
Tamasha: An Exploration of the Inner World

Dr. Ambrish Khare¹, Department of English & Modern European Languages University of Allahabad

Dr. Sadaf Siddiqui², Department of English & Modern European Languages University of Allahabad

Abstract:

Identity has always been the issue of much debate in contemporary literature. Looking for the inner world has been the concern of most of the writers and filmmakers in the 21st century. Many philosophers have tried to find out the answer to this universal question: who are we? But the point is any answer to this question brings about another question. The present paper investigates the predicament of modern man who is caught between the two worlds and is having existential crisis. It is an attempt to understand why there is an inner conflict between what a person really is and what he becomes under the pressure of social obligations. In doing so this study grapples with the questions such as: is there any way to break away from this discourse which restricts human beings from becoming what they are? How the natural self is lost in the abyss of edification and norms imposed by society? How existential crisis affects human consciousness?

Keywords: Identity, Social Structure, superstructure, Existential Crisis

Since the last few years, Indian cinema has been exploring issues that raise the question of identity. To discover the inner world of an individual has become a prominent theme in contemporary movies. Some important bollywood films which explore such identitarian tropes are Queen, Dear Zindagi, Zindagi Naa Milegi Dohara and most importantly Tamasha. The movie depicts the internal world an individual identifies only when he is made to realize that the real source of happiness exists within him.

The story begins with Ved, a kid who loves watching drama shows and listens to historical and mythological stories from an old man. Gradually, the story moves to Corsica, an island on the border of France, where Ved as a young man, is seen spending a vacation and living a carefree life in absence of all that he was familiar with. Actually, it is a world for him where nobody knows him and he can be the person he wants to be. In a way, he can be looked upon under the influence of his natural identity. Here he meets a girl

named Tara and establishes a unique bond with her. But according to their pre-planned decision that they make during their first meeting, they are not supposed to reveal their identities. They decide to abide by the adage "whatever happens in Corsica stays in Corsica". The idea of not revealing their names brings awareness in Ved that his identity is untethered from any given societal norms, and this allows him to live his life to the fullest. Corsica then, for them, becomes a buffer space where they can willingly lose their social sense of self and belonging and partially resolve their existential crises. At the onset the story seems formulaic 'the boy meets the girl and they fall in love' quintessential Bollywood film narrative, wherein the protagonists (hero and heroine) meet in some exotic and remote European country and sing, dance, engage in frolic and eventually fall in love. However, after the first half the film challenges the set narrative and stereotypical depiction of protagonists, and transcends the conformist depiction.

Ved, being free from the accepted conventions of the society, is living his life as a free spirit. Tara falls in love with him but cannot reveal it to him. After four years, she again meets Ved in New Delhi (India) where they introduce each other and continue their love relationship. But the problem occurs when Tara observes that it is not the same person she had met in Corsica, the person she had fallen in love with. She realizes that Ved is just living a mechanical life by fulfilling only what is expected of him. The kind of enthusiasm for life, the kind of energy to enjoy every moment as she had seen in Ved is lacking in him. Even the way he treats Tara is more mechanical than romantic. There is a complex juxtaposition between the man (nameless) she meets in Corsica, falls irrevocably in love with, is a stark contradiction to the man she meets in Delhi.

Ultimately, when he proposes to Tara, she rejects him on the grounds of his inability to perceive what he really is. Ved finds it very difficult to handle this rejection, because this rejection has put his identity into question. He is depressed from this shock, and under the fit of depression, he quits his job by misbehaving with his boss. "When people are confused as to their self-identity, a serious quest for genuine self can begin. When one is painfully conscious of the danger of abandoning one's self, a cry for authenticity is heard" (Golomb 21).

He reaches Shimla, his hometown, to find out that old man who used to tell him stories when he was a kid. It is strange that this time he doesn't go to listen to his stories, but goes to find out his story in his narrative. The old man mixes his stories with some other stories that Ved has already heard as a kid. Ved gets irritated and insists on what is about to happen in his (Ved's) story. The old man shouts over him out of his madness, but even in his

madness he gives him the most valuable lesson of his life. He tells that it is up to him (Ved) to discover what is in his heart and create a story of his own. Towards the climax of the movie, Ved has an interesting conversation with his father where for the first time he can express what his real desires are. His existential crisis gets resolved when he understands that it is up to him to determine the course of his life.

There is no external solution to his internal problem. Existential philosophy believes that our existence is made up of the people and things we keep interacting. Therefore, it should be the right of an individual to give a proper direction to his life. No religion and institution can determine what one wants to be. Under the influence of social norms and codes, Ved fails to understand his love, his passion. "Love is a passion to be chosen and mastered, not sacrificed to" (Cleary 1). Ved's problem is that he has been given certain ideologies through certain superstructure of the society, and he internalizes them as his own. That's why he does not see any problem coming through his behaviour.

The movie has symbolic richness which invites a deep interpretation. It deals with the basic nature of the human mind. It is perpetuated in social science that our identity is not determined the way it should be in its most natural form, but social values and institutions reinforce an ideology which an individual assimilates without even understanding that how far he has gone from his basic nature, the sensibility he is born with. Ved's problem in the movie is not that under the pressure of social institutions he becomes what he is not, but he is in a mental zone in which he has accepted his identity unconsciously. He does not see any problem coming through it. The character of Tara has a symbolic interpretation. She represents all those internal forces that connect people to their deep psyche. Sometimes, the most difficult task for a person is to break the barrier – of looking at what he is within his limited dimensions. When Tara tells Ved that he is not the person she met in Corsico, the person she was in love with, he panics.

On the surface, the movie is just an example of bildungsroman style where a character's physical and mental growth becomes the central issue, but, on a deeper level, a close analysis of the movie establishes this notion that in this modern world, most of us are like Ved looking for a spiritual and mental liberation from everything which is distracting us from becoming what we are supposed to be. In the movie, Ved is shown as someone who is performing his duties without realizing what his actual passion is. Let us rethink what it represents? It represents that creativity is something every individual is born with. But what happens when he starts growing up? When he starts growing up, his notion about what is right and what is wrong for him

is established by social institutions. These institutions, in which family plays a very important role, create a superstructure of ideologies in his mind which is not his own ideology.

Ved's socially constructed identity comes in the way of his artistic world. His institutionalized behavior, because of his daily routine, makes it difficult for him to identify his natural identity. "The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these" (Berger & Luckmann 33). It is very ironic that humans have made these social orders and codes, but now they are governing human beings.

Every individual is born into an objective social structure within which he encounters the significant others who are in charge of his socialization. These significant others are imposed upon him. Their definitions of his situation are posited for him as objective reality. He is thus born into not only an objective social structure but also an objective social world. The significant others who mediate this world to him modify it in the course of mediating it. They select aspects of it in accordance with their own location in the social structure, and also by virtue of their individual, biographically rooted idiosyncrasies. The social world is 'filtered' to the individual through this double selectivity. Thus, the lower-class child not only absorbs a lower-class perspective on the social world, he absorbs it in the idiosyncratic coloration given it by his parents (or whatever other individuals are in charge of his primary socialization). (Berger & Luckmann 151)

The fact is that the process of socialization does not validate our identification with the inner world. Our subjective reality is often different from the objective reality which we keep accumulating from the external world around us. As a kid, Ved's subjectivity is reflected when he stands up in front of the mirror talking to himself. The mirror, in a metaphorical way, stands for his unconscious reality. But, over a period of time, even this mirror fails to reveal the artistic world which exists within him. After the break-up with Tara, when he talks to himself in front of the mirror, he pretends to act like a rational person who has complete control over his emotions.

The title of this movie suggests not only the tamasha of the human world, but also the irony of human life; a tamasha in which an individual pretends to be someone he is not, a tamasha of what a person has possibility to become and what he actually becomes by identifying the objective reality given by the social world around him. Ved's interaction with an auto-rickshaw driver, who is a good singer, marks a brilliant twist in the movie. His art of singing is crushed down under the need of survival. He is presented

as a helpless person who has to make ends meet at the cost of his dream. In the end, Ved's resolution to remain unattached by outside force marks his journey of exploring the inner self. He learns the process of unlearning those societal norms that do not allow him to find his inner voice; he understands true meaning of freedom.

References:

- Berger, Peter L and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. England: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Cleary, Skye. *Existentialism and Romantic Love*. New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Golomb, Jacob. *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*. London & New York, Routledge, 1995.
- Tamasha. Directed by Imtiaz Ali, Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment, 2015.