



Homebound: How Caste Politics, Hierarchy and Socio-Religious Hatred Wound the Brain and Fractures the Self.

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Abstract:

"Homebound" is a powerful film that sheds light on the harsh realities of Caste Politics, Hierarchy and Socio-Religious Hatred Wound the Brain and Fractures the Self. in India. Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, the movie tells the story of two friends, Chandan, a Dalit, and Shoaib, a Muslim, who face immense challenges in their pursuit of a better life. The film is set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and explores themes of identity, friendship, and the struggles of marginalized communities.

Through its portrayal of Chandan and Shoaib's experiences, "Homebound" highlights the systemic inequalities and biases that perpetuate social exclusion. The film showcases how caste and religious identities can lead to discrimination, violence, and marginalization. The characters' struggles to find employment, access education, and navigate everyday life are a stark reminder of the deep-seated social issues that India continues to grapple with

Keywords: Homebound, Caste Politics, Hierarchy, Socio-Religious Hatred, Fractures, Self.

Introduction: The 2025 film *Homebound* is based on the New York Times article titled "A Friendship, a Pandemic and a Death Beside the Highway" (originally published as "Taking Amrit Home") by Kashmiri journalist Basharat Peer. The article was an opinion piece published in The New York Times on July 31, 2020. True Story: It relates to the real-life heartbreaking story of two migrant workers, Mohammad Saiyub and Amrit Kumar, from the village of Devari in Uttar Pradesh. Key events go in this way that the two friends, a Muslim and a Dalit, were working in different factories in Surat, Gujarat, when the impulsive COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 left them unemployed and shipwrecked. With no public transport, they boarded on an exhausting 1,200 km journey back home.



Mohammad Saiyub cradling, holding and crying on the death of his friend on a highway in Madhya Pradesh went viral, becoming a symbol of the immense and colossal hardship faced by millions of migrant labourers during the pandemic.

Tragic and Terrifying End: Despite ultimately receiving medical help at a local hospital, Amrit Kumar died from severe dehydration. Saiyub, who tested negative for COVID-19, then he faced the deadly official and bureaucratic challenges of bringing his friend's body back to their village for burial.

The film, *Homebound* which fictionalizes some details while keeping the emotional core of the story, has been selected as India's official entry for the 98th Academy Awards for Best International Feature Film. Neeraj Ghaywan's film *Homebound* focuses on its powerful representation and depiction of caste, class, and religious discrimination and socio-religious untouchability in India, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, using the real-life story of two marginalized and subaltern friends, Chandan (Dalit) and Shoaib (Muslim). This article explores and explains the themes of systemic injustice, humiliation, poverty, and the resilient but tragic struggle for dignity, caste politics, hierarchy and socio-religious hatred wound the brain and fractures the self often comparing it to Ghaywan's earlier work *Masaan*, and analyzing its nuanced portrayal of a society where pre-existing inequalities are amplified by crisis.



Caste Politics & Religious Prejudice: this article explores and elucidates how the film exposes caste-based humiliation (e.g., Chandan's mother's experience in the school and when Chandan deliberately mentions his caste as General category but later on gets exposed and humiliated by the classmates) and the burden of Muslim identity (Shoaib was invited on the occasion of India-Pakistan Cricket match, and insulted and made fun ridiculous fun of him by commenting on the religious abusive comments), showing how these issues persist invisibly and are exacerbated by societal failures.

Systemic Discrimination: Homebound is praised and appreciated for forcing mainstream cinema to confront systemic issues, depicting how vulnerable groups face neglect and cruelty, even in "normal" times. Doing injustice on the basis of caste politics and socio-religious practice have become new-normal for the society. Various religious groups are creating, practicing and spreading cruelty and terror among the minorities. These so called vandalizing religious mobs have been vilifying the image of India as a secular country in the world.

Influence of the Pandemic: The film keenly and minutely uses the COVID-19 crisis as a catalyst to accelerate existing fault lines, revealing, exposing and tattering the deeply rooted inequalities and the plight of migrant workers, say The Indian Express and Time Magazine. The film, Homebound showed hierarchy and socio-religious hatred wound the brain and fractured the self. Throughout the film Chandan and Shoaib faced these challenges. They are deliberately treated as a neglected human beings of the society. Film shows that the society has forced them to hide their identity and self in the public sphere. All the public and government institutions tries their best to fracture the image of Scheduled Castes and Muslims in all the conditions and functions.

Friendship as Confrontation: The bond between Chandan and Shoaib is seen as a form of joyful resistance against a brutal system that marginalizes and underestimates them, even as they face profound grief, say The Hollywood Reporter and Time Magazine.

Filmmaking Style: Critics discuss Ghaywan's directorial skill in blending stark realism with poetry, maintaining political relevance without becoming mere propaganda, and giving weight to silence and grief, say The Indian Express.

In the context of this film the researcher observes that the neuroscience has forced a fundamental reconsideration of identity. The self is no longer understood as a fixed essence housed in the body. It is a dynamic process, continuously shaped by neural plasticity, emotional experience, memory, and social environment. This insight has radical implications for how we understand social systems, especially caste. The film Homebound is perfect reflection of emotional traumatic and insulting experiences experienced by Chandan and Shoaib. Chandan memory and social environment is full with discrimination and disparities.

Caste politics and humiliation on the basis of caste creed, gender and religion are usually analyzed as a moral wrong, an economic injustice, or a political hierarchy. Neuroscience reveals something deeper and more disturbing. Caste is a system that acts in a straight line on the brain.



The brain is socially fabricated and constructed. Modern neuroscience shows that the brain develops in constant and continuous interaction with its social, political and religious environment. Neural circuits regulating emotion, confidence, fear, and decision-making are shaped early in life by signals of safety, recognition, threat, and exclusion. This means identity is not simply inherited. It is installed. Children who grow up in surroundings of affirmation develop diverse stress responses than those raised under chronic threat or humiliation. Brains acclimate to what they must survive.

Caste politics, caste-based humiliation and religious deprivation make sure that from birth, certain children encounter which is clearly showed in the film, Homebound:

- Repeated signals of inferiority and subordination in the behaviour of Chandan and Shoaib.
- Social exclusion normalized as tradition in the social structure of Chandan and Shoaib.
- Surveillance and scrutiny of behavior and movement reflects in the office work of Shoaib.
- Anticipatory fear of humiliation and degradation is the part and parcel of the film.

What appears socially as “lack of confidence” or “docility” is often neurological survival tactic. Throughout the film, the researcher has observed the dismantling of confidence of Chandan and Shoaib in the social structure. Caste system then commits its most perverse act. It points to these adaptations and affirms them natural deficiencies. Neuroscience and psychology show that trauma is not restricted to individual episodes. It rewires memory systems. Traumatic memory is invasive, fragmented, and obstinate. When trauma is collective and repeated across generations, it becomes rooted in cultural narrative and bodily response.

Religion and oppressed caste-based narratives frequently and regularly describe:

- Fear without immediate reason
- Shame without personal guiltiness
- Anger without harmless outlet
- Exhaustion without visible force.

Niraj Ghaywan picturized the characters who are suffering in the present era. The characters of Chandan and Shoaib becomes the archetype of fear and shame without immediate and personal reasons and guilt. They become angry and violent over the period of time without any harmless and visible force. Most of the time they become helpless and lifeless in front of the unbearable situations.



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar as a neuro-social thinker, in his book Annihilation of caste observes and gives solution over the above-mentioned problems. Caste politics and discrimination on the basis of religious identity is a cultural erasure. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar did not have access to modern neuroscience, yet his political programme bring into line with its deepest findings.

His insistence on:

- Common schooling
- Common dining
- Shared public space
- Intermarriage was not symbolic or merely social.

It was meant at destroying the neurological conditions that reproduce caste. Dr. Ambedkar understood that caste survives and endures not only through law or theology, but through daily embodied experiences. Change the experience, and you change the mind. Change the mind, and the system collapses. This is why he rejected reformist approaches that preserved caste structure. Reform leaves the brain intact and unbroken. Annihilation rewires it. Why neuroscience makes annihilation unavoidable. If identity is shaped by environment, then caste is a system that engineers spoiled environments for some and enriched environments for others. If humiliation harms the brain, then caste is a programme of mass psychological injury. If belonging is biologically obligatory, then caste is biologically hostile. In this framework, annihilation of caste is not extremist. It is therapeutic. It is the minimum intervention required to stop a system that systematically harms minds, fractures selves, and passes injury across generations.

Conclusion

Neuroscience does not substitute moral arguments against caste. It toughens them beyond denial. Caste is not only unjust. It is not only irrational. It is not only immoral. It is neurotoxic. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's call for annihilation was not merely political foresight. It was an intuitive grasp of a truth science is only now articulating. A society that wishes to heal must pull apart the structures that wound its minds. There is no neurological reform and restructuring of caste. There is only its annihilation.

"Homebound" is a powerful film that sheds light on the punitive realities of caste and socio-religious hatred and discernment in India. Directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, the movie tells the story of two friends, Chandan, a Dalit, and Shoaib, a Muslim, who face enormous challenges in their pursuit of a better life. The film is set against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic and explores themes of identity, friendship, and the struggles of marginalized communities. Through its portrayal of Chandan and Shoaib's experiences, "Homebound" highlights the systemic inequalities and biases that disseminate social exclusion. The film showcases how caste and religious identities can lead to discrimination, violence, and marginalization.



The characters' struggles to find employment, access education, and navigate everyday life are a unambiguous reminder of the deep-seated social issues that India lasts to grapple with.

The film has received widespread critical acclamation for its nuanced portrayal of complex and multifaceted social issues and its ability to spark important conversations about caste, religion, and identity. "Homebound" has been acclaimed for its empathetic storytelling, strong performances, and its refusal to shy away from uncomfortable truths.

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