

The Cinematic Representation of Tribal Identity in Bollywood

Chinmoyee Das¹, Dr. Pankaj Kumar²

¹Research Scholar (PhD), Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Central University of Haryana,
Mahendergarh

²Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Central University of Haryana,
Mahendergarh

ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the future of tribal women in India. Tribal representation in Popular Hindi Cinema has been sparse and insignificant for most of its history. While it is not uncommon to find elements of tribal culture portrayed in Popular Hindi Cinema, it has rarely been a significant part of the theme of the films. Most of the 20th century films with Tribal representation have been criticized for problematic representation of tribal culture. Plenty of instances of misrepresentation and stereotyping can be found in films released during this period. Many films resorted to tribal culture and characters as mere objects of entertainment and have been excluded from the main plot of the film. Moreover, stories of the tribal characters themselves have barely been told. In the early 2000s we saw a decline in the problematic representation, and *Laal Salaam* (2002) was one of the rare films to portray the real-life issues faced by modern day tribals. It explores how Hindi cinema can help change societal attitudes toward tribal women. Tribal women have long faced discrimination and neglect in India. Tribal women's stories are often misrepresented in Bollywood's movies. This creates huge stereotypes. This study is about a future where hindi films portray tribal women as strong and capable. It shows how evolving narratives in Hindi cinema can inspire change. Positive representations of tribal women can lead to better respect, equality also opportunities for them. The paper highlights the need for filmmakers to research and understand tribal cultures very deeply. By 2047 Hindi cinema could become a tool for empowering tribal women. It could influence society to appreciate their skills, knowledge and also traditions. This paper discusses how inclusive storytelling can connect mainstream audiences with tribal communities. It focuses on how better media representation can promote gender equality and break barriers for tribal women.

Keywords : Tribal , Gender Representation, Hindi Cinema, Cultural Identity

INTRODUCTION

India is a land of diversity. Among its many cultures the tribal communities hold a unique identity. Tribal women are vital contributors to their communities. Yet they often face social, economic and cultural challenges. Their representation in mainstream media especially Hindi cinema plays a crucial role in shaping society's perception.

Indian cinema was born in the year 1913 with the *Raja Harishchandra*. Today India makes the largest number of films. India has many regional film industries across the country. The most popular of these film industries is Hindi cinema. The popular Hindi cinema industry, also known as Bollywood is based at Mumbai. The Hindi film industry is the most popular film industry in India and the films are circulated all over the country. It is considered to be the face of Indian Cinema and is often regarded as National Cinema.

Aim : To study how evolving Hindi cinema narratives can improve gender representation of tribal women. To analyze how films can inspire social change.

Objectives :

- To understand current representation of tribal women in Hindi cinema and the changing trends in gender portrayal in films.
- To predict how cinema could influence public attitudes and to recommend ways for filmmakers to create inclusive narratives.

Rationale : Tribal women are often stereotyped in mainstream media. Their struggles, achievements and culture are rarely shown. With India's development vision , it is important to include tribal women in the conversation. Cinema is a strong tool for creating awareness. It can bring their voices into the mainstream. This research connects cinema with

social change. It focuses on an underrepresented group. The study promotes inclusion, equality, empowerment of tribal women and It aligns with India's vision for a just and progressive society in future.

Theatrical Framework & Review :

Stuart Hall's theory of Representation deals with how our cultural background, language and understanding of the world creates meanings of objects. Hall has provided with a typology of representation. According to Hall, there are three forms of representation. Media can reflect society and also impacts society's views. Bollywood can either strengthen stereotypes about tribal communities or break them by showing authentic stories. As discussed Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak's postcolonial theory is also helpful in understanding tribal representation. By analyzing post-2010 films this study examines whether Bollywood still follows this pattern or if it presents tribal communities as empowered and self-sufficient. Another key concept in this study is Cultural Identity as explored by Homi Bhabha. History, politics and media shape identity.

These ideas help us study how films show tribal identity whether they challenge or repeat stereotypes and how they affect public views. Representing tribal communities in Indian cinema matters because films strongly influence public opinions. For many urban audiences Bollywood movies are also a source of information about tribal life. When films misrepresent or ignore tribal communities, it reinforces stereotypes and deepens social exclusion. Tribal people have a significant part of India's population. They deserve authentic and respectful representation in cinema. While previous studies have examined tribal portrayal in older films there is limited research on post-2010 Bollywood movies. This period is crucial because Indian cinema has undergone significant transformations in storytelling, filmmaking techniques and audience awareness. This research studies films released after 2010 to see if Bollywood has changed its approach to tribal representation. By analyzing these recent films it aims to add to the discussion on how tribal communities are shown in Indian cinema. It also hopes to guide filmmakers in portraying tribal communities more accurately and sensitively in the future.

Empowering tribal women is important for India's goal of development. It is need to focus on education and financial independence. There is a need of affirmative actions to give tribal women equal opportunities in all areas of life. Tribal women often have low literacy and limited access to resources. Tribal women's stories are often misrepresented in Bollywood's movies. Tribal women in India face complex challenges despite their significant contributions to their communities. (Shashi, 1978). Tribal women often work harder than men contributing to economic activities and household responsibilities (Bhasin, 2007; Soni, 2019). However, their status varies across societies (Bhasin, 2007). Despite some progress tribal women in India still face significant barriers to empowerment (Soni, 2019).

The study finds that while tribal women have made significant contributions they still face many challenges in low literacy, poor health also in limited resources. Media often shows women in stereotypical roles and tribal women are rarely represented fairly in films or media. There is little research that focuses on how gender representation for tribal women can improve in future. This gap needs more attention to understand how education, healthcare and media portrayals can empower tribal women and create equal opportunities for them in all areas of life.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the role of Hindi cinema in shaping societal attitudes toward tribal women the study focused on analyzing films and narratives. The study selected popular Hindi movies from the past decades that featured tribal women. The selection was based on themes and representation. The study examined how movies stories and characters changed over time. It looked at shifts in stereotypes, roles and how tribal women were connected to larger issues. The research aimed to find patterns in these movie narratives.

Analysis

Tribal women have been underrepresented in Hindi films. When portrayed they are often shown as stereotypes. These portrayals are either romanticized or show them in subordinate roles. Films create a narrow one-dimensional view of tribal lives. The lack of authentic representation prevents audiences from understanding their real struggles and strengths. This create biases and marginalizes Tribal women identity.

Evolving Film Narratives : Over time Hindi cinema has started embracing social themes. Films have challenged traditional gender roles. Similarly tribal representation can grow through inclusive storytelling.

Filmmakers can highlight the resilience and cultural richness of tribal women. Stories can showcase their role in education and environment. Documentaries and biopics on real tribal women achievers can inspire society. The films selected for this study—Chakravayuh, Mary Kom, Newton, Anek, and Jawan—offer different perspectives on tribal representation in Bollywood.

Themes and Issues Portrayed: Chakravyuh (2012) delves into the Naxalite conflict, portraying the government's struggle with insurgency and the exploitation of tribal land. It highlights how tribals are often caught between state violence and Maoist ideology, with limited choices. Mary Kom (2014) tells the story of a Manipuri tribal woman who overcomes discrimination and lack of recognition to become a world champion boxer. While it celebrates her success, it also sheds light on the challenges faced by Northeast Indian communities in mainstream media. Newton (2017) focuses on the difficulties of conducting elections in a tribal-dominated area. It presents tribals as politically aware but alienated from the mainstream system. Anek (2022) explores identity politics, questioning the definition of Indianness and highlighting the alienation of Northeast communities. Jawan (2023) addresses multiple social issues, including the exploitation of tribal lands and resources, showing how corruption affects marginalized communities.

Mary Kom and Newton successfully challenge stereotypes by presenting tribal individuals as strong, intelligent and capable. Others, like Chakravyuh, still rely on the trope of tribals being helpless victims of external forces. While Anek brings Northeast identity to the forefront, it sometimes simplifies complex political issues. Earlier Bollywood films often depicted tribals as supporting characters with no agency. However, post-2010 films have started giving them central roles. Mary Kom and Newton present tribal characters as independent thinkers. However in Chakravyuh, the tribal struggle is still largely seen through the eyes of an outsider. Bollywood has become more experimental in storytelling, and directors for example Anubhav Sinha (Anek) and Amit Masurkar (Newton) have shown a commitment to diverse narratives. However mainstream Bollywood still hesitates to produce films with fully triballed stories. The industry needs to move beyond occasional representation and incorporate tribal voices more organically.

Films have the power to educate and influence society. Positive portrayals always can break stereotypes and create empathy. When tribal women are shown as strong and capable audiences begin to respect them. This representation can empower Tribal women to claim leadership roles in politics or any other social movements. It can also encourage the younger generation to value tribal heritage and gender equality.

DISCUSSION

The analysis showed that early Hindi films often portrayed tribal women using stereotypes. They were shown as exotic, primitive or side characters. These representations reinforced certain biases about tribal communities.

Over time some films began to explore the struggles and strengths of tribal women. These narratives reflected real-life issues such as land rights, education and gender roles. However these stories remained rare.

The study concluded that evolving narratives in Hindi cinema can influence societies views. By showing strong, diverse and realistic tribal women characters films can inspire positive change.

Recommendations for the Future

Filmmakers should work closely with tribal communities to share real and honest stories. Governments can support films about tribal themes by offering grants and awards. It is important to encourage tribal women to participate in the film industry as actors, writers and directors. Media platforms can also be used to highlight and spread awareness about the achievements of tribal women.

CONCLUSION

Hindi cinema can redefine how India views its tribal women. It can bridge the gap between marginalized communities and mainstream cinema. When tribal women are represented with dignity and strength it will inspire others to see their value.

The representation of tribal identity in Bollywood films after 2010 has dramatically improved. In the past Bollywood often misrepresented tribal communities by showing them as stereotypes or minor characters. However recent films have made a conscious effort to focus on their stories. Chakravyuh (2012), Mary Kom (2014), Newton (2017), Anek (2022) and Jawan (2023) show this change. They portray tribal life more deeply revealing their struggles, culture and strength. Each of these films presents a different view of tribal identity. Chakravyuh highlights the Naxalite conflict and the reasons behind tribal uprisings. It shows how indigenous people are exploited and their fight for justice. Mary Kom tells the inspiring story of a Manipuri tribal woman who faces social and economic challenges to become an international boxing champion. The film shows how people from marginalized communities can break barriers despite limited resources and discrimination. Newton takes a different approach, focusing on the tribals' political and social isolation. It follows an election officer's efforts to ensure voting rights for a tribal community revealing the neglect they face. Anek explores the identity struggles of people from Northeast India questioning what it means to be "Indian" and criticizing the government's treatment of the region. Finally Jawan includes a storyline about tribal struggles using action cinema to bring attention to their issues. These films show a significant shift by portraying tribals as active

participants in their stories rather than passive victims. Unlike older Bollywood films that exoticized or misrepresented them these films aim for a more genuine portrayal. They raise awareness about lack of political representation, economic hardship and identity crises. While some films still use dramatic storytelling they at least highlight the challenges faced by tribal communities. However there are still some gaps. Despite the improvement Bollywood doesn't often explore tribal stories. Many of these films focus on conflict, struggle or oppression but ignore positive aspects like rich traditions, sustainable living and a strong connection with nature. Non-tribal actors often play tribal characters which raises questions about the authenticity of their portrayal. Looking forward Bollywood can do even better in representing tribals. Filmmakers should work with tribal communities to ensure accurate and respectful storytelling. More films should focus on their everyday lives achievements and contributions. This will help Bollywood move beyond stereotypes and create a more inclusive cinematic world. The tribal representation in Bollywood films after 2010 has improved but still needs growth. Recent films have made good progress in showing tribal struggles and resilience, but true inclusivity will happen when Bollywood consistently tells tribal stories with authenticity, diversity, and respect. This change will contribute to developed India. As a cultural force Hindi cinema can lead this transformation helping tribal women shine in future.

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