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Unheard Screams And Silent Acceptance: Modern Indian Cinematic Representations Of Subaltern Women

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Abstract

In India, though it is easy to associate subalternity with the lowest socioeconomic classes, social castes, and peasantry, social expectations of women allow for the presence of subalternity in all classes. Theorists of subaltern studies have noted that gendered subalternity is particularly complex, as often, the restraints of gender transcend class, allowing for subalternity to exist outside of the lowest socioeconomic sections of society. Since subaltern historiography has been so influential in modern Indian cultural production, it is no surprise that recent Indian films have actively grappled with the complex nature of gendered subalternity. This paper examines Rajnesh Domalpalli's *Vanaja*, Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Naalu Pennungal*, and Deepa Mehta's *Water* to express the ways that recent cinematic productions have actively demonstrated the social construction of gendered subalternity and the ways in which this social position is enforced through constant oppression and violent humiliation. It explores the way that this recent trend in Indian cinema is derived from Mahasweta Devi's dramatic writing, which established a paradigm for the translation of subaltern historiography into performance. This reading demonstrates that social factors collude across classes to construct the position of the subaltern woman, a pattern that reoccurs throughout these cinematic texts. This social trend demonstrates that subalternity does not exist without the influence of those with social power, and these individuals actively enforce the restrictions associated with this status.

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