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## FILMS AND SOCIETY

One of my previous students from South Korea had posed a question, "Madam, I have watched plenty of Hindi movies. A lot of skin exposure and violence is usually what the film focuses on. But during my visit into this country, I found a sharp contrast between the reality and the reel world. People here are austere, bent towards religiousness and extremely moralistic. Why then do you portray a misleading image to the rest of the world."

The question struck me and I got immersed in a realm of musing and pondering.

**Was it our sundry, vibrant, ever evolving society which has been the backdrop of our films since time immemorial**

Or

**Is it the nitty- gritty of the movies which in the long run shape, modify and redefine society.**

Citizens often criticise the recent movies as the source of crime and moral degradation. Late back in 1963 **Gaban** (written by **Munshi Premchand**) portrayed a clerk's deteriorating moralistic values. **Shatranj ke khiladi** (written by **Munshi Premchand**) is another masterpiece which reminds us the fatal downfall of the royal families engrossed in chess, neglecting their respective duties. I should not forget to mention the name of '**Parineeta**', a popular novel by **Sarat Chandra Chatterjee**, reviving feminist sentiments of a woman torn in between two men who are equally essential and choice worthy.

**Tagore** had been pretty progressive and so have been the film industry. Extra-marital affairs, brothels, liquor consumption blended with expensive sets have aggravated the genre of the novels.

Those who were not aware of the masterpieces of **Tagore (Film:Chokher bali)**, **Sarat Chandra Chatterjee (Film:Devdas)**, **Bimal Mitra(Film:Saheb Bibi Golam)** flocked to

the theatres to catch glimpses of the illicit love scenes, lascivious prostitutes and the showbiz. **Chokher Baali** also caresses extra marital relationships in that matter.

The films perhaps borrowed the recent trends and spun a yarn to allure the audience and enthrall them. The social evils, injustice and immoral acts that had penetrated deep into the mesh of society found vent on the screens. In fact it is an enigma whether the film director or our current social norms are at fault. When the film **Fire(1996)** was released, I remember there was a huge uproar of criticisms in both the print and non-print media. When questioned about her opinion, Aparna Sen's candid reply was ``Lesbianism existed much before the release of **Fire.**'' So Deepa Mehta is not culpable.

Needless to say, unlike Hollywood films, Indian films are more society oriented, keeping in view the entertainment of the entire mass. When the directors shifted their glance to quantities and the quality went haywire, films started catering to a curbed audience.

A bunch of writers like **Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Satyajit Ray** and **Mahashweta devi** have been much in demand because of easy language, true to life stories and impeccable characterisation. The readers could identify themselves and their austere lives with these novels and perhaps the Directors also took a plunge to add something new to the platter. When people watched **Rudaali** and **Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa**, they were mesmerised as the ghastly images of naxalite movement kept flooding in their minds. Those who had been the victims of the violent activities could sympathise with the jail inmates and the pathetic life of a `woman weeper'. Similar vibes were provoked with the release of `**Pinjar**' (written by **Amrita Preetam**) as our previous generation was a witness of the sufferings of Hindu Muslim riots. A typical humdrum rustic or even a not so affluent family portrayed what a commoner expects to watch. Hence, movies like **Khushboo, Choti Bahu. Apne paraye, Dena Paona, Kora Kagaaz** became the talk of the town at that time.

Poverty, social stigma, sacrifices related to love has always weaned a numbers of masses. I feel that the word `**catharsis**' is applicable here. When people release their emotions by shedding tears with the moving characters on the screens they feel relieved and relaxed.

Horoscopes, sati, social obligations portray the era of the rigid caste system, the predominance of the worshipping class and the subjugation of the poor people. `**Sati**' unifies these thoughts and it is horrifying to see a mute girl being married to a banyan tree to avoid dying on the pyre of her husband (according to the horoscope predictions). When the viewers watch the movie, they receive notions of the extreme ignorance of the rustics and their maltreatment by the priests and astrologers. `**Devi**' is yet another sarcastic film, based on hollow spiritual beliefs and mass delusion –as usual the aura created by our **babaji's** and **guruji's**. `**Antarjali Jatra**' also talks of the reins of the society in the clutches of a few selfish, patriarchal individuals warning us to be more justified and realistic in our thought process.

Movies like **My brother Nikhil (2005)** and **Vicky Donor (2012)** were fresh showers to our exhausted minds and streaks of hope eliminated for nation-wise refinement.

Some movies could be good examples of guidance and tutorship to look into ourselves and the various norms of the government. The writer, Suchitra Bhattacharya was saddened to see the desperate attempts of the parents running from pillar to post for admissions.

'**Ramdhanu**', when screened became evidently popular as both the parents and the wards identified themselves with the circumstances. Probably the movie or precisely the story asks a very vital question:

**Is our system of education diminishing to a mere warehouse of finished goods?**

Human mind is extremely complex wherein interpersonal and intrapersonal relations have tided over the mainstream movies now and then.

'**Picnic**' (Director:Aparna Sen)defines the conflict which arises between two sisters revolving round one man. The emotions are justified and implicit.

Over possessiveness could lead to getting apart of one from the family. Perhaps the movie '**Icehe**'(2011) has been a reformer in this respect. The newspaper reviews have been pretty active in interviewing various mothers who humbly admitted their grievous blunder of intruding their offspring's choice(on the release of the movie '**Icehe**').Suchitra Bhattacharya has been diligent enough to deal with womanly desires and aspirations.'**Icehe**' was penned down to make the mothers aware of being too child centric and obsessive. **Taare Zameen** '**Par**'pivots round a dyslexic child being misunderstood by his parents, teachers and peers. It is eventually a motivational tutor who helps him curb his shortcomings by unfurling his latent talents.

In this regard, the movie **Three idiots(2009)** and **Udaan(2014)** also reveal the same truth-Chasing one's dream. '**Dahan**'(1997)(Director: **Rituporno Ghosh**) reflects the dismal world of women being gentle, docile and submissive to social dogmas. When she is molested in front of her husband and another woman intervenes to rescue her, it somehow injures the masculine ego of the husband though he is an onlooker in the situation.'**Dahan**' burns in the flame of arrogance, social evils and human apathy.

When **Satyajit Ray** portrayed a simpleton in **Apu Trilogy**, audience was highly impressed. A simple village lad shouting thrillingly at the sight of a railway train, the stalks of 'kaash' flowers swaying in the breeze, the humdrum rustic life, blend of poverty and childhood pranks all add different strokes to the words and imagination of the author. Probably, an urbanite or even children today might not be aware of a genuine village.

**Feminism** has had different forays since ages. It is not only the social vision but also individual concept that gives hue to a character. Scenes depicting carnal desires are most sought-after, and in and out it has been a form of recreation. Accusing a director would be doing injustice to him. Our society has never

probed and glorified the intellectual prospect of a women except for some rare cases. Beauty has always ruled the brains. I believe some would agree with me that the Beauty Contests are just a mere skin show and not a worthwhile event.

It is hence pathetic to find women as mere commodities and not an embodiment

of decisiveness, intelligence and bravery. It's time that the women are portrayed not as objects of mercy.

Mostly the films are fabricated and unrealistic. Latest technical effects are blended with high-track sound and films are shot in the elegant locations. But still, irrespective of all this, people crave for family dramas.

### **Why is it so?**

So, we are again in the midst of an enigmatic issue as to personality shapes environment or environment shapes personality.

At the end of the day it is our family which is our cardinal concern and we being social animals yearn to cherish every bit of time with our loved ones.

To support my view, I would cite the example of `**Hum Aapke Hain Kaun**'(1994), which is still considered as the highest earning Hindi films till date. An enthralling, romantic comedy, it appealed to a greater dimension of viewership, irrespective of age, gender, backgrounds. Perhaps the Director, Suraj Barjatiya had anticipated the eagerness of the crowd and the underlying profit pouring in.

Films do depict the societies from time to time. As discussed earlier, films have tried to render different aspects of the society in the forms of social crimes.

Virtually, it may seem that films like **Talvar**'(2015),`**Khaap**'(2011),`**Matrubhoomi**'(2003) were

captured with the intention of the massive popularity that they would receive. But a spark triggers, pointing us to our role as silent watchers and not responsible citizens of the society. These films remind us to be more proactive reformers to eradicate social evils like honour-killing, female foeticide and female infanticide. `**Talvar**' was released in 2015 but the plot hatched, occurred in June.

The murder of a daughter along with her paramour elicited ample curiosity amongst the readers and people raised eyebrows visualising the ghastliness

of the crime. The parents were convicted and the film too finishes with an incomplete note regarding the reality of the murderers.

**Do the films unfurl the pessimistic arena of life or provoke us to manifest ourselves in some altruistic acts to ameliorate our beliefs?**

Decades back, I had the privilege of watching ‘**Sadgati**’(1981) and ‘**Achyut Kanya**’(1936).The vicious abomination of the caste system and the simultaneous decline and decay of the hapless downtrodden rustics saddened me. Throughout the pages of Indian History, caste system has been substantially predominant. It is strange that we claim ourselves to be civilized, and yet fail to shoulder responsibilities for social amendments.

**Bandit Queen (1994)** is a glowing instance of the prevailing caste system and the atrocities carried out by the patriarchal society. When one watches the film, the gruesome incident of multiple rape portrays the mercenary, abusive society which still triumphs over humanity in major parts of agrarian North India.

Somewhat similar sketch of social evil finds aperture through **Prem Rog (1982)** and **Damini (1993)**.Both the films depict the hideous caste system and a women’s profound struggle against injustice. **Antardwand** (2010) deals with groom kidnapping which truly happens in the state of Bihar.

**Some critics may call me a feminist. At his juncture I would say that I am a womanist to the extent that I am a humanist.**

When intellectuals blame the mass media as the root of destruction of moral values amongst children, I would rather request them to introspect and look into the loopholes already existing. I firmly assert that our films are the mirror of our society. The media has only reiterated what has been succeeding through ages.

**We require to obliterate social evils and contemplate a broader view of life.**

Barring Independence day, we don’t care to retrospect the freedom struggle and the great men behind it.A great round of applause for the makers of **The Legend of Bhagat Singh(2002)**,**Bosethe forgotten hero(2004)**,**Haqueqat(1964)**,**Shaheed(1965)**!I would invoke all the parents to inspire their wards to imbibe patriotic essence and extreme devotion to one’s nation.

Customarily in films, rural India is elevated by showcasing the actors in rich costumes, songs and dances, green paddy fields. But the stark reality is unfathomable. Annually innumerable peasants commit suicide due to debts, starvation etc.

When one watches movies like **Peepli Live(2010),Manthan(1976)** or even **Mother India(1957)**, the miseries of poverty and the viciousness of the money lenders, landlords etc come ahead.

Shifting our glances towards the international sphere, I believe Charlie Chaplin had represented society in a satirical form which symbolised a simpleton struggling in every nook and corner of his life. Once Chaplin had remarked,

**“I’m an individualist, I am an internationalist, a peace monger, and I use my status as a driving force against inequality”**.

Unlike India, many European countries were undergoing utter pathetic circumstance. Nazism, inhuman conditions in factories, social polarity which was in vogue became Chaplin’s subject matter and he chose to make the public aware of the human rights by dint of comedy and sarcasm. When we throng the theatres to watch **The Great Dictator, Modern times, The Kid**, apparent comic scenes hold the underneath tragedy which caters to every individual irrespective of gender, background, age etc. Hitler had occupied majority of European countries and the holocaust which followed was known to the rest of the world. Deviating oneself from controversy, Chaplin conveyed the final message that the Dictators snatch the power from people but in the long run **it is the people and not the Dictator** who rules the country.

The Dictator was released in 1940. In 1950, we do envisage the reflection of Chaplin’s words in our constitution-for the people, by the people and of the people.

For the past few years extensive violence, sexual harassment, eve-teasing, terrorism is being exhibited in both regional and Hindi movies. It could serve a detrimental purpose according to a certain section of society. But the other face of the coin states that the various pros and cons could suffice as an exemplar to the victims. When we watch movies like **Mission Kashmir (2000), Wednesday (2008), Bombay (1995), Little terrorist (2004)** and last but not the least, **Inkaar (2013)** we cannot shun our responsibilities as a citizen. Undeniably, the terrorists, criminals, murderers are all victims of certain unforeseen circumstance, obliging them to be utilized as pawns by some selfish war -mongers. It is our onus to divert them to mainstream and rehabilitate them. These films are the filters which help us to analyse for ourselves that glitz and glamour of the movies is not the ultimatum. The harsh reality is we need to dig deep with a go to enlighten, employ and help realise the dreams of the abundant dejected prisoners.

Well, it's time to talk on the lighter hues of life. Laughter in the form of both words and actions, is a stress buster and perhaps rejuvenates us for a tougher tomorrow. Films of comic relief should not only essentially be encouraged with an aim to recreation but as a source of family gatherings and togetherness. I vividly remember the day I watched the movie **Hera Pheri(2000)** and then **Phir Hera Pheri(2006)**. The contentment I received from the outbursts is perhaps the greatest moments I still cherish. I am fully convinced about the fact that, when we laugh along with our family, it purges the conflicts within and metamorphoses us.

**Needless to say, technology can only provide joy and cannot be compared with the happiness acquired from these petty events.**

There was a time when **Basu Chatterjee, Basu Bhattacharya, Hrishikesh Mukherjee** represented typical middle-class family stories through gullible, heart rendering narrative which enticed a huge set of viewers. I have rarely come across a person who hasn't appreciated **Golmaal(1979), Khatta Mitha(1978), Guddi (1971)** or even

**Rang birangi(1983).** **Hrishikesh Mukherjee** was pretty conscious of the hero worship and youngsters fleeing homes aspiring to become film stars

and eventually ended up ruining themselves and the enormous money that they ran away with. **Guddi**, an humble teenager represents every woman

who had crush on a hero and ultimately found solace in her real life partner. These movies always ended with a happy note with a key objective of making the family get together and rejoice.

**Sooner or later, what matters most is the beneficial aspect of a movie.**

The controversy as to whether films influence society or society influences films is an enigma. But nevertheless, it is undeniable that films as a form of art, reminds us of our tradition and apprises us of some evils.

Films should not reflect a wrong image of our society, customs, tradition to the world across. Any form of art-theatre, movies, painting, folk lore represents the social facets. If utilized in its utmost extent, films could be immensely favourable for the welfare of mankind.

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