

Thematic and Cinematographic analysis of Deepa Mehta's 'Water'

¹Dr. Sewa Singh Bajwa, ²Dr. Ravinder Dhillon

¹Professor, ²Associate Professor
Department of JMC,
Ch. Devi Lal University, Sirsa

Abstract: Marriages are made in the heaven but performed on earth. Everybody yearns for happy wedding life. But sometimes destiny has some other designs. Death is a harsh reality and no one can escape from the cruel jaws of death. Death causes untold misery and brings about irreparable loss. Widows have always been unsolicited in traditional Indian society. The age-old social customs don't even allow remarriage. Widows are not allowed to perform in religious ceremonies. They are regarded as ill-omened. That is precisely why widowhood is regarded as a curse. Deepa Mehta's film 'Water' portrays the life of widows in India. The study brings out salient features of the film direction skills of Deepa Mehta who is regarded as one of the top women film directors of India.

Keywords: Destiny, death, widow, remarriage, society

Theme:

The theme of the film 'Water' is identically selective because of its darkly framed content and despotically gloomy scenes. Showcasing the happiness of women characters even in the delusion of a deteriorating world somewhere depicts that women are strong substance. Just like the fluidity of flowing river 'Ganga' in which other aquatic species swims along. The epidemically risen malpractices towards widows are centred in the whole film. The film asks for the change in society and uplifting the status of women. In a very similar contrast, the film exhibits some of the most-annoying scenes that deliberately ask the viewers for the reformation of change on the matters of women. The unending societal rules lead to the restraint on the lives of women. It also questions the unbelievable extent in belief of one's orthodox religion. The name of the film 'Water' in itself carries dark emotions of characters whose fluidity in life gets change as the variations in their lives occur. Widows must lead a life devoid of pleasures and luxuries. Depiction of other themes like religion, love, desire, hope, superstitions add intensity to the plot.

Plot:

The film exhibits the bitter truth of patriarchal society towards women. Deliberately it represents the lack of awareness among the unaware citizens of Varanasi and subsequently questions the enforcement of law towards women rights. There are three female protagonists in the film Chuiya, Kalyani and Shakuntla. The plot of this film revolves around an eight years old girl Chuihya who is reinforced in child marriage and becomes a widow after her aged husband passes away. Widows are regarded as ill omen and spiritually cursed on society as well as family. Seeing the barber shaving her head breaks the heart of many individuals who witness the patriarchal influence inscribed in the textbooks of Hindu. The little girl Chuihya desperately waits for her parents and lives in the hope that one day she will return to her house. But Chuihya remains perplexed and sees fake dreams. The film depicts that in those times parents of widow were prohibited to take them back to their homes. The sensitivity of Chuihya even in the ordeal of miserably stricken life strikes a subject of humanitarianism that possess by the small girl like her. The moment she realizes that an elderly lady in the Ashram has the starvation for eating a traditional sweets acknowledges her sense of sensibility. The scene where she gives traditional sweets to an elderly ailing lady showcases her innocence even she herself is suffering so much in her life.

Soon the hidden secrets of Ashram start getting open up. With Kalyani's real identification of being a sex-worker to strange men to cunningly proliferated politics of elderly woman in Ashram, the real misfortunes of women's suffering comes to the fore. Above all, the suppressed desires of these women make the audience feel guilty for what their forefather's ancestors negated for years. The appearance of Mr. Narayan (John Abraham) in the film casts an example of the real men equipped with modern thinking and wish to bring change in society. Narayan's quest for love to gain Kalyani remains unsatiated when his own father declines his decision to re-marry a widow. Disheartened by the decision in not being a favour to her, Kalyani commits suicide by drowning herself in the river Ganga. After passing away of Kalyani, things become more brutal with the infuriating attitude of the eldest lady in the clan. Later on, Chuihya also becomes a victim of sexual harassment. Shakuntala gets shock to witness an eight years old girl getting sexually abused by an outsider with whom the eldest lady has made the deal for a day. The film takes a positive turn when Shakuntala herself decides to set Chuihya free from the dark world and decides to send her to Gandhi. Equipping her with courage, Shakuntala reaches the railway junction where she finds that Gandhi is going to depart since he has delivered his speech. In the moments of hurriedness, she finds it difficult to trace Gandhi. She tells Mr.Narayan to take away Chuihya from the place where she lives and probably will die at the same place. Such an interesting articulated film carries the summation of hurtful sentiments of women and their untimely isolation from the world without any crime of their own compels the viewers to ponder over the issue.

Cinematography:

The cinematographer of 'Water', Mr. Giles Nuttgens, has used several cinematographic techniques in framing the film which is larger than life and denotes miserable lives of estranged widows. Using the techniques from lower camera angle to medium camera angle, Mr. Giles has approached unique camera angle techniques to capture some of the most relevant scenes which speak more

about the disillusionment of women in the light of Hinduism. From using medium camera angle in picturing the entire film to the usage of low camera angle for moving the pyres at Ghats of Varanasi, Mr. Giles predatorily framed the anomaly of Hindu rituals which has smouldered the dignity of women. Colour scheme of natural surroundings of Ghats, skies, and rains are pictured as represented in the natural form by the cinematographer. Reverse shot is used when Chuhiya and Kalyani plays with each other during the rain. The cameraman shoots the entire film by using the medium camera angle and clicks a few shots like the one in which Chuhiya gives a Ladoos to an ailing lady in the Ashram. The usage of long angle camera shot in picturing the scene where a barber cuts Chuhiya's hair is praiseworthy. He uses a Dutch camera angle shot to portray the sorrowful suicide of Kalyani and for capturing the heart break scene of Mr. Narayan. The close-up camera angle shot is used in showcasing the embracing relationship between Mr. Narayan and Kalyani. Mr Giles tries to portray the sentiments of women through several shots of the film. This film evokes the arising need of women's liberation. Music and songs are situational in the film that carries it forward.

Locale:

The various shots of the film are shot at the Ghats of Varanasi. The beauty of holy temples of the holiest city is pictured amazingly. The watery flow of river 'Ganga' to sandy banks of the holy river, Mrs. Mehta's team exuberantly frame the scenes of the film that speaks more of immoral orthodox rituals of Indian society. Re-capturing the beauty of nature that doesn't last anymore, the filmmaker has remarkably excelled in portraying the image of an Indian city where smooth wind breezes, rains drizzles, and birds chirp in blue skies. At the time of its making in 2005, the film faced several horrifying and disgusting allegations by several noted activists. As result of which, it became extremely difficult for the crew of film to shoot "Water" in Varanasi. This was the foremost reason behind Mrs Mehta's decision to shoot film along coastline city of Sri-Lanka.

Message:

The film Water clearly depicts that women of old traditions suffered insufferable isolation in their own society. In earlier times, a widow was left with three choices that were either they need to re-marry their younger brother or live apart from her house. The third most dreadfully imposed circumstance for being a widow in eighteenth century was self-immolation along with the deceased husband. The audacity of protagonist in escaping little girl child from various clutches of immoral practices run in the Ashram elucidates that the strength of women is larger to any extent. As theme of the film suggest, remains of Hindus bodies get flow away with waters of river. In a very exact way, the dignity of a woman gets erased away after she becomes a widow and the world around her cohesively blocks all of her humanitarian rights. It is altruistic film that reels the lives of women before Independent India and accumulates several reasons that even after so many decades' women need to fight for their own self. Searching for different alternatives in breaking the walls of low valued inhumane practices Shakuntala successively succeeds in letting Chuhiya come out from the dark world. Shakuntala in the film has set the path for other women to speak out their liberated thoughts with no fear. After all, every life of creature present on earth is limited to some extent. It necessitates that women should not consider themselves beneath any external opposing force of rituals inciting on behalf of them and become a prey to such life taking repercussions. Breaking the unbreakable shambles of old-aged Indian society obsessed with inhumane practices, this film is perfect masterpiece for those women who need to take stand for themselves. The protagonist eventually sets a path for other suppressed women to follow and morph their remaining life with self-respect. A ritual of a society which has entrenched roots in repressing the rights of a female gender has been propagated transversally throughout the ended era. A widow has all the rights as equal to any women. Fuelled with misery, inadaptability of young girl child in living the life of poverty and painfully feuded inner-conscience conflict with the religion is the plight of women who could not step outside the Ashram. The sayings of Lord Krishna that a lotus blooms from the pure water does not implicate that the widows cannot bloom like watery flowers in life. Through the character of Chuhiya director reveals that how to make someone happy while leading a life of sufferings and poverty. Tearing apart a woman from her own dignity is an act of sin not a prejudicially inclined act of divulgence. The film conveys that traditions should not be inflexible like stagnant water.

Conclusion:

Widowhood brings insurmountable misery. Being a widow is a curse. It is a permanent social stigma that cannot be wiped off. Widows face untold hardships in life. They are unwelcome even in their own families. Either they are thrown out of families or the families discard them after they become widows. The film underlines unspeakable isolation and hardships in traditional Indian society. There were times when widow had to perform self-immolation with her deceased husband. The dignity of a woman gets erased away after she becomes a widow and the world around her cohesively blocks all of her humanitarian rights. The entire plot of the film is the representation of repulsive restrictions confined against the pride of women and reverberates the ripples of change and the perseverance in preserving humanity even though in hardest of circumstances. The film depicts the struggle of women searching for alternatives to break age-old condemnable human shackles. Cinematography of the film is of highest quality. The filmmaker has remarkably excelled in portraying the image of an Indian city where smooth wind breezes, rains drizzles, and birds chirp in blue skies. The film portrays the ghats of Banaras, one of the holiest cities of the Hindus. Mr. Giles, the cinematographer, has approached unique camera angle techniques to capture some of the most relevant scenes which speak more about the disillusionment of women in the light of Hinduism. To sum up, it can be safely stated that 'Water' is an excellent film with highly meaningful subject and wonderful cinematography.

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