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**Screening the Subaltern: Pushpa 2: The Rule as a Representation of Marginalized Voices**

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**Abstract:**

This paper examines *Pushpa 2: The Rule* as a cultural artifact that embodies the essence of marginalized literature by foregrounding the struggles, resistance, and aspirations of subaltern voices. The film, rooted in regional cinema, offers a potent narrative that challenges socio-economic hierarchies, caste oppression, illegitimacy, resistance, and systemic exploitation. Through its protagonist, Pushpa, the narrative serves as a powerful critique of hegemonic structures while celebrating resilience and identity reclamation. Employing a multidisciplinary approach that incorporates subaltern studies and postcolonial theory, this paper explores class struggle, gender dynamics, resilience, and cultural representation. It also analyses the cinematic techniques used to amplify these themes, positioning *Pushpa 2: The Rule* as a significant contribution to the discourse on marginalized literature. Ultimately, the study highlights how popular it can serve as a medium for subaltern expression, bridging the gap between mainstream entertainment and critical social commentary.

**Keywords:** Identity, resilience, illegitimacy, culture, Caste Dynamics.

**Introduction**

Marginalized literature refers to literary works that occur when certain types of literature or authors are excluded, overlooked, or silenced within a society or literary canon. It depicts the struggle of subaltern communities, focusing on oppression, identity crisis, discrimination, social injustice, inequality, and systemic exclusion. The representation of marginalized communities in literature and cinema has been a critical area of study in postcolonial and subaltern theories. These narratives often focus on individuals and groups

who exist outside dominant socio-political structures, offering them a platform for their stories and struggles. Indian regional cinema, particularly Telugu films, has often engaged with the themes, portraying the lived realities of marginalized groups. *Pushpa 2: The Rule* is an example of a mainstream film that intertwines mass entertainment with deep social critique and offers powerful depictions of subaltern resistance and identity. Marginalized literature refers to works that center the voices of underrepresented and oppressed groups, addressing systemic issues of class, caste, gender, and ethnicity. Drawing from subaltern studies, this paper uses Gayatri Spivak's seminal question, "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" to analyze how *Pushpa 2* amplifies the voice of the subaltern, particularly through its protagonist.

Pushpa Raj, the protagonist, was born into illegitimacy and struggles against a rigid societal hierarchy that refuses to acknowledge his existence. His rise from a laborer to a feared smuggler signifies his defiance against social norms. His fight for legitimacy is not only a personal struggle but also a representation of the subaltern's desire for recognition. This paper critically analyses the film through the lens of marginalized literature, highlighting how it reflects the realities of caste, power, and survival in contemporary India. Subaltern studies, rooted in postcolonial theory, seek to highlight the lives and struggles of those excluded from dominant power structures. Pushpa's character exemplifies this exclusion, as he rises from a position of social and economic disadvantage to challenge the systems of power that oppress him.

One of the central themes of *Pushpa 2* is the economic exploitation of laborers in the red sandalwood smuggling trade. Pushpa, a daily wage worker, represents the countless individuals trapped in exploitative systems that deny them dignity and fair compensation. His journey from a laborer to a leader symbolizes resistance against entrenched economic hierarchies. The film vividly portrays the class divide, with the wealthy elite profiting from illegal operations while the laborers bear the brunt of the risks. Pushpa's defiance and eventual rise to power challenge this imbalance, reflecting a broader struggle for economic justice. A pivotal scene highlighting this struggle occurs when Pushpa, after a grueling day, sits cross-legged on a chair, asserting his right to rest. The mill manager reprimands him, suggesting that such a posture is inappropriate in the presence of the mill owner. Pushpa retorts, emphasizing his autonomy:

*This is my leg, and this is also my leg. I put my leg on my other leg. Did I put it on the owner or what? Does he want me to work or give him respect?*

Furthermore, the film delves into the personal ramifications of economic oppression. Pushpa's strained relationship with his family, stemming from his illegitimacy and the societal stigma attached to it, reflects the intersection of economic and social marginalization. His determination to succeed, despite these obstacles, highlights the resilience of marginalized individuals in the face of systemic adversity. Although the film does not explicitly address caste, it is deeply ingrained in the social dynamics of the narrative. Its initial marginalization can be interpreted as a reflection of caste-based exclusion, common

in rural and semi-urban India. His struggle for recognition and respect mirrors the experiences of marginalized castes who often face systemic barriers in their pursuit of dignity and equality. His assertion of identity and refusal to conform to societal norms embody the subaltern resistance against caste-based oppression. His rise is not just a personal victory but a symbolic challenge to the hierarchical structures that support inequality. The protagonist seeks a photograph with the Chief Minister (CM) of Andhra Pradesh, Narasimha Reddy. The CM declines by pointing out Pushpa's status as a smuggler and the potential political consequence of being associated with him. This rejection deeply offends him, leading to a vow to unseat the CM and install Siddappa as the new Chief Minister. To achieve this, Pushpa leverages his extensive smuggling network to amass Rs. 500 crores, which he uses to influence political dynamics in his favor.

The portrayal of women in Pushpa 2 provides another layer to the theme of marginalization. While the film primarily focuses on the main character and his journey from weaker to power, the female characters also navigate the challenges of a patriarchal society, as seen through the character of Molleti Kaveri. The intersection of gender and class is evident in the way women are portrayed as both victims and active participants in resistance. Srivalli plays a crucial role in articulating the emotional and psychological impact of discrimination. Through her dialogues, she sheds light on the societal challenges they face, expressing the pain and resilience required to navigate a world that judges individuals based on their lineage. Her perspective adds depth to the narrative, highlighting the intersection of personal and societal struggles. Pushpa's relationship with Srivalli is significant in understanding his emotional depth. Initially, she flirts with him playfully, unaware of the pain he carries. However, as their bond deepens, she becomes a source of stability in his tumultuous life, which is reflected in the song "Sami."

Despite his involvement in illicit activities, Pushpa's deep loyalty towards his family remains a central theme of the film. His actions are often motivated by a desire to protect and provide for his loved ones, highlighting the significance of familial ties. One of the most emotional aspects of Pushpa's journey is his battle for family acceptance. His half-brother and relatives initially reject him, refusing to acknowledge his place in the family. However, his devotion to protecting his niece leads to a gradual shift in his perception of society and relatives. Pushpa's journey is not just about personal ambition; it is a larger narrative about reclaiming identity and dignity. His unapologetic demeanor, distinctive style, and defiance of authority challenge societal norms and assert his individuality. Pushpa Raj's identity is marked by his illegitimate birth, which subjects him to lifelong discrimination. His father, a wealthy man, refuses to accept him, which leads to Pushpa's exclusion from the family and society. The stigma surrounding illegitimacy forces him to carve out his own identity outside the traditional caste. This theme resonates with subaltern studies, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of the subaltern, who must create their own narrative of resistance. The temple scene is one of the most defining moments of the struggle for identity. Pushpa's family decides to offer Mata a crown as an act of devotion. However, when they gather in the temple, his half-brother publicly questions Pushpa's right to be a part of

this sacred ritual, arguing that he has no legitimate name in society. This confrontation exposes the deep-rooted prejudices that Pushpa has faced all his life. However, Srivalli shields, stating that Pushpa is a child of God, implying that his worth is not determined by societal norms but by divine will. Her words act as a spiritual and emotional validation of Pushpa's existence, countering the rigid caste-based hierarchy that seeks to deny his legitimacy. Despite opposition, Pujari accepts the crown, and Pushpa symbolically reclaims his place in both his family and society. This scene resonates with the real-life struggles of marginalized individuals who fight for their rightful space in religious and social institutions.

The use of folk culture, language, and local traditions in the film further emphasizes the importance of regional identities. His character embodies the pride of the marginalized, refusing to be silenced or erased by dominant cultures. His resistance is a form of identity politics, asserting the rights and recognition of those relegated to the margins. Several pivotal scenes highlight the protagonist's confrontation with societal norms and personal struggles, particularly concerning discrimination and identity. When Pushpa learns about his wife's pregnancy, he performs a Tandav, a manifestation of his inner turmoil and rage against the societal norms that have oppressed him. This intense expression symbolizes his determination to break free from the constraints imposed by his surname and social status. His prayer for a daughter symbolizes his desire to break the cycle of illegitimacy and ensure that his child grows up with the recognition he never had. His devotion to Kali Maa represents his longing for justice.

In the film's climax, Pushpa's niece's marriage card is presented, notably bearing his name with the family surname. This act signifies a reclaiming of identity and a challenge to the societal structures that have marginalized him. It represents a step towards acceptance and the dismantling of caste-based prejudices.

**Traditional Attire and Festivals:** The film showcases traditional attire, such as those worn during the Tirupati Gangamma Jathara, emphasizing the rich cultural heritage of the region. These depictions serve to ground the narrative in a specific cultural context, adding authenticity and depth to the story. The inculcation of regional dance forms and music not only enhances the entertainment value but also serves as a medium to express the character's emotions and societal positions. For instance, the choreography in certain scenes reflects traditional dance movements, resonating with the local culture. The film delves into the complexities of social hierarchies, portraying interactions that reflect the ingrained caste system. Through its narrative and character development, Pushpa 2 offers a critique of societal structures, highlighting the protagonist's struggle against systemic oppression. These elements collectively contribute to the film's exploration of marginalized identities, offering a culturally rich and socially relevant narrative.

### **Conclusion**

The film artfully portrays Pushpa's transformation from a marginalized individual to a symbol of resistance. His ascent is emblematic of the resilience inherent in those who dare to defy societal shackles. Through strategic acumen and indomitable will, Pushpa navigates

the treacherous terrains of power dynamics, asserting his identity in a world determined to suppress it. This cinematic journey transcends the confines of individual ambition, shedding light on the pervasive issues of caste discrimination and social stratification. Pushpa's story resonates with the struggles of countless individuals who confront systemic barriers, offering a narrative that is both specific in its cultural context and universal in its themes of resilience and empowerment. In essence, it is a compelling exploration of the human spirit's capacity to overcome adversity. It challenges viewers to reflect on the constructs of social status and the inherent power within those who resist subjugation. The film stands as a testament to the enduring fight against systemic discrimination, illuminating the path toward a more equitable society.

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