

History, Literary Reform and Social Liberation: Cinema a Feminist Resistance in *Shyam Singha Roy*

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Abstract: Education historically functioned both as an instrument of control and a medium of liberation, specially in contexts that are moulded by patriarchy and hierarchy in the society. The Telugu movie *Shyam Singha Roy* (2021) directed by Rahul Sankrityan is set in the backdrop of colonial Bengal to explore the intersection of literary reform, women's education and resistance against an oppressive religious practice. With the character of Shyam Singha Roy a social reformer and writer the film critiques the Devadasi System and insists women's dignity, agency and freedom to think. This paper examines how cinema changes storytelling into a pedagogical space that challenges gender inequality and exploitation under the name of religion. When examined in the feminist theoretical perspectives and the concept of education as a social awakening tool of liberation. This film highlights education not as a formal instruction or knowledge but as awareness, critical thinking and moral courage. By highlighting women's suffering within oppression and presenting reform with writing and activism, Shyam Singha Roy positions film as instruments of social transformation and reformation. The paper says that the film represents how cinema can revive historical injustices, grows empathy and inspire contemporary discourse on gender equality. It explains that intellectual resistance and creative expression are powerful means of unlocking new potential and advancement in social Liberation and equality.

Keywords: *Feminism, Social Reform, Women's Education, Cinema, Liberation, Film Studies.*

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Introduction

Historically, education functioned both as an instrument of control and a medium of liberation. When the access to knowledge is denied and restricted, power remains the same. When awareness is widespread the system of oppression starts to weaken. The film *Shyam Singha Roy* (2021), directed by Rahul Sankrityan, goes back to colonial Bengal to analyse how literature, education and reformation challenge the patriarchal domination and the Devadasi System. Through the double timeline narrative, the film links the past injustice with the accountability in the present. This demonstrates the resistance to knowledge which is essential for social reformation. This paper points out that Shyam Singha Roy positions education and literature as important tools in the feminist reformation. By spotting historical oppression, marginalization of women and literary activism. The film changes cinema into a pedagogical space that gives back the dignity of women and questions wide range of institutionalized patriarchy.

Methods

The research methodology employed in the present study involves conducting a qualitative textual analysis, taking into account feminist theories. In this case, the chosen film for textual analysis is *Shyam Singha Roy*. The main themes analysed in the text include the education of women, social reform, and resistance to oppressive structures.

Results

Plot Overview

The film *Shyam Singha Roy* (2021) directed by Rahul Sankrityan gives a narrative moving between the past and the present. It explores the themes of social justice, women's dignity, awareness and intellectual resistance. The story revolves in two different timelines: contemporary Hyderabad and Colonial Bengal. Through the double narrative structure the film shows the historical injustices that continue across generations.

In the present, the story follows Vasudev a young film maker struggling to find a place in the film industry. After many rejections he finally creates the short film and attracts attention and gets the opportunity to direct a full length movie. Suddenly his success attracts problem, a writer accuses him of plagiarism. The story resembles the life of a reformer named Shyam Singha Roy. This leads Vasu to prove his innocence. As the case is investigated they get to know about the link between Vasu's script and real time historical events. Slowly it is proved that Vasu's memories and creative ideas are connected to the life of Shyam Singha Roy implying a strong connection between the two identities.

The story shifts to Colonial Bengal, there Shyam Singha Roy is a fierce and fearless writer, reformer and intellectual. Shyam is a progressive thinker he strongly opposes social practices that exploits women in the name of religious tradition. One among

the practice is the Devadasi system where young girls and woman are dedicated and forced to serve their entire life in the temples. Shyam directly attacks this system in his writings and public speeches saying that religion should not be used to justify dominance and oppression. His literary works questions the authority of conservative institutions and says the society to consider the traditions.

A central character in this narrative is Rosie a woman stuck within the Devadasi system from childhood. Her life shows the endless suffering the womanhood is enduring, their freedom and education is denied by those social and religious structures. Shyam gradually interacts with Rosie, their interaction gradually inspire Rosie and she recognise her own dignity. Shyam treats her with respect and compassion regardless of her identity as a Devadasi. After facing a difficulty they move to Calcutta and starts a new life. Shyam also Succeeds as a writer and with Rosie's idea he opens a trust to rehabilitate Devadasi's.

In the place where everything is going good, Shyam visits his ailing brother but it turns out to be a trap to murder him for bringing disrespect to the family by marrying Rosie. Then in the present Shyam's brother Manoj assures that the work of Vasu is not a plagiarism along with a proof so the case is closed and Vasu is cleared of all charges. Later Manoj reveals that Rosie is alive and Vasu travels to meet Rosie. Vasu and Rosie have a emotional reunion as per her wish Rosie dies peacefully in Vasu's arms a dance teacher and Shyam Singha Roy's wife Rosie Singha Roy.

History as Social Memory

The historical backdrop of colonial Bengal is not just used as a decoration; it functions as a political memory. In India, a Devadasi is a female artist who is devoted to worship and serve the deity of the temple throughout her entire life. They take care of the temple, performing rituals and also learn and practice classical Indian dances like Bharatanatyam, Kuchipudi, Odissi and Mohiniyattam. Their status and performances in the temple worship is essential. The Devadasi system explained in the film shows how religion was manipulated to authorize exploitation. Young girls who are dedicated to the temples are subjected to lifelong abuse.

The Character Rosie in the movie is undergoing this historical marginalization. Her quietness and suffering indicates women and their erased identities which are seen over the generations under the name of ritualistic authority. By going back to the past the film resists deletion and restores suppressed narratives. The concept of reincarnation in this film suggests the unresolved injustices echoes across time. The present day legal struggle reflects the historical struggle, emphasizing that reform should confront history but should not ignore it. In the film even small girls are subjected to undergo the same abuse in the name of service. This shows that woman regardless of their age is always undergoing the patriarchal societies rules in the name of tradition. We can see that those rules are not applicable to the males in the society right from the old period to modern age and is witnessed throughout the ages in history.

Questioning Agency and Feminism

Feminism as a keynote demands recognition, equality and respect. In common woman ask for the rights and power over themselves and does not ask for the power over men. This deeply connects with Rosie's journey. She is not asking for dominance,

she seeks equality and respect. Before changing her lifestyle she undergoes so much tedious struggle and during that struggle and dominance she finds her true love. When she tries to continue that relationship she faces a hardship and after facing it she starts to transform.

When Rosie breaks her silence and talks for the first time in the film she faces a ruthless consequence for asking questions. She was treated differently by the peoples inside and outside the temple. Outside the temple they see Rosie and her fellow Devadasi's like a goddess but inside their place they are ill treated by the authority of the temples. The Devadasi's are portrayed as an object that is used for quenching their thirst over pleasure.

Rosie's transformation as a woman getting her right to freedom from a silence devotee denotes the feminist awakening. Her exclusion is supported through the denial of voice and education. The patriarchal figures in this film defend exploitation as tradition, culture and custom. This reflects how an ideology normalise injustice in the society.

Shyam Singha Roy's interaction aligns with a moderate feminist reformism. He writes and questions against the Devadasi system and also lashes out religious authority publicly. His dialogues challenges blind faith which asserts that no tradition can justify harassment and cruelty. This becomes a direct encounter with patriarchal structures. So, the theory of feminism is not a abstract theory in the film but a live resistance of Rosie and Shyam's activism as a major support.

Discussion

Education – An Awakening

This film explores the definition of education apart from schooling. Education is seen as awareness, critical reasoning and moral courage. Education should serve as a key to freedom and not as a domination. This idea is much noticed in Shyam's approach. His writings focus to awaken the society rather than instruct and teach passively. Rosie's liberation starts with awareness. Once she understands that oppression is socially built and not divinely ordained, opposing and questioning becomes possible. Education works as awareness and consciousness raising. It is a process through which a person as an individual can understand their condition and challenge it. In the contemporary timeline, the courtroom scenes strengthen this dimension.

Legal rights to learn becomes another form of education. From this, one can identify that justice not only needs emotion but also it needs the knowledge of rights and procedures. In general education operates at many levels like moral, intellectual and institution. In the film Rosie, knows only dance and the language from each teacher who taught her to dance. When she starts to learn from Shyam she gains confidence and shines as a dance teacher. She gains her own confidence and tries to trust herself.

Through the knowledge she possess Rosie get a new name and fame as a dance teacher by the end of the film. This indicates herself destroying her own old suppressed self. At the end of the film she dies in the hands of Shyam's reincarnation as a dance teacher. This redemption is attained through knowledge and awareness. Through education and experience she gains respect in the society which talked ill of her in the past. In this film education is regarded as an awakening tool and it serves as a key of redemption in the character Rosie.

Literature a Revolution

When Shyam Singha Roy was introduced in the film, he was shown having a pen in his hands. He was a revolutionary writer who is working for the reformation of the society. Shyam is a studious and strong reformer. He condemns each and everyone in the village who is dominating the peoples in the name of untouchability, tradition and culture. He believes that violence will not be an answer only literature and words create a greater impact to the wide range of people. He is a writer who denies to remain silent. His literary works point out the cruelty intertwined within religious customs. He believes that writing will become an act of rebellion. Through his writings and speeches he questions societal hypocrisy and demands for reformation through literature. He thinks that only writing can change the society. In an important moment, Shyam declares that tradition cannot justify injustice.

Shyam is not only seen as a romantic hero but also a writer who expose the injustice in the society. In this context one can understand that education is not restricted only to the classrooms but can be manifested as intellectual courage and public discourse. Through his publications, he stabilizes the public opinion and destabilizes the unquestioned traditions. The authoritarian system often condemns literature because ideas will bring change. So the film connects literacy with empowerment. A society which reads transforms into a society hard to control. Literature becomes a superior force which can awaken collective consciousness. The film says that storytelling in written or cinematic has a power which can bring change in the society.

Moral Responsibility and Reformation

The reformation in Shyam Singha Roy is ethical; it is not vengeful or violent. His struggle is deeply rooted in compassion and justice. He argues that education should produce social responsibility. Shyam believes that knowledge becomes ineffective when it is detached from justice. True education will always grows empathy and social commitment. The courtroom scenes in the present time shows institutional accountability and educational system should uphold equality, with intellectual and structural intervention we can achieve reformation. This reformation is attained through continuous work across generations.

The Devadasi system is an institutionalized exploitation sustained by silence and patriarchal dominance. So in general reform drags society into a conflict and chaos. In one powerful scene, Shyam questions the authorities of the temple and strongly points that faith should not be used as a weapon against women. This dialogue infers that religion as a moral and not a oppression. In the film where the reincarnation was shown and Shyam's character was introduced we can witness that he is a man of moral responsibility and his words are full of reformation. In one point he opposes everyone in the society including his family and marries the Devadasi woman Rosie with whom he fell in love with.

This shows that he is a man of his words and he just does not keep it in his writings alone he also shows it in action and implements it in his life. From this the changes starts in the life of Shyam and Rosie. But in the climax Shyam is killed by his own brothers and reincarnates just to fulfil the promise to Rosie. This is also known as love but also a moral responsibility to fulfil his

words. So we can understand that reformation starts with our words actions and moral responsibility.

Pedagogical Bridge – Cinema

The film is an educational tool and it teaches the values of human beings and their emotions. It reconstructs the historical injustice and informs the audience about the Devadasi system and it's reality. The people who are not aware of this system learns from the movie. It not only teaches about the system but also about the history, values of words, emotions, truth and faith. In the final climax scene we can witness his brother assuring that Vasudev is his brother Shyam Singha Roy through a communication and memory of them. This emotional engagement magnify critical reflection. Cinema bridges between the past and the present that connects with the memory and accountability. The emotional engagement portrays moral reflection and it awakens critical consciousness.

The film makes us to feel the live suffering through the characters instead of abstract accounts of history. The narrative link of past and present through reincarnation tells the audience that the social struggle travels across generations. It involves the audience to question about gender norms, authority, tradition and culture. If we view the characters in a thematic dimension; Rosie represent the feminist awakening and marginalization in the history. Her silence is loud throughout the film but her dialogues are simple. Shyam Singha Roy represents reformation through education, ethics, morals and literature i.e., his works in the film. In a Scene he says that "Women are not a commodity" (*Shyam Singha Roy* 1:47:04).

In general history shapes Rosie's suffering and feminism gives her the respect and awareness of the society. Education changes Shyam's reformism and initiates reformation.

Conclusion

Shyam Singha Roy illustrates that education, literature and cinema can work hand in hand as a powerful tool of reformation in feminism. By foregrounding women's dignity it exposes the Devadasi system. The film changes a memory from history to a contemporary issue. Through Shyam's writings and Rosie's control over her life shows that the first step to freedom is awareness and education.

The movie is set in the past but it also connects with the contemporary issues about rights of women, cultural reforms, gender roles and norms. It denotes that traditions should be inspected and evaluated critically rather than accepting and following it blindly. Education is seen as continuous process of questioning and challenging dominance. By giving importance to women's suffering and resistance the film aligns with the modern movements which insists on gender equality. So cinema reflects society and moulds the progress of change from history to modern days.

References

1. *Shyam Singha Roy*. Directed by Rahul Sankrityan, performances by Nani and Sai Pallavi, 2021.