

Globalization, Urbanization, and Slums: A Study of the ‘Slumdog Millionaire’

ABSTRACT

Slums and Urbanization are the two extreme ends of the concept called Capitalist Globalization in the context of urban progress. The two are not in dialogic mode; the prior being unaware of the self-centric motives of the latter, continues rolling in its pathetically dragging status quo, whereas the latter whirs far above feeling secured in flying away from the prior. The deliberate slighting of the slums by the agents of urbanization-cum-globalization gives rise to numerous social issues such as poverty, illiteracy, exploitation of labour, child abuse, disrespect of human dignity, and crime. The said sorry state of things is depicted by Daniel Boyle through his movie ‘Slumdog Millionaire’. By bringing forth the various social issues in the context of urbanization and globalization the filmmaker; Daniel Boyle tries to drive a point home for his viewers that the urban social issues have been created by exploitative capitalist globalization. Through his attempt he questions the ends of capitalist globalization and appeals its stake holders to seriously reconsider it.

Key Words: Americanization, consumerism, class struggle, and Globalization.

Introduction

Slums as a phenomenon have never been the concern of globalization if seen through its foundational ethics but globalization has always been the concern of the slums in diverse ways. This acceptance and negation of the interrelation between the two reveals the true facet of aggressive globalization and its stakeholders. For the agents of globalization and capitalism slum dwellers are hazy populations behind the eroding brick walls beside their shining city roads, meant to be exploited by all ways [8,9]. The slum dwellers in their turn being surrounded by the glittering pressure of globalization have no alternative but to try in their own way to ride the wave which in its turn either carries them or washes them out. In the wake of globalization in India the slums had to pass through this ever going circle. The pathetic reality mentioned above has cursorily been touched upon by a few writers, documentary, and film makers. Daniel Boyle’s 2008 movie ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ based upon Vikas Swarup’s novel *Q & A* is a good attempt to do so in a popular form like movie. The present paper is an attempt to study the cause, reaction, and result of struggle between slum dogs and the forces of globalization in Indian context.

The filmmaker Daniel Boyle through the movie text *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), based on Vikas Swarup’s novel *Q & A* brings in the social issue of Slums as the creation of Globalization and Urbanization onto the screen. It is an attempt to probe the issues circling around slums, the problems of slums, and slum dwellers. India after independence did start its journey with all the good hopes and promises but in reality the promises made in constitution and legislative houses could not fructify to their full bloom in case of laborers and slum-dwellers [10-12]. The capitalist industry spun the web of cities and metropolitans by exploiting the laborers, who lived in slums. The question; How the slums rose up in the middle of the cities and metropolitans, has not been rightly approached. Capitalist ideology triggered globalization followed by urbanization. The urban centers in their initial phase needed laboring hands and thus came in the slums around the

growing city centers. With the sweeping winds of globalization the slums looked odd and thus the drives to push them away from good locations were undertaken and successfully accomplished. During this entire hubbub a lot happened with the slums and the slum dwellers. Boyle's 'Slumdog Millionaire' is an attempt to depict the broader journey of globalization in India and the upheavals in the lives of slums in fictional manner.

After its origin in Europe, globalization sipped in to the metros in the southern nations around 1990. By and by the signs of globalization were seen everywhere but they were clearer and in full colour in the metropolises such as Delhi, Pune, Mumbai, Calcutta, Cairo, Johannesburg, Alexandria, Cape Town, Nairobi, Abadan, Bali, Jakarta and so on in the context of nations in southern part of the globe. "As for India Globalization has become a buzz word after 1991 and day by day this buzzing is getting louder. It has touched all the domains of Indian life and experience" (Kshirsagar et.al 1). The movie text 'Slumdog Millionaire' brings it to fore that the 'have-nots' have been badly hit by the swooping winds of globalization.

The movie 'Slumdog Millionaire' depicts the altered realities of Mumbai under the forces of globalization. The movie focuses its attention more on the poor, homeless, orphans, slum dwellers, criminals, middle class mob and the entire atmosphere surrounding these people. "Globalization is no longer a theoretical concept; it is a glaring reality, impinging upon almost every aspect of human existence" (P. Sam, and G. Sam. 1044-1045). The beginning of the movie is quite catchy. After flashing the title 'Slumdog Millionaire', the movie begins with the narrative voice giving information that Jamal Malik, an 18 year old boy from Juhu Slum, was one question away from winning two million rupees... How did he do it? ... Various conjectures are played and the answer is given at the end of the movie. The last option that his fate is written, signals at the onrushing forces of globalization. It suggests that if globalization can change the lives of so many it can also do for a few slum dogs like Jamal. It offers numerous opportunities to people that one may rise high and that is what happens with Jamal. The thematic angle of the paper is discussed with the following points.

Class Difference:

The question posed in the beginning; how Jamal Malik did it, is in itself discriminatory. It makes clear that Caste has been replaced by Class as a new form of division of people in India. Jamal Malik a slum dog somehow has miraculously surfaced to the public attention. He has answered even the penultimate question in the show; '*Who Wants to be a Millionaire*'. Upon this the media, Police and the rich class, one and all doubt the achievement of Jamal in the show. This speaks loud that these class-centric people do not want to share the shining glitter of globalization with the poor like Jamal. Consequently he is put to hard interrogation by police. Throughout night he is interrogated, tortured and beaten. In the morning the inspector asks him the story of his life and thus the real story begins. Jamal in his life had strangely come across most of the answers of the questions that are asked to him in the show. The film reviewer Roger Ebert's eye also catches the point that Slumdog throws light on two different realities in one India. (Roger Ebert)

In 1992 Mumbai riots Jamal and his brother Salim's mother is killed. Both the brothers make out of Mumbai. They keep wandering from place to place; live on trains, fall in thievery, even become fake guides at Agra. After a few years upon Jamal's insistence they return to Mumbai to search for a girl Lathika who was with them during the riots. Jamal finds her but

cannot live with her as his own brother takes her for him and drives out Jamal. There after he moves out and lives on his own. After many years when he returns to Mumbai once again to search for Lathika, he meets his brother Salim. Now he works for Javed Bhai, a smuggler-cum-gangster. Slums because of being neglected in all respects also rose up as places wherefrom the nefarious activities could be run, and in which the slum dwellers were used.

Throughout this movie, the camera as an eye scans two extreme classes; an affluent class alongside an impoverished one. After uniting with his brother, Salim in one of the scenes points to Jamal the most sumptuous area emerging, where once there was a sprawling Juhu slum. It was this place where they had stayed with their mother, but now it is beyond recognition. Now the slum is no more in sight, may be the dwellers have been forced out of the area to reside somewhere else. They have no right to stay there; they are not the consumers of Globalization. At this point one sees a transforming India in terms of globalization. Salim through illegal associations has also changed his class. Now he stays in an affluent apartment and drives a car. When Jamal has won one million rupees, whole nation is shown to be exhilarating. The sweep of the camera covers these extremes, a nation divided in two classes; Rich and Poor. Globalization has brought along the movement of labour, goods, money, ideas and information but could not bring the same movement in the lives of poor. The movie presents the nuanced details of how India as a nation was changing as an impact of globalization. The country being an inhomogeneous population makes itself an interesting study in the movie; "Because of its nationally hybrid origins and its success among "western" audiences, Slumdog Millionaire has become the ideal battleground for issues of cultural and national representation." (Chan 38)

Social apathy towards the poor:

Globalization offers open competition, but the tragedy is rich become richer and the poor become poorer. In the early part of the movie, in one of the scenes Jamal and his brother Salim are shown playing in the slums. In this part homes are more akin to shanties, bathing is done in the river, or in open, and poverty is rampant. Conversely, in the city, there are shops, apartment buildings, and people with appropriate attire for the climate. The particular scene awakens the audience to the fact that a nation which boasts of becoming a superpower, a hub for technical expertise, and education is still struggling to provide basic amenities to its poor. These people are making a life out of trash and dirt.

After running away from Mumbai Salim mostly is involved in stealing and thieving whereas Jamal does odd works that come his way. At Taj Mahal when Jamal takes a foreign couple around as an unofficial guide, some slum boys steal away the wheels of their car. On return, the driver suspects Jamal as one of the associates of the thieves and starts beating him. After some seconds the foreign couple intervenes. At this place Jamal says; "You wanted to see real India! This is real India". At opera, the slum boys steal the wallets of the foreign audience. These thieving people are poor, uneducated and neglected by society. In the socio-economic system of their time they are left with no alternative but what they are doing irrespective of whether it is right or wrong.

Criminalization of poor:

When their mother is killed in Mumbai riots, Jamal and Salim fall in the company of Mamman who is a thug. He shelters the homeless children and trains them to beg. When he

meets these two brothers for the first time, he finds them to be very hungry. Mamman offers them Coca-cola, a product of globalization. Mamman blinds the children by pouring boiling oil in their eyes. After this the blind children are taught sympathy arousing songs so that people take pity on them and hand them some money. The criminals and thugs like Mamman have given an organized shape even to begging on roads. And it is at the cost of orphans and homeless children. While discussing the movie 'Slumdog Millionaire' author Teruko Kagohashi also takes account of statements of various NGOs regarding the pitiable condition of street children in India. (Kagohashi 1-4). Following into the footsteps of Mamman and Javed Bhai, Salim rises high in the money mad world. After killing Mamman he starts working for Javed Bhai and earns a lot of money. In the end in order to make amends for his behavior towards Jamal and Lathika, he helps Lathika to escape from Javed's home to get united with Jamal. He knows that for this he would be killed, so before his death he lies in the money-strewn bathtub, just to get the last feel of being rich. According to Benedict Anderson a nation is made up of an imagined community (Anderson, 6). While depicting the reality of India as a nation the movie, *Slumdog Millionaire* throws light over two nations. One is richer that belongs to the elite, whereas the other one binds the poor within its poverty.

Signs of Globalization:

- Call Centres: Jamal works in an international call centre, X L 5 Communications, where people from India answer the calls from all over the world. Jamal joins the call centre as a tea boy, but by working there, he gets smarter.
- Easy flow of Ideas: The show "*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*" was first played in America. Following the example of it a programme of that kind has been shown in the movie. In globalization ideas flow faster.
- Money-mindedness: Globalization has started a kind of blind race, in which everybody is running after money. Everybody wants to become a millionaire
- Explosion of Information
- Rising Tourism: Rising tourism industry is the direct result of globalization. Jamal and Salim when orphaned fly away from Mumbai and find themselves in Agra. Agra is one of the cities receiving a lot many international tourists. Jamal takes the opportunity of the increasing Tourism. As there were numerous foreigners like fish to be caught, Jamal becomes a tourist guide. He tells the tourists anything fake and gets money.

Insider-Outsider tension:

In this polarized society the insiders do not want the outsiders to come into the rich zone. Prem Kumar, the host of the show "*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*" in his childhood was a slum boy. He rises from zero. But now he does not want to share the glory of such a shift from poverty to richness. So out of this selfish motive of remaining as an example, he provides Jamal a wrong answer to the penultimate question when they are in men's room in the break.

Americanization/Westernization:

The show "*Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*" is modeled upon an American show, is an indicator, as to what extent the developing nations look up to America as an Ideal. At Taj Mahal Jamal and Salim steal the shoes of the tourists, they sell them to a nearby shop. In one of the scenes they also wear those footwear. This shows the craze for foreign products. Within the

show itself, much of Indian culture is lost, not only because it is a version of an America-based show, but because the host himself has become Americanized. Although the host is Indian, his hair, clothing, and accent are much more similar to what is generally perceived as what it is to be "American" than what it means to be "Indian." The host Prem Kumar and the other characters speak English through most of the film.

Consumerism:

When Jamal and Salim in order to search for Lathika, come back to Mumbai, they take up a job at a hotel, where Jamal takes orders for Chicken Burgher, pop and mineral water. In the same scene Salim takes up an unused distilled water bottle, fills it over once again under a water tap and seals it as if it was a new bottle. Throughout the movie people are seen to be in touch with technology, Television, mobile phones etc. The impact of Globalization and commodification can be felt in this particular scene very strongly as Dissanayake says "the impact of consumerism, commodification, the transnationalized forms of pleasures and desires and their concomitant impact on indigenous traditions becomes extremely important" (pp. 26-27). It is as though when external forces assert their presence, one cannot help but experience their impact.

Conclusion:

Thus the movie 'Slumdog Millionaire' is a depiction of altered realities in the context of the poorest of the poor after the influx of globalization in India. The poor have never been imagined as the customers of globalization, moreover efforts have been taken to keep them away from the luxury and glitter of globalization. Because of being the product of his time Jamal wins the show and becomes a millionaire. But this entire journey tears open the pathetic socio-cultural and economic realities of globalizing India.

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Details of the AI usage are given below:

1. Have made far minimal use of Chat GPT (**ChatGPT 4 Turbo**)

2.

3.

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