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Voices from periphery: A study of women discourse in cinema and literature: Reflections from the writings of Yadvendra Sharma Chandra's *lugaijaat* (1989), Ashok Chakradhar's film *gulabari* (1994) and novel *gulabari* (1998)

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Abstract

Yadvendra Sharma Chandra's story *Lugaijaat*, was written in 1989, which focuses on mundane life of Rajsthani society and the prevalent socio-cultural discrimination based on the lines of gender and caste. The story describes about the exploitation of lower caste community, and extreme violence on women in the regressive castist and patriarchal society. It was also made into a film named *Gulabari* and was again written into a novel. The story revolves around a dalit women named Gulabari, who struggles for remarriage after the death of her husband and only child. The story was a little modified by the director Ashok Chakradhar and was made into film to show the effect of that story and the struggle of a dalit woman in Indian society on the vast level, which was a great success and was well appreciated by the critics and viewer. However after watching the film and its effect on the audience, writer of the story was again motivated to write a novel because he found a gap in the existing literature and cinema. Thus he decided to write a novel which was different than the story and film. It conveyed the insight of writer through the various phases of struggle faced by Gulabari and ultimately the triumph and success of Gulabari to achieve what she had always dreamed of, unlike the story and film. The present paper tries to understand the influence of literature over cinema and vice versa.

Keywords: Dalit feminism, Oppression, Multiple Patriarchies, Casteism, Dalit Womanism

1. Introduction

Literature and cinema in contemporary era, plays an inevitable role into the life of human being, although literature has its origin into the antiquity and cinema into the modern world but both have inseparable similarities with each other, literature and cinema both provides aesthetic pleasure to the senses of human being, literature sparks the imagination into the human being to think freely and cinema explicates the literary imagination into physical shape by cinematic medium.

The debate concerning the relationship between literature and film is as old as the cinematic medium itself. Considered a low-level form of mass entertainment, early film sought to increase its cultural reputation by drawing from the already established arts such as music, theatre, and literature. Hence, cinematic adaptations of literary works or motifs became increasingly common, particularly after the burgeoning film industry shifted its focus from documentation to narration, that is, after the end of what Noel Burch considers the "primitive mode of representation" before 1909 as opposed to the "institutional mode of representation" and its spectator-oriented approach thereafter (Burch, 1990 pg. 186).

The debate over the relationship of literature and cinema has taken a wide area of discussion and enquiry in present academia, Brito speaks about the relationship of literature and cinema, he opines that: "In the era of inter-disciplinary, nothing is healthier than trying to see the literatures verbatim from the perspective of cinema, and the movie iconicity from the perspective of literature" (Brito, qtd in Gualda, pg. 2)

There has been few research and studies done in India in the field of cinema and literature especially to study the relation of literature and cinema. Although there has been comparison of many social science disciplines with literature, due to the emergence of multidisciplinary research methodologies but it is very intermittent to find sundry substantial studies done in the field of literature and cinema, especially the core relation between literature and cinema in India into academia. When one wade through the international academia, one witness's

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substantial numbers of body of works existing within this area of study unlike Indian Academia.

In International academics one could find the sufficient number of researches and projects concentrating on literature and cinema and especially on the area of the study of relationship of literature and cinema. In contemporary era, the literature and cinema is playing a prime role into the daily life individuals, both of the areas are inseparable as the literature is getting its new dimensions and interpretations from cinema and cinema getting its epistemic origin from the literature and in present one could clearly see how the boundary of literature and cinema is melting and becoming blur. (When one makes through the extensive, as a result we find that in some cases cinema gives literature a new dimension or we can say make it better than the original work and at the same time in some cases it distorts the original body of work and we don't get the aesthetic pleasure which we get while reading.)

Plays, Short Story, novels and poetry are essential genre of literature, and these mediums have not only entertained the society from time immemorial and worked as transporters of sublime and ecstasy to the human senses but also, these mediums have worked as a stimulator and mentor to guide the society by showing and bringing different dimensions to the society.

Literature has helped human society to develop them, by showing multiple aspects of human personality through its different genre for example novel, poetry, short stories etc.

As we mentioned above literature has always mirrored some or the other aspects of human society by its different genre and in the same way Cinema has also done the same by its different genre that is Film, daily soaps, songs, documentary etc. and both of these disciplines have helped the society and enriched it by their contribution. What we find in both the area of study is portrayal of human beings with their different characters, distinct human traits, individual peculiarity and multiple personality. Whether its cinema or literature women have always been there playing part in both the zone that is cinema or literature.

They have always been part of the meta-narrative of literature and cinema right from the commencement of these areas, but in the recent years the discussion of women, their role and contributions have taken wider scope of research and study than ever before.

In the contemporary era cinema has become an inevitable part of human life, it has accessibility in almost every household without any hierarchy it's reaching is to every class and society.

What we see in cinema today is the development or the modernized version of theatre, folklore from the past which has changed due to the development in technology and has taken a new contour in the form of cinema.

We find stories in both in literature and cinema, but the medium of turning over of messages is different, in literature the words are conveyed through artistic sensibilities of the author to bring sublimity to the aesthetic senses of the reader while in Cinema it is conveyed with the amalgamation of visual, acting, music, dance and language. What significance we get from literature the similar is conveyed to us by watching cinema also. But their medium of expression is different both expresses itself distinctively. In short we can say that literature gets merged into cinema or in a way it gets assimilated into cinema and cinema takes its origin from literature thus both have an inseparable camaraderie with each other hence have strong influence on each other. The present paper tries to explore this relation of cinema and literature and

the influence of one on the other or vice-versa, explaining and exemplifying from the piece of literature (*Lugaijaat*, (1989) *Gulabari* (1998)) and cinema (*Gulabari* (1994)).

Yadvendra Sharma Chandra's story *Lugaijaat*, was written in 1989, focuses on mundane life of Rajasthani society with the existing loopholes in that contemporary society, like violence against women, multiple exploitation of dalit women, prevailing cast system, and high gender inequality, superstitions, physical and psychological abuse of dalit women by upper caste society, especially the abuse of dalit's by the Landlordism and high cast community.

Although women had always been an inseparable part of literature and cinema but their description were often subject to patriarchal authorship, the women were described within the patriarchal ideologies and were not given the central voices that they required rather they were imparted with stereotypical role of self-sacrificing mother, obeying daughter and an abiding wife, into this whole discourse of women in literature and cinema the voices of multiply marginalized women like dalit, were remotely addressed and highly impossible to locate, it was with the time that gradually and slowly the women began to occupy the central position after centuries of struggle and revolutions. As a result of violent protest and uprising by the activists and intellectual community, women began to get imperative position into the literature and cinema. But this meta-struggle was not heterogeneous and all catering in its nature as a result it gave origin to a new feminist group in India, who felt as outsider and were not at ease with the categorization of Indian women. According to Sharmila Rege the year 1990 turned out to be a revolutionary year into the history of dalit feminism, in this year dalit women took a radical shift from Indian feminism when they fervently questioned "feminism's exclusive focus over the issues of upper caste/middle class women. The social position of women i.e. importantly the caste position of women and the changing manifestations of patriarchal oppression with regard to the caste position of women was not recognized by mainstream feminism. During the 90s, feminism was inevitably challenged for its blindness to the social reality called caste. The question of caste became crucial and unavoidable in feminist politics. A new need was felt among the feminist groups to critique feminism's blindness to caste" (Rege, 2013, in Saujanya T. pg.2)

This new school of feminism which was termed as dalit Feminism blamed the mainstream Indian feminist for failing to consider the uneven and very different experiences of dalit women, this school of feminism opined that the Indian feminism only caters to the need of upper caste and upper class and to certain extant middle class women and totally ignores the issues faced by the dalit women. Indeed the claims and the discrimination felt by the dalit women were true, from antiquity dalit women has been facing coercive and regressive marginalization which is multi-layered and multiply regressive in structure. Women had always hold an inferior position than men in Indian society but the kind of patriarchy that governs the life and social role of dalit women is highly gendered and multiple oppressive in structure. Dr. B R Ambedkar, in his article titled "The rise and fall of Hindu woman" opines that the root causes for suffering of women in India are the Hindu religious books, which ideologically perpetrates the violence against a particular community and gender. Classical Hindu religious books like *Manusmriti*, worked as prime contributor which split society into a stratified caste system and indorses discrimination and disparity in genders. According to the *Manusmriti*, "women have no right to education, independence or wealth that not

only justifies the treatment of dalit women as a sex object and promotes child marriage, but also justifies a number of violent atrocities on women” (M Saniya, pg. 150).

According to *Manusmriti* A Brahmin, Kshatriya, or Vaishya Man can sexually exploit any shudra woman. (*Manusmriti* IX.25)

“Even the killing of a dalit woman is explicitly justified as a minor offence for the Brahmins: equal to the killing of an animal (*Manusmriti*). If the killing of an untouchable was justified as a minor offence, you can imagine the treatment they received throughout their lives” (M Saniya, pg. 150).

The prescribed norms of *Manusmriti*, and other religious doctrines have shaped the life of Hindu religious communities from centuries, which not only depowers a particular community and gender but also provides opportunity to upper caste communities to internalize the domination and power. In the similar way *Gulabari* depicts the narrative of dalit women, it illustrates how Untouchability is all prevalent into the Rajsthani community and also vividly describes the hypocrisy of the upper caste community where on the one hand they cry for purity and containment of their body if touched by dalits and on the other brings a dalit in their house and give her the stature of mother like entity if needed. The instance of this could be seen when Gulbari an Untouchable is asked to breast feed the son of Landlord when the wife of Landlord is incapable of providing the milk to her own child. It explicates and explains the hypocrisy of casteism and untouchability and also brings to the fore as how the upper caste and the powerful community moulds and manipulates the whole religious doctrines and social structure for its own convenience.

Further instances of it could be seen into the character of Gaud Hari. He has pervert, licentious and lustful emotions for Gulabari and fancies her. He proposes Gulabari with the offer of being his mistress and offers her to keep her like a queen which Gulabari refuses because he denies marrying her. Being an upper caste he has no guts to forefront the truth in public that he likes Gulabari. In his offer he says he would keep her in a separate house and give her luxurious life but she has to keep the whole relationship hidden, he does not dare to pronounce his love for Gulabari due to the regressive patriarchal system and cast system. The act of Gaud Hari could also be interpreted as the example of power discourse of Michael Foucault who views that power is everywhere and has been internalized by each and every member of society is such a way that it looks norm of the society and member of a society finds it so natural that breaching of codes becomes an unthinkable act. To quote “We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it ‘excludes’, it ‘represses’, it ‘censors’, it ‘abstracts’, it ‘masks’, it ‘conceals’. In fact power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production” (Foucault 1991: 194).

The story revolves around a dalit women named Gulabari, who struggles a lot to get, re-wed after the death of her husband and child, in the orthodox Indian society. The story was modified by the director Ashok Chakradhar and was adapted into film to show the effect of that story and the struggle of a dalit woman in Indian society via cinematic medium, which was hugely successful and well appreciated by the critics. The story was short Gulabari’s remarriage was given importance in the story while into the film the issue of caste, gender, sexual and psychological exploitation and resistance of Gulabari assertion of a dalit women’s identity was given much importance, it portrayed the struggle of

Gulabari colossally which is very precise and meager in story, narrative of the movie shows the sacrifice and traumatic status of Gulabari’s mind for instance suppression of her mental and physical desire to have a family for 6 years, and experience of different kinds of violence in the house of Ram Ratan. It also exposes the hypocrisy of the *Zmindari* (landlordism), as system how on the one hand they call her *Dhayma* and pretend to be her care taker and father figure but at the same time she was attempted to get sexually harassed by the elder son of the Haveli, (mansion) Vishnu, when Vishnu comes in the night to her room and hold her hand she says:

“Bhavishya bataoge? Kahate ho Dhaya ma, Man me itnana bara paap. Andhere me Gulab ke kaante nahi Dikhate” (Gulabari, director Ashok Chakradhar 1994) (Will you oracle my future, you call me Dhayma, and wicked from inside, you can’t see thorns of rose in darkness), the response of Gulabadi to the Landlord is a path breaking and very new kind of voice that came over into the mainstream writing prior to that the portrayal of dalit women into the literature were often misrepresented, they were often depicted by the upper caste men/women writers as victims of the lust and lechery of higher caste male and had never dared to rebel and fight back and the perpetrated violence and injustice against their body. The writings of Premchandra, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and Mahashweta Devi, are called the voice of the oppressed class and caste and also the voice of dalit community. Though the above writers have been described as the representative voices of dalit community but they have often fallen into the trap of essentializing and homogenizing the experience of dalits as victims and sufferers without resistance, they have often described dalit women as Victims whereas Yadvendra Sharma Chandra, has moved beyond the traditional approach to deal with dalit women, he has created Gulabari, as the voice of resistance and voice of new dalit women, who is assertive and dares to fights back, here we can quote Bela Malik, who claims that new dalit women “[t]he younger women ... [are] most militant and less willing to tolerate the terms of their existence”.(Malik qtd in Ahmad Lone, pg.2).

Gulabari was given used and old clothes to wear, and in the matter of her remarriage she is pronounced as lecherous and woman with loose moral as she wants to have family. Film has also thrown light on the condition of dalit women, being dalit, how Gulabari wants to have a family like the women in *Zamindar’s* (landlord) house and wants to maintain a household like the women in *Zamindar’s* (landlord) house which being a dalit woman was difficult.

Here we see how being a dalit women it was not possible for her to exercise her individual choices she was addressed as a lecherous by her own community as well as the upper caste community for her desire to have a family and husband, whenever she talks about her remarriage she was often attributed with adjectives like licentious, lusty, characterless etc.

Kalpna Kannabiran, in her book talk about the same position of dalit women she argues that: “dalit women are dalit among the dalits’, because they are thrice alienated-on the basis of caste, class and gender” (pg.66).“

Although Gulabari Faces social and psychological assaults from the people around her, still she is never dishearten and never feels down because she is a dalit woman, she is never ashamed of her identity as dalit, she rather fights for her existence and is proud to be a pot maker she also wants Birju and all the children from Gurukul(an old system of education in India where the student and the mentor used to reside together to gain knowledge, where student used to get multiple task for multiple development) to learn pot making.

The movie shows a pond which can be a symbol of Gulabari's unconsciousness which consists of waves, bubbles, which wanted to transcend the boundary of the pond but was surrounded by the walls similarly Gulabari's unconscious mind was also full of emotions and desires from inside and wanted to transcend but were confined by the four walls of society and its hypocrisy, orthodoxy.

She is a robust, self-assertive woman who is not afraid of anyone and takes her own decision and doesn't bow down to anybody, she is very optimistic and has never giving up tendency in herself she fights till the end but doesn't compromise her individuality on the extent of anything. Her love for Birju (son of Ram Ratan), is immense that she always come back to the Haveli (mansion) because she find a glimpse of her own son in the figure of Birju. She has also been shown as the women who opposes untouchably for instance- in the film in Gurukul when Acharya (teacher) tells Gulabari that she cannot serve water because she is untouchable, but she doesn't give up rather she explains to Acharya (teacher) that why can't she do that she is accepted by everybody in the Haveli (Mansion) and if he can drink in the pot which is made by her hand then why can't he drink water from the same hand. This act of Gulabari shows the resistance and the spirit of reformation in the new dalit women.

The ending is different in the story and film, while in the story *Lugaijaat* Gulabari keeps on struggling to get remarry till the end while in the film she died in an attempt to save the Zamindar's son Birju.

Neither film nor the story was satisfactory for the writer as it did not appeal to the aesthetic sense of Yadendra Sharma Chandra. He found gap in the existing body of work, Thus he decided to recreate altogether a new piece of literature with the blend of story and film and intermingling of his imagination in it. He wanted Gulabari's to win her fight to get success out of her struggle, in the novel writer shows through the Story of Gulabari, the struggle and agony of dalit women facing viciousness and discrimination by hypocrisy of society. He also portrayed life of some other dalit women to show how women of dalit community has been multiply marginalized for example Sodra a character was raped and conceived whose parents were torturing her in the

8th month of her pregnancy and dies out of it, for the severe exploitation and extreme, the Status report of the working group on human rights India and the UN, 2012 says: "Sexual violence against dalit women is a systemic way of enforcing status quo of the Dalit" further United Nations special rapporteur on violence against women, Rashida Manjoo, 2013, says that "the reality of dalit women and girls is one of exclusion and marginalization...they are often victims of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights violations, including sexual abuse and violence".

In the novel *Gaud Hari*, who has been show a platonic lover of Gulabari in the film has been portrayed as a lusty lecherous character who has dissolute immoral and wicked eyes on Gulabari's figure, when he says,

"Gori-chitti, bari-bari anken, mansal Badana sabkuchh akarshaka! Jaise koi shakahari Jantu ki nahi raha ki wah ek Kumharin ko dekh raha hai ya apane bhitar wasanasikt iksha ko" (Gulabari, Yadendra Sharma Chandra, 1998 pg. 36). (Fair, deep eyes, and flashy body everything attractive! It is like a vegetarian animal's magnetic eyes. He became so engrossed in her charm that he totally forgot if he was watching a dalit woman or to a lecherous desire inside him). He tries to convince Gulabari that, had it been some other women she would have been ready to be with him but Gulabari

refutes the proposal saying there are different type of women and she is not the one who will give herself for money or for any other kind of greed so here we see how Gulabari has been portrayed a woman with an understanding of individual self-respect.

In the novel *Gulabari* has also been shown having womanist trait, who helps other women to fight for their own individuality for example Asuri a woman, married very young with an middle aged man who abuses her, after a lot of torment she leave her husband, and run away, a secret lover of Asuri wants to get married to her and how Gulabari helps them in their elopement and ask them to respect each other. In the novel not only Ram Ratan but other Zamindars (landlords) have also been exposed as how they exploit the poor and lower class and caste. (The term womanist was coined by Alice Walker in 1983. See her book: *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (NY, Harcourt, 1983). Elsa Barkley Brown explains that feminism in west and America, "excludes the experiences and histories of African-American women. Feminism, as she argues, places priority on woman, while womanism, defined as a consciousness, incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic, and political considerations".

(<http://www.countercurrents.org/stephen161109.htm> accessed date 13/04/15)

In the similar way "dalit women also felt outsider within the Indian Feminist discourse and they call them to be dalit Womanist The dalit Womanist paradigm will be invested with its own meanings from its own political and geographical location, just as Black/African womanism is imbued with its own meaning. dalit womanism will be broad enough to include the experience not only of the dalit women in general, but also sensitive enough to provide space for the expression of the diversity of the experiences of religious minorities, tribal and ethnic identities who are presently termed subaltern, and there can be no stopping the process. It will not only build and shape theory, it will also learn to mediate the spaces as well as build solidarity between itself and the existing Feminist and Womanist thought and theory. It will also negotiate its differences with and build solidarity with men from dalit and other subaltern and marginalised groups. Anyone who see the imperative need to change the paradigms of society from a caste and patriarchy-dominated ethos towards a more inclusive and equitable society will realize its significance".

(<http://www.countercurrents.org/stephen161109.htm> Accessed Date 13/04/15)

The Womanism of the dalits will be based on the lives, experiences and consciousness of dalit women, and include solidarity with other excluded and marginalised groups. In the novel extreme orthodoxy and superstitions of the Rajasthani society has been exhibited which Gulabari opposes for example when Gulabari's aunt says that those who are dead can be brought to life if a dog or cat bites then Gulabari Says that had it been the case no one would have been dead.

"Bua ji yah matra andhviswas hai. Yadi is tarah murde jinda hote to koi marta hi nhi. Sach to yah hai ki mare hue na to kabhi wapas ate hain aur na jinda hote hain" (Gulabari, Yadendra Sharma Chandra 1998 pg. 78).

In the novel *Gulabari* has been depicted to be a winner at the end when she gets what she has always aspired for, that moment comes when Gulabari gets married to Dhaniya and gives birth to twins and lives a prosperous life ahead.

Thus we can say that indeed literature and cinema are intermixed and have a close relationship with each other. The influence of one over the other and vice versa could be seen in

the instance as how the story “Lugaijaat” influenced the film Gulabari and how the film or cinema influenced the writer to write a novel. The changes or modification brought by cinema in some cases makes the literature more likeable for example Gulabari which was liked more than the original story Lugaijaat, the modification brought by cinema is because of the demands from the audience or the changes might bring a lot of appreciation from the audience or else when there is a gap in the main text they try to fill it by putting their imagination into the main script and through visual effect, music, cinematography which makes it more effective to the audience. Here we see how the cinema has made a literary piece better than it was in its original form and at the same time how both the mediums have influenced each other and enriched the body of literature available in both the area that is cinema and literature.

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