A Study of the Role of Emotion in Ideologically Driven Movements through the Prism of Hindi Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Every social and political movement worldwide has inspired generations by the narratives it created through its charismatic leaders. The dreams of their personal Utopias and the subsequent disillusionment too have formed the integral part of these narratives. Similar is the story in India specially vis-à-vis the Naxalbari movement, which inspired a large section of youth from the urban areas, driven by emotion, to join this essentially rural movement.

This paper seeks to examine how romance for ideology also put to test emotion in personal relationships, through thematic analysis of four films namely Sagina (1974), 1084 Ki Maa (1998), Hazaron Khwahisein Aisi (2005) and Chakravyuh (2012). In the end, the paper also examines whether devotion in personal relationships got better of romance with the ideology or vice-versa.

Keywords: *Emotion, Revolution, Naxalbari, Cinema*

INTRODUCTION

A village uprising against the land holders and local administration in a block of the Siliguri sub-division of West Bengal led to the founding of the longest running armed struggle in the parts of rural India. The Communist-led armed struggle which began in Naxalbari block in 1967 continues to wage war against the state in different isolated parts of the country. Such long struggles leads to the emergence of new political, social, economic and emotional paradigms.

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Tomes of literature is available on the first three *viz*, political, social and economic aspect, however, much has not been written about the emotional aspects except for its narration in the screenplays of a decent number of cinemas in Hindi, Bangla and Telugu languages. It would be pertinent to mention here that Bangla and Telugu are spoken in the areas of West Bengal and erstwhile Andhra Pradesh, which have been much influenced by this movement. On the other hand, Hindi is the mainstay of the Indian cinema industry.

METHODOLOGY

This research paper studies through a thematic analysis of the leitmotifs of emotion and ideology-based revolutions and their effect on each other. The films for this study were chosen through a purposive sampling method.

The four movies under consideration are *Sagina, 1084 Ki Maa, Hazaron khwahisein Aisi* and *Chakravyuh*. Of these four films, the first three belong to early part of Naxal movement (early years of Naxalism had its spectre of influence largely in West Bengal and pockets of Bihar), whereas the fourth *Chakravyuh* deals with more contemporary Maoist movement in the country.

DISCUSSION

The Naxalite movement started off with an adage of romanticism around it to only lose in subsequent decades its value of novelty among the educated urban youth. It has now become a part of a vicious social, economic and to an extent a corrupt political pattern. The movement today is disorderly and has not been contributing towards any substantial societal changes despite large scale violence it indulges into.

Unlike the first three film, *Chakravyuh* is located in the Maoist infested Dandkaranya geographic region which touches the borders of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Chhattisgarh and Odisha. This region is now the hot bed of Maoist activity, whereas Naxal ideology has lost influence in West Bengal and remains present only in small pockets of Bihar and Jharkhand.

Coming to the first three films that is *Sagina*, *1084 Ki Maa* and *Hazaaron Khwahisein Aisi*, despite being placed in the same time period and more or less similar geographic region, they are films of different genre. While all the three films examine the urban-rural interface it's under three different contexts and so are the three different personal relationships stories in the three films.

As the title suggests, *1084 Ki Maa* examines the mother-son relationship whereas the other two films have love triangle as integral part of the script but differently shaped and told. In this framework it would also be important to examine the different schools of cinema making to which the directors of the four films belong to -- Tapan Sinha (S*agina*), Sudhir Mishra (*Hazaaron khwahisein aisi*), Govind Nihalani (*1084 Ki Maa*) and Prakash Jha (*Chakravyuh*).

GREAT STORYTELLERS AND ENGAGING STORIES

Ken Aguado, an Emmy-winning producer, screenwriter and author, says, "Visual storytelling in film and television is the art of conveying a narrative journey with the images that are possible because of the amazing technology of this art form. ...It is in our nature to want to understand the world around us, and our eyes are the primary way we do so."[1] The hallmark of the films under review in this research paper is the ability of the directors of these cinemas to treat the complex ideological and emotional issues with a soothing narrative style making understanding of the subject easy. It would be in the fitness of things that we examine the narrative style and work of each of these storytellers to understand their treatment of the ideological issue at hand.

Tapan Sinha – Sagina

A contemporary of the redoubtable Satyajit Ray, Tapan Sinha along with Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen formed part of the quartet of the giants of Bengali cinema. Ray, Sinha, Sen and Ghatak are primarily remembered for their meticulous depiction of social reality. While Ray may have been tallest of all in international recognition, Sinha enjoyed greater mass appeal largely due to his ability to make cinema not just in Bangla but also in Hindi and getting due recognition for it.

In the obituary published in *The Guardian* following Sinha's death in 2009, it was mentioned, "Sinha's subtle approach gave cinematic life to the spirit of the material, with the addition of situations, incidents and subplots that together formed a cohesive and compelling whole."[2] Sinha's art of storytelling was often compared to that of Victorian novelist Charles Dickens, who wove a beautiful mosaic of fanciful characters and sentimental scenes with a backdrop of social apathy to reveal ugly truths.

This mosaic comes out beautifully in *Sagina*, the 1974-Hindi remake of 1970 Bangla

1 https://ken-aguado.medium.com/visual-storytelling-in-film-and-television-4f2d176c17cf

2 https://www.theguardian.com/film/2009/may/12/tapan-sinha-obituary-indian-filmmaker

magnum opus *Sagina Mahato.* Drawing similarity to Dickensian characters, the promotional booklet of the films describes its protagonist Sagina Mahato, played by thespian Dilip Kumar, as, "a man who drank like a fish, smiled like an angel, fought his enemies like a demon and loved his comrades like a primitive God."[3]

The film is based on a story with the same title by Ramon Magsaysay award winning author Gour Kishore Ghosh[4] in 1969. Ghosh wrote this saga in memory of a colleague from his activist days. Though it's based in pre-independence period, the impact on Naxalbari movement in the delineation of characters and plots cannot be missed. During this period, Ghosh was writing regular columns in the newspapers, with the pen name of Rupadarshi, criticizing the rise of the Naxal movement.

Therefore, a certain section of the intelligentsia came to call Tapan Sinha's film to be reactionary[5] as it depicts the left-wing movement in bad light especially the tendencies of Stalinism[6] as espoused by the anti-hero Anirudha, played by Anil Chatterjee. The film starts with the scene of Sagina Mahato being put on trial in a guerrilla court presided by Anirudha, Sagina's defence of his acts, and debate among the other members of the tribunal viz. Amal and Vishaka, played by Swarup Dutt and Aparna Sen respectively. This debate brings out the loss of direction of the movement and disillusionment of the urban youth with the leftist ideology depicted in the film by the character of Vishaka.

Played by Aparna Sen, Vishaka, a foreign educated daughter of an industrialist, leaves Calcutta to work with the labourers of a tea garden in Darjeeling, where Sagina also works. Her sympathy for the labour movement somewhere runs concurrently with empathy for Sagina, which is resented by Lalita, played by Saira Banu, whose beau is Sagina. Vishaka's disillusionment with the movement is complete when Anirudha kills Amal for dissenting against the move to handover death sentence to Sagina. In the end, Vishaka lets her empathy for Sagina overpower her commitment to the ideology, which in the course of time had taken a distorted form. She kills Anirudha and let's Sagina go free.

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3 https://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/endangeredarchives/2010/07/eap-at-the-pictures-sagina-mahato.html

4 https://web.archive.org/web/20040622142204/http://rmaf.org.ph/Awardees/Citation/CitationGhoshGou.htm

5 The word reactionary describes points of view and policies meant to restore a past status quo ante. - *The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought Third Edition, (1999) p. 729*

6 Stalinism means of governing and implementation of Marxist-Leninist policies by creation of a one-party totalitarian police state as done by Soviet leader Joseph Stalin between 1927 and 1953, in the process also espousing a cult of personality. *Deutscher, Isaac (1961). Stalin: A Political Biography (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press. pp. 7–9. ISBN 978-0195002737*; *Plamper, Jan (January 17, 2012). The Stalin Cult: A Study in the Alchemy of Power. Yale University Press. ISBN 9780300169522.*

Govind Nihlani – 1084 Ki Maa

The parallel Indian cinema, an alternative to mainstream cinema, though traces its origin to 1940s, gained prominence in Bengal through the 1950s and arrived on the stage of Hindi film industry in a big way in the 1970s. This period in Hindi film industry saw emergence directors like Shyam Benegal, Mani Kaul, Kumar Shahani, Rajinder Singh Bedi, Saeed Akhtar Mirza, and Govind Nihalani.

Of these, Shyam Benegal, who debuted with *Ankur* in 1974, came to have the longest innings and became a mainstay of this genre of cinema, which has also been at times called New Wave Cinema. Benegal in his early years worked closely with cinematographer Govind Nihalani. Together they tried to promote their own interpretations of realism through the art of cinema.

Nihalani debuted as a director with *Aakrosh* in 1980, which won much critical acclaim. In 1983, Nihalani hit the jackpot with *Ardh Satya* and firmly established his reputation as director of substance. Nihalani followed *Ardh Satya* with several films which went to win critical acclaim. In 1998 came *1084 Ki Maa,* which saw return of Jaya Bachchan to screen after almost two-decades. Based on a story by celebrated author Mahasweta Devi, *1084 Ki Maa* is sympathetic to Naxal ideology as against *Sagina*, which is very critical.

Nihalani has been a great admirer of Mahasweta Devi's writings. In his own words, "Through her writing, you get to hear the voice of a part of the community that is otherwise voiceless. So, even from the sociological point of view, her work is of great value. As far as her approach is concerned, you find that she is very concerned about the fate of her characters, about the dignity of their lives, about the survival of the community, the exploitation they are subjected to, the hardships they face, the official indifference and apathy... In most of her works, her underlying belief in the concept of protest, the concept of fighting for your rights, for your survival, for your dignity."[7]

Mahasweta Devi's novels and plays have a place of prominence in the literary world. However, cinema being a different medium, the movie *1084 Ki Maa* added a wider dimension to public perception about her work. She allowed Nihalani to write the script for the film with several additions to the original text, making it more contemporary to the time film is produced rather than going into a flashback to the 1970s.

The film's narrative puts the protagonist onto an unusual journey through the world of 'rebels' to find the truth about her son's death. "The film is centred on the journey of Sujata

7 http://www.rediff.com/news/jul/28maha.htm

Chatterjee, played by Jaya Bachchan, who wants to understand the struggles of her deceased son, Brati Chatterjee (Joy Sengupta), who was supposedly killed due to his involvement with the extremist Left insurgency. The camera follows Sujata and her guilt of not knowing her national scholarship-winning son's ideologies and intentions at a time when the city of Kolkata was gripped by the Naxal movement," says Sharanya Munsi in a review of the film.[8]

While *Sagina* focusses on the disillusionment of the rebels with the movement and the ideology, *1084 Ki Maa* has Sujata making the journey from being a *Bhadralok*[9] to a rebel sympathiser and a human rights activist. However, not to forget that her sympathy for an egalitarian society comes following the loss of her son, who actually pursued a dream of justice for all.

Sudhir Mishra – Hazaaron Khwahisein Aisi

Sudhir Mishra belongs to the generation which took the baton forward from Shyam Benegal and Govind Nihalani, though he did not work under their tutelage. Mishra was much influenced by the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) network, not because he was a student there but his brother Sudhanshu, a story writer, was. In Sudhir Mishra's own words, "I had a brother, his name was Sudhanshu. He taught me cinema. He joined the Film Institute. He was a very good film-maker who never made a film. He taught me film making. I never went to the institute and lot of people thought that I did, because I used to go and stay in his room."[10]

However, if one closely measures up the possible sources of influences on his film making, it came from different members of his family, who were all film buffs with liking for different genre of films. His father was much impressed by the art films, there was an uncle in the family who loved films made by wrestler turned actor-director Dara Singh.[11]

Another source of influence were the two grand-mothers with diverse choices. While one was a fan of *Sant Gyaneshwar,* a 1964-fim directed by Manibhai Vyas on the medieval saint with some very classy and popular songs sung by Mukesh, Lata Mangeshkar and Manna Dey. The other grand-mother was a fan of Gurudutt's[12] 1962 magnum opus *Saheb, Bibi Aur*

8 https://theprint.in/features/reel-take/as-dd-journalist-dies-in-naxal-violence-hazaar-chaurasi-ki-maa-captures-the-sense-of-loss/145066/

9 prosperous, well-educated people, typically Bengalis, regarded as members of a social class.

10 https://web.archive.org/web/20071014213638/http://passionforcinema.com/film-making-influences-life-and-people/

11 Gulzar; Nihalani, Govind; Chatterjee, Saibal (2003). *Encyclopaedia of Hindi Cinema*. Popular Prakashan. p. 629. ISBN 8179910660. Retrieved 19 July 2012.

12 https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0244870/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

Ghulam, which, as Mishra mentioned in an interview, saw as her own story.

With such diverse influences and having worked early in his career with stalwarts like Badal Sircar and Kundan Shah, Mishra over a four-decade-long career has indeed developed a very impressive filmography, working in 25 films largely as writer-director. While it would be difficult to choose which of his works is better than other, the evolution of the theme of this paper restricts discussion to *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* (2005), which he wrote and directed.

The film is placed during the period of Emergency (1975). The plot unfolds on the campus of Delhi University and the rural areas of Bhojpur district of Bihar, the two forming the weft and warp of the story's fabric and also the general character of the Naxal movement at that particular point of time. It's a story of three friends whose lives are drastically affected following their simultaneous initiation into the world of left-wing movement in rural India and the corridors of power in urban India.

In a review Shaikh Ayaz writes, "[c]haracters in *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi* talk about ideals, oppression, poverty, capitalism and inequality with passion but their bourgeois-by-birth background is not lost on the audience. As an astute filmmaker and close political observer, Mishra is interested in this dichotomy and as he goes about charting the course of the three young lives at the centre of his tale."[13]

Talking of contradictions, the film somewhere also examines the dichotomous relationship between love for ideology and that in personal lives, the underlying theme of this paper.

This dichotomy is best manifested in the end, when 'revolutionary' Siddharth (played by Kay Kay Menon) decides to move to London to study medicine and writes a letter to Geeta (Chitrangdha Singh) saying how anguished and disillusioned he was with the idea of revolution. On the other hand, their power-broker friend Vikram Malhotra (Shiney Ahuja) risks power, position and life for safety of Geeta and Siddharth. Somewhere love in personal life scores over love for ideology.

Prakash Jha – Chakravyuh

Coming to the last film on the list for discussion, one can safely say that Prakash Jha's fleck is closer to commercial than the art form both in the treatment of the theme and

13 https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/bollywood/film-of-the-month-sudhir-mishra-hazaaron-khwaishein-aisi-5945846/

delimitation of the characters. However, this attribute of the film cannot be held against it as one did not hold the 'commercial' treatment of the theme by Tapan Sinha in *Sagina*. They both break shackles of being typecast to make what veteran actor Naseeruddin Shah would call 'realistic cinema.'

"Realistic cinema, which neither belongs to the normal commercial pot boilers genre nor to the 'art' or 'parallel' genus, has arrived in India and is here to stay,"[14] Shah had said in a newspaper interview to dissolve the distinction between parallel and commercial cinema.

That brings us back to Prakash Jha and his films. Jha graduated from making documentaries to films in 1984 through *Hip Hip Hurray*, which was using classification of those days, was a 'middle of the road cinema'[15], a meaningful film made sans a star cast. Basu Chatterjee, Hrishikesh Mukherjee and Sai Paranjape being some of the more famous directors of this genre.

He shifted to making a purely art cinema next, *Damul*, which got the national award for being the best feature film for the year 1985. Thereafter, he has been making realistic films without being type-cast either as art cinema or purely commercial cinema.

The film under discussion, *Chakravyuh*, comes much later in his career in 2012 when he has already made several political films like *Mrityudand* (1997), *Gangaajal* (2003), *Loknayak* (2004), *Apaharan* (2005), *Raajneeti* (2010), and *Arakshan* (2011). He followed *Chakravyuh* (2012) with another political film *Satyagraha* (2013).

It may be mentioned here that unlike *Rajneeti* and *Aarakshan*, *Chakravyuh's* script had multiple characters but the film as such was not multi-starrer. Jha probably decided to do *Chakravyuh* without the stars to make it realistic, an attribute in which both *Rajneeti* and *Aarakshan* fell short.

The films genre, context and presentation has been best captured in a review by Trisha Gupta in *First Post*. It mentions, "With *Chakravyuh* Jha moves away from his two long-term preoccupations – the politics of post-1970s Bihar and the changing role of caste in Indian socio-political life – to a different space, both in geographical and social terms. Set in the tribal-dominated interior regions of Madhya Pradesh where Maoist insurgents are waging a guerrilla war against the forces of the Indian state, *Chakravyuh* is Jha's effort to place a

14 https://indianexpress.com/article/cities/pune/naseeruddin-shah-bats-for-realistic-cinema/

15 https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/entertainment/hindi/bollywood/photo-features/experiments-in-hindi-cinema/experiments-in-hindi-cinema/photostory/29718289.cms

rather complex contemporary problem before Hindi film viewers."[16]

The story is about a dedicated police official setting a mole in the midst of Maoists to break their ranks. The mole comes face-to-face with abject helplessness and poverty of the rural masses whose claim to life and home are continuously getting usurped in the name of development, which in itself has a different connotation, a synonym for exploitation in this region. His empathy for the movement gets a flip when he meets a woman rebel with a tender heart. The love in their relationship makes the Mole desert his friend and join ranks with rebels in spirit. In the battle which follow both the mole and his love meet death.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned right at the beginning, this paper set out to examine whether devotion in personal relationships got better of romance with the ideology or vice-versa. The discussion through the various paragraphs of this paper firmly establishes the praxis that emotion plays an important role within the mind and body of the participants of even an ideologically driven movement. In the disillusionment of Sagina and Vishaka (in *Sagina*) and Geeta, Siddharth and Vikram (in *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*) with ideology and in the reiteration of commitment to ideology by the protagonists of *1084 ki Maa* and *Chakravyuh*, emotions play a dominant role. The potential of emotion to play a decisive role in such situations is best explained in its definition, "an affective state of consciousness in which joy, sorrow, fear, hate, or the like, is experienced, as distinguished from cognitive and volitional states of consciousness."[17] The narratives of the four films reviewed in this paper reinforce this definition.

16 https://www.firstpost.com/entertainment/movie-review-chakravyuh-is-an-honest-attempt-to-decode-maoism-503368.html

17 www.dictionary.com/browse/emotion