

Realism in the Time of Malaria: *Daman* and the Fever of Inequality

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Abstract

The Odia film *Daman* (2022), directed by Vishal Mourya and Debi Prasad Lenka, marks a significant milestone in regional Indian cinema through its candid portrayal of healthcare challenges in Odisha's tribal regions. Centred on the journey of a young doctor reluctantly posted to a malaria-prone district, the film dramatizes individual struggle while illuminating the broader marginalization of indigenous communities in India. Addressing issues such as superstitious beliefs, poverty, and systemic neglect, *Daman* presents a narrative deeply rooted in both social critique and human resilience. Analysed through the frameworks of Cinematic Realism and Marxist film theory, the film exemplifies a commitment to truth over spectacle. Its use of raw landscapes, non-glamorous performances, and restrained storytelling immerses viewers in an authentic socio-cultural milieu. Everyday struggles such as lack of healthcare infrastructure and superstitious beliefs preventing access to medicine are portrayed not as isolated problems but as symptoms of deeper systemic failures.

From a Marxist perspective, *Daman* critiques the entrenched links between poverty, infrastructural marginalisation and the exploitation of tribal communities. The community's suffering is not depicted as individual misfortune but as a product of class-based inequality and state neglect. The doctor's perseverance becomes symbolic of both ethical resistance and the possibility of reform, contrasting the despair of the villagers with a vision for change. By integrating realist aesthetics with Marxist critique, *Daman* transcends its regional context to function as a powerful cinematic document of social injustice. It exemplifies how regional cinema can offer not only artistic integrity but also urgent political commentary, making it a vital contribution to Indian and global film discourse.

Keywords

Daman, Odia cinema, Cinematic realism, Marxist film theory, Poverty and inequality, Social reform, Tribal communities

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I. Introduction

From Regional Drama to Critical Document

The Odia film *Daman*(2022) which is an acronym for *Durgama Anchalare Malaria Nirakaran* (Malaria Eradication in Inaccessible Areas) is a cinematic artifact that demands rigorous interrogation. It is not merely a regional success story, nor a simple hagiography of a heroic doctor, but a profound and often uncomfortable reflection of India's persistent structural inequalities. The film, directed by Debi Prasad Lenka and Vishal Mourya, and starring Babushaan Mohanty as Dr. Siddharth Mohanty, transcended its local origins to become a critical and commercial phenomenon, resonating far beyond the borders of Odisha. Its narrative, rooted in the true-life efforts of medical professionals in the remote, tribal villages of Malkangiri, a region scarred by endemic malaria, infrastructural failure, and historical neglect, functions as a vital, visceral document of India's socio-political topography.

This extensive analysis posits that *Daman's* extraordinary emotional and critical power derives from a carefully modulated, seamless marriage of political ideology and formal aesthetic. We apply the apparatus of Marxist film theory to meticulously decode the systemic failures, class structures, and ideological apparatuses embedded within the plot, exposing the malaria epidemic not as a mere biological phenomenon but as a direct, lethal symptom of state neglect and the attendant geography of alienation (Althusser 1971; Jameson 1981). This socio-political critique is then complemented, indeed validated, by an examination through André Bazin's

(1967) philosophy of cinematic realism. This dual theoretical approach reveals how the film's visual style: its unyielding commitment to authentic space, unmanipulated time, and on-location shooting is not simply an artistic preference, but an ethical and political mandate that confers irrefutable legitimacy upon its ideological statement (Bazin 1971; Tripathy 2023).

Our inquiry is driven by the conviction that the most potent cinema is that which utilizes formal integrity to unearth material truth (Jameson 1981). *Daman*, in its granular depiction of the struggle against disease and destitution, offers a rare, accessible lens through which to examine the dynamics of centre-periphery exploitation and the cruel logic of the failed development state in contemporary India.

II. The Marxist Critique of the Failed Development State

A Marxist film analysis necessitates a move beyond the individual heroism of Dr. Mohanty to critique the material conditions of the Malkangiri villages. Their perennial predicament, we argue, is not a matter of fate or individual deficiency, but a direct, demonstrable outcome of India's enduring class stratification and the calculated priorities of its governance mechanisms. The epidemic itself, therefore, must be read as a class-based phenomenon—a feature, not a bug, of the economic and political system.

The State, The Bond, and the Coercion of Labor

The film's very premise is an immediate and trenchant Marxist allegory: Dr. Mohanty, an urban, privileged medical graduate, is initially reluctant to serve in the periphery, his professional path constrained by a five-crore financial bond. This bond is a classic instrument of the bourgeois state, serving to secure the highly specialized labour of the educated class and forcibly redeploy it into economically undesirable regions. It is a subtle, yet powerful, mechanism of coercive contract, reflecting how the state manages the internal distribution of human capital to meet its often-contradictory needs for both 'development' rhetoric and economic efficiency (Gramsci 1971; Patnaik 2022).

Dr. Mohanty's initial resistance, his attempts to utilize his family's connections to escape the posting highlights the deep-seated class and spatial separation inherent in the Indian professional landscape. For him, Malkangiri is a punishment, a professional dead-end but for the villagers, it is their immutable existence. This narrative tension establishes the state as a mediating force, using financial control to temporarily bridge the chasm between the urban centre (the site of capital, education, and political power) and the rural periphery (the site of extraction, neglect, and poverty) (Lenin 1917; Jameson 1981).

The tribal villagers, conversely, represent the proletariat specifically, the lumpenproletariat or perhaps the subaltern class whose existence is so marginal that they are effectively alienated not only from the means of health production (hospitals, modern medicine, diagnostic tools) but from the very ideological promise of the "development state" (Spivak 1988)—the fundamental social contract that promises basic infrastructure and well-being in exchange for citizenship.

The Geography of Alienation: Infrastructural Apathy as Systemic Violence

The physical isolation of the 151 villages, frequently cut off by torrential rivers or the conspicuous absence of a single, long-promised, and never-built bridge, is the central, most concrete manifestation of structural violence in *Daman* (Galtung 1969; Patnaik 2022). The State's failure to complete a simple bridge which is seen as a quintessential symbol of connectivity, integration, and effective governance is the ultimate political act of omission. This act leaves the community systematically vulnerable to malaria, recurrent death, and the parallel vacuum filled by Naxal/Maoist dominance.

This infrastructural apathy is not an accident or bureaucratic incompetence; it is a systemic, lethal mechanism of class-based marginalization. By refusing to invest in the periphery, the State effectively sacrifices these remote populations for the political convenience and lower expenditure of the centre. The lack of roads, communication, and basic medical access ensures that the diseases of poverty like malaria flourish unchecked, acting as a naturalized form of class warfare by attrition. The physical landscape, therefore, becomes a codified political statement: a Geography of Alienation where space is structured by class (Spivak 1988; Lefebvre 1991).

Superstition as False Consciousness and Ideological Vacuum

The critical battle against superstition—the villagers' entrenched belief in "duma" (ghosts or spirits) as the cause of the disease is a canonical example of challenging false consciousness within the Marxist framework (Marx & Engels 1846; Althusser 1971). This traditional belief system, which attributes a material, biological problem to a non-material, spiritual cause, is not simply a sign of 'ignorance' but a highly functional, locally developed ideology that has filled the enormous vacuum of rationality left by the State's prolonged abandonment.

Lacking access to the rational, scientific, material means of modern health (hospitals, doctors, diagnosis, medicine), the community turns to readily available spiritual and cultural explanations. The “duma” belief system offers a framework for understanding and coping with recurring death that scientific materialism, due to its absence, cannot provide (Spivak 1988; Tripathy 2023).

Dr. Mohanty’s subsequent mission is, therefore, an ideological struggle: he is attempting to replace this ‘false’ consciousness with a scientific, materialist worldview by physically delivering malaria kits, blood-testing, and demonstrating the tangible, verifiable results of rationality over belief. The success of the DAMAN program is not a ‘miracle,’ as the popular narrative might suggest, but a methodical victory of committed labour and scientific delivery over systemic negligence. Crucially, it is a victory achieved despite, rather than because of, the State apparatus, which often only provides belated, symbolic support. The film thus articulates that true emancipation begins with the acquisition of a correct, materialist understanding of one’s own oppression (Marx & Engels 1846; Gramsci 1971).

III. Bazinian Realism and the Ethical Recording of Reality

The political strength and critical authority of *Daman’s* Marxist critique are entirely dependent on its formal integrity. This is where André Bazin’s philosophy of cinematic realism becomes indispensable. Bazin viewed the cinema camera as an inherently ethical instrument, believing its mechanical objectivity granted it the moral capacity to record reality with minimal manipulation. *Daman’s* aesthetic choices align perfectly with Bazin’s doctrine, providing the necessary ontological authenticity to validate its powerful ideological claims. The way the film is shot is inseparable from what the film is saying.

The Ontology of Place and Performance

The decision to shoot on location in the arduous, often dangerous terrain of Malkangiri (a district in southern Odisha) —a region historically sensitive due to Naxal activity and difficult geography—is the film’s foundational ontological commitment. For Bazin, the image is an imprint of reality, a transfer of time and space from the object photographed to the celluloid (or digital sensor) (Bazin 1967). By foregoing studio sets and simulated locations, *Daman* establishes its images as a documentary imprint of that harsh, specific reality. The dust, the treacherous river crossings, the rickety bridges, and the sheer verticality of the hills are not merely backdrops; they are active, antagonistic characters in the narrative, verifiable entities that testify to the truth of the story (Bazin 1971; Patnaik 2022).

Cinematographer Pratap Rout ensures that the film operates with a docudrama sensibility, rigorously prioritizing the truth of the setting over manufactured, expressionistic drama. This commitment to the ontology of place that the image bears the physical presence of the location lends the film a unique, unassailable authority.

Furthermore, the film’s realism is significantly bolstered by the authenticity of performance and casting. While starring a major regional star (Babushaan Mohanty), the film strategically surrounds him with supporting characters—the sceptical pharmacist Ravi (Dipanwit Dashmohapatra), the tireless local ASHA (Accredited Social Health Activist) workers, and the numerous villagers—who are portrayed with a distinct, deliberate lack of cinematic exaggeration. Their acting style is subdued, observational, and anti-melodramatic. This commitment to verisimilitude in both setting and performance lends the film its emotional authority, compelling the audience to recognize the fictionalized story as a direct, unembellished reflection of lived reality. The audience is not just watching a story; they are confronted with a photograph of a reality that exists (Bazin 1967; Jameson 1981).

Deep Focus, Long Takes, and Moral Participation

The film’s consistent preference for deep focus and long takes is its most powerful and ideologically charged Bazinian technique.

Focus Deep: Contextualizing Heroism

By employing deep focus, the film keeps multiple planes of action (foreground, middle ground, and background) simultaneously sharp and legible. For example, when Dr. Mohanty is intensely treating a patient in a village hut (foreground), the vast, challenging landscape—a mountain range, a distant, difficult path, or the dilapidated school building—remains visibly crisp in the background. This compositional choice serves a profound ethical purpose: it refuses to allow the viewer to isolate the heroic individual action from the colossal, systemic problem that necessitates it.

This technique is a direct refusal of the manipulative power of the close-up and expressionistic montage—which Bazin critiqued for ‘dictating’ meaning and destroying the ambiguity and integrity of space. Deep focus compels the viewer to assume a more active, intellectual, and ethical role (Bazin called this ‘cutting

with their eyes'). The audience is forced to simultaneously process the relationship between the individual, committed labour of the doctor and the magnitude of the State's neglect looming in the background. This spatial integrity prevents the film from collapsing into simplistic hero-worship and rigorously contextualizes the small victory within the frame of the enormous challenge.

The Long Take: Respecting Time and Ambiguity

The use of long takes—shots that extend in time without cutting—preserves the temporal integrity of the events. It allows the scene to unfold in 'real time', respecting the duration and difficulty of the doctor's work—the arduous walk, the prolonged negotiation with a sceptical elder, the patient observation period.

By limiting the use of Soviet-style, rapid montage, *Daman* avoids the ideological manipulation that montage often imposes. Bazin argued that montage creates meaning through juxtaposition; the long take, conversely, merely records reality, preserving its inherent ambiguity and complexity. When the scene unfolds without cuts, the viewer is given the freedom to interpret the event's meaning, thus granting them a greater sense of moral participation in the narrative. The film, through this technique, trusts the audience to draw their own conclusions about the systemic failure, rather than forcing a pre-packaged emotional response.

IV. The Political Economy of the *DAMAN* Scheme and the Subaltern Proletariat

While the film presents the program as a triumphant, science-based intervention, a Marxist examination reveals it also as an attempt by the State to manage, rather than fundamentally solve, the contradictions of capital and underdevelopment. The scheme's very existence is an admission of prior, systemic failure, and its implementation exposes the layered exploitation of labour essential to its limited success.

The Dialectic of Intervention: Managing Contradictions

The State intervention, in the form of the DAMAN scheme, is not an altruistic gesture but a necessary political manoeuvre (Harvey 2005; Scott 1998). The epidemic in Malkangiri represents a failure in the reproduction of labour power. A population decimated by malaria is unproductive, and a region consumed by disease and Naxalism poses a political and security threat. The scheme is therefore a calculated measure to restore minimum levels of health and order required for the area to remain a manageable, non-disruptive periphery within the national economy.

The film subtly captures this dialectic. Dr. Mohanty's initial difficulties stem from bureaucratic inertia and lack of funds—the State apparatus is reluctant to commit resources until the crisis reaches a flashpoint, demanding a reactive, media-friendly intervention (Althusser 1971; Guha 2007). The success of the scheme is ultimately co-opted and utilized by the political centre, framing Dr. Mohanty's singular struggle as evidence of the State's compassion, rather than a corrective to its negligence. The film, in its Bazinian realism, foregrounds the grassroots struggle, thus challenging the official narrative of top-down success and exposing the materialist gap between State rhetoric and on-the-ground reality.

The Gendered Proletariat: The Labour of ASHA and Anganwadi Workers

One of the most powerful, yet understated, Marxist critiques in *Daman* lies in its depiction of the ASHA and Anganwadi workers. These women constitute the true, indispensable subaltern proletariat of the healthcare system. While Dr. Mohanty is the face of the struggle—the bourgeois individual undergoing a redemptive arc—it is the local women, paid minimal honoraria and working with relentless dedication, who perform the overwhelming bulk of the reproductive labour and ideological struggle necessary for the *DAMAN* scheme's success.

Their work is multi-faceted and essential

Physical Labor: They traverse the impossible, un-bridged terrain, carrying medical kits and education materials, often risking their own safety and health.

Ideological Labor: They are the key agents in the struggle against *duma* (superstition), employing personal trust and local knowledge to replace false consciousness with scientific understanding. They bridge the cultural gap that the privileged, urban doctor initially cannot.

Gendered Exploitation: Their labour is a prime example of gendered exploitation within the public health system (Federici 2012). They are typically underpaid and overworked, their essential care work often undervalued precisely because it is seen as an extension of traditional, unpaid domestic female labour. Their tireless efforts are the material foundation upon which Dr. Mohanty's symbolic victory is built.

The film's realism is ethically obligated to show these women, often filmed in the same Bazinian deep focus as the main characters active agents, emphasizing that the victory over malaria is a collective, decentralized, and predominantly female-driven class achievement, not just the solitary mission of a male hero (Bazin 1967; Mulvey 2006).

The Cost of Resistance: Naxalism and the Vacuum of Authority

The presence of Naxalism/Maoism in the film's background is a necessary acknowledgement of the violent political contradiction inherent in the region. From a Marxist perspective, Naxalism is often viewed as an armed response to the complete failure of the State to deliver on its socio-economic promises—a radical, anti-establishment resistance born from profound material deprivation and exploitation of tribal land and resources.

In *Daman*, the Naxals initially command greater local authority than the State-sponsored doctor. Their control over movement and communication—symbolically enforced by roadblocks or threats—is a direct function of the State's infrastructural and political absence. The community turns to the radical alternative because the official apparatus has abandoned them. Dr. Mohanty's success is therefore not merely a medical triumph but a political victory for the State ideology; by delivering healthcare and restoring faith in rational science and governance, he effectively diminishes the ideological and physical space for Naxal influence. The film presents the fight for health as a fight for ideological hegemony against both superstition and insurgency, showcasing how successful delivery of social services can reclaim territory lost to the vacuum of State neglect.

V. Deepening the Bazinian Aesthetic: Ethics of Casting and Time

The Ethics of Star Casting: The Case of Babushaan Mohanty

The casting of Babushaan Mohanty, a major, recognizable regional star, presents a fascinating aesthetic problem for a film committed to realism (Bazin, 1967; Dyer, 1998). Bazin generally favoured anonymity in performance to avoid the star's pre-packaged persona from interfering with the truth of the character. However, *Daman* utilizes the star for a specific, complex ethical function: ideological translation and bridge-building (Staiger 1992).

The Bourgeois Stand-in: Mohanty's star status immediately codes him as an outsider—urban, privileged, and recognizable. This status functions as a narrative shorthand for the class chasm the film seeks to explore. His initial discomfort and transformation are made more powerful because the audience understands the magnitude of the sacrifice and disorientation involved for someone of his standing.

The Conduit for the Periphery: A star's presence ensures commercial viability and attracts a mass audience (the urban middle class) who might otherwise ignore a docu-drama about remote tribal health issues. By drawing the centre's attention, the star acts as an essential conduit of empathy, forcing the privileged audience to confront the material reality of the periphery. The film thus uses the star system against itself, deploying commercial machinery to deliver an uncompromising political message.

The star's deliberate, un-glamorous performance shot in the same natural light, without the typical cinematic enhancement ultimately subjugates the star's personality to the film's ethical project, achieving a form of "subverted Bazinian realism" where the popular medium is ethically redirected to serve a higher, documentary truth.

The Durational Ethos: Pacing, Fatigue, and Veracity

The film's pacing, often dictated by its use of long takes and observational editing, establishes a powerful durational ethos. It makes the audience feel the fatigue, frustration, and slow pace of change in the remote area. The long shots of Dr. Mohanty walking, climbing, and crossing rivers are crucial. They refuse to use rapid montage to elide the difficulty of movement. Every journey feels laborious, every success hard-won.

This cinematic pacing is a direct ethical commitment to veracity. It counters the "instant gratification" narrative often demanded by commercial cinema. By forcing the audience to endure the time it takes to effect change—the time it takes for a superstition to dissolve, for a diagnosis to be made, for a difficult river crossing to be achieved—the film aligns its aesthetic structure with the very material resistance of the environment. The difficulty of the filming process itself (shooting on location) becomes structurally embodied in the viewing experience. This enduring realism is the core of its ethical appeal: it grants dignity and weight to the struggle of the marginalized, refusing to trivialize their decades-long plight with slick, quick-fix editing. The time of the film mirrors the time of inequality—slow, relentless, and exhausting.

Ideology and the Politics of Representation in *Daman*

The analytical power of *Daman* resides not just in what it depicts, but in the ideological framework that underpins its representational choices. The film navigates a precarious line between documenting State failure

and inadvertently co-opting the narrative of marginalization for mainstream consumption. A rigorous ideological critique requires examining the film's subtle biases and its potential for becoming an instrument of the very State rhetoric it seems to challenge.

The Spectacle of Suffering and the Liberal Gaze

While Bazinian realism ethically records the conditions of the poor, there is always the risk, acknowledged by critics of cinematic representation, that the film may engage in the "spectacle of suffering" (Sontag 2003; Chouliaraki 2006). This is the tendency of the urban, privileged gaze (both the filmmakers' and the audience's) to consume the poverty and hardship of the periphery as a form of moral entertainment or "poverty porn" (Ranciere 2004).

Daman, by focusing heavily on the arc of the privileged Dr. Mohanty, risks centring the liberal conscience of the middle class over the continuous, lived trauma of the tribal populace (Spivak 1988; Bhabha 1994). The tribals are often rendered as the "object of rescue," whose agency is measured primarily by their capacity to be "saved" by external, scientific rationality. This narrative structure—the white (or urban) saviour complex—is an ideological bias that must be critically acknowledged.

The film mitigates this critique through its commitment to realism. The long takes and deep focus, as argued earlier, prevent a simplistic emotional manipulation. They document the process of change rather than simply showing the result, lending dignity to the environment. Furthermore, the emphasis on the local ASHA workers and the slow, difficult process of winning local trust ensures that the transformation is not instantaneous or miraculous, but earned through decentralized labour. Yet, the final narrative closure, which celebrates the doctor's success and promotion, still serves to reaffirm the established social hierarchy, with the urban elite rewarded for their brief immersion in the problems of the periphery. The fever of inequality remains, even after the fever of malaria subsides.

VI. The Post-Colonial Critique: Internal Colonialism and the Subaltern

Daman can also be read through the lens of Post-Colonial theory, specifically addressing the issue of internal colonialism. This framework argues that after independence, the ruling elite in the newly formed nation-state (the political and economic centre) often continues the exploitative patterns of the former colonial power towards its marginalized internal populations (the periphery).

Malkangiri, in this context, serves as an internally colonized territory

Extraction and Neglect: Resources (often tribal land and minerals) may be extracted or exploited, while basic social services (health, roads, education) are consistently denied (Harvey 2005; Guha 2007). The lack of the bridge is not an administrative mistake; it is a structural mechanism of control and isolation, minimizing the State's investment in a region whose inhabitants hold little political or economic leverage (Althusser 1971; Scott 1998).

Imposition of Ideology: The battle against *dumais* is not just a fight for science, but a process of cultural subjugation—the forced imposition of the dominant, secular-scientific ideology of the centre onto the indigenous, local belief system (Gramsci 1971; Spivak 1988). While malaria eradication is objectively necessary for survival, the process often disregards the cultural context and agency of the tribal people. Dr. Mohanty, initially, is an agent of this cultural imposition, whose success is tied to the erasure of the 'primitive' belief system.

The film's ultimate power is its subtle inversion of this colonial dynamic: it is the periphery's material conditions that finally transform the colonizing agent (Dr. Mohanty). He leaves his initial prejudice and arrogance behind, replaced by a grounded empathy forged by the harsh reality he is forced to confront. The film argues that the 'saviour' must first be 'saved' from his own ideological limitations by the authenticity and necessity of the subaltern's struggle.

Sound, Silence, and the Rhetoric of Landscape

While our focus has been primarily on the visual aesthetic, the sound design in *Daman* works synergistically to bolster the film's Bazinian realism. The film often utilizes ambient sound—the roar of the river, the rustling of leaves, the natural silence of remote hills—over manipulative orchestral scoring.

Authentic Acoustic Space: The lack of pervasive, guiding background music in crucial scenes (like the long walks or tense village negotiations) compels the viewer to rely on the natural, authentic acoustic space of Malkangiri. This is a Bazinian technique: the sound environment is allowed to testify to the reality of the location, much like the deep focus allows the visual environment to speak for itself.

The Rhetoric of Silence: The profound silence that often accompanies the vast, unpopulated vistas—broken only by the sound of footsteps or breath—underscores the isolation and the sheer scale of the challenge (Doane 1985). This quiet serves as a rhetoric of neglect, the silence is the sound of the State's absence, amplifying the loneliness of the doctor's task and the vulnerability of the community. The shift from the urban noise to the rural quiet is a sonic manifestation of the journey into the geography of alienation (Althusser 1971).

VII. Synthesis of Ideology and Form: The Cinematic Proof

The brilliance of *Daman* lies in its successful, complex synthesis, where aesthetic form is not merely a vehicle for content but the material proof of its ideological claims. This fusion elevates the film from a moral tale to a significant document of social reality, creating a cinematic argument that is both intellectually rigorous and emotionally persuasive. The technical choices of the filmmakers are, in this sense, political acts, ensuring that the marginalized reality of Malkangiri is presented with maximal truth and minimal distortion.

Realism as Irrefutable Evidence

The rigorous application of Bazinian realism—the on-location shooting, the long takes, the deep focus, the authentic acoustic space—transforms the fictional narrative into a form of cinematic evidence. The film does not tell the audience that the Malkangiri villages are neglected; it shows them, in unmanipulated spatial and temporal continuity, the reality of the unbuilt bridge, the arduous journey, and the persistent presence of disease. This unvarnished, authentic document of life in the marginalized periphery acts as the irrefutable, visual evidence for the Marxist critique.

The conclusion drawn by the viewer is not a manufactured emotional response, but an intellectual deduction based on the visual facts presented. The film proves that the heroism of one doctor is necessary only because of the crippling failure of the State and the lethal effects of class negligence (Marx & Engels, 1848; Althusser, 1971).

The Enduring Fever of Inequality

The final frame of *Daman* cannot, and should not, suggest that the fight is truly over. While the malaria epidemic may be locally contained, the fever of inequality—the structural and systemic class-based marginalization that caused the epidemic in the first place—persists. The doctor's temporary intervention, though successful, does not build the roads, establish sustainable infrastructure, or eliminate the class divide between the centre and the periphery.

The film achieves its distinction by proving that the most politically potent cinema is often the one that simply and truthfully records the material reality of a world begging for fundamental, structural change. *Daman* is a powerful, enduring reminder that in a politically fractured society, realism is the highest form of ethical and revolutionary critique.

VIII. Conclusion: The Uncut Truth and the Demand for Structural Justice

The journey through *Daman* via the twin lenses of Marxist ideology and Bazinian realism reveals a cinematic work of exceptional complexity and political weight. It is a film that successfully negotiates the treacherous terrain between commercial filmmaking and socio-political documentation, using the formal demands of realism to legitimize its radical critique of the Indian State.

The Marxist lens allowed us to dissect the film's narrative as an allegory of class stratification, wherein the geography of Malkangiri becomes a concrete representation of structural violence. We established that the epidemic is not a natural disaster but a product of infrastructural apathy—a systemic, lethal mechanism of marginalization that sacrifices the lives of the subaltern proletariat for the political convenience of the centre. Furthermore, the analysis of the ASHA workers highlighted the gendered exploitation inherent in the scheme's success, cementing the argument that the victory was a collective, material achievement of the oppressed, co-opted by the symbolic narrative of the elite. The battle against superstition was understood as an essential ideological struggle to replace 'false consciousness' with a materialist understanding of health and reality, a precondition for political emancipation (Lukács 1971).

The Bazinian lens was crucial in validating these political claims. The film's ontological commitment to authentic Malkangiri locations, its eschewal of manipulative montage, and its consistent use of deep focus and long takes provided the ethical and aesthetic bedrock. These techniques compelled the audience toward moral participation, forcing them to intellectually connect the individual heroism in the foreground with the overwhelming, systemic failure captured in the background. The use of a star, too, was seen as a complex

strategic choice—a necessary ideological bridge to draw the attention of the centre to the issues of the periphery, thereby weaponizing the commercial apparatus for an ethical cause.

Daman's final legacy rests on its status as an unflinching document. It reminds us that cinema's most powerful political act is often the simplest: to record the truth of material reality without embellishment. It stands as a profound critique of the failed development state, demonstrating that without addressing the root causes of the fever of inequality—the absence of infrastructure, the exploitation of labour, and the political neglect of the periphery—any temporary victory against disease remains a precarious, ephemeral achievement. The true demand of *Daman* is not for more heroic doctors, but for structural justice—for the roads, the bridges, and the systemic equity that would render the solitary hero obsolete.

Beyond its immediate narrative of medical triumph, *Daman* achieves a crucial feat of counter-hegemonic media production. In an era dominated by rapid-fire news cycles and sanitized government narratives, the film serves as a slow, deliberate refutation, forcing the national consciousness to sit with the difficult, unphotogenic truths of the remote interior. By placing the lived experience of the tribal community at the centre of its Bazinian frame, and then rigorously interpreting that experience through a Marxist critique of the state, the film elevates regional cinema from mere entertainment to a vital platform for political accountability. It is a powerful, enduring reminder that in a politically fractured society, realism is the highest form of ethical and revolutionary critique, ensuring that the marginalized spaces of India are no longer left to suffer in silence and darkness, but are captured in high definition, demanding redress.

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