

Chapter 19

Depiction of Naxalism in Telugu Cinema

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ABSTRACT

Naxalism has become a menace, assumed gigantic proportions, and become difficult to contain. Naxalism has donned different roles depending on the geopolitical, social, and economic conditions. India is in a peculiar disposition to address Naxalism, which is rampant, largely fueled externally and internally by way of violence, extortion, sympathisers, and advocacies in the form of urban Naxals. This chapter will discuss how Naxalism is widespread in India and the way it is depicted in Indian movies in general and Telugu movies in particular. It is an attempt to bring to the fore what is compelling for people to resort to Naxalism, delving upon the framework of Bazinian realist, psychoanalytic, and ideological film theories.

INTRODUCTION

The reciprocal relationship between cinema and society and how they both influence each other, and we also know how visual medium is very impressionable and impactful on the minds of cine-goers. The uprisings which originated in a small village of Naxalbari in West Bengal penetrated different parts of India. As it was a new phenomenon with some unknown people coming to the rescue of poor peasants and the oppressed, many were fascinated by these phenomena including filmmakers and it started reflecting in films. One such film is *Vimukti Kosam* (Emancipation) in Telugu released way back in 1983 in the backdrop of Srikakulam, a small tribal district in Andhra Pradesh.

Earlier movies based on Naxal themes were made on a shoe-string budget, lacked commercial content and was considered as art movies or parallel cinema. Hence, they were deemed to be insipid and were appreciated only by a select few. Today, things have changed and films with the same naxal themes are being made with commercial elements, sprucing up raconteurism through a visual medium. Taking a cue, many mainstream film producers and directors joined the bandwagon coming up with movies on Naxal themes in different vernaculars based on regional markets. These movies depicted Naxals as either protagonist (à la modern-day Robin Hood) coming to the rescue of the poor and illiterate rural folks. In

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3511-0.ch019

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contrast, others described them in a negative shade, and some others projected them neutrally leaving it for the audience's discretion to judge.

UNDERSTANDING INDIAN CINEMA

India is one of the largest film industries in the world, releasing over a thousand films each year. Famous Hollywood stars nowadays are showing intent to work in Bollywood due to the amount of craze and adoration received by their Indian counterparts. Many movies were made with socially relevant themes where one can relate to in the present-day circumstances. Cinema reflects society. Different filmmakers present the realistic situations happening around us on the screen from their perspectives showcasing the good, the bad and the ugly of the community and delivering a message through the film. These films typically based on the models of realism, ideological and psychoanalytic approaches resonate with underlying messages. The purpose of these movies is to influence audiences and give out a message relevant to current times, thus bringing about awareness in the viewers to contemporary social issues and ills.

Filmmakers have produced movies and continue to do so in various genres *viz* mythological, socio-fantasy, romance, freedom struggle, war, patriotism, politics, dacoits, terrorism, spy thrillers, social, drama, insurgencies etc. Although, films have been made with socially relevant issues of their times: films on war *viz* *Haqeeqat*, *Hum Saya*, *Saat Hindustani*, *Prem Pujari*, *Hindustan Ki Kasam*, *Aakraman*, *Vijeta* etc.; movies on Dacoit themes were made in the late 1970s, and 1980s *viz* - *Ganga Jamna*, *Sholay*, *Dacait*, *Ganga ki Saugandh*, *Dharam Kanta*, etc.; videos on terrorism have also made *viz* – *Roja*, *Drohkaal*, *Dil Se*, *D Day*, *Company*, *Satya*, *Khadgam*, *Kurbaan* etc.; and on Naxal insurgencies *viz* – *The Naxalites* (1980), *Andhi Gali* (1984), *Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa* (1998), *Tango Charlie* (2005), *Jalsa* (2008), *Virodhi* (2011), *Chakravyuh* (2012), *Buddha in a Traffic Jam* (2014) etc. Naxalism continues to be a burning topic even in the millennium, socially responsible & conscious filmmakers latch onto this opportunity to make movies on this subject and many more in vernacular styles. Telugu movies such as *Drohi*, *Erra Sainyam*, *Dalam*, *Sindooram*, *Kubusam*, *Gamyam*, etc., have portrayed Naxalism as its central theme. R. Narayana Murthy's name needs a noteworthy mention in this genre of Telugu movies.

RACONTEURING AND FILM THEORIES

The film is a powerful medium of communication as it inherently influences how the audience perceives the world around them. The film is an audio-visual medium for dissemination of information and is also a means of raconteuring. Films are attempts made by artists to recreate life as it was based on the circumstances and realistic happenings in the society that are intrinsically woven into the film to fascinate audiences and connect emotionally. Each individual's perspective of storytelling differs in one's unique method. It is a commonly accepted phenomenon that scholarly articles, reviewers, critics use film theories to build reviews and critical interpretations. One such name that comes to mind is Andre Bazin, a French film theorist who emphasised the use of realism. Film theories are systematic attempts to think about and explain the nature of cinema, how it works as a medium and how it embodies meaning for viewers (Prince, 2000). Realistic films project an artist's impression about the world around him and capture the real-world situations or events, and present in a way without the distortion that the audiences

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