

**Name: Medha Jha**  
**PHI/15/12**

### **Masaan: Movie Review**

*A touching plot on narratives of life*

Masaan means 'crematorium', which refers to 'fly away solo'. This parallel love story between Shalu and Deepak offers romantic relief to the otherwise tense story of Devi. Deepak belongs to a family of doms -- people who help burn corpses on the ghats -- while Shalu is an upper-caste girl, unknown of the harsh realities of life that Deepak meets every day. The first of these tells the story of a trainer at a coaching computer centre Devi Pathak. The film opens with her and her student, Piyush Aggarwal, checking into a hotel room. They are interrupted during sex when policemen burst in, having been tipped off by hotel staff who questioned Devi and Piyush were indulging in "indecent behaviour". Inspector Mishra records the barely dressed Devi on his mobile phone while Piyush locks himself in the bathroom and commits suicide by slitting his wrists. Devi and her father Vidyadhar are subjected to blackmail by Inspector Mishra, who demands a huge bribe of Rs. 300,000 to hush up the matter. In desperate need of money, Vidyadhar begins to indulge in a betting game, where people bet on small boys to dive and collect the maximum number of coins from the Ganga riverbed within a specified time. He lets people bet on Jhonta, an orphan who works for him after Jhonta volunteers himself for the game. Meanwhile, Devi has to switch jobs due to the stigma associated with her having pre-marital sex. She eventually gets a government job in the railways in Varanasi, but news regarding her pre-marital sexual indulgence reaches there as well.

The second story involves Deepak Kumar, a Varanasi boy from the Dom community whose family works in cremation by burning funeral pyres. Deepak wants to transcend the limitations of a casteist society. He studies civil engineering at a polytechnic college where he meets and falls in love with Shaalu Gupta, a high caste Hindu girl. They start meeting each other and during a trip to Allahabad on

the banks of the Ganges, they share an intimate moment. Back in Varanasi, Deepak tells her about his caste and the work he does burning corpses. Shaalu remains firm and tells him that she will be with him even if her parents refuse. She asks him to focus on his placements and get a job, while she reaffirms her commitment to him.

However, unfortunately, during a pilgrimage trip with her family, Shaalu dies in a ghastly bus accident. Her body with those of other victims ends up at the same cremation ground where Deepak's family works. Deepak is shattered on seeing her dead body and loses all purpose in life. He retains her ring as a souvenir. Deepak is eventually able to overcome his grief and discards Shaalu's ring in the Ganges. He gains a placement as a civil engineer in Allahabad. Later that same ring is picked up by Jhonta who loses consciousness underwater while collecting coins. He regains consciousness in the hospital and gives the ring to a remorseful Vidyadhar, who decides to stop playing with Jhonta's life. He sells the ring and is finally able to pay off Inspector Mishra.

Married by the parochial mindset of people regarding her situation, Devi leaves Varanasi and joins a course at Allahabad University. She pays a visit to Piyush's family only to be slapped by his father. She comes to the banks of the Ganges to immerse the gift Piyush had given her on that fateful day in the hotel. Deepak, who is by the bank, notices her crying and offers her water to drink. A boatman beckons, offering both of them a ride towards Sangam. They both board the boat and strike up a conversation.

**Detailed observation on life, perspectives, and the emotion of letting go:**

Masaan exposes the paradox that conservative and rebellious attitudes exist in the same space. The characters of the film have all been brought with social and religious values/beliefs but they want to break the shackles of society to make space for love, humanity and individual identities.

The film also takes a stand against the caste and gender divide that continues to haunt our society. From "Ghar ki ijat" being a girl's responsibility to the tragedy of

doms who are called 'dom raja' despite leading an impoverished life because of the discrimination they face in the society; Masaan portrays it all with honesty.

Masaan end abruptly ends the philosophical and lyrical journey that Grover and Ghaywan have woven throughout the film. Suddenly, it seems the filmmaker isn't sure whether he wants the stories as a key point for the narrative. Apart from the last minutes, however, one cannot complain about the film.

Chaddha, Mishra and Kaushal have all incorporated their characters effortlessly. Chaddha, who has earlier proved her prowess with films like Gangs of Wasseypur and Fukrey, beautifully portrays the strong-headed Devi who is a free soul caught in the social confines of a small-town. And her character aptly brings it out when she says in one of the scenes, "Choti jagah, Choti soch." But she does not hesitate in fighting against the narrow mindedness of the small town and has her ways to explore and experiment with things. One of the scenes where Kaushal stands out is when he reveals to Shalu that he is a dom. In a very playful mood, Shalu teases him asking where lives and he blurts out, "Harishchandra ghat pe rehte hain. Lash jalana pesha hai humara aur humare parivaar ka." The pain of centuries of discrimination against his caste comes out in his eyes and cuts through his heart.

### **My interpretation:**

The 109-minute film reflects the brutal truths of Indian society – sexual repression, the caste divide, financial hardship, limited mobility – through individual philosophical journeys. The advantage of an ensemble format is that every encounter is judiciously turned over and sent on its way to its rightful conclusion, and there is a satisfying circularity to each of the character's experiences. But there simply isn't enough time to scrutinise the ramifications of Devi's rude brush with the law or the star-crossed Deepak-Shaaluu romance.

The movie teaches about facing the difficulties of life and finding ways in life. The last scene was a deciding moment of letting go. It's not an ideal colourful movie with protagonists, but it has characters with stories that connect.

