



The Horrors of life without Woman Indian Dystopian movie Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women

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Abstract:

Matrubhoomi is a film based on the issue of female infanticide and female foeticide in a country like India and its effects on gender balance and the recurring social anarchy it creates. Matrubhoomi's female protagonist Kalki is the last surviving woman who reminding of Draupadi of the Mahabharata undergoes tremendous sexual oppression within family at the hands of male family members. After running through the festival circuit, including the 2003 Venice Film Festival, and 2003 Toronto International Film Festival, Matrubhoomi was commercially released two years later on 8 July 2005, with 150 prints. It was dubbed into six languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Bengali, and French. The film depicts the horrors of life without woman. The film boldly imagines, though it may look unrealistic to many, the femaleness world where in the absence of women the male members of society are transformed into animals. Dystopias generally depict futuristic and rotten societies. The places portrayed by dystopian works are defined by having great uncertainty and misery. They reflect chaotic systems where societal norms and gender roles are turned upside down, and which become perfect scenarios for the emergence of female leaders who can take control of the situation as they are no longer necessarily subjected to a patriarchal system. The idea of Matrubhoomi first came to Jha when he read about a village without women in Gujarat in a news magazine. One night in Paris while surfing the Net, he came across an article that said that over the years, millions of girl children had fallen victims to gender discrimination in India.

Keywords: Dystopia, Gender discrimination, Infanticide, Patriarchy, female feticide

Introduction

Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women is an Indian dystopian tragedy film written and directed by Manish Jha. The idea of Matrubhoomi first came to Jha when he read about a village without women in Gujarat in a news magazine. One night in Paris while surfing the Net, he came across an article that said that over the years, millions of girl children had fallen victims to gender discrimination in India. 'When French producer Patrick Sobelman asked him to produce an outline for a script on the subject, he wrote down a huge 200-page script but cut it to 70 pages, all within the space of a week. 'The project received a green light when its Indian producer Pankej Kharabanda came on board.'¹ Inspired by a magazine report about a village in Gujarat, which had no women, Manish Jha's Matrubhoomi: A Nation without Women portrays one of the grimmest realities of present day India. Manish Jha says, 'I wanted to examine the emotional and psychological impact of a society without women,' 'It is a very extreme situation ... a whole nation without women.'² 'It depicts a future in an Indian village populated exclusively by males due to female infanticide over the years.'³ Silverman says, 'Though cinema is a fairly recent

phenomenon as compared to literature and other fine arts, it is equally true that it is one of the most revolutionary art forms today. As film combines images and words it has certain correspondences and relationship with other forms of expression like novel, poetry and drama. We certainly do not "read" images in movie in the same way as we "read" images in a poem or story or novel.'⁴ Having grown up in Bihar, he said he was aware of the practice of female infanticide and wanted to write a script about a future village if the practice continued. 'As women became extinct, the film allowed him to bring to light issues like polyandry, bride buying and rape.'⁵ Matrubhoomi received widespread critical acclaim and was shown at festivals through 2003, including the 2003 Venice Film Festival, where it was presented in the Critic's Week and later awarded the FIPRESCI Award. 'For its important theme on women's issues and female infanticide handled with sensitivity by a first-time director.'⁶

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The term 'dystopia' comes from Greek prefix dys means "sick", "ill", "abnormal". According to Francois Ost, shown in his analysis of the sources of

the legal imagery contained in the works of Franz Kafka, imaginary societies where the conditions of existence are much worse than those of real societies. It seems that the term “dystopia was first used in 1868 by Greg Webber and John Stuart Mill in a speech at Britain’s Parliament.”⁷ Dystopias generally depict futuristic and rotten societies. The places portrayed by dystopian works are defined by having great uncertainty and misery. They reflect chaotic systems where societal norms and gender roles are turned upside down, and which become perfect scenarios for the emergence of female leaders who can take control of the situation as they are no longer necessarily subjected to a patriarchal system. Indian films have successfully projected and analyzed different issues concerning Indian women. Films like *Astitva* discusses the character of a woman neglected by husband; *Astha* portrays a woman who becomes a victim of financial crisis; *Bavandar* presents the plight of a Rajasthani woman who was raped for her agitation against child-marriage; *Water* reveals the condition of Indian widowhood, and *Fire* is concerned with the very sensitive issue of lesbianism. After running through the festival circuit, including the 2003 Venice Film Festival, and 2003 Toronto International Film Festival, *Matrubhoomi* was commercially released two years later on 8 July 2005, with 150 prints. It was dubbed into six languages, including Tamil, Telugu, Bhojpuri, Gujarati, Bengali, and French. The story of *Matrubhoomi* begins in a rural village in Bihar, with the delivery of a baby girl to a village couple. Her disappointed father, who was hoping for a boy, drowns her in a vat of milk in a public ceremony. ‘This unchecked trend leads to the village being populated mainly by males and a tiny number of older women.’⁸

The film *Matrubhoomi* revolves around Ramsharan, a rich landlord and widower and his five sons- Suraj, Brijesh, Lokesh, Shailesh and Rakesh. All sons are desperate for marriage excluding younger son Suraj. In a conversation with the priest Jagannath the father is ready to have any girl of twelve or thirteen years of age for his sons. But the priest replies: “Forget a girl of twelve or thirteen, even an eighty year old woman is not available”.⁹ Ramcharan finds out about a single young girl, named Kalki who lives some distance from the village and buys her from her father. After marriage Kalki quickly becomes a sexual object. ‘The central character Kalki being married to five brothers is analogous to Queen Draupadi being married to the Pandava brothers in Mahabharata. Kalki references the forecast of Vishnu's tenth incarnation, Kalki, who would end the Kali Yuga.’ She daily suffers sexual abuse at the hands of father-in-law and her four brothers-in-law. Only the youngest son Suraj treats her like a human being and Kalki, too, in return, shows her kindness and love

towards him. As she starts coming closer to the youngest son, all men of the family together kill Suraj. After this incident Kalki somehow escapes the hell with the help of a low caste servant boy and turns to her father for help, but the father hungry for dowry does not help her at all. The low caste servant boy is killed by the four brothers but the revenge is taken on Kalki and she is repeatedly raped. Eventually when Kalki becomes pregnant, one low caste person also claims for paternity. This creates a very chaotic situation in village and caste war is triggered off and every man in village gets killed. Kalki becomes pregnant and everybody rejoices. A new servant boy is appointed for her care. ‘As the news spreads, every man in the area claims paternity of the unborn child, which causes violence to break out in the village. The men kill each other off over the rights to Kalki and her child. In the meanwhile Kalki goes into labour. The film ends on a violent but hopeful note, as she births a baby girl.’¹⁰ The tale of Kalki, a metaphoric Draupadi who inhabits a rural India somewhere around 2050 killing nearly all as Kalki gives birth to a girl. The Mahabharata reference gives way to the forecast of Vishnu’s incarnation, Kalki, bringing an end to Kalyug. The film ends on a hopeful note showing Kalki giving birth to a female child and a little smile on her face a smile of hope for future.

Conclusion:

Matrubhoomi is a film based on the issue of female infanticide and female foeticide in a country like India and its effects on gender balance and the recurring social anarchy it creates. *Matrubhoomi*’s female protagonist Kalki is the last surviving woman who reminding of Draupadi of the Mahabharata undergoes tremendous sexual oppression within family at the hands of male family members who operate as arch patriarchs for her. The film depicts the horrors of life without woman. The film boldly imagines, though it may look unrealistic to many, the femaleness world where in the absence of women the male members of society are transformed into animals. There is no doubt that the film in order to create social awareness for women issues. *Matrubhoomi* ends with a birth of a baby girl in the family a new hope in future.

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