



INTERROGATING POWER, IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL DYNAMICS: A MARXIST ANALYSIS OF RAJKUMAR HIRANI'S SELECT CINEMAS.

Susmita Rajkhowa

(Faculty, Department of English)

(Sibsagar Commerce College)

ABSTRACT: Rajkumar Hirani's cinematic universe stands as a testament to the potential of cinema to not only entertain but also challenge societal norms and power structures. Through a Marxist analytical lens, this research paper delves into Hirani's films, with special reference to *3 idiots*, *PK*, *Munna Bhai MBBS*, and *Sanju* to unearth the intricate interplay of power, ideology, and social dynamics within contemporary Indian society. Drawing upon Marxist concepts of power dynamics and class struggle, this study aims to uncover how Hirani's narratives expose the contradictions and injustices inherent in capitalist systems while offering glimpses of resistance and social transformation. By examining the portrayal of characters negotiating their identities, confronting institutional authority, and challenging dominant ideologies, this paper seeks to illuminate the socio-political implications of Hirani's cinematic interventions. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of popular culture in interrogating power structures and envisioning alternative futures.

KEYWORDS: Power, ideology, social dynamics, class struggle, cultural hegemony, resistance, popular culture.

INTRODUCTION

Rajkumar Hirani is a prominent Indian filmmaker known for his impactful narratives and social commentary. His filmography includes critically acclaimed works such as *3 idiots*, *PK*, *Munna Bhai MBBS*, *Sanju* etc. His cinematic style characterized by memorable characters and heartfelt storytelling has earned him widespread acclaim and established him as one of Bollywood's most influential directors, resonating with audiences and sparking meaningful conversations about contemporary Indian society. Rajkumar Hirani's cinema holds significant socio-political implications, as his films serve as a medium for both entertainment and social commentary. This, too, can be envisioned through the medium of popular culture. It plays a significant role in interrogating power dynamics within Indian society. Relying on Bourdieu's concept of 'Cultural Capital' Hirani, through his films leverages the accessibility and reach of popular culture to engage audiences in critical reflections on power structures and their implications. Cultural capital functions as a form of power, enabling individuals to accrue social advantages and reproduce social hierarchies. One aspect of popular culture's role is its ability to subvert dominant narratives and challenge established power dynamics. For instance, in *Munna Bhai MBBS*, he challenges the hierarchical structures within the medical profession, highlighting how corruption perpetuates unequal power dynamics. While in *Sanju*, he examines the power dynamics between the media and celebrities, showcasing how sensationalism and tabloid journalism can distort reality and manipulate public opinion. The film also explores the personal struggles of its protagonist, *Sanju*, as he grapples with the pressures of fame and societal expectations. Moreover, the concept of institutional authority is also highlighted well in *3 idiots*. He critiques the authoritarianism inherent in the Indian education system, where teachers wield

immense power over students, often oppressing creativity and individuality. The main objective of this study is to bring forth the intersection of popular culture and Marxism giving prior importance to power dynamics in select films of Raj Kumar Hirani. It will specifically put emphasis on how his narratives contribute to deeper understanding of power structures and addresses alternative futures within contemporary Indian society. Theorists like Max Weber, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, Antonio Gramsci and Judith Butler have contributed their thoughts on various power structures existing in a society. Max Weber has brought to light the interplay between power, authority and domination in social relationships. He explores how individuals and groups exercise power over others through various means, including coercion, persuasion, and manipulation. The movies chosen for this study include – *Munna Bhai MBBS*, *3 Idiots*, *PK* and *Sanju*. The study will adopt a Marxist analytical framework in understanding power structure and the relevance of popular culture in Hirani's cinema.

POWER DYNAMICS IN 3 IDIOTS

3 Idiots offers a critical examination of power relations within the educational system, highlighting the need for reform and innovation in traditional approaches to teaching and learning. Through its portrayal of institutional authority, teacher-student relationships, pressure to conform, and acts of resistance, the film encourages viewers to rethink prevailing educational paradigms and envision alternative futures for education. The film depicts institutional authority figures, such as the strict Head of the Institution i.e. Viru Sahastrabudhe (Virus), as wielding immense power over students, enforcing discipline and conformity through fear and intimidation. Virus represents the embodiment of the traditional, rigid educational system, which prioritizes academic success and conformity over individuality and creativity. Students are subjected to arbitrary rules and punishments, reinforcing the power dynamics between faculty and students within the institution. As Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* says "Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society". Characters like Rancho rebel against this pressure, advocating for a more holistic approach to education that prioritizes passion and creativity over rote memorization and academic rankings. By questioning established norms and advocating for alternative pedagogical methods, Rancho and his friends embody a form of resistance against the oppressive power dynamics within the educational system.

IDEOLOGICAL HEGEMONY IN PK

'Ideological hegemony' is a concept given by Antonio Gramsci in his book *Prison Notebooks*, written while he was imprisoned by the Italian Fascist regime. Gramsci argued that the ruling class maintains its power not only through force and coercion but also by securing the consent of subordinate groups to the existing social order. And, this consent is achieved by naturalizing the concept in people's beliefs, perceptions and behaviours. Gramsci further emphasizes the role of cultural institutions like education, media, popular culture and religion to showcase the practice of 'ideological hegemony' in everyday lives. These so called institutions serve as sites for the production of ruling-class ideologies, thereby validating power dynamics in a society. In Rajkumar Hirani's *PK* the concept of 'ideological hegemony' is prominently depicted through the exploration of religious dogma, cultural norms, and the ways in which dominant ideologies maintain power and control over society. The titular character, PK, an alien visitor to Earth, questions the rigid adherence to religious rituals and customs, highlighting the absurdity of sectarian divisions and religious conflicts. PK's encounters with various cultural practices, such as arranged marriage and superstitions, highlight the oppressive nature of cultural norms and their role in perpetuating inequality and discrimination. The film basically challenges stereotypes associated with religion, gender, and ethnicity, encouraging viewers to raise a question. Throughout the film, we have seen PK's journey as a form of resistance against ideological hegemony, as he challenges established norms and questions the authority of religious leaders and institutions. Through his interactions with individuals from different religious and cultural backgrounds, PK promotes empathy, understanding, and unity, undermining the divisive narratives propagated by hegemonic ideologies. The film encourages viewers to question their own beliefs and values, fostering a sense of critical consciousness and empowerment to challenge dominant ideologies.

CLASS STRUGGLE IN *MUNNA BHAIBBS*

'Class Struggle' is a concept mostly associated with Karl Marx where he argues that societies are divided into conflicting classes – the capitalist class and working class, with opposing interests. And, much of historical development can be understood as the result of these struggles. Relating to this idea, Rajkumar Hirani in his film *Munna Bhai MBBS* highlights the theme of class struggle in order to explore the disparities and injustices inherent in the healthcare system and society at large. The film as a whole critiques the elitism and lack of access to healthcare services that perpetuate class divisions. Characters like Dr. Asthana epitomize the privileged elite, who wield power and influence within the medical establishment, while individuals like Munna are marginalized and excluded from opportunities for advancement. The film exposes the injustices perpetrated by a system that prioritizes profit and prestige over the well-being of patients and the equitable distribution of healthcare resources. The film depicts the challenges faced by economically disadvantaged individuals in navigating the healthcare system, including long wait times, inadequate facilities, and financial constraints. Foucault in his book *The History of Sexuality* addresses: "Where there is power, there is resistance". Similarly, Hirani through his characters portrays the acts of resistance and finally advocates the power of solidarity and transformative potential of knowledge to address social inequalities.

MEDIA AND CELEBRITY CULTURE IN *SANJU*

Media and celebrity culture are the products of popular culture. There are several theorists like Jean Baudrillard, Stuart Hall and Guy Debord who have explored how media images and representations shape our understanding of reality. They have also emphasized the transformative power of media in shaping social and cultural dynamics. Talking about Hirani's movie *Sanju*, power dynamics within the entertainment industry are depicted through the protagonist Sanjay Dutt's turbulent life journey as a Bollywood actor. It explores the construction of celebrity narratives and the role of media intermediaries in shaping public images. Sanju faces constant scrutiny and judgment from the media, which often prioritizes scandalous stories over factual reporting, leading to misunderstandings and misrepresentations. The film also shows how Sanju grapples with addiction, legal troubles, and family conflicts under the harsh glare of public scrutiny. In order to subvert this, Hirani Challenges the one-dimensional portrayals often perpetuated by the media, and humanizes Sanju by portraying his vulnerabilities and flaws. Sanju's journey towards self-acceptance and forgiveness serves as a powerful narrative of resilience and transformation, challenging societal perceptions of celebrities as inherently flawed or irredeemable. The film encourages viewers to look beyond sensational headlines and tabloid gossip, recognizing the humanity and complexity of those who live their lives in the public eye.

CONCLUSION

Through a Marxist analytical lens, this study illuminates the socio-political implications of Hirani's cinematic interventions, offering insights into the potential of popular culture to interrogate power structures and envision alternative futures. By examining the portrayal of characters negotiating their identities, confronting institutional authority, and challenging dominant ideologies, Hirani's films contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of cinema in fostering critical consciousness and advocating for social change. Hirani's storytelling serves as a potent tool for dissecting entrenched power structures. *3 Idiots* critiques the rigidity of the educational system, advocating for a shift towards more inclusive and creative approaches to learning. In *PK*, Hirani confronts ideological hegemony by questioning religious and cultural norms, urging viewers to reassess their beliefs and embrace empathy and unity across diverse backgrounds. *Munna Bhai MBBS* delves into the theme of class struggle, shedding light on the injustices within the healthcare system and advocating for equitable access to healthcare resources. Lastly, *Sanju* explores the complexities of celebrity culture and media scrutiny, challenging one-dimensional portrayals and humanizing public figures.

By portraying characters that resist oppression, confront authority, and challenge dominant ideologies, Hirani's films inspire viewers to critically engage with their surroundings and advocate for positive change. Ultimately, the Marxist analysis of Hirani's select cinemas underscores the transformative potential of cinema as a medium for interrogating power dynamics and envisioning a more just and equitable society.

REFERENCES**PRIMARY SOURCES**

- [1]. Hirani, Rajkumar, director. *3 Idiots*. Vinod Chopra Productions, 2009.
- [2]. Hirani, Rajkumar, director. *Munna Bhai M.B.B.S.* Vinod Chopra Productions, 2003.
- [3]. Hirani, Rajkumar, director. *PK*. Rajkumar Hirani Films, 2014.
- [4]. Hirani, Rajkumar, director. *Sanju*. Rajkumar Hirani Films, 2018.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- [5]. Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulacra and Simulation*. Translated by Sheila Faria Glaser, University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- [6]. Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice, [7]. Harvard University Press, 1984.
- [7]. Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith, Zone Books, 1994.
- [8]. Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley, Vintage Books, 1990
- [9]. Gramsci, Antonio. *Prison Notebooks*. Edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg, Columbia University Press, 1992.
- [10]. Hall, Stuart. *Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse. Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, edited by Stuart Hall et al., Routledge, 2013, pp. 128-138.
- [11]. Marx, Karl, and Friedrich Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Edited by Frederic L. Bender, Norton Critical Edition, W. W. Norton & Company, 1988.
- [12]. Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, University of California Press, 1978.