



LINGUISTIC REBEL IN NAGRAJ MANJULE'S FILMS

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Nagraj Popatrao Manjule (b. 1978) is an Indian film director, actor, producer, scriptwriter, poet, screenwriter, and filmmaker. He is best known for his Marathi film *Sairat*, short-film *Pistulya* for which he received National Film Award in Non-Feature Film category. His another film *Fandry* won the Indira Gandhi Award for Best Debut Film of a Director in 2018. Besides filmmaking, Nagraj is a sensitive poet. He published a book of poetry in Marathi titled *Unhachya Katavirudhha* (Against the Conspiracy of Heat) which won the *Bhairuratan Damani Sahitya Puraskar*.

Manjule grew up in Jeur village in the Solapur district of Maharashtra. He belongs to the traditionally-nomadic Waddar community, a Dravidian tribe. He earned his M.A. in Marathi literature from University of Pune, followed by a master's in communication studies from New Arts, Science and Commerce College, Ahmednagar.

Manjule is strongly inspired by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the emancipator of downtrodden and the father of the Indian constitution. His films are deeply rooted in his own experience growing up as a *Dalit* in rural Maharashtra. His films have focused on the plights faced by members of these communities, including social discrimination at the hands of high-caste communities as well as the resulting economic hardships.

His first National Award-winning short film *Pistulya* is a reflection of his 'felt experience'. The film focuses on the desire of a *dalit* boy to attend school, and his inability to do so because of his family's poverty and a deep-seated disdain for formal education within his community. His debut feature film, *Fandry*, was released in February 2014; the word means "pig" in the Kaikadi language. Manjule's second film, *Sairat*, premiered at the 66th Berlin International Film Festival. Like *Fandry* and *Pistulya*, it deals with caste discrimination and honour

killing, a practice still widespread in parts of India. *Sairat* also seeks to address discrimination based on caste, gender and class. Almost all his films are remarkable for linguistic rebel.

Manjule's views on language are rebellious. He has courageously expressed his views in numerous interviews and speeches. He believes that there is nothing like pure or impure language. All languages are pure as they effectively communicate feelings and thoughts. In an interview with veteran actor Kishor Kadam, he said, 'Language is also a factory and we the people create it. Language is a centuries-long process. Moreover, during the study, I also realized that languages are created only by working people, labourers, farmers and factory workers. Our Marathi also has words from Farsi, Kannada, Tamil, Sanskrit languages. There is no such thing as pure. The very concept of pure is very futile.' When asked about language of his films, he answered, 'your community, geography, city, nature, all determine your language, color, food and drink. In Konkan, coconut is more common in food, while we have more peanuts. My language is my language. The language of Sant Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram is also that of the village. But the city is not like a monitor. When I first came to Pune, I felt inferior about the language. Language is language and the purpose of

language is not to define, but to communicate. But rather than what we are saying, it is seen whether we speak grammatically correctly or not.' For him Language is just a means of communication. Nagraj blames the established class of using language as a tool of exploitation. Throughout the history, privileged classes have demeaned, devalued and exploited the masses using languages as a weapon. Being a student of language art and culture, Nagraj is well aware of this age long discrimination. There is a method in his art. It is not merely a coincidence that the titles of his films are far away from standard language of privileged class. There is logic behind it. He aims to give prestige to underprivileged words. Nagraj compels established class to accept the downtrodden words in Marathi language. His film is an artistic rebel that forces the audience to see the beauty in marginalised lives and words. His films are about the depressed and downtrodden community. There is maintained a fine balance in his portrayal of exploiters and the exploited. The conflict his depicted neutrally. The deliberate selection of words by Manjule in his script deserves a doctoral dissertation. The present research paper aims to highlight the choice and intention of the writer-director. The researcher has taken into account one short film and three

films written and directed by Nagraj Mnajule.

Pistulya - It's a short film written and directed by Nagraj Manjule. The title denotes revolver. In Maharashtra a tribe named *Paradhi* (Hunter) is defamed as a criminal community. Robbery and loot are the only means of their livelihood. The community is closely associated with weapons and police force. The new born babies are named after weapons and other crime related objects. The name Pistulya denotes to the destiny of the child who longs for education. The film is based on the life of an 8-year-old boy from the backward *paradhi* community, who struggles to educate his sister.

Fandry – (2013) It is a directorial debut of Manjule that focuses on a young boy's love amidst caste-based discrimination. The film, set in Akolner, a village near Ahmednagar, revolves around the issue of caste discrimination and narrates the story of a teenager from a Dalit family who lives at the village fringe, and falls in love with an upper caste girl.

Fandry is a fictional story set in the background of caste discrimination depicting the love of a 13-year-old boy. Jambhuvant Kachru Mane, nicknamed Jabya is a pre-teen who lives in a makeshift house on the outskirts of a caste

segregated village with his parents and 2 sisters (one a widow with a toddler). The surname Kacharu (garbage) reflects the social status of the family. The family belongs to the *Kaikadi* community, an oppressed caste, and earns its living by doing menial jobs. Owing to the caste-ridden power structure of the village society, the boy's father has a fearful and submissive personality which is exploited by upper-caste villagers. Jabya is disillusioned by the predicament of his family and shows interest in school where he has also fallen in one-sided love with a forward caste girl named Shalini (nickname: Shalu) (Rajeshwari Kharat) who he has never talked to but tries desperately to get her to notice him. In the end he understands that his own boundaries have collapsed in his attempts to assimilate with the other castes and has thus become vulnerable to their attacks. Reaching self-awareness for the first time in his life, he suddenly explodes in rage and grabs a rock and throws it at his oppressors, thus re-establishing his boundary.

Sairat - (2016) one of the most popular Marathi films ever, *Sairat* (Wild) is a romantic tragedy. It tells the story of two young college students from different castes who fall in love, sparking conflict between their families.

Manjule conceived the story in 2009, basing it on his experiences of caste discrimination, but scrapped it when he decided that it was boring. After making *Fandry* (2013), he revisited the story and completed its script the following year.

Prashant "Parshya" Kale is a low-caste young boy whose father is a fisherman. He does well in school, and is captain of the local cricket team. Archana "Archi" Patil is the daughter of a wealthy, upper-caste landlord and politician. Headstrong and also academically proficient, she enjoys driving a tractor and motorcycle. As they study in college, they fall in love and find ways to spend time with each other.

Jhund - (transl. *Herd, unorganised group*) is a 2022 biographical sports film based on the life of Vijay Barse, the founder of NGO Slum Soccer. The film is about a sports teacher, who, on the edge of retirement, makes a Football team of children from a slum area and how only a football game changed their life. This film is more about social issue and less about

football. The film is a commentary on what we as a society can do to help the have-nots identify their plus points and cross the boundary to leap onto the other, brighter side.

Nagraj is basically a poet. All his films are poems on the screen. His thirst for equality and his intense hatred for exploitation and superstitions can be clearly seen in all his films. However, the expression of the rebellious spirit is surprisingly polite and balanced. He just holds the mirror and shows the cruel face of social injustice. As far as language is concerned, he prefers day- to day words without glamour and prestige. He strictly avoids artificial, decorative and bombastic phrases which is common feature of mainstream Marathi films.

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