Creation of ideology through the language of cinema: a feminist discourse study of media education

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Abstract

This paper is an effort to deconstruct the language in the discourse of cinema to examine how media generates a concept and presents it in a manner that the ideology underlying the concept sounds natural; rather a cultural construct. With the linguistic and analyses of a selection of excerpts from the movie ‘Astitva’ (i.e. Identity), I try to show that creation of ideologies and distribution of power is done through language. This paper decodes and deconstructs the linguistic content in the discourse of cinema to draw attention to highlight the issues related to women in cinematic representations and their identity.

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1. Image of Women in Cinema

The role of media, in the modern world cannot be underestimated. As a tool for the production and dissemination of ideology that serves the interests of the group/class that exercises economic and political control over it, media occupies a strategic place in the game of power relations within a social formation. According to Zafar (1991) media can be seen as being engaged in an exercise, which does not enable the speaker to think independently but creates public opinion instead. As South-Asia subscribes to capitalist ethic within patriarchy, the media here operates within a more commercially oriented frame of reference and balance is in favour of the male. The increased reiteration of the slogan that women’s place is within the home and the insistence that this view is integral to our culture and religion, has seen in both the verbal and physical molestation of women in different walks of life. The unremitting focus on women as the symbol of male honour has increasingly transformed her body into the space where male vendettas are carried out.

2. The Language of Cinema

The word ‘Cinema’ comes from the Greek word ‘Kinema’ meaning movement.

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The language of cinema is a discourse having certain features; the use of metaphors, pronouns, the art of spin and rhetorical devices, which distinguish it from other discourses. Laura Mulvey (1975) advanced the idea of a ‘ruling ideology’ which leads the male onlooker to identify with the male protagonist, or hero in the film. Mulvey argued that the male hero in the film acts as ‘the bearer of the look’. This means that he possesses the controlling power of the male gaze and that the film ‘sees’ everything in the narrative through his eyes. The male spectator is therefore in privileged position, seeing the female characters through the gaze of the hero, sharing as it were in the power of the hero. She wrote a widely-discussed article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ about pleasure, mainstream cinema, and the possibilities of a new kind of film which challenged the dominant system. She thought that the narrative fiction film created images of women, which were used for the gratifications of men. The most powerful institutions in society, including the cinema, are being run for the benefit of men. This study provides insight into the cinematic representations of women, the projection of ideologies and eventually educating the masses through media.

2.1. Movie in Focus

The movie ‘Astitva’(2000) meaning ‘Identity’ is about a woman Aditi and realization of her own self. Shrikant has been married for 27 years, and is still in love with Aditi, who has sired him a son, Aniket, who is now 25 years of age, and is in love with a charming young woman named Revathi, who he hopes to marry soon. One day, out of the blue, Aditi finds herself the sole heir to a large estate, and sum of money, which belonged to a male named Malhar Kamat who was her music teacher long ago. Shrikant is puzzled by these turn of events, and closely questions Aditi. Shrikant discovers, from his diary entries, Malhar Kamat's connection to his son Aniket. He immediately forces Aditi to confess her indiscretion in front of his friend Ravi, his wife Meghna and son. Aditi confesses and Aniket disowns his mother, Shrikant gets extremely agitated but refuses to divorce her and pronounces punishment: she must live with him as long as it takes and he will not henceforth speak to her. Meghna and Ravi try to talk him down but he remains obdurate. Meghna (herself divorced from her former husband who had similar character traits to Shrikant) is stunned by this and reveals it to Revathi. Revathi promptly breaks off her engagement to Aniket. In the climax Aditi delivers thought-provoking lines followed by Revathi who explains to Aniket that she broke the engagement because of the way he acted and treated Aditi and all the men in the family were the same, narrow-minded and also supports Aditi by saying that her act wasn't a crime. The movie ends with Revathi and Aditi walking out the house, whilst Shri and Aniket standing in the doorway.

The movie can be seen divided into two parts; the first part asserts the male domination over the female and the last part declares the emergence of feminist discourse. I propose to show through this paper that it is actually the language of media which creates and propagates the concept of power in the favor of male (See Excerpt 1,2 & 3) or female (See Excerpt 4).

3. Linguistic Analysis

The linguistic content is decoded from selected excerpts from the movie to display the hidden ideologies at work.

Excerpt1:

“Dekho Aditi Hamare Gharane mei na kisi aurat ne nokri ki hai na kisi ne kerewai hai. Mujhe apne ghar mei biwi ke pese nahi chahye, mei apna ghar chala sakta hon.”

(Shrikant to his wife Aditi)

English Translation:

“Look Aditi, never before has any woman in my family has done job or made to do job. I do not want wife’s money in my home. I can run my household.”
Analysis:

This excerpt comes in response to Aditi’s question when she tries to seek her husband’s approval to take up a professional career. It provides examples of lexical items with the prepositional phrase ‘Hamare gharane mei’ [in our family], the noun phrase ‘Bivi ke pese’ [wife’s money], the verb ‘Chala’ [to run (manage household)] and the personal pronoun ‘Mei’ [I]. The language analysis highlights the fact that Aditi’s husband Shrikant is a narrow-minded stereotype male. For him, it is unnecessary rather useless for a woman to work. Firstly, he has associated job with money earning only. Secondly, his authoritative use of language sounds like a command rather opinion.

The phrase ‘Hamare gharane mei’ [in our family] shows here the pompous and egoist nature of Shrikant and he takes pride in specifying his family norms in the word ‘Hamare’ [our] that whatever other families are doing it is unnatural for his family to allow a woman to work. The line ‘Na kisi aurat ne nokri ki hai na kisi ne kerwayi hai’ [never before has any woman in my family has done job or made to do job] is a generalized statement by Shrikant referring to all the females who were and are subdued by the male dominance. The word ‘Aurat’ [woman] means that whether she is wife, mother, daughter, sister or daughter-in-law his family’s woman is not allowed to work.

The use of the phrase ‘Biwi ke pese’ [wife’s money] does not make any logical sense that how come economy can be related to male and female and how, literally speaking, female-earned-money is different from male-earned-money. If Shrikant can work and earn money then why the same act is forbidden for his wife. It is the social construction of the meaning, which enfolds a negative connotation. It shows Shrikant’s fears relating the queries he has to face from his family and society in case his wife will work. He has no courage to face the challenges of patriarchy on one hand and on the other hand his sense of manhood does not allow him to take a stand.

The first entity of the statement ‘Mujhe apne ghar mei biwi ke pese nahi chahye’ [I do not want my wife’s money] negates the following entity ‘Mei apna ghar chala sakta hon’ [I can run my household] in a way that Shrikant does not want his wife to earn and dislike to have money from his wife. Whereas the second entity, which is conditional, means that if he is not able to run his household he would have definitely allowed his wife to earn the living for the family. Shrikant empowers the ideology of man as a breadwinner though the continuous use of his personal pronouns ‘Hamarey’ [our], ‘Mujhey’ [I], ‘Apna’ [my] and ‘Mei’ [I]. The most brutal comment, a feature of South-Asian society, and is projected in these lines also is the continuous use of possessive pronouns ‘Apne ghar mei’ [in my home] and ‘Apna ghar’ [my household]. Here he has deprived his wife from the ownership of his house and announced himself as the sole owner of the house. Shrikant’s linguistic behavior signals the social male authority over the female.

Excerpt 2:

‘Kitni bar kaha hai ke nokri chor do, arey yar hamin kis cheiz ki kami hai jo ghar ki bahu nokri kare’

English Translation:

“So many times I have told her to quit the job. What do we lack? Why does a bride of our family have to work?”

(Shrikant to his friend Ravi, about his daughter-in-law Revathi)

Analysis:

Britannica defines Chauvinism as ‘an attitude of superiority towards members of the opposite sex’. Shrikant is prejudiced about woman’s independence in any sense, personal or professional. He takes pleasure in ruling women. He has not only blocked his wife’s professional career as a singer but also tries to impose restrictions on his daughter-in-law. The portion ‘hamin kis cheiz ki kami hai’ [What do we lack?] refers to Shrikant’s concept of ‘Female-earned-Money’ as mentioned in Excerpt 1 that a woman should only do job in midst of financial crisis, when the male bread winner of the family cannot support any good.

By calling Revathi as ‘Hamare ghar ki bahu’ [bride of our family], Shrikant totally negates Revathi’s identity by merely tagging her as an object related to household unit. For Shrikant, Revathi is nothing but as would-be-wife to his son and his would-be daughter-in-law following the same patriarchal tradition which his wife Aditi followed and thus given a tag of ‘wife’ and she lost her identity within the struggle to come up to the expectations of this tag ‘wife’.
Excerpt 3:

“But I am a man!”

(Shrikant to his friend Ravi)

Analysis:

This line comes in response to Shrikant’s past life disclosed by Ravi, his friend. The line marks the gender discrimination between Shrikant and his wife Aditi. Shrikant has made Aditi confess about her past and the fact that Anikait is not actually from her marriage to Shrikant but actually from her relationship with her music teacher. Aditi delivers the whole truth in front of her husband, son, Ravi and Meghna. Reacting to this truth Anikait and Shrikant gets furious, whereas Ravi and his wife Meghna take it on humane level. Ravi suggests Shrikant to forgive Aditi but Shrikant denies bluntly. To this Ravi reminds Shrikant: “Agar tumahara yehi Stand hai to tum khud bhi loyal kahan thei. Yad hai, kuch saal pehle tum ne tumhare affairs ke bare mei mujh se kaha tha, yad hai?” [If this is your stand, how loyal had you been? You remember telling me about your affairs a few years ago, Remember?]

And Shrikant replies “But I am a man” which proves that Shrikant’s ethics are different for male and female. For him, a man can have illegitimate relationships simply because he owns the tag ‘man’ which is his license to independence in all fields. Being a man he should only question and can never be questioned. The word ‘But’ is a transitional word which links the sentence with the previous utterances of Ravi. Shrikant does remember all his previous affairs, and without any embarrassment, shame or remorse he replies that he is a man which entails-Unquestionable! For him, a male may independently exercise physical relationships inside or outside the home. This is what media education implies through language that the word ‘man’ is a license to everything and on the contrary ‘woman’ is a term referred to set norms and values dominated by a male master. The patriarchal male has made rules for his own convenience and sexuality is the one major area where a woman is exploited severely by males.

Excerpt 4:

“Mujhe nahi lagta mei kisi bhi muamle mei purshon se kam hon aur iss hisab se aurat honey ke natey jo bat mere liye galat hai wo tumhare liye liye bhi galat he honi chahye aur mer d hone ke natey jo bat tumhare liye sahi hai wo aik aurat hone ke natey mere liye bhi sahi he honi chahye.”

English Translation:

I do not think I am any less than a man in anything. So, what is wrong for me, being a woman must be wrong for you too. What is within your rights as a man is within my rights too”!

(Revathi to her fiancé Anikait)

Analysis:

This last excerpt is actually a reflection of Aditi’s viewpoint but through the mouth of Revathi. It discusses the way which is adopted by Aditi and the thoughts of a radical feminist. It is linguistically analyzed by giving the sociolinguistic and sociocultural connotations of words ‘Purshon’ [males], ‘Sahee’ [right] and ‘Galat’ [wrong]. The patriarchal ideologies maintained by Shrikant and Anikait are brought in contrast to feminist views of Aditi, Meghna and Revathi. There is repetition of two lexical items ‘Sahee’ [right] and ‘Galat’ [Wrong] which embody the infrastructure of moral norms in South-Asian society. For Revathi, if ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ are two extremes of morality than they should be followed equally, free of gender biases. Shrikant does not think of his countless illicit relations ‘wrong’ but his wife’s sexual relation, even if it happened once is doomed ‘wrong’. Patriarchy, I insist, is an ideology of male domination supported by males and for the males. Here, Revathi challenges the vicious framework of South-Asian patriarchal structure and sounds feminism by announcing her identity as a woman rather empowering it to dominate males, but speaking of equality in all the spheres of life. Finally, this excerpt from movie negates the ideology of male domination and inaugurates the notion of female identity which is provoked through the use of language.
4. Conclusions

The research concludes following basic features regarding media education.

- In the movie the actors present themselves to public as ‘agents for change’. It is this feature which marks their resemblances very close to revolutionists because the language they use is ideologically loaded. Language is coded and codification is a process whereby conventions are established.

- Speakers in the movie use language to construct identities: identities change from moment to moment and these identities are constructed through language. As their language changes every moment, their identities shift constantly.

- Media educates presenting the cultural constructs as the ruling ideology in a way that the ideology seems natural.

- Dissemination of power is done through media and cinema plays a vital role to it.

- Images of femininity are smudged by the idols of patriarchy and the consistent use of personal pronoun ‘Mei’ [I] by the male speaker mainly confirms it at various stances in the movie.

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