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THE IMPACT OF LIBERALIZATION, PRIVATIZATION AND GLOBALIZATION [ICLPG-2021]

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Editor In Chief:

Mr. J. BENET RAJADURAI

Assistant Professor,
Department of Humanities – Sociology,
St Francis De Sales College, Bangalore.100

Dr. P. KUMARAN

Assistant Professor, P.G. & Research Department of History,
C. Abdul Hakeem College (Autonomous),
(Affiliated To Thiruvalluvar University - Vellore),
Melvisharam – 632 509, Ranipet, Tamilnadu

Prof. S.C. ANDREW MICHAEL

Assistant Professor,
Department of Sociology,
Loyola College of Social Sciences,
Trivandrum, Kerala.

Dr. K. M. A. MOHAMED OMER FAROOQUE

Assistant Professor, P.G. & Research Department of History,
C. Abdul Hakeem College (Autonomous),
(Affiliated To Thiruvalluvar University - Vellore),
Melvisharam – 632 509, Ranipet, Tamilnadu

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Dr. NISHAJOLLY NELSON

Head, Department of Sociology,
Loyola College of Social Sciences
Trivandrum, Kerala.

TRANSMISSION OF LITERARY THOUGHT THROUGH NETFLIX DIGITAL STREAMING PLATFORM: A STUDY OF SOCIO- CULTURAL DYNAMICS IN THE FILM *AJEEBDAASTAANS*

Mrs MARIA SHAIKH AHMED

Assistant Professor (English), Ramniranjan Jhunjhunwala College
Ghatkopar, Mumbai- 400 086.

Abstract:

The movie *AjeebDaastaans* streamed online on the Netflix platform throws light on different facets of human life. The film consists of four individual narratives- "Majnu", "Khilauna", "GeeliPucchi" and "Ankahi". The paper titled "Transmission of Literary Thought through Netflix Digital Streaming Platform: A Study of Socio- Cultural Dynamics in *AjeebDaastaans*" focuses on the identities of neglected individuals with multiple identities. The research establishes that digital streaming platforms play a great role in depicting how sweeping change destabilizes traditional norms of society by revolutionizing thinking of millions of users across the world. The film *AjeebDaastaans* is a glaring example of how streaming platforms as Netflix bring about a great change in socio- cultural dynamics which leads to the emergence of a new digital culture. Also, literary thoughts of artistic freedom and rebellion have brought about a revolution in the film arena through Netflix, Amazon, Hotstar and many online streaming platforms.

Key Words: Marginalization, Transgression, Sexual identities and Culture

Paper

The paper "Transmission of Literary Thought through Netflix Digital Streaming Platform: A Study of Socio- Cultural Dynamics in *AjeebDaastaans*" brings to light significant aspects of the emergence of a new global culture influenced by modern technological innovations. The research establishes that digital streaming platforms play a great role in depicting how sweeping change destabilizes traditional norms of society by revolutionizing thinking of millions of users across the world. It also focuses on the broader aspects of culture and people representing different geographical regions are streamed online by accommodating their diverse identities in the digital space.

The protagonists in the movie *AjeebDaastaans* are symbols of a new wave of change in the socio- cultural sphere brought about by a wind of literary thought. The film blows off age- old ideas by presenting a new line of thought on the Netflix streaming platform through four separate narratives- "Majnu", "Khilauna", "GeeliPucchi" and "Ankahi". Each story resembles a geometrical segment that has a starting and a finishing point. An expanse of darkness for a short while at the close of each episode gives some time to the viewers to ponder over the real and unknown aspects of life. At the end of each story, a new narrative springs into action.

It is, therefore important to present a brief analysis of each segment of the narrative from the

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movie *AjeebDaastaans* in order to understand the role played by streaming platforms, especially Netflix, in transmission of literary ideas which would lead to a massive change in the socio-cultural approach of human beings. All the four stories exist independently and may not rely on each other to complete their meaning. However, these narratives are all merged into a single film for giving a glimpse into different facets of human life.

The first narrative titled *Majnu* from *AjeebDaastaans* is about the unhappy marriage of Lipakshi to the homosexual, Babloo. He may have transgressed social boundaries by accepting his homosexual identity but he warns Lipakshi to live an honourable life and preserve the traditions of his family. Lipakshi, in turn, openly flirts with men and gets involved in a torrid affair with Raj, her husband's employee. The story presents themes of betrayal through the action of different characters. Babloo makes homosexual advances towards Raj while Lipakshi also has a secret affair with Raj. On the other hand, Raj seeks revenge because Babloo mercilessly attacked his father and broke his leg for accidentally dashing his Mercedes to a flower pot. Raj also makes Lipakshi pack her bags and wait at the railway station for him but he never turns up. The handsome hunk, Raj takes revenge by looting Babloo financially and impregnating his wife, Lipakshi. At the end of the story, both Lipakshi and Babloo who are cheated by Raj hold hands and shed tears as both of them can feel the common pain of betrayal.

The lead character, Meenal, in the next narrative *Khilauna* is a housemaid in a plush locality. The entire focus of the story shifts to her tiny sister, Binny, the apple of her eye, who hides a little toy that belongs to the rich master's infant child. The tale centres on the investigation of the

murder of the little infant boiled in the pressure cooker when the lights went off during the house party. Although, the name of the killer is not openly disclosed at the end of the story yet the audience is clever enough to gauge that the little girl, Binny, who is always shown using the pressure cooker skillfully, thought that the child is a khilauna (toy) for the rich parents and she playfully puts the child in the pressure cooker on a high flame. The narrative also depicts the life of the poor yet vibrant maid, Meenal, who is on the brink of being seduced by her owner in return for electricity. Also, she demonstrates the hatred of the have-nots towards the richer classes.

GeeliPucchi is one of the most sensational narratives in the film *AjeebDaastaans*. The lead character of this segment is BhartiMandal, a single woman and the only female worker in a factory. She is qualified enough to get the position of a Data-Entry Operator at the same place but she is left heartbroken when Priya Sharma gets the job because she belongs to the upper caste. Further, they end up becoming good friends. Priya Sharma reveals that she liked another girl in her younger days and now she does not find satisfaction in her married life. She falls for the boyish Bharti in one of her weak moments and this scene clearly reveals that both of them are lesbians. On the other hand, when Bharti discloses that she is a Dalit and she belongs to a family of midwives, Priya who is on the verge of having a relationship with her does not want to go ahead any longer. Although they still remain very good friends, Priya sidelines her in the presence of higher officials and her family members. Later on, Bharti advises Priya to get pregnant and when she gets busy with her child she handles her work efficiently. Since Bharti knows that her mother-in-

நவீனத் தமிழாய்வு (பன்னாட்டுப் பன்முகத் தமிழ் காரணஞ்சூய்விதழ்) 3-5 ஜூன். 2021 - சிறப்பிதழ் (ISSN: 2321-984X)
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law does not want Priya to work after the birth of the child, she even goes to the extent of informing Priya's family members about the uncongenial environment of the factory. Due to family pressure, Priya finally quits the job and Bharti takes over as the new Data Entry Operator.

The plot of *Ankahi* revolves around a family drama in which the marriage of Natasha and Rohan is falling apart. She is frustrated with Rohan, her workaholic husband because he does not want to learn sign language to communicate with Samaira, their young daughter who is on the verge of turning deaf. She drifts into Kabir's arms when she gets a note from her husband in which he informs her that he will be leaving Samaira with her mother because he was too busy. The deaf photographer, Kabir, after sharing moments of intimacy with her follows Natasha to her house to express his feelings for her. When she sees her husband and Samaira chatting away freely, she has tears in her eyes. She had longed to see them together and so she shuts the door on Kabir's face.

The online digital platform, Netflix, in the film *AjeebDaastaans*, therefore, depicts all the above characters in traditional setting of urban and rural areas in India. These characters may seem to be rooted in their culture but they do not hesitate to break the mould of tradition time and again to find freedom. Lipakshi finds nothing wrong in having a relationship with Raj because her husband cannot satisfy her sexual desires. At first, Priya has a geelipucchi moment with Bharti and frustration leads Natasha into an extra-marital affair. Such bold ideas would have not been accepted easily by the audience thronging theatres to watch action-packed movies, comedy and family dramas on the big screen. However,

when the same audience watches such movies with their ear-plugs on or even in the presence of family members, they immediately get exposed to the dark side of life they refused to face on physical theatre screens. Thus, streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon or Hotstar give a lot of scope to present ideas of homosexuality, lesbianism, and female sexual desire. Given the open arena of digital space of the internet, viewers readily absorb such bold concepts as products of a new culture. In the movie *AjeebDaastaans*, both male and female characters find more freedom to give voice to their inner feelings on the online streaming platform. The flamboyant characters depicted in this movie leave their own mark on the internet digital space, thereby etching out a distinct identity. However, these characters fail to cast a spell on the public when they move about on the screen in the physical space of cinema halls. For example, the movie-going populace could not accept a dwarf character, Bauua Singh (Played by Shahrukh Khan) and another character affected by cerebral palsy, Aafia Yusufzai Bhinder (Played by Anushka Sharma), in the film *Zero*. The 'macho-man' and the 'beautiful girl next-door' images were shattered by Bauua Singh and Aafia Bhinder. The film *Zero* was, therefore, a major flop at the box office and these wonderful characters suffocated on the screens of big cinema halls. Although present-day scriptwriters are more vocal about their thoughts, people do not accept their ideas when they dare to go against the grain. The macho-man and the traditional Indian woman image still mesmerize the minds of the Indian audience. They refuse to look at the real facets of life that they pretend to ignore. They also do not want to see what lies beyond masculinity and femininity. As in *AjeebDaastans*, they do not want gays/ lesbians as Babloo and Priya or a Dalit character like

Bhartito occupy the film arena and so these characters are marginalized from the physical cinematic space.

The marginalization of the minority groups from the 'major' cinematic space also does not allow their cultures to flourish. Thus, they find more representation on the internet digital space when the films representing the feelings of such marginalized characters are streamed online. Just like the characters breathe freely on the streaming platforms even the audience makes these characters famous by embracing their feelings.

The film *AjeebDastaans* has gained immense popularity due to the depiction of realistic characters living 'non-imaginary' lives. Although the characters in this film are fictional, yet the complexities in their life and their distinct sexuality is what makes them both 'real' and 'non-imaginary'. Bharti's unabashed lesbian sexuality combined with her Dalit identity, the feminine erotic desire depicted by Lipakshi and we also see the evils of class divide from the perspective of a maid- all these characters are true to life. The streaming platform makes the audience realize that such characters are present in the Indian milieu but they nullify their existence by misrecognizing/ derecognizing their identity.

These fictitious characters in the movie *AjeebDaastaans* are beyond the imagination of the theatre-going public. Therefore, they simply cannot relate to them and so they are 'non-imaginary' because they are not a part of popular imagination. So they easily fall out of cinematic spaces and can easily lose their credibility. Thus, such streaming platforms as Netflix come to their rescue by bringing the unknown stories of these protagonists to the center of the narrative.

Every story in the movie *AjeebDaastaans* depicts a slice of life. However, the culture of the present day world is in a state of flux as the most dominant traditions of the world are influenced by the booming internet culture and even the digital culture cannot do away with the practices of the physical world. In the following words:

There are two basic schools of thought. The first argues that existing cultures might find themselves essentially recreated in digital form as more and more life experiences, from the exciting to the mundane, play out in digital spaces. The second school of thought posits that the dominant digital culture emerging now is a separate culture unto itself. It seems likely that neither version of these imagined forms of digital culture will dominate; instead, we will likely see a combination of the two. Parts of existing culture will appear online as they do in the physical world and parts of digital culture will seem completely new, previously unfathomable because they could not or would not appear in the tangible world. (Poepsel "Media, Society and Culture")

If Poepsel's line of thought is applied to the movie *AjeebDaastaans*, then it can be argued that multiple sexual identities have never found a decent space in the traditional thought process and even in physical cinematic spaces. However, the online platform, Netflix streams these literary ideas depicted in the movie *AjeebDastaans* which are consumed by the masses through the online digital mode. This leads to a clash of culture practiced in the physical world and in the digital arena. However, this conflict leads to the evolution of a new culture in which both these worlds combine to influence each other.

Another important aspect brought to light is the movement of content across nations

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which dissolves boundaries that separate different regions on the globe. Also, the use of Subtitling procedures takes care of the language barrier. People from different places across the world come close through such streaming platforms because while watching such films there are chances of-

. . . associating identifiable political and socioeconomic characteristics that create a community of consumers who identify with the use of some visual elements and their symbolic meanings. . . a wider process of self-justification of indexing sites' actions. Images and site architecture are able to communicate norms, meanings, and shared values, reflecting a communion of interests, ideas and online behaviors. (Shagrir66)

According to the above quote, communities across the world can feel for each other because the content related to LGBT issues or Gender bias as depicted in *AjeebDaastaans* when streamed online depicts the universal need for liberty and socio-cultural change. The flood of cultures portrayed on these platforms depicts the diversity of human nature yet they share common ideas of self-autonomy and freedom. Also the thinker, Menner refers to "what Straubhaar calls 'cultural proximities' between nations that do not share borders or obvious cultural-historical connections" (191).

Further, the Central Board of Film Certification in India restricts the creative freedom of artists by censoring films/scenes involving nudity or vulgar language. Many films showcasing such content have been censored or they are pulled off the cinema screens because of their portrayal of bold and unconventional ideas. Although such literary ideas find their place in a novel, story or a play, filmmakers hesitate to depict

them on the big screen. This is because although LGBT community is protected by the law, their marginalization on the cinematic screen and in Indian society continues till today. However, online streaming platforms as Amazon and Hotstar, especially Netflix, have taken the lead in avoiding the censor scissor by bringing taboo subjects to the forefront. SagarPandit, a Business Head, at Netflix says:

It's a very open culture, but 'censorship' is a word that you can't use in our offices. It's considered a bad word....The internet is not a cathedral, it's a bazaar. Where in the traditional broadcast industry, everything was inside the cathedral, everything was linear, on the internet you cannot do that. The web has no boundaries. ('Censorship')

According to Pundit, the content that is available on these streaming platforms is unbiased and it has no limits and boundaries. The web gives space to people from all communities-. Therefore, such bold ideas are presented without any restrictions on these web screens. Thus, such films on these streaming platforms are viewed again and again by millions of subscribers because the portrayal of nudity and the use of vulgar language makes content more real and convincing.

The ideas of revolt, self-expression and quest for freedom find expression in literature. Apart from this, the usage of foul language and depiction of raw sexuality sets the trend of rebellion and freedom. Thus, online movie streaming platforms tend to change the traditional mindset of individuals and bring about great change in society by taking such bold ideas forward through transmission of literary thought.


Principal

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**Principal
Ramniranjan Munjhunwala College,
Ghatkopar (W), Mumbai-400086.**