

**PORTRAYAL OF THE CONCERNS OF THE MARGINALIZED IN
MAINSTREAM HINDI CINEMA: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
*DO BIGHA ZAMIN AND CHAKRAVYUH***

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Marginalized, the term does not exclusively refer to a particular section of society; rather the term marginality is a condition that applies to all those sections, groups or people who are experiencing a complex disadvantageous situation due to various factors such as social, political, ethnical, cultural, and economical or gender. This echoes Ranjit Guha's interpretation of the term 'subaltern' which means that a subaltern need not necessarily only belong to the labouring class of the society but one who is marginalized or subordinated in terms of gender, caste, class or any other possible way.

It is not that exploitation or marginalization happens only at the economic level as is often viewed but it can be at various levels as mentioned. A person, section or a group exploits or marginalizes the other to the periphery in order to be at the centre and gratify its thirst for power. Moreover, one becomes marginalized when one is denied or robbed off certain basic things which are essential to his or her survival and the access to which is at the hands of the oppressed or the privileged section. One of the most significant and eternal source of power from the time immemorial has been 'land'. On the basis of land many have been time and again exploited and marginalized. Again, land if it has been the source of power it has also been the source of food, shelter and income.

Europeans from the period of Renaissance or even before, set it as a moralising task to enslave the natives politically and economically in the guise of civilizing them. The mechanism of colonisation was more often by force and the main target was that of political enslavement. The method of colonisation at most levels had been forceful, so even after consistent trials the colonizers somehow have been unable to completely colonize the psyche of the natives and as a result of which there has been instances of many nationalist reactions and struggles against the foreign regimes. Throughout the 20th century many nations have struggled and have been successful to overcome the political domination of colonising power and achieve independence but even after independence in a third world nation, quite a considerable sections of society faced the same old situation of domination and exploitation at the hands of political, social and economic forces, as a result of which the plight of many remain unchanged and for them independence was only an illusion. In the 20th century in many third world countries, in the name of progress, elites, industrialists along with the cooperation of the political class robbed the rights of the indigenous people from their own land. For the political class and the elites the land is the symbol of power and a medium to gain wealth. In the name of development poor families are forced to sacrifice their land to make way for corporate expansion which has become the idiom of the so called progress.

The theme of the rights of the land has been a prominent area of discussion among the intellectuals and it has been the reason of various revolts and again it has been a potent subject in literature and films. In mainstream hindi cinema also, the issue regarding problem of land has been quite often addressed. In this paper my aim is to focus on two mainstream Hindi movies- *Do Bigha Zamin* (1953) and *Chakravyuh* (2012) directed by Bimal Roy and Prakash Jha respectively and show how the problem of land as a concern of the marginalized has been highlighted in both the films. These two films largely deal with the problem of land and it also shows that how the political class and the big business houses for their ulterior motives have robbed off the lands of the poor through various manipulative means and force. I chose these two films in order to show that how the problem of acquisition of land still persists and how the act of depriving the poor from the rights of their land is still relevant today as it was in the past.

After gaining independence as most of the third world countries, India stressed upon the significance of industries in the growth and progress of the nation. *Do Bigha Zamin* shows the plight of the farmers after independence. The project of modernisation of India was heralded with the opening of numerous factories, mills and industries throughout the country and the emphasis was on production. Too much stress on the industries and factories somehow neglected the sorrow plight of the poor farmers for whom the land was their only asset. The film begins with the scene that how farmers are eagerly waiting for the rains and also shows that how elated and satisfied are they when rains come. Since, at that time there was no facility of irrigation so the farmers mostly had to be at the mercy of Rain Gods. It also shows that how the feudal and the industrial class together for their own profit seeking ventures deprive the farmer of his land which is his only possession, source of income and above all his identity. As the vogue of development was on swing, the feudal lords were in lurk of some alternative profit making ventures as Zamindari system was on the decline and was soon to be abolished by the government and the most profitable and powerful source of income was to own big factories, mills and industries. The feudal lords found the ownership of factories and mills synonymous to their feudal dominance as here too he would be the lord of the factory or the mill and would have enough opportunity to exercise his power and dominance over the workers who work in it and this would continue with the process of exploitation which they have exercised on the farmers throughout the centuries. The director Bimal Roy explicates that how the poor farmer was tricked and deprived of his land and the most heartening fact was that there was no governing body who could address his cause except that he had to be at the mercy of the court of law which ultimately gave a short time period to the poor farmer to return his debts. Thus it is shown under what precarious condition a farmer is forced to come to city in search of job in order to return his debts. To snatch away from the poor his profession (in this case depriving the poor farmer of his land) is the highest form of exploitation as it becomes immensely difficult for him as he needs to at first search a new profession and then learn the intricacies of that from the very beginning. The film further shows the struggle of the farmer and his family and ultimately ends in the tragic note where his land gets captured and setting up of factory is on the process and the irony of the whole situation is that everything happens legally. So the film highlights that how even after independence the poor farmers were exploited by the feudal lords and on the other by the emerging process of industrialization in which every attempt was been made to deprive the poor of their rights.

In the movie *Chakravyuh* the director Prakash Jha highlights the issue of acquisition of land of the indigenous people. In this movie Jha along with the issue of the acquisition of land also address the issues of Naxalism and also highlights the role of the Government and that of

the corporate world in this context. The issues which he tries to address are in more than one way linked with each other. The reason for choosing Chakravayuh is that it is recently one of the films in the mainstream Hindi cinema which somehow raises the issue of acquisition of land and also highlights the issue of naxalism. In the film Jha tries to show that how the plight of the indigenous people has been the same as it was during the time when India gained independence or the British era. The tribals and the small farmers are poor today in the same way as earlier times. But the significant change is that there has been change and progress in the process of exploitation. Earlier as shown in *Do Bigha Zamin* it was the feudal lords and the vogue of industrialization that was responsible for the acquisition of the land of the poor and the Government was passive regarding the concern of the marginalized, but now in the era of globalization it is the big capitalist class with the active involvement and support of the Government who in order to make more profit and fulfil political goals is always in the lurk of acquiring land of the farmers in the name of development. Jha in the movie shows that how the government along with the corporate bodies try to acquire the forest land as their prime interest lies not in the welfare of the indigenous people but the motive is to acquire the minerals that lies beneath those lands for setting up big industries and factories which would fill up their coffers and as a result of which development would spread in the area in such a way that there would be big housing complex, industries, hospitals and educational institutions run by the private body which would be ultimately affordable only by the affluent sections of the society and thus the poor and the unprivileged would automatically cease to exist. Thus by driving out the indigenous people and cleaning up the forests, the area would be branded as being developed and the credit of which would be given to the Government and that particular business class. Jha rightly shows that the issue of land acquisition cannot be dealt in isolation without addressing other issues like naxalism.

Through the story of friendship between two friends, Jha throws light on the conflict between Government and the Maoism. He shows how the Maoists think it justified to take arms against the Government for securing the rights of the tribals. Jha realistically tries to approach about the whole problem. He exposes the policy of Government whose aim is more to get rid of the issue of naxalism and clearing way for the multinational companies than to think upon the real welfare of the people of those areas. In the film it is shown that the Government totally remains silent when the Mahanta Group chairman takes the help of saffron goons to demolish the villages of the natives and also forces the officer in charge to free the culprits. In some way or the other Jha seems to be sympathetic with the Maoists but also doubts the notion that “Justice flows from the barrel of gun.” He somehow seems to doubt the possible outcome or the solution of this struggle. The film has tried to harp on different interrelated issues but to be certain it is a critique of the capitalist version of progress which annihilates the poor from the whole scene. But somehow the themes have not been dealt in great depth; one reason may be its complexity. One of the lacking areas in my opinion is that more focus has been given on the character of Arjun Rampal due to which issue of the problem of land was not adequately dealt in detail. Here lies one of the main drawbacks of the main stream Bollywood movies where focus is more on the heroes than the themes. There is always an effort to transcend a character from the status of being an actor to that of the hero. So, the film is more character oriented than theme or issue oriented. Again, Jha has tried to portray the character of Arjun Rampal as an ideal police officer who though at the beginning sympathises with the local people but fails to understand the root cause of their problems and like many others think that corporate investment in that area can only improve the plight of the people of the area. The character of Arjun Rampal is a person who

is a staunch follower of nationalist ideology, who keeps the duty assigned to him above everything. He is among those people who views Nation as a phenomenon that has to be worshiped and thus keeps it on supreme level but fails to understand and overlooks the problems of the people who constitute or make that concept nation. This further throws light upon the fact that the civil servants, army and police are trained in a fashion that they ultimately become pawns and servants of the political parties that run the Government and frame its policies rather than being the protectors of nation and its people. So, both the films in their own distinct ways show that how the indigenous people are robbed off of their identities and rights.

So, while *Do Bigha Zamin* shows how feudal forces adopting the process of industrialization deprives the poor of their rights, *Chakravyuh* on the other hand shows that how Globalization as a concept ultimately means the annihilation of the poor and how in rural India, the impact of Globalization is just a replacement of the feudal paradigm which is working very subtly with the consent of the authorities in fast robbing off the space of the unprivileged. Comparing both the films it can be asserted that in *Do Bigha Zamin*, the main protagonist is the poor farmer who is being exploited and so the audience witnesses the firsthand portrayal of his plight while in *Chakravyuh* we find that though the concerns of the tribals are addressed but they remain in the background and are not among the main characters. So, the audience is unable to know their viewpoint and hear their voice. This has often been the case; it is the affluent, elites or the dominant section that represents the cause of the marginality and act as pseudo sympathisers. It is the reason that even after independence many sections of society have remained marginalized.

While concluding it may be asserted that films in today's age are the most powerful medium accessed by the masses mainly for the purpose of entertainment but it is a medium which like other literary media is a critique of life and mirror to society. There must lie some responsibility with the film makers to contribute to the cause of the society and make films for the cause especially of those people who do not have the access to the basic amenities of life instead of merely harping on same old 'masala' themes as films are not simply about 'entertainment, entertainment and entertainment'.

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