

## Coalition between Politics & Entertainment in Hindi Films: A Discourse Analysis

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### Abstract

*The study attempts to explore dynamics of political discourse as reflected in Hindi films. Political messages in most Hindi films are concealed within entertainment. Films use thrilling & entertaining plots mixed with political content in order to convey their messages to the public. Films not only reflect reality but also construct the political ideology. The public is generally unaware of the extent to which they are being influenced, managed and conditioned by the political discourses in Hindi films. This study attempts to conduct the discourse analysis on the Hindi film "Chakravyuh" to find how politics and entertainment are merged together to influence public opinion. The film is based on the dark, largely-unexposed world of the Naxalites fighting for their land and dignity. Discourse analysis of the film will help in exploring how an entertaining film can carry a meaningful message. For over 40 years in India, since the emergence of the Naxalite rebellion, cinema has drawn inspiration from the rupture caused by this iconic movement in Indian political history. Hindi films seem to have woken up to Naxalism, or Maoism, as it is more commonly known today. The discourse analysis of this film will be significant in analyzing unusual coalition between films, entertainment and politics.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Discourse Analysis, Entertainment, Hindi Films, Naxalism

### Introduction

Politics being a central object in democratic and highly politicized country like India has its impact, influence and discourse on every walk of life of this country. Cinema as vital life line of this country shapes our shared inner consciousness and has tremendous influence on our society. The present study attempts to conduct the discourse analysis on the Hindi film "Chakravyuh" to find how politics and entertainment are merged together to influence public opinion.

Cinema & politics as important and influential aspects of our society have any kind of inter-relationship of influences, are these two have capacity and capability to influence each-other, how they interact and how cinema adopt or take shape via political discourse of this country?

As cinema has its own pattern, construction, structure, meaning making process, form and style, reflection, representation, this research will focus on these cinematic considerations and its interaction and encounter with contemporary political discourse.

Contemporary Hindi cinema of 21<sup>st</sup> century has its own legacy of political discourse and debate right from its origin as, in our freedom struggle, after independence with Nehruism, its disillusion with promises, representing anger and frustration with its main focus on entertainment. Hindi cinema has a unique (especially popular Hindi cinema) form and style with a different kind of cinematic presentation, in this format entertainment occupies large space and serious debate and discourse are very rare with depth.

Politics and cinema make strange bedfellows. While some of our biggest films have managed to hold a mirror to the political underbelly in the country, some however themselves became victims of the ire of a few far-reaching politicians. Many a times, political parties even go to the extent of trying to cash in on a film's popularity. On a similar vein, South star Vijay's *Thalaivaa* finally released in Tamil Nadu after much brouhaha, while the latest film to court political controversy is Shoojit Sircar's *Madras Cafe*, based on the Sri Lankan civil war in the late '80s.

Hindi commercial cinema – colloquially known as 'Bollywood' – is now the focus of rapidly escalating interest both amongst teachers of film or media and in the academic community. Skillfully choreographed dances, moving songs, aesthetically pleasing or lavish sets and costumes and sensational plots and characters have invited the attention of newer and wider audiences and, in tandem, given rise to literature that seeks to explain, or to explain away, the popularity of Hindi films. Recently, dozens of scholarly and journalistic articles and several book-length studies (Chakravarty 1998, Prasad 1998, Kazmi 1999, Mishra 2002) have offered interesting textual analyses of aspects of Hindi films ranging from nationalism and 'culture' to the 'role of women' and 'nature of the hero'. Others have championed aspects of these films and assumed that viewing them is essentially 'Indian', radically 'traditional' or 'popular' in that it empowers 'Bollywood' audiences by connecting them to a set of necessary cultural traditions. Historically, however, textual studies have argued that Hindi films are based on the good versus evil master narratives of epics, are pre-realist, spectacular, irrational, based on emotion, formulaic, escapist, patriarchal and/or ultra-nationalist and generally politically reactionary (cf. Rangoonwala 1975, Dasgupta 1991).

### **Objectives**

1. To explore dynamics of political discourse as reflected in Hindi films.
2. To study how films use entertaining plots mixed with political content in order to convey messages to the public.
3. To find how politics and entertainment are merged together to influence public opinion.
4. To find how films can be a tool to not only reflect reality but also construct the political ideology.

### **Literature Review**

Commercial Hindi cinema plays a central role in the negotiation of national identity. For decades, the expatriate Indian served as a counter-example for acceptable behaviour, a living testimony of inappropriateness. In the mid-1990s, following the liberalization of the Indian economy, the rise of Hindu nationalism and the advent of a multiplex-going urban middle-class, the stereotype were turned around.

Popular Hindi cinema has, since the first film was made in India in 1913, played a central role in the formulation of the national identity and in the promotion of normative behaviour. So much so that the 'film is perhaps the single strongest agency for the creation of a national mythology of heroism, consumerism, leisure, and sociality' (Appadurai & Breckenridge 1996: 8). However, the low-brow, elusive and largely unrealistic nature of the screenplays confined the study of the films' social, cultural and political implications to a footnote in historical and sociological works for several decades. In this context, the unrelenting interest political parties and successive Indian governments have taken in the production of exemplarity on the big screen and in the control, mostly through censorship and taxation, of cinema is striking. Then, in the 1990s, the rise of Hindu nationalism, the liberalization of the Indian economy and the renewed affection of the Indian middle class for cinema halls, previously deserted in favour of home entertainment, generated more production and more revenue. This period coincided with a new academic interest in Bollywood (Gopal & Moorthy 2008, Silva 2004, Viridi 2003: 210, Prasad 2003).

Reputed writers specializing in the theory of globalization and cultural studies like Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, although their analysis of cultural consumption and Indian modernity is not based on cinema, nonetheless started to take into account the importance of the big screen in the national imagination. To quote the words of D. Bhoopaty, 'cinema is widely considered a microcosm of the social, political, economic, and cultural life of a nation. It is the contested site where meanings are negotiated, traditions made and remade, identities affirmed or rejected' (Bhoopaty 2003: 505). Besides, a growing number of studies by Jyotika Virdi, M. Madhava Prasad, Sumita Chakravarty, Tejaswini Niranjana, Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Rustom Bharucha, Patricia Uberoi, Anthony Alessandrini, Ravi Vasudevan and Rachel Dwyer and Christopher Pinney insist on the concurrence between India's political and social history and its cinema.

Some of our films do break the conventional narratives and venture into the forbidden space of politics. Prakash Jha's *Gangaajal* exposed the inner workings of the police and judicial system and the machinations of the ruling politicians, both gave the country a startlingly real view of Bihar in a series of films. His blandest film yet, *Aarakshan* came with the promise to address the raging debate on reservation, an emotionally charged issue that deserves a series of films from the heated days of the Mandal Commission to today's caste divide along political lines but ended up as a critique on the commercialization of coaching classes.

Indeed popular Indian cinema in Hindi constitutes a particularly interesting area of study as much because of its history as because of its key role in the creation of the national identity and its place in the collective imagination. Directors, producers, distributors, financiers, officials in the Central Board of Film Certification (Censor Board) all seek to ensure the projection of lucrative, aesthetically pleasant and acceptable contents. This results in a prescriptive and normative body of works that have, over the years, reflected and mostly shaped ideas of national identity, gendered behaviour, and acceptability. As Ashis Nandy noted, 'the popular film is low-brow, modernizing India in all its complexity, sophistry, naiveté and vulgarity. Studying popular film is studying Indian modernity at its rawest, its crudities laid bare by the fate of traditions in contemporary life and arts. Above all, it is studying caricatures of ourselves' (Nandy 1998: 7). These distorted reflections; one might add, not only exaggerate features but also paradoxically dictate patterns of normality. In this sense, they shape and impose exemplarity by broadcasting role models, figures of idealization and identification at once. Popular cinema is thus a major actor of social engineering.

The literature review suggests that Hindi films have been integrating entertainment & political elements to convey the messages to the viewers.

### ***Exemplarity, Nationalism and the State***

All through the 20<sup>th</sup> century, popular cinema evolved apace with Indian nationalism and politics and developed pro-independence, socialist, reformist, neo-traditional, capitalist, globalized and ethnic themes (Farges 2000: 158). As Joël Farges explains, cinema is a 'distant and distorted echo of periods of Indian history, from the independence movement to the state of emergency' and 'acts (in the viewer's imagination) like a collective and individual memory and which has had the time, over almost a century, to 'become' India' (Farges 2000: 164, 168). Right from the 1900s and through the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the big screen became the blank page on which nationalist pride was inscribed in a mythological vocabulary. Cinema, a medium which Indians took to with great ease and rapidity has indeed been part of the nationalist historiographic project since the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Twenty films were made in India in the 10 years after the first Indian motion picture was released in 1913. Seven years later, at the time when the country was embarking on the *swadeshi* movement, a first Film Enquiry Committee was set up in order to recommend the substitution of British imports with locally-made films and an Indian magistrate named as its director. In spite of British censorship, the number of films with a social concern and pro-independence stance increased in the 1920s and 1930s (although the films dwelling on social issues generally insisted on the civilizing impact of colonization). During the Second World War, the quick pace of industrialization facilitated important investments in cinema while the reduced sea traffic gave rise to a large black market. Cinema became at the time a real local industry that mattered in the national economy.

Soon, after independence, regional parties, like the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) founded in 1949 in Tamil Nadu, used this media to voice regional demands. Realizing its potential in terms of control/subversion, publicity, and social engineering, the central government very rapidly tried to assert its control over this industry through the creation of the Central Board of Film Certification in 1951 and the setting up of the Film Finance Corporation, an all-India public funding body, in 1960.

The state-control over cinema became blatant during the Emergency when the movie *Kissa Kursi Ka* (whose director, Amrit Nahata, happened to be an opposition MP from the Janata Party) was banned and the prints confiscated or even destroyed in 1977 because of its hardly veiled criticism of Indira Gandhi's regime (Bhoopaty 2003).

Of course, the government or state departments do not provide film-makers with guidelines regarding the heroes on the big screen. However, all through the years of Nehruvian socialism, screenplays reflected the ideals of the young nation-state. During the 1960s, with the 1962 war with China and the 1965 war with Pakistan, films adopted a more belligerent and chauvinistic tone. Later, in the 1970s, while the country was undergoing a profound social transformation, Amitabh Bachchan embodied the angry young man perhaps symbolizing the nation going through a crisis. The 1990s, following the rise of Hindu nationalism during the 1980s and the country's economic liberalization in 1991, witnessed the emergence of a new generation of films glorifying consumerism even as they made religion and feminine docility the core of the definition of Indianness. Admittedly, 'in essence, cultural practices and products do not have any political leanings' (Martin 2000: 178) and culture only acts as a pointer. Nevertheless, one should be careful not to disregard the highly symbolic aspect of the representations portrayed as authentic and apolitical (Sircar 1995: 326). As a matter of fact, irrespective of the historical period, Indian cinema has always crystallized a view of Indian identity that it later projected and imposed more or less forcefully in order to comply as much with the current governmental ideology as with the market. The shift from the expatriate as a counter-model, to the NRI as the epitome of modern India follows the same logic.

### **Films & Politics**

The presence on screen characters of Indian origins who are settled abroad is not a new phenomenon. It has however not been given due academic consideration (with exception to Deshpande 2005, Brosius & Yazgi 2007, and Mehta & Pandharipande 2010). The very first Indian documentary, shot in 1902, focused on a certain Mr. R. P. Paranjpye, a former scholar at Cambridge (Alessandrini 2001: 320). Less than twenty years later, in 1921, *Bilet Pherat* [On Returning from Abroad, N. C. Laharry], the first Bengali film, dealt with loss of one's roots and the corruption of Indian values after living abroad. But the expatriate Indian did not gain currency on the big screen until 1967 with *An Evening in Paris* (Shakti Samanta) and *Purab Aur Paschim* [East and West, Manoj Kumar] three years later (the terrain had been prepared by *Sangam* in 1965, which shows foreign locations and Indians moving freely around the world for leisure). This period corresponds to the coming of age of the first generation of Indian migrants in the United Kingdom, the adolescence of the second uprooted generation and the mass influx of educated Indians in the United States after the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965. However, the overseas Indians are portrayed in both films as depraved persons or as outsiders whose very Indian identity is dubious. In *An Evening in Paris*, for example, there is no question of immigration as the hero Sam, played by Shashi Kapoor, is not Indian and is neither presented as a *videshi* [foreigner] nor as a *pardesi* [outsider]. Even though Sam is visibly Indian, speaks Hindi fluently and strongly defends the honour of Indians when arguing with his friend Michel, he introduces himself as a Frenchman as if his place of residence were a determining factor for defining his nationality. This illustrates the way Indian nationality was viewed at that time: it was based above all on the law of the soil and circumscribed by national borders before mass migrations redefined the sense of national belonging.

In *Purab Aur Paschim*, the emigrant, whose Indian origin is this time not denied, is presented in an extremely unfavourable light. The young hero played by Manoj Kumar is called Bharat [India] and quite explicitly embodies the nation. He visits London to meet the Sharmas, friends of his father. Mrs. Sharma, brought up in England, drinks, smokes and calls her husband 'Darling' (according to conservative Hindu etiquette, the wife should not use her husband's first name and always treat him as *parameshwar* [god]). Their daughter, Preeti, smokes and drinks like her mother, wears mini-skirts and, in a supreme gesture of acculturation, has dyed her hair blond. The son's name drives the point home: Orphan. Manoj Kumar, who is also the film's director, paints a psychedelic picture of a metropolis obsessed by consumerism and sex. Living abroad means here living in a den of depravity and uncensored appetites and losing or renouncing one's original values. In these conditions, emigration can only be shown as a negative phenomenon and the migrant as 'the moral antithesis' of the real Indian (Uberoi 1998: 308). Manoj Kumar however grants his characters redemption at the end of the film: either through death (for Orphan) or a return to the native country (for Preeti).

In the 1980s, this trend continued ‘amidst angry heroes who were fighting against corruption and coming to terms with social upheavals in India and its role in the capitalist world order’ but, by the end of the decade ‘film sets and costumes began to illustrate a look and feel of urban centres (openly displaying the brand names of Coca-Cola, Ralph Lauren, Nike, etc.)’ (Dudrah 2006: 67-8).

Until the 1990s, the foreigner was thus an absolute counter-example and anti-hero whose salvation lay in a dramatic change of status, like Orphan or Preeti. This ideological construct of migration as a morally reprehensible act, Rosie Thomas (1996: 170) points out, is deeply rooted in Indian lore and goes back to the character of Ravana, the king of Lanka, in the *Ramayana*. Until the late 1980s, emigration still bore the seal of moral disgrace. At the time, prominent economists like Jagdish Bhagwati went to length to evaluate the actual cost of the brain drain in order to levy a tax from expatriate Indians (Bhagwati & Dellafar 1973). This attitude starkly contrasts with the peons the successive governments have sang of NRIs in the past ten years, priding themselves on the potential benefits of migration in the form of remittances, FDI, image and lobbying.

Nevertheless, during the next decade, foreign characters of Indian origins suddenly acquired a totally different connotation. The term *vilayat* gave way to *pardes* to designate the place of residence of overseas Indians. *Vilayat*, a Persian word derived from the Arabic *vilaya* meaning ‘province’ in contrast to the Persian homeland of Mughal rulers, was used during the colonial era to designate England and Europe, *i.e.* what was outside India, and was always associated with immorality and social aberration. The root of the word *pardes* is *des*, meaning country, home. The suffix *par-* corresponds to both *per-* and *pro-* in Latin, evoking an idea of movement and of being proactive. *Pardes* is therefore much more positive than *vilayat* and does not actually entail either a spatial or a moral distance with the homeland (*pardes* can even sometimes designate a place within the national territory). Actually, more than half the films with the word *pardes* or *pardesi* in their title seen between 1931 and 2010 were made after the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> These recent films always vehemently champion Indian values through a dominantly essentialist and culturalist discourse, but these values can now be transposed outside the national territory. In the moral code upheld in this type of film, some values occupy a central place and are mentioned frequently like *sharm*, *lihaz*, *izzat* [shame, modesty, honour], three virtues presented as the preserve of women (Karudapuram 2001). This new generation of neo-traditional films combining ethnic nationalism and the praise of materialism therefore also seek to champion a patriarchal structure that idealizes the woman sublimated by either virginity or motherhood while insisting on her submissiveness. In addition, the emigrant is no longer accused of forgetting his roots and values: it is the host country (for example, *firang* (foreign) or *Angrezi* (English) culture) and, more generally, Western culture that are held responsible if at all. Ideal Indians have hence become deterritorialized models of national identity.

C. Sharma, a former Indian diplomat and member of the government-appointed High Committee on the Indian diaspora, remarked that ‘Bollywood was selected long back for the purpose of connecting the Indian people residing across the world. Hence both intra & inter connectivity is facilitated by Bollywood. Showing of an Indian film became a focal point of connectivity’ (Sharma 2010). In addition to fostering a sense of community going beyond the national borders (Deprez 2010: 145, Gowricharn 2009), most of the recent films with expatriate characters show that being a part of the national ethos is no longer determined by nationality or place of residence but by blood ties and morality. This new generation of films made during the last fifteen years thus reflects the insidious change from *ajus soli* to a *jus sanguini* conception of citizenship. The migrant, promoted to the rank of blood brother, has therefore ceased to be a symbol of the ‘Other’ and has become instead the prototype of the new Indian, globalized and modern, but always a nationalist at heart. The fact that he belongs to the nation is constantly underlined through the use of the possessive pronoun before the words ‘country’, ‘India’ or ‘Hindustan’ and, despite going through all types of ordeals, his ‘Indianness’ is always reaffirmed at the end of the film. For instance, the rich American of Indian origin played by Amrish Puri in Subhash Gai’s *Pardes* sings ‘I Love My India’ and recites ‘*Karam Mera India, Dharam Mera India, Vatan Mera India, Sajjan Mera India*’ [India is my destiny, India is my religion, India is my motherland, India is my beloved]. As for the expatriates in *DDLJ*, they talk with great emotion of ‘*apna desh*’ [my country], ‘*meri hi mitti*’ [my soil], ‘*hamare desh ki mitti*’ [our country’s soil]. To borrow Benedict Anderson’s words, ‘in these ‘natural’ ties, one senses what one might call ‘the beauty of *Gemeinschaft*’ (Anderson 1983: 143). Far from being isolated cases, these examples are representative of the ethnic nationalist discourse developed for the diaspora in films made during the years 1990-2000, and remind one of the slogan ‘Global Indian Family’ devised by the Indian government for the first PBD.

Punathambekar noted that ‘in positioning and drawing the diaspora into the fold of a ‘great Indian family’, *K3G* articulates everyday struggles over being Indian in the diaspora to a larger project of cultural citizenship that has emerged in relation to India’s tentative entry into a transnational economy and the centrality of the NRI (non-resident Indian) figure to India’s navigation of this space’ (Punathambekar 2005: 152). The same holds true for other movies of that period.

### ***Methodology***

As political discourse is a complex concept, the methodology applied with a view to investigate the research questions is discourse analysis which is a form of content analysis and provides an in-depth data analysis. The data source will consist of a set of Hindi films of 21 century based on elements of political discourse.

More qualitative forms of content analysis that do not assume highly stable meanings of words but, rather, include a sensitivity to the usage of words and the context in which they are used are compatible with discourse analysis and can, in fact, be used within a broad discourse analytic methodology in the analysis of social reality.

The present study undertakes the discourse analysis of the film Prakash Jha’s *Chakravyuh* (2012). The film is ‘inspired by’ contemporary events such as the arrest of top CPI (Maoist) leader Kobad Ghandy, the killing of 76 CRPF jawans in Dantewada, corporate land grab and the exploitation of natural resources. *Chakravyuh* narrates the story of two friends set against the background of the “biggest internal security threat” of the country in recent times.

### ***Discourse Analysis***

Discourse” refers to “the language” of filmmaking in action and to the way the film acts upon the viewer. Discourse is the rhetorical dimension of the story, the way it is made to persuade and manipulate you. Discourse is a way of referring to this action, to the ideology of the film: discourse refers to the way that stories position their viewers.

Discourse analysis is a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretive, and constructionist. It explores how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created and are held in place. It not only embodies a set of techniques for conducting structured, qualitative investigations of texts, but also a set of assumptions concerning the constructive effects of language (Burman & Parker, 1993).

### ***Discourse Analysis of the Film ‘Chakravyuh’***

*Chakravyuh* is not the first film from Bombay to have dealt with the ‘Maoist/Naxalite issue’, though it is the first mainstream film to do so. In 1980, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas made a film called ‘Naxalites’ starring Mithun Chakraborti and Smita Patil. Unfortunately not too many copies of the film seem to survive to this day. Govind Nihalani directed several films in 80’s and 90’s, which tangentially touched the issue, including an adaptation of *Hazaar Chaurasi ki Maa*. Gulzar’s *Hu tu tu* (1999), was set in the context of Maharashtra’s political-industrial nexus, and had Nana Patekar playing a character inspired by Gaddar. *Laal Salaam*, a Nandita Das-Sharad Kapoor starrer set in 2002, based its plot on the binary opposition between the Naxalite violence and Gandhian alternatives while echoing anti government sentiments. The blockbuster *Sarfaroosh* had a subplot about a tribal rebellion in Chandrapur under the leadership of a certain ‘Veeran’, whose movement was a creation of Inter Services Intelligence. However, the resemblance to Veerappan prevented the audiences from making the connect to the intended reference to the Maoist movement. Then the 2005 film *Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi*, a love story set in the context of elite Stephanians joining Naxalite movement in 1970’s, reintroduced the term ‘Naxalite’ to a certain kind of elite and middle classes.

Naxalite” is a term used to refer to various militant communist groups operating in different parts of India under various organisations. The term derives from Naxalbar, the name of the village in West Bengal where the movement originated. The Naxals are considered to be far-left radical communists, supportive of Maoist political ideology. They have been declared a terrorist organisation under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of India (1967). The present insurgency is said to date from 2002.

In terms of story, *Chakravyuh* is an adaptation of Hrishikesh Mukherjee’s *Namak Haram* in today’s context. While *Namak Haram* was about a middle class friend of an Industrialist, who joins a trade union as an informer only to flip sides, *Chakravyuh* replaces the trade union with the Maoist movement and the character of the industrialist with the character of superintendent of police.

The fact that a movement centered largely around Adivasi struggles has replaced the popular perception of the industrial trade union movement as the counterpoint to capitalism, in an inversion of the teleological scheme, is a topic worthy of detailed analysis by itself.

To be fair enough, at least at the surface it does come across as fairly sympathetic (as distinct from support) to the causes taken up by the rebels. It does avoid the temptation of proposing any easy solutions in form of the legal route, Gandhian alternatives or inclusive development. Neither does it seek recourse to sandwich theory or reduce the movement to a question of violence and non-violence. In a fairly simple fashion it does make the land grab motive of the corporates (Mahanta), influence of corporate houses on polity and their role in aiding private armies like Salwa Judum fairly clear. However it does stay clear of indicting the police for creation of Salwa Judum, and to the contrary it depicts the police as hostile to Judum, which is not without its iota of truth. To its further credit, it does attempt to unmask the 'developmentalist' strategies of the State in the form of sending benign administrators to win over the confidence as a precursor to land grab. Sometimes his sympathies touch the wrong ends too. For instance, his 'sympathetic depiction' of people's courts seem to strike a chord with those who are only too eager to hang all the 'corrupt' in the public, a sentiment that is not uncommon in the times of Anna Hazare.

However, one might be tempted to look beyond what seems like sympathy on the surface to probe the limitations that a ruling class society imposes on the content, even when they seem to be at their sympathetic best.

### ***The Intellectual, the Leader and the Intellectual Leader***

In the opening shot of the film, we see an aging Maoist intellectual (Om Puri) being captured by the police near the Bhopal bus stand. If the reference to the Kobad Ghandy arrest does not suffice, we are soon told that this determined idealist was a product of Doon School, LSE and Oxford (the latter two bearing little resemblance to Kobad's education in St. Xavier's College Mumbai and subsequent training in accountancy). This depiction of Maoist intellectuals as ethical figures disillusioned with the system has been a constant feature of depiction of the movement since the Naxalbari phase. And no film (including arthouse attempts like Amma Arriyan, Hazaaron Khwaishein Aisi or Hazaar Chaurasi ki maa) which ever touch the topic would be complete without a reference to the fact that some of the intellectual leadership is provided by those who passed the litmus test of excellence as determined by bourgeois education systems. One might find very few newspaper articles and popular writings pertaining to the top leadership which do not mention their degrees. There is little doubt that there have been intellectuals who served as an integral part of every movement rooted in Marxist thought. But the degree of their influence in determining the course of any movement could not have been more wrongly overstated.

It is precisely such myths and facts and the combination of the two, which dictate perceptions of the Maoist movement among middle end of salaried classes or sections of what can be loosely termed as 'national bourgeoisie' towards the movement. While the movement itself might be perceived as ideologically misconstrued, there has been a bit less certainty among the members of this class to tag Maoists as terrorists. Even when wedded to the interests of larger global capital, the lack of more direct contradiction of interests, lends a certain ambiguity towards this movement. However such a sentiment may not be shared by those members of this class who reside in strongholds of the movement. A peculiar trait of this class seems to be a demonisation of parliamentary politicians without touching on exploitative nature of institutions or systemic features of the State. Maoists, when projected as an opposition to a system led by corrupt and greedy politicians, are also bound to be seen in partially favourable terms by this section. It is no surprise that even a maverick like Arindam Chaudhari, the director of IIPM, talks in favourable terms about Maoists while reserving his abuse for the greedy politicians. Even though his opinions in general may not be reflective of this class at large, but such sentiments do find an echo among a sizeable section of this class. However these sentiment that only border on sympathy should not be misconstrued for support that would spill out on the streets to protest against Operation Green Hunt or Soni Sori.

The logic of projections overplaying the role of intellectuals, also however, make it fairly consistent with another flawed narrative of the movement as an intellectually determined movement, where the highly intelligent misguided ideologues make use of the illiterate as cannon fodder for their ambitions. This narrative itself is as much a product of this romanticisation of its leadership as much a product of class interests which seek to colour the reality to suit their interests. By all means those who get ignored are the social groups which form the real force of such movements.

If the romanticisation of intellectual involvement is one aspect, fascination with the leadership is another. The film does not fail on that count either. So the complex battle is at times reduced to one between the respective leaders-Zonal Commander Rajan (Manoj Bajpai) and SP Adil Khan (Arjun Rampal). In one of the scenes, where Rajan seeks advice from a Human Rights activist, the leader is told that ‘aisa yuddh confidence ka khel hota hai, do leaderon ke atmavishwaas ka’ (Such a war is a game of confidence played between two leaders). It is no surprise that for middle classes who perceive politics through glorified personality cults, leaders and their personal characters seem to weigh over the actual character of the movements as determined by its rank and file and its support base. Films such as *Raavan* take it to extreme heights, where the figure of Beera (Abhishek Bachchan) becomes a substitute for a movement itself. Such illusions are no strangers even to the self-proclaimed sympathisers of the movement. A book by a well-known reporter on the history of the Maoist movement could have very well been titled ‘Biographical Sketches of Leadership’. Those referred to as heroes of the movement in middle class circles are often only the leaders be it Kondapalli Seetaramaiah, Saket Rajan or Varghese. While the deaths of revolutionary leaders receive large obituaries, those of the soldiers end up as statistics.

Regardless of whether the movement itself took an active initiative in promoting such a ‘cult of hero’, the middle class sympathisers and non-sympathisers alike have a great role in sustaining such cults. While it may be argued that such cults often create sympathies, even if superficial, among sections of society that may not have a direct stake in the revolutionary movement, such a discourse is not only limited but also counterproductive. To illustrate in terms of an example from Cinema, in the film *Red Alert*, the Maoist foot soldier (Sunil Shetty) after siding with the Police, gives them information which leads to the death of all his fellow soldiers. However, when sent on a mission to shoot the head of the movement (Vinod Khanna, a former BJP MP from Gursdaspur) realizes that the educated well-intentioned man deserves another chance. We are then taken to the future, where the ‘reformed Naxalite’ admiringly watches the ex-leader on television who, in his new avatar as a corporate leader, is preaching the virtues of corporate farming models. Regardless of the absurdity of the plot, the limitations of such sympathies become only glaringly obvious when the intellectual quality of the leadership is projected as a redeemable feature of such movements and worthy of appropriation. Rank and file and their aspirations are as dispensable in such imaginations of the movement as logic is for a Bombay film.

If people and people alone are the makers of history, then how are these people depicted in the stories of revolution that circulate in circles which have patience for stories in the first place? Unfortunately neither the stories that often do the round of activist circles, nor the depiction by the big media houses or cinema seem to have space for ‘people’. *Chakravyuh* does not fail in representing such tendencies. First and foremost, the Adivasis are merely labelled as Adivasis – without any reference to their specific tribes such as Bhils or Gonds. The ‘Adivasis’, when not a part of the armed struggle, are depicted as poor, hapless and even gullible with the term *masoom Adivasi* (innocent tribal) frequently thrown around by both sides. The Adivasis first enter the frame during the SP’s round to a village to earn their confidence. On spotting a police jeep, they attempt to flee away only to retract back when they see the SP applying first aid to a physically handicapped tribal. When the SP proceeds to give a speech, the camera focuses on an Adivasi woman with an expression befitting an earnest listener. Adivasis are shown as equally earnest listeners, when the Zonal Commander is giving a speech.

Elsewhere they are restricted to playing the hapless victims under the paternalistic care of Maoists and at times forming their informer network and support bases. Those in the rebel army are reduced to numbers in the assembly. Even for a scene, the director does not make the mistake of lending the foot soldiers a voice. Neither a sense of remorse nor sympathy is depicted at the loss of their lives, often at the cost of saving the lives of their leaders or for kidnappings. One might feel tempted to consider such depictions as indicative of the actual nature of relationship between the non-Adivasi leadership and Adivasis who form the backbone of the movement. But if the persistence of Adivasi support to this movement (at least in Bastar) is any indication, such a relationship is complicated enough to be unable to fathom from a distance to any satisfaction.

When absence of voices does not suffice, orientalism does its bit to pitch in to the regressive quotient. The women are clad in exotic looking headgear; the men are depicted with spears in hand and the rebel army members in long hair and beards. Since no depiction of any tribe across the world is complete without glimpses of ‘tribal culture’ in form of festival dances, we are subject to visuals of Adivasi men and women clad in sparkling white and red costumes dancing around in circles along with the armed soldiers.

### ***Balancing Act***

The character of a violent hero fighting against the system (as vague as the term gets) is no stranger to Bombay cinema. This violent hero has assumed various forms over the years. At times he is a dacoit, at times an unemployed disgruntled youth, at times an idealist police officer who discovers the virtue of bending the rules, and at times an Underworld don. However when it concerns issues bearing resemblance to real life and painted as controversial, Cinema either toes the establishment line by villainising those against the 'system' or ends up playing a balancing act through techniques such as pitting the violent anti-system heroic character against an equally heroic pro-system character. At times the lead actor could start off as a rebel and then mend his ways. The need for such balancing acts could partly stem from the fear of losing a censor certificate and partly from the fear of alienating either sections of financiers or audiences.

In the case of *Chakravyuh*, it had to contend with additional pressure from the censor board and corporate houses to give it a semblance of balance. Prakash Jha is no stranger to this balancing act, having done it in *Aarakshan* where after the mandatory chore of depicting two sides of the coin, the film seeks a solution in Gandhian models of trusteeship. In *Chakravyuh*, he attempts to play the balancing act by constantly flipping between scenes critical of Maoist movement to scenes which seek to humanise the movement. The SP applying ointment is posited against a speech by Zonal commander in the village. The ruthless killing of the informer is balanced with a tribal acting as Maoist informers. The evil police officer's character is countered with a corrupt lecherous area commander. This leaves sufficient ambiguity to allow room for all possible interpretations without completely disappointing anyone.

### ***Narrative***

Staying true to the script of *Namak Haram*, the film ends with Abhay Deol slain at the hands of police dying in the arms of SP. We are then told that this act of sacrifice strengthened the struggle of Govind (the intellectual) and Rajan (Zonal commander), and this struggle has soon spread to over 200 districts of India. We are furnished statistics on inequality, borrowing from the Arjun Sengupta report about 75% living on less than Rs. 20 per day and 100 odd families controlling the nation. And finally warning us of dangers of such inequality, which if not controlled could lead to a civil war.

While all other facts are vaguely correct (except for the fact that Arjun Sengupta's report needs to be readjusted for 2012 prices), the truth about a movement spreading like wild fire across the poorest regions remains exaggerated enough to the point of being blatantly untrue. Even the most optimist supporters of this movement would acknowledge that in its stronghold it wields influence on around 40% of the area. It has nearly been wiped off most parts of Andhra Pradesh. Marxist movements world over have not been able to devise strategies to deal with capitalism, let alone the Maoist movement in India, which has been at its best tackling semi feudalism.

While it is understandable that the most romantic of supporters would want to fuel their illusions with such lies, or that home ministry might want to use it as a ruse to strengthen its offensive, why are sections which have no direct stake in this conflict willing to believe and propagate such myths, apart from the charming simplicity of these myths?

Such a story of the possible onset of a revolution in the event of failure of reforms has long been the mainstay of large sections of society, to the point that they have become integral to functioning of 'parliamentary democracies'. At times they enable the State to assume greater authority in the guise of crushing seditious tendencies, but at the same time they operate as warning signals against excesses of the State, failure of its welfare functions and the anarchy of markets. But at the same time, one has definitely not seen any drastic improvements in 'welfare mechanisms' of the Indian state and all evidence in fact points to the contrary. So perhaps these contradictions can only be partially answered by recourse to the specifics.

Such are of course the contradictions of these times and the contradictions among the ruling classes which lead to the political stalemates of the sort we witness now. Prakash Jha's *Chakravyuh* unintentionally ends up serving as a fitting testimony to these contradictions

## Conclusion

The research study will be significant in researching the area of Hindi films with a view to uncovering its key attributes that construct political discourse. The aim is to investigate cinematic representation of political discourse in Hindi film. The reasons for undertaking such a research lie mainly within the salience of political discourse within Hindi films, the inevitable presence of politics in Hindi films, as well as the vast unexplored field of political discourse as approached from cinematic perspective. Reading film and popular culture diagnostically presents insights into the current political situation, into the strengths and vulnerabilities of the contending political forces, into the hopes and fears of the population. Film thus provides important insights into the psychological, socio-political, and ideological make-up of a specific society at a given point in history. Reading film diagnostically also allows one to detect what ideological solutions to various problems are being offered, and thus to anticipate certain trends, to gain insights into social problems and conflicts, and to appraise the dominant ideologies and emergent oppositional forces. Consequently, diagnostic political critique enables one to perceive the limitations of mainstream conservative and liberal political ideologies, as well as helping to decipher their continuing appeal. It enables one to grasp the utopian yearnings in a given society and challenges progressives to develop cultural representations, political alternatives, and practices and movements which address these predispositions. Such diagnostic reading thus helps with the formulation of progressive political practices which address salient hopes, fears, and desires, and the construction of social alternatives that are grounded in existing psychological, social, and cultural matrixes. Consequently, diagnostic film critique does not merely offer another clever method of reading films but provides weapons of critique for those interested in producing a better society. It can be concluded that films use thrilling & entertaining plots mixed with political content in order to convey their messages to the public.

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