Portrayal of Subaltern classes in the R.K. banner films during 1G50s: A Historical Study

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***Abstract*—This paper examines the portrayal of subaltern classes in the films made by Raj Kapoor, under his banner, R.K. Films and Studios, like Neo-realism, many of his films often depicted the struggles of the marginalized communities. Many filmmakers made films addressing post-independence issues, but Kapoor's cinema stood out for its depiction of the hardships of the subaltern classes. Although his films were mainly focused on entertainment,but they also explored the struggles of the subaltern Classes. His works, such as Awaara (1951), Boot Polish (1954), Shree 420 (1955), and Jagte Raho (1956), provided a lens into the lives of the downtrodden. Kapoor's cinematic style combined entertaining storytelling with social critique, often using songs to highlight the struggles of the Subaltern Classes. His 1950s films, in particular, reflected themes of social injustice, largely shaped by his close association with writer Khwaja Ahmad Abbas[1] and Legendry Lyricist Shailendra[2]**

***Index Terms*—Subaltern Classes, Raj kapoor, Migration, Poverty, Corruption, Unemployment, Urbanization, Injustice, Hypocrisy, Capitalist, Socialist.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Raj Kapoor is one of the best filmmakers of Hindi cinema of the Golden Period, along with Bimal Roy, Guru Dutt, Mehboob Khan, and V. Shantaram. Initially, he started working as an actor, debuting as a male lead in Neel Kamal (1947), made by Kidar Sharma. But he became a director and producer with Awaara (1951). His last film was Ram Teri Ganga Maili (1985), made under his banner R.K. Films and R.K. Studios. This research paper has not intended to examine and analyze his all films, but it focuses only Four films, which he made in the 1950s, and these are Awaara (1951), Boot Polish (1954), Shree 420 (1955), and Jagte Raho (1956),and they are examined to analyze the portrayal of subaltern classes in these films.Raj Kapoor was a very popular actor-director-producer of his time. His films mainly focused on entertainment, music, and dance. He also considered himself a popular filmmaker rather than a realist, and most of his films portrayed the canvas of larger-than- life themes. However, he made meaningful cinema during the 1950s and tried to portray the problems and struggles of the subaltern classes. He raised issues of poverty, migration of labourer's, corruption, unemployment, class conflict, judicial flaws, crass urbanization, and social and economic inequalities.Although he had no political ideology, he was clearly influenced by the Nehruvian ideology. His association with Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, who was associated with IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association), made his path towards meaningful cinema. K.A. Abbas was a Marxist and socialist in his ideology, and he wrote scripts containing social issues and the problems of the subaltern classes. Besides Abbas, legendary lyricist Shailendra also influenced his filmmaking with heart-touching songs written for his films. These songs were infused with humanist socialism and played a crucial role in the portrayal of subaltern Classes struggle In these films. Raj Kapoor was also deeply influenced by Charles Chaplin, and he adopted Chaplinesque traits in his acting. Chaplin was famous for depicting the struggles of subaltern classes in a humorous style, and this trait is mostly evident in Shree 420 (1955) but also visible in Awaara (1951).

Definition of Subaltern classes:
The concept of "Subaltern " originates from the work of Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci[3] and has been further expanded by historians and Scholars, particularly in the post-colonial studies like Ranajit Guha[4], Gayatri Chakravorty spivak[5].

II. PORTRAYAL OF POVERTY AND UNEMPLOYMENT OF SUBALTERN CLASSES

Raj Kapoor portrayed the crisis of poverty and unemployment in many films, but in the 1950s decade's films, he has shown these problems in Subaltern's perspectives. In Awara (1951), Raj (Raj Kapoor) and his mother faced the crisis of poverty when his father exiled his mother and his mother tried to raise her son as a decent and honest man but poverty forced him into the world of crime and when he tried to lead the life of an honest man, there was no work for him and therefore he again forced into the world of crime.

"Gharbaar Nahin, Sansaar Nahin" "Mujshe Kisi ko, Pyaar Nahin"

This stanza of the famous song, "Awaara Hoon" depicted the crisis of poverty and unemployment in a heart-touching manner.

In Boot Polish (1954) film, the crisis of poverty and unemployment has been shown through the struggle of two orphan siblings Bhola (Ratan Kumar) and Belu(Naaz). It raises concern about the lack of State and Social assistance for orphans. Although this film concludes on a happy note but showcased the crisis of subaltern classes, specially living in the slums, which lacked basic facilities for people. In Shree 420 (1955) film, crisis of poverty and unemployment has been shown throughout The film in chaplinesque style. Raj Kapoor adopted the style of Charlie Chaplin in Indian idiom. The protagonist of the film, Raj (RajKapoor), comes to Bombay in search of work from a small city, but according to his

qualification he found no work and forced to do work in a laundry of clothes at a meagre salary.

"Chhote se ghar mein, gareeb ka beta Mai bhi hoon maa ke, naseeb ka beta Ranj-o-gam, bachpan ke sathi Andhiyon mein, jali jivanbatti
Bhukh ne hai, bade pyaar se pala"

This stanza of the song "Dil ka haal sune dilwala", portrays the pain and struggles of the poor's and unemployed youth in a heart touching manner. In Jagte Raho (1956) film, the attitude of the society towards poor people has been shown through the struggle of an anonymous villager (Raj Kapoor), who was trying to quench his thirst.

III. PORTRAYAL OF SOCIETAL PREJUDICES AGAINST SUBALTERN CLASSES

Raj Kapoor has shown prejudices of society against subaltern classes in his films during 1950s. In Awaara (1951), the prejudices of the society towards Women's character has been shown In the film. Judge Raghunath (Prithviraj Kapoor), exiled his wife Leela (Leela Chitnis) mere on the suspicion of infidelity, through Judge Raghunath (Prithviraj Kapoor)
character, Raj Kapoor has shown the prejudices of society that a criminal's descendant will always be a criminal. In this film, when protagonist Raj (Raj Kapoor) tried to live a life of a honest man, societal prejudices against criminals forced him again into the world of
crime.In Boot Polish (1954) film, when both siblings decided to quit begging and start doing boot polish, nobody in society supported them from upper class, which shows the
prejudices of society about beggars and orphans. In Shree 420 (1955) film, characters of Maya (Nadia) and Seth Dharmanand sonachand (Nemo), represented the societal prejudices towards subaltern classes. When Raj (Raj Kapoor), demanded his fair share in money earning through Gambling, Maya (Nadia) refused to give him fair share, which
portrays the societal injustice towards the upliftment of subaltern classes. In Jagte Raho (1956) film, the behaviour of Urbanite towards a poor villager has Shown the prejudices of society towards marginalized classes.

IV. PORTRAYAL OF CONFLICTS BETWEEN CAPITALIST CLASS AND SUBALTERN CLASSES.

The films of Raj Kapoor in 1950s decade has shown conflict between capitalist and subaltern classes in abundance. In Awaara (1951), this conflict has shown through the gap of living conditions of people belonging to capitalist class or rich people and people of subaltern classes. this film portrays the lack of basic needs for marginalized people in a newly independent nation, which was still trying to overcome the wounds of partition.

Judge Raghunath's character portrays the prejudices of capitalist class against subaltern classes in the nature of judicial bias. According to him, a criminal born due to criminality of genes, not due to circumstances and conditions around him, which shows the attitude of the

capitalist class towards subaltern classes.

In Shree 420 (1955) film the conflict between capitalist class and subaltern classes has shown in a large scale. This film portray, how capitalist class makes fool to poor people by selling dreams through fake advertisements and try to exploit them. It has shown the barriers created by the capitalist class in the path of subaltern classes. "Manzil mere pass khadi hai"

Paavn mein lekin bedi padi hai "Taang adata hai daulat wala"

This stanza of the song "Dil ka haal, suney dilwala" portrays the barriers created by capitalist class in front of subaltern classes through hegemony in the society. through the characters of Vidya (Nargis) and Maya (Nadia), Raj Kapoor has also shown the dilemma of subaltern classes between capitalist interest and socialist interest.

V. PORTRAYAL OF MULTIPLICITY OF CRISIS FOR SUBALTERN CLASSES.

Besides the portrayal of poverty, unemployment, many other problems have been shown by the Raj Kapoor in his films like migration, Improper urbanization, child labour, lack of state and social assistance**.** In Awaara (1951), Raj (Raj Kapoor) has to do child labour for survival of himself and his mother and in Boot Polish (1954) both orphan siblings have to do child labour for their survival and it is still a big problem in our country that many children have to do child labour for their survival despite many anti-child labour laws. In Awaara (1951), the wife of Judge Raghunath (Prithviraj kapoor) has to migrate from Lucknow to slum area of Bombay, where she and her child Raj (Raj Kapoor) have faced lack of basic needs. Same as in Shree 420 (1955), the protagonist Raj (Raj Kapoor) has to migrate Bombay from Allahabad (Prayagraj) in search of employment, which still is a big problem in our country.The problem of improper urbanization and lack of basic facilities in urban centres has been shown by the showman Raj Kapoor in his films. In Awaara (1951), Shree 420 (1955), Boot Polish (1954), improper urbanization was a common theme which is still prevalent in our country and even on large scale. Indian cities are over populated due to migration of population in search of employment. The lack of state and social assistance has been shown in Raj Kapoor's films in 1950s. In Awaara (1951), the lack of state and social assistance to subaltern classes has been shown. For the upliftment of subaltern classes, there was no help for rehabilitation exists for Raj (Raj kapoor) and he again forced into the world of crime, same as in Boot Polish (1954) film, there was lack of state assistance for Orphan children's. In Jagte Raho (1956) film the hypocrisy of elite class has been shown through many characters in the film.

VI. PORTRAYAL OF HOPES AND ASPIRATIONS OF SUBALTERN CLASSES.

Despite having shown many problems, there are the portrayal of hopes and aspirations have been also shown in the Raj Kapoor's films. Legendary lyricist Shailendra has written many songs for Raj Kapoor's films which depicts the hopes and aspirations of Subaltern Classes.

The title song of Awaara (1951), "Awaara hoon" besides depicting the pain of Subaltern Classes, depicts the hopes and aspirations also.

"Aabad nahin, barbad sahi"

"Gata hoon khushi ke, geet magar"

This stanza of the song portray the hopes for a better future despite suffering from many problem's.

Shree 420 (1955) film's opening song has shown the hopes and aspirations of the subaltern classes in a newly independent nation.

"Mera joota hai Japani Yeh patloon Englishtani Sar pe lal topi Roosi

Phir bhi dil hai Hindustani"

This stanza of the song has depicted the aspirations of citizens of newly independent nation, who aspiring to become global or inclined towards globalization but wants to remain Indian by heart.

"Honge Raje, Raj Kunwar Hum bigde, dil Shehzade

Hum Singhanshan Par Ja baithe Jab jab karein Irade"

This stanza portrays the abolition of Zamindari System in a democratic Republic where now anyone can become the king because in democracy every citizen has the equal right to hold any office under the Republic of India.

In Boot Polish (1954) film the song "Nanhe-munhe Bachche ,teri Mutthi mei Kya hai,"

portrays the hopes of the better future for poor children's and the character of John (David) presented the Communal harmony which is a necessary precondition for progress in a multi-religious Country.

Despite portraying the sufferings of the Subaltern Classes, Raj Kapoor's films portray the hopes and

aspirations of a newly independent democratic Nation, which liberated from 200 years colonial rule and recovering from the trauma of Partition. Although the solution he presented for the problems were at one Superficial.

VII. CONCLUSION

Raj Kapoor's cinematic legacy stands as a testament to his deep understanding of societal issues and his ability to portray them in a way that resonated with audiences across generations. His films, particularly those produced under the R.K. banner in the 1950s, played a significant role in highlighting the struggles of subaltern classes, making them a focal point of mainstream Hindi cinema. Inspired by the Chaplinesque style, Kapoor masterfully blended humor with social critique, ensuring that his films were not just engaging but also thought-provoking.Through a qualitative and content analysis of his selected films, this research paper has examined the recurring themes and limitations in his depiction of Subaltern classes.His films such as Awaara (1951), Shree 420 (1955),
effectively showcased the challenges faced by the Subaltern classes, while also offering narratives of hope, resilience, and transformation. Kapoor's ability to humanize their struggles through compelling storytelling and relatable characters set him apart as a filmmaker with a strong social conscience.Furthermore, this study has explored the historical and narrative aspects of how Kapoor's work which contributed to the larger
discourse of class consciousness in Hindi cinema. While his films presented a romanticized view of the struggle, they nonetheless provided visibility to Subaltern voices, influencing both contemporary filmmakers and audiences. This research paper also acknowledges certain limitations, such as idealized resolutions and a somewhat simplified
approach to complex social issues. Overall, Raj Kapoor's films during the 1950s serve as a crucial cinematic archive that not only entertained but also challenged societal norms, fostering a greater awareness of social disparities. His legacy continues to inspire filmmakers who seek to address issues of inequality and injustice through the powerful
medium of cinema.

SUB REFERENCES

1 Khwaja Ahmad Abbas was associated with IPTA (Indian people's theatre association) and had socialist and Marxist leanings and made several films as a director but gained success as a script writer with Raj kapoor.

2Shailendra is called the Lyricist of common man, who has written many songs filled humanist socialism.

3 In his Prison notebooks, he used "Subaltern" to refer those groups in society who are subject to the
hegemony of the ruling classes and lack political representation. These include peasants, workers, women and marginalized social groups, who are excluded from mainstream history and politics.

4 In Elementary Aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India (1983) and Subaltern Studies volumes, Guha defines the Subaltern as the people who exist outside the dominant elite structure of colonial and post-colonial society.

5 In can the Subaltern speak? Spivak critiques the ability of the Subaltern especially Subaltern women to express themselves within dominant discourse structures. She argues that subaltern voices are often
mediated or silenced by elite intellectuals.

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