

Chapter 1

Social Dynamics of Hindi Eco–Cinema and the Politics of Water

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ABSTRACT

*Eco-terrorism and environmentalism in Indian mainstream visual media are either eclipsed or serve as ancillary thematic props to the project. The big banners, production houses, mainstream directors, actors, scriptwriters of the industry rarely undertake eco-cinematic projects since these movies fail in box-office collection. However, the beginning of the 21st century has seen a paradigmatic shift with the advent of “green movies.” Interestingly, Nila Madhab Panda’s *Kaun Kitney Paani Mein* (2015) and Aparnaa Singh’s *Irada* (2017) have successfully projected on the silver screen the problem of ground-water contamination and the scarcity of water leading to ecocide. The current chapter explores how eco-cinema has become a critical platform to talk about grim ecological matters like water contamination and depletion to sensitise the audience regarding the need for water conservation.*

INTRODUCTION

Although the dissemination of fictional content through an audio-visual medium, in the form of stage-shows, theatrical representations, local music, puppetry etc., has been a relatively standard practice, it considered as a little contrast to the beautiful culture of the educated elite. But now it has become a powerful medium of conveying a message to a broader audience, of reflecting conventions and values, of revealing cultural codes and beliefs, and of mirroring the socio-cultural and religious-ethical customs and manners of the human society in its vast and varied shapes and forms (Lakhendra, 2014). There is no denying of the fact that to explore the ever-changing realities of contemporary society; cinema is one of the most befitting mediums. The way in which filmmakers record and manage the various dimensions of time, place and action, allows the audience to get a glimpse of a multisensory world that is beyond the limits of verbal narratives. The lens of the camera provides the director with a unique vision that enables

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him to explore the multifarious elements present in our physical environment. In return, the viewers are gifted with an opportunity, in the form of either documentary or fictional accounts or fantasy films, to have a glimpse of the different worlds- the one close to home, around the globe as well as the imaginary.

In recent years, audio-visual media has started to be recognised as one of the most engaging and emotive ways to sensitise audiences towards different ills and evils, varied inequalities and injustices, several concerns and considerations that characterise the human society. Every other issue including communal tension, political rift, the question of nation and nationalism are addressed through the silver screen. But as far as the point of environmental crisis is concerned, there is a sense of denial that continues to plague our response, as far as popular visual media is concerned. Even in the present era of Anthropocene, dealing with environmental conservationism, the celluloid is considered to be a fringe activity. However, it unquestionably has the potential to help the audience to unearth the reality of the helpless vulnerability and precariousness and the dynamics of human existence on the earth.

In India, quite predictably, the realm of literature, art and popular culture is not sincerely interested in representing the cataclysmic environmental crisis through the different forms of cultural productions. The Hindi language film industry which is sometimes referred to as a synecdoche for the whole of Indian cinema hardly shows any genuine interest in visually representing the dreadful catastrophe that awaits the human race if the environmental concerns are not addressed right at this moment. A majority of conventional Indian films have accommodated perspectives towards social causes extensively. In Bollywood, there have been films on several serious issues-from corruption to partition, from disability to LGBTQ, from terrorism to politics, from sports to court and many others. But the managerial approaches of a technological fix have kept the Bollywood film industry mostly silent about some significant environmental crisis that confronts the entire human civilisation today. The denials, inertia and silence of the contemporary, niche and mainstream filmmakers towards ecological imbalance unequivocally points out that it is not so much a crisis of nature as of our thought, culture and imagination. However, since the late 1980s, with the establishment of a few nature-related channels or eco-media like *National Geographic*, *Discovery*, *Animal Planet* etc., the production of “green movies” are much in vogue (Bharali, 2014).

THE RISE OF ECO-CINEMA

Theoretically, Green movies, also popularly known as “eco-cinema”, represent a diversity of creative productions that address issues related to the intertwined relationship between human and natural world as well as help to retain this perception as an alternative to conventional media spectatorship (Bharali, 2014). In other words, eco-cinema can be considered as a conscientious apparatus in a social context to tackle issues related to natural predicaments and ecological discrimination directed against ethnic minorities. These movies not only focus on exploring the symbiotic relationship between the humans and the natural environment, but are also supplemented by contemporary realities like global climate change, chemical toxicity and other ecological hazards regarding food production, organic and inorganic pollutants, groundwater contamination that intensely affect the lives of almost every individual (Rust, Monani, & Cubitt, 2013, p.14). The burgeoning realm of eco-cinema addresses and challenges ecological issues and many more through the creative productions of a vast array of transnational filmmakers. Observing World Environment Day and organising Climate Summits every year or arranging mass campaigns against environmental disparity does not serve the purpose of providing adequate conservation of the ecological injustice. The long term effects that can create through the cinematic lens of eco-conscious

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