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Tripti Karekatti • Chandrakant Langare

Under the Lens: Films, Gender and Culture

© Editors

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PREFACE

Tripti Karekatti and Chandrakant Langare

This edited volume is an outcome of the national webinar organised by the Department of English Shivaji University, Kolhapur. The main objective of this webinar was to bring together scholars, research students and teachers interested and working in Literary Studies, Film Studies, Gender Studies, and Cultural Studies to explore the contested relationship between Films, Gender and Literature.

The selected papers explore the complexities of human societies through an analysis of cinematic and literary representations. Varied perspectives are employed such as that of disability studies, semiotics, queer studies, environmental studies, translation studies, subaltern studies, and many more to study the intersection of gender, films and/or literature. The focus is on international, national and regional cinematic experiences. The new wave cinema, parallel cinema, or popular cinema and cinema of the past and present have been scrutinised by the paper writers.

The collection opens appropriately with Samar Nakhate's address entitled 'Realigning Narrative in the Contemporary Context of Machines and Minds' which stresses the need of the contemporary novel-cinema gender studies to realign itself in the present times in which 'masculinised' 'machinated narrative controls our mind' to a huge extent.

Sara Regenellia's paper using statistics foregrounds the gender biases in the films and in the film industry using data from USA and India, to show that women are still stereotyped and relegated to subordinate roles. Mustajeeb Khan's paper focuses on the ups and downs faced by cinema as a medium vis-à-vis state control and creativity; Prakash Joshi's paper uses historiographical discussion in its analyses of the epic *Padmavat* and the film by Bhansali.

Regional cinema - Marathi, Telugu, Malyalam, and Kannada - is explored in the papers by Tripti Karekatti, Balkrishna Magade, Nalla Dilip Kumar, Anagha Anil and Vellikkeel Raghavan, S. B. Biradar and Anupama Dhavale.

Sounds, lyrics, and language of images are explored by Tripti Karekatti, Sonali Joshi and Mukul Joshi and Shaila Shree M.N.

Various facets and intersections related to gender, sexuality, caste, class and disability are discussed in the papers by Chandrakant Langare, Pooja Halyal, Zeba Irfan and Samina Khan, Shrikant Walwadkar, Dipanjan Kundu, Maryam Afzal, Nandita Banerjee, Garima Zha, Maitri Verma and Ayushi Zina

Adaptation and issue of fidelity is examined by Tarala Deshpande, S. Jayanthi, Sanjay Khamalatti and Prabhanjan Mane.

Other genres like horror, documentary, apocalyptic cinema are explored by Preeti Oza, Suchitra Awasthi and Srushti Dodia

We are thankful to Honourable Vice Chancellor Prof. Digambar Shirke and Honourable Pro- Vice Chancellor Prof. P. S. Patil for their academic support and encouragement provided during the whole process from organisation of the webinar to the publication of this volume.

We thank Dr. Gita Viswanath for writing a short but stimulating foreword.

We thank all the faculty members from the Department of English, Shivaji University, Kolhapur. We thank the research scholars for their active participation and help. The administrative staff of the Department of English was also of great help. We thank them too.

We thank Mr. S. K. Bhutani from Crescent Publishing Corporation for bringing out this volume and extending all the support needed.

Tripti Karekatti and Chandrakant Langare

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An Ecocritical Analysis of Ecological Discourses in Select Marathi Films

Balkrishna Magade

As Richard Kerridge rightly puts it "ecocriticism tracks environmental ideas and representations, both explicit and implicit, in works of art, literature, films and other texts. It seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their consistency and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis" (1998). Willoquet-Maricondi in his introduction of edited book, *Framing the World: Explorations in Ecocriticism and Film* (2010) examines how the field of ecocriticism offers both philosophical and theoretical foundations for the ecocritical study of films. It also provides ecocritical standpoints toward films: (1) those films that are explicitly and intentionally about natural systems and environmental threats; (2) those that in which the absence of nature is noticeable or in which the environmental dimension of social injustices is obfuscated; (3) and those that incorporate nature and environmental issues in their narratives but whose modes of representation reveal the ideological limitation or shortcomings of the culture vis-à-vis the environment (2010). Human beings are the earth's only cinematic creatures. If creation of cinema is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined

carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment.

The Marathi film *Devrai* (2004) , awarded the Best Film on Environment Conservation/Preservation at the 52nd National Film Awards and released on 11th March 2004, is directed in duo by Sumitra Bhave and Sunil Sukhtankar and produced by the Schizophrenia Awareness Association and K. S. Wani Memorial Trust. It is the story of Sheshshahi Desai (Shesh), a brilliant but eccentric man who lives with his mother, sister Seena, and cousin Kalyani in the Konkan region of the state of Maharashtra in India. The film begins with the repeated surrounding sound of words "Parvati, Devrai, to be preserved" (My translation) along with the image camp of felling of the tree. Now the audience is very much eager to know-What's Parvati? What's Devrai? And what's to be preserved? The whole narrative of the film moves round the answers of these questions. Devrai which is called Sacred Grove is a small patch of forest near Shesh's home preserved under religious ground. Shesh is always obsessed with that place. In fact, Parvati is a wife of his servant Shambu but he visualizes in his imaginary world Parvati as a Devrai and vice versa that appear frequently in his ramblings. He also believes that people will destroy Devrai. His outburst in the promotion party of his brother-in-law "You people cut Devrai. What do professors know about science? Even what do they know about trees? Is Devrai's knowledge got in the lab?" (My translation) reveals his deeply rooted awareness of the threat of ecological loss i.e., deforestation. Slesh's representation of "These trees, leaves, flowers, fruits, pods grow from mother land. Their interconnection is fixed here in my brain and mind" (My translation) seems to be distortion of reality and disturbance of thought and withdrawal from social contact but his sister Seena

questions "Is my brother being an environmental conscious a lunatic one?" (My translation) He expresses himself that Devrai will survive itself "Devrai is self-existent", it's everywhere "Devrai is a form of universe" and it refers to long back tradition "Devrai is also found in the *Mahabharata*" (My translation). Therefore, his struggle for the conservation of Devrai which has been a wide part of his perception is inescapable.

The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmark in Literary Ecology (1996) edited by Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm challenges the notion that everything is socially and/or linguistically constructed and instead, proposes ecocritical positions. Barry Commoner's first law of ecology is that "Everything is connected to everything else." (Glotfelty & Fromm: 1996). Here in this film Shesh feels that there is perfect harmony between the biological factors in Devrai. Moreover, there is relation between human and nonhuman world and inner and outer, too. The Shesh and Kalyani go in the vicinity of nature, Devrai that offers a solution to the chaos. He expresses:

"See. How sweet (green lush) this Devrai is! Do you see this tree and this creeper and that creeper one? They are growing interdependently. All they are interconnected-seem to be separate but aren't so. So are we- you and I, mother and Seena and Shanbhu. All of us are connected to one another with warm relations. Our mind is, too, a kind of Devrai. Did you understand KA-LYA-NI? Listen! Listen! Do you listen to Devarai's breathing? And Devrai's song of its own do you listen to? Our Devrai passed through very hard days you know. Never can I live alone without Devrai" (My translation)

His memories of Devrai, when he stays in city Pune, results in his increasing restlessness and loneliness. Devrai is everything for him, medicine, peace of mind, his

source of learning and survival. He never bears any kind of damage to Devrai. He thinks that man is not possible without mind, so is he not without Devrai. The film begins with his restlessness about the ecological plight of Devrai and ends with the comfort of companions- Kalyani and Devrai as his tranquility.

At the end of the film *Devrai*, the background song reveals Shesh's physical and psychological reunion with Devrai and all those feelings of hitherto go and hitherto come:

No outcry, but awakened the grove
To the fore home, missing the way to
A frenzied bird, no one understands
Why hullabaloo, hullabaloo? Why hullabaloo,
hullabaloo?

Here is fire, never is ash
Injured, never conscious of
Huntsman, huntsman, huntsman, huntsman
A frenzied bird, no one understands.
Why hullabaloo, hullabaloo?

Here is habitation, no companion
Home (Oikos) is here, no protector
Alone Alone All All Alone.
The frenzied world, never a bird understands
Why hullabaloo, hullabaloo? Why hullabaloo,
hullabaloo?

Stretched her arms a passer-by,
Sheltering a bird in her tender cover
Pinching to hands tears to eyes
But a smile all over the lips passing a way
Jungle Jungle Jungle
Crying a bird in her arms
Whispering softly in her ears
Guiding him a passer-by the way to grove

Guiding him a passer-by the way to Devrai
 Guiding him a passer-by the way to Devrai
 Guiding him a passer-by the way to Devrai
 Guiding him a passer-by the way to Devrai
 (My translation)

Another Marathi film, *Pak Pak Pakak* (2005), released on 15th April 2005 and directed by Gautam Joglekar, deals with the narratives of Bhutya who now lives in isolation in the nearing forest of the village, Mangalpada. He transforms a mischievous parent-less boy, Chiklu who lives with his grandmother in the village. Actually Bhutya was a herbal doctor (Vaidu). Before coming to this forest, he used to provide humble service and treatment to everyone. His happy home is burnt due to the human ego. He leaves his village and begins to live in the dense forest. At the outset, the very shameful and cruel act of hitting of an innocent deer by some villagers as a game of hunting in that forest brings in him a shift from egocentric to ecocentric sphere. He takes away the deer writhing in agony due to hit from the brutal grasp of human bond. He bewails "Humans call it sports. The human race is the pride of all evolution". Though this film seems to be a kid's comic genre and superstitious one but majorly focuses on the great threat of ecocide on account of the encroachment of the humans over the nature. Bhutya advocates "when people come to forest, everything will be finished. It's all over. Peace that used to reign here will remain no more. More than hundred people will come and invade us. They'll burn everything down to ashes...Let the cruel man roam free in the jungle...There they'll come with saws and axes to hack down and destroy everything" (My translation). He even transforms the school boy by inculcating old ecological values through suggesting rare medicinal herbs as available remedies to all possible

diseases and sufferings of birds, animals and humans. Bhutya clears Chiklu's doubt in every possible way: "Kashththavshadhi is an eternal supply of medicinal herbs. Human greed makes an invitation to maladies. Diet control is essential and there is a need of fresh air...conditional weakness or damage occurs to both sensory and motor organs due to possible accident or injury during pregnancy results in behaviour that weakens mental functions. There is a remedy available. Hence treatment is possible- two Mandukparini pills twice a day after meals" (My translation). Bhutya's harmonious relation with the environment around leads to his treatment that contains equal herbal mixture of Chitrak, Manjishtha, Shigrur, turmeric, Didimi, Talajans, Marjika, Sadapan and Kutaj for the permanent cure of the cow, Kalyani suffering from an oedema at its udder. He helps the deer injured with his warm touch: "The sounds of silence help simmer down the turmoil of the deer. The soul finds tranquility in the lush dense forest. And Ayurveda, the great science instils strength to recuperate physically and mentally unconditional unilateral progress" (My translation). He believes that "life is beautiful and we must strive to keep it beautiful" by bringing human and nonhuman world together.

The ideologies of human-animal relationship in Indian films in general and in Marathi films in particular originate from Indian history and culture. Almost all animals such as cows, snakes, oxen, dogs, deer, elephants etc both domestic and wild are worshipped as deities in Hindu religion. Instead of harmonious existence, there seem to be hazards to that relationship in the film, *Pak Pak Pakak* due to one and other reason. The cry of Gaurakka, an old woman in the village, shows her feelings of restlessness when she finds the plight of her docile cow, Kalyani due to illness. She mourns "my darling Kalyani is dying. It's

the end of my world...What should I do now?" (My translation) Further, Chiklu's grandmother is anxious about Kalyani's mysterious illness and Gaurakka's condition as well as about the health of the rest of the cattle in the village. She expresses herself "more cattle will be infected...What poor Gaurakka will do without Kalyani?" Bhutya makes his dialogue with female eagle, Saguna. He brings in awareness among Chiklu about the poisonous and non-poisonous snake variety and their natural behavior and how human tendency is more harmful to the natural cycle than that of these species: "Victims die more from the fear of the bite than from the venom itself. Only five venomous species are in India...Russel Viper, Pit Viper, Krate and Cobra and fifth ... MAN. The first four are at least useful to agriculture" (My translation). As a matter of fact, the planet earth is not a place to be owned but one to be inhabited. Every animal is born for dying and not for killing; dying is natural and killing is human. Instead of eco-centric perception, the human's egocentric dominance disturbs the natural cycle.

Thus, such ecological issues as deforestation, hazards to the harmonious human-animal relationship and unrestrained anthropocentrism have been given consistent attention in Marathi films *Devrai* (2004) and *Pak Pak Pakak* (2005).

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Nainital, Uttarakhand. (Email: suchitraawasthintl@rediffmail.com, sawasthi@uou.ac.in)

Zeba Irfan is a Research Scholar at the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University. (Email id-irfaze@gmail.com)

Dr. Samina Khan is Professor at the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. An Academician, Researcher and Humanist, she has taught for almost thirty-five years and completed her education from Banasthali Vidyapeeth, Rajasthan, a premium institution of women's education in India. She holds a PhD in English Literature from AMU. Prof. Khan's area of specialization is Drama and Comparative Literature. Thirteen scholars have been awarded PhD under her supervision, and currently, she is supervising eight research projects. Her areas of interest and research include Performance Studies, Prison Literature, Human Rights, Gender Issues and Communication skills (public speaking). (Email: khansamsamina@yahoo.com)

Dr. Balkrishna Magade works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English of Kisan Veer Mahavidyalaya, Wai. The topic of his M. Phil. Dissertation was "Dilip Chitre's English Poetry: An Ecocritical Study". He has many research papers published in ISSN and Peer-Reviewed Refereed journals at his credit. He has presented many Research Papers in the State, National and International Conferences and Seminars. He has also made his contribution as a unit writer in text book and Self-Instructional Material of Shivaji University, Kolhapur. The topic of his Doctoral Research was "Nissim Ezekiel, Gieve Patel, Arun Kolatkar And Dilip Chitre: An Ecocritical Study". He has completed UGC Minor Research Project entitled "Environmental Concerns In The Post-Independence Indian English Poetry". (Email: mbalkrishnan.wai@gmail.com)

Ms. Maitri Verma is a Research Scholar of English at Banaras Hindu University, India. She completed her post-graduation and graduation from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, respectively. Maitri is an independent researcher who also pens poems in English and

"Under the Lens is a potpourri of essays on cinema with focus on two key areas, viz., adaptation from literary texts to films and the representation of women in films. Apart from these, the essays cluster around themes of caste, disability, queer identity, sound and music. The films chosen for study range from the popular to parallel cinema that cover assorted languages such as Hindi, English, Marathi, and Kannada. Even if lacking in a unifying thematic or conceptual thread, this anthology comprising essays by university professors and research scholars, showcases a serious engagement with cinema as a notable cultural production with significant social import.

The diverse, even if disparate collection of essays provides a lens through which to view the larger, more encompassing themes of gender, culture and their imbrication in cinema. The book should be of great use to students and research scholars in the areas of film, gender and cultural studies."

- **Gita Viswanath** (Creative Writer and Author of *The Nation in War: A Study of Military Literature and Hindi War Cinema*, Cambridge Scholars, U.K. 2014. Baroda)

"When we try to understand the nature of the cinematic experience, narrative which relates to and affects the receiver through its complexly woven structure in an audio-visual, spatiotemporal, machine-constructed narrative, with the traditional elements of other arts internally flowing, and along cultural lines, we realize that these aspects give it strength in a new way. Thus, the external and internal dynamics of working with an experience manufactured by machine, technology, and industry were made available to the viewers, thus connecting machine and mind into a new language.

- **Samar Nakhate** Former Professor and Dean Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune.

"Today, in contemporary cinema, women are still stereotyped, even in the roles that should show independence and autonomy. Therefore, although the authors have the right to freely express artistic contents as an expression of their creativity, it is also desirable that society evolves to a condition of reduction of sexism, so that women are no longer relegated to subordinate roles, both in cinema and in reality. In this sense, as society evolves, cinema will act as a mirror."

- **Sara Reginella** (Italian Psychologist, Writer and Film Director)

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