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NIL BATTEY SANNATA: A PARADIGMATIC SHIFT FROM PATRIARCHY TO PARITY

Abstract

Cinema is like a mirror image of the society and it does imbibe traditions and culture of the society. Since it is an important medium to look into the nerves of the society and concurrently it is a strong apparatus of our society to cast and recast people in their gender-based roles. Indian Cinema is basically male-oriented industry, in terms of direction, production and casting. The condition of women, in real life and in reel life, is equally marginalized and this disparity encourages their segregation as subaltern being. They are on the fringe of the Indian society and cinema, which is visible at the casting and costing of their roles. On the one hand, cinema has created a dominant place in our cultural studies and on the other hand, it is considered by scholar a significant artefact of cultural hegemony. This is the reason, any study about a particular culture and tradition would be considered as an incomplete study without the reference of contemporary film industry. In the most of Indian movies, the story line revolves around the hero and the heroines are assigned secondary roles to the heroes. But some of the movies have broken this legacy and try to establish women as the centre of the action. These movies have provided a plethora of opportunities to women artists and assigned them divergent and challenging roles to reconstruct their images, both in our society and cinema. This drift has got circulation in Indian cinematic parlance with the passage of time. Henceforth, there are few epoch-maker movies which have carved a niche in the heart of the audience and *Nil Battey Sannata* is one of that genre. This movie is presented before us in a light tone and banter but it is strong enough to voice some of intense and fierce topics related to our contemporary society. This movie leads the audience as well as critics to ponder on the prevailing norms and traditions of our society. It is vociferously claiming equality at the level of gender and class.

Key Words: Apparatus, Marginalization, Subaltern, Reconstruct, Circulation, Equality

Movies are the signboard of our society and are considered as central part and parcel of our lives. Now a day, it is characterized as an integral component our life and emerges out to be an undeniable entity. Its expanding area is further consolidating this point that a movie can alight and delight the people. Perhaps, this is the ground, it is considered by scholar as an important cultural artefact to harbour their ideas on.

A brief history of Indian cinema is enough in itself to expose the harsh and scathing truth of Indian cultural politics which have had placed women in a peripheral and subsidiary position.

But things have changed over the period of time, so do our movies and the shifting trends of film industry are reflecting and consolidating this point. In this context, Surekha Kadapa-Bose has rightly opined that films are not only covering but also discovering the social realities of our life.

Movie-makers have certainly come a long way from the days when women – centric films were just about showcasing her plight and suffering... Nowadays, however, the trend is to try out roles that are a complete departure from the usual, which is mostly playing the quintessential second fiddle to the “tall, handsome and impossibly resourceful” hero, hanging on to his muscular arms and doing a few song-and-dance routines..... film scripts are more in tune with society today, which is undergoing a transformation. Girls and women are no longer ready to accept their second class status; they are defying patriarchal norms, being assertive at home and in the work space, and are keen on exercising their choice in every sphere of life. (2015.n. Page)

Movies are the strongest apparatus of the capitalist forces to consolidate their hegemony in the society. But at the same time, they can be equally applied to the deconstruction of the earlier presentation and cast of women characters in our movies. This transformation is evident in contemporary cinema where the different associations are at work to grapple our attention towards the particularities of Indian film industry. For example :

‘The Women in Cinema Collection’ which includes actors, directors, editors, cinematographers, make-up artists and costume directors, met Chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan with a slew of demands to ensure gender justice and find recognition in an industry where discrimination is not just rampant, it allows little room for nay dialogue on women ‘s service and pay conditions (The Hindu, 1)

Hence, movies are an important source to introduce a number of vital themes and issues of our life. *Mother India*, which was made by Mehboob in 1957, *Mirch Masala* made by Ketan Mehta in 1989, and *Mohra* made by Rajiv Rai in 1994, are some of classy movies which have written new chapter in the history Bollywood Industry. Here is one such movie named *Nil Battey Sannata* which was released on 22 April 2016, and directed by Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari. For this movie, Iyer has bagged the Filmfare Awards of the Best Debut Director, while Swara Bhaskar and Rai Shukla have seized the Screen Awards for the Best Actress (Critics) and the Best Child Artist Awards for this movie.

Some of the reviews of the movie are worth of quoting to highlight the distinct and specific characteristics of the movie.

According to The Hindu *Nil Battey Sannata* is “A feel-good film about gender and education with performance and themes that resonate”.(2016, n.pag.)

While for TOI *Nil Battey Sannata* is “ a rare film, the kind that will bring tears to your eyes but leave a smile on your face. It is gratifying to watch something unpretentious in times when masala films are stooping to entertain”.(2016, n.pag.)

Iyer has subverted the trends of Hindi cinema by presenting the female’s saga by female and about female. In her debut movie, she has attempted to introduce some of the vibrant and pertinent issues of our society: Single motherhood, parenthood, youth in the state inertia, preconceived notion of the profession and education, etc. The characters are fabricated in a life-like colour and manner. The problem of Chanda and Apeksha is so relevant that it has

become difficult for us to discriminate between the real and imaginary. The characters are harbouring the hope and aspirations of man of flesh and blood, not of imagination.

This movie has touched upon the shores of unexplored social issues and simultaneously, reconstructed them in an innovative forms and attires for instance: Motherhood is introduced before us in a challenging version and variation. The images and roles are typical but the sense of subjectivity and identity rejuvenates the concept of motherhood in this movie. Instead of presenting father at the centre of the family, the story-line weaves around the mother and her daughter.

Discard of Gender Specific Roles

Chanda, the mother of Apeksha, was not able to complete her highschool but keen to provide higher education to her daughter. Though, she is a household maid but She is not ready to sacrifice her dreams at the altar of her mundane and temporal difficulties. Therefore, she decides to teach her daughter and for this, she is toiling day and night. The most extolling characteristic of Chanda is that she does believe in hard work and manages everything by herself.

Chanda is equivalently aware of the hardships of manual workers, therefore, she insists on the education of her daughter. This is the beauty of this movie, which has critiqued the gender-based depiction of women and establishes women as an independent and conscious being. She does not want to engage her daughter in the house-hold works and tries her best to provide all the necessary facilities to Apeksha for her education.

Here, mother is overtaking the role of authoritative parents and turns out to be a benefactor of her daughter. Chanda does not hesitate to break the order of society for the betterment of her daughter. Her role is subversion of male hegemony and dominance where women can't explore themselves. Apeksha is affectionately called by her mother as Apu.

Chanda proves herself to be the father of Apu, in the terms of the earning, planning and up-bringing. She not only, corrects her but also, inculcates in her seeds of aspiration and dreams for her bright future. She proves herself to be the real saviour of herself and her daughter, instead of seeking help from others.

There is a strangled relationship between Chanda and Apu in the movie, that is quite similar to our real life. As Chanda is working strenuously to save money for her daughter but Apu does not consider her hard work. Since, Apu is in her adolescence that is the most tumultuous stage of a person's life where it is very hard to make a sense of the worldly affairs and its order. Often times, this does happen to us when we ignore our parents' hardships. We do inculcate grudges against them for undermining our drive without considering the truth.

Window to the Heart of Indian Society

The predetermined notion of labour has paralysed the rational of our society which has classified people into varied sections on the basis of their works. Apu, Sweety and Pintu have internalized the preconceived notion of labour which had frozen their mind to think about their dreams. In the movie, Apu States that as the son of the doctor becomes a doctor, the son of an engineer becomes engineer, so a daughter of a housemaid can only be a housemaid. Therefore, there is no need to study hard for being a housemaid. Her statement is pointing towards the rampant hierarchy at the professional level. After getting the answer of Apu, Chanda was not able to sleep properly and decided to get admitted to her daughter's school so that she would be able to discover the academical problems of her daughter. She was willing to have the

glimpse of the educational environment of her daughter. Though the original idea was of Dr. Diwan but she dared to be in the school and at the class of her daughter.

Chanda takes trouble not to hurt Apu but to encourage her for studies. Chanda wants to change her perception towards education, profession and life. Therefore, she decided to educate herself so that she would be able to assist her daughter in her study. But things are not as simple as we consider them, nevertheless not firm to hinder Chanda's daunting Journey to education. Mother presence at daughter's school aggravates daughter's anger. During this process, Chanda has to face many taunts and banter of the students as Pintu laughs at her and states, "Is umar me aurten lagati hain madhe par Bindi, ye ab aayin hai is umar me padhane English, Maths and Hindi". It means women of her age are busy in putting bindi on their forehead but she is here to study English, Maths and Hindi.

Apu starts taking her study seriously so that she will be able to defeat her mother. Once the mother will change her mind, Apu will be back on the path of aimless excursion. This truth was very hard for Chanda to face and she was broken into pieces, after acknowledging the truth. At the mean time, Chanda lost her four jobs and she started working at a food stall for the bright future of her daughter. Instead of acclaiming her mother's hard work, Apu assumes that her mother is getting financial support from the man who had dropped her at night Amar proves out to be a real facilitator of Apu and makes everything clear to her.

Alternatively, through her consistency and dedication, Chanda proves herself to be a horse in the long race and her performance proves the saying: "Jab Jago Tabhi Savera" of the Principal in the movie. Finally, her efforts prove to be strong enough to culminate positive results and she succeeds in transforming Apu's notion towards education, profession, life and identity. She was able to inspire not only Apu's friends but Apu as well. In fact, she was the shaping hand behind the blossoming of their dreams as well as their personality.

Nil Battey Sannata celebrates the empowered women of our society who are capable of nurturing her family and to dream of the bright future at the courage of her own. Instead of putting her armour before dismaying circumstances, she decided to pursue on the path of hardship and aspired for her dreams of respected life and profession. This movie is a real celebration of the bildungsroman development of a mother-daughter relationship as well as their identities.

A Strong Whip at the Conyem[orary Education System

Nil Battey Sannata has touched many integral issues of our life; education is one of them. The movie is surfacing the dormant but dangerous trends of our education system which are engulfing the bright future of our country and transforming education into a hub of commercialization.

Here, the characters are the mouthpiece of our society which has segregated and stratified people on the basis of their class, resources and financial status. In fact, Apu, Sweety and Pintu is expressing the sub-conscious power-politics and harsh realities of our society which have jeopardized the minds of children to dream of their future and career.

Nil battey Sannata is exposing the dirty politics of coaching institution which are concerned about money instead of imparting knowledge. These institutions are mushrooming day by day and they are constructing their own future instead of students. As in the movie, the owner of the coaching institution Mr Gupta was worried about the future of his institution, not of Apu's. Dr. Diwan also confessed this fact that things were wholly changed, now a day, education is taken the place of business.

Apu's school is a window to the present scenario of the education where students are scared of subjects, simply because they do not have proper guidance and motivation regarding this field. In fact, they have inculcated apathy for their studies and school and they don't have any aspirations. Students' frustration and dilemma come to the fore when they have to pen an essay on their dreams. As in the movie, Pintu was ashamed at thought of his dream that was to be a taxi driver and in the similar fashion, Sweetie did not know about her future. Both of them had internalized the other's images instead of creating their own. Apu was at the gunpoint of her teacher, for not having a dream of her own.

This point is the climax of the movie where after realization of her mother's truth, Apu spoke for the first time on the behalf of her mother and decided to internalize her dream. She was able to make sense of the fact that her mother's dream was not imposed on her, instead it is the expectation and aspiration of her mother from her daughter.

The role of the principal, who is known as Mr Srivastava, is fabricated plausibly and he seems like one of the characters from our real life. In our classrooms, we have peculiar teachers who are dedicated to their rules. He has his cynical and sarcastic style to humiliate his students. But he has a motivational vocabulary which overflows with positive and negative enforcements. Though he is absurd but his inspirational words stimulates student to be a horse of long race, instead of a beast of burden. He turns out to be an outstanding character of the movie and carved a place in heart audience through his particularities.

The character of collector is the motivating force behind the incubation of Chanda's dreams. His humbleness is in sharp contrast to the behaviour of Dayal and his gatekeeper. His brief conversation with Chanda was good enough to inspire Chanda to pursue the dreams of UPSC for her daughter. For being collector, it is no compulsory to spend a lot, but to burn might oil for it. Her dream will be graspable on the ground of hard work. Chanda has decided to incubate the dreams of an I.A.S. officer for her daughter and further, moves on it unflinchingly. This movie promulgates this idea that one can choose occupation on the basis of one's merit.

The poverty and penury is temporal phenomenal which lies within our mind and further impaired our thinking. The person who do not have any dream, is the poor one because life is meaningless for him or her. But for the character like Chanda, life is an opportunity to realize her dreams and the real celebration lies in sincere attempt. The lines of *Wings of fire* are unfurling this statement: "You have to dream before your dreams can come true. Some people stride towards whatever it is that they want in life; others shuffle their feet and never get started because they do not know how to find it either" (Kalam, 8).

Nil Battey Sannata is creating an era of learning; learning at personal and impersonal level. It can be challenging but don't be scared of it. It is not about cramming of facts and data but it is a matter of enjoyment and understanding. The movie is promulgating this message that for complete comprehension of a subject like math, it should be related to our life and have to be enjoyed. Amar is parting this message in the movie and Chanda's efforts prove that there is no age for learning and nothing can hamper one from obtaining one's destination. One's genuine efforts are more significant than the final results.

Chanda, Apu and Amar are carrying forward this message that life is the greatest tutor in our life which teaches us the lesson of learning; how to confront the world and create the best out of the worst. If the person is determined then the barriers like sex, gender and class are transitory. Negative forces can put hindrance in your path but cannot deter your determination. Apesha (Expectation) of Chanda proves out to be true at the end of the movie where Apu was

answering the question of interviewer of Indian Administrative Services and further consolidates this statement that expectations are the base of life.

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