Genre of Gaze: Mainstream vs Parallel Indian Film Directors: a Theoretical Observation

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ABSTRACT: In the beginning of 1970s with the introduction of feminist theory in film we started too conversant with some terms like ‘male gaze’, visual pleasure, spectatorship etc. From the end of 1960s scholars are influenced by the works Simone De Beauvoir’s ‘The Second Sex’, Betty Friedan’s ‘The Feminine Mystique’, and Kate Millett’s ‘Sexual Politics’. As long as the basis for feminist analyses of films were De Beauvoir’s perception of women as “other,” Friedan’s discussion of the social mythology that works to predicament women to a “natural” female role of passivity and maternal nurturing under a dominant patriarch, and especially Millett’s examination of how the ideology of femininity is instilled in women through many forms of cultural texts from scientific theories to literary works. Though Beauvoir’s, Friedan and Kate were the pioneers to introduce feminist perception in films nevertheless the alternative ideas of Laura Mulvey, Sally Potter, reopen the new arena of analysis of dual composition: the critique of gaze in mainstream cinema and the advocacy of gaze in alternate or counter-cinema. So in this paper I want to analyse that in the aspect of post nineties Indian cinema is it hypothetically or rationally possible to segregate the gaze of mainstream and alternative film directors when they visualize to women on screen?

Keywords: Indian films, Male Gaze, Spectatorship, Visual Pleasure.

I. Introduction:

Dualism, which takes many forms, including this split between the critical analysis of mainstream texts and a more activist agenda of promoting films by alternative filmmakers who offer alternate visions to promote women characters on screen and undoubtedly it is one of important features which dominate in the history of feminist film theory. Other symmetries exist as well, for instance, between an emphasis on amassing more and more evidence of women’s exclusion and distorted representation in mainstream cinema as opposed to uncovering ways in which these films deconstruct themselves by exhibiting contradictions, gaps and tensions within patriarchal ideology. One of eminent Indian film maker RitupornoGhosh was articulated that another critics set out to observe films that in spite of the devastatingly patriarchal dimensions of mainstream cinema still achieve to speak to female audiences in various ways. Because feminist film theory is at its commencement so knotted to feminist film practice, there has also always been a questioning of what the connection between theory and practice should actually comprise.
II. Objectives of the Study:

- Main objective of the study is to examine the difference of gaze between alternate and main stream film makers.
- Are Alternative film directors free from male gaze, when they are visualized a woman on screen?

III. Methodology:

Present study is based on secondary sources like literature and cinematic materials Here indirect literature, articles, autobiographies, interviews, memoire, post nineties main stream and alternative films are explained as intersectional method.

V. Result and Discussion:

Historically 1970s feminist film theory has represented the main configuring design of feminist film theory throughout the twentieth century. Beyond the general definition of feminist film theory as a mode of theoretical conjecture that makes gender and its investigative focus, the particular method of that analysis has been from the beginning disputed. The earliest critical deportment came to be known as the images of women approach or reflection theory. It is a generally sociological viewpoint that sees film texts as simple reflections of social authenticity and critiques mainstream films for representing images of women that are, in fact, not reflections, but falsifications of women’s real lives which work to support patriarchal dogma.

Scholars like Laura Mulvey among many others after her, have appraised cinema for objectifying the female body, claiming it becomes a passive common of the pleasured active male prurient gaze and this argument is readily applied here. Furthermore by only acknowledging women in terms of their sex, female identity is imagined to be clustered around two polar extremes of sexuality - dharma and desire. There is no other attempt to depict and reconnoiter the range of emotional and psychological complexities that may exist in-between these extremes, and in doing this is actively refutes that other complex female identities and subjectivities exist. Secondly in the aspect of main stream cinema it has observed that all female erotic performances of ‘make believe’ occur in public spaces which continues to delineate the sexually charged aspect of femininity outside of and distanced from the inner shrine of the domestic sphere and its associations with chaste wifehood and benevolent motherhood. Moreover, only allowing the expression of sexuality on the terms of either ‘make believe’ or westernized ‘otherness’ nullifies real sexual experiences of everyday women by portraying sex as a forbidden ‘fantasy’, which if indulged in results in social disapproval. As we have seen, main stream cinema visualises women within an explicit structure of representation that relates to idealised values of womanhood. Women are represented as stereotyped characters, reacting to and participating in conservative social situations in ways that uphold social norms. Social scientist Uberoi has claimed that by portraying women in this way the media serves to make dominant gendered roles and behaviour appear natural and
therefore any space for the exploration and demonstration of female subjectivity is rendered redundant.

Mulvey’s essay has extremely significant on feminist film theory and on film theory in general because it not only challenges head-on the crucial questions of pleasure, spectatorship, and gender identity in mainstream cinema but induces these terms together into an interpersonal whole. Her work has also been highly productive in that it is enthused the most passionately contested debates in feminist theory throughout the 1980s and 1990s. These debates center on three issues elevated in Mulvey’s essay: the male gaze, feminist counter-cinema, and the female spectator. Each of these issues has led to distinguished developments in feminist film theory, as well as substantial difference. Mulvey’s idea of the male gaze has also been challenged for reducing mainstream cinema to an atrocious anti-female monolith, ignoring socio-historical changes that have prejudiced cinematic portrayals, and failing to explain why women would ever enjoy, or even watch, films that represent them only as male fantasy figures and castration intimidations.

Mulvey has anticipated, instead, a theory of female spectatorship that encompasses an alternation between masculine and feminine poles of spectator positioning. Girl’s movement, which is based on the Freudian theory, through a masculine phallic phase to the acceptance of a feminine sexual identity. Mulvey postulates a greater tendency for female spectators to adopt bisexual identifications. The female spectator is said to hesitate between identification with the female image and the male figure of active looking and desire. In other words, active female spectatorship involves masculinization, and while the female audience may be “restless in its transvestite clothes”, as Mulvey recommends, they really have no substitute but passive identification with their own cinematic objectification, with to-be-looked-at-ness spectator.

In the phrase of early Indian cinema women actors could not concern about male conspiracy to visualize women as passive object which was closely linked with the patriarchal and social controls over women. In the aspect of main stream films thus heroines are always represented as chaste, submissive, modest and self-sacrificing and are stereotyped as either the virtuous all giving mother, or long-suffering wife. These stereotypes were emphasised and affirmed through particular bodily practices and dress. Dwyer and Patel explained that mothers and wives were always portrayed wearing a sari, as was the heroine, as an “emblem of her chastity and goodness”. Main Stream Indian film directors are aesthetically concern, they have certain dominant tendencies, which show that far from simply remaining in an elongated state of not-yet-ness, Indian cinema has evolved a particular, distinct combination of elements, putting the technology to a use that whether constant with the camera’s ontology or not, is consistent enough over time to suggest ideological affectivity.

Contemporary mainstream cinema imports to be nothing more than pure entertainment, enjoyed for the profligate spectacles of dance and song, action packed adventures and glamorous actresses. Commercial film provides for a vast heterogeneous audience and
therefore lacks general differentiation as it needs to integrate visual pleasure into a ‘something for everyone’ project. During the pre and post-Independence era, the films produced were standardised to integrate and communicate nationalist ideals of social morality and tradition. This was conveyed through melodramatic formulaic plots centered on traditional feudal family sagas, romanticized communal values and archetypal heroes and stereotyped heroines from popular mythology. At that era films became a site for the nation’s reinvention by contribution an occasion for India to differentiate herself from her colonial past and westernized values, becoming more modern but without being any less Indian.

Another significant feature of mainstream cinema is segregation between ‘good’ sexuality (dharma) and ‘bad’ sexuality (desire), that is demonstrated through specific social roles and behaviour. This concept is linked with the idea of the ‘female ideal’. In the film ‘MejoBou’ (1999) there patibrata heroine Radha is the personification of ‘good’ sexuality and is opposed to the ‘vamp’ Manorama a receptionist who is the exemplary malevolent woman with overt sexual displays of lust. In the film director Anjan Chaudhury has represented to Radha as the symbol of ‘good sexuality’ whose sexual desire is yet not fulfilled nevertheless she has never ever cheated to her husband. She is determined that her purity, moral values, countless waiting and faiths of god will bring her husband to her. Manorama is visualized as the erotic spectacle and the central sexual pleasures of cinema her provocative appearance in front of Radha’s husband is not only symbolized unscrupulous, immoral image of vamp her existence is also created an extra sympathy for Radha. Scholars like Kasbekar, Dwyer & Patel, and Prasadhave stated that ‘unofficial’ erotic pleasures had to be achieved by strategically circumscribing female eroticism within the socially acceptable domain of the song and dance sequence. In the film when Radha performed disco in front of people for examine her modernity then her performance has visualized within the realms of ‘make believe’ and therefore allow for transgressed voyeuristic enjoyment. But when this spectacle is performed by the Manorama, who is generally allowed more space for sexual promiscuity because of her nature as a ‘bad’ woman, she is “usually disposed of (by the convenient stray bullet) as a fitting punishment for her threatening sexuality”). Clothing is also used strategically in revealing and emphasizing the erotic female body. According to the common features of vamp Manorama can include smoking, drinking, and dancing. She can also be quick to fall in and out of love. She characterizes unacceptable behavior and is seen as unpleasant. She is almost always punished for her behavior.

Apparently in the aspect of post nineties Indian parallel films have challenged to the stereotypical portrayed of female characters of mainstream films. In the films like ‘Samsodhan’ (1996), ‘Lajja’ (2001), ‘HariBhari’ (1999), ‘Astitva’ (2004), ‘Laxmi’ (2014), ‘Mardani’ (2014) etc. there women visualized as central characters of films and they are visualized as integral part of socio-economic –political reality. In the aspect of post nineties Indian parallel films the otherness of sets out to be thought-provoking and stimulating with little or no attempt to create pleasure in the conventional sense as it is found in mainstream films Influenced by artistic and
literary modernism, directors like ShyamBenegal, GovindNihalni, Buddha Deb Dasgupta, Meera Nair, AparnaSen, AnjuBhora etc. offer major challenges to mainstream the ideas of realism and narrative development. From a modernist perspective, they create passive spectators by presenting a story as expressive of truth or reality.

According to Mulvey, narrative film is made for the pleasure of the male spectator alone, who seeks to control and "indirectly" possess the female figure through narcissistic identification with the main male protagonist, who controls the gaze and the events on the screen, thus giving the male spectator a reassuring sense of omnipotence. Here I want to explain the visualization of rape scene in the context of main stream cinema where the gaze also provides another kind of pleasure the voyeuristic one. In the film ‘InsafkaTarzu’ (1989) there visualized the trauma of two rape victims and their enormous struggle for achieving justice. Nonetheless director visualized two rape scene in a pleasurable way. When Rajbabbr raped to ZinatAman and PadminiKolapuri those scene eroticized by directors and technicians which has proved victims have enjoyed the forceful penetration. Those scenes have explained this ambivalence, where the woman is seen as a lure (object of desire) and a threat (woman seen. as lack and therefore signifying the castration anxiety), impels men to worship and fetishize woman on.

Simultaneously in the aspect of parallel films post nineties film directors not only visualize the ‘rape scene’ for analyzing the aggression of masculine power and sexual domination, they narrate the complex politics of patriarchal subordination behind it. In the film ‘Dahan’ (1996) director RituparnoGhosh was concerned on post rape narration. He visualized that how protagonist Romi survives the fear and humiliation on her rape by a stranger Jhinuk and her subsequent relinquishment by her husband. Directors of parallel films have emphasized on Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), of rape victims. Victims experience both short and long-term psychological effects of rape. Director AparnaSen has explained that one of the most common psychological consequences of rape is self-blame. Victims use self-blame as an avoidance-based coping tool. Self-blame slows or, in many cases, stops the healing process. Other common emotional and psychological effects of rape include:

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) – feelings of severe anxiety and stress
- Depression
- Flashbacks – memories of rape as if it is taking place again
- Borderline personality disorder
- Sleep disorders
- Eating disorders
- Dissociative identity disorder
- Guilt
- Distrust of others – uneasy in everyday social situations
- Anger
- Feelings of personal powerlessness – victims feel the rapist robbed them of control over their bodies.
Other important genres of the male gaze in mainstream films are the beautification of heroines and eroticized the female body. With the globalization of media industries from magazines, advertisements, film, and news, the faces of Indian women are highly sexualized, radicalized, and gendered. They have emphasized to the ideal zero figures, fair complexions, and bouncing hairs of heroines, who are ideal for visual pleasure and can, create male fantasy. The difference of the ‘textual’ versus the ‘empirical’ spectator, or the ‘diegetic’ versus the ‘cinematic’ spectator, is a miniscule version of the difference between the psychoanalytic model in film studies and ethnographic methods to female spectatorship and audience studies. In order to give a more viable comprehension of female spectator in spectatorship studies Mary Ann Doane proposes ‘masquerade’. Jackie Stacey also points out that “Mary Ann Doane’s theory of femininity as ‘masquerade’ (1982) explores the modification in the female spectator’s relationship to the dominant patriarchal structures of cinematic looking organized around prurience and fetishism. Doane argues that femininity is constructed differently in relation to the voyeuristic and fetishistic drives of the masculine subject/spectator”. The pure binary positions of ‘textual’ and ‘empirical’ spectator are even analyzed by Stacey. She states that if ‘spectatorship’ is simply a textual position, then there may only be a masculine or a feminine option; however, if spectatorship refers to members of the cinema audience, surely the possible positioning multiply. The reluctance to engage with questions of cinema audiences, for fear of dirtying one’s hands with empirical material, has led to an inability to think about active female desire beyond the limits of masculine positioning.

The cinemas of India, in spite of important alterations, share a common ground, a set of aesthetic concerns, certain dominant tendencies, which show that far from simply residual in a prolonged state of not-yet-ness, Indian cinema has evolved a particular, distinct combination of elements, putting the technology to a use that, whether consistent with the camera’s ontology or not, was consistent enough over time to suggest ideological affectivity. Yet the theoretical foundations of film theory remained unchanged. In this regard, I want to discuss article Vigilantism and the Pleasures of Masquerade: The Female Spectator of Vijayasanthi Films (2002) by TejaswiniNiranjana that deals with female spectator, gaze and pretense in the Indian context. Though this article also talks about (female) vigilante and suggestions the lineage of the vigilante in Telugu films by locating it in politico-cultural contexts, where Niranjana poses challenges to the existing notions of spectator (ship), gaze and masquerade.

The study of Vijayasanthi films therefore, results in many serious questions. As Niranjana argues [If] the idea of the masculine spectator-position is based on the over-visible image of the woman (to be looked at, to be acted upon); what happens then, when the woman’s image at the heart of the film is no longer that of the feminine female but the almost anti-feminine Vijayasanthi? What then is the spectator-position in relation to the masquerade, since this is a different kind of masquerade? Would it be appropriate to talk about the de-masculinisation of the spectator-position of classic narrative cinema?

So when gaze and spectator (ship) are used to examine Indian cinema it is expected that the eroticism and cultural conventions surrounding the look in India are similar to the culture
where these concepts have appeared from. People gaze if one looks ‘beautiful’ or ‘ugly’, if someone has a new car, if one is a foreigner or a stranger, etc. While, this kind of looking (staring) is absent and is considered offensive in the parallel films. One should hiatus here a while and understand ‘voyeurism’ in the above context. In voyeurism as Metz defines it, the object of the look is outside of and distanced from the subject, there is no punishment for looking and no reciprocity. In other words it is a secret pleasure of looking at something or somebody, which you are not allowed to look at. In the Indian context, the ‘look’ or to look at is neither prohibited nor punished. Though there is pleasure involved in this way of looking (staring) it is obviously different from the pleasure of looking secretly (voyeurism). The above is just an instance to challenge the unproblematic use of gaze and spectator (ship) in theorizing Indian cinema and also to stress the need for developing analytical tools which should emerge from the Indian context.

According to the Marx it is executed that heterogeneous mode is characterized by the separate production of the component parts of a product and their final assembly into one unit, while in the second, organic mode, a given raw material passes through various stages of production assigned to various workers or units within an integrated serial process (Marx, Capital-3). Extending these concepts to film, Prasad understands Indian main stream cinema as heterogeneous form of manufacture and parallel cinema as organic or serial form of manufacture. If one conceives Indian cinema as an assemblage of pre-fabricated parts, we get a more accurate sense of the place of various elements, like the story, the dance, the song, the comedy scene, the fight, etc. in the film text as a whole. On the other hand, what makes this method of operational unsuitable for parallel films the fact that a material base – the story – is the point of departure of the production process and its transformation into a narrative film is the final goal of that process.

Marx uses the needle as an example for serial manufacture where the base material of the product is present from the beginning to the end of the process. Similar is the case with parallel cinema where the narrative is the base material for the film and the end process of film making, is that of telling this narrative. In contrast to this, Marx uses the watch to explain heterogeneous manufacture.

In the aspect of post nineties Indian parallel films, directors are followed quite a different course. Rather than propagating a unified picture of ideal Indian culture, parallel film sought to create some kind of insight into Indian life by capturing the experiences and contradictions of a society in transition by converging on small sections of Indian reality but explore their complex layers of meaning. In particular a new type of woman is ascended which is contrasted strongly with the dreamy traditional heroines of popular film as she was placed in many different contexts, confronting a multiplicity of social problems in which all areas of Indian social life were unprotected, inspected and interrogated. Film maker Manish Manjarekar has claimed that he “initiates to his own convention of cinema that he has created” and this tradition receipts deep root in the study of patriarchy, feminine identity and the intricacies of human emotion.
For example, films like 'Mrityudand' (1997) and 'Astitva' (2001), that guide us through a male dominated world from the eyes of a woman. Prakash Jha and Manish Manjarekar have disrupted the idea of domestic ecstasy and the home as a warm and intimate preserve by portraying Chandrabati and Aditi as confined within the home and her conventionalized role as a wife. Dissatisfied with her husband neglect of her for his work, Aditi begins to fall in love with Mallar Kamod, her music teacher, in the film 'Astitva' (2000) there are visualized the sexual and reproductive empowerment of women. Protagonist Aditi challenges to the male domination on the context of sexual and reproductive relations. She has tried to recollect her identity. Director Manjarekar has visualized the character of Aditi as self who has an existence and a body which has contravened the limits of wifehood and motherhood. Astitva is not merely about existence it is about the women’s struggle to find her identity in male dominated society, it is struggle to establish women’s sexual and reproductive emancipation. It is declaration of all that which constitutes a personality with its distinct relationships, anxieties, dependencies, natures, desires and ambitions prejudices and preferences. The film has challenged to the so called ‘Agniparikhsha’ where Sita had to prove her purity in front of patriarch. And she suffered for her banishment. In the film protagonist Aditi explodes this traditional myth of ‘ideal wife or ‘Pativrata’ by 1) establishing the sexual desire of woman too is a drive much like any man’s and 2) by challenging the husbands autocracy to live under the same roof and suffer the humiliation and pain of rejection on the ground of having committed infidelity. In the film ‘Mrityudand’ (1997) there visualized that Chandrabati’s individuality is recognized between their relationships. Through her motherhood she achieves power which is motivated to take decision for self and her body. Her pregnancy is not only gives her sexual and reproductive freedom it is also broken the boundaries between public and private and challenges to unfair patriarchy.

In the film ‘Antarmohal’ (2005), directed by Rituparno Ghosh, the patriarchal domination on female sexuality is visualized very critically. The plot of the film is based on the short story of Profulla Kumar Roy’s ‘Mrinmoyee’. The film is about Bhubaneswar, in the colonial era, the year 1896, a rich yet incongruous man who has a fanatical desire for an heir and a greedy lust for power. Having been unsuccessful in fathering a child with his first wife, Mahamaya, he marries a younger and more susceptible girl named Jasomati. Having still failed to make Jasomati pregnant, Bhubaneswar recruits the help of a Brahmin priest who is tidy to sit in the bedroom in cantation chants during the act of sex it because Bhubaneswar has faith in it, which will improve the chances of insemination. Although Jasomati is extremely uncomfortable and unhappy about this situation, Bhubaneswar forces her to have sex with him. Rituparno had visualized the traumatic experience of a married woman in the ground of marital rape.

In an act of rebelliousness against this Mahamaya sneaks into the bedroom and, sitting in front of the priest, she starts to titillate him. Lifting up the bottom of her sari to quickly flash her knee, she smiles and laughs as the priest starts to stammer over his words. After repeating this a few times and with the priest increasingly unfocused, she starts to pull her sari off her shoulder and play with it gradually. The viewer, watching this scene from behind Mahamaya,
suddenly sees her pull her sari right down, skimpy her unadorned back to the audience but her bare breasts to the priest. The priest dumbfounded, stops reciting abruptly, but Mahamaya just throws her pallu back round her body, gets up and leaves the room laughing. Director Rituparno was not represent the scene for creating erotic and sexual approach on scene but he used to ‘Mahamaya’s sexual urge, body and Shari to examine and challenge male power and dominance. Furthermore this scene is symptomatic of the issues that pervade society at large. Bhubaneswar and the priest symbolize patriarchal society and religion and Mahamaya’s body, in an ironic move, is transformed into a site of resistance in which she uses the very medium that women are subjugated by, her body, and arguably her sari, the traditional symbol of chastity and virtue, to confront and criticize rigid dominant moral values of society. However in this scene the relationship between the body, desire and the selfhood is re-figured as Mahamaya’s ‘body work’ becomes empowering as female ‘sex’ is retrieved from patriarchal clutches and re-inscribed to the female body and control. Simultaneously he explained through the film that in a patriarchal family always women have to prove their fertility, if a woman cannot give birth of child then patriarchy is marked them as barren but men would not be responsible for that. He also proved the film that a man would also be an impotent.

VI Conclusion:-

In the context of parallel cinema it is very relevant that the protagonist not only confronts against the male gaze when she appears on screen, sometimes women directors, technicians have to fight against stereotypical mind set-up of patriarchal subordination in film industry. The realist/anti-realist debate centers around the question of the documentary’s capacity to provide an objective view of socio-historical reality given that its presentation of that reality may, and some say necessarily must, involve creativity, distortion, dramatic license, poetic accentuation, amplification, or distillation for the purposes of entertainment, education, polemic, or propaganda. Parallel films also tend to blur the distinction between fact and fiction. Parallel film directors believe that events may be theatrical for the camera to imitate what is believed actually to have happened and the filmmaker may intervene in the action or conduct interviews with the film’s social subjects.

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