

Paralyzed Psychological Equilibrium in *Sorry To Bother You*

(A Film Review)

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Paralyzed Psychological Equilibrium in *Sorry To Bother You*: A Film Review

A film acts as a medium to offer a true societal picture in a manner that is equally convincing and shocking to the audience. Its purpose need not be restricted in depicting the realities but in making a wholesome experience for them (Sitney 38). The experimental film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018) looks beyond a single genre for depicting the contemporary situation, by an extension of creating a pseudo-reality which is humorous but equally frightening. It experimented with the conception of a form by accumulating both fictional and non-fictional elements, as well as by playing with the conception of time. It is a misconception that fiction is only a make-believe world, contrarily it is loaded with situational problems and observations on society (McGuinness and Simpson 180). *Sorry to Bother You* is regarded as an experimental film because the non-fictional element of the problems of race merges with the fictional element of genetically mutating human beings; where a black man completely loses his personality but regains consciousness, when he gets transformed into a post-human species.

From the beginning of the film, it is noticed that Cassius Green believes in the idealism of the American dream, where any and every man can become successful through hard labor. Regal View has entirely enraptured the mind of Cassius to become a 'power caller' as he even gossips in 'White Voice' and stops only, when his friends get offended (*Sorry to Bother You* 22:43). Even he gnaws at the exclusive elevator and is least perturbed about the injustices that is met out on the black employees in lieu of back breaking labour. As power and consciousness do not go hand in hand, Cassius too got blinded with the superficial greed of power. In the film, the section, where Cassius is able to smoothly handle each of the customers is shown in a fast-forwarded manner, where Johnny, the supervisor is congratulating him after each successful call as he able to tackle the job of 'Stick to the script'

with ease. However, Riley's comic intervention in these portions often hides an indirect indication to the fact that Cassius indirectly signed the contract of his life's script which is written by the white men.

With time, as Cassius started to taste success, he completely disowned his black identity, his roots and the mission of the united protest against the white powerholders with his friends. Moreover, the luxurious lifestyle and his new-class position loosened his grip over his conscience (Sculos 186). Riley builds his entire narrative in a linear manner without hardly any flashbacks which makes it easier for the audience to understand that how the protagonist gets entangled in the web of further exploitation. Ultimately, it indicates the contemporary situation where in this prevailing capitalistic exploitative world, the idea of work-life balance has become a ridicule and human beings are nothing better than automations.

Then all of a sudden, the audience are transported from the reflection of the harsh workplace reality of the telemarketing center, in Regal View to Worry Free which is an uncanny megacorporate setup, where they genetically transform workers into slaves. When Cassius is invited by Steve Lift in his meeting to do a rap, he almost startles and then manages to blurt out to "Nigga shit". This scene is reflective in a way that shows that how the cognitive faculty of a black man gets crippled to the extent of creating an existential crisis. The transformation is so subtle, yet shocking in the form of an unexpected twist indicating more degraded level of exploitation, where American white men are genetically mutating black men into powerful Equisapiens (34:49). This is Riley's mastery to be able to craft these horrific visuals closer home where audience cannot help but relate with their future, where the workers would turn into animals and would lose their thinking capacity and voice to protest against their masters just like the slaves of earlier times. As suggested in Lecture

“Messing with Genres: *Sorry to Bother You*”, the film can be attributed within the ambit of Afrofuturism as racial exploitation can be observed in the contemporary techno culture (Dery 180). The concept of Afrofuturism explains that the film despite having both comic and fictional elements, has the contemporary touch of an underlying tension of racial exploitation of black workers against the white masters and white clients in the workplace.

Moreover, the director Boots Riley deliberately messes with the genres of horror, science fiction and socialism into one, when Steve Lift explains the durability and profitability of the Equisapiens to Cassius (*Sorry to Bother You* 38:10). The moment Cassius realized his mission behind the worker modification process, of genetically mutating workers into bonded laborers, it is already too late. Riley fused this part of the film with the horror of science fiction, more vividly, where a normal human being gets transformed into half-human and half-horse species by snoring a fusing catalyst. According to film critic Mark Kermode, the film is a dystopia presenting the elements of comedy and science-fiction together from the beginning to the end (*BBC*). Despite, the film having a hybrid genre, it is able to concoct the genres towards producing the powerful themes of racism and the work culture exploitation in California.

This exploitation sets the mind of the audience to understand the precarities of a neo-liberal economic structure through its protagonist, Cassius Green who works in a telemarketing industry (Stanić 83). This non-fictional structure of telemarketing industry enables the audience to empathize and relate with the real present time economic condition, in which they also, like Cassius, run behind money without having the time to reflect upon the situation they are passing through. However, in the end the audience encounters some creatures which are an admixture of human beings and horses (*Sorry to Bother You* 35:21). This fictional part is a deliberate attempt to transport the audience to a different reality of an

unimagined future, creating a break to the linear plot, where Cassius was slowly foregoing his racial identity and the white men were successfully able to twist his mind to earn their profits.

The theme of exploitation in the telecommunication industry and racism runs explicitly in *Sorry to Bother You*, as it shows the success ladder of the black community in America is to enter the greater loop of exploitation. Through the other characters such as Detroit, Cassius's girlfriend and his friends such as Squeeze and Salvador is being projected by Riley as foils who always tried to stand for their black identity. However, Cassius himself in the pursuit of doing something which will make him immortal for posterity, underwent transformation which had no way to return, despite his realization. Thus, the film *Sorry to Bother You* is the need of the hour to venture into the modern forms of exploitation and racism and even hints at the changing form of this exploitation in the near future.

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