
Cinema Serving as Mirror to Society

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ABSTRACT:

Cinema, since its very beginning, has been a great medium of reflection of the socio-economic and political changes of the society. Films have an immense potential to project the images of a society in a way that conventional mediums never could. The Indian film industry is one of the largest film industries of the world exploring the images of the Indian society through cinema.

Many films are made every year with the social issues on their backdrop. And this trend has been prevalent since the start of the filmmaking in India. The filmmakers like Satyajit Ray, V Santaram, Satyen Bose, Raj Kapoor, Shyam Benegal, Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Prakash Jha, Mani Rathnam, Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, Amir Khan, Rajkumar Hirani, Madhur Bhandarkar and many others to name in the country who, through their hard-hitting and realistic films, have made people give some serious thoughts over the prevailing social and political issues in the society.

The Indian films made on the backdrop of social issues started getting international recognition even before our country India was not independent. Film, 'Neecha Nagar' directed by Chetan Anand in the year 1946 was a pioneering effort in Indian cinema that inspired many filmmakers to make films based on social issues. Neecha Nagar was the first Indian film to gain recognition at international level as it won Grand Prix du Festival International du Film, the highest award at the first Cannes Film Festival in 1946.

Similarly, 'Mother India' directed by Mehboob Khan in 1957 casting Nargis, Sunil Dutt, Raj Kumar, Rajendra Kumar and others was another milestone in parallel cinema that went on to win an Oscar nomination in the category of best foreign language film. The film represented the story of a widowed mother of two sons living in a patriarchal village of the country. The film dealt with the social and cultural changes taking place in the country which had been independent only for ten years. The film left a mark on all the classes and races of society across the country.

If we peep into the Indian cinema and the films highlighting sundry social, cultural, economic, political issues since the beginning of the rise of the film industry in the country till now, the list of such films is unending with names like 'Jagriti', 'Do Bigha Zameen', 'Prem Rog', 'Bombay' 'Hare Rama Hare Krishna', 'Rang De Basanti', 'Swades', 'Chandni Bar', 'Peepli Live', 'Page 3', 'OMG', 'Aarakshan', 'Chakravyuh', 'Paan Singh Tomar', 'Udaan', 'Mr and Mrs Iyer', 'Chak De India' and many more.

The Indian film industry has also, with the passage of time, been reflecting the transformation of Indian psyche with the changing time. Shammi Kapoor, during the 1950s initiated this transformation and then in 1970s and 80s actors like Rajesh Khanna and Amitabh Bachchan showed the change in the thoughts and behaviours of the people.

And in last one decade i.e. after 2000, the new India with news issues could be seen in the films like 'Dil Chahta Hai', '3 Idiots', 'Peepli Live', 'Shanghai' and others. Therefore, films have never only been a piece of art but also a great tool of social reforms and a mirror reflecting the social issues prevalent in our society.

Keywords: Cinema, society, social issues, political issues, cinema as a social mirror, caste system, industrialization etc.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The method used to prepare this research paper is content analysis and review of the films made during different era of the Indian society since its beginning in India in the early 20th century.

RESEARCH DESIGN:

The research design chosen to complete this paper is descriptive as it has been prepared after the study of different books, websites, magazines and more importantly after watching films.

In this research paper we have tried to find out the how the films of different genres produced in the country in last several decades reflected the contemporary condition. For this, we have referred to some books, websites giving information about the older movies which we do not easily find in the market.

OBJECTIVES:

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- ⇒ This research paper aims at studying how the Indian cinema, since its very beginning, been a mirror to the society reflecting numerous social, political and economic issues prevalent in different parts and among different classes of the country's population.
 - ⇒ The paper also tries to establish a logical relationship between popular sentiment and cinematic depiction, during different eras.
 - ⇒ In this paper, we have attempted to come up with some of the milestone films which have been detrimental in strengthening the connect between the mass and society. It is this connect which was captivated by the film industry leading to its growth by leaps and bounds.
 - ⇒ The paper also aims to analyze some of the milestone films which have enabled cinema to be a mirror reflecting major socio-economic and political issues which have always remained sensitive for mankind.

HYPOTHESIS:

- Almost every film is based on a plot decided by the filmmaker which ultimately comes from the real-life character, incidents or issues.
- Films have always been a reflection of the social condition of their era.
- Films of all the genres whether – comedy, thriller, action, romance or art reflect a particular class or section of society and the activities they engage themselves in.
- Films are one of the most powerful mediums of communication to portray any kind of issue or situation prevalent in a society.
- Cinema based on social issues also conveys a message to the society and the policymakers and have the power to bring about a change in the society

INTRODUCTION:

“Indian Cinema has virtually become a parallel culture. Talk of India to a foreigner and debate virtually centers on Indian films.”

--- Amitabh Bachhan

Films have always been a mirror reflecting the actual image of our society. Cinema too is a form of mass media which is inspired and influenced by society and quite beautifully and effectively portrays the moments of life beautifully.

Films are nothing but the amalgamation of art, literature and science. While art and literature are reflects the moments of life brilliantly, science studies man and his world. And since cinema is the combination of the three, it undoubtedly, portrays man and his life in society.

Indian cinema that completed a journey of hundred years reflected various colours and aspects of the society with every passing decade. While in the beginning films of Dadasaheb Phalke like Raja Harishchandra and Satyavan Savitri showed spiritual bent of mind of people in the society, these days films like Chakravayuh by filmmaker Prakash Jha shows how the neglected section of the society are fighting with the system which, they feel, is exploiting them and making them suffer. Similarly, Tigmanshu Dhulia in his film ‘Paan Singh Tomar’ which was based on a real-life character of an athlete employed by Indian Army who was forced to be a bandit after his cousin brother illegally acquires his land and tries to kill Paan Singh and his family.

In 1970s and 80s, the films like Ankur, Manthan, etc, art cinema finally came of age and showcased common man’s struggle with the system and striving for basics of life. Post 90s, when Indian society woke up to globalization and liberalization, new-age cinema makers too broke traditional Bollywood’s definitive cinematic boundaries. These are just a few films to name. There are such hundreds of films which were based on social issues and real life characters trying to reflect what and how are things taking place in society.

Earlier, most of the films were made with the rural background on their backdrop. But these days, with the urbanization taking place across the country at a rapid pace most of the films being made these days focus on urban lives of the people. Today’s films clearly reflect the changing pattern of lives in villages and towns, new social ethics and the impact of modernization and globalization.

Films with their rich inputs like music, screenplay, casts, scripts and dialogues reflect the contemporary society in which they are made. The filmmakers derive the ideas, concepts and imaginations for the films from the surroundings that they live in.

There were innumerable films which were produced during last one hundred years' journey of Indian cinema which in some way or the other threw light on different issues prevailing in the society from time-to-time. Some of the prominent films from the talkies era have been taken into consideration into this research paper.

Amrit Manthan – 1934, Directed by V Shantaram, the film came down heavily on the tradition of animal sacrifice prevalent in the society at those times. It reflected the real scenario of inhumane tradition of animal sacrifice in the name of religion.

Chandi Das – 1934, A New Theatre production, directed by Nitin Bose, the film starring K L Sehgal was the first Super hit film. It reflected the orthodox Brahmin society of West Bengal in the early days. The story reflects the travails of Chandidas who being a born Brahmin falls into love with a woman of other caste.

Devdas, The classic Devdas which has been remade at least 10 times since its first release in the form of a silent movie by filmmaker Naresh Mitra in year 1928, reflected feudal society of west Bengal.

Achhut Kanya – 1936, A Bombay Talkies production and directed by Franz Osten Achhut Kanya was released in year 1936. It was the first half of the 20th century and the country was gripped with the problem of caste system and untouchability, which was reflected with such a brilliant and courageous (calling courageous is in reference to the society of that time), that the movie made a history and is still considered a masterpiece of Indian Cinema.

The daughter of a railway crossing guard falls in love with a son of high class Brahmin.

Hunterwali – 1935, At times cinema has broken its boundaries and guided the society to come out of the shackles of age old orthodox traditions, a fantastic example of the courageous attempt of cinema to move against the stream was Hunterwali, a movie released in year 1935. Writer and Producer Jamshed Boman Wadia, took the entire cine industry of that era by

surprise with the movie where a woman not only played the central character but also did fantastic stunts in dresses which are now called mini skirts or shorts. It was probably India's first female centric movie. The Indian society was vibrant with nationalist feelings, it was during this time that resentment was brewing among the Indian mass against the atrocities of autocratic British rule, the movie allegorically reflected the same scenario where a woman stands against the atrocities of autocratic rule. Here woman which was considered a symbol of being meek reflected the Indian mass and her consequent transformation into a powerful force standing against brutal rule was the actual aspiration of Indian mass which was represented by Nadia, the heroine.

The President – 1937, With the rapid inception of western ideas into Indian society, which came as a by product of colonial rule, seeds of industrialization were being sown in the later 30s. It was during this time that the foundation of industrial empires like Tatas, Birlas and others was being laid, cinema also reflected this in its own aesthetic way, like in the 1937 release, The President director Nitin Bose weaved a conflict between capitalists and working class amid a delicate love story between mill owner heroine and a worker.

Neecha Nagar - 1946, Neecha Nagar by Chetan Anand was brilliance in terms of direction though it was indianisation of Maxim Gorki's book the Lower Depths: but it was the expertise of Anand which made the movie one the most internationally recognized Indian movies in those years. The movie not only reflected the downtrodden society and its values but also portrayed the upper echelons of the society of that era. Nevertheless, it also reflected the gap between neo-rich (modern rich) and poor.

Jaagte Raho – 1956, If it comes to the depiction of society Raj Kapoor is far above excellence in capturing the minutes frames and hues of the society. The movie Jaagte Raho released in year 1956, for instance pictured the urban middle and lower middle class with such an expertise that it made the movie immortal, though like any other art medium it also raised questions on the prevalent flaws of society in a sarcastic way.

Mother India – 1957, Mother India directed by Mehboob, it reflected the mass of the pre-independent India which was predominantly agrarian and was struggling to free itself from

feudal shackles. The film was made with the biggest budget at that time and also generated largest revenue. It reflects the India as it was penned by Premchand in his famous novel Godan.

Teesri Kasam – 1966, Year 1966: Teesri Kasam, a film based on the story of socialist and acclaimed author Faniswar Nath Renu. It also depicted the social structures of the rural India. Basu Bhattacharya diligently sketched the rural cultural settings. Where it not only gave a glimpse of the modern society's outcomes in form of Hirabai's self devaluation where she doesn't considers herself good for a rustic but her selfless lover Hiranman.

Zanjeer – 1973, In the seventies, Prakash Mehra's Zanjeer made a dramatic plea against illegal drugs manufacturing business. The film, almost addresses those involved in this dirty business. This film is said to be the first hit film with Amitabh Bachchan in the lead role. In the film, Amitabh's sister dies of lethally spurious injection and Amitabh's father who refuses to his boss's command to continue with the illegal business is murdered in front of young Amitabh's eyes who grows up to revenge his father's killing. And that's how the era of 1973 marks the beginning of an 'angry young man'.

Ankur – 1974, The film, Ankur was the first film of Shyam Benegal which criticizes the caste system in the country and also exposes the hypocrisies of the ruling class. Besides, the film also reflects beautiful location of the lush green fields of the Indian countryside and the multi-colored saris of the women that stand out like rainbows which married women in that society would wear.

Pati, Patni aur Woh – 1983, Directed by B R Chopra, the film was a crystal clear reflection of the changes that took place in the 3 decades of the post colonial era. A clear example of realistic cinema, it sketched the problems, personal life and vision of the emerging middle class, of the Indian society, though middle class still had very insignificant presence.

Bombay – 1995, The reflection of the Hindu-Muslim communal riots was also seen in the Bollywood after the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 with the making of the film Bombay in 1995. Directed by Mani Ratnam, the national award-winning film gained great response

from the audience on its release. The film depicts the communal disturbances in Bombay (now Mumbai) as a result of controversy surrounding Babri Masjid in Ayodhya and its subsequent demolition in December 1992.

Besides, other films like Damini (1993) showed an image of the judicial system of the country wherein citizens have to struggle a great deal to get justice. It came as an appeal to restructure the judicial system of the country so that people could get justice on time. The film Haseena Maan Jayegi that released in 1999 with the song ‘What is mobile number’ reflected the beginning of the mobile culture in India. Sarfarosh, directed by John Matthew Matthan in 1999 dealt with an IPS officer who fights to stop cross-border terrorism. The film was released during the time of Kargil conflict got great response from the audience. Similarly, the movie Duplicate in 1998 seemed to advocate the idea of foreign direct investment (FDI) and the film Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani (2000) reflected the stiff competition among the various television channels to be number one.

Peepli Live – 2010, Directed by Anusha Rizvi was a satire reflecting the plight of the farmers in the country and the media and political response to the issue, it basically showcases the change, as well as the existing gap between the developed and marginal India.

The increasing consumerism among media and also the insensitivity, rather the difference between communication and understanding between rural and urban India is also beautifully reflected in the movie.

These were just the snap shots of some of the movies, but if a holistic view of the entire film industry is analyzed, the medium has become popular because of the depiction of the populist sentiments of the Indian society.

It is the very fact that people relate to the films and turnout to the theatres. Films, since very beginning, were a mirror reflecting the issues of society. Every kind of issue gets representations in cinema through one film or the other. While films like Peepli Live shows the plight of the farmers and its politicization by the political leaders and media hype films like Shanghai shows how the big real estate players are working in our society and exploiting the middle-class society to make money.

CONCLUSION:

- The research work consolidates the idea that films indeed are a great medium of communication that has the immense potential to reflect the socio-economic condition of a society.
- Indian cinema since its very beginning has been mostly focusing on the social and political issues as a backdrop for their stories.
- Cinema besides being a great source of entertainment for the people have always been a mirror to apprise people about what kind of culture and lifestyle is prevalent in different classes of society
- Indian film industry has also been reflecting the change in the social psychology with the passage of time.

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