory and Narrative Paradigm to achieve the objectives of this research. Popular culture, especially the movie works both as a tool of awareness and a source of entertainment. Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw develop an idea that is called the Agenda Setting theory. It tells about the influence of media effects on the public minds. According to them, a particular issue is given so much priority by the media that the audience automatically understands its importance (Durian, 2013, 8). Nila Madhab Panda, the director of the movie *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* gave priority to the water crisis issue to draw the public attention above all issues. This theory explains two types of level- first level and second level. The first level is about the exposure of the information created by the media house. And the second level focuses on the reaction of the audience and how it sensitises on people (McCombs, 2002). Similarly, the movie *Irada* exposes the life-threatening disease that gradually becomes a common illness for poisoning the ground water. Walter Fisher, the American academician introduces a theory- The Narrative Paradigm. He argues that all the narratives generate a logical meaning of verbal and non-verbal interpretation. This concept explains that the awareness happens in the form of a story (Fisher, 1985, 349). The story is an array of the events that bring the credibility of an issue. The director Aparna Singh uses such narrative technique in her movie to make the ground water poisoning issue reliable.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL TERROR HAPPENINGS IN IRADA

The movie begins with a shayari by Nawaz Deobandi that bears together the terror and the message. The translation of that shayari is like that people remain

silent seeing the burning of someone else's house thinking it would not affect their house but later on the wind took the fire and lit rest of the houses (Singh, 2017, 00.03.53). We the common people assume that the phenomena happening around the world will not affect their surroundings but gradually it starts to impact on all. In the movie the girl of the ex-army was infected with cancer, but everyone remains silent. Finally, a time came, and they all faced the infection of the groundwater. They forget that if they don't think about the preset "apocalypse", the future will no longer be safe. But it is our duty to leave a better earth for our future generation. Mahatma Gandhi opines: The earth, the air, the land and the water are not an inheritance from our forefathers but on loan from our children. So, we have to handover to them at least as it was handed over to us (Kaushik, 2019).

Parabjit Walia, the ex-army, found that her daughter is infected with lung cancer, and it is already in a stage that she will not survive longer days. According to a doctor's report the girl is suffering from "malignant growth" due to contact with a drug regularly. Parabjit was shocked with the report as he has seen his daughter growing up before his own eyes and how is this possible. He starts to find out the root of the actual reason behind the report. He is choked by the fact that the drug infection came from solid waste mixing in water. Regularly his daughter goes for a swimming practice to a nearby pool. Walia thought that probably the pool water was infected but gradually he came to know that not only the water bodies of that area are infected, but the ground water is also infected by the solid waste of the industry.

When Parabjit digs deep to find out the fact, he understands that there is a company named PPFPL owned by Paddy H. Sharma, regularly sends drums of chemicals and mixes it with the ground water by the system of "reverse boring". Reverse boring is a process by which a pipe goes under the earth till ground water level and mixes so many "contaminated chemicals" in groundwater. Christopher Anderson suggests that "garbage exists on the border between the natural and the artificial, and by extension between human culture and wild nature" (Anderson 35). According to the direction of the company owner, the workers do this process regularly as they know that the "transformation" cost of that solid waste to "eco-friendly" chemicals is too high. An ironic fact is that the owner of the company is selected for the Golden Ten Award. It is an award for "environmental sustainability" and the award is given by the state government. Ramandeep Braitch, the chief minister of the state conferred that award to the owner as she tied up with a pact of money and nominated the owner to hide the "environmental brutality". Deliberately she did it to turn off the media and public minds from the bad impacts of the company. Maya, an interesting character from this movie comments, "this city is as much down as it is up" (Singh, 2017, 00.42.07). The movie highlights the issue that not only the corporates and the companies are responsible for the "fatal degradation" but also sometimes the government is directly involved for some mere profits (Masud et al., 2018, 11).

The effect of the poison goes deep in the earth. It is not only mixed with the water but also it dissolves with the blood of the people. Riya's death exposes that "both blood and water are owned by Paddy" (Singh 2017). According to a character in the movie, it flows in the vein and artery of the people (Singh, 2017, 01.28.29). He said that the food that they eat that produces from the soil is infected with the solid waste. The pathetic fact is that the government should ensure healthy food for its people as it includes in the "fundamental rights" of the people but in this matter the government is playing the crucial role to poison the food. Colin Gonsalves, the senior advocate of the Supreme Court opines that Article 21 says about the "Right to Live" that includes the right to have healthy foods. Right to food means healthy food and

not toxic and poisonous food. But now it is hard to have healthy food but who is responsible for this toxic food? The corporate- the government is responsible for this as the corporate with the help of the government is putting poison in food (Birchfield et al., 2010, 720).

6. ENVIRONMENTAL FEAR IN KAUN KITNEY PAANI MEIN

The movie Kaun Kitney Paani Mein directed by Nila Madhab Panda opens with a dialogue of Saurav Shukla who plays the role of king Braj Singhdeo. He relates ancient and modern times and reveals the power of time that in ancient time it vanishes the dinosaurs and at present it pulls the humans to the verge (Panda, 2015, 00.01.38). The movie is set in two villages of Odisha. The movie exposes the pathetic conditions of the villagers who face “limitless sufferings” for the scarcity of water. This movie also teaches us about the truth that unskilled usage and mismanagement of water can lead to the “shortage, scarcity and finally utmost sufferings”. The movie highlights the pictures of two fictional villages- Upri and Bairi. Upri villagers are very skilful, and they know how to save water and lead their “life with prosperity”. They are very hardworking and prefer to do their own work. They save rainwater and use it for their cultivation. They never face the scarcity of water. On the other hand, Bairi villagers are very idle and depend on others for their daily lives. They always want an easy-going life, sell one after another ancestors’ land at mere cost and lead an idle and comfortable life. The scholars found that human’s comfort and easy-going life makes the “environmental crisis” more and more critical (Chappells and Shove, 2005, 35).

The scarcity and the shortage are not natural. Now-a-days it is happening due to man-made reasons. The Pandit in the movie comments on the crisis of the Bairi village. He opines that their ancestors like father, grandfather and great grandfather exploit the natural resources so much that they don’t have anything to use (Panda, 2015, 00.25.27). If they had considered water as a “precious resource”, they would never face scarcity. They didn’t leave a single drop for their future generation. He also says that the water bodies are far off words, if they dig deep and open new wells also, they will not get a single drop of water as it is a curse due to their “ancestors’ misuse and exploitation” (Panda, 2015, 00.25.35). The continuous practices of water mismanagement led to scarcity, and it also raises “sustainability concerns”. Hardeep Singh Puri, the Union Minister for Housing and Urban Affairs and Petroleum and Natural Gas in an international meeting opines: “Water crisis in India is not due to lack of water but primarily because of mismanagement of water resources” (Pilia, 2023).

The water scarcity and mismanagement can directly impact real estates and property values. The king Braj Singhdeo falls in great debts though he bears the title ‘king’. Normally it happens due to his lazy nature. He doesn’t want to work even though he depends on servants to open and wear the vest. Finally, he decides to sell all of his lands and pay all of his debts. But he faces problems in doing so. He arranges an auction to get the true value of the land. The surprising and startling fact is that the auction starts from 1 crore for the whole village, but none is ready to buy the land even in 25 lacs. They said that the land is infertile and all around the village there is no trace of a single drop of water. If they buy the land, they have to suffer from severe loss (Panda, 2015, 00.16.16). Later on, the prince persuades a Britisher to buy the land, and he came to buy the land to open a project on it. But when he comes to know that there is no source of water, immediately he leaves the place saying, “no water, no money” (Panda, 2015, 00.32.11).

The Indian economy is mainly based on the primary sector e.g. “agricultural sector”. But presently it faces low crop production due to unequal management of water. In this movie, the CM remarks that at present time water politics is the most terrible politics in the world (Panda, 2015, 01.17.31). Naturally, India has an unequal distribution of water because of its geographical location. Every state does not have the same rainfall. Some states face heavy rainfall, and some states suffer from drought. Though nature is not responsible fully for this situation, human beings are also responsible for their “anthropocentric attitude”. But this kind of unequal distribution can be managed by government initiatives by making water dam projects (Pradhan & Bhattacharya, 2019, 415). The Bairi villagers of this movie are facing the same level of scarcity. Earlier they have available water for everything but now they come to this situation due to unskilled usage and mismanagement of water.

7. CONCLUSION

The term “Eco-Terror” implies the threat or acts of environmental destruction that creates fear over “ecological consequences” (Schwartz, 1998, 493). The type of “environmental terror” is shown in the movie *Irada* is a threat for the whole nation. Such a threat should be exposed publicly so that they can stop this “man-made violence” over the “mass population”. The director successfully does so, drawing the public's attention to the “synthetic disaster” on the environment. Similarly, the movie *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* is a well-presented movie on the unskilled and careless attitude towards natural resources that finally brings scarcity and sufferings. The term “Eco-fear” rightly matches this movie as this movie presents the upcoming “threat of water scarcity”. Therefore, the new generation directors took the genre of “Eco-cinema” to highlight the human recklessness that brings “calamities and disasters”. They masterly present the fatal issues through “popular culture”, especially cinema, that emerge as protectors of the earth awakening the mass about the climate change threat (Sharma and Choubey, 2020, 07).

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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