Deciphering Audism

Reading Disablism in Nagesh Kukunoor’s Iqbal

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Abstract— Ethnocentrism is another sociological concept. Ethnocentrism is a portmanteau word made up of two different words- ethnicity and centrism. When a person centralizes his or her own culture then in the process he marginalizes all the other prevailing cultures. This happens when the person feels superior about his culture. This attitude is visible in those people who exhibit ableist ideology, thus, privileging the ablest culture and marginalizing the disability culture. To eradicate such mental attitudes it is important to adopt a cosmopolitan view which accommodates people of all the cultures and beliefs irrespective of their background, experience and identity. Cosmopolitanism believes in inclusion of every identity.

Key words: Disablism, film text, cinematic setting, semiology

Introduction
A film by Nagesh Kukunoor, Iqbal deals with the theme of oppression. Suffering from hearing impairment, Iqbal was determined to become a successful cricketer, but his aspirations were initially not supported by anybody because of his hearing disability. He gets support only from his sister, Khadija who helped him constantly throughout his pursuits. Throughout the filmic narrative people tried to repress Iqbal because his hearing impairment was perceived as deviant by the society. Nagesh Kukunoor is one of the most famous directors in India. For him literature or filmic representation is not a medium to gloss over the squalid realities of life, instead he believes that literature can be the sole medium to talk about the harsh realities and also to bring about a reformation in the society.

Theory
Nagesh Kukunoor’s works starkly present human pathos, sentiments, trauma and longings. His experimentation with the technique was a way to centralize agonized existences. His thoughts regarding human existence is fiercely impasioned with powerful meanings. Iqbal is a simple tale of grit of an 18 year old and his family superbly told by Nagesh Kukunoor. The director takes care of the technicalities of cricket without delving into them too much. And the sprinkles of humour, like naming Iqbal's buffaloes after cricketers and making them field, helps ease the intensity. (Patwardhan) In the film we can see that Iqbal turns out to be a unique character with extraordinary abilities. He eventually turns out to be victorious in the film. It seems as if, if a person is unable to achieve anything then the purpose of his life remains unaccomplished. The story is worthy of mention only if it indicates overcoming of one's disability. Otherwise, the story is left unheard. Iqbal is the character played by Shreyas Talpade. He is a boy with big dreams and despite being deaf and mute, he is ambitious to lead a good life ahead. He does not consider his disability a hindrance in his path. This adds uniqueness to his character. His mother and sister were very supportive in his struggle to obtain a position in the national cricket team. “Far from the growing 'scientific training' for cricket, Iqbal practices bowling alone on a dry patch of land with pruned branches as stumps. Steaming in from the other end, bare feet, his only aim is to strike the stumps.” (Patwardhan) Iqbal's sister, Khadija, makes a request to the coach of Kolipad Cricket Academy to enroll Iqbal. Though after learning some techniques he is thrown out of the academy but his struggle does not end there. He goes to the village drunkard, Mohit, for guidance. The character of Mohit is well played by Naseeruddin Shah. Mohit had been a fast bowler of the state but never got the chance to represent India. Mohit is a frustrated man who was initially reluctant to help Iqbal but after sometime he starts taking interest and consequently Iqbal's struggle becomes his own and from that moment his life gets a meaning and purpose.

“When Iqbal finally achieves his dream and walks out of the Indian dressing room onto the ground, he can't hear the deafening cheers in the stadium. But he has lived the moment so many times in his dreams, he doesn't need to.” (Patwardhan) The story is devoid of twists and turns. The narrative is quite predictable but the author seems to be aware of the fact that the narrative is such that it will catch the attention of the audience till the end.

Iqbal was constantly told by people that he will not be able to become a cricketer because of his hearing disability but he was adamant to become one. He faces rejection at various levels. He did not belong to an economically stable background so he could not afford to buy a cricket set or pay the fee for learning cricket. He used to hide at the back of the ground in order to learn by watching the trainer. The trainer in his village used to, train the boys of his academy, but as Iqbal was unable to afford the fees of the academy so he used to learn by watching the trainer from a distance. He used to ask his sister to interpret everything in sign language, which she used to do readily and happily. His struggle is noteworthy as in spite of having hearing disability he aims at becoming a cricketer and finally succeeds in his attempt. The character has to live the emotions of the role or character played by him/her. There is always fear involved with the disabled identity.

The nature of the fear appears to vary with the type of stigma. For most stigmas stemming from physical or mental problems, including cancer,
people experience fear of contagion even though they know that the stigma cannot be developed through contact. (Coleman 148)

Iqbal's father was aware of his son's disability. He believed that farming is a stable profession and this art will help his son in times of economic crisis. Iqbal's father tries very hard to make his son realize that it is mandatory for him to learn farming if he wants to earn his living and sustain himself but Iqbal's unidirectional passion towards cricket compels him to chase his dreams with fiery zeal. He is supported by his sister Khadija throughout. We can also see how Naseeruddin Shah changes from a wanderer to a mature person with insight. He was a mentor who finally becomes Iqbal's friend. “It's a story that leaves you inspired and shows the power of the human mind. Iqbal is not only about cricket.” (Patwardhan)

Findings

Cinema is a medium of expression where meaning can be perceived and analyzed by viewing the images projected on screen. Cinema suggests the thought or idea in mind. The thought suggested here is that Iqbal's effort to overcome his disability and achieve his goal is mandatory because otherwise his life would have no credentials and value. His perseverance in the film is emphasized by recurrent use of soft focus. A film also has a language like other forms of verbal text. Literature or other artistic forms are capable of expressing emotions. Similarly, various shots in the films are also capable of expressing emotions. These emotions are conveyed in the form of images projected on the screen. The language of the film cannot be studied under the discipline of linguistics, rather it is a part of semiology where every image can be studied and interpreted as symbol which gives meaning. The reason has something to do with the economy of visual storytelling in an ableist culture. This in turn comes out of the legacy of eugenics and the current hegemony of ableism itself. If you want to make a film that is about disability in such a culture, then every part of the story has to do with disability. The film has to be, in some sense, obsessed with disability. But if the roving eye of the camera takes its focus off of disability, then disability has to disappear or it will create a buzz of interference in the story telling. (Davis 44) Film and cinema are not synonymous terms. They are different. Film is a composite system of codes which is concerned with the means of expression. It also takes verbal language into consideration. Cinema is concerned with the images especially, the nonverbal component of the images. The code of the film is different from the language of the film. Codes are abstract as they are subject to multiple interpretations but language of the film is the sequential arrangement of images, which moves on the screen in an orderly form. Sound effects, music and speeches are also part of the language of the film. Cinematic setting helps us to perceive the life and times of the characters. The surrounding environment speaks a lot about their lifestyle and conditions. The geographical area gives us the information of the protagonist's occupation and his or her socio-economic status in the society. The setting of the movie Iqbal is a village where the majority of people earn their living through farming. Iqbal's journey becomes significant because he was courageous enough to fight with the circumstances and his disability to achieve his goal.

So when an actor takes on a role as a person with a disability, he or she is entering a world of signs and meanings that encapsulate the larger society's attitude toward disability. This system of signs and meanings participates and encourages the non-disabled person's fantasy about disability. (Davis 45)

Conclusion

There are different kinds of motion visible in the film like slow motion and stopped motion. Slow motion is used to accentuate the perseverence. The last shot played by Iqbal is shot in slow motion in order to enhance its effect. Stopped motion is used when a person becomes numb due to the great loss which he or she has witnessed. Stopped motion can only be defined vis-a-vis accelerated, reverse and slow motion. Stopped motion can be witnessed when Iqbal finds nobody to train him for cricket. Props used in the film give us meaning and are interpretable. Ball and bat are the props used recurrently in the film. This signifies Iqbal's passion for cricket. Along with props, costumes also play a significant role as they speak about the character's economic and social position. It also gives a glimpse of the character's national identity, religious leanings, gender position, class, psychological status etc. Lighting is another factor that gives meaning to the filmic text and which can be analyzed by the people. Various combinations of lighting are used to achieve a desired effect like backlighting, underlighting, sidelighting, fill lighting etc. The final performance of Iqbal towards the end of the filmic narrative is an appropriate example of fill lighting. Underlighting is visible in the beginning of the filmic narrative when he used to live in the village in deprivation. Side lighting is seen when he plays cricket in his village for the first time with other boys. Back lighting is visible when he learns cricket from his coach, Mohit and when Khadija supports him in his struggle of learning cricket. High-key explicates even diffusion of light. High-key lighting is visible throughout the second half of the film where Iqbal started gaining acclamation. In low-key light, the contrast between bright and dark is starkly visible. This is visible in the first half of the film when Iqbal was struggling to become a cricketer and he was economically weak. Another major dimension to explore is the acting of the actors in the film. The gestures and facial expressions appropriate for horror and thriller movie is poles apart from the expressions needed to convey in comedy and romance. The right kind and amount of emotion has to be projected at the right time then only the scene will convey the intended meaning. The character of Iqbal never fails to emulate aptly as and when needed in the film. The idiosyncrasies of the characters were believable.

Screen theorists thus analyzed the ideological dimensions of film and held that what we call reality is not somehow already there but was a world created by signifying systems, themselves generated through the ideologies of the dominant power structures. (Habib 2008, 197)
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REFERENCES