DESCRIPTION OF CHILDOOD AND ASLO FEMALE IN CONTEMPORARY CINEMA OF INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Having established itself as the prime locus of popular culture, Indian cinema as an academic discipline has grown in tandem, especially through the last two decades. The preliminary motive of this dissertation emerged with the recognition that little has been said and written about a particular segment of Indian cinema—children’s cinema in India. In order to comprehend a vast subject such as children and films within the Indian context, this thesis looked at the various perspectives that a subject like this brings to the mind. Perspectives such as that of definition, genre, audience, content and themes. Through an extensive survey of literature on the definitional aspects of a category such as children’s cinema one finds how it includes films that are exclusively aimed at child audiences while it also includes films that deal with aspects about children and childhood that bring the adult and the child together in a more intimate way. In other words, children’s cinema is a much-debated subject, a fluid concept with changing meaning based on the context, content, and audience.

KEYWORDS: culture, Audience, Theme, Cinema, Film.

I. INTRODUCTION

A plethora of scholarship on Indian cinema has been published in both academic journals and popular media, and it has covered a wide range of topics related to this segment of Indian culture. There are a variety of topics covered in these Indian film studies, including socio-historical transformation, fan culture and fame, industry dynamics, Bollywood, and a variety of other topics. However, in this vast field of research, there has been relatively little spoken or published about the subject of children's films and about childhood in India, despite the importance of these topics. The creation of childhood in modern Indian film is the subject of this research dissertation. There is a strong emphasis on the role of children in films, as well as the numerous issues that they symbolize within the cinematic imagination of modern Indian cinema. Nonetheless, when it comes to a wide subject such as children and cinema, there are several viewpoints and elements that must be considered and explained before one can begin to specialize in a specific field of study within the subject area in question. Approaching this subject from the perspective of various commentators writing about children's cinema is a good way to start the conversation. When one begins to investigate the history of the link between children and cinema, one learns that this relationship dates back to the very beginning of the invention of film itself. One is transported back to the 1890s, to the pioneering work of the Lumièrè Brothers, when the first pictures of a
Kid emerged on a moving picture screen for the first time. Watering the Gardener and Breakfast with Baby, both of which were live-action films, showed the kid in his or her normal environment. Professor Vicky Lebeau's work on childhood and cinema situates the kid as a figure through whom one may investigate the forms of film in visual culture, according to her research on the subject. Throughout the book and film history, she points out how, “often borrowing their themes from illustrations, paintings, newspaper cartoons, and picture postcards, the first films with children drew on a broad range of visual and narrative forms to orient their audiences in the busy world of the moving picture.” Children have appeared in films for well over a century since then, whether it is Georges Méliès' adaptations of fairy tales or the Disney film Cocoon.

II. Role of Children’s Films Society of India

Any investigation of the relationship between children and films in India must take into account the past and trajectory of the Children's Film Society of India, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the production of films for and about children in India. In the same way that the governments of Britain and Russia invested in the creation of children's films, the governments of India made similar investments in the production of children's films during the early years of its independence. The establishment of the Children's Film Society of India (CFSI), a state-funded organisation, was a watershed point in India's post-independence history. In 1955, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, established Children's Day in honor of his compassion for children, which has now become a ritualized and canonized celebration on November 14, Nehru's birthday. From the outset, Nehru was closely linked with children and children's film, and he made it a point to express his affection for Indian children in a variety of settings. One of the ways he achieved this was by hosting a screening of state-produced children's films in the Rajya Sabha. He is also rumoured to have brought them abroad, to locations such as Russia, for a variety of cultural exchange activities and exchanges. As a result, the child-centered picture became very moral and educational in character throughout its run on the national tour. After implementing his idea, the Center for Film and Television Studies (CFSI) set out to “exclusively develop indigenous and exclusive film for children to encourage their creativity, compassion, and critical thinking.” It was with their production Jaldeep, which won the Best Children's Film award at the 1957 Venice International Film Festival, that the organisation first gained widespread notice. Since its founding, the Children's Film and Television Institute (CFSI) has constantly created, presented, and disseminated content for children, ranging from feature films, short films, and cartoons to television series and documentaries, among other things. It has played a crucial role in refocusing the attention of the film industry on children and on films concerning children. Almost from the beginning, the Child and Family Studies Institute (CFSI) was tasked with bringing together a broad spectrum of specialists in the field of understanding children and childhood, including educators, psychologists, and film practitioners. Among those who have worked with CFSI have been Amol Gupte, Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Sai Paranjpe, Santosh Sivan, Ram Mohan, Rituparno Ghosh, Nandita Das, MS Sathyu, and Pankaj Advani, as well as some of the most significant directors in Indian cinema. Taking this initiative through the medium of films demonstrates the state's active participation in the formation/creation of new notions of childhood in newly independent India.

III. CHILDHOOD IN THE MARGINS: VILLAGE AND THE CITY
Both Fandry and Kaaka Muttai belong to new aesthetic among independent filmmakers who comment on contemporary social issues through the perspective of children. Both these films through their child characters problematize the normative grids through which one views ‘childhood’ by depicting the complex ways in which some children actually negotiate and cope with the material conditions of their marginality. In a certain sense these two films contemporary films seem to complement each other as they make possible the enunciation of similar concerns regarding children, childhood and poverty through distinct contexts. One of their many similarities is that they both cast non-actors in the lead roles. Moreover, the portal through which these narratives seem to be channeled are the real life experiences of the directors themselves. Fandry in particular is semi-autobiographical, in which the director Nagaraj Manjule expresses his childhood experiences of caste based discrimination. Fandry tells us the story of a twelve year old Jabya and his love/crush on an upper-caste girl from school. Having directed two feature films so far, Sairat (2016) and Fandry– both of which have received national and international acclaim, Nagaraj seems committed to highlighting the oppressive nature of caste. Manjule’s first short film, Pistulya (2009), which also won a national award, focused on the childhood of the poor and their suppressed aspirations for a better life. It depicted the educational aspirations of a child and the lack of it due to the social conditions the child is a part of. Fandry’s autobiographical elements resonate with the experiences of life as narrated in many Marathi Dalit Swakathans (autobiographies). In an interview, Manjule confesses about his own lived experience of caste, “When I think about myself, by default I am thinking about my caste, as it is present everywhere, in my village, my condition, my language, the people around me, the clothes they wear, and their traditions.” The personal experiences of the director as well as the actual challenges of growing up being Dalit and poor in rural India where caste identities dictate the limits of dreams and aspirations makes Fandry a film about childhood and the larger social issues pertaining to caste-based identities. 3 Kaaka Muttai, on the other hand, derives its central theme from real-time conversations between the director M. Manikandan and his son, who constantly asks him for pizzas. One day, not having enough money to buy a pizza, the idea for the film struck him. The narrative of the film is centered on the experiences of two brothers, China and Periya who live in the slums of Chennai and develop a desire to eat a pizza, which they have recently discovered. These two films are located in different contexts—rural and urban India. Both these films seek to explore children and childhood experiences against the context of specific socioeconomic conditions that percolate in the form of the everyday. In both these films, the personal aspect of childhood is located within a larger political condition. It is the figure of the child that is used to bring together the personal and the political in a manner that poses critical questions related to identity. Drawing on the theme of the human need for social acceptance and biological sustenance through the tropes of food, both these films present a social critique of existing inequalities. The narrative of the films, woven around the preoccupations of disadvantaged children brings out some of the most intuitive and natural emotions. These intuitive and natural emotions are placed in a manner that brings out its conflict with the transforming nature of Indian society in lieu of the operation of mechanisms of consumerism, technology and other modes of modernity.

Fandry opens with a swift movement of the camera in an arid landscape, accompanied by clanking, creaking sounds and an instrumental soundtrack which keeps recurring in the film at crucial moments. Amid sparse brown woods, with little or no greenery, one sees a young boy, with a dark complexion, carrying a catapult in his hand, wandering around taking shots at a seemingly elusive bird. The visual vocabulary of the film resonates with the life of the central protagonist, young Jabya —there is little color
and light in most frames. The landscape in the film is used in a manner to interact with the child’s perspective to indicate an aseptic, impersonal world. Jabya’s otherwise shy, quiet demeanor often finds full expression in many of the landscape shots, where one finds him smile, think and act without inhibition. The film is set in a village called Akolner which is located in the rural parts of Maharashtra. The village seems to experiencing a transition between old and new social structures. Represented through the feudal culture existing in the village, one sees orthodoxy and untouchability upheld with pride. The distance between lower and upper castes is maintained through physical segregation as well as through social relations. At the same time, there are modern means of trade and communication such as telephone and television towers providing internet and mobile connections to those who can afford it. Brands like Pepsi and popular clothing are also shown in the everyday lives of the people. The village also has a seemingly democratic educational institute, which is the local school that caters to children from all caste backgrounds. Supposed progressive outlook of the villagers is symbolized through the school as it is one of the few spaces that allows entry to all. Here one finds the poor and the rich studying together; the space of the school in the rural setting allows for a meeting ground between children from different castes, classes and gender.

3.1 Elusive Bird of Love and Freedom

Jabya, a twelve-year-old girl, meets and falls in love with Shalu while in the confines of her school environment. What distinguishes Jabya and Shalu is their different social and economic origins, with Jabya belonging to a lower caste and Shalu belonging to a wealthy upper caste family, respectively. When the politics of caste and identity collide with the needs and emotions of children, one can understand how the rural setting of old and modern institutions may be quite dangerous. Due to the imposition of broader social-economic systems, the reality of a narrative set around childhood days in school, where sexual arousal among young children is frequently observed, is juxtaposed with the impossibility of its completion on both a physical and a mental level. The positioning of the figure of the kid between these two worlds allows for a certain critique of modern realities in a town that is on the verge of revolution, but which continues to be plagued by deeply ingrained prejudices and prejudices towards children. Moving through with the plot, one discovers that its momentum is tied to Jabya's pursuit of a certain bird, an elusive black sparrow that eludes him at every turn. Throughout the course of the film, the hawk swooped to symbolise Jabya's feelings for his classmate Shalu. For Jabya, the bird signifies romance, not just in the context of Shalu, but also more broadly in terms of his aspirations and ambitions for better things in general. He has aspirations such as owning a pair of pants and a new shirt for the next village festival, to name a few of examples. Perhaps the bird represents a future that transcends caste identification and economic position for him as well as for others. The camera moves quickly, capturing the movement of the bird that eludes him as well as the movement of Jabya's body as she grows up in the woods. In these moments, Jabya and his companion, Periya, joyously jog over large empty fields, climb trees, and swap jokes, all while pursuing the black sparrow, which is the primary subject of the film.

IV. BLACKBOARD STORIES AND BEYOND

School is frequently depicted as the social environment in children's films, both in international and Indian cinema, as it is the official institute of instruction for children. It is well known that formal education is strongly connected with a variety of factors that are related to molding children and the formation of conceptions about childhood. However, while it is widely acknowledged that socioeconomic
situations shape the lives of children along with mass media influences, it cannot be denied that the social institutions that most directly shape modern childhood experiences are the family and educational institutions, which are the most important of these institutions. Outside of the family, it is frequently the school that has a considerable impact on the definition and shaping of childhoods, and it is frequently at the heart of concerns about the future of children. 2 Because of the intimate link that exists between children and their schools, subjects related to school and education are frequently included in popular movies. There is the ‘school film genre,’ as it is commonly referred to, which has its own distinct and standard plotline, characters, themes, and ideology depicting the role it plays in the construction of childhood, as well as its own distinct and standard ideology depicting the role it plays in the construction of childhood. 3 David MacDougall, a film practitioner and researcher, examines how, in many films based on tales about children and education, the school is represented as an institution of social control. He focuses mostly on films from Euro-American cinema. 4 Many of these films, which are representative of Western cinema, include a strong critique of the wider narrative of institutionalized social control in post-industrial nations, which is expressed via the paradigm of educational institutions. Many academics have expressed worry about the state of education in post-industrial societies, which is based on systems of tracking and regulating children and adolescents. 5 Some of the Euro-American films, which are primarily concerned with themes of conflict between children and teachers, illustrate how the school as a system of social control has altered the landscape of childhood. It expresses itself in the practices of hourly instruction, structured leisure, uniforms, and new social relationships, which are all part of this change of childhood. For example, Zero for Conduct, one of the first films to show the authoritarian features of boarding school, is heavily influenced by the boarding school experiences of young boys in its production. Throughout the film, an oppressive and bureaucratic educational system is depicted, as are moments of revolt that occur within it. If the lads are caught outside on Sundays, they will receive a zero, as indicated by the heading of this article. As a result of this setting, many hilarious episodes of youngsters engaging in pillow fights, pelting the headmaster with fruits, and so on can be found on the internet. The film's camera methods depict the school's architecture as if it were a jail, and the sound of the headmaster's voice is captured as a rambling that appears to be out of place in the setting. In most cases, these school films are narrated from the perspective of the child, who battles ruthless teachers and endures punishment while rebelling against school structures whose primary goal has almost always been to control and contain, if not discipline and punish, the children in their midst.

4.1 Schooling the Nation

In Indian cinema, the topic of education and school has recurred in a number of films concerning children and childhood, particularly those depicting rural life. Although the topic has remained consistent over the years, the context and meaning associated with it have changed with time. Consider the fact that, in general, the films of the 1950s and 1960s promoted the notion of formal training and the idea of children attending school. An educational message was promoted towards the conclusion of Bootpolish, a famous film in post-independent India that featured children as the main characters. After a few minutes of dialogue, the film concludes with the characters Bhola and his sister dressed in school uniforms, holding hands, and heading towards the arched entrance to their school, which is called Nav Bharat School (New India School). Rajadhyaksha and Willemen have described the film as an "allegorical portrayal of the newly independent Indian country" in their statement. "Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai, Nehrujiki Jai, aaj se Hindustan azad hai (Hail Mahatma Gandhi! Hail Nehru! )," the two kid protagonists exclaim in the film's closing scene, heralding the establishment of a new order. India is a free country!" I'm not speaking to
anyone specifically. In this video, one can observe how the newly consecrated socialist ideology of independent India appropriates the image of the kid and the notion of education in order to offer an agenda of liberation for the people. Other socialist films, such as Awaara, which depicts urban poverty and unemployment, also focus on the normative role that schools have in society as a whole. In Awaara, a scene portrays the young protagonist being wrongfully expelled from school, which leads to him committing a heinous act of stealing shortly after. After being caught stealing a piece of bread for his ill mother, the youngster is sent to jail. A structure of this nature suggests that the school is the only location outside of the house where a kid may discover a better and more secure future for himself or herself. A new global order is being created, and once again, school and education in connection to children is being established as a road that leads to infinite chances that will maintain a productive life and allow for the creation of a new world order. A common theme in most films from this period is that the route to liberation from the socioeconomic disparities that existed in newly independent India was tethered to the sphere of education, with school being depicted as a space of equal opportunity and self-determination. When looking at these early films, Chandra notes that they have a certain (mis)belief in intrinsic talent, and that every kid may have a nice existence with some assistance from the generous state, regardless of his or her social realities (Chandra, 2001). The majority of these educational narratives frequently lay the responsibility for growth squarely on the shoulders of individual individuals. Their hard effort and commitment to the values intended by the new state, along with a little bit of luck, is regarded as the primary drivers of social mobility, rather than the state's responsibility to guarantee equal opportunities for all citizens. Such a representation frequently fails to take into account other important social realities, such as the specificities of caste, class, and gender in the Indian setting.

4.2 Beyond the Blackboard

We have already discussed how exact nature of education and schooling influence children’s lives in this chapter. Now we will look at how marginalized children and their childhoods are represented in Indian cinema, as well as how those who are outside the realm of formalized knowledge and pedagogy are represented in regard to education (knowledge). This study aims out to discover those places in which one may locate representations of non-formal kinds of knowledge, and it does so via the use of a few carefully chosen children's films. To give you an example, the film Slumdog Millionaire follows Jamal Malik, a young guy who wins the largest amount of money available on an Indian game show called Kaun Banega Crorepati (which is based on the British show Who Wants to be a Millionaire?). Because Jamal is from the slums (Dharavi) of Mumbai, his low socioeconomic status causes the television show's producers to question his credibility, as one might wonder how a poor person with no formal education and who has grown up in poverty could possibly know the answers to such obscure and specific questions. When Jamal is caught for cheating over the course of the tale, it is shown how he "explains" to his police interrogators why someone like him, a slum boy with little formal education, would know the answers to the esoteric questions that are posed to him. He tells them about his upbringing and how he learned all of the answers to the questions posed by the game show presenter via his trials and tribulations. In addition to many direct thematic concerns such as urban poverty, child labor, and media corruption, the film's narrative delves into the concept of knowledge and its relationship to class and access to schooling, as well as the knowledge that one stands to gain through one's own life experiences, among other things. A prevalent subject in modern Indian cinema involving children and childhood is the portrayal of youngsters as street-smart. Examples of this are films such as Chillar Party (2011), Kaaka Muttai (2014), Gattu (2011) and others that deal with children and childhood. By examining these films, we want to gain a
better understanding of the ways in which alternate elements of knowledge are recorded in the context of Indian childhoods that are defined by vivid social-economic realities. We hope to shed light on the portrayals of Indian children who are marginalized by circumstances such as poverty, orphanhood, child labor, or lack of access to school and formal education that are shown in popular culture. What is particularly striking about their film portrayal is that these youngsters are shown to be occupying public areas without the presence of an adult. Several studies have demonstrated that this experience leads to the formation of some type of contextual knowledge, which in turn begins to define the life of these marginalized youngsters.

V. WHAT ABOUT THE GIRLS? REPRESENTING FEMALE AGENCY

The representation of the kid in Indian cinema has progressed significantly in terms of the way it is created. The child has been used in a variety of ways, including as part of a larger nationalistic ideology, as a mediator between various trying to transform social and economic contexts in both rural and urban India, and as a bargaining chip in the negotiation of schooling and education for children from both middle-class and more marginal backgrounds. From a more societal to a more individualized narrative, the kid has also played an important role in contextualizing different structural elements such as caste, class, poverty, urbanization and consumerism in film. The representation of children in Hindi cinema may be summarized as having "ideologically and symbolically articulated, [supported and questioned] the prevailing ideals within the national, caste, and religious milieux of both pre and post liberalization India," according to the author. If one examines the marginal presence of the female kid in Indian film, this assertion becomes much more apparent. With over six decades of experience representing popular feelings, it is no surprise that the majority of films about children and childhood in popular Indian cinema appear to be about males, with girls either absent or at the periphery of the narrative. Not only do films about children or those depicting childhood appear to be in less supply in the wider part of Indian cinema, but films about childhood shown through the eyes of women are even scarcer. Sudhir Kakkar, a cultural theorist, has written a study on childhood in India that draws attention to the prejudice and inequality that exists within Indian society with regard to gender—where one can find that large parts of the Indian tradition of childhood are solely concerned with boys and ignore, if not completely disallow, girls from participating in their childhood. Since the wider gender bias in the Indian setting tends to prefer boys over girls, this imbalance is mirrored in the greater focus placed on academic study of a girl's childhood when compared to the more emphasis placed on academic study of a boy's childhood.

One approach to addressing the underrepresentation of girls in Indian film is to quickly review their place within the body of Indian children's literature, which may be found here. Young and adult male storylines predominate in Indian children's literature, as does male narratives in general. Stories of boyhood predominated in older works such as Amar Chitra Katha (ACK), which drew on the legendary scriptures of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to portray stories of youngsters. When ACK first appeared in India in the 1970s, it was widely read as children's literature. In their critical analysis, Chandra and Sreenivas note out that a majority of the characters are shown as having a distorted approach of both caste and gender issues. It has been determined that the symbolic linkages with discourses of gender, class, and caste in ACK are discriminatory and prejudiced in favor of individuals of different nationalities or those with dark skin, as well as women. In this classic comic book, Gods and Goddesses, monarchs, demons, and historical events are depicted, and there are plenty of stereotypes to be found among the characters. For example, it associates light-skinned masculinity with divinity, strength, virtue, compassion, and upper
caste status, whereas dark-skinned masculinity is coded through the semiotics of violence, brutality, stupidity, bestiality, and low caste status in the illustrations of dark skinned masculinity. In a similar vein, these graphic legends associate light-skinned femininity with beauty, a good family life, and happiness, whereas dark-skinned femininity expresses itself in the form of manifestations of hideous physical appearance, wrath, promiscuity, and other deviant behaviors. According to Sreenivas, the most chilling aspect of these comics is not their open championing of exclusive stereotypes with an emphasis on "traditions" associated with stories that are authentically Indian, but rather their open championing of exclusive stereotypes with an emphasis on "traditions" associated with stories that are authentically Indian. The adoption of a single authentic Indian culture by the Indian middle class is a subtle hegemonic articulation that is based on the bothering of all non-Hindus, Adivasis, Dalits and women in favor of a single authentic Indian culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

Due to a variety of economic and corporate considerations, there is some uncertainty regarding the exact definition of commercial mainstream film and art or parallel cinema, which is a problem in the industry. One may discover a juxtaposition of social reality and amusement in several of the Indian films released in the last several years, both in Hindi cinema and in films from other parts of the country. With the growth of global media networks, international film festivals, a varied audience, and the accompanying digital development, the aesthetic distinctions between popular and art cinema are becoming increasingly blurred. In terms of finance, the dynamics of the industry are today more intertwined and interconnected than they were previously. Because of the combined effects of economic mobilization, political transformation, and artistic impetus, a wide range of varied narratives have been able to emerge in contemporary cinema in recent years. Because of the emergence of new independent cinema within the broader sector of Hindi cinema, as well as the existence and steady growth of regional cinema, there have been changes in film production, reception, and the conception of characters and topics.

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