

Bhojpuri: Big-Small cinema



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Bhojpur: the area demystified

- ❧ The eastern UP and Bihar along with some places in Madhya Pradesh and Nepal are Bhojpuri speakers;
- ❧ About 100 million people speak Bhojpuri but the official numbers may be smaller as most mention Hindi as their mother tongue in census surveys;
- ❧ The region is economically very poor and main economic profession is agriculture and that too kharif (rice based) with almost no industries

Bhojpur: the area demystified :2

- ❧ With almost no land reform and the unequal distribution of landed plots and low level of technology employed, agriculture is not able to employ people or create an agricultural middle class which has the purchasing power
- ❧ The banks gave the lowest credit to farming sector in this area with CDR (Credit Deposit Ratio) being the lowest in the country!

Bhojpur: the area demystified-3

- ❧ As a result this region accounted for largest outmigrations from the region to industrial Gujarat or Maharashtra or agricultural Punjab
- ❧ Planning Commission reports that of all out migrations Bihar and UP account for 27% of all figures for unskilled and semi skilled migrations
- ❧ Lack of technical education in these states and poor standards of schooling and higher education has kept the migrations as low income generating ones

Bhojpuri: The Language



- ❧ Bhojpuri is essentially a branch of Sanskritik Hindi group of languages and shares syntax and script with Hindi, Awadhi and Braj
- ❧ But it is different in vocabulary and its cultural adaptations from other languages
- ❧ What is worth probing about Bhojpuri that despite having millions of speakers and hundreds of films made, it is still a dialect and not a language and does not have any worthwhile literature

When does a language get a cinema?



- ❧ So when it is not even a full fledged language, how come it got a vibrant/dynamic cinema which is commercially successful;
- ❧ It may be argued that like for a dialect needs a grammar and script to qualify as language, in modern days it (the dialect) must acquire a cinema of its own;
- ❧ It must be argued here that with the cheaper technology, it is no longer difficult to have a cinema even in smaller dialects; commercial success is yet another story

The beginning...



- ❧ It was 1960s that on the prodding of first President of India Dr. Rajendra Prasad, himself a Bhojpuri speaker, that Nasir Hussain got the act together and first Bhojpuri film 'Ganga Maiyya Tore Piyari Chadhaibo' (I will offer yellow to you, O mother Ganga') was made.
- ❧ What I would like to argue that regional pride and love for language motivated the first film in the Bhojpuri.
- ❧ And now because of this political and economic revival of one of the major Bhojpuri speaking states (Bihar) that Bhojpuri films are on upswing

Contd...



- ❧ I would like to argue that no cinema thrives only on economics or creative urge, political support is necessary too
- ❧ The example of Hollywood is with us: it travels with pax-Americana

Outmigrations and Bhojpuri cinema

- ❧ Bihar and UP have witnessed massive outmigrations in last two decades due to poverty and unemployment
- ❧ To this factor alone scholars have solely rested their arguments about the rise of Bhojpuri cinema
- ❧ The nostalgia for life left behind and need for cheap entertainment for largely migrant men population that Bhojpuri cinema was

But....



- ❧ If migrations were to explain the phenomenon of Bhojpuri cinema, then how do we explain its popularity in Bihar and UP?
- ❧ Bihar and UP have the lowest theatre density and even major Hindi films don't get release due to domination of screens by Bhojpuri cinema in these two regions
- ❧ Again, Bhojpuri cinema does not manage to get as popular release in Delhi despite having sizeable population from these regions
- ❧ So I guess more study is required. There is no one size fits all.

Small cinema!



☞ We should move away from concepts like regional cinema to small cinema whereby one may argue that compared to Mumbai Film industry (Hindi films)

Small Cinema: the original concept

- ❧ Matte Hjort (Small Nations, Global Cinema, 2005) had applied this concept to some European and other countries having lesser population and making fewer films than Hollywood
- ❧ Such films were normally national cinema, funded by the state or public money, were meant to bolster national pride
- ❧ For example the Danish cinema was made with this national pride vis-à-vis the Hollywood and it was the reason as claimed by Hjort that it grew in number and viewership

Lets adapt the idea>>



- ❧ The model of Small Cinema as applied to Denmark/Cuba or Burkina Faso or even Hong Kong needs to be modified to be applied to Bhojpuri cinema
- ❧ Bhojpuri cinema is different from Hindi films industry in three key areas:
 - ❧ 1) It caters to a smaller population and geographical expanse;
 - ❧ 2) It makes films on much lesser budgets;
 - ❧ 3) Its viewers are economically weaker

Bhojpuri cinema is small



- ❧ The need to readjust Hjort's concept of small cinema can not be over emphasised
- ❧ While Hjort's nations are small they all are mostly rich in resources and most nation states are politically empowered to make and promote national cinemas
- ❧ Bhojpuri region is neither rich nor politically sovereign, and hence could not take political decisions to support the cinema in this language

Smallness defined:



- ❧ Bhojpuri is spoken in Bihar and eastern UP and in small measures in other states;
- ❧ Compared to the expanse of Hindi films, its geographical expanse is smaller
- ❧ Similarly while there could be 80 to 100 millions of Bhojpuri speakers, the number of Hindi speakers run in hundreds of millions.
- ❧ Most middle and upper class Bhojpuri speakers do not watch Bhojpuri films and they generally patronise Hindi cinema

Cheaper technology and its import

- ❧ The equipment for shooting and post production processing remained very low standard.
- ❧ There was almost no star system in the beginning, cutting costs on that front.
- ❧ These films were almost not released in theatres and were exclusively marketed on CDs which were sold for as low as Rs 5 and could be hired along with CD players to watched at marriages or group screenings.
- ❧ The cruder technology ensured its success in poorer region.

Migrations and Bhojpuri cinema

- ❧ Most scholars have attributed the rise of Bhojpuri cinema to massive migrations by Bhojpuri speakers to other regions and their longing for home (nostalgia).
- ❧ They often have cited the examples of Amritsar, Ludhiana, Delhi or Mumbai and popularity of Bhojpuri cinema there to prove the point.
- ❧ But then one may ask as to what would explain the immense popularity of Bhojpuri films in Bihar and UP, the two home states of Bhojpuri speakers?
- ❧ Hence one has to revisit the easy reductionism and find for legible answers

Low density of theaters



- ❧ The Bhojpuri region has one of the lowest theatre density with even major city like Patna having only six theatres with very low entry charges.
- ❧ And still the rampant poverty and under development did not allow the footfalls.
- ❧ The new wave of Bhojpuri cinema flourished on the sale and distribution of cheap and affordable CD technology. Initially it was only the CD sale that earned them revenue.
- ❧ It is the crude and cheap technology that made up for commercial success of Bhojpuri cinema

Growth of Bhojpuri cinema

- ❧ Though it is not within the ambit of this essay, it may be pointed out that the current and most successful phase of Bhojpuri cinema started in about 2000 and most certainly in 2004 with the now iconic film Sasura Bada Paisa Wala (My Father-in-law is very rich!) and Daroga Babu I love You (O' Police officer I love you)
- ❧ But before that Bhojpuri cinema had two successful phases: one in 1960s and another in 1980s
- ❧ Both times it slowed down due to lack of state patronage, higher costs of technology and the cost of star fee as most artists were from Hindi films and commanded higher fee

Conclusion/ s



- ❧ To sum up, Bhojpuri cinema is small cinema and not regional one;
- ❧ Its success was its crude technology and unknown actors
- ❧ Out migrations had role in its success but not more that over seas territories contribution to Hindi (or for that matter Tamil or Telugu cinema)
- ❧ The real reason for its success was the cultural-regional assertion of Bihar and UP.