

Subaltern reading of film: with special reference to Marathi New Wave

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Abstract: The history of mainstream cinema in India is also a history of the growth of India as a nation. While in the initial years after the Independence India saw films that dealt with themes of subaltern struggles, the shift came post 70s when films began showing middle class angst. Post 90s the films kept their date with globalisation and liberalisation phenomena, the focus now being shifted to characters that were 'global' in nature. The subaltern had slowly begun disappearing from the film canvas. However, the New Wave cinema in Marathi is foraying into a terrain hitherto seldom inhabited by mainstream cinema, thereby making the medium mainstream subaltern sensibilities. With the non-stereotypical usage of characters of women and children and using folk medium like *tamasha* for the narrative, these New Wave films have been highly successful in 'making the subaltern speak'. The present paper has done 'reading' into important issues that come up in some of these films through the broad canvas of subaltern sensibilities. With an objective of analysing treatment of subaltern themes, the paper employs comparative analysis to look into cinematic representation of the subaltern world from the point of view of subaltern studies.

Key words: New Wave cinema, subaltern, Marathi films, film reading

INTRODUCTION

Film as an art may not have been a subaltern medium *per se*. But the medium largely attracted working class and blue-collared audience in the initial years 'transforming cinema into a site of mass entertainment.' (Grainge, et al. 2007, p. 22). During its beginning years, film was considered a path of the menials, not to be trodden by the cultured. Traditionally the film actors were not people of high status. Acting in films was considered very cheap as the medium was perceived as 'low art' as against the theatre which was seen as 'legitimate' art. (Ibid. p. 94). In the Indian context, in the early stages men impersonated as women to play female roles. Film as a medium had a humble origin and there were serious doubts if the medium would survive at all. But, today the medium has not only survived, it is thriving to be perhaps the most effective visual medium entertaining, educating and informing masses.

The first feature film in India was *Raja Harischandra* by Dadasaheb Phalke which came in the year 1913. In fact, this film was released two years before the Hollywood's full-length feature film *The Birth of a Nation* by D. W. Griffiths. That speaks of the fascination early film makers showed for this medium in India. If one traces the history of Indian cinema, especially post-Independence, one cannot miss the evolution of this medium corresponding with the evolution of India as a democratic nation itself. Just after the Independence, when the nation was trying hard to put its resources together to rise as a nation under the leadership of Nehru, having a socialist outlook, we have films attuning to and vibrating with this phenomenon. Thus the angst of the poor, and the rural masses, their struggle for survival are portrayed in the early films of Raj Kapoor, Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak, among others.

However, with the steady growth in Indian economy, urbanisation and progress in literacy we see cinema too keeping its date with the urban, the industrial and the middle class phenomenon. These are the decades of films of the likes of Dev Anand, Amitabh Bachchan, Rajesh Khanna, and others. However, it is also true that the subaltern frustrations were never to be missed on the visual canvas of these films.

But, with the onset of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation post 1990s, the Indian economy grew by leaps and bounds and there emerged a steady rise in the strengthened presence of India and Indians globally. Now, the cinema too began accounting for this development. Thus, we have Bollywood films which are either shot abroad extensively, or characters in the films who are foreign-bred, educated abroad or foreign returned. In any case, the focus in many films seems to go even upward towards higher middle class or the *crème de la crème* of society. The post 90s films of Shahrukh Khan, Hrithik Roshan, Salman Khan etc. are examples to this paradigm shift in the visual narratives. Thus, the idea of the subaltern appeared to be disappearing from Bollywood. However, it finds its emergence in regional cinema. The present study envisages to make a subaltern reading of one such emergence in a regional cinema – Marathi.

SUBALTERN

To evaluate the subaltern reading of film, it is essential to understand the concept subaltern. The concept subaltern first came to be a subject of discourse and research through the Italian communist thinker Antonio Gramsci who gave expression to it in his writings on the fascist hegemony in Italy under whose rule, the large sections of society suffered without their own

awareness at times. In fact, Gramsci himself was a victim of such subjugation. In his view 'subaltern' is a subjected underclass in a society where the dominant power exerts its hegemonic influence (Gramsci, 1996). In the Indian context, many writers working on Subaltern Studies have borrowed several of Gramsci's ideas which, they think, are relevant and meaningful to the context (Guha, 2009).

The research in Subaltern Studies by writers such as Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakravarty, among others, have given a definite shape to the subaltern discourse in the post-colonial Indian scenario.

According to Ranajit Guha, (2009) while the colonial rule was a systematic subjugation of the Indian masses through direct force and subversive methods (such as hegemony), the situation did not as such change after the Independence. He holds that what followed was now a continuation of the colonial legacy, where those in power made use of the state machinery to subjugate the citizens through hegemonic rule. This led to frustrations among masses and the result of this was farmers' agitation which led eventually to Naxalbari movement in the late 60s.

On the other hand, Gayatri Spivak is of the view that the subaltern is that category of people who cannot actually speak. Their 'subalternness' ceases to exist when they begin to 'speak'. She has focused extensively on the feminine who she considers as historically subjugated. She critiques the dearth of the gender question in the initial Indian subaltern studies, as the subjugation of the feminine must constitute an essential dimension of subaltern studies (Spivak, 1988).

According to several of these thinkers, the question of the subaltern voices being heard seems a distant possibility. Even while the subalterns attempt to speak or rise up, all that would lead only to further subjugation by the state power machinery. Guha states that the subaltern masses are always under the control of the ruling classes, even when they rebel or rise up. However, this assertion contradicts his position when he speaks of the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny (Guha, 1996).

While in the past, force was the means through which subalterns were kept in subjugation, the post-colonial tactic is mostly hegemonic which is 'a particular condition of Dominance, such that the organic composition of Dominance enables Persuasion to outweigh Coercion.' (Guha, 2009, p. 366). What this means is that the state now wields its power somehow to cajole the

citizenry to come to terms with its policies through (forceful) persuasion in the name of ‘national interest.’

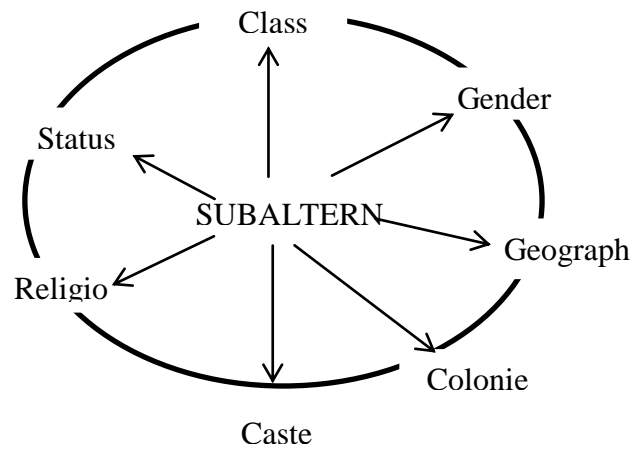


Figure 1

From the point of view of the Indian discourse on the concept ‘subaltern’, Fig. 1 represents the wider gamut of issues that this concept would entail. Subaltern thus is a subjected underclass on the basis of such divisions as caste, class, gender etc. The point to note here is that while the Marxian concept of the ‘underclass’ or the ‘subaltern’ was purely on the class or economic parameters, Gramscian concept goes much wider. The Indian scholars in Subaltern Studies, understandably, have adopted considerable Gramscian concepts to evaluate the Indian subaltern dynamics.

CINEMA IN INDIAN SUBALTERN CONTEXT

In the light of the above discourse on the understanding of the ‘subaltern’, one can trace the reflection of this dynamics in the evolution of Indian cinema. For example, in the cinema of Bimal Roy (eg. *Do Bigha Zamin*) and Shyam Benegal (eg. *Ankur*), who have concentrated increasingly on the subaltern in their films, this class of people is portrayed as that which cannot really speak. Even when they speak or rise up, that leads to self-destruction. In these films what is projected is the frustration and betrayal experienced by these people who felt let down even after they thought that they were part of a grand democratic state. The rise of the ‘angry young man’ in the 70s is also a representation of the subaltern frustration and anger. In several films of this genre, we see the angry character of Amitabh Bachchan, a personification of anger, eventually being led to a state of no return.

Even as the rise of cinema was predominantly an urban phenomenon in terms of production and distribution, its reach was not limited to the urban. The Bollywood cinema, even as it wore an elitist garb in terms of its technology and cast, could not have survived without the support of the quintessential mass audience. It is this same audience which was largely responsible in making stars out of film heroes and heroines. As Chidananda Das Gupta points out: 'It is not the middle class that has made Bachchan what he is today. It is the plebeians, the lumpen proletariat that took him to the pinnacle of success.' (2008, p. 185). The same could be said about Raj Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna and a host of other superstars.

Cinema being patronised by the subaltern was quite decisive in the growth of the film industry in South India as well, where most mega stars had and still have a number of fan clubs, a unique trend in every city, town and major village. In states like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, cinema was a base for several stars to build up their political careers. Further, cinema as a medium could grow widely due to the rise of mini film theatres (called 'tents' in local lingo) in even remote areas of southern states. Today, even in the era of multiplexes, it is these theatres in the suburbs that are the life blood for the success of the so called 'masala films' in the South, especially in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.

As cinema developed into an industry, it was basically economics and profit that became the driving forces behind the medium. Considering the popularity of this new medium and its powerful effect on masses, the state felt a need to take its social enterprises to the masses through issue based feature as well as non-feature films. Thus, several institutes to promote this medium were set up. The chief among these were, National Film Development Corporation, Film and Television Institute of India, National Film Archives of India, etc.

With the formation of these institutes, there emerged a new trend of parallel cinema or art cinema in India. In fact, the distinction with regard to commercial and art cinema perhaps is unique only to India. This was necessitated by the state patronage of parallel cinema. The state with a socialist outlook under the leadership of Nehru, felt the compulsion to take to the people its many projects, at the same time encouraged creative minds to bring forth through parallel cinema, the sensibilities of the ordinary citizens. Unfortunately, the result of this development was that increasingly the commercial cinema remained city-centred in terms of narrative, form and content, while the so called art or parallel cinema focussed the rural. The films of Satyajit Ray,

Rithwik Ghatak, Mrinal Sen, Girish Kasaravalli, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, among others, are examples of the rural emphasis in parallel cinema.

However, today Independent film makers in regional cinema are making films on varied social and subaltern themes that are noteworthy. The new wave that is sweeping Marathi cinema in the recent years, as well as the new generation Malayalam films, not to forget the new trend cinema in Tamil and other regional languages, are combining city-rural, middle class-poor binaries, thus paving the way for another trend of film making which is quite different from the so called art cinema.

MARATHI NEW WAVE

In the light of the subaltern narrative, let me now discuss the Marathi New Wave cinema which has given a deliberate focus to the subaltern. In fact, one can even say that the content which is essentially rooted in subaltern narratives is the quintessential feature that defines the Marathi New Wave.

What is this New Wave? It can be likened to the film movements that swept Italy in the 1950s, France in 1960s or Iran post 1970s. These were movements which were defined by films that were low budgeted, and used ordinary unknown artists and dealt with themes related to subaltern masses. The most characteristic quality of such film making was its realistic narrative without any exaggeration of emotion or action. In effect, it can be defined as an ‘avant-garde movement.’

With the rise of such a movement, the distinction between art and commercial films is slowly on the wane today in India. Instead, what we see are films combining art with commercial elements. These are low budgeted films with lesser known or newer artists and they appeal to common man’s sensibilities. Such films can be classified as new wave films, as they fit the classical definition of new wave to a large extent.

A number of films in this genre have come in different languages. These are not the typical ‘art’ films of yesteryears that were made only for film festivals and hardly saw the light of day in theatres. Only a few people watched them. The new wave films are released in theatres and are becoming highly successful, with producers getting back their money and directors and actors getting noticed. Of course, these films have artistic elements which were typical of the so called

art films. However, they also have certain commercial elements such as song, dance and action, but all that is well integrated into the core narrative. In the words of Venkiteswaran (2010) a typical 'high art' cinema had 'lengthy shots, sparse dialogue, long silences, absence of songs, dance, stunts, sidekicks and humour.' (p. 46). The new wave cinema that we see today in India has not done away with such characteristics to completely turn away from being artistic, but has added elements which could appeal to ordinary mortals and not the so called 'intellectual audience' alone.

Some of the other characteristics of this New Wave cinema are that as they are low budgeted, the local settings add to the realistic depiction. Also, many of the characters are low profiled and hence do not carry the burden of image to lift the film. The themes are relevant and contemporary which the audience can very easily relate to.

It is this trend that is sweeping the Marathi cinema in the last few years. Marathi language has a rich tradition of literature and theatre. Even it had a rich cinema tradition as well. The father of Indian cinema Dadasaheb Phalke was from this region, and his contribution to Marathi is significant, especially in the era of silent cinema. Marathi cinema grew significantly in Kolhapur in Maharashtra in the hands of Baburao Painter and others. But, with the rise of Hindi cinema in Bombay (present Mumbai), Marathi cinema could not compete with the overarching reach of Bollywood cinema and only played a poor second fiddle, while theatre and folk art such as *tamasha* picked up in other parts of the state.

But, today there seems to be a resurgence in the Marathi cinema and the strong Marathi theatre has also contributed to this rebirth of cinema. Many of the directors and actors in these films today have either worked in Marathi theatre or have close links to it. The New Wave Marathi trend perhaps began with the film *Shwaas* which was India's official entry to the Academy Awards in the Best Foreign Film category in 2004. As Rasik (2011) observes: 'The Marathi New Wave doesn't have a common cinematic thread like the Italian Neo-realistic movement. But a conscious effort to push boundaries is definitely visible.'

Marathi world of cinema has thus come up with very impressive films in the last few years. 'Within half a decade we see films like *Dombivali Fast* (2005), *Valu* (2008), *Gabhricha Paus* (2009), *Jogwa* (2009), *Natrang* (2010), *Vihir* (2010), *Tingya* (2008), *Harischandrachi*

Factory (2009), and many others creatively exploring hitherto ignored subject matters, constituencies and spaces.’ (Wani, 2013, p. 27).

The point to be noted is that most of these recent unique films have for their subject the subaltern class of Indian society. And yet they appeal to the sensibility of all those who care for the underbelly of India. Films such as *Jogwa*, (2009), *Gabricha Paus* (2009), *Deool* (2012), *Fandry*, (2014) and *Sairat* (2016) are some examples of how directors in Marathi vibrate with contemporary issues.

SUBALTERN READING OF MARATHI NEW WAVE

As mentioned above, the Marathi New Wave cinema is basically about the subaltern. The rural comes alive with all its glory as well as indigence; variety as well as orthodoxy; simplicity as well as complexity. There is life and humour in the rural life. There are also pain and unjust power structures at play. However, what comes across quite tragically is the emotional disconnect between the subaltern and the hegemonic power structures.

Some examples: In the film *Gabricha Paus*, we have the protagonist Kisna, who wants to fight the vagaries of nature and the indifference of the state and continue farming. His tragic end comes in the very process of his fight for survival. What this signifies is that no matter how hard one struggles in a hostile situation, the emotional disconnect between the haves and the have-nots, and the state and the subjects will result in the subaltern being driven to a crunch situation from where they have no return.

In *Deool*, what we see is how superstition can overpower the ordinary rural ethos and change the village dynamics inside out. Even when the *Datta* god which is the one element responsible for so much upheaval in the village, is being stolen does not result in an end to the superstition. This is because, for the powers that be, it is important to install another *Datta*, so that they are in perfect control of the village power structures.

The film *Jogwa* is a visual narrative of the extent of exploitation in the name of rituals and traditions that the subaltern is subjected to. The practice of *jogti/jogtin* is not just about superstition; it is also about the issue of human dignity and justice which are hard to come by for the subaltern.

Marathi film *Fandry* which has won many awards, is a prototypical account of the subversive power and caste structures at play in a subaltern narrative. This is perhaps one of those very few films that have matter-of-factly brought out the raw reality of the caste question. The brutality of caste system in the modern world plays out more subtly than the historic untouchability. Here is a family, the day-to-day struggles of which are a spectacle of entertainment for the so called upper caste people in the village. The entire narrative is depicted through the eyes of the teenage son in the family, Jabya. The irony is that this boy is chasing two ‘birds’ – one, a long-tailed sparrow and the other a fair girl from the upper caste – both of whom are elusive to him.

The caste dynamics at play in this film are similar to the dynamics playing in any village today. Caste today is not just about untouchability; for untouchability in its true sense is no more a major concern, when you can easily stay away from people whom you don’t like. It is about attitudes and perceptions. In the film *Fandry*, the family of Kachrya, the father of Jabya the ‘lover boy’, lives as usual on the fringes of the village; but the family is sought after to tidy the dirt of the village, i.e. to catch stray pigs which are another symbol of defilement. Perhaps, the family can be banished only when all the dirt (pigs!) is done away with from the village.

The modern day social dynamics as regards caste too seem to have a similar matrix. While discrimination in terms of untouchability seems less obvious, the discrimination as regards the roles to be played by the lower castes have only taken an intensive shift. The aspirations of the subaltern to prosper are being critically truncated by the unscrupulous hegemony of the ‘upper castes’. An analysis of the statistics given out by the National Crime Records Bureau, reveals that crime rates against dalits have increased by over 25 per cent since 2006 (Crime in India, 2016). This is even when there are stringent laws for crimes committed by anyone against dalits.

The final scene in the film *Fandry* where the young Jabya gives vent to his suppressed anger seems just an aberration in a scenario where dalits are considered a mass to be merely used and suppressed, and the discrimination and humiliation meted out to them seen as something normal.

Ingle (2018) analysing the two Marathi films *Fandry* and *Sairat* holds that the marginal life of Maharashtra has been mainstreamed in these two films. Though caste comes as a crucial factor, it is determined not so much through untouchability as stressing on the lowly status of the subaltern. For example in *Fandry* the lowly status (Kaikadi caste) of Kachru, Jabya and the

family is highlighted through the constant jibes of the upper caste about their caste trade, namely that of catching pigs. In *Sairat*, though the caste of the subaltern is not known, it is clear that Parshya and his family which lives in a single room shanty must not aspire to come closer to the Patil family. It is important to note that both these films have been directed by Nagaraj Manjule who has carried the subaltern angst into the films, being a Dalit himself.

Redefining ‘gaze’

Laual Mulvey, a film and culture critic, in her famous essay on ‘visual pleasure and film narrative’ (1988) speaks of how female character in the Hollywood cinema is essentially there as an object of male gaze. She speaks of three ‘looks’ the cinema has to offer: ‘the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion.’ (p. 68). Her argument is that through these three looks the female is objectified in Hollywood cinema. In this context Gayathri Spivak’s (1988) discussion on the feminine in subaltern studies is important. In the 100 odd years of the history of cinema, we see the female mostly being portrayed as an object of ‘desire’. She is commonly depicted as being subordinate to the male protagonist, just as in real life she is made to be subordinate to her male partner.

The male gaze phenomenon is not unique only to Hollywood cinema. The history of Bollywood cinema as well as the cinema in the South are not devoid of a male gaze factor. The woman in most of these films has no definite role. Her only role is to be available to the hero’s gaze and his antics. She is expected to be the object of his desire, seducing or cajoling him through her song and dancing.

The New Wave Marathi cinema, though, is redefining the so called gaze in general and male gaze in particular. The female in these films is an important cog in the narrative. She is not merely an object of desire, she is also a decisive factor in shaping the destiny of the hero and, more importantly, in leading the plot narrative. For example, in the film *Gabricha Paus*, the wife is all watchful to make sure that her husband is not in anyway driven to ending his life in the wake of crop failure and lack of rain. In *Deool* we find the wife (Sonali Kulkarni) keeping her husband Bhau Galande (Nana Patekar) in her control, even as he is a dominant figure in society. In fact, most of these New Wave films have the female either as an equal partner of the male or as indispensable character in the growth of the storyline. Moreover, there are several New Wave

films which are female oriented such as *Me Sindhutai Sapkal*, *Jogwa*, *Shala*, *Sairat*, among others, the characters of which transcend the stereotyped 'male gaze' phenomenon.

Ingle (2018) speaks of how the gaze which has 'objectified the marginal subjectivities and social experiences' is challenged to introspect in *Fandry* and *Sairat*. This dimension is important. The audience who watches these films becomes in a way symbolic representatives of the dominant upper caste. In both the films, it is the dominant castes who objectify the subaltern, as is the norm in Indian society. In *Fandry* when Kachru, Jabya and other family members are compelled to catch pigs, the entire village makes a spectacle of the episode, deriding and humiliating them with caste references.

Subaltern angst through children

In the representation of the subaltern reality, children have been used very decisively by film directors across the globe. When a narration is presented through the eyes of a child, it works at two levels:

1. Child looks at reality with innocence and, without the baggage of in-born prejudices.
2. Child by its very existence, dependency and fragility, is a microcosm of the larger subaltern reality.

Hence, a child-centred narrative of the subaltern or the reality through the eyes of a child helps in chronicling the account as dispassionately as possible. This could be the reason why the Italian neo-realism of the 50s and the Iranian New Wave which began in the 70s, have used children effectively and extensively in their subaltern narratives. The films of Vittorio De Sica in Italy or the films of Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majjidi, Mohsen Makmalbaf and others in Iran have successfully painted the subaltern reality through the eyes of children. In the Indian context too, Satyajit Ray, being influenced by Italian neo-relaism, brought forth the angst of the subaltern through the eyes of children, especially in his early films.

Directors of the Marathi New Wave have made use of child characters to give expression to the subaltern subtleties. For example, in the film *Tingya* there is the little boy Tingya. His passionate love for his bullock is an excuse for the director to examine the struggle of a farming community in the midst of poverty and crop failure. However, the compromises that the family

make in finally letting the little boy have the love of his life – the bullock – and not sell it, despite the situation warranting otherwise, is a definitive factor in making sense of subaltern sensibilities.

There are several other films in the Marathi New Wave which are child-oriented or that have children as important characters: *Shaala* and *Fandry*, are a couple of them, not to forget the first film in the New Wave trajectory, *Shwaas*.

Use of *Tamasha*

In the 70s and 80s many Marathi films used the folk art *tamasha* for the purpose of narration. These films were very successful. Tamasha is an entertainment in dance and drama form. Originally, tamasha was a typical folk medium of the subaltern communities and it is interesting that this form finds its entry into film. This folk art is traced to be emerging originally in the form of *lavani* and *powda* folk forms of people such as the bards and genealogists who were mostly from the communities of Gondhali (bard), Gavli (cowherd), Mahar, Mang, Sali-Mali (weavers and gardeners) and Bhats (bard and genealogist) (Rege, 2002). Here, an important aspect to be noted is that tamasha was not very popular among upper caste people till recently in Maharashtra and it had remained predominantly a folk medium of the subalterns. However, things have started changing post 90s coinciding with the rise of the market economy. Today tamasha has been turned into a very lucrative ‘folk art’ by the powers-that-be and dominates the television entertainment as well. The entry of tamasha into Marathi films especially in the 70s and 80s, was not a taboo, considering its entertainment factor. As Rege points out: ‘The Marathi cinema, dominated by brahmins and marathas, drew its raw material from the lavani tamasha of the kolhatis, mahar and mangs, converted it into saleable goods, and took it back to the audiences in the small towns at double the price.’ (Rege 2002, p. 1044).

However, this era did not prolong as there was tedium and an overdose of the same (“100 years”). But its reappearance is once again seen in the Marathi New Wave films today. A film like *Natarang* celebrates this folk art by the very portrayal of the rise and fall of its protagonist Guna (Atul Kulkarni). The art is also used in recounting the story of a cruel superstitious system called *jogti-jogtin* (male-female servants of God) in Maharashtra in the film *Jogwa*. The rich tamasha trait has been effectively used in these films, not merely as an entertainment factor, but also to bring out issues that seem important in a subaltern context. On the other hand in the story of the

film *Balgandharva* (2011) we see this folk art being adopted by the upper castes to gain prestige and status.

The trajectory of the adoption of this folk art form tamasha in films is a reflection of its evolution in real life itself. Once in the domain of the subaltern, today tamasha is being institutionalised and the original custodians are sidelined. Once a very rich rural folk art, now it has made inroads into the city auditoriums and TV studios. This is ‘hegemony’ of a different kind wherein a subaltern heritage is being co-opted by the upper castes purely from the political economy point of view. This is reminiscent of what Spivak (2008) argues about the Subaltern today being permeable and that the indigenous knowledge of the subaltern being transformed into intellectual property.

CONCLUSION

The subalterns in Marathi films are radically different from the subalterns of a typical Bollywood film. While the subaltern of the yesteryear Bollywood film was a victim of his/her circumstances and in search of a benevolent saviour to come to their rescue, the subaltern in the Marathi film is a master of his/her own destiny. Jabya in *Fandry* cannot fight the system of the subtle caste dynamics at work. He finds it even harder to comply to the demands of his ‘lower caste’. He must fend for himself. He cannot even fight, for he is yet a boy. However, the last shot of the film seems a radical statement from the boy who till now seemed weak and subdued. He throws a stone at his enemy and at the camera which is capturing his misery. He seems to be attempting to destroy both at once.

For long under the shadow of Hindi cinema, the Marathi New Wave in the recent past has undeniably given, in the words of Amrit Gangar (2013, p. 83), a ‘new sensibility towards cinema’. This sensibility, no doubt, comes from its shift from an urban middle class centric emphasis to its paradigm shift and focus towards the rural and the subaltern. If the subaltern is ‘a position without identity’, (Spivak, 2008) then Marathi New Wave films are trying to retrieve the lost identity by going to its ethos through these varied themes. Film as a mass medium, or for that matter any other medium, does not carry the burden of bringing about radical social transformation. However, one cannot deny the fact that by its very nature, this visual medium is more capable of educating and informing people than any other medium. What Marathi New Wave films are doing is to portray the subaltern sensibility without resorting to uncharitable

judgements or exaggeration. It is not as though these films are trying to give a voice to the voiceless. That does not seem to be the motivation. But, in more than one sense these films sensitively meander through the subaltern ecosphere taking the viewers along to experience the subaltern world.

It is true that the New Wave Marathi films with subalterns as the lead characters attempt to make them 'speak'. However, they are also realistic enough to acknowledge that speaking comes at a cost. Jabya in *Fandry* has to resort to violence to speak towards the end of the film. In *Sairat*, the director carries the narrative of the love tale of a subaltern boy with an elite upper caste girl to almost its logical conclusion, only to give it a depressing end. The honour killing that we witness at the end is a stunning message the director gives to the audience that the powerful can quell the voices of the ordinary with sheer impunity. This is not a ghost story, but reality witnessed daily in India. The episode of the recent Unnao rape case and the ordeal the poor victim and her family are put through is but an example.

It is ironic that in the over 100-year history of Indian cinema, with its considerable focus on the subaltern, we do not have a single mainstream actor or director who is a dalit. And that is when a film like *Fandry* seems important. The director (Nagraj Manjule) is a dalit, so is the protagonist Jabya (Somnath Awghade) and several of the crew members. This indeed is quite a definite moment in the epoch of Indian film history. And the difference between a dalit making a film about his community and someone else making it are quite striking. That brings us once again to Spivak's question 'can the subaltern speak?' Yes, they can, as films like *Fandry* and *Jogwa* have shown. And yet in the context of caste question, they will continue to be subalterns, for the caste question is much more complex than a class or a race question. All the same, Marathi New Wave cinema has attempted to foray into a terrain hitherto seldom inhabited by the larger film canvas, thereby making the medium richer and more meaningful.

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