

Storytelling of reality in realistic cinema '*Court*' (2014) with the perspective of Bazin's realism film theory: A case study

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ABSTRACT

Cinema is known as the mirror of society in worldwide. It reflects the people, places, ideas, thoughts, behavior, problems and various issues of society. Parallel cinema had shown this reflection of society in earlier years. Some of the Marathi Cinemas were influenced by the new wave of parallel cinema movement. Cinema is a complete process in itself. Storytelling is most important and comparatively most influential part of it. Storytelling can be divided in two ways. One is the content and events in story, i.e. story, characters, locations; and the other is mode of delivering it on screen i.e. film treatment, camera techniques and editing.

In recent years most appreciated and critically acclaimed movie was '*Court*' (2014). Movie was called best realistic movie of its time. It is having great social significance, presenting a postmodern, humanist point of view. But along with the content of reflecting reality, there is another angle which must be explored. A realistic film storytelling should be seen through the lens of realism film theory. This study includes the discussion of realistic cinema storytelling with the case study of '*Court*' (2014) in the perspective of Andre Bazin's realism film theory. This cinema is examined by above mentioned both ways of storytelling. This case study explains how the realistic cinema '*Court*' has shown its realistic storytelling ability stands differently which is rarely seen in Indian cinema ever.

Keywords

Storytelling, Realism, Court, Bazin, Cinema, Realistic film, Film theory.

1. Introduction

Cinema is known as the mirror of society in worldwide. It reflects the people, places, ideas, thoughts, behavior, problems and various issues of society. Parallel cinema has shown these reflections of society in earlier years. Some of the Marathi Cinemas were influenced by the new wave of parallel cinema movement. Marathi cinemas like Jabbar Patel's *Saamna*, *Simhasan* and *Umbartha*, Amol Palekar's *Akriet* and *Bangarwadi*, Rajdutt's *Shaapit*, Nachiket and Jayu Patwardhan's '*22 June 1897*' came up with similar genre like parallel cinema. In 21st century, one Marathi film came with untouched storyline and realistic approach. Not only this film received critically acclamation but also became the India's official entry for Oscar awards. The film was '*Shwaas*'(2003). After 50 years long wait Marathi film was able to win National award too. Previous one was '*Shyamachi Aai*' in 1953. This cinema became the first step towards resurgence of Marathi cinema. It brought a significant change within the Marathi cinema. After *Shwaas*, Marathi filmmakers started to bring the realistic cinemas on the screens. It brought a new wave of realistic cinemas in Marathi industry. In the year 2014 a cinema called '*Court*' made its milestone entry. Young director Chaitanya Tamhane made significant film experiment by directing a realistic film '*Court*'.

If we take the close look of films, one can easily say that storytelling in the film is undoubtedly significant and important part of film. Every film has its own way of storytelling, so does the realistic films. This research aims to understand the storytelling of realistic film '*Court*' with the perspective of Bazin's realism film theory.

2. Types of cinema

- **Mainstream film:** It can be defined as commercial films. These films are made by major entertainment studios or companies. Better availability of finance, allow these films to afford more expensive actors, wide releases or limited releases and are sold at popular retail stores.
- **Low-budget film:** A motion picture shot with little or no funding from a major film studio or private investor. They are either shot using professional or consumer equipment. Many young or first time filmmakers shoot low budget films to prove their talent before doing bigger productions. Modern day young filmmakers rely on film festivals for pre promotion. They use this to gain acclaim and attention for their films, which often leads to a limited release in theatres. Some low budget films gain a cult following and this often leads to a wide release.
- **The New wave cinema:** The 'New Wave' group of young French and Italian film directors of the late 1950s and 1960s, who wished to discard many of the conventional formulae of the current cinema. They used the freedom of light- weight hand- held cameras outside the studio, with innovative story lines and unconventional editing and sound. Realistic films were part of this movement.
- **Parallel cinema:** It is completely opposite of main stream or commercial cinema. Usually these films depicts the issues and problems, those are being faced by the common society members but parallel to the main stream entertaining cinemas. It has typical audience as it talks about society issues. Indian cinema has experienced parallel cinema movement previously. This movement had significant impact on Indian film history by their own unique style.

3. Review of literature

In the doctoral research "Neorealism in Indian Cinema: 1944-69" (2012) Sharma Manoj discussed about neorealism that the main characteristics of neorealist cinema were authentic settings, natural dialogues, non-professional actors, naturalistic lighting and simple direction. In Italy, under Fascist rule the kind of cinema that was being created was detached from reality and aimed at promoting an ultra-nationalist propaganda. He further stated that Neorealism's techniques and concerns were rooted in Indian reality which had poverty, inequality, unemployment, caste and class conflict, regional and religious divide, patriarchal oppression and overarching authority of the state. He also mentioned that the colonial and post-colonial scenario was felt by Indian filmmakers. They borrowed from its stylistics and also tried to adapt and modify to suit their own styles. Satyajit Ray, Guru Dutt, Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak and Bimal Roy were committed to this kind of cinema.

In the research paper 'Nationhood, authenticity and realism in Indian cinema: the double take of modernism in the work of Satyajit Ray' (2000) Vasudevan Ravi stated in the context of Indian film studies, the classical realist text has been given a particular inflection, where it has been aligned with the development of a culture of modernity with certain political ramifications. He further mentioned that these comprise the understanding that realist cinema addresses, indeed seeks to constitute a modern spectator invested in the cognitive practice of individualized perception central to the development of a civil society of freely associating individuals. He found that a realist art cinema is then part of a culture of civil society which in practice is the preserve of a small segment of society quite at a remove from wider weaves of social and political subjectivity.

The book 'Film Theory: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies' (2004) written by Simpson Philip, Utterson Andrew and Shepherdson K.J. They discussed about filmmakers like Robert Bresson, De Sica, Renoir, Rossellini and Orson Welles had in common was a desire to put cinema at the service of what Bazin called a fundamental faith in reality. The credibility of a film did not come from its verisimilitude but from the identity between the photographic image and its object. They further mentioned for Bazin, realism was a style whose chief elements were the long take, deep focus, limited editing and, when possible, the use of non-professional, or at least relatively unknown actors. Realism for Bazin was both the essence of cinema- its ontology and rhetoric whose keys were simplicity, purity and transparency.

In the research paper on Cinematic Realism in Bigelow's "The Hurt Locker" Meyer Kely defined how much Andre Bazin's realism theory was used in Bigelow's cinema. She further stated that early film theory has its basis in one major goal: to define film as art in its own right. She mentioned The Hurt Locker (Bigelow, 2008) is largely regarded as a "realist" film. Bigelow's stylistic filmmaking and a fragmented narrative offer the viewer an opportunity to delve inside the harried mindset of an EOD team in Baghdad. She observed that there are many understated formative qualities of The Hurt Locker that support Bazin's ideas.

4. Realism film theory

Andre Bazin, French theorist and critic, held film realism in high regard. Bazin felt that cinema was exceptional as an art form not because of the ways its formal elements could be manipulated, but instead for the incredible capability of a machine to use light to create an image of reality. Bazin believed that film reached its greatest potential when it represented real time and space. He focused on elements perpetuate spatial reality: long takes, deep focus shots, and minimal shifts through editing. Bazin was concerned with the realism of perception rather than content and he advocated for films that allowed spectators to make choices that give them a more democratic role in the viewing process. In an excerpt from What is Cinema Bazin wrote, "Cinema is a conquest of realism-not certainly, the realism of subject matter or realism of expression but that realism of space without which moving pictures do not constitute cinema."

The book 'What is Film Theory' (2010) written by Rushton Richard and Bettinson Gary unfolds the various film theories. They stated in this book "Formative theorists discuss film in framework that values the unique ability of filmmakers to use elements such as cinematography, montage, art direction, and sound to set it apart from other media and from reality. Realist theorists examine cinema from a standpoint that places great value on film's ability to literally recreate images of our world. All theories have a common interest in film as a distinctive process that has the ability to show people the world in a new way. Realist film theory, the forte of theorist Andre Bazin, derives its significance from its focus on analyzing a medium whose formative elements allow it to recreate reality."

Realism film theory can be defined with some easy points that, things should be shown as things are actually in reality. Bazin believed that photograph is recreation of the reality and so the cinema too. It is the recreation of experiences. In realistic cinema the subject and treatment should be same i.e. reality. In these kinds of cinemas most of the characters should be played by the non professional actors. Minimal camera movements and on location shooting gives the feel of reality. Minimal editing and original location sound should be included in cinema. All these are some major characteristics of realistic film as per the realism film theory.

5. Storytelling of the cinema

Storytelling is the backbone of cinema. If we dissect the cinema in smaller parts, we will find the storytelling as biggest part among them. To analyze the cinema, one needs to analyze the storytelling. Storytelling can be divided in two different categories one is the content and other is form.

In the content category there are some major sub-categorization is necessary like story, characters, events that took place in the story and locations.

5.1 Story:

Court cinema has crafted with unique story. The story took place in the Mumbai, Economical capital of India. Cinema's name 'Court' itself says the core of the story. This is the story of an old social activist, folk artist Narayan Kamble. He usually writes the songs, poems and presents it in the society. Mainly the common working class people are his specific crowd for the

plays and acts. He was arrested by the police and charged him for one of the scavenger's death. The main allegation was Narayan Kamble made him to suicide by his song, where he said scavengers should stop this work or they should commit suicide for doing this work. Story goes further with this proper procedure of case in court, debates of both the prosecutors, procedures of system. Later on it reveals that it was not the suicide and it was the accident and Narayan cannot be held under this charge. Simultaneously another case was registered on Narayan with different charges. Story moves on with these controversial statements and acts. Finally it comes to summer vacations of the court and but again court denied to give bail as he was charged with sedition offences. The story gives us the actual feel of procedure of system, court, police etc. How this system runs with immense coldness and completely lazy approach. The story reflects this reality in its every aspect. The story took place with multilingual situations i.e. Marathi, Hindi, Gujarathi and English. This shows the mixed multilingual culture of society in Mumbai city.

5.2 Characters:

The characters shown in the Court are absolute depiction of the society. Every character is crafted as representation of the particular characteristic. Narayan's character depicts the true social activist with rebelling ideology. The surname 'Kamble' itself gives audience the idea as its identity linked with Ambedkariet ideology. Usually social activist are radical about their thoughts. He looks like communist activist as he works for the workers upbringing. His song attacks on the class structure of the system and society. He has shown as fearless about his doings and acts.

Two prosecutors are involved in the story. One is Narayan's lawyer and other is public prosecutor. Narayan's lawyer is actually working for human rights activities. He is one of the representatives of such lawyers, working for the human rights in the society. He is never shown worried about the fees that supposed to be paid for being lawyer of Narayan's case. The public prosecutor is shown the female character. She is shown with absolute stunning characteristics of public prosecutor. She is nothing to do with Narayan's actualities, she takes it as her job only. She is eager to finish the case and make him to be jailed as soon as possible. This typical characteristic is absolute usual in other public prosecutors.

The judge is one of the most important characters in this story. He is shown as usual judge of court. He is nothing to do with case. He just taking it as job role, not thinking too much on evidences carried in front of the court. Rationality is not there during the sessions, going with typical approach and mindset about the Narayan Kamble. The police inspector is also one of the important characters in this story. The inspector is absolute representation of Indian police system. His casual approach in collecting evidences is shown perfectly. The use of stock witness by inspector is absolute reflection of reality of system.

Every person has two different lives, one is professional life and other is private life. Narayan's layer's private life is also shown in the story. He is shown same kind of behavior in his private life too. It clearly signs that he not using any kind of hypocrisy. The public prosecutor and judge are shown with dual personalities. They are different in private life. Public prosecutor is shown as careless about the Narayan as seems to be criminal only for her but on other hand she is very kind and caretaking mother as well as wife in her personal life. The judge is also having this dual personality. He is something different in professional life. Though he is supposed to be rational as the judge but in personal life he is completely irrational and having blind beliefs. Through these characters director shows the reality in Court cinema.

5.3 Events in story: The events in the story depict the reality in every aspects of the cinema. The regular life of Narayan Kamble is shown in opening sequences of story. Then the arrest of Narayan, introducing his lawyer, his introductory conversation with officer in charge of the case, denial of bail, procedure of court for standing the case in court room, regular happenings in court, typical approach of system towards the rebelling social activist, typical boring debates of the court room, other case in court, casual approach in the investigation by police, use of stock witness in the court by police, granting the bail, again arrest of Narayan on other charges in different case gives us the feel of reality. It makes to feel as it happens around us. On other hand the events that took place in the story makes public's opinion even concrete about laziness of system.

5.3 Division of form:

In the form category there are two major sub-categorizations is necessary like camera techniques and editing. For this study researcher has gone through every single shot, scene of the cinema. As per the basic elements of realism theory, below table shows the actual statistical count of shots in cinema.

Table-1
Form division of shots in cinema

Forms	Numbers/Shots	Total shots
Lang Takes (More than 10 Seconds)	126	126
Mise-e-scene	121	
Still shots	120	
Eye level shots	120	
Long shots	72	
Mid shots	54	
Deep focus	86	
Seamless editing	126	

6. Uniqueness of cinema and direction

- Director makes highly political comment during the whole cinema. He talks about the court, its procedure, the police department system and social system
- This cinema eradicates the typical structure of Indian cinema. It has included any kind of melodrama in the story. There is no family drama, songs, dramatic events in the story. It does not have any hero or heroine.
- The cinema talks about only present situation, it doesn't talk about any historical backgrounds or flashbacks.
- This cinema gives the actual feel of reality with linear type of storytelling of the story.
- The director Chaitanya Tamhane shown very neutral approach in direction. The direction looks like the news or documentary style direction. It is completely rare direction style in Indian cinemas.
- Postmodernism is showed in the cinema. Except Narayan's lawyer, nobody is thinking about Narayan Kamble. Every other character is nothing to do with Narayan. Emotion less society and people are shown in the story, which has become the post modernist approach.
- Most of the shoot of cinema has taken on locations and has minimal use of studio.
- Disinvestment of the system is depicted in the cinema. Court, lawyer, the crowd in court, police are completely looks separated with each other. There is no connectivity at all between each other.
- Cinematic metaphors are frequently used with absolute comments on the behavior of system.
- Court is shown as one of the character in cinema. It is absolute steady and calm, coldly watching everything happening there.
- In the last scene of the film, director made absolute stunning and realist comment on the system. In the last scene he depicted the behavior of system. Sleeping system is shown (the judge), some minors of the society were shown as making chaos (Children), system get irritate, woke-up from sleep, catches and slaps on his face as he is one of the most powerless, poor minor of society (one child) and again the system sleeps after this (The judge).
- Subject of the story and treatment of film is same i.e. reality.

7. Conclusion

Court was released in 2014 and directed by Chaitanya Tamhane. The film received many national and international critics award. The film was appreciated all over for its realistic expression, unique cinematic technique, storytelling, treatment and many more. This research aimed to observe and analyze its storytelling of reality with the perspective of French theorist and critic Andre Bazin's realism film theory. This cinema gives the feel of unbearable coldness to the audience. During the film audience started to experience the laziness, uncertainty of the system. Director wanted to express the reality of system with the realist way and he is succeeded in it.

The content i.e. story, characters, events in the story, locations and form i.e. camera techniques, editing is absolute to the mark as per mentioned in the theory. Evolution of storytelling defines that it reflects the reality in the film. The cinema Court looks not only realistic but somewhere hyper realistic in its manner. This case study comes to end with the expression, that the film itself followed the Andre Bazin's realism film theory at par. So this film becomes one of the rarest film expressions of realistic cinemas in India.

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