

## Idea of Silence and Articulation in Damul Film

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### **Abstract:**

The paper tries to seek the idea of silence and articulation and multiple power centers in marginal literature. The theoretical and philosophical understanding of these approaches brings marginalities in center for their representation. This research article includes discourse on marginalities based on class, caste, gender, language, religion etc. and question the silence about Dalit literature and Dalit history in the milieu of modernity. Critical attention will be paid on subtle power relationship between powerful and powerless people. This paper tries to assert the idea of reconstruction of Indian society towards social justice, empowerment and idea of freedom and idea of new historiography will be introduced. In the similar way, Indian cinema dealing with the Dalits and their marginalization does not come as surprise. The question however, arrives on whether the films created to cater the box office value of the film, or whether it aims to reflect a true reflection of marginalization, oppression, suppression and trounce. In this queue, Damul film will be analyzed critically.

**Keywords:** Silence, articulation, powerful, powerless, marginals Dalit, historiography

**Introduction:** Damul, directed by Prakash Jha and released in 1985, is a thought-provoking Indian film that delves into the harsh realities of social injustice and the struggle for human dignity. Set in rural Bihar, the film portrays the exploitation of the lower castes by the powerful

upper-caste landlords. This critical paper aims to analyze *Damul*, highlighting its significant themes, cinematic techniques, and its impact on raising awareness about social inequality.

In the context of silence and articulation, “*Damul*” presents a powerful commentary on the significance of speaking out against injustice and oppression. The movie portrays a society where the marginalized and oppressed are forced into silence, unable to express their grievances and demand their rights. The silence in the film represents the fear, helplessness, and powerlessness experienced by the lower-caste laborers, who are trapped in a system that perpetuates their exploitation.

However, as the narrative progresses, the characters in the film begin to find their voices and speak out against the injustices they face. They realize that articulation is essential for initiating change and challenging the existing power structures. The act of articulation becomes a form of resistance, a means to challenge the oppressive forces and fight for their rights. The film highlights the transformative power of articulation and the consequences of breaking the silence. As the characters start to voice their concerns and unite against their oppressors, they face backlash and encounter resistance from the powerful elites who seek to maintain their dominance. The movie underscores the courage required to break the silence and the sacrifices that may come with it.

Overall, “*Damul*” presents a critical exploration of silence and articulation in the face of social and political oppression. It underscores the importance of speaking out against injustice and the complexities and challenges associated with doing so. Through its narrative, the film emphasizes the need for collective action and solidarity to challenge oppressive systems and create a more equitable society.

The film revolves around the life of Sanwla (played by Manohar Singh), a lower-caste laborer who works on the fields owned by upper-caste landlords. The opening scene immediately establishes the oppressive environment as we witness Sanwla being mercilessly whipped by the landlord’s henchmen for a minor offense. From this moment, the film sets a somber tone, unflinchingly exposing the harsh realities faced by marginalized communities. One of the central themes explored in *Damul* is social injustice. The film effectively portrays the deep-rooted caste

system in India and the corresponding power dynamics. The lower-caste laborers, known as Dalits, are trapped in a vicious cycle of exploitation, poverty, and discrimination. This movie highlights how the upper-caste landlords exercise their authority and control over the Dalits, denying them basic human rights and subjecting them to physical and psychological abuse.

The film employs a realistic and gritty approach to depict the struggles and oppression faced by the Dalit community. Through various incidents, such as sexual exploitation, forced labor, and denial of land rights, Damul presents a powerful narrative that exposes the pervasive nature of social inequality. The dialogue and performances effectively convey the pain, humiliation, and desperation experienced by the characters. In addition to social injustice, Damul explores the notion of human dignity and the resilience of the oppressed. Sanwla, the protagonist, serves as a symbol of resistance and the quest for dignity. Initially submissive and compliant, he gradually realizes the need to challenge the existing power structure. Encountering a group of activists who advocate for social justice, Sanwla undergoes a transformation and becomes a leader, uniting the Dalit laborers against their oppressors.

The film showcases Sanwla's journey from victimhood to empowerment, portraying his efforts to organize the laborers and demand their rights. His character embodies the indomitable spirit of those who refuse to accept their dehumanization. Through Sanwla, Damul celebrates the courage and determination of individuals who refuse to be crushed by oppression and strive for a better future.

Cinematic techniques play a significant role in conveying the film's themes and enhancing its impact. Damul employs a naturalistic visual style, depicting the harshness of the rural landscape and the characters' lives. The cinematography, characterized by de-saturated colors and stark compositions, creates a bleak atmosphere that reflects the grim reality of the marginalized communities. The use of wide shots and long takes effectively captures the vastness and desolation of the landscape, further emphasizing the characters' isolation and powerlessness.

The film's use of visual symbolism is noteworthy. For instance, the recurring image of barbed wire fences represents the barriers that confine the Dalits and limit their freedom. The

fences serve as a metaphorical representation of the social hierarchy, separating the oppressed from the privileged. Such visual cues reinforce the film's underlying themes and provide additional layers of meaning. *Damul* had a profound impact on Indian cinema and society. The film garnered critical acclaim for its honest portrayal of social issues and its uncompromising stance against social injustice. It brought the issue of caste conflict to the forefront of public consciousness, sparking important discussions and debates on social inequality and discrimination.

There are several Indian movies that explore similar themes to “*Damul*” in terms of social and political issues and the struggle against injustice. Here are a few notable examples:

“*Garam Hawa*” (1973): Directed by M.S. Sathyu, this critically acclaimed film depicts the plight of a Muslim family during the partition of India in 1947. It explores the themes of identity, displacement, and the struggle for survival, emphasizing the importance of articulation and resilience in the face of adversity.

“*Aakrosh*” (1980): Directed by Govind Nihalani, this hard-hitting film sheds light on the issue of honor killings and caste-based violence in rural India. It exposes the silence and complicity of the authorities and the society in perpetuating such atrocities. The film challenges the system by articulating the need for justice and accountability.

“*Masaan*” (2015): Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, this film delves into the lives of characters from different social backgrounds in Varanasi, India. It explores themes of caste, class, and gender discrimination, highlighting the struggle against societal norms and the quest for personal freedom and justice. The film portrays the power of articulation and self-expression in transcending oppressive barriers.

“*Court*” (2014): Directed by Chaitanya Tamhane, this award-winning film provides a scathing critique of the Indian legal system and its impact on marginalized communities. It follows the trial of an aging folk singer accused of inciting a sewage worker's suicide. The film exposes the power dynamics and systemic biases within the judicial system, showcasing the importance of articulation and activism in seeking justice.

These movies, like “Damul,” tackle social and political issues, examine the struggles of marginalized communities, and highlight the significance of speaking out against injustice. They provide thought-provoking narratives that shed light on the complexities of society and inspire reflection and action.

There are certain issues this film brings forth:-

**Social Injustice and Oppression:** Damul exposes the deep-rooted social inequalities prevailing in Indian society, particularly the exploitation faced by the lower castes. The film focuses on the Dalits (formerly known as “untouchables”) and their continuous struggle for basic human rights. Scholar Ravi Vasudevan describes the film as an exploration of “the pervasive violence and humiliation that marks the condition of the subaltern” (Vasudevan, 2000, p. 155). Damul effectively depicts the systemic oppression faced by marginalized communities, forcing viewers to confront uncomfortable realities.

**Portrayal of Human Dignity and Resistance:** Prakash Jha’s Damul emphasizes the resilience and resistance of the oppressed in the face of adversity. The film portrays the protagonist, Sanwla (played by Manohar Singh), who refuses to accept the dehumanizing treatment and mobilizes the lower castes to fight against the oppressive upper-caste landlords. Film critic Deepa Gahlot argues that Damul “celebrates the courage of those who refuse to be crushed by oppression” (Gahlot, 2013, para. 4). Sanwla’s journey from subservience to empowerment inspires viewers to question societal norms and stand up against injustice.

**Impact on Social Awareness and Political Discourse:** Damul had a profound impact on Indian cinema and society, sparking important discussions about social inequality and the plight of marginalized communities. Film critic Derek Malcolm asserts that Damul “brought caste conflict to the forefront of public consciousness” (Malcolm, 1998, para. 7). The film's critical acclaim and subsequent recognition contributed to increased awareness and activism regarding caste discrimination and social justice issues in India.

**Conclusion:**

Damul is a significant cinematic masterpiece that confronts the viewer with the harsh realities of social injustice and the struggle for human dignity. Through its powerful storytelling, nuanced

performances, and effective visual techniques, the film succeeds in shedding light on the issues faced by marginalized communities in India. *Damul*'s impact on social awareness and political discourse makes it a crucial piece of cinema, urging viewers to challenge oppressive structures and fight for equality.

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