DegreeLive

BA English Honours | Semester V | Calicut University

Fundamentals of Film Studies

Course Code: ENG5CJ301 • Module 4 Notes

Module IV: Indian Cinema

1. Plurality, Subalternity & Radical Realism in Indian Cinema

Indian cinema is a vast, multifaceted cinematic continent comprising dozens of distinct linguistic industries. Beyond the commercial formulaic entertainment of mainstream Bollywood lies a rich heritage of socially engaged parallel, regional, and independent cinema that fearlessly confronts the faultlines of Indian society: caste oppression, gender subjugation, institutional corruption, and urban alienation.

2. Nagraj Manjule: *Fandry* (Marathi, 2014)

Nagraj Popatrao Manjule's groundbreaking debut feature *Fandry* (which translates from Marathi to "Pig") is widely recognized as one of the most powerful anti-caste cinematic masterworks in modern Indian cinema:

- **Setting and Protagonist:** Set in a rural village in Maharashtra, the film centers on Jambuvant "Jabya" Kachru Mane (Somnath Avghade), a spirited 13-year-old Dalit boy belonging to the severely marginalized Kaikadi community. Jabya harbors an innocent, unrequited romantic affection for Shalu, a fair-skinned girl belonging to the dominant feudal Maratha caste.
- **The Black Sparrow and Magical Escape:** Haunted by internalizing caste stigma and dark complexion, Jabya obsesses over catching the mythic black sparrow, believing folk lore that burning the bird and applying its ash will make Shalu fall in love with him. This pursuit symbolizes Jabya's desperate, magical desire to escape the humiliating prison of caste reality.
- **The Pig-Catching Climax (Institutional Humiliation):** The film culminates in a harrowing, 20-minute sequence where Jabya's destitute family is ordered by upper-caste village elders to catch a stray black pig running loose through the village. As Jabya, his father Kachru, and his sister chase the squealing pig through public streets, the upper-caste villagers mock and jeer at their degradation. The pig functions as an explicit caste metaphor—the upper castes view Dalits as untouchable scavengers identical to the animals they are forced to hunt.
- **The Final Stone of Defiance:** When an upper-caste village bully taunts and humiliates Jabya and his family once more, Jabya reaches his psychological breaking point. In an extraordinary act of rebellion, Jabya picks up a heavy stone and hurls it with furious defiance directly at the camera lens—and by extension, directly at the complicit upper-caste audience and feudal Indian society. The screen freezes on Jabya's gaze, shattering cinematic complacency with revolutionary anti-caste anger.

3. K.G. George: *Adaminte Vaariyellu* (Malayalam, 1983)

Kulakkattil Geevarghese George's *Adaminte Vaariyellu* (*Adam's Rib*) stands as an undisputed feminist monument in the history of Indian and Malayalam cinema, presenting an uncompromising, multi-layered deconstruction of patriarchal oppression across three women from different social classes:

- **The Three Protagonists Across Social Strata:**
  - *Alice (Srividya):* An upper-class Christian woman trapped in a loveless, sterile marriage to a ruthlessly ambitious, emotionally vacant businessman (Mammootty). Alice seeks solace in extramarital affairs and attempts business autonomy, but finds herself commodified and morally cornered by society, culminating in her tragic suicide.
  - *Vasanthi (Suhasini):* A lower-middle-class working woman carrying the crushing dual burden of a demanding government office job and exhausting domestic servitude. Trapped with an indifferent,

selfish husband, an abusive mother-in-law, and an invalid father-in-law, Vasanthi's mind slowly fractures under relentless patriarchal demands, resulting in her psychological breakdown and confinement to a psychiatric asylum.

- *Clara (Soorya):* An impoverished, vulnerable subaltern domestic maid working in Alice's home. Clara is systematically sexually exploited by Alice's husband and societal men, eventually forced into commercial sex work and remanded to a government rescue home.

- **The Surreal Climax and Fourth-Wall Liberation:** In one of the most radical, avant-garde endings in world cinema, Clara leads an open rebellion inside the women's rescue home. The inmates break through the institutional gates and run toward freedom. As they run, Clara runs directly toward the camera, physically pushing the director (K.G. George himself), the crew, and the film cameras out of the way, breaking through the cinematic fourth wall. This astonishing self-reflexive climax declares that cinema itself cannot neatly contain or domesticate female liberation—women must smash the apparatus of representation to claim genuine autonomy.

4. Neeraj Ghaywan: *Masaan* (Hindi, 2015)

Neeraj Ghaywan's critically acclaimed debut *Masaan* (which translates to "Crematorium Grounds"), co-written with Varun Grover, won two awards at the Cannes Film Festival. Set against the eternal, sacred, and death-haunted ghats of Varanasi, the film weaves two poignant parallel narratives confronting caste rigidity, youth sexual guilt, and bereavement:

- **Devi Pathak's Arc (Sexual Moral Policing):** Devi (Richa Chadda), a small-town college lecturer, checks into a budget hotel for a consensual premarital sexual encounter with her student lover Piyush. When a corrupt police inspector raids the room, Piyush panics and commits suicide in the bathroom. Devi and her scholarly father (Sanjay Mishra) are subjected to relentless police blackmail, social shaming, and patriarchal guilt. Devi's journey is one of quiet, courageous refusal to accept societal victimhood, eventually securing a job in Allahabad and reclaiming her life.
- **Deepak Kumar's Arc (Caste & Dignity of Labor):** Deepak (Vicky Kaushal) belongs to the Dom community, a severely marginalized sub-caste traditionally assigned the grueling, stigmatized hereditary labor of burning human corpses on the cremation ghats of Harishchandra Ghat. Deepak strives to escape this caste destiny by studying civil engineering. He falls deeply in love with Shaalu (Shweta Tripathi), an upper-caste Hindu girl who loves him for who he is.
- **Tragedy and the Convergence at Sangam:** Deepak's dreams are shattered when Shaalu dies in a tragic bus accident, and her corpse is brought unknowingly to Deepak's own cremation ghat for burning. Deepak's grief is gut-wrenching and visceral ("Ye dukh kaahe khatam nahi hota bey"). The film converges when Devi and Deepak meet on a small boat at the sacred confluence (Sangam) of the Ganges and Yamuna rivers in Allahabad, finding shared solace, silent understanding, and the fragile rebirth of hope amid the ashes of loss.

Advanced Cinematic Hermeneutics, Apparatus Theory & Visual Dialectics (Extension Phase 1)

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Film scholars and cinematic theorists navigate foundational dialectical debates within Module 4:

- **The Kinematic Apparatus & Ideological Projection:** Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz conceptualized the cinematic apparatus as an ideological machine. The darkened auditorium, the invisible projector behind the audience, and the luminous screen recreate the conditions of Plato's Cave and the Lacanian Mirror Stage. The spectator is positioned in an illusory state of transcendental subjecthood, identifying with the cinematic gaze while absorbing dominant ideological values.
- **The Gendered Gaze & Visual Pleasure:** Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* revolutionized feminist film criticism. Mulvey demonstrates that classical Hollywood cinema is structured around patriarchal visual pleasure, splitting the cinematic gaze into active/male and passive/female. Women on screen function as erotic spectacles (to-be-looked-at-ness), subjecting the female form to voyeuristic objectification and fetishistic scopophilia. Subverting the male gaze requires avant-garde cinematic forms that disrupt narrative illusion.
- **Dialectical Montage vs. Deep-Focus Realism:** A central historical cleavage divides Sergei Eisenstein's montage theory (where meaning arises from the violent collision of two disparate shots) from André Bazin's realist aesthetics. Bazin championed deep focus and the continuous long take (exemplified by Orson Welles and Jean Renoir), arguing that preserving spatial and temporal continuity respects the ambiguity of physical reality and grants spectators perceptual freedom.

2. Comparative Analytical Matrix: Cinematic Movements, Techniques & Ideologies

A structured comparative assessment delineates performance metrics and aesthetic paradigms in Module 4:

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- **Phase 1: Spatio-Temporal Segmentation:** Deconstructing the film into sequences and individual shots; mapping narrative beats against temporal progression and camera setups.
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- **Phase 3: Sonic & Rhythmic Architecture:** Evaluating the acoustic landscape—synchronized dialogue, ambient Foley tracks, diegetic music vs. non-diegetic emotional underscoring.
- **Phase 4: Ideological & Cultural Hermeneutics:** Situating the cinematic artifact within historical class, caste, racial, and gender power dynamics, decoding what the film naturalizes or challenges.

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