

“A Marxist Study of Raj Kanwar’s Cinematic Narrative: Class Struggle and Capitalist Hegemony”

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Abstract: This paper examines the 1994 Indian film *Laadla* (Beloved Son), directed by Raj Kanwar, through a Marxist lens to analyze its portrayal of Marxist ideology within Indian cinema. It focuses on the significance of Marxism from the perspective of Indian mill workers, exploring the conditions and issues faced by workers in the film. The study emphasizes the nuances of economic deprivation and the portrayal of ruthless capitalist characters in the 1990s, while also investigating the concept of a class-based society. By analyzing Marxist elements in *Laadla* (Beloved Son), the paper seeks to understand the components of capitalism and the cultural hegemonic rule of power structures. A Marxist approach illuminates the functioning of a stratified society, highlighting the sensibilities of workers and the attitudes of mill owners toward them. The research reiterates Marxist philosophy and evaluates the film based on its Marxist traits and distinctive features.

Keywords: Marxist Ideology, Class Struggle, Indian Cinema, Capitalism, Labour Exploitation

Before diving deep into the discussion and comparing the marxist elements in the movie, It is important to understand the sensibility which marxism conveys. The theory was propounded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 19th century. The theory is a social framework that understands the means of production and its relation with the working class. Marxism sees society in relation to class struggle and they studied the literature and society to develop certain model of society which was by and large present in the ancient times. By growing capitalism and technology the crucial thing lost was the empathy towards the deprived classes. Society became more profit driven in the recent decades. The urge to make more profit lead the humans to leave the baggage of ethics and

morals. The industrial revolution was no doubt necessary for the smooth functioning of society but it came at the cost of humanity. Karl Marx model of Marxism indicates the society as classless. Of course it is mandatory to have a proper check time to time to assure the safety and prosperity. The famous quote of marxism is "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" the quote clearly states that everyone will be provided according to his need.

This envisions the classless society where production is measured with proper accountability to assure if the people are getting according to their needs. The industrial revolution plays an important role in developing factories, making society more dependent on production. In the name of production and wealth, the capitalist class or the owners of the companies forgot the utmost crucial thing which was humanity. Labors were not seen as humans instead they were observed as the commodity. Labor class was exploited and they were not given any incentives for extra work. The owners of the companies used to make them work in harsh conditions. Hence it was a cruel system which was embedded in our culture. The portrayal of such narrative in the cinema have been there for a long time.

The Soviet cinema of the '20s has inspired artists and audiences for decades and still is the foundation for many theoretical and aesthetic debates. Those films remain crucial not because of their role as revolutionary propaganda - that was largely recuperable by Stalinism - but because they embodied the ambitions of a thriving cultural avant-garde to ally with a revolution and its vanguard. (Forsyth 2)

The paper analyses the marxist ideology in the Indian cinema. Raj Kanwar's 1994 movie *Laadla* depicts the feature of marxist ideology. *Laadla* 1994 is a Bollywood drama which focuses on the class conflict, love and hatred. Raju who is the protagonist is a kind hearted, honest and hard working mill worker. He lives in a deprived conditions in a slum. As a union leader, he fiercely say what is right and stand by it. He advocates the rights of the co workers. Sheetal Nath, the strong and dominating woman who is the owner of the factory which is called Nath Industries, clashes with Raju over his activism.

Raju is the portrayal of the justice and marxist ideology. He puts the demand of the workers in front of the owner. Seeing his rebellious attitude, Sheetal tries to oppress workers. It shows the elements of capitalist approach by its antagonist. *Laadla* presents the ground for marxist literary analysis. Its narrative techniques show the class struggles and

the hegemony of power structure. Class divide between Raju and Sheetal portrays them as opposing characters where one is against the other. Raju represents the working class which is described as Proletariats in Marxist ideology and Sheetal as a mill owner represent Bourgeoisie culture of the 1990s. According to Karl Marx's framework of class struggle and economic exploitation, a marxist reading of Laadla reveals how the film critiques and negotiates capitalist ideology.

The storyline of the film shows the tensions between proletariat and bourgeoisie, with Raju's advocacy for workers rights clearly states the Marxist principle of, "to each according to his need," he is of the view that the resources of society should meet the needs of individual rather than making profit out of it. By analysing the film on plot, such as labor disputes and Sheetal's manipulative marriage to Raju to suppress his instinctual nature of bringing change, proves the class dynamics and capitalist power structures. The film reveals the mindset of the Capitalist class. It shows that they retain power by different complex strategical structures that puts the victim in a riddle, and sometimes by interpellation to achieve desired results in making profit. It symbolises power which is explained by Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* says:

We are informed that if repression has indeed been the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality since the classical age, it stands to reason that we will not be able to free ourselves from it except at a considerable cost: nothing less than a transgression of laws, a lifting of prohibitions, an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality, and a whole new economy in the mechanisms of power will be required. (Foucault 5)

In this case Sheetal's ruthless pursuit of a government contract and her decision to marry Raju to suppress his activism indicates the declining ethics and morals of the capitalist structure. It illustrates capitalist tactics to maintain power. Marxist ideology mirrors Marx's concept of alienation, where workers are made to deprive from the products of their labor. Sheetal's disregard towards workers reflect the bourgeoisie prioritisation of surplus value over human needs. Highlighting specific scenes, like when Raju confronts Sheetal over the strike issue exemplifies class struggle.

The other scene where they both argue and Raju rages in anger and slaps Sheetal symbolises the revolution and uprising which marxism claims. The scene where Sheetal

tries to eradicate the labor from the factory by hiring machines that would do the work of the labours indicate the inhumane nature of the capitalist class. This creates a tension in the factory and Raju holds a stance to support the arguments of the labor proving that the machines are of no use. Sheetal's primary motive behind ordering machines was to suppress the Raju's activism and maintain the power in the factory. She sees Raju as a direct threat to her hegemonic rule in the factory. Raju on the other hand educate the workers about their rights and raises questions against the policies of the factory.

The end aligns with the theory of hegemony where the factory owner has been shown that she has changed and accepted the workers rights. The end of the movie shows Sheetal's change in nature and tries to compensate the situation. But according the concept of Antonio Gramsci's hegemony. The ruling class tries to maintain power by co-opting the dissent by gaining the consent of the subordinate groups through different means. Similarly the end has been portrayed like the victory of the labor's cause but actually it does not end in an interest of workers. It's the tactic of the capitalists to hold on to power. The overall situation doesn't change for labor.

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