

SOCIETAL ECHOES ON SCREEN: MARITAL RAPE DEPICTIONS IN INDIAN CINEMA'S TRANSITION

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ABSTRACT:

In the world of Indian cinema, time is captured not just on film but also in the stories it spins. This study unveils a comparative exploration of the portrayal of marital rape in two emblematic Indian films, "Dehan" (1997) and "Ammu" (2022). With a lens focused on pre-liberalization and post-liberalization eras, this research employs a robust blend of content analysis and textual analysis to unravel the nuances of cinematic depictions.

The aim of this study is to unravel the metamorphosis of societal attitudes and cinematic narratives surrounding marital rape across these two distinct epochs. The objectives encompass an intricate dissection of contextual underpinnings, character dynamics, and cinematic techniques that shape the representation of this sensitive theme. Employing a theoretical framework rooted in gender studies and cultural analysis, this research probes the intersection between art, society, and transformation.

The findings underscore how cinematic portrayal of marital rape has evolved, reflecting shifting socio-cultural dynamics and offering intriguing insights into the evolution of societal perspectives. This study contributes not only to the academic discourse on film studies but also to the broader understanding of how cinema serves as a mirror to societal metamorphosis. As celluloid narratives unfold, they unveil the intricate tapestry of change, urging us to contemplate the role of cinema in molding and mirroring societal perceptions.

KEYWORDS: *Marital Rape, Indian Cinema, Content Analysis, Textual Analysis, Dehan, Ammu.*

INTRODUCTION

Stepping onto the silver screen, Indian film spins fanciful narratives that go beyond simple amusement, unfolding a mesmerizing tapestry of society's aspirations, challenges, and changes (Kusuma K., 2018). A social construct that simultaneously reflects and affects the fundamental

core of human life, gender is a mystery that is solved inside its borders by the interplay of light and shadow (Balabantaray S., 2020).

The incorporation of Cultural Studies into literary departments across India and the larger South Asian area has led to an increased interest in film among academics. India, the country with the most films produced worldwide, has seen the emergence of cinema as a major cultural force that influences people from all socioeconomic classes and as a source of mass enjoyment (Manohar U. & Kline S. 2014). The cinematic medium has been profoundly established in Indian culture, greatly impacting the development of sociocultural norms. Indian cinema, which began its journey in 1913 with the debut of the movie "Raja Harishchandra," celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2013 (Malur P., 2021) This voyage is still going on, providing a constantly changing means of enjoyment and fulfilment for people. Even if the primary goal of the film is to entertain, it has proven over time that it is also capable of bringing attention to pressing societal concerns. This trait has highlighted the power of movies to influence social change (Kusuma K., 2018).

A basic social construct known as gender defines the process of classifying people and social behaviors according to their sexual orientations. The term "gender" refers to a group of characteristics and actions that society assigns to either males or females (Cody L., 2023). It illustrates the framework through which society views and anticipates behavior from each gender. The idea of gender first came into being as a way to emphasize how socially manufactured masculinity and femininity are, as well as how men and women interact in certain ways (Tasew A. & Getahun K., 2021). As the 1980s came to a close, the field of masculinity and femininity studies moved beyond women's studies and began to focus on gender itself. This change put the emphasis on examining how gender is ingrained in every aspect of human culture, society, and relationships (Tannvi T & Narayana S., 2022).

Theoretically, gender permeates important societal pillars like the economy, ideology, family, and politics and forms an integral part of the fabric of society, according to Manohar U. & Kline S. (2014). Gender isn't just a facet of individual identity, but a pervasive societal institution that governs expectations, influences daily routines, and permeates important societal pillars like the economy and ideology. The sociological investigation focuses on the area of gender roles, which are the responsibilities that society assigns to people depending on their gender (Cody L., 2023). According to masculine or feminine paradigms, these roles determine behavior and self-perception. Through socialization, these roles are absorbed and shaped by cultural influences. Gender is characterized through interactions and behaviors among people as much as by an innate male or female condition (Pleck J., 1975).

The role of cinema, which serves as a reflection of historical and societal practices, is crucial in sociological research. Cinema, like other forms of media, is crucial in creating gender ideals and promoting gender socialization (Kusuma K., 2018). Media artefacts shape our identities, ethnicity, race, nationality, sexuality, and perspectives of "us" and "them." Films stand out as an essential medium for influencing debate in this setting. With its function as a conduit for individual aspirations, societal issues, and cultural narratives, Indian cinema has the capacity to change the socio-cultural environment (Balabantaray S., 2020).

The depiction of women in media structures and in media content has long been a cause for concern since it reflects and reinforces larger gender inequities. The widespread adoption of traditional female gender roles in society is largely facilitated by films, which are the dominating

form of public communication. Women's identities have received particular attention in research on gender and cinema, with the "second wave" feminism of the 1960s and 1970s serving as a focal point for the criticism of women's roles and images in the film industry (Manohar U. & Kline S. 2014).

Women's status in India has undergone a fundamental change as a result of the nation's progressive reforms and changing cultural perceptions on women. India's rich legacy has supported its progress in a variety of creative fields, and women have made significant contributions to society and politics (Kusuma K., 2018). In the 1970s, Indian film in particular saw a change towards more politically and socially conscious storytelling, known as Parallel film. In Indian film, a phenomenon that has existed since the genre's birth, women's portrayal, status, and social roles are reflected. The relationship between women and film in India is multifaceted, with a rich body of literature and a sophisticated view of feminism in developing nations (Gross J. & Levenson R., 1995).

Examining the function of agency in women's lives is necessary in order to comprehend the place and representation of women within the dynamics of power and gender relations. "Agency" refers to a person's ability to act independently and make decisions (Stromquist N., 1997). This idea emphasizes that any social being has agency since it applies to both individual actors and collective entities. Cinematic characters and ideas are presented in a way that reflects this agency, eliciting an emotional response from viewers through familiarity, alignment, and allegiance (Cody L., 2023).

The representation of marital rape emerges as a crucial focal point in cinematic discourse, demonstrating the nuanced handling of this delicate subject in Indian cinema spanning two different historical epochs: pre-liberalization and post-liberalization. The examination of this difficult topic in the realm of cinema gives a special viewpoint on the development of society's knowledge and sensitivity to such issues. Long buried in society's shadows, marital rape slowly made its way into the film's story, revealing how knowledge and representation have changed over time (Kusuma K., 2018).

Prior to liberalization, Indian cinema frequently dealt with traditional gender roles, usually upholding the status quo. Marriage was often portrayed in ways that met social norms, avoiding the difficulties of marital rape. The investigation of personal concerns remained restrained throughout this time period, which was characterized by a more conservative filmmaking style (Sharpe J., 2005).

On the other hand, there was a significant deviation from traditional depictions throughout the post-liberalization phase. Cinema changed as society changed, reflecting progressive stories that dared to explore previously forbidden issues (Sarkar B., 2013). The portrayal of marital rape in films changed from being an unspoken truth to a pressing issue. Movies have adopted a more open discussion of marital relationships in recent years, allowing women to speak up and sparking cultural debates (Manohar U. & Kline S. 2014).

The transition is clarified by comparing two exemplary films from these periods side by side. The representation of marital relations remained firmly ingrained in traditional gender norms in the pre-liberalization classic "Dahan," overshadowing the intricacies of marital rape (Rahman H. & Kareem S., 2023). Contrarily, the post-liberalization masterpiece "Ammu" defied these

constraints by presenting a direct examination of marital rape that struck a powerful chord with viewers (Haricharan P., 2022).

Since the post-liberalization period saw a more accepting climate for expressing intimate matters and celebrating women's agency, the history of cinematic treatment parallels wider societal shifts. This change emphasizes how the film may impact and reflect cultural attitudes, bridging the gap between the screen and real life (Sarkar B., 2013).

In a nutshell, Indian cinema, a powerful creative and cultural force, has a transforming impact on how society views and discusses gender relations. The depiction of sensitive topics like marital rape and the defining of gender norms are only two examples of how film reflects society change (Banerjee B., Rao T., 2022). The development of Indian film reflects the development of society as a whole, passing through traditional values and embracing progressive stories. The power of cinema resides not just in its ability to entertain, but also in its capacity to spark social change by exposing the intricate web of gender interactions in India. The route leading to a more equal and inclusive future continues to be illuminated as the screen flickers with life's many stories (Rahman H. & Kareem S., 2023).

The aim of this study is to examine and contrast the portrayal of marital rape in Indian cinema, focusing on two distinct time periods - pre-liberalization (as represented by "Dehan") and post-liberalization (as represented by "Ammu"). By analyzing the cinematic treatment of this sensitive issue, the study aims to shed light on changing societal attitudes, narratives, and cinematic techniques over time.

The research will employ a content analysis and textual analysis approach to compare the depiction of marital rape in two Indian movies, "Dehan" (1997) and "Ammu" (2022). Content analysis will involve a quantitative assessment of scenes, dialogues, and narrative elements related to marital rape within each movie. Textual analysis will delve into the qualitative aspects of how the issue is presented, including the context, portrayal of characters, emotions, and societal implications.

In the captivating realm of Bengali literature, a luminary named Suchitra Bhattacharya graced us with her profound narratives and captivating novel. Known as a master wordsmith, she bravely championed the rights of oppressed women and used her pen as a lethal weapon against social norms, leaving an enduring impression on both hearts and minds (Basu M., 2023).

She whirled about 20 literary greats in an exquisite artistic endeavor citing works like "Dahan: The Burning," "Hemanter Pakhi (Autumn Bird)," "Kacher Dewal (Glass Wall)," and "Udo Megh (Stray Cloud)." She depicted the challenges of women against the constraints of a male-dominated society with each stroke of her narrative brush (Baral A., 2023).

Suchitra Bhattacharya received several honors, including the coveted Bharat Nirman Award, the Sahitya Setu Award, the Katha Award, and the Tara Shankar Award. But destiny gave us a cruel blow by stealing this literary titan from us too soon (Lahiri S., 2013).

The legacy she leaves behind will inspire future generations as we say goodbye to this inspirational speaker. The words of Suchitra Bhattacharya still ring true today, upending expectations and enabling women to shatter social constraints. Her genius shines as a compass for everyone who has the courage to imagine and rebel in the grand universe of writing (Mukherjee G., 2015).

The representation of the constant hardships women who dare to break free from society's constraints confront in "Dahan" is what gives the film its core. The story dives into the awakening of women to struggle for equality and justice in a world controlled by males. Romita, a sensitive homemaker, suffers a horrendous attack; Jhinuk, a young teacher, is the only one to provide rescue.

The narrative reveals the dominant male-centric framework that oppresses women in patriarchal civilizations via Romita's struggles. Romita's husband Palash, motivated by his masculine ego and his incapacity to protect her, accuses her rather than supporting her pursuit of justice. As she is subjected to marital rape and made into a symbol of her husband's machismo, Romita's pain intensifies.

Romita begins the route to justice by submitting a complaint, but society casts doubt on her morals and claims that Romita's honor is in their hands. The glaring gender-based discrimination brings to light the societal inequalities that already exist.

Jhinuk's fiancé Tunir tries to silence her, but her willpower wins out. She recognizes the abuse women frequently experience at the hands of males, who treat them like simple objects. She describes the hidden prejudices that harm gender-related interactions.

As the story progresses, Romita's court evidence is tainted by her husband and family's anxiety, exposing the emotional and mental suffering that women frequently experience. Mrinalini, Jhinuk's grandmother, emerges as a source of knowledge and emphasises the cyclical nature of a woman's imprisonment, passing from father to husband and, on occasion, son—all disguised in the garb of love and ties.

By claiming control over Romita's body and decisions, her husband makes her situation worse. He commits marital rape and uses a misguided sense of spousal entitlement to defend it. Romita's existence is upended by the road incident, which makes her aware of society's darker aspects, family betrayals, and the unpleasant reality about her spouse. Social pressures increase as she considers breaking off her relationship with him, silencing her and requiring her acquiescence, effectively stifling her screams for justice.

Unflinchingly capturing the challenges and marginalization women face, "Dahan: The Burning" gives voice to their battles against the patriarchal system. These strong female characters, as portrayed by Suchitra Bhattacharya, demolish gender preconceptions and the roles patriarchy has assigned them.

The 2022 Telugu drama thriller "Ammu" deftly combines the harrowing subject of marital abuse and resiliency in a plot that unfolds against the backdrop of post-liberalization India (Haricharan P., 2022). The movie dives into Ammu's life as she struggles to deal with the terrifying truth of marital rape in her seemingly perfect marriage. Using "Ammu" as a lens to evaluate the shifting societal viewpoints, narrative complexities, and cinematic approaches across different periods like the post-liberalization period.

At its foundation, "Ammu" highlights the pervasive social problem of marital rape, deftly playing out amid the constraints of a shifting Indian society after liberalization. The video depicts the heartbreaking transformation of Ammu's marriage to police officer Ravi. The representation painstakingly shows how Ammu's once-harmonious relationship turns into a terrifying struggle. Her quiet and compliance, which are motivated by fear and cultural

expectations, accentuate the severity of her suffering and draw attention to the sneaky nature of marital rape.

As "Ammu" unravels, it becomes evident that the film serves as a reflection of changing times and attitudes towards marital rape. The story deftly follows Ammu's development from quiet to resiliency and her quest for revenge against her attacker. A perspective through which to view the transforming process of cinematic depiction and social acceptance of marital rape is provided by the study's analysis of the narrative arc, character interactions, and cinematic components of the film.

In this regard, "Ammu" emerges as an effective tool for examining how marital rape is portrayed in Indian culture during the post-liberalization age. This study intends to clarify the changing cultural perspectives, narrative techniques, and cinematic approaches used to address and reflect upon this important matter by analyzing how the movie portrays the problem. This study attempts to further knowledge of the complex relationships between cinema, culture, and the representation of delicate subjects like marital rape by a thorough analysis of "Ammu."

CONCLUSION

The representation of marital rape appears as a potent thread in the tapestry of Indian film, weaving together the complex web of societal change. This investigation, led by the lights of "Dehan" and "Ammu," has shed light on how Indian film has changed over time as a reflection of shifting views and stories about gender dynamics.

The muted cries of Romita echoed the suppressed voices of countless women, trapped within the confines of traditional gender roles. The film's lens refracted the light on the oppressive patriarchy that cast its shadow over their lives. The struggle of Romita, emblematic of a larger battle, unveiled a society marred by inequality and the pervasive influence of established norms.

In contrast, "Ammu" shed light on the post-liberalization era, a period in which film gallantly broke free of its restraints to face the gloom. Through Ammu's eyes, we witnessed a society awakening to the horrors of marital rape. A society's collective journey towards rethinking its position on gender relations was poignantly reflected in the shift from compliance to resistance. "Ammu" mirrored the cinema's ability to alter, which has developed to reflect unsaid stories and changing social mores.

The core of cinema's function in societal transformation is encapsulated in this study's tapestry, which is weaved from the threads of analysis and reflection. We investigated the complex interplay of gender dynamics, cultural views, and cinematic approaches throughout history, using "Dehan" and "Ammu" as our guiding lights. The silver screen tempts us to explore the shifting terrain of social change as it flickers with tales of adversity and tenacity. Once a quiet witness, the celluloid canvas today echoes with the voices of the silent, sparking discussions that span the gap between the past and the present.

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