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The Portrayal of Childhood in the Cinema

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Abstract

Children as well as childhood's portrayal in cinema become part of the on-going discourse of children's films. According to Bazalgette and Staples, "children's film can mean just the exhibit of films for general target market having some kids; it can also indicate the committed production of films for children." Despite the prevalent impact of the state-sanctioned discourses gone over, there is a current pattern to depict children and the family in various terms in contemporary cinema. Incongruous child - moms and dad connections along with single-parent households are now commonly portrayed in the modern movies. The film representations may indicate that the belief of a conventional household is changing. This substantial adjustment may in addition, serve to wonder about the role of the family and children within the framework of the dominant international discourse while highlighting the fact that lots of kids remain in a tough situation in the culture.

Keywords: Portrayal, Cinema, Children, Childhood, Contemporary

Introduction

Children and childhood years' portrayal in the films becomes a part of the on-going discourse of children's films. According to Bazalgette and Staples, the term, "children's film can simply mean the exhibit of movies for general target market consisting of some youngster and children; it can additionally indicate the devoted production of movies for children". By 'children' they imply people under the age of 12" (Bazalgette & Staples, 1995:92). This interpretation, in certain cases, is still debatable since several films are made with youngsters or have some kids generally in the narrative, however which are not mainly for these youngster audiences. To discuss problems in defining these films, Andrews (2000:7) argues that not all children's films are for children and not all films children see are just these films.

The concept of children's film is shaped by various perspectives. Andrews (2000:19) further explains these perspectives as: "there are films targeted at children, movies regarding youth, and films youngsters see regardless of whether or not they are children's films". For that reason, it is suggested that kids'

movie: "ought to read as reflections, not as children's interests or dreams or wishes but instead are of adults." The texts which adults generate for youngsters, represents adult perspective, both of childhood years as well as (by ramification) of their adult years itself" (Buckingham, 1995:47). Both Andrews and Buckingham's also endorse the predicaments to specify a film that is purely for children; additionally, both expose the adult's perspective in children's movies. Therefore, while children and childhood years are prominent cinematic topics, they are represented in several movies, but constantly from the adult's perspectives. Valet defines youngsters' appearance in films as a representation that: sets up the connection of an order which is para-social, para-historical. The child discontinues to belong to the culture as well as locates himself or herself on the margin of the story. More than the reflection of a period or a certain adaptation, he or she comes to be the living witness which talks, concretizes, and remembers us in its pure ontological reality, its outright existence (Kelleher, 1998:30). Buckingham as well as Valet's concepts of the presence of children in movie lead to the idea that children's existence in film conveys adults' point of view, the director's specifically, of specific issues for different purposes in the socio-cultural space.

Portrayal of children in the World cinema

The childhood years, has been viewed as the symbol of innocence globally. Due to the European Christian customs, children in cinema are generally represented as little monsters and are shown as irrational. The enchanting perspective, for example, presented kids as lacking adult's adverse aspects (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1995:1). Writing in 1762, Rousseau, emphasised the kid's simplicity and innocence (Konigsberg, 2000:277) while recognizing that these characteristics are easily influenced by the adult's cultural and social context. Jenkins defines childhood years as a separate domain from the world of adult's problems, suggesting that children can be used as both, sign of passing life along with the hope for the upcoming future. In addition, Jenkins conceives kids as active topics that are concerned in determining their very own lives, and who can build their own society (Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004:8).

Hollywood has also frequently portrayed children as innocent. As Konigsberg states, children in movie, from *Shirley temple in little miss marker (1934)* through *Lipnicki in Mc Guire (1996)*, have mainly remained wonderful and innocent (2000:277). Movies produced by Disney offers fine examples of children represented in an ideal family and their social life, making Disney's movies appropriate to the public as representative of conventional family values in their films (Kramer, 2002). Since millions of individuals worldwide enjoy Disney films, these might be influential factor in strengthening this romanticized picturesque of childhood. Tanner (2003:366) suggests that Disney's animated films place a great emphasis on family relationships, while streamlining the diversity of principle of the family as well as standing as couple pairs in typical gender role. Giroux (2004) discloses that while Disney's films offer a socio-political background of this fascination with an aura of innocence, which are created around children's understanding and awareness about themselves and their respective world, they also tend to broaden the conservative views, like male dominance and racial stereotyping. As pointed out in Tanner (2003) earlier research by film scholars such as Tseelon in 1995, Beres in 1999, Wiersma in 2001, and Dundes, in 2001 discovered that in Disney's films, female characters are regularly placed as

subservient to male personalities. These attributes likewise can also be discovered in Steven Spielberg's movies as well. Mann (2005:196) argues that Spielberg's movies mainly portray children as representatives of innocence in danger from the adult's World. Mann additionally points out that in Spielberg's movies girls are subordinated to their sibling brother.

Unlike their innocent appearance in Hollywood movie, youngsters in the early British silent films were portrayed as rebellious and prankster (Sobchack, 1989:15). British silent cinema shows the suggestion of rebellious youngsters as a symbol of power as well as authority vested in the upper-class over the lower class. According to Sobchack (1989:19): Gysies, tramps, criminals, and children show up continually during plot that represents assaults on standard manners and morals, strikes on the patriarchal, reliable frameworks of culture. Rebelliousness against authority is frequently viewed as teenage obsession, therefore it is appropriate that youngsters were able to represent this power in the very early movies.

Politicisation of children in anime movies is also found from United States to Japanese anime films. Spigel (1999) finds that those children have been politized as well as commoditised in US anime, with the personalities in the anime representing the nation, spirit, and identity of the USA. At the same time, Japanese anime communicate Japanese identifications with their child characters. Yoshida states that Japanese anime has likewise been determined as increasing Japanese cultural imperialism in Asia. Thus, Yoshida suggests that, in preventing uneasiness in the direction of Japanese expansionism, the anime's producers present a statelessness and Japanese-ness in these films (2004:11).

In Iranian movies representing childhood has been an approach to pacify political risk, considering that the Iranian censorship limits the scope of a political discourse in the cinema. Sadr (2002) suggests that children in Iranian cinema have become an alternative to adult duties, for filmmakers to be able to go over delicate issues. Sadr (2002:235) further adds that children were relatively freer than the adults; they might go anywhere as well as do more or less anything. This is in line with Mir-Hosseini's declaration (2000) that, considering the Iranian federal government limited love and women in movie in the early 1980s, children have been utilized to convey human emotions.

Children can additionally be discovered as the focus of the story in both Italian neo -realist as well as Brazilian movies. In these movies, children exist in a real world that has complicated problems, thus destabilising this innocent child's fallacy (Traverso, 2005). Traverso states that, while children are often portrayed in Brazilian films as orphans, however, independent, Italian neo-realism portrays the battle of youngsters as well as their troubles within the family. Fisher deliberates over Deleuze's suggestions about Italian neorealism to recommend that in this cinema children represent more than simply weakness and lack of identification. In Fisher's words: "The passive youngster nonetheless is only part of the tale, only fifty percent of the assembled part is of opposition young people. Deleuze's idea of the child as a normally weak observer reeks of a constructed discourse regarding youth as high as any type of, especially since youngsters, also in Italian neo - realism, are anything but passive and weak (Fisher, 2001:99)".

The contradictory depiction of children in movies can additionally be discovered in early German DEFA movies. Fisher (2001:100) says that in these movies youngsters are stood for both as social threat and, in contrast, as a social adhesive. Children's existence, according to Fisher, is an icon of anti-conservative middle class social networks as well as represents the absence and castration of the patriarch in inverted gender associations. Moreover, Fisher specifies that in early DEFA films, children likewise signify the conservative values of the bourgeois social relations by fortifying the subjective machismo. Fisher (2001:102) also quote: "Children exemplify the optimistic future, the legacy and persistence of every little thing for which the ideal man subject stands and works. Children constitute the foundation of any society, they are the struts and bricks, the real vessel around which the bourgeois house is arranged as well as right into which your house pours its resources and ideology".

Like German filmmakers, Chinese filmmakers combine two pictures of children in their films to portray both a real as well as a dreamed world. Donald (2005) argues that children in Chinese movies are used as political carriers to create a model of citizenship, both as an ideological and an economic icon. Donald further describes that youngster portrayals in Chinese films concentrate on belief, emotion, and famous summary of China as a nation. Thus, in the brand-new age of reform, children are depicted as ideal people that make excellent initiatives for the future of China.

In French movies, the children are presented as a target of loss either in their own life or in their partnership with others" (Hayward, 1999:99). Nonetheless, Hayward additionally points out the political use of representation of children in French cinema to talk about numerous considerable concerns such as nationalism and motherhood. Powrie infer that French cinema depicts children as a tool to discuss family relationships: accordingly, in French cinema children's representation would therefore questions the very subsistence of the family. Powrie (2005:351) asks: 'is the family there for protection, or is it a setting for death? Therefore, the images of enduring childhood in World cinema depicting the enchanting picturesque of happy and innocent childhood is not eternal. On the contrary, "in modern European films the portrait of the missing child implies the lost element of desire, origin and vanishing point" (Wilson, 2005:340). Furthermore, an additional picture of child, one that deconstructs adorability is portrayed by unscrupulous kids in film (Jackson, 2000:6). In summary, the different ways of portraying childhood in cinema emphasise the significance of children's presence in the movies.

The Representation of Children in Indian Cinema

Indian cinema has a reputation for being one of the world's largest annual film producers and has one of the world's largest film markets. However, the number of films that are children-centric, whether in terms of being for or about children, is rather small. Children's cinema remains on the fringe in both Bollywood and regional cinema (Rajagopalan 2013, 10). Despite having the world's biggest population of children, Indian popular culture appears to have devoted little attention to critically examining young people's lives (Pandey 2011, 2).

In the Indian context, as with the first film made in the world, the image of a child has a major part among the popular films since the post-independence period. In previous research on child and juvenile delinquency in Indian films, much attention has been paid to children in popular films. Nandini Chandra

(2009) studies early portrayals of children and young people in Hindi films of the 1950s and films such as *Munaa* (K. A. Abbas 1954), *Dosti* (Satyen Bose 1964) and *Jagriti* (Sudhir). They presented the images of children to focus on post-war suffering and concentrating on the misery of lower class. The film develops a vision of childhood that goes back to the beginning of Hindi film (Chandra 2009: 130). This genre is within the framework of the Nehruvian Socialists and the Indian People's Theatre Association, and notably appears in the films of K.A. Bose, Raj Kapoor, Heman Gupta and Satyen Bose. (Chandra 2009, 131).

Alternative or parallel cinema seems to have invested more in portraying children-centric stories in the 1970s, as seen by leading filmmakers such as Shyam Benegal, Mrinal Sen, Sai Paranjpe, and M. S. Sathyu, all of whom are part of Children's Film Society of India (CFSI). *Jadoo Ka Shankh* (1974), *Sikandar* (1976) and *Kitaab* (1977), were popular children-centric films during that period in the Indian cinema.

In the 1980s, *Salaam Bombay* (Mira Nair 1988) drew high attention to the themes of marginalization, poverty, class, gender, and the ways in which children and childhood seem to communicate these concerns. The film, which is often considered "non-Indian" in terms of production and distribution, has received mixed reactions from film critics and scientists, who have criticized it for having an "outside" view of poverty in India.

In the decade of post-liberalization (in the 1990s), the number of children-centric stories were reduced with some commercial Hindi films presenting children as tool for drama. Two such examples are the character of Anjali in *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* (Karan Johar, 1998), who unites his father with his lost love, and little Raju as a helper who accompanies Raja's adult lover in *Raja Hindustani* (Dharmesh Darshan, 1996), but instead of centring it towards that childhood, what one sees is the advent of a hero who never grew up (Creekmur 2004, 354). One of the reasons for this decline in children's accounts could be the demise of a parallel film movement after the 1980s.

In Indian cinema during the period, children were often not included as the central protagonists and seldom enjoyed the autonomy in film representation. However, in the late 1990s, a ground-breaking film focused only on the age, experiences and emotions of a child was made, *Rockford* (Nagesh Kukunoor, 1999), a film that examines the lives of teenagers in the boarding schools that were once founded themselves in the popular educational image in India. In his film, Kukunoor reveals the nuances of childhood and addresses the sensitive and often implicit issue of sexual awakening among Indian teenagers.

The Slumdog Millionaire (Danny Boyle, 2008) is a worldwide successful film that returns the image of childhood from the side-lines. Like other foreign productions, the film was heavily criticized by the local media in India on the same basis as in *Salaam Bombay* – i.e., outsider views on conditions in India. This film takes us to the city slums, an account that, with a happy ending when a poor child grows up, wins a very rewarding quiz show and reunites with his dream girl, thus changing his destiny (Collins 2009). Such performances are sometimes seen as a form of filmic manipulation, where a poor child on screen often becomes a unique avatar to capture human emotions. Many such accounts represent the instinct of the poor to do business and creativity to overcome their metaphoric or actual problems, and

such tales of impossible success are just as well-designed to fit into the mainstream. Without addressing the problems of caste, merit, gender, and class.

Conclusion

Although children have never dictated the narrative in films, and although they generally remain marginal, the nature of their marginality has changed. Where it is common for child actors to portray children living in low-income conditions, to capture the early lives of heroes, or to represent poor orphans - in line with most of the post-colonial reality itself. With audience the idea of collective experience, nowadays, it is rare to find a film with a reflective depiction of childhood in working or lower middle-class families. Filmmakers, who concentrate their films around child protagonists, are likely to incite intergenerational and wider social conflicts. While studying films across countries with different cultures and in different era's, one thing is common with the depiction of children and childhood in the cinema. i.e., it is being only used as a tool, like an allegory or metaphor where otherwise it was difficult to convey, be it Indian, Iranian, Hollywood, German or Chinese Cinema.

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