

# Reflection of socio-economic issues in Hindi films post Liberalization

Neha Saluja\*

## Abstract

Cinema has always enjoyed a significant place in the lives of the people. It permits the individual to relate to a world which is several times distant from their real life and on other occasions touches and becomes the reflection of their conditions. It has established itself as an important catalyst in building the nation and developing its people. In this paper for studying the reflection of socio-economic issues in Hindi films, I have examined three commercial Hindi films post Liberalization. The aim of the study is to identify possible influence of political climate in determining the social and economic state of the people and how Hindi films have presented it in different ways.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic issues, Liberalization, Reflection, Hindi Films, Political scenario

## Introduction

The social and economic environment of India needless to say has been witnessing major uproar since New Economic Policy introduced in 1991 by then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao. Anarchy in Indian social structure is extremely complex and frequently plays a pivotal role in shaping the economic state as well. Social issues, related to how society perceives the life of a person, which affects the masses, groups and ultimately an individual. In India, social problems are highly diversified, glaringly evident discriminatory attitudes towards people of the different religion, caste and gender have been prevalent for generations. Throughout the country, religious practices and norms are strictly followed and even caste-wise differences are pervasive.

The social disproportion has given rise to economic disparity, inequitable distribution of wealth, the ever increasing gap between have and have nots', lack of equivalent work and education opportunity has dropped the Indian progress graph to a great extent. The not so constant wants of the members of the society under the restricted resources is escalating drastically.

\*Lecturer, Asian School of Media Studies, Noida, UP, India.

Cohesion amid social and economic issues is absolute and the social hierarchy, indeed, affects the economic activities of an individual and vice-versa. The reciprocal association between the two can be determined by examining the factors influencing immigration, reservation, poverty, unemployment, corruption and likes. Since 1991, doors have been opened for better international trade practices, privatization initiatives, tax reforms and this economic liberalization has been believed to be the solution of all the problems in the Indian social order. Herbert Marshall McLuhan in his book *The Medium of Masses* states, 'All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unadulterated'. (McLuhan, 1967) Hence, one of the most effective medium of reaching out to masses, Cinema is being used to depict the socio-economic issues as the central theme for most of the Indian films post 1991, distinctively in Hindi films.

### Realism in Films

Socio-Economic turmoil was observed even after World War II in many parts of the world; consequently it affected the lives of the people in the countries such as Russia, Italy and Japan. Representation of the changes in the daily life of the people, including the constant struggle against poverty, depression, price-rise, racial discrimination and oppression became the direct narrative in the films, and eventually, developed the Neo-Realism Movement in cinema. *Open Rome City* (dir. Roberto Rossellini, 1945) and *Bicycle Thief* (dir. Vittorio De Sica, 1948) opened gateway to present the socio-economic issues in the cinema. Inspired from this movement, Indian film directors Bimal Roy and Satyajit Ray with their movies *Do Bigha Zameen* (1953) and *Pather Panchali* (1955) respectively laid the foundation of using reality in cinema, focusing on socio-economic crisis, with the aim of sensitizing people towards it.

A theorist, Cesare Zavattini articulated the theory of Neo Realism in a manifesto titled, *Some Ideas on the cinema*. Zavattini, in this manifesto called filmmakers for using reality in cinema to sensitize people towards reforms and socialism. He called on filmmakers to "excavate reality, to give it power, a communication, a series of reflexes". (Zavattini, 1953) Also, he stated that the life is not what is invented in stories, life is another matter. Zavattini anticipated the impact of commercial cinema on humanity and asked for immediate and effective attention to the human condition. I agree what Cesare Zavattini mentioned, however, I would like to take it further and argue that the socio-economic issues can never be addressed without analyzing the influence of political climate in the given society. By political climate, I understand, ruling party's decision making that directly or indirectly has an effect on the society, state and nation at large and ultimately the individual of the society. The interplay of social setting, economic reforms and political agenda outlines the condition an individual lives in.

For this, I am using Content Analysis methodology for critically examining three important Hindi films post liberalization, namely *Swades* (dir. Ashutosh Gowariker, 2004) dealing with immigration and reverse brain drain, *Rang De Basanti* (dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006) based on corruption, nationalism, peoples protest dealt by government machinery

and *Aarakshan* (dir. Prakash Jha, 2011) touching the sensitive issue of caste based reservation.

### **Swades (dir. Ashutosh Gowariker, 2004)**

Immigration, a socio-economic issue is the prime theme of this film. Immigration is the act of permanently leaving one's country or region to settle in another. There are many reasons why people might choose to emigrate. Better economic opportunity is a 'pull factor', as is a quest for a better climate. Fears of poverty or of religious or political discrimination are 'push' factors.

In this film, Mohan, character played by Shah Rukh Khan is shown working with NASA in United States of America and visited India to take his childhood nanny with him. Mohan was reluctant to stay in the village where his nanny resides and therefore, rents a full-equipped fancy tempo traveler and stays in it, as he believes and finds that basic sanitary needs and other necessities will not be according to his living standards. Through this, director has attempted to show the two worlds one which is economically stable, has better career opportunity, good money, technological advanced and better living conditions and another which is poverty stricken, Caste System is still prevalent, job prospects are economically weak, less or no technological advancement and hence, difficult living conditions.

Moreover, Mohan conceptualizes and builds a hydro-electricity plant; this clearly shows that citizen's run initiative can lead to higher gains and satisfaction to develop the socio-economic conditions.

I understand that the decision by the government to introduce New Economic Policy broaden the horizon for the people to move outside India for the purpose of education, job and trade but it ultimately led to people getting attracted to fine living condition, international standard of education and handsome income and found the scenario back home socially and economically weak due to political decisions.

### **Rang De Basanti (dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006)**

One of the most serious forms of socio-economic issues, Corruption was carefully dealt in this film. Though, the movie was highly commercial with pure entertainment packaging, yet, it highlighted the issues in the most emotional way and touched the hearts of many. Corruption, a moral impurity which may include activities like tax evasion, bribery, kickbacks and others done by public officials to achieve personal gains at the cost of public welfare.

This film, explicitly talked about Political corruption, which is very dangerous and widespread. People feel cheated by their elected representatives and governing party, which is responsible for determining the level of corruption. The plight of people and their fight against it has been embedded in film's narrative.

One of the characters, Ajay Singh Rathod, a MiG-21 Indian Fighter Pilot acted by R. Madhavan was killed in the plane crash and was officially announced that due to pilot's error the accident took place and the case was closed. This was not convincing for his near ones and detailed investigation presented the harsh truth that the cheap spare parts of MiG-21 were exchanged against personal benefit by the Defence

Minister. In pursuit to give due right and tribute to martyr, angered family members and friends played by Waheeda Rehman, Aamir Khan, Soha Ali Khan, Kunal Kapoor, Sharman Joshi and Siddharth Narayan along with a group of supporters make a decision to do a peace protest, which was later joined by many and turned into a mass protest against illegal political practices which affects social, economic and personal life of an individual.

Peace protest and marches since this film has become a phenomenon for change in India. The impact of the film was so huge that after its release in January 2006, the first candle light peace march was observed by the citizens at the India Gate to protest against the verdict in Jessica Lal murder case in March, 2006. And, since then it has impacted the society and to follow it as a trend for fighting for rights.

I strongly believe that this film portrayed the concept of India Awakening with a complete satire on India Shinning electoral campaign during 2004 Lok Sabha election by Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP).

#### **Aarakshan (dir. Prakash Jha, 2011)**

The most peculiar feature of Indian societal structure is Caste based discrimination. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the constitutional designer and policy maker took a serious decision of reserving seats in education and government offices for the Dalits (formerly referred to as untouchable class), to evade the Caste System in India and provide sensitive and equal Indian social framework for the development of the country and its people. It was entirely a political move to go away with a social problem which not only adversely concerns the movement of an individual of Dalit class in the society and lastly leaves less or no scope for his economic progress. Caste System was abolished long back but it is still very much practiced in the most of the households and mindset of the people.

In Aarakshan, the film opens with character Deepak Kumar, a Dalit, played by Saif Ali Khan who is appearing for an interview in school for the post of a teacher, which is supposedly for the children of elite group of the society. The whole scene echoed the attitude of the privileged group towards a Dalit or a backward class. He is rejected on the grounds of not being from the cultured background who can deal with the students coming from affluent and sophisticated families.

The story took new heights when a real incident was shown from recent Other Backward Class (OBC) quota reservation issue which came to light after being held pending for years since massive violent protest in 1989 by the students against the recommendations made by Mandal Commission, which was established in 1979 to reconsider the reservation policies and give seats to OBC as well. In film, students are shown angry and frustrated due to caste based reservation and feel that there must be a competition which will offer equal platform to all irrespective to which class they belong.

Sushant, an upper-class boy, played by Prateik Babbar is agitated because of losing a seat in his dream educational institute, where he wished to do his Masters because of caste reservation and also a similar incident happens with his Brahmin friend, referred as Pandit in the film. Sushant gets into a heated argument with

Deepak Kumar, who is now a lecturer in his current college questioning the grounds of reservation policy. With following events in the film, it is clearly reflected that how caste reservation is influencing education and job set ups. Furthermore, reflected the implication of citizen's participation in improving these situations. More significantly, film Aarakshan presented the role played by political parties to make caste as a vote bank agenda to propagate them and capture a power chair.

I consider that a political decision to uplift and provide improved socio-economic life to the downtrodden of Dalit class has considerably distorted as a tool to gain power. Many political parties now openly identify themselves with a caste and interestingly have been winning, Uttar Pradesh present political scene is the exemplary example of it.

For this research, I have used qualitative research method, where I am doing content analysis of these films. I have carried out my analysis and done observation by watching the films which served as both primary and secondary source of information for me.

#### **Conclusion**

This paper has examined the reflection of social and economic issues in the mainstream Hindi cinema focusing primarily on three highly commercial films post liberalization, Swades, Rang De Basanti and Aarakshan. With these films, I would like to conclude that the political climate of a country gives a platform to its social and economic issues and the impact of these issues ultimately affects the individual in both positive and negative way. Hindi films have successfully shown how political matters influence the individual, the society or the country and change their social and economic state. These three films have also set a benchmark that citizen's participation can play a vital role in dealing with socio-economic issues which are politically driven.

#### **Notes**

Socioeconomics is an area that governs the understandings and the activities of individuals that shape them as economically active. Such issues are lack of education, cultural and religious discrimination, overpopulation, unemployment and corruption. ([http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8045579\\_socioeconomic-issues.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8045579_socioeconomic-issues.html))

The New Economic Policy was announced by the Government of India in June 1991. The new liberal policies consisted of international trade and investment, privatization, tax reforms and initiating inflation controlling measures.

He was the ninth Prime Minister of India from 1991-1996. He is known primarily for initiating Economic Liberalization Policy of India in 1991.

A social issue (also called a social ill or a social problem) is an issue that relates to society's perception of people's personal lives. Different societies have different perceptions and what may be normal behaviour in one society may be a significant social issue in another society. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social\\_issue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_issue))

Herbert Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher of communication theory.

Neo Realism, in cinema and literature, is a cultural movement that brings elements of true life in the stories, rather than a world mainly existing in imagination only. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neorealism\\_%28art%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neorealism_%28art%29))

Immigration is the movement of people into a country or region to which they are not native in order to settle there. Immigration is made for many reasons, including temperature, breeding, economic, political, family re-unification, natural disaster, poverty or the wish to change one's surroundings voluntarily. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration>)

In philosophical, theological, or moral discussions, corruption is spiritual or moral impurity or deviation from an ideal. Corruption may include many activities including bribery and embezzlement. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corruption>)

Political corruption is the use of power by government officials for illegitimate private gain. ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political\\_corruption](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_corruption))

Thousands protest for justice for Jessica, (<http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/mar/04jessica.htm>)

India Shinning, a marketing slogan of BJP during Parliamentary Elections 2004.

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, popularly also known as Babasaheb, was an Indian jurist, political leader, philosopher, anthropologist, historian, orator, economist, teacher, editor, prolific writer, revolutionary and a revivalist for Buddhism in India.

In Hindus, there are four principal castes (divided into many sub-categories) and one category of people who fall outside the caste system are referred as the Dalits. (<http://navsarjan.org/navsarjan/dalits/whoaredalits>)

The Mandal Commission Report: to consider the question of seat reservations and quotas for people to redress caste discrimination, and used eleven social, economic, and educational indicators to determine backwardness. (<http://www.pucl.org/from-archives/Dalit-tribal/mandal-2.htm>)

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6. *Yuva* (dir. Mani Ratnam, 2004)
7. *Rang De Basanti* (dir. Rakeysh Omprakash Mehra, 2006)
8. *Welcome to Sajjanpur* (dir. Shyam Benegal, 2008)
9. *Peepli Live* (dir. Anusha Rizvi, Mahmood Farooqui, 2010)
10. *Aarakshan* (dir. Prakash Jha, 2011)
11. *No one killed Jessica* (dir. Raj Kumar Gupta, 2011)