

Thematic and Cinematic analysis of the Films of Deepa Mehta

Dr. Sewa Singh Bajwa

Associate Professor,
Department of Journalism & Mass Communication,
Ch. Devi Lal University, Sirsa

Abstract: Women of today have not only conquered the outside world but have broken the patriarchy of male dominated society. From the heart of hers like that of a mother, the women have created films which are much more meaningful and depict a mirror of present day society. Her vision has outshone many films which relied more on male protagonist. The essence of her sweet innocence to delicate smile of hers like that of morning dew on the grass, the women have envisaged stories that are not in the vicinity of any male filmmakers. Reeling under the reality of naked truth happening inside the veils of a covertly framed society to narrating the rhythmical rhymes of aged old customs repressing her rights, women filmmakers have made everlasting films. Taking the films to an edge above other films, Mira Nair and Deepa Mehta have not left any stone unturned. Recreating the films that consist of real-life contempt, lessons and directs the society to whole new world where age-old customs are answered with rationality rather than inborn prejudices. Relapsed social syndrome which affected the lives of many females is exhibited through a better medium of kaleidoscope by these women of hope. This research paper endeavours to analyse the cinematographic and thematic aspect of the films of Deepa Mehta.

Keywords: Women, Patriarchy, Protagonist, Filmmaker, Custom, Social Syndrome, Kaleidoscope, Cinematographic.

Introduction:

Deepa Mehta is apt and holds an authority of its own kind in making films on bold issues concerning women in India. Her films are equally relevant for the womenfolk of other countries with traditional social set up. That is why her films have great and unparalleled universal appeal. Her films abound in a plethora of complex signs, symbols and metaphors which may be beyond the comprehension of common cine goer. Reviving each character's resemblance to real life characters, these women's imagination has carved some of the most amazing stories that have huge significance. Inducing the audience through the emotionally strong and hopeful stanzas in the narratives, the pinkish gender specific films making women directors of Indian origin have earned respect from across the globe. Self-belief, encouraging repressed souls to relive and withdrawing the curtains over the narrow minded perception of society, the films of women have acted as salvation for all the people who shunned their inner voices. There are scores of Women directors who have tried to depict the pinkish gender in different hues. Here is brief depiction of the life and careers of these women:

Deepa Mehta:

Deepa Mehta was born on 1st January 1950 and is a renowned Indo-Canadian film direct. Deepa Mehta is a transnational artist and a screen writer, director and producer, whose work has been called "courageous", "provocative" and breath-taking. She has been highly recognized for her Trilogy, 'Fire' (1996), 'Earth' (1998) and 'Water' (2005). 'Fire', which Deepa wrote and directed, is the first film in her Elemental Trilogy. 'Earth', based on Bapsi Sidhwa's acclaimed novel about Partition, Cracking India, is the second film in the Elemental Trilogy. Written and directed by Deepa Mehta, it is a light hearted, affectionate comedy about two mismatched lovers. Deepa's final film in the Elemental Trilogy is 'Water'. 'Water' is a powerful, hauntingly tragic story, set in Benares (Varanasi) in which a child widow at the age of eight is forced to enter a house of widow and who is forced to enter a house of widows where she has to live for the rest of her life. Deepa's work as an artist, as a progressive voice about social issues, and her generous mentorship has often been recognised. She has received numerous honorary degrees and many awards and honours.

Many film critics and editors have remarked her films as the production of artistic courage to elucidate the social lives of many and a beneficiary vision that helped many people to look beyond the prejudiced thinking and biased notions. Her writings and directed art works are regarded as provocative and astonishing as it leaves no folds in telling the story of an ordinary family.

Cinematography:

The cinematographer of the film 'Fire', Mr Giles Nuttgens, uses different camera angles, shots-to-shot in this film. He uses long shot for filming the scene where Sita breaks down and is consoled by Radha. Mr. Giles uses close-up and extreme-close-up shots to film the intimate scene between Radha and Sita. He uses another shot to film the bed-room scene where these two leading actresses portray their sexual desire for each other. He uses medium shot to film the scenes in kitchen where Radha helps Sita in cooking the food and both discuss the importance of a newlywed- to eat cardamom for the groom to drink half glass of milk. He uses low-angle shot to film the scene where Ashok gets violent with Radha and to an extent where he doesn't mind to try to extinguish the fire from catching her sari. He uses high- angle shot in the beginning of the film where Jatin and Sita are seen spending their time together in sight-seeing of marvellous Taj Mahal. He uses over-the-shoulder angle many times in the film where Jatin fights with Sita and in one scene where Radha and Sita sits at verandah to discuss about the rights and wrongs in their lives. He uses Dutch angle shot in the ending scene of the film where Sita gets extremely shocked to see Radha in a devastating situation.

In some scenes objective angle is used like in the introductory scene where Jatin (Javed Jaffery) and Sita (Nandita Dass) are standing under the roof of Taj Mahal.

The cinematographer of 'Water', Mr. Giles Nuttgens has used several cinematographic techniques in framing the film which is larger than life and denotes miserable lives of estranged widows. Using the techniques from lower camera angle to medium camera angle, Mr. Giles has approached unique camera angle techniques to capture some of the most relevant scenes which speak more about the disillusionment of women in the light of Hinduism. From using medium camera angle in picturing the entire film to the usage of low camera angle for moving the pyres at Ghats of Varanasi, Mr. Giles predatorily framed the anomaly of Hindu rituals which has smouldered the dignity of women. Colour scheme of natural surroundings of Ghats, skies, and rains are pictured as represented in the natural form by the cinematographer. Reverse shot is used when Chuhiya and Kalyani plays with each other during the rain. The cameraman shoots the entire film by using the medium camera angle and clicks a few shots like the one in which Chuhiya gives a Ladoos to an ailing lady in the Ashram. The usage of long angle camera shot in picturing the scene where a barber cuts Chuhiya's hair is praiseworthy. He uses a Dutch camera angle shot to portray the sorrowful suicide of Kalyani and for capturing the heart break scene of Mr. Narayan. The close-up camera angle shot is used in showcasing the embracing relationship between Mr. Narayan and Kalyani. Mr. Giles uses the over the shoulder camera angle when Kalyani sees in the eyes of Mr. Narayan for getting the assurance that his father will accept her as their daughter-in-law. Mr. Giles tries to portray the sentiments of women through several shots of the film. This film evokes the arising need of women's liberation. Music and songs are situational in the film that carries it forward.

Cinematography of 'Earth: 1947' has successfully been completed because of the hard bearing efforts of Mr. Giles Nutgens. While making Earth, he uses camera angles like established camera shot and master shot. Major part of the film is shot by using mid shot camera angles. In the scene where a train is coming from Gurdaspur to Lahore station, he uses established camera shot so that viewers are able to get the view of the full scene. For shooting the climax scene, he uses a dolly zoom camera angle to feature the fierce and forceful presence of Muslim mob facing Lenny's family. In this shot, he also featured Dil Nawaz to showcase his rising dominance. Mr. Giles has shot most of the conversation among Dil Nawaz, Shanta and Lenny by using the low angle camera shot. For filming the eating style of people in the film, he uses the master shoot. There is a scene in the film in which Dil, Hasan, Shanta, Sher Singh along with Lenny are seen eating food together. This is the scene, where Mr. Giles took the help of the master shot to capture the togetherness of old time friends whose friendship soar through the passing times. Cinematographer brilliantly shot the theatrical sequences in the film. With the use of colours, lightning and props cinematographer creates unnatural mise-en-scene in the film.

Thematic analysis:

Deepa Mehta's 'Fire' is a joint family-centric film that depicts the repressed culture and traditions of the society. Ashok represents the patriarchal society wherein male dominates the women and other members of the family. Being the head of the family he tries to suppress the feelings and desires of her wife, brother and sister-in-law. Female protagonists Radha and Sita dare to challenge the suppression unwelcome and rebel against the verdict of traditional society and indulge in a homosexuality. They just don't want to remain the breeding stock and tied tightly in age old cultural bonds. Infertility is considered as a curse for Radha that leads her to devoid her of the pleasures of physical desires. Similarly, Sita faces the hardships of dejected marriage while her husband Jatin enjoys an illicit relationship with his Chinese girlfriend. Female head of the family Bijli is a traditionalist believes in the cultural and traditional bonds. Mundu, the servant, also bears the burden of unsatiated sexual desires that leads to his jealousy towards the illicit relations of Radha and Sita. Masculinity is depicted in the character of Sita when she smokes and wears Jatin's clothes. Hiding reality in the guise of blatant lies points out the compulsion of unity in the joint family system. Deepa Mehta wisely depicts romance and drama through verbal and non-verbal communication in the film. Attire and location in the film provide a sense of familiarity to middle class Indian population. Dialogues in the film carry rich content derived from Indian rituals and traditions. Director successfully attempts to exhibit suppressed feelings of female protagonist through intense dialogues and throws a light in the trapped world of two women.

Director of 'Fire' sensibly portrays homosexuality through simple and intense dialogues which deal with emotional and social stigma of the society. Film is not about sex, it is about searching true love and get physical pleasures irrespective of gender. Close up and extreme close up shots give expression to the characters in a wider sense. Love, solace, prejudiced opinions, suppression and repression are beautifully exhibited by Deepa Mehta in this film. Overall the cinematic treatment succeeds in portraying the theme which has long been considered a taboo in Indian society. This film exhibits that no supreme societal rule is above the choice of any set of individuals. Having feelings of lesbian may be deniable in the society but it is fully justifiable in the eyes of unsatiated souls. It is an eye-opening film to lots of people whose minds still cultivate age old male chauvinist traditions.

Deepa Mehta's another film 'Water' depicts the unhappy condition of widows. Like 'Fire', 'Water' also underlines the desires of the women which are suppressed in male centric society. They are not allowed to wear, eat and act as per their respective desires. They have to wear chaste white sarees and are forbidden to apply any makeup on their faces. In the film, life of the widows is depicted as stagnant water. Though they are not allowed to assist in any sacred rites and rituals but they are forced to earn livelihood by becoming prostitutes. With unique and sensible cinematography and colour scheme, the director exhibits the painful sufferings of widows in the film. Character of Chuhiya is a satire on the patriarchal society and its traditional rituals and customs. The most distressing part that triggers wave of discomfort is the act of child sexual abuse of Chuhiya that brings tears in the eyes of spectators. Depiction of the fate of widows through the character of Kalyani is shown brilliantly. By using the medium shots in high and low camera angles, some scenes portray the emotions of characters skilfully. Though there is not a rich feast of shots yet

the film brilliantly depicts the theme on celluloid tape without extravagant shots. The cinematography seems appropriate and does full justice with the theme. Sculptures of gods and goddesses, and many other props enhance the meaning and add beauty to the film. Ray of hope is visible in the lives of widows that they still believe in the existence of God. Character of a pimp is beautifully exhibited in the film. Film also points out that animals and birds can be better companions in solitude and provide much needed solace to the soul. Through the character of Mr. Narayan, the director depicts that not only women but men are also the victims of social taboos. Film elucidates the expression for the change in the climax scene and pleads the audience to oversee the discourse of change in the guise of immoral practices. A widow even in the male chauvinism society is not liable to lose her dignity.

'Earth: 1947' lays emphasis on different reasons that lead to riots and fratricidal tendencies in people during partition in 1947. Deception and dishonesty of people is shown in the narrative. Religious tension among Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims that would affect many future generations is wonderfully portrayed in the film. Symbols and cinematography exhibit the overall vision of the director. 'Earth' is the symbol of mother but its division speaks about the uncomfortable lives of people at the partition of India. The film unfolds the fate of Shanta who has down-to-earth nature but treats Shanta as an object. Signs and Symbols used in the film help the spectators to understand the non-representational concepts of the films. Language act as carrier of different mood-swings in the film. Abusive words and wisdom enriched dialogues are utilized wonderfully by the characters in the movie. Cinematographer of the film uses tight shots and camera angles like establishing camera shot to depict the scene of Lahore when a train loaded with dead bodies arrives at railway station. Dialogues and camera angles help in the development of plot of the film. Attire of the characters is strictly according to their religion but there is a flaw in the attire of the characters. Though it is the time of the partition but they all are seen wearing warm clothes. Depiction of bloodshed through various camera angles makes the film more realistic and pulsating. Director, through long-lasting music, exhausted powered whistle of the train, soothing sound of horse drawn cart, yelling of a peacock, screaming of guards during the partition, silence of vulnerable people parting with their place along with their belongings, eerie shadows on the characters and animals etc. wonderfully depicts their emotions and situations. The film shows people divided on the basis of land, religion and wrecked fundamentalism. This is a sign of devastating lives of many unknown people. Its title is very appropriate to the content ingrained in the plot as the instances remain gloomy and desperate. The plot of the film remains very sensitive till the end. The climax of film sends shivers down the spine of the audience and the most disgusting history showcases the plight of many unfortunate ones who swayed into oblivion in dismayed manner. Deepa Mehta in her trilogy 'Fire', 'Water' and 'Earth: 1947' explores hidden, dejected and forbidden issues prevalent in patriarchal society.

Apart from the Trilogy, Deepa Mehta also directed 'Midnight Children' based on the novel of Salman Rushdie. 'Midnight Children' is about the life journey of Salim Sinai, born in the midnight hour of India's independence and possess the power of hearing depressing voices of other kids who are too born at midnight of New India. Splendid Dal Lake in Srinagar, beautiful surroundings of Lahore, Karachi and Rawalpindi are depicted through medium and long shots. Apart from medium shot, reverse shot, Dutch angle shot, extreme long shot and over the shoulder shots are used for filming emotional instances among the leading characters. This film is a historical piece in revisiting the history of India and providing clues about volatile structural loop holes in the edifices of a democratic nation. Some significant and meaningful dialogues build up the plot of the movie. The rigidity in the voice of Salim's father after discovering that the child is not his biological off-spring and earnest gestures of Salim's mother to allow his family to accept him is well exhibited. Rich vocabulary, extraordinary colour palette, wisely formed cinematography and appropriate attire makes the film worth watching. The leadership of Nehru and his actions in leading to the partition of India by carving out a new country, Pakistan, at the midnight of 14th August 1947 leads to the sacrifice of many lives to a fratricidal war are vividly described. The war of Muslims against other Muslims and demanding the separation of the East Pakistan from the West Pakistan underline the notion of a dismantled Islamic country. With a civil war emerging inside its own territories, the intensity of trauma enhances the fear in the minds of many civilians. The film shows cases how an incorrect political discussion brings about the inevitable death sea that takes away the lives of anonymous people without informing them. It is known in history that the creation of Bangladesh in 1970 rippled waves of atrocities in the lives of unknown individuals. Deepa Mehta's incredibility in reframing the exact unavoidable incidences with such precise is the reaping fruit to the country like India privileged with glorious past. The film depicts that the audacity of hope is bigger than the thoughts of downgrading pessimism which comes to people quite often.

Conclusion:

The thematic analysis of the movies of Deepa Mehta makes it crystal clear that she prefers making movies on bold issues. Having feelings of lesbian or homosexuality may be deniable in the society but they are fully justifiable in the eyes of unsatiated souls. In this context 'Fire' and 'Water' are eye-opening films to lots of people whose minds still cultivate age old male chauvinist traditions. All her movies have got wide critical appreciation. Feminist issues have been discussed at length and meaningful cinematography enhances the meaning of the movie. Shot selection and camera angles are exuberant. Dialogues are precise and meaningful. The plots are rather suggestive and the director depicts men and women as the victims of social taboos. On the basis of above discussion one may safely conclude that she is heads and shoulders above other female film directors of Hindi cinema.

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