



Critical Review Article

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Exploring Water Scarcity Through the Lens of Ecocinema: A Review of the film Kaun Kitney Pani Mein

Neha Nandani*

Department of Mass Communication and Media studies, Central University of Punjab, Punjab, India.

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the unique portrayal of water scarcity through satire in the ecocinema 'Kaun Kitney Pani Mein' (2015). Employing narrative analysis, the study examines the narrative strategies and thematic elements used to address the pressing issue of water scarcity within the satirical framework of the film. Through an exploration of plot dynamics and dialogue, the research uncovers the underlying socio-political commentary embedded in the narrative. The study highlights the significance of eco-cinema as a medium for environmental discourse and social critique, shedding light on its potential to provoke critical reflection and inspire collective action. By analyzing 'Kaun Kitney Pani Mein' (2015) through the lens of satire, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how art and cinema can serve as powerful tools for raising awareness and catalyzing change in environmental discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Human beings in the 21st century have become ecological engineers on a global level, posing a threat to the life-sustaining capability of all of Earth's natural spheres. The growing popularity of the term 'Anthropocene' signals an important shift in how humans are coming to understand their relation to the environment. Anthropocene refers to the epoch in which the impact of human activities has become as important and critical as the natural processes. The modern world led by the Anthropocene has equated increased consumption with growth (Malm & Hornborg, 2014). In the context of the Anthropocene, humans no longer have the luxury of imagining humanness and culture as distinctly separate from nature, matter, and worldliness. This context suggests the urgent need for critical reflection on the state of the environment, on human subjectivity and actions (Neimanis. *et al.*, 2015).

Water is a finite resource, and the current pattern of rising demand and excessive use is unsustainable as the

amount of water available per person decreases rapidly. India is anticipated to experience significant migration and urbanization in the next ten years, leading to a looming water problem (Prabha *et al.*, 2020). Filmmakers, like other artists, are always curious about how people interpret their place in the natural world, and film, like other creative forms, offers unique possibilities for doing so (O'Brien, 2018). Ecocinema studies, a sub-branch of Ecocriticism, incorporates documentary, fiction, and experimental films, primarily focusing on addressing ecological concerns.

Ecocinema aims to promote environmental awareness, protection, and conservation. Moreover, they encourage viewers to contemplate their role as members of the natural environment and their place within the broader biotic community, which encompasses humans (Bharali, 2014). The concept of eco-comedy extends beyond being a niche phenomenon confined to the creative endeavors of environmentally conscious individuals. The entity

*Corresponding Author: Neha Nandani

Address: Department of Mass Communication and Media studies, Central University of Punjab, Punjab, India.

Email ✉: nehasingh12101997@gmail.com

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possesses the capacity to neutralize, expose veracity, foster participation, disseminate information, foster cohesion, ignite motivation, enable agency, and, most importantly, generate novel perspectives, aspirations, and arenas to catalyze advantageous endeavors. Using the term “dying” by comedians to describe their onstage failures highlights the enduring dichotomy between comedy and tragedy (Takach, 2022).

India has a rich cultural heritage that showcases a deep reverence for the environment. Ancient Indians respected and admired the natural elements, including animals and plants, which were considered worthy of worship. Today, India is confronted with many challenges and barriers, such as population growth, water scarcity, erratic rainfall during monsoons, deforestation and wildlife depletion, soil erosion, declining sea levels, and health hazards linked to the rise in human illnesses and climate change. In her article, Shubhra Gupta (2015) concisely summarizes that the utilization of water as an exchange commodity is a potent concept, particularly considering the prevalence of drought and scarcity of accessible potable water in numerous regions of India. The ubiquity and appeal of ecocinema within the Indian context remains a mystery. India is currently experiencing numerous ecological issues, including deforestation, climate change, polluted air, natural disasters, depletion of rivers and natural resources, species extinction, and habitat loss. Astonishingly, these difficulties continue to be concealed, given that the disturbance of the ecological equilibrium is a major cause of many health problems that affect the lives and livelihoods of people in the country (Bhattacharya, 2020).

Water is one of the most important commodities that man has exploited than any other resource for sustenance. Most of the water on this planet is stored in oceans and ice caps, which is difficult to recover for our diverse needs. Most of the demand of water is fulfilled by rainwater, which gets deposited in surface and groundwater resources. The quantity of this utilizable water is very limited on Earth. Most of India's surface waters, including rivers and lakes, are getting increasingly polluted due to the onslaught of human activities of diverse nature (Rana & Guleria, 2018). *“Our observation focused on the methods these individuals employed to sustain themselves. They are sustaining themselves by engaging in stimulating conversations and sharing humorous anecdotes... Given this information, I decided to create a piece of satire. This is a genre that I am particularly fond of. There is a scarcity of satires in Bollywood,”* Nila stated to PTI (“Kaun Kitney Paani Mein”, 2015). Films like ‘Kaun Kitney Paani Mein’ with the urge to make people aware of the facets of the water crisis going in India. In fact, the other political and social angle connected to the water crisis issue.

Kaun Kitne Paani Mein

‘Kaun Kitney Paani Mein’ (2015) is an intellectually

stimulating film directed by Nila Madhab Panda, skilfully blending satire with socio-environmental critique. The film is set in a rural Indian environment and effectively intertwines the lives of individuals from two neighboring villages, each facing distinct water availability and scarcity circumstances. The film delves into the intricate dynamics of power, politics, and love amidst the context of a scarcity of water. It offers a stimulating examination of social disparities and the adverse consequences of uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. The film is engaging because to its combination of an enticing plot, well-developed characters, and a thorough exploration of vital subjects. It offers amusement and promotes reflection on pressing environmental issues and the imperative of sustainable advancement.

The film examines the complex problems related to water scarcity, caste dynamics, and power struggles in rural India. The film takes place in a made-up community dealing with a water shortage. It connects the lives of its characters while highlighting the diminishing water resources. The movie's narrative illuminates the harsh reality experienced by communities where access to water is not just a question of convenience but a crucial factor for survival and shaping societal organization. The video primarily depicts the significant inequalities in the availability of water resources, where the upper caste landlord exercises control over the primary water source while the lower caste society endures neglect and deprivation. This story structure functions as a potent allegory for the wider socioeconomic disparities that are widespread in Indian society. The film clearly exposes the systematic inequities caused by caste systems and unequal distribution of resources by contrasting the realities of the rich and underprivileged.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed narrative analysis to comprehend the visual and textual language utilized in the film. Further, the researcher carefully observed the film, paying close attention to noteworthy narrative elements that pertain to environmental concerns and the related societal norms in the films to construct a narrative and portray the societal ramifications of water scarcity. Themes were divided, describing the scenes, dialogues, and characters, how they resemble the water scarcity and its consequences. This endeavor aims to craft a story that encompasses the multifaceted aspects of ecocritical discourse.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Water Scarcity and Societal System

The initial scenes adeptly establish the setting by acquainting the viewers with the primary dilemma of water scarcity in the village. This sequence introduces the main issue of resource depletion and hints at the

difficulties the protagonist faces in the movie. One of the key scenes occurs when the lower caste protagonist, played by Kunal Kapoor, negotiates with the upper caste landlord, portrayed by Saurabh Shukla, for access to the water tank. This confrontation highlights the power dynamics at play and symbolizes the broader socio-political tensions surrounding resource distribution and caste privilege. The outcome of this negotiation sets the tone for subsequent conflicts and resolutions in the film.

The movie features heartbreaking flashbacks that offer valuable insights into the village's history and dynamics, specifically concerning the ancestral connection between the protagonist's family and the landlord's lineage. These flashback scenes enhance the audience's comprehension of the origins of the present water issue and the lasting influence of past injustices on modern societal systems. The film seamlessly integrates love subplots alongside its socio-political commentary, providing moments of levity and fostering genuine human connection. These particular sequences, such as the developing romantic relationship between the main character and the daughter of the landlord, serve as a contrasting element to the weightier subjects explored in the film. Additionally, they emphasize the shared human experiences of love and yearning in the face of hardship. The narrative incorporates various plotlines, including the romantic liaison between a prominent figure and an individual belonging to a lower socioeconomic stratum. The depiction illustrated the hostility between the interconnected communities.

Social Divide and Hierarchy

At the start of the movie, there is a gathering where the higher-caste individuals deliberate on water distribution. The decision-making process is predominantly controlled by the upper caste, with minimal to no involvement from lower-caste populations. This scene sets the power dynamics and social hierarchy related to the allocation of water. The portrayal of the upper-caste landowner, Singhdeo, overseeing the water reservoir highlights the unequal allocation of resources. Singhdeo, an elite class member, selfishly stockpiles water for his own advantage and takes advantage of the lower-caste people who rely on him for water. This vignette illustrates the methods by which the privileged class sustains its authority and dominance over crucial resources.

According to Panda (2015), the intricate relationship between caste and the acquisition of natural resources is illustrated by Dora, a lower caste serviceman who makes a deep assertion: 'One's thirst is not contingent upon their caste. An individual who is parched continues to experience thirst! the defining feature of a thirsty individual is their thirst, not their caste.' The film portrays lower-caste villagers completing basic duties for upper-caste landowners in return for water on multiple occasions. The scenes depict the economic exploitation

and social subjection experienced by marginalized people, who are compelled to labor for the upper castes to ensure access to water. Interactions with individuals of distinct castes emphasize the social division depicted in the film. Characters from various caste backgrounds interact with tangible tension and a clear hierarchy, where the upper castes show authority while the lower castes experience discrimination and marginalization. Water rights conflicts arise among different castes due to the worsening water problem. The urgent need for water worsens current social conflicts, resulting in clashes and aggression among groups competing for authority over scarce water supplies. These confrontations represent the entrenched social division and inequality that exist in the village.

Political Corruption and Power Dynamics

Political corruption is evident when local leaders influence water distribution for personal gain. They focus on supplying water to regions that will ensure their votes in future elections, ignoring the genuine needs of the population. The scene demonstrates how politicians manipulate the water shortage to advance their own interests and retain their authority. Corrupt politicians engage in negotiations with affluent landowners to obtain water rights in return for political backing or financial benefits. The backroom agreements show how political influence and financial power are utilized to regulate access to water supplies, putting common villagers at the whim of unscrupulous officials and affluent elites.

In the film, politicians are shown to intervene in the allocation of water supplies, showing bias towards specific persons or communities due to personal relationships or political loyalty. This manipulation of water distribution worsens the water issue and increases the disparity between society's rich and downtrodden sectors. The film illustrates how politicians take advantage of vulnerable populations, like the lower castes, by making false promises of water supplies in return for political backing. The deceitful techniques underscore the merciless nature of political power relations and the lengths to which politicians would go to preserve their control over resources. Characters in the story confront the corrupt political system and work towards change despite the challenges they face. They coordinate protests, rallies, and grassroots campaigns to advocate for fair access to water and uncover political corruption. The pictures depict how communities show perseverance in challenging political situations and their unwavering commitment to advocate for their rights.

CONCLUSION

The characters are depicted with intricacy and subtlety, each embodying distinct aspects of the socio-political environment that contribute to the film's comprehensive

thematic investigation. In terms of cinematography, the film effectively portrays the picturesque charm of India's rural areas while also highlighting the grim truths of environmental deterioration and the exhaustion of resources. The filmmakers effectively communicate the importance of addressing water scarcity as an urgent environmental and humanitarian concern by using powerful imagery and symbolism. Moreover, the film's storyline disrupts traditional concepts of heroism and villainy, obscuring the boundaries between what is right and wrong and offering a more intricate depiction of morality and human conduct. The intricacy of the narrative in 'Kaun Kitney Paani Mein' prompts viewers to critically contemplate the fundamental reasons and outcomes of water scarcity and social inequality.

This film serves as a captivating cinematic examination of the intersection between water scarcity, caste dynamics, and socio-political power conflicts. The film provides valuable insights into the complexities of addressing pressing societal issues and emphasizes the significance of collective action and social justice in ensuring equitable access to resources for all communities. This is achieved through an engaging narrative, well-developed characters, and poignant themes. The film addresses various societal taboos, including consenting sexual activity and religious ignorance. Nevertheless, the prevailing matter that remains constant is the water predicament encountered by a particular sector of society. The film illustrates that water conservation is predominantly a matter of mentality, irrespective of monetary means or influence.

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